ANALYSIS OF LITERAL AND IMPLIED MEANING IN INSTAPOETRY @RUPIKAUR: A SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC STUDY

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Abstrak: Perkembangan Instagram sebagai bentuk sastra digital di media sosial menandai transformasi dalam cara puisi diproduksi dan dikonsumsi dalam budaya kontemporer. Karya-karya @rupikaur dicirikan oleh bahasa minimalis, repetitif, dan metaforis, namun mengandung kedalaman makna yang mengundang interpretasi luas dari pembaca. Studi ini berawal dari permasalahan bagaimana makna literal (makna semantik) dan makna implisit (makna pragmatik) dibangun dalam instapoetry dan bagaimana hubungan antara kedua lapisan ini membentuk kekuatan ekspresif teks. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan struktur makna literal berdasarkan relasi leksikal, metafora konseptual, dan pola sintaksis, serta untuk mengungkap implikatur, tindak tutur tidak langsung, dan makna kontekstual yang muncul dalam tujuh puisi karya @rupikaur yang diterbitkan selama tahun 2023–2024. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus tekstual. Data diperoleh melalui analisis dokumen digital dan dipilih secara sengaja berdasarkan representasi tema-tema seperti cinta, identitas diri, pemberdayaan perempuan, memori kolektif, dan ketahanan emosional.
Kata Kunci: Makna, Semantik, Pragmatik, Instapoetry.

Abstract: The development of instapoetry as a form of digital literature on social media marks a transformation in the ways poetry is produced and consumed within contemporary culture. The works of @rupikaur are characterized by minimalist, repetitive, and metaphorical language, yet they contain a depth of meaning that invites broad interpretation from readers. This study originates from the problem of how literal meaning (semantic meaning) and implied meaning (pragmatic meaning) are constructed in instapoetry and how the relationship between these two layers forms the expressive power of the text. The objective of this research is to describe the structure of literal meaning based on lexical relations, conceptual metaphors, and syntactic patterns, as well as to uncover implicatures, indirect speech acts, and contextual meanings that emerge in seven poems by @rupikaur published during 2023–2024. This study employs a qualitative approach with a textual case study design. The data were obtained through digital document analysis and were purposively selected based on the representation of themes such as love, self-identity, women's empowerment, collective memory, and emotional resilience.
Keywords: Meaning, Semantics, Pragmatics, Instapoetry.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media over the past five years has significantly transformed the landscape of literary production and consumption. Instagram, as a platform based on visual content and short textual formats, has become a space for the emergence of instapoetry poetry published in digital form characterized by minimalism, conciseness, and shareability. This phenomenon reflects not only a shift in medium but also a transformation in aesthetic and linguistic strategies in meaning construction. Recent studies in international Scopus-indexed journals confirm that digital poetry on social media presents new forms of expression that combine structural simplicity with interpretative depth (Malik & Fatima, 2022; Johansson, 2021). In this context, the @rupikaur account represents a significant global instapoetry presence due to its consistent use of simple language to convey powerful emotional, social, and political messages.

From a theoretical perspective, literal meaning falls within the domain of semantics, emphasizing denotative or lexical meaning embedded in linguistic structures. In contemporary linguistics, literal meaning is understood as the result of systemic relations among lexical elements within a text (Zhang & Liu, 2020). Recent research demonstrates that semantic analysis in digital texts is essential for identifying explicit meaning patterns prior to further interpretation (Al-Shehari & Alghamdi, 2023). In digital poetry, the simplicity of diction often constructs an apparently direct literal meaning, which subsequently serves as the foundation for deeper layers of meaning.

Implied meaning, in contrast, is examined within pragmatics, which highlights the role of context, implicature, and communicative relations between writer and reader. Contemporary pragmatic studies emphasize that implied meaning in social media texts is frequently constructed through conventional and conversational implicatures that rely on shared knowledge between creator and audience (Kecskes, 2022; Haugh & Culpeper, 2021). In Instagram poetry, implied meaning often emerges through omission, implicit metaphors, and linguistic minimalism that invites interpretative participation (Anderson, 2020; López & Pérez, 2024).

