IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO: GENDER BIAS IN TIKTOK'S DISCOURSE ON INFIDELITY IN INDONESIA

Wirdatul Khasanah
Sastra Inggris, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
wirdatulkhasanah@unesa.ac.id

Imam Hanafi
Sastra Inggris, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
imamhanafi@unesa.ac.id

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana kata *pelakor* (perebut laki orang) dan *pebinor* (perebut bini orang) dikonstruksi secara sosial di masyarakat melalui video yang di unggah di platform social media berbasis video, TikTok. Data dari penelitian ini diambil dari 32 TikTok caption yang menggunakan hashtag *pelakor* dan *pebinor* dalam rentang waktu April 2024 sampai April 2025. Dengan menggunakan Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) yang dikombinasikan dengan teori Model Tiga Dimensi Fairclough, penelitian ini menemukan adanya bias gender yang kuat di masyarakat. Perempuan yang diberi label *pelakor* sering sekali digambarkan sebagai perusak rumah tangga, menerima penliaain negative yang intens, kecaman moral, dan juga perundungan publik. Sebaliknya, laki-laki yang diberi label *pebinor* cenderung digambarkan dengan yang yang lebih humoris, menerima lebih sedikit penilaian, dan sering kali dilihat sebagai poihak yang pasif atau bahkan korban rayuan. Representasi yang tidak seimbang ini menggambarkan adanya nilai-nilai patriarki yang mengakar di masyarakat Indonesia di mana beban moral dan kesalahan secara tidak proporsional dibebankan kepada perempuan.
Kata Kunci: *pelakor, pebinor,* bias gender.

Abstract

This study investigates how the words *pelakor* (perebut laki orang) and *pebinor* (perebut bini orang) are socially constructed in society through TikTok, a short-video platform widely used in Indonesia. The data were collected from 32 TikTok video captions using the hashtags #*pelakor* and #*pebinor* which have more than 10,000 likes posted from April 2024 to April 2025. Using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) combined with Fairclough's Three-Dimensional model, this study found that there is strong gendered bias in public discourse. Women who are labelled as *pelakor* are often portrayed as intentional homewreckers, receiving intense negative judgment, moral condemnation, and public shaming. In contrast, men labelled as pebinor tend to be framed in a more humorous way, receive less judgement, and often being depicted as passive or even victims of seduction. This biased portrayal highlights the deep-rooted patriarchal values in Indonesian society where moral burdens and blame are disproportionally placed on women.
Keywords: *pelakor, pebinor,* gender bias.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, there is a specific term to refer to a woman who is perceived to be responsible for ruining someone else marriage. This word is called "*pelakor*" or in literal meaning means *perebut laki orang (*the thief of someone else's husband). This word has been widely used since 1990s when there was a love affair between one of Indonesian singers called Mayangsari with Bambang Suharto, the son of former Indonesian president. Since then, every time there is adultery, specifically artist or famous person, the term *pelakor* is popped up again in society either in mass media or in social media. The most recent case is the case of an Indonesian singer called Nissa Sabyan who has adultery with her boss in which the boss has already had a wife. Thus, people started calling Nissa Sabyan as *pelakor* because he ruined someone else marriage.

However, there is also a term to refer to a man who has affair with someone else wife. This word called *pebinor*, stands for *perebut bini orang* or in literal meaning means stealer of someone else's wife. However, this term is not as popular as its counterparts. The word *pebinor* rarely appeared in society either in social media such as Instagram, TikTok, or even in online newspapers. From my preliminary research using social media called TikTok, I found that from April 2024 to April 2025 there are more than 150 videos using *pelakor* as hashtag while there is only less than 70 videos using *pebinor* as hashtag.

Thus, having these unequal portrayals of the words *pelakor* and *pebinor* in social media, this study tries to address the injustice discursive of the word *pelakor* and *pebinor* on TikTok by looking at how social media users in TikTok construct the *pelakor* narrative and compare it to the treatment of *pebinor*. Using the perspective of Feminist Critical discourse analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2007), this study tries to uncover the rooted construction of gender inequality in social media especially TikTok.

