

**UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

**SEMANTIC CHANGE ANALYSIS OF UNRECORDED  
WORDS AND MEANINGS USED BY ENGLISH SPEAKING  
COMMUNITY ON TWITTER**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University  
as Partial Requirements to Obtain Bachelor's Degree in  
English Literature Study Program.

**ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM**  
**FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES**  
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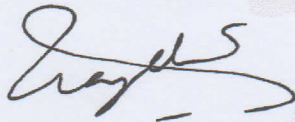
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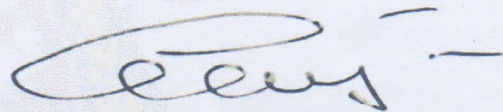
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**THESIS**  
**SEMANTIC CHANGE ANALYSIS OF UNRECORDED WORDS AND**  
**MEANINGS USED BY ENGLISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY ON TWITTER**

**BY**

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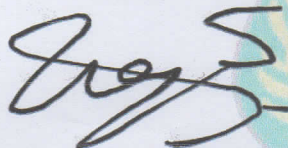
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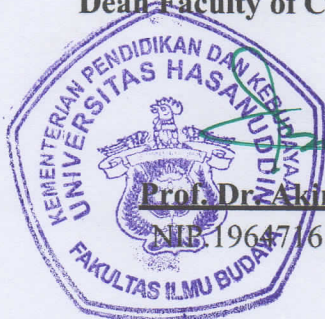
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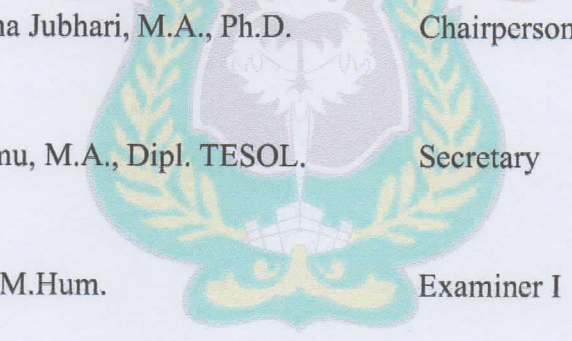
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Today, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, the Board of Thesis Examination has kindly approved a thesis by **FIRDA IRIANTI ARIFIN** (Student Number: **F041171304**) entitled “**SEMANTIC CHANGE ANALYSIS OF UNRECORDED WORDS AND MEANINGS USED BY ENGLISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY ON TWITTER**” submitted as one of the requirements to obtain Sarjana Sastra (S.S) degree at English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University.

Makassar, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021

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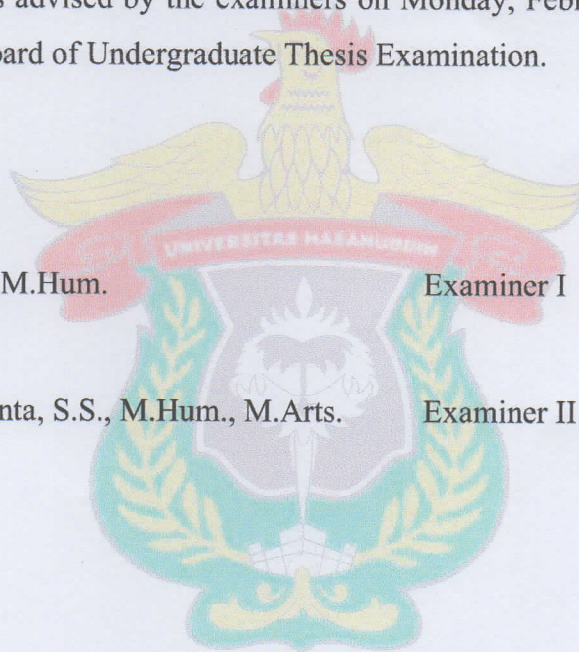
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Yang Menyatakan,

Firda Irianti Arifin

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Makassar, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021

The Author,

**Firda Irianti Arifin**

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## ABSTRACT

**FIRDA IRIANTI ARIFIN (F041171304).** *Semantic Change Analysis of Unrecorded Words and Meanings Used by English Speaking Community on Twitter* (Supervised by Ria Rosdiana Jubhari and Abidin Pammu).

