

THE CASE OF 'TO KNOW IS TO HEAR' IN BAHASA INDONESIA

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Abstract. This study explores the relationship between sensory experience and cognition in Bahasa Indonesia through the conceptual metaphor “TO KNOW IS TO HEAR.” Although cognitive semantic studies have examined conceptual metaphors in many languages, research on Indonesian cognitive semantics, particularly sensory-based cognition, remains limited. Drawing on Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this study investigates how Indonesian speakers conceptualize knowledge, understanding, and information through hearing-related expressions. The data consist of lexical items associated with cognition, including *dengar* (‘hear’), *tahu* (‘know’), and *paham* (‘understand’), as well as figurative expressions such as *kabar angin* (‘wind news’), *kabar burung* (‘bird news’), *desas-desus* (‘rumours’), *menyampaikan ilmu* (‘to convey knowledge’), and *menuntut ilmu* (‘to pursue knowledge’). Data were collected from Indonesian dictionaries, the Indonesian Corpus, and native-speaker intuition. The analysis combines dictionary examination, NSM explications, and metaphor analysis based on source and target domains. The findings indicate a close conceptual association between hearing and knowing in Bahasa Indonesia. Hearing functions not only as a sensory activity but also as a means of acquiring information, forming knowledge, and developing understanding. This study provides preliminary evidence for the conceptual metaphor TO KNOW IS TO HEAR in Bahasa Indonesia.

Keywords: Cognitive Semantics, Conceptual Metaphor, Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), Bahasa Indonesia, Auditory Cognition

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara pengalaman sensorik dan kognisi dalam Bahasa Indonesia melalui metafora konseptual MENGETAHUI ADALAH MENDENGAR (TO KNOW IS TO HEAR). Meskipun kajian semantik kognitif telah banyak meneliti metafora konseptual dalam berbagai bahasa, penelitian mengenai semantik kognitif bahasa Indonesia, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan konseptualisasi kognisi berbasis indera, masih relatif terbatas. Berlandaskan teori *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* (NSM) dan *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT), penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana penutur Bahasa Indonesia mengonseptualisasikan pengetahuan, pemahaman, dan informasi melalui ekspresi yang berkaitan dengan aktivitas mendengar. Data penelitian meliputi sejumlah leksem yang berhubungan dengan kognisi, seperti *dengar*, *tahu*, dan *paham*, serta ungkapan figuratif seperti *kabar angin*, *kabar burung*, *desas-desus*, *menyampaikan ilmu*, dan *menuntut ilmu*. Data diperoleh dari kamus bahasa Indonesia, korpus bahasa Indonesia, serta intuisi penutur asli. Analisis dilakukan melalui telaah leksikal, eksplikasi NSM, dan analisis metafora berdasarkan domain sumber dan domain sasaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya keterkaitan konseptual yang kuat antara aktivitas mendengar dan proses mengetahui dalam Bahasa Indonesia. Aktivitas mendengar tidak hanya dipahami sebagai pengalaman sensorik, tetapi juga sebagai sarana memperoleh informasi, membangun pengetahuan, dan mengembangkan pemahaman. Temuan ini memberikan bukti awal mengenai keberadaan metafora konseptual MENGETAHUI ADALAH MENDENGAR dalam Bahasa Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Semantik Kognitif, Metafora Konseptual, *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* (NSM), Bahasa Indonesia, Kognisi Pendengaran

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INTRODUCTION

Cognitive semantics or cognitive linguistics is an approach in linguistics which hold the view that a part of human general cognition is linguistic knowledge (Saeed, 2003). From this perspective, language is not an autonomous system but rather reflects how humans perceive, conceptualize, and understand the world through cognitive processes. The development of cognitive semantics cannot be separated from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980b). CMT proposes that metaphor is not merely a linguistic or stylistic device but a fundamental mechanism of human thought. Ye (2007) explained CMT as a theory that depends its core principles on human motoric sensory experience as the real manifestation of their cognition and the conceptual metaphor is a pivotal element in extending bodily experience to shape the abstract concepts. Conceptual metaphors enable speakers to structure and understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences derived from bodily interaction with the world.

