



Semantic Ambiguity of 'MAIN' Word in Kompas.com News Articles 2025

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to identify and analyze the semantic ambiguity of the word “main” in news articles published on Kompas.com throughout 2025. The study focuses on examining the lexical and contextual meanings of the word “main” as well as the differences and potential contradictions between those meanings in news discourse. The word was selected because it frequently appears in various journalistic contexts and demonstrates a high level of polysemy and contextual variation.

Methodology – This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method using semantic analysis. The data were collected from news articles published between January and December 2025 containing the word “main” in headlines or article contents. Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by accessing Kompas.com and selecting relevant articles through purposive sampling. The research instruments included data classification sheets and analysis tables. The data were analyzed through data reduction, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing based on lexical, contextual, grammatical, and connotative meanings.

Findings – The findings reveal that the lexical meaning of “main” as “to play” rarely appeared directly in the news discourse. Instead, the word frequently carried contextual meanings such as seriousness, warning, manipulation, violation, hidden relations, risk, and strategic actions. The study also found that ambiguity emerged due to polysemy, idiomatic expressions, grammatical variations, and contextual interpretation. Forms such as “main-main,” “main mata,” and “main api” significantly contributed to semantic ambiguity in journalistic language.

Novelty – This study offers a specific semantic analysis focusing on a single polysemous word in Indonesian online news discourse. It emphasizes the relationship between lexical meaning, contextual meaning, and ambiguity in media language usage.

Significance – This study is beneficial for linguistics researchers, media language analysts, journalists, educators, and readers who seek to understand contextual meaning and ambiguity in journalistic texts. It may also serve as a reference for further studies related to semantics and language use in mass media.

Keywords: Ambiguity; Contextual meaning; Journalism language; Kompas.com; Lexical meaning; Polysemy; Semantic ambiguity; Semantics

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1. Introduction

Language is the primary means of conveying information, both orally and in written form. Through language, people can express ideas, opinions, emotions, and knowledge in everyday communication. In linguistic studies, meaning becomes the central focus discussed in the field of semantics. Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning systematically, including how meaning is formed, interpreted, and understood in communication (Yunira et al., 2020). Semantic studies are important because language users often interpret words differently depending on context and situation. In addition, semantics helps explain the relationship between language and meaning in communication processes.

Semantics studies the meaning of words both lexically and contextually. Lexical meaning refers to the basic or dictionary meaning of a word, while contextual meaning refers to meaning influenced by situations, conditions, and language use within a sentence or discourse (Liu et al., 2022). In communication, especially in mass media, contextual meaning often becomes more dominant because language is closely related to social conditions and the intentions of speakers or writers. Journalists frequently use words strategically to make news more interesting, persuasive, and attractive to readers. Consequently, the same word may produce different meanings depending on the topic and context of the news.

In the use of language in mass media, ambiguity or multiple meanings are frequently found. Ambiguity occurs when a word, phrase, or sentence has more than one possible interpretation, causing readers to understand information differently (Williams & Wright, 2024). This phenomenon is important to analyze because ambiguity can influence readers' comprehension of news content, particularly in journalistic texts that demand clarity and accuracy of meaning. According to semantic studies, ambiguity commonly appears because of polysemy, idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and contextual interpretation in language use (Purwono & Datang, 2024). Therefore, understanding the relationship between lexical and contextual meaning becomes essential in interpreting media language accurately.

One example of semantic ambiguity can be found in the use of the word "main" in news articles published on Kompas.com. Lexically, the word "main" means "to play" or to engage in a game or activity. However, in journalistic contexts, the word often carries different meanings depending on the topic and situation discussed in the article. In political or legal news, for instance, the word "main" may imply manipulation, dishonesty, or involvement in unlawful activities rather than literal play. In contrast, in sports news, the same word generally retains its literal meaning related to playing a game or participating in a match. Media language often uses contextual expressions and persuasive diction to attract readers' attention and strengthen the delivery of information (Istiyanto et al., 2024).

