

A Comparative Analysis of Indonesian and Korean Verbs: A Semantic and Pragmatic Perspective

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the differences and similarities in the verb systems of Indonesian and Korean from a semantic and pragmatic perspective. Using a qualitative descriptive method supported by Creswell's approach, the research examines verbs in both languages through the Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) and Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Data were collected through literature reviews and document analysis, focusing on lexical analysis, categorization based on core and variant verbs, and contextual analysis based on politeness and social usage. The data analysis process follows Miles and Huberman's (1994) model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Indonesian has a more flexible verb system, where a single verb can convey multiple meanings depending on the context. In contrast, Korean verbs tend to be more specific and vary according to meaning changes and levels of politeness. These differences reflect the linguistic and cultural characteristics of both languages in understanding and using verbs.

KEYWORDS: verbs, semantics, pragmatics, Indonesian language, Korean language, prototype theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Languages exhibit unique characteristics in their verb systems, which shape how actions and events are expressed. Indonesian and Korean, despite belonging to different language families—Austronesian and Koreanic, respectively—both demonstrate intriguing similarities and differences in their semantic and pragmatic structures. Understanding these differences is crucial for comparative linguistics, second-language acquisition, and cross-cultural communication (Erkin & Munavvar, 2024; Yaumi et al., 2024; Karubaba et al., 2024).

Although Indonesian and Korean come from different language families—Indonesian from the Austronesian family and Korean as an isolate language—both languages share certain grammatical similarities, particularly in verb usage. One of the main similarities is that verbs in both languages do not change form based on the subject or tense (Blevins & Kaufman, 2024; Lim, 2024; Ko et al., 2025; Kwon et al., 2024). Additionally, both languages use affixes in verbs and have a politeness system that distinguishes different levels of formality in communication.

One of the key findings from the analysis is that several basic verbs in Indonesian and Korean have direct equivalents with similar usage patterns. For example, the verb *melihat* (to see/watch) corresponds to *보다* (*boda*) in Korean, both of which function similarly in general contexts, such as in the sentence "Saya menonton film di bioskop" (I watch a movie in the cinema), which translates to "저는 영화를 봐요" (*Jeoneun yeonghwareul bwayo*) in Korean. However, in many cases, a single Indonesian verb can have multiple meanings depending on the context, whereas Korean uses different verbs for each specific

meaning. For instance, *memperhatikan* (observing) is translated as *주시하다* (*jushihada*), and *menatap* (staring) is translated as *응시하다* (*eungsihada*) in Korean. Another noticeable difference is in politeness levels—while Indonesian verb forms remain unchanged, Korean modifies verbs based on formality, such as *말하다* (*malhada*) ("to speak") becoming *말씀하다* (*malsseumhada*) in a formal setting. These differences highlight how Indonesian relies more on context, whereas Korean employs distinct verbs to convey precise meanings and social nuances.

This study explores the similarities and differences between Indonesian and Korean verb systems, focusing on their semantic flexibility, specificity, and pragmatic use in social contexts. Indonesian verbs tend to be more general and context-dependent, meaning a single verb can carry multiple meanings based on its usage. Conversely, Korean verbs are more specific, with distinct verbs assigned to different nuances of meaning, often influenced by formality levels and social hierarchy.

By employing Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) and Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987), this research examines the lexical categorization, core meanings, and contextual variations of verbs in both languages. The study applies Miles and Huberman's (1994) model for data analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings provide deeper insight into how each language structures its verbs, reflecting underlying cultural and cognitive patterns in communication.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the comparative study of Indonesian and Korean linguistics, highlighting the dynamic ways in which verb meanings are shaped by semantic frameworks and pragmatic usage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND STUDY SIGNIFICANCE

1. Prototype and Cognitive Theory by Eleanor Rosch (1978)

The study of verb meaning variations in Indonesian and Korean can be explained through Prototype and Cognitive Theory, introduced by Rosch (1978). This theory states that semantic categories consist of core members (prototypes) and peripheral members that are less central. In a linguistic context, this means that within a word group, one base word is considered the best example of that category (prototype), while other words represent more specific variations.