This paper focuses on cognitive semantics in Bahasa Indonesia. Despite the growing body of research in cognitive linguistics, studies on Indonesian cognitive semantics remain relatively limited. Existing research has largely concentrated on the closely related Malay language. The existing studies about semantics/cognitive semantics mostly come from the neighbouring language *Malay*, for instance the study by Goddard (2008) on the differences of English *heart* and Malay *hati*, and the study by Ho-Abdullah & Hashim (2009) which focuses on semantic concept of nature. However, few studies have specifically explored the relationship between sensory experience and conceptualization in Indonesian, particularly in relation to the role of sensory perception in the construction of knowledge.

To address this gap, this paper presents a pilot study investigating the relationship between human cognition and sensory experience from the perspective of Indonesian speakers. Specifically, it examines the conceptual metaphor TO KNOW IS TO HEAR, exploring how hearing functions not only as a sensory activity but also as a cognitive pathway for acquiring information, developing understanding, and constructing knowledge. By examining hearing-related lexical and figurative expressions in Bahasa Indonesia, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Indonesian speakers conceptualize cognition through sensory experience and to provide preliminary insights into the cognitive semantic structure of the language.

METHOD

Theoretical framework of this study is the combination of the Natural Semantics Metalanguage (NSM) and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The use of NSM is based on the Ye (2007)'s explanation that in Chinese, the concept of 'mind' is always embodied and is not seeing as a separate part of body as the reason to use NSM to investigate *taste* in Chinese. The same phenomenon happens in Bahasa Indonesia. Goddard (2008) argues that in cases where *mind* would be use in English, Malay is using *hati*, this statement is also true in Bahasa Indonesia. Moreover, as cognitive semantics is underdeveloped area in Bahasa Indonesia, the use of the CMT to investigate the language is a preliminary step finding out Indonesian speakers' sensory experience. There are two groups of data, they are groups of words related to human cognition and group of figurative phrases. In Bahasa Indonesia vocabularies, words that are related to 'understand' and 'to hear' are *dengar* ('hear'), *tahu* ('know'), and *paham* ('understand'). In the first step, a dictionary analysis is presented to show basic concept of these words. The next step is to use NSM to write explications of them. This analysis is crucial to underpinning the concept of these three words and the connection of it to Indonesian speakers' cognition. The final step is to use the CMT, *source domain* and *target domain* to analyse series of metaphor shown in figurative phrases related to 'to know is to hear' such as *kabar burung* ('bird news'), *kabar angin* ('wind news'), *desas-desus* ('rumors'), *seperti burung berkicau* ('like a bird twitting'), *menyampaikan ilmu* ('to pass the knowledge'), and *menuntut ilmu* ('to search knowledge'). This analysis is a complement to support findings on the NSM analysis. The source of data is taken from dictionaries, Indonesian Corpus and a native speaker (the author).

RESULTS

Dictionary Analysis

The dictionary analysis reveals semantic overlap between hearing and cognition. The word *dengar* ('hear') is associated not only with auditory perception but also with obtaining information and learning about events. Similarly, the derived form *memberitahu* ('to inform') links the concept of knowledge to communicative acts that rely on hearing. The analysis of *tahu* ('know') and *paham* ('understand') further suggests a semantic connection between knowledge acquisition and auditory experience. Several dictionary examples show that knowing and understanding frequently emerge through hearing explanations, words, and information.

NSM Analysis

The NSM explications indicate that hearing functions as the initial stage of cognitive processing. Indonesian speakers conceptualize understanding through a sequence of hearing, knowing, and eventually understanding. The semantic components repeatedly found in the explications include hearing information, wanting to know, believing the information, acquiring knowledge, and communicating knowledge to others. These findings suggest that hearing is not merely perceptual but also epistemic in nature.

CMT Analysis

The metaphorical expressions provide additional support for the conceptual relationship between hearing and knowing. Expressions such as *desas-desus*, *kabar angin*, and *kabar burung* conceptualize news as sound-based phenomena. Likewise, expressions such as *menyampaikan ilmu* and *menuntut ilmu* suggest that knowledge is treated as something transmitted through communicative interaction. The source domain of sound is therefore mapped onto the target domains of information and knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Dictionary Analysis

This analysis is based on two types of dictionary, an Indonesian monolingual dictionary (Nasional, 2008) and a bilingual dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia to English (Schmidgall-Tellings, 2010).