To this end, this study addresses two research questions; they are 1) How are the term *pelakor* presented in TikTok captions? 2) how does the portrayal of *pelakor* differ from *pebinor* in TikTok content?

Earlier studies have looked at how the word *pelakor* is used in public conversations, especially on social media. Situating the study under the framework of feminist critical discourse analysis, (Martin-Anatias, 2019) analysed how society use the word '#pelakor' by analysing Instagram's hashtag. From her data, she found that the term *pelakor* is constantly used in social media, specifically in Instagram and frequently used to blame the other women and elicit the role of men in infidelity. She further found that this gendered bias term has been a misogynistic attitude which is rooted in society. Similarly, Chairil et al., (2023) looked at Facebook groups such as "Anti-Pelakor Indonesia" to find out how online shaming practices happened in society. Using a qualitative discourse analysis method, they found out that shaming practices are used in society as a form of social punishment for the women who wrecked someone else married.

These previous studies have shown that women are often blamed more than men in cheating cases. However, little attention has been put into how the word *pebinor* has been addressed in the society. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by analysing TikTok caption using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to find the patterns on how social media shaped gendered bias.

Background
Pelakor and Pebinor

The word *pelakor* stands for *Perebut (thief) Laki (husband) Orang (other person)*. It usually refers to a woman who is perceived as having affairs with someone else's husband. This word was first appeared in Indonesia in 1990s to refer to someone called Mayangsari, an Indonesian singer who was perceived to be the one who broke Bambang Suharto's marriage, the son of former president Indonesia (Martin-Anatias, 2019:2). Since then, every time there is an affair scandal between married couples, the word *pelakor* is always used. The word Pebinor which stands for *Perebut Bini Orang (*the stealer of someone else's wife), on the other hand, has been used as the opposite and is rarely used in society.

TikTok

TikTok is a short-video social media platform that was launched in 2016 and since then gets bigger attention globally. In Indonesia itself, TikTok has large and active users across all ages which makes TikTok a major public space for conversations and viral trends across the country. As (Anderson, 2020:8) notes, TikTok's structures encourages emotional, authentic, and sometimes chaotic contents which reflects cultural trends in the society. This makes TikTok an important platform for studying how narratives such as *pebinor* vs *pelakor* circle around in the society.

Feminist critical Discourse Analysis

The aim of feminist CDA is "to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (Lazar, 2007:142). Thus, while CDA focuses on how hidden ideology of a text is constructed, feminist CDA will also take how gender of men and women is portrayed in a text. It is to show up the gendered assumptions of men and women and how hegemonic power relations is generated and portrayed in different context and communities (Lazar, 2007:145). Furthermore, Lazar (2005:6) argues that a feminist critical analyst believes that men and women should be in equal status.

Fairclough's Three Dimensional Framework

To analyse the data, the three dimensional framework of Fairclough (1992) is used. This model sees discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes

society. He proposes that discourse should be analysed at the three interconnected levels: text, discourse practice, and social practice as follows:

- Text analysis focuses on how the text in the society is structured, including on the word choice, grammar, and rhetorical strategies. In the case of this study is how the word *pelakor* and *pebinor* is used and delivered through TikTok hashtags or captions by society.
- Discourse practice as the second levels looks at how the text is produced, circulated, and interpreted among society.
- Social practice examines how the broader social context shapes and is shaped by certain narratives in the society.
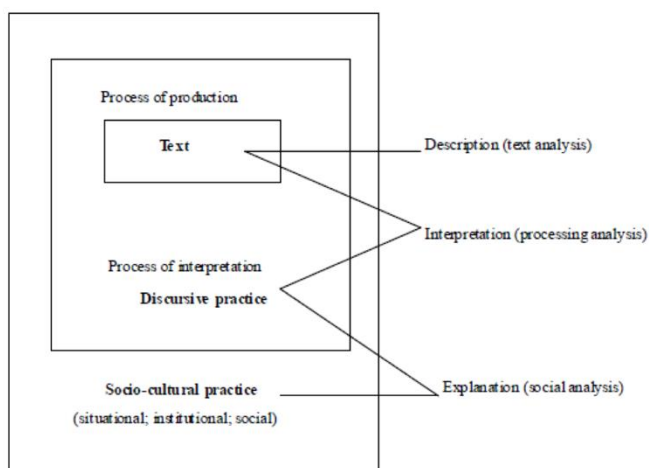