Several studies have explored the application of this theory in different languages, particularly in semantic analysis and cognitive processing of words within a language. However, research on how this theory applies to comparisons between Indonesian and Korean remains limited. Therefore, this section will review various studies supporting this concept and examine how prototype theory can explain differences in verb usage between the two languages.

2. Basic Concepts of Pragmatic Theory

In analyzing verb meaning variations in Indonesian and Korean, pragmatic theory plays a crucial role in understanding how verb meanings are not solely determined by semantics but also by social context and communication situations. Pragmatics in linguistics focuses on the relationship between language and its use in social interaction, explaining why different verbs are used in specific situations, especially in languages with formal speech systems like Korean.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies how meaning is interpreted based on communicative context, rather than just linguistic structure (Levinson, 1983; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Bachriani et al., 2018; Andini et al., 2021). In the case of verb variations, meaning is influenced not only by semantic features but also by who is speaking, to whom, and in what situation the conversation occurs.

Some key concepts in pragmatic theory relevant to this study include: 1) Deixis – the use of words that depend on context, such as pronouns, time, or place references. 2) Implicature – implied meaning that is not explicitly stated in the words used (Grice, 1975). 3) Politeness and Formality – how verb choices reflect social relationships between speakers and listeners (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In Korean, verb selection is highly influenced by politeness levels and social hierarchy, whereas in Indonesian, situational context is more flexible in determining verb meaning.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study examines the comparison of verb systems in Indonesian and Korean through two main approaches: pragmatics and semantics. The primary focus is to understand how verbs in both languages exhibit meaning variations and usage differences based on contextual factors and semantic categories. These aspects are interconnected, as a verb's meaning is not solely determined by its semantic structure, but also by how it is used in everyday communication.

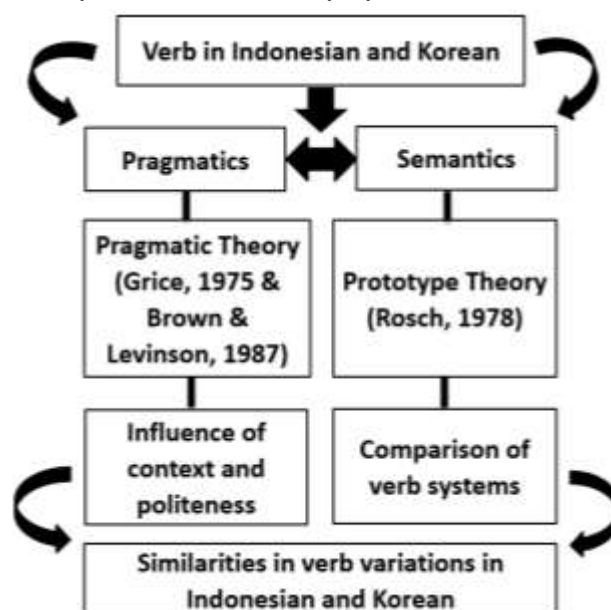


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The pragmatic approach in this study is based on Grice's Pragmatic Theory (1975) and Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987). Grice explains how the cooperative principle in communication influences verb selection, while Brown and Levinson explore how politeness levels and social relationships affect verb choices. This theory is particularly relevant in Korean, where the politeness system is more complex than in Indonesian, making it crucial to analyze how verbs are selected in different social situations.

From a semantic perspective, this study applies Rosch's Prototype Theory (1978), which states that within a semantic category, there exists a core verb (prototype) that is most commonly used, while other verbs serve as more specific variations or derivatives. For example, in Indonesian, the verb "melihat" (to see) can be considered a prototype, while "menonton" (to watch), "mengawasi" (to monitor), and "mengintip" (to peek) are variations with more specific meanings. In Korean, the verb system is generally more detailed, with distinct verbs assigned to each specific meaning.