Furthermore, the integration of semantics and pragmatics in digital literary studies has become increasingly relevant, as texts do not exist monomodally but rather within multimodal ecosystems involving visual design, typography, and audience interaction. Recent international

studies demonstrate that integrated analyses of explicit and implicit meaning in digital texts can reveal identity and emotional constructions more comprehensively (Rahman, 2023; Silva & Santos, 2022). Therefore, a semantic–pragmatic approach constitutes an appropriate framework for examining instapoetry as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is motivated by the need to systematically examine the relationship between literal and implied meaning in @rupikaur's instapoetry. Although previous studies have addressed instapoetry from feminist, digital discourse, and multimodal perspectives, relatively few have specifically integrated semantic and pragmatic analyses to identify these two layers of meaning simultaneously. The research questions are as follows: (1) How is literal meaning constructed in @rupikaur's instapoetry? and (2) How is implied meaning constructed through pragmatic mechanisms in these texts? This study aims to describe and analyze the relationship between literal and implied meaning using an integrated semantic and pragmatic approach. The distinction of this research from prior studies lies in its systematic linguistic focus on meaning duality rather than on thematic or ideological dimensions alone. Its novelty resides in applying lexical semantic frameworks and pragmatic implicature theory to instapoetry as a form of contemporary digital literature, thereby contributing theoretically to the development of digital literary linguistics in the social media era.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A.   *Main Theoretical Foundation: George Yule's Pragmatic Theory*

This study is grounded in George Yule's pragmatic theory, particularly his concepts of implied meaning, implicature, context, and inference. Yule defines pragmatics as the study of meaning communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a hearer based on specific contexts. Meaning is not always explicitly encoded in linguistic structure; rather, it is often inferred through processes involving shared knowledge and situational context. Within this framework, implied meaning arises when readers or listeners draw conclusions beyond the literal meaning of an utterance. Yule emphasizes that interpretation depends not only on linguistic structure but also on social, cultural, and psychological contexts. This perspective is particularly relevant for contemporary digital texts, where communication frequently relies on implicit strategies and linguistic economy. Recent research confirms that pragmatic inference remains a dominant framework for analyzing implicit meaning in digital discourse (Kecskes, 2022; Haugh &

Culpeper, 2021), and that contextual interpretation in online discourse is increasingly complex (Al-Shehari & Alghamdi, 2023).

B.   Literal Meaning from a Semantic Perspective

Literal meaning constitutes the primary focus of semantic analysis. Conceptually, it refers to denotative or conceptual meaning contained within lexical units and grammatical structures. Semantic analysis examines relations such as synonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, and other semantic relations within the linguistic system. Contemporary developments in semantics extend beyond dictionary meaning to include structural meaning patterns in digital texts (Zhang & Liu, 2020). Recent studies indicate that literal meaning structures in online texts form the interpretative foundation prior to pragmatic analysis (Silva & Santos, 2022; Rahman, 2023). Corpus-based approaches further highlight the importance of identifying explicit lexical patterns as a basis for meaning analysis (Al-Shehari & Alghamdi, 2023).

C.   Implied Meaning and Implicature in Contemporary Pragmatics

Implied meaning refers to meaning that is not directly stated but inferred through context. The concept of implicature is central to understanding how utterances convey more than their literal content. Research in the *Journal of Pragmatics* emphasizes that digital communication intensifies the use of implicature as a strategy of linguistic economy (Kecskes, 2022). Haugh and Culpeper (2021) argue that implicit meaning in modern discourse emerges from the interaction between linguistic and social contexts. Similarly, López and Pérez (2024) demonstrate that social media poetry often utilizes controlled ambiguity to generate specific pragmatic effects. Thus, implied meaning results from the interaction between text and context, requiring active reader participation in interpretation.