Figure 1. Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model

In the context of this study, FCDA and Fairclough's three-dimensional model are combined to examine how the word *pelakor* and *pebinor* are constructed in society through TikTok captions. While FCDA provides the feminist lens on how language reflects and reinforces gender inequality, Fairclough's three-dimensional model offers structured way to analyse data across the three levels. By combining these two approaches, the study is able to explore not only the patterns of language used in TikTok captions but also seek to understand how women and men are portrayed in the society through social media discourse.

METHODOLOGY
Data Collection
This study collected the data from TikTok videos uploaded on the platform publicly from April 2024 to April 2025 with some basic criteria such as the video must have at least 10,000 likes and contain either the caption or the hashtag *pelakor* or *pebinor*. This to ensure that the video reached wide range of users in TikTok. From 120 videos

under the hashtag *pelakor,* and 90 videos under the hashtag *pebinor,* this study found there are 32 videos which are qualified. Those are divided into 27 videos using *pelakor* in their caption and 5 videos contains the word *pebinor*.

Data Analysis
Later, the data was grouped and analysed by using Fairclough's three dimensional model. So, a table was created to list all date. Since the first step involved the analysis of the text, focusing on the word choice was the next step. The words that shared common themes of each title were highlighted to make the coding or grouping. The examples of the coding is the use of verbs in a sentence such as steal, ruin, or the emotional tone such as anger, sarcasm, and the labelling practice such as calling someone as *pelakor* or *pebinor*. The second analytical step was to interpret the intertextuality of how the word *pelakor* was portrayed in TikTok, and the last one involved the analysis of social practice of how the word *pelakor* is used in social life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Unequal Distribution of Content
From 32 videos retrieved, 27 were about *pelakor* while just 5 of them discussed about *pebinor.* This indicates that the discussion of *pelakor* is more common and popular in the society compared to the word *pebinor*.

Thematic Patterns in *Pelakor* Captions
The captions under the word pelakor were grouped into several major themes as follows:

Table 1. Thematic Patterns in *Pelakor* Captions

Theme	Example Captions	Descriptions
Blaming the pelakor	"the legal wife confronts the pelakor", "I forgive everyone except the pelakor"	Indicating that the people blaming pelakor for breaking the marriage.
Public shaming and confrontation	"pelakor caught in a boarding house raid", "taking a friend to confront the pelakor"	Exposing pelakor in a public
Mocking and moral judgement	"you're beautiful but still a pelakor", "pelakor being proud"	Sarcasm and insults in pelakor
Victim narratives	"this is how it feels to continue marriage after husband stolen by pelakor"	People positioning themselves as the victims of betrayals in a marriage.
Defense against accusations	"when you are accused of being a pelakor"	Defending oneself from being labelled as pelakor

Provocations/challenge	"dare to name the person who ruined your relationship"	Calling out people to expose pelakor who ruins the marriage.

Thematic Patterns in Pebinor Captions

The *pebinor* captions were grouped as follows:

Table 2. Thematic Patterns in Pebinor Captions

Theme	Example captions	Descriptions
Neutral identifications	"5 signs of a pebinor", "characteristics of a pebinor"	Describing traits of pebinor without strong emotional words
Mild humor or light judgement	"a police officer caught sleeping with someone's else", "pelakor and pebinor are always the same"	Using neutral or humorous tone with less anger

Overall Observations

Overall, the findings confirm that strong gender biased appeared on TikTok captions since women as *pelakor* are aggressively blamed, insulted, and publicly shamed in infidelity while men as *pebinor* are either lightly criticised or discussed humorously without harsh judgement.

Pelakor stands for *perebut laki orang* (the stealer of someone else's husband). *The* term pelakor itself depicts that the doer is actively engaged as an active agent, not a passive agent. (Martin-Anatias, 2019:3) argues that the word *pelakor* itself is sexist and biased. This word put the women as an active actor in the marital relationship, meanwhile men here are put to be the passive actor where they put in innocent position. Men as the one who are being stolen by women. Thus, from this term construction only, the society put women as the one who is responsible in extra marital relationship while men are put as passive agent who are not responsible.