Language has never been constant. It changes through years by way of trade, immigration, conquest and now the most common way of communication, social media. This study aims to define new words and meanings found within the English-speaking community on Twitter that have not been recorded by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (OALD).

This study was conducted by using a qualitative-descriptive method. The data were taken from previous studies that have specifically listed the new words but have not yet taken the issue from the perspective of semantics. In total, there are 33 words and meanings that were taken and analyzed. The analysis was done by observing the usage of each new word and meaning on Twitter. This study, then defined each of the words and compared them to their old meanings or origins. After that, Bloomfield's typology on semantic change was used to determine the types of semantic change that occurs in each word.

There are two findings discovered in this study. The first finding shows metaphor type occurs most often than the rest 8 types with the percentage of 31.4% out of the whole data. The second finding is 14.3% of the data could not be classified into Bloomfield's typology, therefore new types are proposed in this study to complement the theory, they are homophone and borrowing. This study is expected to help the second-language learners in understanding new word and meanings as well as avoiding misunderstanding in their communication.

**Keywords: semantic change, social media, twitter, typology.**

## ABSTRAK

**FIRDA IRIANTI ARIFIN (F041171304).** *Semantic Change Analysis of Unrecorded Words and Meanings Used by English-Speaking Community on Twitter* (Supervised by Ria Rosdiana Jubhari and Abidin Pammu).

Bahasa tidak pernah bersifat konstan dan terus berubah selama bertahun-tahun melalui perdagangan, imigrasi, penaklukan wilayah serta media sosial yang telah menjadi tempat berinteraksi yang paling umum saat ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendefinisikan kata dan makna baru yang muncul di antara pemakai Bahasa Inggris di Twitter yang juga belum tercatat pada kamus Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (OALD).

Penelitian ini dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Data dari penelitian ini diambil dari penelitian sebelumnya yang telah mencatat kata dan makna baru ini, namun belum mengusut permasalahan ini dari sudut pandang semantik. Secara keseluruhan ada 33 kata dan makna yang diambil dan dianalisis. Analisis dilakukan dengan mengobservasi penggunaan kata dan makna baru di Twitter sebelum akhirnya penulis memberikan definisi pada setiap kata. Definisi lama atau asal kata kemudian dibandingkan dengan definisi baru yang telah diberikan. Setelah itu, tipologi Bloomfield dalam perubahan makna digunakan untuk menentukan tipe perubahan makna yang terjadi pada setiap kata.

Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan dua temuan. Temuan pertama memperlihatkan bahwa tipe metafora merupakan tipe yang paling sering terjadi dengan persentase 31.4% dari seluruh data. Sedangkan temuan kedua menunjukkan 14.3% data yang tidak dapat diklasifikasikan kedalam tipologi Bloomfield. Maka dari itu, untuk melengkapi teorinya, penulis mengajukan dua tipe baru dalam perubahan atau pergeseran makna, antara lain *homophone* dan *borrowing*. Penelitian ini tentu diharapkan dapat membantu masyarakat, terkhususnya pelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua, untuk memahami kata dan makna baru dalam Bahasa Inggris serta terhindar dari kesalahpahaman dalam berkomunikasi.

Kata kunci: **perubahan makna, pergeseran makna, media sosial, twitter, tipologi.**



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Background

Language has never been fixed, it constantly changes and adapts to our changing lives, developed technology and culture. If we analyze literary works from the notable classic authors like William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë or Thomas Hardy, we may notice how different the English language back then compared to it is today. Language is indeed transformed through generations and evolved along with human needs. This may occur in meanings, pronunciation, or even the structure.

Changes in meanings, mostly happened to accommodate new ideas, inventions and technologies that develop through the years. For instance, the word *mouse* is not only referred to rodent, but also a pointing device for computer. Also, *gay* which originally means joyous or happy now refers to homosexual person. In some other cases, a completely new word is also created to name new inventions. We may take a look at words *selfie* and *modem*. Neither of those words exist before the invention of hand phone and internet. This is what we called semantic change, when the word meaning shifts from its original definition or when enrichment of meanings to already existing words occur (Wilkins, 1996). Semantic change may also refers to words that are taken from another language that used to accommodate new ideas.

