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Unveiling 'Spek LC': How Language Perpetuates Gender Bias through Digital Discourse

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Abstract - **Language plays a central role in shaping and reproducing social reality. Through language, individuals construct meaning, express ideology, and reinforce or challenge social hierarchies. One expression that illustrates this dynamic is "Spek LC", a popular term on social media on platform X. Derived from "spek" (specification) and "LC" (Lady Companion), it originally described physical looks but has shifted into a form of verbal violence and gender-based discrimination against women. This study analyzes the denotative and connotative meanings of "Spek LC" and its psycholinguistic implications using Roland Barthes' (1957) connotative semiotics and the Affective Load framework. Employing a qualitative content analysis, textual data were collected from public posts and comments containing the term "Spek LC" on platform X. Findings reveal that at the denotative level, the term refers to appearance, while at the connotative level, it functions as a derogatory label suggesting immorality and social inferiority. Exposure to this term generates a high affective load, evoking emotions such as shame, anger, and self-stigmatization. Overall, the study shows that language in social media operates as a symbolic power that perpetuates gender bias through emotional and ideological mechanisms. It emphasizes the need for critical language awareness to promote ethical and inclusive digital communication.**

Keywords : **Connotative Semiotics, Digital Verbal Violence, Gender Based Discrimination.**

INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a neutral means of communication but a reflection of how people perceive, categorize, and construct social reality. Through language, individuals express emotions, reinforce beliefs, and reproduce power relations that shape their interactions. Language carries multiple layers of meaning: denotation, which represents literal description, and connotation, which conveys ideological implications embedded in cultural myths [1]. From this perspective, language functions not only as a communicative medium but also as an ideological instrument that naturalizes social hierarchies and moral judgments [2].

In digital culture, linguistic expressions often serve as mirrors of collective values, prejudices, and moral assumptions. Social media, in particular, transforms language into a dynamic arena where identity and ideology intersect through humor, sarcasm, and labeling. One striking example of this not only communicates hostility but also reproduces power relations through everyday language practices [3].

Analyzing relations through everyday language practices [3].

this phenomenon requires an integration of semiotic and psycholinguistic perspectives. Drawing on Barthes's theory of connotative semiotics, *"Spek LC"* functions as a cultural sign whose connotation encodes social ideologies about femininity, morality, and class. From a psycholinguistic viewpoint, the term also carries significant affective load, meaning that it can evoke emotional responses

such as shame, anger, or fear among its targets. This emotional resonance highlights that words act not only as vehicles of meaning but also as embodied stimuli capable of eliciting and modulating emotional responses and affective processes [4].

Despite the widespread use of gendered verbal labels in online communication, academic studies combining semiotic interpretation with psycholinguistic analysis in the Indonesian digital context remain scarce. Investigating "Spek LC" thus provides insight into how language not only reflects but also sustains gender-based hierarchies through emotional manipulation and ideological reinforcement.

This gap research work has offered valuable insights into related, yet separate, fields. Studies focusing on Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), such as the analysis by Linimasa [5] have extensively analyzed the sociological implications of misogyny and sexism on platforms like X. However, such research predominantly focuses on the macro-social dynamic without delving deeply into the linguistic mechanism of the violence. A critical lacuna remains: research that integrates both the semiotic interpretation (to understand the ideological reinforcement) and the psycholinguistic affective load framework (to gauge the emotional impact) in the context of the highly specific Indonesian term 'Spek LC' remains limited.

This transformation illustrates how digital language can carry ideological violence that reinforces gender stereotypes and moral hierarchies [6]. The expression "Spek LC" reveals how seemingly casual words can perform gendered discrimination. Users often employ it to ridicule or shame women, linking their physical appearance or behavior to assumptions of immorality or promiscuity. Such usage represents a form of linguistic objectification in which women are reduced to inert objects, judged by appearance and behavior rather than agency or subjectivity [7].