Dengar 'hear'

According to a monolingual dictionary, *dengar* is to catch a voice. There are 11 different word change by using affixes. The most common are changes to *mendengar* (*me+dengar*) and *mendengarkan* (*me+dengar+kan*). Among four different meanings provided for *mendengar*, the second meaning of 'to get news' is the most interesting one. This is because part of meaning in 'to hear' in Bahasa Indonesia is 'to get to know what is happening' either it is about someone or about something. While for *mendengarkan*, part of the meaning is 'to pay attention to'. This meaning suggests that the hearing sensory in this language contains the meaning of 'seeking information'. In a bilingual dictionary, *dengar* is translated to 'to hear' and 'to learn about'. This dictionary is obviously presented that in English, this word is equivalent with learning which has strong connection with 'to know'. However, this dictionary does not provide any examples to support the claim.

Tahu 'know'

In Bahasa Indonesia dictionary, there are seven senses of *tahu*, the most related sense is 'to know'. Like the previous word, the most common use of *tahu* is *mengetahui* (me+tahu+i). This word has three senses, one of them is 'to know with signs.' Until this point, there is no indication of 'hear' in the meaning of *tahu*. Interestingly, there is a word *memberitahu* which comes from the same *stem tahu*, the meaning of this word is 'to tell/to inform'. At this point, the sense of 'hear' is presented because to tell, to say, can be sensed with hear. More evidence is given on the bilingual dictionary, in the fourth sense of the word *mengetahui*, it is translated to 'to hear, understand' in English. This time, there is an example given,

- ✓ Saya mengetahui bahwa dia baru pindah.

I know/hear that he/she just move

Based on the example above, it is more on the meaning of 'know' rather than 'understand' because it is about 'news' of someone who has just moved. There is nothing to be understood in that case and context. So, it can be predicted that there might be a connection between 'hear' and 'know' but the evidence is still not enough.

Paham 'understand'

In Bahasa Indonesia, *paham is to understand*. The word *memahami* (me+paham+i) is commonly use in relation to understand feeling and also knowledge. There is a strong correlation between *memahami* and *menjelaskan* ('to explain'), these two words always appear together in utterances. It has meaning of to fully understand something not just a part of it but also the whole picture. In Indonesian-English dictionary, the third sense translation is 'to make sense out of, figure out'. The example given is:

- ✓ Tidak dapat dipahami apa yang dia katakan.

not can understand what - he/she says

(They could not make sense out of what he said)

This example once again gives a glimpse of connection between understanding and hearing by the presence of 'say' after the word *dipahami* which is the passive version of *memahami*.

In this dictionary analysis, several important points are noticeable. There is an indication of relation between 'know' and 'hear', but this connection needs more evidence because of the examples given in the dictionary are not enough. Another point, it seems like the connection is noticeable in bilingual dictionary while in Bahasa Indonesia dictionary itself, the connection is still vague. The possible explanation for this is monolingual dictionary is expected to use by

the native speakers or native-like users, so the connection might be presented but it needs deeper analysis and closer look, while in bilingual dictionary the connection are much easier to find because it is simplified to help the users.

NSM Explications

This section is to investigate the hypothesis of 'to know is to hear' in Bahasa Indonesia using NSM, explication of words which are related to this topic is presented in the following analysis. In several contexts, the use of word will compare to English which is famous with '*I see what you mean*' phrases which are the indication of '*to know is to see*'. Examples on this section are taken from the Indonesian Corpus.

Mendengarkan ('to listen')

There are several components of meaning that includes in word *mendengarkan*. To begin with, examples from the stem *dengar* is presented follow by *mendengarkan*. The sense that is to explicate is the sense of 'to know', in the following examples, it is to do with 'I have heard it' and 'know'.

- Baru dengar tentang majalah ini dari vcd ceramah Ibu Irene
(Recently, heard about this magazine from the preach video of Mam Irene)
- Dan, saya dengar juga, pada abad segitu Amerika pun masih terpengaruh konservatisme Eropa
(And, I also heard that in that century, the USA is still under the European conservatism)

Two examples above show that the association of hearing something is related to 'something new' also 'knowledge that already been obtained'. To compare this to English, most likely the use of 'heard' is considered as 'guessing' and 'not sure', while in these two sentences, there are not any signs of hesitation. It is simply a statement and indicates 'I heard it before', and 'I tell you now because I knew it'.