According to Palmer (1981:2-5), semantic change is possible because the cultural interaction exists within the society. Migration, conquest and trade made it possible for a language to thrive even faster through the years. For that reason, after thousand

and thousand years of usage, historically-related languages sometimes hard to distinguish.

In this modern world where mobilization and socializing has been eased by highly-advanced technology, like the Internet, the encounter between broad social groups with different cultural backgrounds occur even more often. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tik Tok and Twitter are several platforms that successfully connect people all around the world resulting in a larger cultural interaction. As an outcome, people easily adopt distinctive norms of life where language is part of the package. This later leads to the high occurrence of semantic change.

Nonetheless, among all social media, Twitter has its own significance in developing new meanings specifically in English words. This is possible for the platform allows its users to interact efficiently and effectively. They let people express themselves mainly through words and not pictures and videos. It is very unlike YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram. Also, in contrast to Facebook who allows its users to make a lengthy post, Twitter in the other hand limits the length of a post or what people call as *tweets*. The users are only allowed to type up to 280 characters per tweet. This limitation is not seen as a weakness at all for the users are enforced to be creative to find the simplest and briefest way in expressing themselves. Shahlee and Mustaffa (2019) claimed that users' creativity in the effort of achieving efficient communication has increased the occurrence of word transformation. Thus, semantic change might happen more often on Twitter than any other social media, despite their corresponding

purpose to connect people around the world.

### **B. Statement of the Problem**

It should be understood that semantic change and innovation largely posed as a problem in the social life, especially in today's era where we are not only socializing offline but also online. Normally, sub-communities like social media communities will less likely to share their semantic changes extensively outside their community. However, as the social media expands through years, more people join this sub-community and spend hours diving into the internet every day. Gradually, real life language starts to be affected by the language they use online.

This phenomenon is called *neologism*; when a newly-formed words or meanings from one small group started to be used by larger communities. Twitter itself has become the 4<sup>th</sup> most used social media in Indonesia and by November 2019 there are 22.8 million active Twitter users in Indonesia. Because of this, many English learners in Indonesia who are not part of the sub-community suffer from misunderstanding, especially when the dictionary has not yet recorded all these new established words and meanings. Furthermore, there are too few studies that analyze semantic change in social media. Most of semantic change research focuses on literature work as in books, movies and songs. To add that, there have been many works that analyze the morphological structure of the neologism, yet very few take this issue from the perspective of semantics. Looking at the lack of research done and the number of words that thrive almost every single day, it is important to undertake a semantic analysis of those new words and meanings that occur on Twitter.



### **C. Scope of the Problem**

For the reasons elaborated above, this study recorded and defined new words and meanings that most commonly used by English speaking community on Twitter, including newly-created words and existed words with unrecorded new meanings. These might also be in the form of slang and idioms. Furthermore, this study used semantics as its main approach and semantic change typology by Leonard Bloomfield to determine the types of change that occurs in each word.

### **D. Research Questions**

There are several questions to answer:

1. What are the unrecorded words and meanings commonly used by English speaking community on Twitter?
2. What are the meanings or definitions of each words and meanings commonly used by English speaking community on Twitter?
3. What kind of semantic change occurs on each words and meanings used by English speaking community on Twitter?

### **E. Objectives**

There are several objectives to achieve in this study, they are:

1. To identify and describe the old meanings or the origins of unrecorded new words and meanings on Twitter, including slang and idioms.
2. To define unrecorded new words and meanings used by English speaking

community on Twitter, including slang and idioms.

3. To compare the original meaning or the origin of the words with the new meaning based on its usage on Twitter.
4. To identify the types of semantic change that occurred in the unrecorded new words and meanings on Twitter, including slang and idioms.

#### **F. Significance of the Study**

This study aims to help English second-language learners who are not part of the Twitter community to understand the definition and usage of the unrecorded new words and meanings. Nonetheless, this study filled the gap of the previous study that have not been taking this issue from the perspective of semantics.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following chapter elaborates the theoretical background and framework of this study even further. The chapter starts with the definitions of related keywords and followed by a fine explanation of semantic change typology. Also, in order to exhibit the urgency of this study, the chapter ends with the discussion of similar works preceding this study.