The core goal of this research is to conduct a critical analysis of the term "Spek LC", which is widely used on social media platforms like X, to uncover its layers of meaning and its social and psychological implications. Specifically, the study aims to analyze both the denotative and connotative meanings of the term from its literal physical description (denotative) to its use as a derogatory label carrying moral stigma, social inferiority, and gender discrimination (connotative) using Roland Barthes' 1957 Connotative Semiotics framework.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative content analysis approach aimed at uncovering the cultural connotations and ideological messages embedded in the digital use of the term *"Spek LC."* The analysis focuses on how this term operates as a linguistic tool of gender-based verbal discrimination, interpreted through Roland Barthes' [1] theory of connotative semiotics and the Affective Load framework in psycholinguistics.

Time and Research Setting
The research was conducted on October 9 to 16, 2025, utilizing online data collection exclusively from the social media platform X. This platform was selected because of its linguistic spontaneity and accessibility, which allow natural occurrences of verbal labelling and gender discourse to be observed authentically.

Research Procedures
The first procedure is Data Collection. Data were gathered through non-participant observation, focusing on posts that display patterns of gender-based verbal labeling or ideological expressions of moral judgment. Using the search keyword *"Spek LC,"* posts were screened for contextual relevance and semantic clarity, ensuring the corpus represents diverse uses and connotations of the term.

The second procedure is Data Screening and Coding. Each selected post was examined for authenticity, coherence, and representativeness. Lexical elements were coded according to recurring connotative patterns, such as sexual labeling, moral policing, and class-based devaluation. These categories mirror the structural findings in the analysis section, enabling the identification of thematic clusters that expose both the semiotic and psycholinguistic layers of meaning.

The third procedure is Data Analysis, Evaluation, and analytical criteria. The coded data were analyzed in depth using the frameworks of Barthes' semiotics and psycholinguistics. The success indicators of this research were measured based on the clarity of the identified ideological connotative patterns and the consistency of mapping between linguistic connotations and the resulting Affective Load. The final conclusions of this study serve as both a record of analytical evaluation and documentation of program sustainability

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The use of the term *"Spek LC"* in online discourse can be analyzed through Roland Barthes' theory of connotation in Mythologies [1], which posits that a sign operates on two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotatively, the term refers to a physical description and profession *"Spek"* meaning specification or appearance, and *"LC"* (Lady Companion) referring to a singing guide.

However, at the connotative level, the meaning of the term shifts significantly: it evolves from describing a profession to functioning as a discriminatory label toward women who dress revealingly or are perceived as impolite, often implying "entertainer" or even "prostitute." This semantic transformation reflects how language on social media carries cultural and ideological biases [8], findings that gendered expressions online frequently employ neutral or humorous tones to reinforce sexist and discriminatory attitudes toward women.

The semiotic analysis reveals that the term "Spek LC" functions on two distinct layers of meaning, exhibiting a significant shift from physical description to a loaded social judgment. Denotatively (Layer 1), "Spek LC" refers simply to "Lady Companion/Singing Guide" or physical appearance. However, at the Connotative level, the meaning shifts drastically: the term refers to women judged as low-value, associated with stereotypes of being an entertainer, and implies gender discrimination and moral judgment, often without factual context. This can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Denotative and Connotative of "*Spek LC*"

Level of Meaning	Term	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Denotation (Layer 1)	*"Spek LC"*	"*Spek LC*" = Physical appearance. "*LC*" = Lady Companion/Singing Guide	Straightforward description without moral value.
Connotation (Layer 2)	*"Spek LC"*	Refers to women judged as low-value, considered "cheap" due to their way of dressing or appearance, and often interpreted as an "entertainer" or even "prostitute".	Gender discrimination, social labelling, and perpetuation of the stereotype of the woman.