- Sang ulama itu mendengarkan dengan seksama penjelasan sang khalifah
(The cleric listened carefully to the caliph's explanation)
- Suami saya mendengarkan dengan cermat,
(My husband is listening carefully)
- Saya pernah tertegun mendengarkan cerita Mas Tomi,
(I was stunned to listen to Tom's story,)

The example above is to associate the word *mendengarkan* 'to hear' with the English 'to see'. The modifiers after *mendengarkan* which are 'seksama' and 'cermat' have sensory meaning of 'to see', but it is occurred in this sentence to give meaning 'carefully' and 'accurately'. From these examples, there are a close connection between speakers' sensory experience in Bahasa Indonesia between 'to see' and 'to hear'. The other example given is the word *tertegun* 'stunned', which in English word is to do with the sense of seeing but in this language, it is also used to modify the sense of hearing. So, the part of analysis is because of this to senses of seeing and hearing are closely related, even by hearing something, the Indonesian speakers correlated to 'know' about something.

Someone X Mendengarkan Y

For some time, not short time

X can hear what Y say

X want to know what Y say

X is doing this to cause him to know something about what Y say

X think after this he can know something about what Y say

After this, X can say something about what Y say

X think this is true

Memberitahu ('to inform')

- Ami tak bisa memberitahu Bapak
(Ami cannot tell father)
- Pukulan pada wajan yang digunakan untuk memberitahu para pembeli
(The sound of hitting on the wok used to inform buyers)
- Indera ini untuk memberitahu kita kapan waktunya makan.
(this sense is to inform us when it is time to eat)

The example above is to show the basic meaning of *memberitahu*, it simply to tell something to someone. On the next example, the more complicated meaning appeared. It is to do with the sense of hearing, the subject of this sentence is 'sound' itself resulting from the hitting, after that the verb used is *memberitahu* which has the meaning of 'to inform'. This sentence suggests that in Bahasa Indonesia 'sound' is considered as 'some kind of information' or 'something to tell someone'. The last example is to do with 'some kind of sense to signal something'. Once again, in this example signalling is coming from the sense of hearing because the verb used is *memberitahu*. So, 'to inform' is not always coming from 'someone who speak'

it can be coming from 'something' and using the speakers' sensory experience, this signal is mostly coming from sound that can be heard to be understood.

✓ **Someone X *memberitahu* Y**

Someone X said something to someone else Y at that time

Because of this, Y can think something like this:

"I hear what this someone say

I know now what this someone say"

After this, I can say something about what this someone say

✓ **Something X *memberitahu* Y**

When something happens to someone Y at that time

Y can think something like this:

"something happens

Because of this, I feel I know something now

It is true

Like I feel when I *mendengarkan* [m] about something

Memahami ('to understand')

- Berbicaralah sambil diikuti gerakan, agar mereka lebih mudah memahami arti kata dan hubungannya.

(Talk while being follow by movements, so that they more easily understand the meaning of the word and its relationship)

- Sejujurnya aku kurang memahami penjelasan Sakura
(Honestly, I do not understand Sakura's explanation)

- Beliau juga memahami perkataan para sahabat
(He also understood the words of his companions)

The word *memahami* is always follow by something like 'talk', 'words', and 'explanation'. These words are to do with utterances, so from the receiver perspective, the sense to use in order to get the meaning is hearing. In the example above the word *berbicaralah* is appeared before *memahami*, this is mostly the context of the process of understanding in Indonesian culture, a speaker listens to an explanation. One other thing from this example is the word *gerakan* 'movement' that contains sense of seeing. The fact that it presents in the same sentence as a complement of hearing sense is once again suggests that the sense of seeing and hearing in Indonesian speakers' sensory have a close relation in order to understand something.

✓ **Someone X memahami something Y**

I can hear something about Y

Because of I mendengarkan [m] about Y

I think I know about Y now

This is true

After this, I can say something about Y

Using the NSM explication to present meaning of cognition words in Bahasa Indonesia, there are several important parts to conclude, about mental state and also cognition process. For mental state, Indonesian speakers is always gathered information from someone else or something happened before. After experiencing this, they think that they know about something. It is also noticeable that by experience here means that they 'hear' and/or 'listen' about it from someone or from something that they think they hear. The similar parts from the explication is they think it is true just by listen to it. Another important thing is speakers think they can say something about this later. For the cognition process, it is started by 'hear' something, and 'want to know', in the middle of this process 'seeing' can be optional sense to include before finally arriving at 'now I know'. This process is not stop here; the next step is 'to tell' this something to another person. So, the more they listen, the more they will say 'now I know' and the ultimate goal is *paham* ('to understand'). However, this final step of 'to understand' is still questionable because the degree of frequency of 'now I know' until arriving to this step is remain unclear.

