



## Connotative Meanings in Political Headlines of a Local Newspaper

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received 30 May 2026 Revised 06 June 2026 Accepted 27 June 2026 Available online 30 June 2026</p> <p>ISSN: <a href="https://doi.org/10.32734/ijlsm.v5i1.26114">2986-3848</a></p> <hr/> <p><b>How to cite:</b> Noerfida, C., Aziz, Z.A., &amp; Muthalib, K.A. (2026). Connotative meanings in political headlines of a local newspaper. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 5(1), 10-19.</p>	<p>This descriptive qualitative research aims to identify the types of connotative meanings found in political news headlines of Serambi News, an online local newspaper published in Aceh Province. In analyzing this study, the writer used Leech's theory of meaning. The data were drawn from 65 political news headlines, selected for the presence of words or phrases with connotative meanings. The data were analyzed by examining the expressions in the headlines and reading the full articles to understand the context. The analysis revealed 44 connotative meanings categorized into three types: negative, neutral, and positive. The results showed that negative connotations were the most dominant type, representing 45.45% of the total findings, followed by neutral (29.55%) and positive (25%). This indicates that political headlines in Serambi News tend to adopt a provocative, critical tone to attract readers' attention. Moreover, the study highlights that the interpretation of connotative meanings can vary across contexts, cultures, and individual perceptions. Therefore, understanding connotative meaning is essential for both media producers and consumers in shaping and interpreting political discourse.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Connotative Meaning, Political Headlines, Serambi News</p>



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### 1. Introduction

The headline is a vital element of newspapers, serving as the primary tool for capturing readers' attention and encouraging them to read the entire article. According to Salliyanti et al. (2018), when people start reading a newspaper, their initial focus is on the headline, typically located at the top. If the headline is appealing and closely aligns with their personal interests, they are more likely to read the entire news article. Conversely, if the headline does not capture their attention, they will usually read only the headline. Therefore, the appeal of a newspaper's headline plays a crucial role in determining whether readers will engage with the entire article or merely skim the headline.

Headlines in the news are expected to be well-written and can convey synopses of news content. Since a headline is considered the essence of news and serves as a summary of an article, it should be highly crafted, and its significance should be obvious (Jiang, 2019). Moreover, using proper language in news headlines is essential for conveying messages clearly and preventing misunderstandings among readers. According to Rahmanda (2024), using appropriate journalistic language in news headlines helps prevent miscommunication and communicate the news clearly.

However, headline news frequently uses terms with multiple meanings, resulting in ambiguity, which may influence how readers understand the news. For instance, a study of *CNN World* headlines found that 60% of headlines used words with multiple meanings, suggesting a strong potential for varied interpretations and, in turn, affecting readers' comprehension of the news (Tarsil & Simatupang, 2024). Besides using terms with

different definitions, news headlines also contain language that carries implicit interpretations, further shaping how readers perceive the content. It is apparent from the analysis of *The Jakarta Post Online News* that 30 headlines contain words with deeper, suggested meanings (Candra & Martiarini, 2018).

The use of words with implied meanings in headline news can stimulate the reader's emotions and may also lead to confusion, as readers might find it challenging to discern the intended meaning. In semantics, this is called connotative meaning. Connotative meaning refers to the additional layers of meaning that a word conveys beyond its literal definition (Leech, 1981, p. 12). Finch (2003, p. 136) states that texts used in journalism and advertising have connotative meaning. This includes headlines, which are an integral part of journalistic language. For instance, the headline "*Popkot Medan Wadah Lahirkan Atlet*" from *Waspada* daily newspaper contains connotative language, with the word "*lahirkan*" denoting the act of creating or producing rather than its literal meaning of "*giving birth*" (Sallyanti et al., 2018)

The significance of connotative meaning in headlines becomes even more evident in political news, where they often serve as a gateway to understanding complex issues and reveal political bias. This is because political headlines are crafted not only to inform but also to evoke reactions and shape public opinion on key issues. Language in political headlines can trigger emotions for readers, influencing different responses and stereotypes (Tang, 2024). Wijayanti and Shalima (2020) state that connotative language in online political media titles aims to evoke a sense of value and capture the reader's attention. Ultimately, the use of connotative language in political headlines plays a crucial role in engaging readers and influencing their interpretation.