Following the identified semantic transformation, the evidence from Platform X detailing the usage of the term "Spek LC" (Table 2) demonstrates specific connotative patterns. The context of the data reveals multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on class and appearance. Other instances show verbal harassment, sexual harassment, and physical labeling linked to sexuality. Furthermore, connotations related to moral policing, reputational degradation, and implied unfaithfulness are evident. These patterns emphasize how the term actively functions to reinforce gendered and discriminatory attitudes. This can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Connotation of "*Spek LC*" from Platform *X*

No.	Data ID	Comment Quote	Context of Use	Connotation
1.	@rdb	*"pas profilnya dibuka juga orang spek lc pendidikan rendah"*	Context on a woman's profile with revealing clothes	Discrimination based on class and appearance.
2.	@cmv	*"brisik bgt spek lc"*	Insulting woman considered too expressive on social media	Verbal harassment and negative labelling.
3.	@jjy	*"spek lc anjay"*	Spontaneous. Mocking comment woman's photo post	Physical labelling with sexual connotation.
4.	@els	*"art-nya spek lc gitu, ga takut apa suaminya kegoda"*	Linking clothing to partner's fidelity	Victim-blaming and moral policing.
5.	@edf	*"spek lc masa di bandingin sama Chealsea"*	Comparison that devalues a woman	Objectification and verbal harassment.
6.	@cvd	*"duh ternyata seleranya spek lc"*	Comment on a photo of male couple	Discrimination based on gender preference/taste.
7.	@wsp	*"mantan lu noh spek lc"*	Labeling a former partner	Harassment based on reputation.

No.	Data ID	Comment Quote	Context of Use	Connotation
8.	@abz	*"jelek spek lc"*	Degrading physical appreance and morals	Double stigma: ugly & immoral.
9.	@kbp	*"jelek spek lc kabupaten"*	Adding an element of social class mockery	Discrimination based on region & gender.
10.	@gtcr	*"ternyata seleranya spek lc wkwk"*	Mocking a man's partner choice	Covert verbal harassment.
11.	@spik	*"Lc bisa di pke juga g bng"*	Hinting at explicating sexual meaning	Direct sexual objectification.
12.	@nfzz	*"spek lc bangettt…Dempulan dan filternya to the max"*	Comment on a glamorous-style post	Body shaming and stereotype of sake beauty.

Based on the full set of connotative findings, the evidence is classified into three overarching Categories of Discrimination (Table 3). The first category is Gender Labeling and Sexualization, where women are categorized based on their clothing, appearance, or perceived sexual availability. Second, Victim Blaming/Moral Policing associates the women with moral judgment such as immorality or disloyalty. Third, Class and Aesthetic Devaluation degrades an individual based on their perceived lower social class or failure to meet aesthetic standards. A final pattern observed is Reputational Degradation, which uses the label to damage an individual's social image. The thematic categorization confirms that "Spek LC" acts as a powerful instrument of social control and prejudice. This can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories of Discrimination

Category	Description	Data Examples
Gender Labeling and Sexualization	Women are categorized as "LC" based solely on their clothing, appearance, or manner of speaking; sexual labelling is used to judge them from their outward looks	No. 2,3,8,11
Victim blaming moral policing	Comment associated women's clothing or appearance with immorality, temptation, or marital disloyalty.	No. 4,6,10
Class aznd Aesthetic Devaluation	Women are demeaned based on perceived lower social class, excessive appearance, or failure to meet beauty standard.	No. 1,9,12
Reputational Degradation	The label is used to damage women's social image or reputation, often linked to romantic or relational context.	No. 5,7

From Psycholinguistic perspective, the repeated use of the term *"Spek LC"* generates a high affective load, which the emotional and cognitive weight carried by linguistic stimuli influence perception and response. Affective load emerges when words or expressions activate emotional circuits in the limbic system, especially amygdala, which processes threat and emotional salience before conscious reasoning occurs [9].

Furthermore, strong emotional states, whether positive or negative, have been shown to enhance memory formation and retention [10], suggesting that the derogatory nature of "Spek LC" is not easily forgotten by the recipient. The neurological processing of these emotional words confirms that language and emotion are deeply intertwined, as emotion words activate specific neural regions beyond general language areas, solidifying the link between linguistics and affective experience [11].