D.   Context, Inference, and Digital Discourse

Context is a fundamental component of pragmatics, encompassing physical, social, cultural, and situational dimensions surrounding an utterance. In digital communication, context becomes more complex due to multimodality and audience participation. Recent studies reveal that meaning interpretation in digital discourse is strongly influenced by shared cultural references and online communicative practices (Johansson, 2021; Anderson, 2020). Malik and Fatima (2022) further argue that digital texts are inherently multimodal, meaning that meaning is constructed not only verbally but also visually and typographically. Indonesian linguistic

studies likewise emphasize the increasing importance of the semantic–pragmatic interface in analyzing online discourse (Rahmawati, 2021; Nurhadi, 2023).

E.   *Integration of Semantics and Pragmatics*

The integration of semantics and pragmatics enables simultaneous analysis of two layers of meaning: literal meaning as explicit structure and implied meaning as contextual inference. This integrative approach is known as the semantic–pragmatic interface. Silva and Santos (2022) assert that integrated analysis facilitates the identification of relationships between explicit and implicit meaning in contemporary texts. Rahman (2023) highlights its relevance for multimodal digital texts. Within the Indonesian context, Pratama and Wahyuni (2022) and Fitriani (2022) similarly emphasize its significant contribution to understanding meaning construction in social media discourse. Accordingly, this study positions Yule's pragmatic theory as the principal framework for analyzing implied meaning, supported by semantic analysis for identifying literal meaning and reinforced by recent scholarship on digital discourse.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as it focuses on an in-depth exploration of the construction of literal and implied meaning within a specific phenomenon instapoetry texts on the @rupikaur account allowing for holistic contextual and interpretative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The data consist of textual documents published on Instagram, selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) complete poetic texts; (2) containing potential literal and implied meanings; and (3) published within the past five years. The number of data items was determined according to the principle of data saturation, continuing until no new meaning categories emerged (Guest et al., 2020).
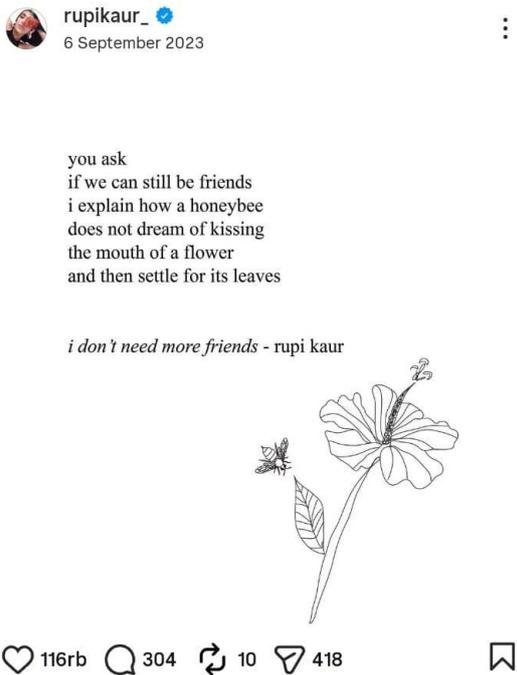
The research was conducted within a digital or virtual field, as Instagram functions as a public communication medium shaping practices of meaning production and interpretation in online culture (Tagg & Seargeant, 2021). Data were collected through document analysis, involving identification, downloading, initial coding, and systematic text classification (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022). Data analysis employed thematic analysis combined with open coding, encompassing stages of data reduction, coding, semantic and pragmatic categorization, theory-based interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo software