Studies on the use of connotative meanings in journalistic language, particularly in political news headlines, have been recently conducted by many researchers. Jayanti, Asridayani, and Afrilesa (2019), for example, have investigated how connotative language impacts readers' emotions and identified the types of connotations present using Leech's (1981) and Parera's (2004) theories. The study found that connotative meanings in political headlines can evoke strong emotional responses and can significantly influence readers' perceptions. Febriyanti (2024) also reported that, among the 10 selected headlines analyzed from BBC News online coverage of the Israel-Gaza war, none featured positive connotations, while 10% used negative connotations. The remaining 90% of the headlines exhibited neutral connotations, which were the most dominant type. The study concludes that the predominant use of neutral connotations in the selected headlines might be an effort by the news writers to elicit similar emotions and reactions from the readers. Maula and Ilyas (2021), in analyzing the use of connotative meanings in expressions related to the impact of the coronavirus in *Tempo English Magazine*, revealed that the Magazine predominantly uses expressions with negative connotations (15 instances), which are associated with economic threats, inadequate government policies, and the widespread negative effects of the pandemic. On the other hand, 12 expressions convey positive connotations linked to solutions for controlling the virus, the government's proactive response, and efforts to mitigate the pandemic's impacts.

Based on previous studies, the connotative meaning of headline news significantly affects readers' interpretations and emotional responses. However, the author notes that most research focuses on international and national news platforms, leaving a gap in the examination of local newspapers. Such a local newspaper is *Serambi News*, the most prominent news outlet in Aceh, which regularly reports on political issues. Several headlines appear to contain connotative meanings that are difficult to interpret, such as "*Bola Liar Politik Aceh*" (uploaded on 22 September 2024), because the term "*bola liar*" carries an implied meaning that may be unclear to general audiences. This lack of understanding may lead to misinterpretation of the intended message. Therefore, this research aims to uncover the connotative meanings in *Serambi News* political headlines and provide readers with clearer insights into the underlying implications.

This recent research, therefore, aims to identify the connotative meanings in *Serambi News* headlines related to political issues. This research is significant in advancing the understanding of connotative meanings in political headlines, particularly in local news outlets such as *Serambi News*. This exploration can enrich existing studies on language and its impact on readers. Practically speaking, this research is valuable for media practitioners, journalists, and political analysts, as it provides insights into how political messages are framed and perceived by the public. Additionally, this study offers a foundation for further research on the role of connotation in shaping the interpretation of political issues in local journalism.

## 2. Literature Review

Language is not only a tool for communication but also a medium for expressing emotions, impressions, and personal experiences. Words do not always carry a fixed or neutral meaning; instead, they often evoke certain emotions or associations depending on the context in which they are used. This phenomenon is referred to as connotative meaning, which is the expressive value of an expression that goes beyond its purely conceptual content and is based on what it refers to (Leech, 1981). A connotative meaning is an interpretation

that emerges due to the emotional connections that language users develop with the words they read or hear (Pateda, 2010). It means that a word's meaning is determined not solely by its dictionary definition but also by individuals' subjective experiences and feelings. Similarly, Kridalaksana (as cited in Suwandi, 2011) argues that connotative meaning is a component of a word's meaning that is influenced by the emotions of both the writer and the reader. This suggests that words can carry additional layers of meaning beyond their literal sense, making communication more nuanced and expressive.

Connotative meaning is shaped by personal memories, impressions, and emotions associated with an object or concept (Fauzan & Sakinah, 2020). This implies that connotative meanings are highly subjective and can vary from person to person. For instance, the title of one of Ariana Grande's songs, "God is a woman," has a connotative meaning because the lyrics describe a woman as a god who has greater power in love and places women at the center of the earth, rather than God being a woman with gender (Pratiwi et al., 2020).