Passive voice

This section highlights how society uses the word *pelakor*. Of 27 captions, 8 captions used passive lexical voice to address the word *pelakor*. Linguistically, the use of this lexical voice can be further divided into two themes. The first one is *pelakor* as a label given from society where women is positioned as someone accused or marked by public judgment. The second one *pelakor* is presented as an active agent in infidelity where women are described as actively causing damage to marriage.

Five captions positioned *pelakor* mainly as a negative label given by society such as "when you are accused of being a *pelakor*", "*pelakor* caught in a boarding house raid". Also, three captions portrayed *pelakor* as an active agent who caused harm such as "the husband was stolen by *pelakor*", "the marriage was ruined by *pelakor*".

Negative label

In many of the captions of the users, *pelakor* is often mentioned negatively. Out of 27 *pelakor* captions, 17 captions were negatively labelled and framed as an identity that carries shame, immorality, and social disgrace such as "you are beautiful but still a *pelakor*", "*pelakor* with pride", "a girl who steals a man isn't just a *pelakor*, but a prostitute".

These examples show that *pelakor* is not just a term describing women but also a stigmatising identity used to judge women's moral character. The negative label is also usually followed by sarcasm, mockery, or linking *pelakor* to a more insulting word such as "*pelacur*" (prostitute). This aligns with Lazar's (2005:11) argument stating that everyday discourse is not just merely about social realities, but actively works to reinforce gendered power structure. To contrast, the word *pebinor* is often described in a neutral or even humours tone without attaching strong moral judgement to men.

An Active Agent

Other passive voice words used in TikTok captions are the words "was taken" *(diambil),* "being stolen" *(dicuri),* is seized "*direbut*" and "is seduced" (*digoda*) such as "the husband was stolen by the *pelakor*" or "my boyfriend was stolen by the *pelakor*".

Similar to the previous section where the structure is subject followed passive voice, this section shares the same structure pattern; however, the subject is the husband or the man involved in infidelity. The passive lexical voice such as taken, stolen, seized, and seduced indicating that subject in this structure is a passive agent. It points out that a husband or a man in infidelity is the victims of the other women; thus, it highlights that the other women or *pelakor* in this context is an active agent actively attract the men.

Blaming

The last three data have tendency to blame women in infidelity. It is shown by some linguistics features that will be elaborated in this section. In addition, this result is in line with the result of Amani and Rusadi (2018:388) in which they found that news media tend to blame the other women in their news article.

One example from the data is the caption:
"I forgive everyone except the *pelakor*"

This indicates that *pelakor* is the only unforgivable figure which implies that if men involved in a cheating, they will

still be forgiven. The emotional targets only on the women. This indicates that women carries the moral burden of the affair.

Another captions states:
"To the pelakor who ruined my family's life."
Here, the caption uses strong emotional language such as ruined my family's life to show that *pelakor* is the doer of the destructive force. Again, women is the only one blamed for the cheating in a marriage.

From the lexical choices in the TikTok captions, it can be seen that *pelakor* is constructed as someone who must be blamed and punished in an infidelity. Being accused, stamped, and mentioned are the three common words used to label *pelakor*. Furthermore, users of TikTok also positions the husband as a passive agent while *pelakor* acts as active agent. It indicates that in marriage, if there is *pelakor*, it is *pelakor* who is wrong, not the husband because *pelakor* actively seduces and attracts someone else's husband. The words used to indicate this are "stolen, and taken".

Discussion
The rooted patriarchy concepts
In Indonesia, there has been known two era of political regime that influenced the life of its people. It is the old order era whose president is Soekarno and new order era whose president is Soeharto. According to Martin-Anatias, (2019), Indonesia's socio-cultural life has been influenced by new order era whose era started from 1966-1998. This regime has shaped the construction of men and women in Indonesia (Ida, 2001:25). Apart of doing domestic work, women should also be submissive to men. Men are treated like God who cannot be wrong. So, if there is a domestic conflict no matter what the problem is, it is women who are always wrong. This concept seems to be rooted in society in which if a boy make mistake, society will normalise it as "boys just do what boys do"; meanwhile, if it is a girl who make mistake, society will judge the girl because the society expect the girl to be "how girl should be", being nice and calm for instance.