#### **A. Theoretical Framework**

##### **1. Semantics and Meanings**

Years before the existence of semantics, there have been many scholars coming from various different backgrounds hypothesizing the nature of meaning. For example, in philosophy, language meaning has been one of the biggest interests since the early years of the twentieth century. Bertrand Russell—a British philosopher—along with an American mathematician, Gottlob Freg, took Aristotle’s basic idea of ‘logic’ into the area of natural language by defining the term as the original media of human reasoning. However, it wasn’t the first-time semantics was initiated. According to Palmer (1976: 1) the term semantics was first introduced by M. Bréal in 1894 in his paper entitled ‘*Reflected Meanings: A Point in Semantics*’. Palmer also defines semantics as a technical term used to refer study of meaning that covers variety aspects of language.

Daxon (2005) in his book ‘*A Semantic Approach to English Grammar*’ cited



that semantics lies in between two grammatical parts; morphology and syntax, for there is a significant relation among meaning, morpheme and grammatical structure. We may take a look at how affixes may determine the meaning of a word and how the grammatical structure may affect the intended meaning. Daxon also divides the two types of meanings that a word may consist of. The first one is reference which refers to the actual reference of the word, as for example the word *chair* refers to furniture completed with legs and a back that used as a tool to sit. The second one is known as sense which determines the relation between words; *big* is an opposite word of *small*, therefore the relation between the two words is antonymous.

In general, meanings can be divided into two: grammatical meaning and lexical meaning. Grammatical meaning refers to words that could only gain its meaning after being bound with another word while lexical meaning is the literal meaning of word we recognized as stem. Previous to Daxon's time, Leech (1981) has break down meaning into seven different types as follows:

a) Conceptual meaning

Conceptual meaning is similar to what other scholars recognize as denotative meaning. Leech considers conceptual meaning essential for it forms the basis of communication. Conceptual meaning is a word which has the same concept with the object it is being referred to. As for example: *mother*, which refers to a female parent.

b) Connotative meaning

A meaning that refers to the associations which the word suggests or implies.

As for example: *home*, which doesn't refer to physical house, but a feeling of warmth, safety and convenience. Connotative meaning may also be affected by cultural background. We may take a look at the object 'owl' which is highly associated with bad luck and malignance in China, but in Britain it signifies wisdom.

c) Social and affective meaning

Social meaning refers to a meaning based on its social circumstances whilst affective meaning focuses on the speaker's attitude towards the hearer or another thing (e.g., addressing a 70-years-old person *a senior citizen* has a more positive attitude than calling them *old man*).

d) Reflected meaning

Reflected meaning is when a word has more than one conceptual meaning which may result in ambiguity.

e) Collocative meaning

Collocative meaning is the meaning that a word may acquire with the company of another word. For instance, 'green house' would mean differently if we separate the two words.

f) Thematic meaning

This meaning refers to the way people organize the message or utterance in order to emphasize a certain meaning. We may take a passive sentence as an example:

'*Chandler washed the car*' in comparison to '*the car is being washed by*

*Chandler*'. In the first sentence, the writer would like to emphasize the subject who did the action while the second one implies that the car that Chandler washed is a more important information.

From this we may conclude that semantics is a scientific study of language meanings which highly determined by internal (concept in mind) and external (reference to the actual world) factors. The study of meaning also should be taken attentively for it is not only focus on the lexical and grammatical meanings, but also relates to the grammatical structure in general. Leech (1974) also stated that semantics is a central concern in communication as it is becoming even more exigent. In fact, the urgency of this issue is a result of the language evolution every day.

## **2. Semantic Change**

Eugenio Coseriu (1958) stated that language is not a product, but a process which exists inside of the speaker's mind. Every time people communicate, they actually carry out what is verbally present in their mind. In this case, we can agree that every individual has different perspectives, images and projections on something that usually affected by their social and cultural background. Thus, when these differences have a direct contact with one another, a change in language may occur. As an addition, language innovations might also be encouraged by the tendency of the speakers to communicate efficiently with the least effort. To put it bluntly, interaction plays a big part in the occurrence of language change. Bailey CJ (1973) as quoted by Eisenstein & O'Connor (2014)

has emphasized this idea by stating that the movement of linguistic innovation depends on the density of interaction between people from different regions.