Cultural and societal factors also influence the connotation of a word. Suryaningrat (2012) notes that different communities may perceive the same word differently based on their collective experiences and values. For instance, the color red may symbolize luck and prosperity in Chinese culture, while in Western contexts, it may be associated with danger or passion. This cultural variability demonstrates that connotative meaning is not fixed but rather dynamic and context-dependent. Connotative meaning carries more communicative value than denotative meaning because it reflects personal and cultural associations beyond a word's literal meaning (Leech, 1981). Similarly, Yule (2010) defines connotative meaning as the special meaning that individuals may ascribe to words, emphasizing its subjective nature. In some cases, connotative meanings can even be deliberately used to imply deeper or hidden messages in communication.

### 2.1 Characteristics of Connotative Meanings

According to Leech (1981, p.13), there are three characteristics of connotative meaning. Firstly, connotative meaning refers to the real-world associations connected to an expression when it is used or heard. In other words, connotation does not only come from the dictionary meaning of a word, but also from how the word relates to the speaker's real-life experience and emotions. For example, the word "*tsunami*" may simply mean a natural disaster to people in countries that have never experienced one. However, for people in Aceh who lived through the 2004 tsunami, the word can evoke fear, trauma, and sorrow because of their painful memories. This shows that connotative meaning is influenced by the realities surrounding the word's use. Therefore, connotative meaning must be studied and understood through one's experience of language in actual use (Parera, 2004).

Secondly, connotative meaning is unstable. It depends on how the speaker and the hearer interpret language and varies from age to age and society to society. An individual's experiences, culture, and historical period can influence the interpretation of connotative meaning (Leech, 1981, p. 13). For instance, the word "*woman*" has often been burdened with attributes such as being frail, prone to tears, and emotional. These connotations arise from societal attitudes rather than fixed realities, highlighting how connotative meanings are shaped by the cultural and social environments in which they are used.

Since connotative meanings are tied to the speaker's personal experiences in the real world, they tend to differ more significantly between communities than denotative meanings do (Allan, 2007). For instance, the word "*home*" may evoke deeply positive connotations, such as warmth, safety, and unconditional love, for individuals who were raised in nurturing, emotionally supportive family environments. In contrast, for those who have experienced instability, neglect, or domestic violence within their household, the same word may trigger negative associations, including fear, anxiety, and emotional distress. This contrast highlights that connotative meanings are not fixed but shaped by personal experiences and social contexts, making them highly subjective and variable across individuals. This subjectivity is closely tied to the emotional and personal responses that certain words can elicit. As Kreidler (1998, p. 44) explains, connotation refers to the personal and emotional associations a word evokes in a speaker or listener, extending far beyond its dictionary definition.

The last characteristic is connotative meaning, which is indeterminate and open-ended because it depends on the speaker's knowledge and beliefs. As Allan (2007) stated, connotative meanings are closely tied to the speaker's personal experiences in the real world, which is why they tend to vary more significantly between communities than denotative meanings. Similarly, Parera (2004) also explained that certain words carry different connotations across individuals, social groups, cultures, and generations. This makes connotative meaning open-ended, offering a range of interpretations. Leech (1981) further emphasized that any characteristic of the referent, whether identified subjectively or objectively, can contribute to the connotative meaning of the expression. This reinforces the open-ended nature of connotative meaning.

## 2.2 Types of Connotative Meaning

Chaer (2003) states that connotative meaning refers to a meaning that carries a sense, whether positive, negative, or sometimes neutral. Hook (as cited in Widarso, 1989, p. 71) also divides connotative meaning into three parts: positive connotative (purr word), negative connotative (snarl word), and neutral, which is mostly jargon. First, a positive connotation refers to a word that carries pleasant or favorable emotional associations. Examples of positive connotations include incredible, amazing, spectacular, and fantastic, as these words are associated with positive emotions or admiration. However, the connotation of a word often depends on the context in which it is used. A neutral word can take on a positive connotation when placed in a specific context. For instance, the Indonesian word *cair* (literally meaning “liquid”) generally carries a neutral connotation. However, in the headline “*Hore... THR dan gaji ke-13 PNS segera cair*” (Hurrah... THR and the 13th salary of civil servants will be released soon), the word *cair* has a positive connotation. In this context, *cair* refers to the release of salaries or bonuses, which brings happiness to the readers. Therefore, the word conveys a positive tone in this particular context (Jayanti et al., 2020).