The ambiguity of the word "main" demonstrates how meaning is highly influenced by context. Readers who only rely on lexical meaning may misunderstand the intended message of a news article. Consequently, contextual interpretation becomes crucial in understanding the actual meaning conveyed by journalists. This phenomenon also reflects the dynamic nature of language in media discourse, where words are often used strategically to create emphasis, attract attention, or strengthen certain messages within news reporting (Wibowo et al., 2024). In online news discourse, ambiguity may also function as a stylistic strategy to make headlines more appealing and provocative for readers.

Previous studies on ambiguity in online news have shown that polysemous words frequently create multiple interpretations among readers. Research conducted by Tarsil and Simatupang (2024) found that lexical ambiguity frequently appears in online news headlines and may cause different interpretations among audiences. Purwono and Datang (2024) also explain that lexical and grammatical ambiguity often emerge in public discourse and legal texts because words are interpreted differently depending on context. Furthermore, Nguyen and Hekman (2024) state that media discourse frequently uses contextual language strategies to shape readers' understanding and perception of information. However, most previous studies discuss ambiguity in general terms without focusing on a single word that consistently appears across various news contexts. In addition, previous studies tend to separate lexical and contextual meaning analysis instead of examining the relationship and potential contradiction between them.

Therefore, this study focuses specifically on the semantic ambiguity of the word "main" in Kompas.com news articles published throughout 2025. This study aims to analyze the lexical and contextual meanings of the word "main" and identify the differences and potential contradictions between those meanings in journalistic discourse. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to semantic studies, particularly in understanding ambiguity in media language. In addition, this research may provide useful insights for journalists, readers, and future researchers regarding the importance of contextual interpretation in understanding news texts (Ryazanov et al., 2024).

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method to analyze the semantic ambiguity of the word "main" in news articles published on Kompas.com in 2025. The qualitative descriptive method was selected because the study focused on understanding and interpreting meanings based on language context rather than testing hypotheses statistically. The theoretical framework of this study was based on semantic theories proposed by Abdul Chaer (2022), Mansoer Pateda (2022), and Harimurti Kridalaksana (2023), particularly concerning lexical meaning, contextual meaning, grammatical meaning, and semantic ambiguity.

The data source consisted of news articles published on Kompas.com from January to December 2025. The data included words, phrases, and sentences containing the word "main" in news headlines and article contents that potentially indicated ambiguity. Data collection was conducted by accessing the Kompas.com website, searching articles using the keyword "main," selecting relevant articles from categories such as politics, law, and sports, and documenting excerpts containing the target word.

The main research instruments were data classification sheets and analysis tables. The collected data were classified according to lexical, contextual, and grammatical meanings. Data analysis was conducted through several stages: data collection, data reduction, data classification, contextual interpretation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on identifying differences and potential contradictions between lexical and contextual meanings in shaping readers' interpretations of news discourse.

2.1. Research Data

The data source in this study is news articles published in Kompas.com in the period January to December 2025. The data used is in the form of words, phrases, or sentences that contain the word "main" in the title and news content that has the potential to cause ambiguity in meaning.

The data collection technique is carried out by:

- Access Kompas.com site
- Using the search feature with the keyword "main"
- Select multiple relevant news articles (e.g. within a certain range of years)
- Collect data in the form of sentence excerpts or paragraphs containing the word "main"

2.2. Research Instruments

Main instruments:

- Data classification sheet
- Analysis table

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

- Access Kompas.com
- Search for articles with the keyword "main"
- Collect relevant data
- Log and group data
- Data reduction
- Data presentation
- Conclusion drawing

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results and Data Tabulation

In this section, data on the use of the word "main" in news articles Kompas.com 2025 are presented which have been collected through documentation techniques. The data obtained amounted to 39 findings that included the use of the word "main" in various contexts, both in the title and the content of the news.

The data has been classified based on several aspects of analysis, namely lexical meaning, contextual meaning, grammatical meaning, and nuances of connotation and denotation. The presentation of this data aims to provide an initial overview of the variation in the use of the word "main" before further analysis is carried out.

The following is data on the use of the word "main" in news articles in Kompas.com which shows the ambiguity of the meaning.