The analysis in this study is divided into two main aspects. From a pragmatic perspective, it examines how context and politeness levels influence verb selection in Indonesian and Korean. From a semantic perspective, it compares how both languages categorize verbs based on prototype concepts and variations. This approach aims to identify distinct and shared verb usage patterns in both languages.

The expected findings of this study are to identify similarities and variations in verb usage between Indonesian and Korean. Although both languages have different grammatical structures, they may still exhibit similar verb usage patterns in various social contexts and semantic meanings. The conclusions drawn from this study will provide new insights into how languages categorize verbs and how their usage is shaped by social and cognitive aspects.

Thus, this research not only contributes to the field of comparative linguistics, but also enhances

cross-linguistic understanding of verb selection based on semantic and pragmatic factors. Additionally, the findings will be valuable for language learners, particularly in understanding similarities and differences in verb usage between Indonesian and Korean.

III. METHOD

1. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze verb variations in Indonesian and Korean based on pragmatic and semantic aspects. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of verb usage in different social contexts and semantic meanings, in line with Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) and Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

2. Qualitative Descriptive Approach

This approach aims to systematically and accurately describe linguistic phenomena based on the collected data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is interpretative and emphasizes the understanding of meaning in specific contexts. In this study, verbs in Indonesian and Korean are analyzed to identify usage patterns and the influence of social context on their variations.

3. Data Collection Techniques

The data for this study were collected through literature reviews and document analysis, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of verb variations in Indonesian and Korean. The data collection process involved lexical analysis, which includes identifying and classifying verbs from various sources, such as dictionaries, written texts, and spoken conversations in both languages. The collected data were then categorized based on Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) by grouping verbs according to their prototypicality, distinguishing between core verbs and their more specific variations. Additionally, contextual analysis was applied, considering politeness and social usage aspects, as outlined in Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987). This analysis helps to understand how context influences verb selection and meaning variations in social interactions. By employing this approach, the study provides a comprehensive depiction of how the verb systems in Indonesian and Korean evolve in both semantic and pragmatic domains.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which consists of three main stages: 1) Data Reduction – Selecting, filtering, and classifying Indonesian and Korean verbs based on semantic and pragmatic categories. This stage categorizes verbs according to Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) to understand the relationship between core verbs and their variations. Additionally, Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987) is applied to examine the impact of social context on verb selection. 2) Data Presentation – Organizing the findings in the form of tables or charts to facilitate comparisons between verb systems in both languages. A structured data presentation helps in identifying usage trends and structural differences in Indonesian and Korean verbs. 3) Conclusion Drawing – Identifying patterns of similarities and differences in verb usage between the two languages based on the prior analyses. This stage provides insights into how the concept of verbs develops in the linguistic systems of Indonesian and Korean from both semantic and pragmatic perspectives.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on several linguistic facts, the researcher has identified patterns of similarities and differences in Indonesian and Korean verbs, as shown in the table below.

No.	Verb Categories	Meaning in Indonesian	Example in Indonesian	Equivalent in Korean	Example in Korean
1	Melihat	Menonton → Watching	Saya menonton film di bioskop.	보다 (boda)	저는 영화를 봐요. (Jeoneun