Second, negative connotation refers to words that evoke unpleasant or unfavorable emotional reactions. Negative connotation is also known as a snarl word. According to Hayakawa in Leech (1981, p. 44), snarl words are unfavorable expressions used to give forceful emphasis to one’s hostility or disapproval. Terms referring to extreme or uncompromising political views, such as communist or fascist, are particularly prone to becoming snarl words. Another example can be seen in the word *gelapkan* (literally “to darken”) in the headline “*Gelapkan Sepeda Motor Teman untuk Beli Sabu*” (Darkening Friend’s Motorcycle to Buy Narcotics). The word *gelapkan* does not mean physically darkening the motorcycle, but rather to embezzle or to steal. Therefore, it carries a negative connotation, evoking negative feelings (Salliyanti et al., 2018, p. 77).

Third, neutral connotation refers to words that explicitly express no particular emotion or attitude. They describe something without suggesting approval or disapproval. For instance, the word *thin* is generally considered neutral because it describes a physical condition without implying whether it is good or bad. As Chaer (2003) explains, *thin* does not carry a particularly pleasant or unpleasant emotional tone. In contrast, words such as *slim* and *skinny*, which share a similar denotative meaning, carry positive and negative connotations, respectively. While *slim* tends to evoke admiration, *skinny* may trigger discomfort or criticism.

Connotation stimulates and engages the senses, emotions, attitudes, judgments, beliefs, and specific needs (Parera, 2004). The direction of this stimulation can be either positive or negative. The classification of these responses can overlap and change, influenced by the experiences and associations that individuals and societies hold. Thus, connotations are not fixed and absolute. A connotation may carry a negative meaning at one point in time and a positive one at another. For example, the word “*fire*” can carry both positive and negative meanings depending on the context in which it is used in the sentence. For example, in the sentence “*His words were a fire that ignited the spirit of the youth,*” the phrase carries a positive connotation, representing enthusiasm and motivation. However, in the sentence “*His statement ignited a fire of public anger*”, the word *fire* has a negative connotation because it implies anger. Similarly, Chaer (2003) notes that a word’s connotation can vary across individuals, regions, and historical periods. For example, the word *pig* holds a negative connotation for Muslims, but it does not carry the same negativity for those outside the faith. This suggests that positive and negative connotations are subjective and may vary depending on one’s background or context.

## 2.3 Connotative Meaning in Journalism

Journalistic language must follow the principles of journalism, one of which is being attractive (Chaer, 2010). This means that the sentences and words used should evoke interest or emotion, encouraging people to read the text. To achieve this, journalistic writing sometimes employs words with connotative meaning to stir the readers’ feelings. Finch (2003) states that non-core vocabulary is often chosen in persuasive writing, such as advertising and journalism, because of its greater connotative impact, which helps influence the audience’s emotions or opinions. This implies that the use of connotative meaning is a common feature of journalistic language, particularly in contexts that aim to influence readers’ emotions.

Connotative words in journalism also function as a means to emphasize what the reader should pay closer attention to, reflecting the writer’s stance regarding which actions or entities are considered negative or positive (Sitio, 2020). This linguistic strategy aims to guide readers toward adopting a particular perspective while interpreting the text. Particularly in conflict zones, language is frequently utilized to promote certain viewpoints, whether positive or negative, and to reinforce specific ideologies (Khanji, 2018). The connotations of specific political terms can vary significantly across speech communities, depending on their prevailing political systems and media orientations. For instance, the term “*jihadist*” may carry a positive meaning in certain Islamic states, whereas it is generally perceived negatively in non-Islamic contexts. Similarly, the term

"revolutionaries" might be viewed as commendable in one context but as threatening or undesirable in another, depending on the sociopolitical circumstances and historical background (Bouderbane, 2024). The variation illustrates that the use of connotative meaning in journalism is interpreted differently across regions, depending on the public's cultural, political, and linguistic understanding of the term.

In certain communities, a single word can carry heavy emotional weight and spark intense reactions. For instance, the term "Israel" carries a strongly negative and stereotypical connotation, often associated with opposition and political tension. Stereotypical connotations, especially those related to ethnicity or religion, must be used with great caution in journalistic contexts, as they can easily offend or provoke emotional responses even when used in satire or humor (Parera, 2004).