facilitated systematic mapping of relationships among categories (Woolf & Silver, 2022). Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability using theoretical triangulation, audit trails, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Ethical considerations were observed by responsibly using publicly available data, maintaining textual integrity, and avoiding exposure of personal data from other platform users.
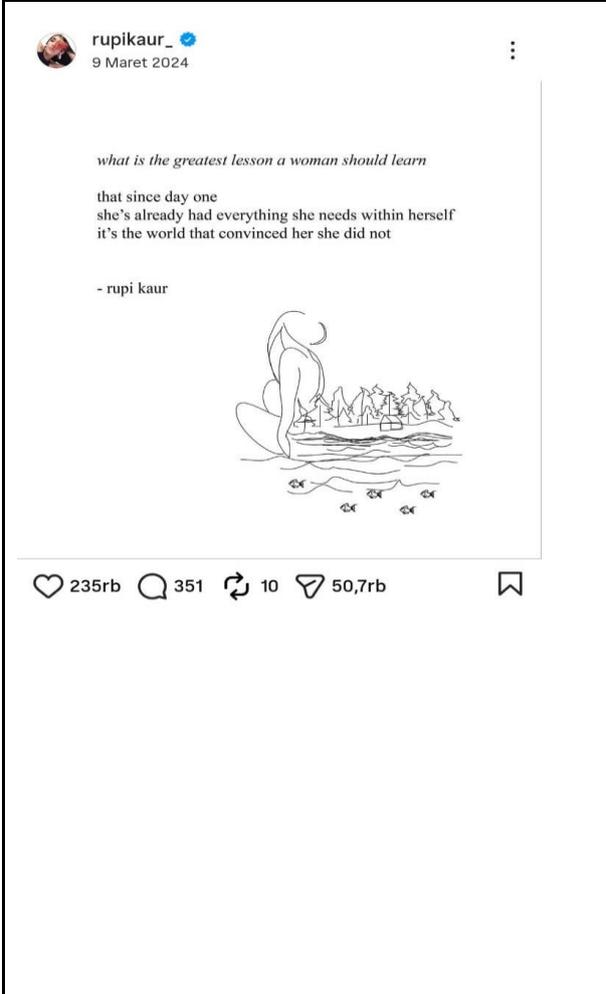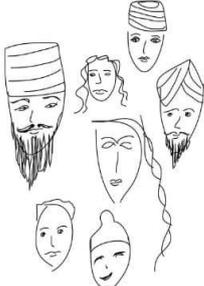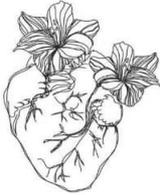
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following are the results of the pragmatic semantic analysis of @rupikaur's Instapoetry works.

Poems	Semantic and Pragmatic Meaning
rupikaur_ ✔ 6 September 2023 you ask if we can still be friends i explain how a honeybee does not dream of kissing the mouth of a flower and then settle for its leaves *i don't need more friends* - rupi kaur ♡ 116rb ○ 304 ⇄ 10 ▽ 418	**Semantic Meaning** ● ***Honeybee*** denotes a bee, an insect that collects nectar. ● ***Mouth of a flower*** literally refers to the central part of a flower (pistil/petals), the source of nectar. ● ***Leaves*** signify the outer parts of a plant that are not the source of nectar. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● ***Honeybee*** represents the lyrical subject (the "I"). ● ***Flower* symbolizes** a romantic partner or love relationship. ● ***Mouth of a flower*** implies intimate and profound love. *Leaves* represent a more superficial relationship, such as friendship.

rupikaur_ ✔ 29 September 2023 my mind my body and i all live in one place but it feels like we are three completely different people *disconnected* - rupi kaur ♡ ◯ 146 ⇄ 5 ▽ 🔖	**Semantic Meaning** ● *My mind* denotes the cognitive aspect of a human being. ● *My body* refers to the physical body. ● *And I* literally indicates the self or personal identity. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● The poem suggests disharmony among rational **(mind)**, physical **(body)**, and personal identity **(self)**. ● *Three completely different people* does not refer to three actual individuals but functions metaphorically to express psychological or emotional disintegration.
rupikaur_ ✔ 21 Februari 2024 when you start loving someone new you laugh at the indecisiveness of love remember when you were sure the last one was *the one* and now here you are redefining *the one* all over again *a fresh love is a gift* - rupi kaur ♡ 97,2rb ◯ 190 ⇄ 8 ▽ 1.320 🔖	**Semantic Meaning** ● *Start loving someone new* literally means beginning to love a new person. ● *Indecisiveness of love* refers to uncertainty or ambiguity in love. ● *The one* **lexically** denotes someone perceived as a destined or true partner. ● *Redefining the one* literally means redefining who is considered the destined partner. ● *A fresh love is a gift* signifies that new love is a valuable blessing. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● The concept of *"the one"* is not absolute but an emotional construct subject to change. ● When *"someone"* falls in love again, they recognize that prior convictions were not final.