This means emotionally charged language can elicit visceral reactions, such as tension, embarrassment, or anger even prior to full semantic comprehension. In the context of the study, *"Spek LC"* operates as a linguistic trigger that evokes strong affective responses such as humiliation, anxiety, anger, and internalized shame. These reactions are not simply cognitive interpretations but embodied emotional experiences, illustrating that meaning in language is inseparable from emotional processing [12]. In online environments, this phenomenon can escalate into linguistic trauma, where victims internalize negative labels and reshape self-concept based on

repeated derogatory input [13]. Furthermore, this intense verbal aggression also leads to affective conditioning; a form of psychological habituation where individuals associate specific linguistic cues with persistent feelings of inferiority or distress [14].

The affective load tied to *"Spek LC"* thus reflects two intertwined dimensions, the first one Cognitive linguistic activation, where negative lexical associations (e.g., "cheap", "immoral", "lower class") rapidly frame social judgment and moral evaluation. The second one is Emotional embodiment, where those linguistic signs produce psychosocial effects such as shame, fear, withdrawal. or defensive anger.

Emotionally charged abusive language is processed faster and remembered longer due to its heightened effective salience, reinforcing the persistence of emotional harm [3]. Thus each repetition of *"Spek LC"* not only communicates social stigma but also reinforces emotional conditioning at the cognitive level. Ultimately, the psycholinguistic impact of *"Spek LC"* extends beyond temporary discomfort, It functions as a sustained effective mechanism of control, conditioning emotional responses such as fear of judgment, self-censorship, and internalized inferiority, thereby maintaining the ideological power of gendered language in online spaces. As Zhuo concludes [9], affective language acts as both cognitive cue and emotional weapon, shaping human thought.

Social behavior, and perpetuating cultural hierarchies through emotional-laden communication. Beyond emotional activation, affective load also affects how quickly and deeply language is processed. Empirical evidence indicates that words with high emotional valence, especially negative ones, require increased attentional allocation and lead to delayed lexical recognition due to the interplay between emotional arousal and semantic evaluation [15]. This implies encountering *"Spek LC"* in online comments prolongs cognitive processing, embedding the insult more vividly in memory. As a result, emotional language not only communicates stigma but also reinforces memory consolidation and emotional retention, thereby heightening the psychological impact of digital verbal abuse [10].

Language further functions as a tool for emotional regulation and social conditioning. Emotion-laden words activate both semantic and affective brain regions, illustrating that linguistic processing and emotion regulation are dynamically intertwined [11]. In digital discourse, this means that emotionally charged expression like *"Spek LC"* do more than inflict individual discomfort—they shape social norms by reinforcing the idea that women's appearances are subject to moral evaluation. Thus affective load functions as a socio-emotional mechanism of control, instilling fear of judgment and prompting self-monitoring behaviors that sustain gender hierarchies online.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that the use of the term *"Spek LC"* on social media is not merely a casual linguistic expression but a reflection of a mechanism of verbal violence and gender-based discrimination that operates through systems of signs and connotative meanings. Semiotic theory, the term has undergone a semantic shift from a neutral description of physical appearance to an ideological symbol containing moral judgment and stigma toward women. At the connotative level, *"Spek LC"* is used to evaluate, demean, and normalize stereotypes that portray women who dress openly or appear glamorous as "immoral" or "cheap."

From a psycholinguistic perspective, this term carries a significant affective load, in which exposure to such degrading language can trigger negative emotional responses such as shame, anger, or low self-esteem. This finding demonstrates that language possesses the power to shape both perception and emotion, reinforcing unequal social structures. Therefore, *"Spek LC"* functions not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a social and psychological practice that perpetuates gender inequality in digital spaces.

The study reveals that language in social media does not merely reflect social reality but actively constructs and legitimizes ideology through everyday discourse. Understanding the connotative and affective meanings embedded in terms such as *"Spek LC"* allows us to see how symbolic power operates through language, and how verbal violence can be disguised in humor, jokes, or casual remarks.

For future researches, it is recommended to expand cultural and gender perspectives, by comparing similar linguistic phenomena across different online communities or countries to identify both global and local patterns of connotation, incorporate interviews or online surveys to capture the personal perceptions

and emotional experiences of women who have been targeted by discriminatory language, thus deepening the psycholinguistic understanding of affective impact, fellow researchers could also integrate critical approaches, such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Feminist Linguistics, to explore further how language, ideology, and power intersect in digital communication.

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