Many linguists believe that language changes through the years because the need of human to adapt to the new world. Yet quoting from Murtiana (2012), Noam Chomsky seems to have another idea on the matter. Chomsky believes that rather than a product of natural adaptation, language change is “emergent physical properties associated with the specific structure of the brain”. Meredith (1998) then begs to differ and stated that language change is a result of imperialism, politics, economics and cultural diversity. Meredith also added that language change occurs for the sake of the human race to survive and adapt to the evolving world. This theory, then gained a lot of supporters, including Stephen Pinker (2000) and Mahoney (2008).

After all, we may conclude that in order to adapt to the advancing world, people recreate grammar and establish new meanings based on the input received from primary and secondary communities they encountered through life. The language change that originally occurred in the structure of a language known as grammatical change whilst the invention of new words and enrichment in word meanings known as semantic change.

Bloomfield (1933: 425) and Andreas Blank (1999: 61) simply described semantic change, as any change in the meaning of words over the time whilst Henings (1995:50) defined the term as a change which occurs when the sense of the word expands or contracts with the original meaning. Semantic change also

refers to words taken from another language that used to accommodate new inventions or ideas.

According to Palmer (1981:2-5), semantic change happened when there is borrowing process between languages while Bloomfield (1933: 425) claimed that semantic change is a result of the change of use to other semantically related terms. However, now that we have come to the era of technology where the internet has become as common as foods in the sense of daily consumption, the motivation of semantic change in social media might be a little different from what it is in real life. Shahlee & Mustafa (2019) stated that the occurrence of new words in social media is motivated by the creativity of users that in need to communicate faster. Also, the character limitation on social media, like Twitter, has limited its users to make a lengthy post forcing them to be extremely creative to express themselves in a short text.

Unfortunately, in some cases, a change in language considered as a problem and many linguists are not very happy about it. Anderson & Trudgill (1990) and Finnegan, Besniar, Blair & Colins (1992), as written in Murtiana (2012:105), claimed that the change has ruined the standard resulting to flaws in language. Murtiana also quoted Aitchison (2001) who agrees with the statement by saying that there are a lot of misusages in current language and “the standard of speech and pronunciation has declined”. But Crystal (1992) affirmed that semantic, phonological, grammatical change is an inevitable event for language has never been a static system.

### 3. Types of Semantic Change

There have been many linguists arranging their own version of semantic change typology, yet as cited in Hasan (2015), the most accepted typology was set by Bloomfield in 1933. There are 9 types of semantic change that Bloomfield arranged in his book “*Language*” (1933: 426-427). Those could be seen as the following:

- a) Narrowing: when the meaning of a word change from describing generic items to describing more specific items. In other word, when the meaning becomes less general from the previous meanings. As for example: ‘*mete*’ (old English) used to refer to foods. Bloomfield believes that ‘*mete*’ is where the word ‘*meat*’ comes from, but instead of foods now ‘*meat*’ refers to ‘*an edible flesh*’.
- b) Widening: In contrast to the first semantic change, widening refers to meanings that become less specific from its previous meanings. For instance, the word ‘*dog*’ that is taken from the middle English word ‘*dogge*’, in this case refers to a particular breed of dog. However, now, ‘*dog*’ refers to ‘*any kind of dog*’.
- c) Metaphor: the change of meaning based on the similarity of its senses. For example, the word ‘*chill*’ that previously used ‘*to cool down*’ something, now broadly used to tell someone to ‘*relax*’. The similarity of the senses is on the reduction of temperature and the emotion of the hot-tempered person.



- d) Metonymy: when the meanings are close in the sense of space and time or when the meanings have a high association to the reference. As seen on the word '*cheek*' that comes from the old English word '*cēace*' which means '*jaw*'. Another example would be the word '*jaw*' that historically came from the old French word '*joue*' that means '*cheek*' in English. Another example would be the word '*Hollywood*' that refers to US film industry, when actually it is only the name of a place where most of American movies were filmed.
- e) Synecdoche: when part of something used to refer to the whole part of something or vice versa, as seen on the word '*thread*' that usually used to refer to the whole clothes and not only the actual thread.
- f) Hyperbole: when the meanings change from weaker to stronger meaning, for instance, '*to kill*' originally means '*to strike*' or '*to hit*' but now used to refer the act of sending someone to their death.
- g) Meiosis/Litotes: the exact opposite of hyperbole, when the meaning of a word shift from stronger to weaker meaning. An example includes a word '*astound*' which previously means '*strike with thunder*' now it means '*shocked*' or '*astonish*'.
- h) Degeneration: when the meaning shifts pejoratively or negatively, as seen in the word '*silly*' which used to refer to a '*happy person*' now refers to someone who makes a fool of themselves.
- i) Elevation: when the meaning of a word positively shifts from the original

meaning (amelioration). The example of this process could be seen in the word '*nice*'. In the twentieth century the word means '*clumsy or careless*', nowadays the word '*nice*' is used to refer something '*good*' or '*pleasing*'.