Parera (2004) further explains that the use of language with connotative meaning must be applied carefully, and only in appropriate contexts and at suitable times. In journalistic writing, particularly in news reporting, the language should focus on presenting facts and concrete evidence to the readers without being influenced by the writer's personal views. Readers have the right to receive information that reflects reality, untainted by the subjective opinions of journalists or editors. This principle represents the ethical dimension of using connotative language in journalism. News reports and journalistic content should prioritize denotative language that is precise, measurable, and verifiable since connotative meanings are often illogical, unpredictable, and more likely to cause misinterpretation.

### 3. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. According to Gay and Airasian (2000), the descriptive qualitative method is a study that determines and describes the way things are. It aimed to describe and analyze the data as it naturally occurred, without manipulation. In addition, this method supported the identification and description of meanings within the descriptive data, as it aligned with the purpose of this study: to uncover the connotative meanings in political news headlines descriptively. The subject of this research was the political news headlines published in the political column of *Serambi News*. Sugiyono (2009) states that the study object is an attribute, nature, or value of a person, item, or activity, with particular changes specified by the researchers to be learned and from which conclusions are derived. In this case, the study focused on the connotative meaning in the selected headlines.

Since this study involved identifying and classifying connotative meanings within political news headlines from *Serambi News*, the researchers played a central role in interpreting language nuances. To support this interpretation, the researcher also examined the contexts of the connotative words in the headlines and the full news texts to better understand the connotative meanings embedded in them. The data will be presented in a table to help the researcher systematically analyze and interpret the connotative meanings in the political headlines.

One of the crucial stages in conducting research is determining the appropriate data collection techniques. According to Moleong (2013), qualitative research commonly uses three primary methods for data collection: observation, interviews, and documentation. For this study, data were collected from the *Serambi News* website. The data were collected from the *Serambi News* website. Subsequently, the researchers selected headlines that contained connotative meanings.

A total of 65 political news headlines with connotative meanings were identified. The next step was to identify the words or phrases that carried connotative meanings for analysis. Since the original articles were written in Bahasa Indonesia, the final step in the data collection process involved translating the content into English. Before translating, the researchers consulted the KBBI Online website (<https://www.kbbi.web.id/>) to obtain the literal meanings of the words, as literal meaning is needed for comparison and to help readers see the differences. At the same time, contextual interpretation is part of the analysis section. KBBI (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*) Online is the official digital dictionary of the Indonesian language, which provides standardized definitions and explanations of Indonesian words. The data were then analysed following the model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Result

This study identified 44 connotative meanings across 65 political news headlines. The difference in numbers occurs because several words, such as *kursi* 'chair', appeared repeatedly in more than one headline, which means one connotative meaning can be found in multiple headlines. The connotative meanings in the news headlines will be categorized by type. The classification depends on how the words or phrases are perceived in the headlines, particularly in light of the context and the emotional or psychological impact they may have on readers. Each identified connotative meaning was first translated literally into English so that

readers could clearly see the literal meaning before understanding that the connotative meaning goes beyond it.

### 3.1.1 Positive Connotation

Positive connotation is words or expressions that create favorable, supportive, or optimistic impressions. The phrase *tancap gas*, " meaning "step on the gas" was found in the headline "*PDIP Siap Tancap Gas, Megawati Segera Umumkan Nama Capres 2024*" (PDIP Ready to Step on the Gas, as Megawati will soon announce the 2024 presidential candidate). The phrase "*tancap gas*" does not literally mean pressing the gas pedal of a vehicle. Connotatively, it suggests that *PDIP* is accelerating its political actions. The term carries a positive connotation in this context, reflecting *PDIP*'s readiness to face the national political contest.

Another finding in this category is the phrase *satukan barisan* 'unite the line' as in "*Abu Razak Serukan Kader PA Satukan Barisan Rebut Kekuasaan di Parlemen Aceh*" (Abu Razak Calls PA Cadres to Unite the Line to Seize Power in the Aceh Parliament). Literally, the phrase means to arrange people so they stand or line up in a straight line. However, considering the context of the news, which discusses political strategy ahead of the 2024 election. The phrase means strengthening solidarity, avoiding division, and building internal cohesion within the party toward a shared goal to reclaim power in parliament. Therefore, the phrase carries a positive connotation as it represents the spirit of togetherness and organized political struggle.