CMT Analysis

Analysis in this section is to carry based on the paper of Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a). There are many metaphors presented in this paper based on the English perspective, one of them is 'seeing is understanding'. However, in Bahasa Indonesia, which is already explained in the section above, the indication of 'to know is to hear' is established. The following examples is to explore 'news is sound' and 'knowledge is sound'.

News is sound

- Ada desas-desus bahwa ini ada hubungannya dengan kontes kepresidenan.
(there are rumours that have to do with the context of the presidency)

The metaphor of *desas-desus* ('rumours') is widely used in the written and electronic news media. This metaphor does not have any meaning by its self, it is just the representation of the

sound ('hushh') like the sound of 'blowing winds'. This metaphor is to support about how information cognitively passed around in Indonesian community. It started from the 'sound' that they 'hear'.

- Kabar angin dapat menyebabkan kerisauan di tengah masyarakat.

(hearsay can cause concern in the community)

Another metaphor for news is *kabar angin* ('wind news'), the sense which is include in this metaphor is 'touch' and 'hear'. As the 'wind' cannot be seen, it is to be felt and to be heard to know the presence of it. The 'wind' is sometime also become the subject of the sentence like *angin sampaikan...* ('the wind conveys...'), by making a wind a subject to pass through the information/news imply the sense of 'to hear' is the main concern. 'News is sound' has a negative meaning in these two contexts, but the fact that these two metaphors are widely used in Indonesian community demonstrates how speakers' sensory experience in Bahasa Indonesia in perceiving 'to know' is to use the sense of 'to hear'.

- *Kabar burung* (Bird News) ('hearsay')
- *Seperti burung berkicau* (like bird twitting) ('chatty')

These other examples are using 'bird' as the metaphor, example (3) has the same meaning as the previous one's which is 'rumours' while the example (4) is using to represents someone who is 'chatty'. The use of bird to represent communication also gives a hint to the perception of how information is delivered because birds are a creature known as the sound that they produce.

Knowledge is sound

- *Menyampaikan ilmu* (telling knowledge) ('to teach')
- *Menuntut ilmu* (sue knowledge) ('to study')

The findings of this study extend previous work in cognitive semantics by Goddard (2008) and Ho-Abdullah & Hashim (2009), particularly in relation to the conceptual structuring of meaning in Austronesian languages. Goddard (2008), in his analysis of English *heart* and Malay *hati*, demonstrates that lexical items in Malay carry rich cultural and emotional meanings that differ systematically from their English counterparts, highlighting the importance of culture-specific conceptualization in semantic interpretation. Similarly, Ho-Abdullah & Hashim (2009) emphasize the role of nature-based semantic representations in Malay, showing how environmental and experiential factors shape conceptual meaning. Building on these studies, the present research contributes a new dimension by focusing specifically on sensory-based cognition, particularly auditory experience, in Bahasa Indonesia.

Unlike the previous studies that primarily examine emotional (e.g., *hati*) or nature-related conceptual domains, this study reveals a systematic mapping between hearing and cognition, where *dengar*, *tahu*, and *paham* as well as expressions such as *kabar angin* and *desas-desus* demonstrate that knowledge is conceptually constructed through auditory experience. Therefore, while Goddard (2008) and Ho-Abdullah & Hashim (2009) highlight culturally embedded lexical and environmental conceptualizations, this study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence for a sensory-grounded epistemic metaphor, namely TO KNOW IS TO HEAR, in Bahasa Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the conceptual metaphor TO KNOW IS TO HEAR in Bahasa Indonesia using NSM and CMT. The analysis of lexical items, dictionary entries, corpus examples, and figurative expressions reveals a close relationship between hearing and cognition. Hearing functions not only as sensory perception but also as a means of acquiring information, constructing knowledge, and developing understanding. The findings provide preliminary evidence that Indonesian speakers conceptualize cognition through auditory experience. Future research may expand the dataset and examine additional sensory metaphors in Bahasa Indonesia to further explore the relationship between language, culture, and cognition.

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