Table 1 - The data on the use of the word "main" in news articles in Kompas.com

no	Date	Title/ Context	Word Forms	Makna lexical	Contextual Meaning	Grammatical Meaning	Connotations (Nuances)	Denotati on	Source
1	15 Aug 2025	Don't Mess With SOEs	main- main	Play	very serious	Reduplication	Affirmation of policy seriousness	Play	Video Compass
2	11 Nov 2025	Don't mess around with bullies	main- main	Play	Hard Prohibition	Reduplication	Stern warnings	Play	Video Compass
3	12 Nov 2025	illegal mining	Main	Play	Deviations	verb	Indications of violations	Play	Compass
4	19 Nov 2025	Not for fun	main- main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Serious commitment	Play	Compass

5	Oct 28, 2025	kidnapping hoax	Main	Play	Engineering	verb	Information Manipulation	Play	Compass
6	13 June 2025	Amateur	Main	Play	collusion	Idiom	Hidden cheating practices	Play	Compass
7	4 Mar 2025	Not a joke	main-main	Play	very serious	Reduplication	Emphasis on urgency	Play	Compass
8	Feb 3, 2025	If you play around	main-main	Play	Violation	Reduplication	Threat of action	Play	Compass
9	Aug 21, 2025	Don't mess around with the DPRD	main-main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Liability Claims	Play	Compass
10	1 Jul 2025	Until I get to Bungen	main-main	Play	commitment	Reduplication	Seriousness of development	Play	Compass
11	5 June 2025	Don't mess with electricity	main-main	Play	Serious Prohibition	Reduplication	Policy Warning	Play	Compass
12	10 Mar 2025	The Food Mafia Is Being Hunted	main-main	Play	Manipulation	Reduplication	threats to perpetrators	Play	Compass
13	22 Jan 2025	Insider Messing Around	main-main	Play	Cheating	Reduplication	Indications of deviations	Play	Compass
14	Oct 24, 2025	In Christ I	main-main	Play	Not serious	Reduplication	A contemptuous attitude	Play	Compass
15	March 25, 2025	Until I am in Taiwan	main-main	Play	Threats	Reduplication	Political tensions	Play	Video Compass
16	Apr 8, 2025	main film	Main	Play	Acting	verb	Professional activities	Play	Compass
17	16 Mar 2025	Frolic	Frolic	Play	Not serious	Affiliation	Underestimating the situation	Play	Compass
18	Oct 31, 2025	play with fire	Main	Play	Dangerous	Idiom	High risk	Play	Video Compass
19	23 of 2025	Play Hard	Main	Play	Pressure	Phrase	Firm strategy	Play	Video Compass
20	Oct 18, 2025	Don't want to mess around	main-main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Strong commitment	Play	Video Compass
21	March 17, 2025	Not Playing Deportation	main-main	Play	Decisive action	Reduplication	Hard Policies	Play	Video Compass

22	06 March 2025	not messing around with the House of Representatives	main-main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Affirmation of authority	Play	Video Compass
23	Dec 15, 2025	Gaming Company	Main	Play	Illegal Practices	verb	Violation of the law	Play	Compass
24	Dec 2, 2025	Don't Mess With	main-main	Play	Threats	Reduplication	Discipline Pressure	Play	Compass
25	17 Nov 2025	Don't mess with education	main-main	Play	commitment	Reduplication	Policy Seriousness	Play	Compass
26	Oct 27, 2025	Don't Mess With Mine	main-main	Play	Affirmation	Reduplication	Firm attitude	Play	Compass
27	1 Sep 2025	Fun code	main-main	Play	Mode	Reduplication	Hidden Practices	Play	Compass
28	1 Aug 2025	Recruiting is playful	main-main	Play	Cheating	Reduplication	System manipulation	Play	Compass
29	16 May 2025	don't mess with PMI	main-main	Play	Prohibition	Reduplication	Policy Warning	Play	Compass
30	23 June 2025	Don't try to play	Main	Play	Manipulation	verb	Potential Violations	Play	Compass
31	17 Mar 2025	I'm - I'm ASN	main-main	Play	serious violations	Reduplication	Threat of sanctions	Play	Compass
32	21 Jul 2025	main serobot	Main	Play	Violation	verb	destructive actions	Play	Compass
33	10 June 2025	Threatening to Play	Main	Play	Violence	verb	Aggressive Threats	Play	Compass
34	23 Jul 2025	tanggal main	Main	Play	Schedule	Phrase	Timing	Play	Compass
35	04 May 2025	Don't play attack	Main	Play	Conflict	verb	Military Warning	Play	Video Compass
36	March 28, 2025	Playing Threats	Main	Play	Pressure	verb	Conflict Situations	Play	Video Compass
37	31 Jul 2025	Judge's Eye Play	Amateur	Play	collusion	Idiom	dishonest practices	Play	Compass
38	Feb 3, 2025	Not messing around	main-main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Firm Affirmation	Play	Compass