	● ***Love*** is dynamic rather than deterministic.
	Semantic Meaning ● ***The greatest lesson*** lexically refers to the most important lesson. ● ***A woman should learn*** positions "woman" as a generic subject. *Since day one* means from the beginning of life. ● ***Everything she needs within herself*** indicates that all necessities or potential already exist within her. ● ***The world convinced her*** literally means that the social environment influenced or persuaded her to believe otherwise. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● ***The world*** represents not merely the physical world but social systems, patriarchal culture, beauty standards, and social constructions that marginalize women. ● ***Everything she needs*** implies inherent potential, self-worth, intelligence, and inner strength.

rupikaur_ ✔ 4 Juni 2024 i will never be quiet about the way my people resisted so i could be free - rupi kaur ♡ ◯ 123 ⟳ 8 ▽ 🔖	**Semantic Meaning** ● ***I will never be quiet*** literally means "I will never remain silent." ● ***My people*** denotes a community or group forming part of the speaker's identity (ethnic, cultural, or national). ● ***Resisted*** means to struggle or fight against something. ● ***So I could be free*** indicates the attainment of freedom as a result. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● ***My people*** refers to a group experiencing oppression or colonization (in the context of Rupi Kaur, potentially associated with Punjabi/Sikh diaspora identity). ● ***Resisted*** implies collective struggle against power structures. ● ***Be quiet*** does not merely mean physical silence but silence regarding history and injustice.
rupikaur_ ✔ 10 September 2024 what is stronger than the human heart which shatters over and over and still lives - rupi kaur ♡ 150rb ◯ 316 ⟳ 83 ▽ 20,5rb 🔖	**Semantic Meaning** ● ***Stronger*** means more powerful. *The human heart* literally refers to the biological organ. ● ***Shatters over and over*** denotes repeated breaking. ● ***Still lives*** means continuing to live or function. **Pragmatic Meaning** ● ***Human heart*** refers not to the biological organ but to human emotional capacity. ● ***Shatters*** represents heartbreak, trauma, loss, or suffering. ● ***Still lives*** implies resilience and the ability to recover.

Semantic Meaning
- *Here you are living* literally means "Here you are, alive."
- *Despite it all* signifies "in spite of everything."

Pragmatic Meaning
- *It all* refers to unspoken hardships, trauma, loss, or failure.
- *Living* implies not merely biological survival but emotional and existential endurance.

Discussion
Poem 1

The findings demonstrate a close interrelation between literal (semantic) and implied (pragmatic) meaning. Literal meaning functions as the foundational structure establishing textual coherence, while pragmatic meaning emerges through readers' inferential processes regarding the analogy employed.

Semantically, the metaphor of the bee and the flower constructs a conceptual mapping between the natural domain and interpersonal relationships. The opposition between *"mouth"* and *"leaves"* generates a hierarchy of meaning core versus periphery, essence versus complement. Although lexically simple, the poem is conceptually dense.

Pragmatically, the central meaning resides in implicature. The poet does not explicitly state, "I refuse to be just friends," but instead employs an analogy that appears logically and naturally indisputable. Consequently, the rejection is framed as "natural" rather than as an emotionally driven personal stance. This strategy mitigates the illocutionary force while simultaneously intensifying its emotional impact. The use of natural metaphors universalizes

meaning, facilitating inference and demonstrating how structural simplicity generates interpretative depth.

Poem 2

Semantically, repetition and parallelism (*"my mind / my body / and I"*) construct a triadic structure emphasizing fragmentation. The opposition between *"one place"* and *"three completely different people"* produces conceptual tension.

Pragmatically, the poem conveys existential alienation. The psychological implicature lies in the disconnection among mind, body, and identity, reflecting internal disharmony rather than literal multiplicity.