		something with focus (e.g., a film)			yeonghwareul bwayo.)
		Memperhatikan → Seeing with the intention to understand	Polisi memperhatikan angka.	주시하다 (jushihada)	경찰이 용의자를 주시해요. (Gyeongcari yongijareul jushiheyo.)
		Mengawasi → Observing with the intention to monitor	Ibu mengawasi Puterinya.	지켜보다 (jikyoboda)	엄마가 딸을 지켜봐요. (Eommaga tarreul jikyobwayo.)
		Menatap → Gazing at something with high intensity	Dia menatap langit malam.	응시하다 (eungsihada)	그는 밤하늘을 응시해요. (Geuneun bamhaneureul eungsihada.)
2	Mendengar	Mendengarkan → Listening actively	Saya mendengarkan lagu favorit saya.	듣다 (deutda)	저는 좋아하는 노래를 들어요. (Jeoneun joahaneun noraereul deureoyo.)
		Menyimak → Listening carefully	Siswa menyimak penjelasan guru.	경청하다 (gyeongcheonghada)	학생들이 선생님의 설명을 경청해요. (Haksaengdeuri seonsaengnimui seolmyeongeul gyeongcheonghaeyo.)
		Menangkap → Understanding the conveyed message	Saya menangkap maksudnya.	이해하다 (ihaehada)	저는 그 의미를 이해해요. (Jeoneun geu uimireul ihaehada.)
3	Berbicara	Berkata → Expressing something in words	Dia berkata bahwa dia akan datang.	말하다 (malhada)	그는 올 거라고 말했어요. (Geuneun ol georago malhaesseoyo.)
		Mengobrol → Speaking in a relaxed setting	Kami mengobrol di kafe.	이야기하다 (iyagihada)	우리는 카페에서 이야기해요. (Urineun kapeeseo iyagihada.)
		Menjelaskan → Speaking to provide understanding	Guru menjelaskan materi.	설명하다 (seolmyeonghada)	선생님이 내용을 설명해요. (Seonsaengnimi naeyongeul seolmyeonghaeyo.)
		Membicarakan → Discussing a topic	Mereka membicarakan proyek baru.	토론하다 (toronhada)	우리는 새 프로젝트에 대해서 토론해요. (Urineun sae peurojegteu e daeheso toronhaeyo.)
4	Memegang	Menggenggam → Holding something tightly	Dia menggenggam tanganku.	쥐다 (jwida)	그는 내 손을 쥐었어요. (Geuneun nae soneul jwiosseoyo.)
		Menjabat → Shaking hands in greeting	Mereka menjabat tangan.	악수하다 (aksuhada)	우리는 서로 악수해요. (Urineun seoro aksuhaeyo.)

		Mengangkat → Lifting something up	Dia mengangkat koper ke mobil.	들다 (deulda)	그는 가방을 들어요. (Geuneun gabangeul deureoyo.)
		Memegang → Controlling or being responsible for something	Dia memegang kendali proyek.	맡다 (matda)	그는 프로젝트를 맡아요. (Geuneun peurojegteureul matayo.)
5	Memikirkan	Memikirkan → Reflecting on something seriously	Saya memikirkan masa depan saya.	생각하다 (saenggakhada)	저는 미래를 생각해요. (Jeoneun miraereul saenggakhada.)
		Merenungkan → Thinking about something reflectively	Dia merenungkan keputusan itu.	숙고하다 (sukgohada)	결혼 문제에 대해 오랫동안 숙고했어요. (Gyereon munje e daehe oretdongan sukkohaesseoyo)
		Mengkhayalkan → Imagining something imaginative	Dia mengkhayalkan hidup di luar negeri.	상상하다 (sangsanghada)	그는 해외 생활을 상상해요. (Geuneun haeoe saenghwareul sangsanghaeyo.)
		Menganalisis → Thinking about something systematically	Ilmuwan menganalisis data penelitian.	분석하다 (bunseokhada)	과학자가 데이터를 분석해요. (Gwahakjaga deiteoreul bunseokhaeyo.)
6	Datang	Tiba → Arriving at a place	Saya tiba di bandara pukul 7.	도착하다 (dochakada)	저는 공항에 7시에 도착해요. (Jeoneun gonghange 7sie dochakhaeyo.)
		Mengunjungi → Coming to a place for a purpose	Kami mengunjungi museum seni.	방문하다 (bangmunhada)	우리는 미술관을 방문해요. (Urineun misulgwaneul bangmunhaeyo.)
		Mendekati → Moving toward something/someone	Dia mendekati pintu.	다가가다 (dagagada)	그는 문으로 다가가요. (Geuneun mun euro dagagayo.)
7	Memberi	Menyerahkan → Handing something over	Saya menyerahkan dokumen itu padanya.	건네다 (geonneda)	저는 그에게 서류를 건네요. (Jeoneun geuege seoryureul geonneyo.)
		Menyumbangkan → Donating something for charity	Dia menyumbangkan uang untuk korban bencana.	기부하다 (gibuhada)	그는 재난 피해자를 위해 돈을 기부해요. (Geuneun jaenan pihaejareul wihae doneul gibuhada.)
		Menghadihkan → Gifting something as a present	Saya menghadihkan buku kepada sahabat saya.	선물하다 (seonmulhada)	저는 친구에게 책을 선물해요. (Jeoneun chingu ege chaekul seonmulhaeyo.)
8	Mengambil	Mengangkat →	Dia mengangkat	들어올리다	그는 바닥에서