39	Feb 25, 2025	Don't mess around with BBM	main-main	Play	Seriousness	Reduplication	Policy commitment	Play	Compass
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3.2. Discussion of Semantic Ambiguity Analysis of the Word "Main"

The discussion in this study is carried out by referring to the findings of the tabulated data, then analyzed descriptively using semantic concepts, especially lexical meaning, contextual meaning, and ambiguity of meaning. Semantic ambiguity occurs when a word has more than one interpretation depending on the context in which it is used. According to Nick Riemer (2022), meaning in semantics cannot be separated from context because interpretation is influenced by linguistic and situational factors. In addition, Fajar Ardiansyah (2024) states that ambiguity frequently appears in discourse due to differences in meaning interpretation by speakers and listeners. Therefore, the analysis of the word main in this study focuses on identifying lexical meaning and contextual meaning that create semantic ambiguity.

3.2.1. Forms of Use of the Word "Main"

Based on the tabulation of data, the word "main" appears in various forms, namely basic, reduplication, and idiomatic forms. Forms of reduplication such as "not messing around" and "playing around" were the most dominant forms found in the data.

The dominance of this form of reduplication shows the existence of a function of affirmation of meaning in sentences. In linguistic studies, reduplication is often used to give intensity or emphasis to certain meanings (Kridalaksana, 2022). This can be seen from the use of "not kidding" which consistently leads to the meaning of seriousness in various data contexts.

In addition, idiomatic forms such as "flirt" and "flirt with fire" are also found in some of the data. This form suggests that the word "main" has undergone an expansion of meaning that can no longer be interpreted literally. This is in line with the opinion of Chaer (2022) who states that idioms are linguistic units whose meaning cannot be explained from the meaning of their constituent elements.

Thus, the variation in word forms in the data shows that linguistic structure has a direct influence on the formation of meaning.

3.2.2. Lexical Meaning of the Word "Main"

Lexically, the word "main" has the basic meaning of "doing play activities" as stated in the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (Language Development and Development Agency, 2023). This meaning is general and does not depend on a specific context.

However, based on the results of data tabulation, the use of this lexical meaning is not predominantly found in news texts. Most of the data actually shows that the word "main" is used in a meaning that has shifted.

This shows that lexical meanings only serve as a basic foundation in understanding a word, while the meanings used in language practice are more influenced by context. This is in line with the view that lexical meanings often expand when used in certain discourses (Rahmawati, 2023).

3.2.3. Contextual Meaning of the Word "Main"

Based on the contextual meaning column in the tabulation of the data, it was found that the word "main" has a variety of different meanings according to the context in which it is used. These meanings can be classified as follows:

- The meaning of seriousness, as in "not messing around"
- Meaning of prohibitions or warnings, such as "don't mess around"
- Meaning of violation or deviation, such as "playing a project"

- d. Meaning of cheating or hidden relationships, such as "flirting"
- e. Meaning of risk or danger, such as "playing with fire"
- f. The meaning of an activity or role, such as "playing a movie"

This diversity of meanings shows that context has a very important role in determining the meaning of a word. The meaning is determined not only by the form of the word, but also by the situation of its use in the sentence. This is in accordance with semantic theory which states that contextual meaning arises as a result of the relationship between language and usage situations (Leech, 2023).

In addition, the appearance of repeated meanings in certain categories indicates a pattern of language use in news texts. This is also supported by research by Putra and Sari (2023) which states that media language tends to use contextual meanings to reinforce the message conveyed to readers.