### 3.1.2 Negative Connotation

Negative connotation is words or expressions that suggest unfavorable, critical, or pessimistic impressions. This study found 20 negative connotative meanings in 22 headlines published in the *Serambi News* newspaper. Some examples of such expressions are as follows.

The word *menghantam* 'hitting' was found in the headline "*Jubir Pemerintah Aceh MTA: Pernyataan Dek Fad Gerindra Seperti Menghantam Partai Sendiri*" (Aceh Government Spokesperson MTA: The Statement of Dek Fad from Gerindra Is Like Hitting His Own Party). The word "*menghantam*" in the headline is not interpreted literally as "to punch/to hit something hard". However, in the context of the news, *menghantam* here connotes bringing down or discrediting. It implies that Dek Fad's statement unintentionally reveals his party's incompetence in addressing Aceh's poverty stagnation. Previously, Dek Fad stated that during Achmad Marzuki's tenure as the Acting Governor of Aceh, there had been no significant achievements and that the poverty rate continued to rise. According to the MTA, such a statement can be perceived as a form of self-criticism of his own party, *Gerindra*, which holds 8 seats in the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRA) and shares responsibility within the government for overcoming poverty in Aceh. Therefore, if the headline is reinterpreted, it would approximately be: "Aceh Government Spokesperson MTA: The Statement of Dek Fad from Gerindra Is Like discrediting His Own Party," and it carries a negative connotation.

The word *kangkangi*, meaning "straddle," is another example that falls under this category. In the headline "*Kuasa Hukum Teuku Cut Rahman Ingatkan DPRK Abdyta tak Kangkangi UU Soal PAW*" (Legal Counsel of Teuku Cut Rahman Reminds DPRK Abdyta Not to Straddle the Law Regarding PAW), the word "*kangkangi*," according to KBBI, means "the gap between the upper parts of the thighs." However, this literal meaning does not make sense in the context of the news headline, suggesting that the word carries a different meaning. Based on the context article's article, the writer concludes that "*kangkangi*" connotes "to overstep." The statement supports this: "The legal counsel of Teuku Cut Rahman reminded the Regional House of Representatives of Southwest Aceh (DPRK Abdyta) not to rush in deciding that his client is no longer a member of the council. If forced, Erisman added, it would conflict with Law No. 17 of 2014 and Government Regulation No. 12 of 2018. Therefore, if the headline were to be reinterpreted contextually, it would become: Legal Counsel of Teuku Cut Rahman Reminds DPRK Abdyta Not to Overstep the Law Regarding PAW.

The expression "*tanyoe aceh chit biek rhah pingan*" 'we the Acehnese are indeed the ones doing the dishes' was found in one of the headlines "*Jokowi Perpanjang Masa Jabatan Achmad Marzuki, Apa Karya: 'Tanyoe Aceh Chit Biek Rhah Pingan*' (Jokowi Extends the Term of Office of Achmad Marzuki, Apa Karya: 'We the Acehnese are indeed the ones doing the dishes'). The Acehnese expression "*Tanyoe Aceh Chit Biek Rhah Pingan*," when literally translated, means "We Acehnese are indeed the descendants of dishwashers." To fully understand the connotative meaning of this expression, it is important to analyze the key lexical elements used in Acehnese. First, the word "*tanyoe*" refers to the inclusive "we," meaning the speaker includes both themselves and the audience in the statement. In Acehnese, there is also an exclusive form, "*kamoe*" (equivalent to *kami* in Indonesian), which excludes the listener. The use of "*tanyoe*" in the headline, therefore, highlights a collective identity of all Acehnese people, suggesting that the unfavorable situation being described is shared by the whole community, not just a certain group.

Second, the word “*biek*” means “descendants”. In Acehese, this word often carries a negative connotation because it is always paired with undesirable qualities. For example, expressions such as “*biek hana malee*” (descendants without shame) or “*biek hana goet*” (descendants lacking goodness). In this context, “*biek rhah pingan*” literally means “descendants of dishwashers,” and connotes a lineage associated with unimportant roles. In the fuller version, “We Acehese are only washing the dishes, while others are the ones who eat,” the phrase implies that Acehese people are relegated to unimportant roles. In contrast, others reap the benefits or hold the power.