		Lifting something from below to above	tasnya dari lantai.	(deureoolrida)	가방을 들어올려요. (Geuneun badageseo gabangeul deureoolryeoyo.)
		Mencuri → Taking something without permission	Pencuri itu mencuri sepeda motor.	훔치다 (humchida)	도둑이 오토바이를 훔쳐요. (Dodugi otobaireul humchyeoyo.)
		Memetik → Picking something from a tree or plant	Dia memetik apel dari pohon.	따다 (ttada)	그는 나무에서 사과를 따요. (Geuneun namu eseo sagwareul ttayo.)
9	Menekan	Menindih → Pressing something from above	Dia menindih kertas dengan batu.	눌러놓다 (nulleonota)	그는 종이를 돌로 눌러놓아요. (Geuneun jongireul dollo nulleonohayo.)
		Memencet → Pressing something with a finger	Saya memencet tombol lift.	누르다 (nureuda)	저는 엘리베이터 버튼을 눌러요. (Jeoneun elrebeiteo beoteuneul nulleoyo.)
		Menahan → Pressing or restraining something to prevent movement	Saya menahan pintu agar tidak tertutup.	막다 (makda)	저는 문이 닫히지 않게 막아요. (Jeoneun muni dadhiji anke makayo.)
10	Menarik	Menyeret → Pulling something by sliding it	Dia menyeret koper di lantai.	끌다 (kkeulda)	그는 가방을 끌어요. (Geuneun gabangeul kkeureoyo.)
		Mencabut → Pulling something from its place	Saya mencabut rumput liar.	뽑다 (bbobda)	저는 잡초를 뽑아요. (Jeoneun japchoreul bbobayo.)
		Menggulung → Pulling something while folding it	Dia menggulung tikar setelah selesai digunakan.	말다 (malda)	그는 돛자리를 말아요. (Geuneun dotjarireul marayo.)
11	Mendorong	Menggiring → Pushing something in a specific direction	Pemain itu menggiring bola ke depan.	몰고 가다 (molgo gada)	선수는 공을 앞으로 몰고 가요. (Seonsuneun gong eul apeuro molgo gayo.)
		Menyodorkan → Pushing something toward someone else.	Dia menyodorkan formulir kepada petugas.	내밀다 (naemilda)	그는 서류를 직원에게 내밀어요. (Geuneun seoryureul jigwonege naemireoyo.)
		Mengusir → Pushing someone to leave	Satpam mengusir orang yang mengganggu.	쫓아내다 (jjotanaeda)	경비원이 방해하는 사람을 쫓아내요. (Gyeongbiwon i banghaehaneun saram-eul jjotanaeyo.)
12	Menjalankan	Mengoperasikan → Operating something like a machine or vehicle	Dia mengoperasikan mesin itu.	조작하다 (jojakada)	그는 기계를 조작해요. (Geuneun gigyereul jojakhaeyo.)

		Mengelola → Managing or handling something	Dia mengelola perusahaan dengan baik.	관리하다 (gwanrihada)	그는 회사를 잘 관리해요. (Geuneun hoesareul jal gwanrihaeyo.)
		Melaksanakan → Carrying out a task or activity	Tim kami melaksanakan proyek ini.	수행하다 (suhaenghada)	우리 팀은 이 프로젝트를 수행해요. (Uri timeun i peurojegteureul suhaenghaeyo.)