3.2.4. Grammatical Meaning of the Word "Main"

Based on data tabulation, the use of the word "main" in news Kompas.com 2025 shows that there is a variation in terms of the form of its use in sentences. This can be seen in the grammatical meaning column which indicates that the word "main" is not always used in the same form.

Of the 39 data analyzed, the word "main" was found in several forms, such as main, mesmer, as well as in the form of phrases such as play, fireplay, and hard play. This difference in form suggests that the word "main" is used in a variety of different sentence structures.

In the study of theory, it is explained that grammatical meaning is related to the meaning that arises because of the relationship of words in a sentence. In this case, the form of use of the word "main" also affects the meaning produced. For example, in the non-playful form, the word is used to affirm an attitude, while in the playful form, the word "play" is part of an expression that has its own meaning.

Based on the data found, it can be seen that the change in the form of the use of the word "main" in sentences is related to the difference in meaning that appears. This shows that the meaning of a word is not only determined by its basic meaning, but also by the way it is used in sentences.

These findings also relate to a focus on looking at how semantic ambiguity occurs in the word "main". The variation in the form in the use of the word suggests that a single word can produce different meanings depending on the structure of the sentence.

Thus, it can be concluded that grammatical meaning also plays a role in giving rise to variations in meaning in the word "main", thus supporting the occurrence of semantic ambiguity in news texts.

3.2.5. Connotative Meaning of the Word "Main"

Based on the tabulation of data that has been compiled, the use of the word "main" in news Kompas.com 2025 also shows a connotative meaning. This can be seen in some data where the word "main" not only has a meaning according to the context, but also contains additional meanings that are indirect.

Of the 39 data analyzed, several uses of the word "main" in the form of phrases such as play, fireplay, and playful loudness show the existence of a connotative meaning. In this context, the word "play" is no longer interpreted as 'play', but has other meanings that have evolved in the use of language.

The connotative meaning of the word "main" can be seen from the presence of flavor values or additional meanings beyond the basic meaning. In some data, the meaning is related to certain situations, such as an informal relationship (flirting), risky actions (playing with fire), or a firm attitude (playing hard). The meaning cannot be understood directly from its lexical meaning, but depends on the context of the sentence and the habits of use in society.

Based on the data found, the use of this connotative meaning suggests that the word "main" can have more than one meaning in its use. This shows that there are variations in meaning that can cause differences in interpretation.

Thus, the connotative meaning also enriches the use of the word "main" in news texts and becomes a form of semantic ambiguity found in this study.

3.2.6. Ambiguity of Meaning in the Use of the Word "Main"

Based on the results of tabulation of data, ambiguity of meaning arises as a result of the difference between lexical meaning and contextual meaning. The word "main" in some data has more than one possible interpretation if it is not seen in the context of the sentence.

For example, the lexical use of the word "play" can refer to play, but in certain contexts it can mean serious, violative, or even risky. This shows that one form of a word can produce a variety of meanings.

This ambiguity is a common phenomenon in language. According to Ullmann (2022), ambiguity occurs when an element of language has more than one possible meaning. In the context of news media, ambiguity often arises due to the use of language that is efficient but dense in meaning.

Thus, the ambiguity in the data of this study is contextual and can be understood by paying attention to the entire sentence.

3.2.7. Relationship between Data Findings and Theory

The results of the study show that there is a compatibility between the data findings and the semantic theory used. Data show that the meaning of the word "main" is not fixed, but changes according to the context of its use.

This is in line with the view that the meaning of language is dynamic and influenced by context factors and linguistic forms (Lyons, 2022). In addition, the dominance of contextual meaning in the data also shows that the use of language in the media emphasizes more on communicative functions than literal meanings.

Thus, the findings in this study reinforce the theory that meaning is not only in words, but also in how they are used in certain contexts.

3.2.8. Similarities and Differences in the Meaning of the Word "Main"

Based on the results of data analysis, there are similarities and differences in the use of the word "main" which is seen from the lexical meaning, contextual meaning, grammatical meaning, and connotative meaning.

The similarity found is that all the data have the same basic form of the word, namely "play", with the lexical meaning of 'play'. This shows that basically, the word "main" has the same meaning, even though it is used in different contexts. In addition, most of the data also shows a relationship between contextual meaning and usage situations in sentences, so that the meaning that appears can still be understood in a certain context.