In addition, even though the country itself hosts 6 official religions that is Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, Indonesia is known as one of the largest homes to Muslims community in the world. Thus, many Islamic concepts has influenced Indonesia's rule since the very first time this country founded. Even though the government says that it is not an Islamic country, however, many rules made is always influenced by Muslim community. The rules itself can be seen from the Indonesian constitutions and other laws. The

Islamic rules has also been socially constructed in society unconsciously. So that whatever people do should be aligned with the concept of Islam.

Martin-Anatias (2019:5) states that the concept of sexuality and gender were learned through the Islamic interpretation of *kodrat* (nature), *harkat* (dignitiy), and *martaba* (status). Further, she notes that the concept of *malu* (shame) has also been rooted in Indonesian society. She further adds that through the concept of *malu*, women are labelled and stigmatised when doing something against normativity. However, this concept does not go to men in which they have more freedom to do anything they want without being stigmatised.

Thus, through the previously mentioned concept, if there a woman does not act the way society expect her to be, she will be stigmatised and judged. This concept also goes the same with the concept of "*pelakor*" in society.

Injustice Practice in Society
Although both *pelakor* and *pebinor* exist in the society language, there is a strong imbalance in the use of the two. When talking about cheating in a legal marriage, the word *pelakor* is more often appeared compared to the word *pebinor*. This has been proven by the findings of the study that during the timespan of one year, there were 27 videos talking about *pelakor* with different topic, from mocking, blaming, provoking, or even doing public shaming. Meanwhile, for the narrative of *pebinor,* there were only 5 videos and none of them blaming the men. Mostly, the narratives either just make a fun of the word *pebinor* or giving neutral identification of *pebinor.* Thus, women are always overwhelmingly framed as the main actors who are responsible for the infidelity while men just treated minimally.

As (Anderson, 2020:8) mentions that TikTok promotes content that is authentic, emotional, and often sensational which makes blaming and shaming is likely go viral. Emotional caption which targets *pelakor* can easily receive high engagement, thus making negative gendered discourse more massive in the society.

The unequal construction of the word *pelakor* and *pebinor* in the society shows that there is injustice discursive practice in society who is still favour men. Furthermore, This study has also proved that the term *pelakor* is a gender biased term as it blames women for the relationship and leaving men as someone who is innocent of this practice.

Blaming for women, absenting men

Although there are many massive movements on gender equality, it is however still men are typically the people in power either explicit or implicitly. Meanwhile women, on the other hand, usually always be the subordinate ones. According to (Moon et al., 2023:183) the construction of women as someone who needs to be provided, guarded, and wants to look pretty attracts men to be the "hero" for women. Similarly, Firmansyah, (2019:3) states that women is always labelled as weak, associated with chores, and incapable of making decisions. This labelling has been rooted since a long time ago so that it rooted in the society unconsciously and become practice and being accepted by wide society without being realised.

The word *pelakor* and the blame of women and absenting the role of men in infidelity suggest that in society it is acceptable for men to cheat on their wives and if the men cheating, the wives will be blamed because they are not good enough. On the other hand, the third person also being blamed because they are considered as seducing the men. So, men always in the position of he is right. Either it is the wife who is false or the third person who is false. The TikTok caption reinforce this pattern indicating that women are not only blamed but also ridiculed, labelled, and morally judged.

According to Martin-Anatias (2019:8), the blame for women rooted in Soeharto's regime in which women were "called" true women when they were envisaged only as dutiful wives and doting mothers. This idea persists in society in which to become a full woman; a woman should marry and have children. Being a good wife means cooking for the whole family, serving the husband, and staying at home to take care the whole house. A woman when becomes a wife is also forced to follow the order of her husband, whatever the order is. She is also expected to sacrifice herself to men (Martin-Anatias, 2019:8).