The presented data illustrates a comparison of verb meanings in Indonesian and Korean, focusing on how a single verb can have multiple meanings depending on its usage context. Indonesian verbs tend to be more flexible in meaning, whereas Korean verbs are typically more specific, distinguishing meanings based on situation and the object affected by the action. This difference provides valuable insights into comparative linguistics, particularly in understanding how both languages construct semantic and pragmatic structures in daily communication.

One of the key findings from the table is that some basic Indonesian verbs have direct equivalents in Korean, with similar usage patterns. For example, the Indonesian verb *melihat* (to see/watch) is translated into Korean as *보다* (boda). This verb functions similarly in common contexts, such as in the sentence "Saya menonton film di bioskop" (I watch a movie in the cinema), which translates to "저는 영화를 봐요" (Jeoneun yeonghwareul bwayo) in Korean. A similar pattern is observed with *mendengar* (to hear), which corresponds to *듣다* (deutda) in Korean, and *berbicara* (to speak), which matches *말하다* (malhada).

However, in many cases, a single Indonesian verb can have multiple meanings depending on context, while Korean uses different verbs for each specific meaning. For example, *melihat* in Indonesian can mean *menonton* (watching), *memperhatikan* (observing), *mengawasi* (monitoring), or *menatap* (staring). In Korean, each of these meanings has a distinct verb: *보다* (boda) for watching, *주시하다* (jushihada) for observing, *지켜보다* (jikyoboda) for monitoring, and *응시하다* (eungsihada) for staring. This demonstrates that Korean has a more detailed lexical system, while Indonesian relies more on contextual interpretation to determine specific verb meanings.

Aside from differences in meaning variation, Korean is also more structured in distinguishing verb meanings based on the object being acted upon. For instance, in Indonesian, the verb *mengambil* (to take) can encompass various actions such as lifting, stealing, or picking. In Korean, different verbs are used depending on the object involved: *들어올리다* (deureoolrida) for lifting, *훔치다* (humchida) for stealing, and *따다* (ttada) for picking. This indicates that Korean verbs are more precise, while Indonesian verbs are generally broader in meaning.

Another significant difference lies in politeness levels in verb usage. In Indonesian, formal variations are relatively simple, usually affecting pronouns or polite expressions, while in Korean, politeness levels significantly influence verb forms. For example, the verb *말하다* (malhada) (to speak) can change to *말씀하다* (malsseumhada) in formal or respectful contexts. This reflects Korean culture's strong emphasis on social hierarchy in communication, whereas Indonesian tends to be more context-dependent and flexible.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that although Indonesian and Korean belong to different language families, they share common patterns in basic verb usage. However, Korean is more specific in distinguishing meanings based on context, object, and formality levels, while Indonesian is more flexible in its usage. These differences highlight that Indonesian learners of Korean need to pay closer attention to verb variations, while Korean learners of Indonesian must focus on how context influences verb meanings.

V. CONCLUSION

This study identifies fundamental differences in the verb systems of Indonesian and Korean from semantic and pragmatic perspectives. Semantically, Indonesian verbs tend to be more general, where a single verb can carry multiple meanings depending on context. In contrast, Korean verbs are more

specialized, with distinct verbs for specific meanings. Pragmatically, Korean applies stricter verb usage rules based on politeness levels and social hierarchy, whereas Indonesian is more flexible in this aspect.

The analysis using Prototype Theory (Rosch, 1978) reveals that both languages contain prototype verbs, which serve as the central members of a verb category, with variations developing from the core verb. Meanwhile, Pragmatic Theory (Grice, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1987) explains how verb selection in Korean is more influenced by social context compared to Indonesian. This research successfully identifies patterns of differences and similarities in the verb systems of both languages.

In conclusion, these differences not only highlight the unique linguistic characteristics of each language but also reflect cultural distinctions and cognitive approaches in how Indonesian and Korean speakers understand and use verbs in everyday interactions.

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