On the other hand, the difference is seen in the variation in meaning that results in each use of the word "main". Based on data, the word "play" can have the meaning of seriousness, warnings, violations, hidden relationships, risks, or certain activities. This difference is influenced by the context of the sentence, the way the word is used, and the relationship between the word and other elements in the sentence.

In addition, differences can also be seen in terms of the form of use. The word "main" can appear in the form of a base, reduplication, or in the form of an idiomatic phrase. Each of these forms produces a different meaning, thus showing the variation of use in the language.

Thus, the similarity lies in the same basic form and lexical meaning, while the difference lies in the meaning produced in the context of use. This suggests that the word "main" has a

flexible nature in language and can generate a variety of meanings, ultimately leading to semantic ambiguity.

3.3. Synthesis of Discussion

Based on the overall data findings and the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that the use of the word "main" in news texts shows that there is a close relationship between the form of the word, the meaning, and the context of its use. These three aspects cannot be separated because they affect each other in forming the understanding of meaning in a sentence.

In terms of form, the data show that the word "main" is not only used in the basic form, but also in the reduplication and idiomatic form. Reduplication forms such as "not messing around" tend to be used to provide an affirmation of meaning, while idiomatic forms such as "flirt" and "flirt with fire" show figurative meanings that cannot be interpreted directly from their lexical meaning. This shows that variations in word forms have an important role in determining the direction of the meaning produced (Kridalaksana, 2022).

In terms of meaning, the results of the study show that the lexical meaning of the word "main" is not predominantly used in news texts. On the other hand, contextual meanings appear more often and show quite wide variations, such as the meanings of seriousness, prohibitions, violations, cheating, risks, and certain activities. This dominance of contextual meaning shows that in language practice, especially in news media, the meaning of a word is determined more by context than its basic meaning (Leech, 2023).

In addition, the diversity of meanings that appear in the data also shows the existence of certain usage patterns. For example, the form "not playing" is consistently used to indicate seriousness, while the idiomatic form tends to be used to convey figurative meanings. This pattern shows that the use of words in news texts is not random, but follows certain customs or conventions in journalistic language (Putra & Sari, 2023).

In terms of ambiguity, this study shows that the ambiguity of meaning arises as a result of the difference between lexical meaning and contextual meaning. The word "main" can give rise to more than one interpretation if it is not understood in the context of a complete sentence. However, this ambiguity does not always lead to misunderstandings, since in many cases, the context of the sentence is enough to clarify the meaning in question. This is in accordance with the opinion of Ullmann (2022) who states that ambiguity is part of a language system that allows for variations in meaning.

Furthermore, the results of this study also show that language in news media tends to use words that have the flexibility of meaning to reinforce the message conveyed. The use of the word "main" in various contexts shows that journalistic language not only serves to convey information, but also to provide emphasis and attract the attention of readers (Hidayat, 2022).

4. Conclusions

Based on an analysis of 39 examples of the use of the word slang in news in 2025 from Kompas.com, it can be concluded that the word main has a fairly high level of ambiguity of meaning. This ambiguity arises due to the obvious difference between the lexical meaning and the contextual meaning when used. Lexically, the word play means 'to play'. However, in all the data studied, this meaning hardly appears directly. Conversely, the meaning of the word play is determined by the context of the sentence, resulting in a variety of different contextual meanings, such as seriousness (not messing around), offense or deception (playing in a case), idiomatic meaning (playing), and metaphorical meaning (playing with fire, playing hard). In addition, there are also uses that are almost in accordance with lexical meanings, such as playing movies, although there are relatively few of them.

The ambiguity of the meaning of the word main in this study is triggered by several factors, namely the conflict between lexical meaning and context, the expansion of meaning (polysemi), the use in the form of idioms and metaphors, and significant dependence on the context of the sentence. Therefore, the meaning of the word play in news articles is not singular, but has a variety of possible interpretations that can only be understood from the context of its use. The findings of this study show that meaning ambiguity is an inherent phenomenon in the use of journalistic language, where one word can be used to express various meanings according to the author's communication intentions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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