This sexist attitude has been normalised by society for decades so that if there are women who are not the way how they were expected by common society, people will label her as a rebellious wife. Thus, if women fail to serve her husband and thus her husband have affairs with someone else, it is the wife who will be blamed because the wife is considered as not having good service towards the husband.

It takes two to tango

There is an idiomatic expression in English saying "it takes two to tango". It means that if it takes two people to be in a situation; and thus both parties responsible for the situation (Collins Dictionary, 2025). This concept should also be applicable in extra marital affair. It is impossible

there will be the other women in a marriage if one of the parties do not contribute to the affair itself.

However, what happens in society is that the only party who is being blamed always the other woman. It is men as the one who are being stolen by women. Thus, from this term construction only, the society put women as the one who is responsible in extra marital relationship while men are put as passive agent who are not responsible in the action. Thus, the idiomatic expression it takes two to tango does not apply in infidelity especially in Indonesian context.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how TikTok captions contribute to the construction of gender blame in the case of infidelity through the terms *pelakor* and *pebinor* by applying Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional framework. This study found that women labelled as *pelakor* are framed as the main actors responsible for breaking down the marriages, while men *(pebinor)* are often treated lightly.

The analysis revealed several key features such as the frequent use of passive voice to obscure men's roles, the strong application of negative label toward women, and the framing of women as active doers who cause harm in someone else's relationships. In contrast, men were largely absent from blame narratives or mentioned in neutral or humorous way.

This findings reflect that society in Indonesia still see the other woman as the only party who is wrong in infidelity. Whereas, in extramarital status, it always takes both sides to tango. However, what happened in society is that if there is cheating in a marriage, regardless of whoever who makes the first move, it is always woman who is being blamed and thus absenting the involvement of men. Men are always seen as the one who cannot be wrong. This blaming towards women has been rooted in society since a long time ago as the result of a patriarchal system.

Suggestions

Future studies could explore a broader range of platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, or analyse user comments alongside captions to gain deeper understanding of how audiences respond and negotiate these gendered discourse. Furthermore, examining regional variations within Indonesia may reveal how cultural differences impact the use and reception of terms like pelakor and pebinor across different communities.

REFERENCES

Amani, H. F., & Rusadi, U. (2018). *Women on Article about Infidelity in Online News Media: Case Study of Mrs. Dendy on Tribunnews.com*. *165*(Iccsr), 387–390. https://doi.org/10.2991/iccsr-18.2018.85

Anderson, K. E. (2020). *Getting acquainted with social networks and apps : it is time to talk about TikTok*. *4*, 7–12. https://doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-01-2020-0001

Chairil, A., Rahmawati, D. H., & Fauzan, L. A. (2023). Digilantism Practice: The Online Shaming for the Cheaters. *Jurnal Spektrum Komunikasi*, *11*(1), 120–131. https://doi.org/10.37826/spektrum.v11i1.457

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change* [Book]. Polity.

Firmansyah, R. C. W. (2019). Bentuk-Bentuk Pelabelan Negatif Terhadap Perempuan Dalam Novel Gadis-Gadis. *Senasbasa*, *2*, 38–48.

Ida, R. (2001). The Construction of Gender Identity in Indonesia: Between Cultural Norms, Economic Implications, and State Formation. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, *16*(1), 21–34.

It takes to two tango. (2021). In *COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Lazar, M. M. (2005). Politicizing Gender in Discourse: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as Political Perspective and Praxis. In M. M. Lazar (Ed.), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse* (pp. 1–28). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230599901_1

Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis1. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *4*(2), 141–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900701464816

Martin-Anatias, N. (2019). Pelakor : An Unjust Discursive Term for "the Other Woman." *Language @Internet*, *17*, 1–18. https://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2019/martinanatias

Moon, Y. J., Nesi, A., & Yuliantari, A. P. (2023). Ragam Bahasa Bias Gender Pada Pemberitaan Aktris Pascacerai: Perspektif Sosiolinguistik. *Semantik*, *12*(2), 175–188. https://doi.org/10.22460/semantik.v12i2.p175-188