Poem 3

Linguistic minimalism enhances pragmatic effect. The absence of explicit explanation invites readers to fill interpretative gaps through personal experience. Semantically, the repetition of *"the one"* illustrates lexical flexibility and conceptual redefinition.

Pragmatically, temporal reflection between past and present encourages readers to recognize emotional inconsistency as part of human experience. The generalized pronoun *"you"* universalizes the experience, transforming the poem from a narrative about changing partners into a reflection on reconstructing love's meaning.

Poem 4

Semantically, the poem constructs a conceptual opposition between *"within herself"* and *"the world,"* establishing an internal external dichotomy. The verb *"convinced"* signals persuasion and internalization of external values.

Pragmatically, the poem functions as an ideological affirmation. The rhetorical question emphasizes empowerment, performing both representative and implicitly directive speech acts that encourage women to recognize their inherent worth. Its minimalist style conceals strong social critique and empowerment discourse.

Poem 5

Semantically structured through cause and effect (past resistance enabling present freedom), the poem employs straightforward lexical choices.

Pragmatically, its meaning lies in collective historical identity. The unspecified nature of resistance broadens interpretative scope, allowing representation of various collective struggles. The statement *"I will never be quiet"* performs a commissive illocutionary act expressing enduring commitment and solidarity.

Poem 6

Semantically, a paradox emerges between destruction and survival. The literal impossibility of a shattered heart surviving prompts metaphorical reinterpretation.

Pragmatically, the rhetorical question emphasizes emotional resilience. Rather than asserting strength directly, the poet invites readers to infer it independently.

Poem 7

Although minimal in structure, the phrase *"despite it all"* introduces implied adversity. Pragmatically, the poem affirms existential resilience. Referential ambiguity universalizes interpretation, encouraging personal reflection.

Across the seven poems, a consistent pattern emerges in constructing literal and implied meaning. Semantically, Rupi Kaur employs simple diction, short sentences, repetition, and universal metaphors grounded in nature, the body, and interpersonal relationships. This simplicity constitutes a stylistic strategy that generates conceptual density through oppositions such as love–loss, destruction–resilience, internal–external, and individual–collective.

Pragmatically, the primary expressive force lies in implicature, rhetorical questioning, conceptual metaphor, referential ambiguity, and indirect speech acts. Ambiguous expressions such as *"it all," "the one,"* and *"my people"* broaden interpretative possibilities and foster both personal and collective reflection.

Thus, literal and implied meanings function complementarily rather than independently. Literal meaning serves as the interpretative gateway, while pragmatic meaning deepens emotional, psychological, and ideological dimensions. These findings confirm that minimalist digital poetry retains significant linguistic complexity and warrants analysis within contemporary semantic–pragmatic frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that literal meaning (semantics) in @rupikaur's instapoetry is constructed through minimalist, repetitive, and metaphorical linguistic structures. Lexically

simple expressions such as *heart, mind, flower, free,* and *love* form cohesive semantic relations through conceptual oppositions including core–periphery, internal–external, destruction–resilience, and freedom–oppression. Natural metaphors, rhetorical structures, and syntactic parallelism serve as principal devices in constructing literal meaning that appears simple yet remains conceptually dense.

Pragmatically, implied meaning constitutes the central expressive power of the poems. Core messages are not explicitly articulated but emerge through implicature, rhetorical questions, conceptual metaphors, referential ambiguity, and indirect speech acts. Readers are actively engaged in inferential processes shaped by emotional experience and social context.

Thematically, the poems consistently address love and relational rejection, identity fragmentation, redefinition of love, women's empowerment, collective historical awareness, and emotional resilience. Literal meaning functions as textual foundation, while pragmatic meaning expands interpretation into psychological, social, and ideological domains.

In conclusion, the relationship between semantics and pragmatics in @rupikaur's instapoetry is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Literal meaning does not stand independently but operates as a bridge toward deeper contextual interpretation. This study affirms that contemporary digital poetry, despite its brevity and minimalism, possesses substantial analytical depth within linguistic inquiry, particularly concerning the interaction between literal and implied meaning in modern digital communication contexts.

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