In this news article, the remark was made by Apa Karya, a former Defense Minister of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Because of his important role in Aceh’s history, his words carry strong meaning. His frustration stemmed from the central government’s decision to extend Achmad Marzuki’s term as Acting Governor of Aceh. Achmad Marzuki is a military figure and bureaucrat in Indonesia who was born in Bandung, West Java, and is not Acehese, which shows that Aceh is still led by outsiders rather than its own people. Therefore, the expression carries a negative connotation, highlighting Acehese feelings of being sidelined in their own land. Apa Karya’s remark “*Loen yang setuju Pj Gubernur Aceh harus awak Aceh walaupun lahe di mana saja*” (I agree that the acting governor of Aceh should be someone from Aceh, regardless of their birthplace).

### 3.1.3 Neutral Connotation

Neutral connotation is words or expressions that elicit no emotional response at all. In this study, 13 neutral connotative meanings were found in 31 headlines. The phrase *di depan mata* ‘in front of the eyes’ was found in the headline “*Reshuffle di Depan Mata, Ditanya Nasib Menteri NasDem, Jokowi: Ditunggu Saja*” (“Reshuffle in Front of the Eyes, Asked About the Fate of NasDem Minister, Jokowi: Just Wait”). The phrase “*di depan mata*” or “in front of the eyes” literally refers to something being physically in front of one’s eyes. However, in this context, it means the cabinet reshuffle is imminent. The connotative meaning of “*di depan mata*” is considered neutral because it does not carry any emotion.

The word *kantong* ‘pocket’ was also used in a headline to reflect a connotative meaning. It is found in the following headline:

*“Demokrat Tegaskan Satu Nama Cawapres di **Kantong** Anies Bukan Gimmick, NasDem Mengaku Tetap Konsisten”* (“Democrat Emphasizes One Name of Vice-Presidential Candidate in Anies’ **Pocket** Is Not a Gimmick, NasDem Admits to Stay Consistent”).

Referring to the KBBI, *kantong* literally means a pocket or pouch (such as on clothes). However, in the headline, “*kantong*” carries a connotation that differs from its literal meaning. It suggests that Anies already hold the vice-presidential candidate’s name but has not yet been announced. The quote supports this, “*Riefky yang juga anggota Tim Delapan Anies Baswedan itu menyebut, Demokrat, PKS, dan NasDem sudah sepakat menyerahkan keputusan bakal cawapres kepada Anies Baswedan,*” (Riefky, who is also a member of Anies Baswedan’s Team of Eight, stated that the Democratic Party, PKS, and NasDem have agreed to hand over the decision regarding the prospective vice-presidential candidate to Anies Baswedan) which shows the name is already chosen and kept by Anies, just not revealed to the public yet. The connotation is neutral, just showing that something’s already settled, but still kept inside.

### 3.2 Discussion

The results of this study reveal that negative connotations are the most dominant, accounting for 45.45% (20 out of 44), followed by neutral at 29.55% (13 out of 44), and positive at 25% (11 out of 44). This indicates that political headlines tend to emphasize negative tones more than positive or neutral ones. This finding is similar to that of Maula and Ilyas (2021), who also found that negative connotations were more common. In their study of the use of connotative meaning in Tempo English Magazine, most expressions conveyed negative tones.

This predominance of negative connotations aligns with the nature of political headlines, which are often provocative and designed to make readers curious. This aligns with Sumadiria’s (2017) statement that headlines should be provocative to attract immediate attention. For example, the headline “*Tifatul Sembiring hingga Mardani Ali Sera Komentari Pidato Jokowi di Musra: Nanya Boleh Dong*” contains the phrase “*nanya boleh dong,*” which carries a negative connotation with a provocative tone because it implies criticism sarcastically. This kind of expression is effective at attracting readers’ attention, as it triggers emotional responses and makes the headline more engaging.