The typology above could be used to explain further the process of change that occur in today's English language. This is such an interesting topic to look upon, especially in today's era, where the language thrives swiftly because of the social media we use to communicate daily with people around the world. One of the social media platforms that has its own significance in developing new words and meanings is Twitter. The next sub-chapter will explain the basis and feature of Twitter that has made the platform as popular as it is today.

#### **4. Twitter**

Twitter is an American social media platform established in 2006. Twitter is a very unique platform for it limits its users from making a long post known as *tweets*. Twitter challenges its users with their 280-character limitation per tweet and focusing the users on text interaction instead of videos and pictures. Though, Twitter still allow its users to upload such files, however, most interactions in this platform are done through shared words.

There are other interesting features on Twitter such as *hashtag* that provides people with national and international topics they want to know more about. They can follow any specific topic by clicking the follow button and the updates will regularly appear on their timeline. Not only that, the most talked words locally and globally are listed in *Trending Topics*, helping people stay up-to-date with both

national and international news. Because of this extremely interactive feature of Twitter, the interaction between users seem to be limitless, we may reply, retweet and even like tweets from people around the world.

In 2013, Twitter become one of the top ten most-visited website and gained a title ‘The SMS of the Internet’. Quoting from Jakarta Globe, in 2016, Indonesia is the third country with most Twitter users in the world and on November 2019 Statista Research Department claimed there are 22.8 million users that are active on Twitter.

## **B. Previous Study**

When English language used to thrive swiftly through conquest, trade and migration, social media comes and escalates the possibility of language to evolve even more rapidly than before. This, unquestionably, has drawn the attention of many linguists especially in recording the newly-established English words and meanings. Some take the matter from the perspective of morphology, semiotic (Pei: 2014) and some even are interested in knowing the spread of these words throughout the United States of America (Eisenstein, O’Connor, Smith & Xing: 2014; Shroff & Ramesh: 2016).

Shahlee & Mustafa (2019), Ratih & Gusdian (2018), and Liu & Liu (2014) analyzed English newly-established words from morphological point of view and categorized each word into the morphological processes occurred. Shahlee & Mustafa (2019) took their data from platform WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter then made their conclusion that the most common morphological process found in those words is

acronym while this process occurred mostly in verbs. However, Liu & Liu (2014) who previously had done similar research found that the most common process found in the newly-established English words is compounding and it is mostly happened in nouns. On the other hand, Ratih & Gusdian (2018) came up with a conclusion that the most common process occurred in their research is affixation. The diverse results from each research is possible not only because the platform they utilize to collect their data were different, but also because the three research had taken place in a different time and even space, whilst words invention occurs almost every day.

With that being said, it is important to always have a more updated research for current established words on the internet, especially words and meanings that haven't been recorded in the dictionary. Though the research elaborated above are highly practical, however, most words analyzed are already been recorded in the dictionary. To add that, none of them has taken this matter from the perspectives of semantics. Most of the studies above only focused on the structure of the words and not the meanings when most people, especially English language learners are struggling in understanding the meaning of the new terms including slang, idioms and abbreviations. The closest research that uses semantics approach to define these new words and meanings was done by Dong Jinyu in 2014, where Jinyu described the semantic vagueness of language used on the internet. However, the research doesn't give any official definitions for each word. Another similar work that specifically analyzes the types of semantic change that occur in words was done by Mahade Hasan (2015) where he specifically defined the types of semantic change that occur in Arabic

words in Bengali.

This paper aims to fulfil the gap explained above by recording and defining both unrecorded words and meanings used broadly by English speaking community on Twitter. The words then compared to its old meanings and categorized into its own types of semantic change based on Bloomfield's theory in 1933.