According to Yunus (2010), a provocative headline appeals to psychological factors and stimulates the reader's emotions. Emotional stimulation in headlines can come from both positive and negative connotative words. However, based on this study's findings, the positive connotation category is the least frequent of the three. This suggests that political headlines are less likely to use positive connotation instead tend to rely more on negative tones to grab attention. Furthermore, connotative words also function as a means to emphasize what the reader should pay closer attention to, reflecting the writer's stance regarding which actions or entities are considered negative or positive (Sitio, 2020). Therefore, the lack of positive connotations in *Serambi News* headlines shows that the news directs readers' attention more toward negative political issues.

The connotations of specific political terms can vary significantly across speech communities (Bouderbane, 2024). For example, the connotative word *Tegak Lurus* in the headline "*Posisinya Sebagai Ketua PA Aceh Barat Diganti Tarmizi SP, Samsi Barmi: Saya Tegak Lurus ke Mualem*" is considered positive because it portrays loyalty to the political leader Mualem. However, it can also carry a threatening tone for communities that oppose Mualem's leadership. In other words, it can take on a negative meaning depending on the person. This is common in connotative meaning because one of its characteristics, as Leech (1981) notes, is instability. An individual's experiences, culture, and historical period can influence the interpretation of connotative meaning.

Therefore, connotative meaning must be studied and understood through one's experience of language in actual use (Parera, 2004). That is why the researcher reads the entire article to accurately categorize the correct type of each connotative word found in the headlines. For example, the word "*keras kepala*" in the headline "*Fahri Hamzah: Indonesia Perlu Pemimpin yang Agak Keras Kepala, Adanya di Pak Prabowo*". At first, the researcher thought that the word "*keras kepala*" had a negative connotation because, in general, being stubborn is considered a bad trait. However, after reading the entire article and its placement in the headline, "*keras kepala*" turns out to be positive because it describes a leader who is brave, firm, and not easily swayed by foreign pressure. So, to truly understand the connotative meaning, the context must be considered.

The use of connotative words in news headlines can lead not only to misinterpretation of their type but also to ambiguity. This is because not all readers easily understand some connotative words in *Serambi News* headlines. Unlike words such as "*kursi*" (chair) to mean political position or "*nakhodai*" (steers a ship) to mean leading, which are quickly recognized, there are other connotative meanings that are less clear. For example, "*bola liar*" (wild ball) in the headline "*Bola Liar Politik Aceh*" or the phrase "*Tanyoe Aceh Chit Biek Rhah Pingan*" in the headline "*Jokowi Perpanjang Masa Jabatan Achmad Marzuki, Apa Karya: 'Tanyoe Aceh Chit Biek Rhah Pingan'*" can be difficult to understand. Moreover, these expressions are not clearly explained in the article. On the one hand, it may attract certain readers to learn more. However, it can also discourage others because the meaning is not clear from the headline alone. Readers tend to overlook complex headlines in favor of simpler ones, which are more accessible and easier to comprehend (Shulman et al., 2024).

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of 65 political news headlines of *Serambi News*, a total of 44 connotative meanings were found. The percentage for each type was calculated by dividing the number of instances of each connotation by the total number of connotative meanings, then multiplying by 100. Based on this calculation, negative connotations constitute 45.45% (20 out of 44), neutral connotations 29.55% (13 out of 44), and positive connotations 25% (11 out of 44). Negative connotation is the most dominant type found in the headlines. The prevalence of negative connotations suggests that political headlines in *Serambi News* tend to emphasize provocative, critical tones rather than positive ones. This supports the idea that headlines are designed to attract readers' attention, often by stimulating emotional responses. The study also shows that connotative meanings can vary depending on the context, culture, and personal interpretation. Words like *keras kepala* and *tegak lurus* prove that the same expression can be understood as positive or negative depending on how it is used and who interprets it. Therefore, context plays an important role in determining the type of connotative meaning.

For journalists, it is suggested that they pay attention to word choice when writing headlines, since the overuse of negative connotations may too often lead readers to focus more on conflict than solutions. For students and teachers, this research can serve as material for learning how language in the media carries hidden meanings. Finally, for readers in general, it is important to develop critical thinking when reading news, especially political headlines, so provocative tones do not easily influence them.

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