

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Humans are social creatures with unique personalities, dependent on others for survival and requiring constant interaction in order to function in society. Without communication, these interactions would not occur. Therefore, to ensure communication runs effectively, language becomes an important tool to convey and receive information. As stated by Setiawan & Zyuliantina (2020, p. 97), language must be used properly so as not to cause double meaning or confusion for the recipient. That is, to avoid misunderstandings, speakers and writers must be skilled in using language clearly and precisely. Therefore, it is clear that language plays an important role in shaping how meaning is interpreted in communication.

Along with the development of society in the digital era, the function of language has also evolved. In this context, language intersects directly with linguistic studies, especially the field of semantics. According to Butar-Butar (2021, p. 9), “The term semantics is actually a technical term that refers to the study of the meaning of language.” In other words, semantics examines how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and understood. Semantic analysis can be applied to various forms of modern communication, including social media, which has become one of the most widely used platforms for entertainment, self-expression, and digital marketing. Among these platforms, Instagram has become extremely popular, especially among millennials, with over 1 billion users worldwide since its launch in 2010. On Instagram, one of its key features is the caption, a short piece of text attached to an image or video, which serves to attract attention, evoke emotion, or convey a message. However, due to the casual nature of social media, users often express themselves freely without paying attention to the clarity or structure of their language. As a result, captions sometimes contain phrases or sentences that can be interpreted in more than one way a phenomenon known as language ambiguity. One

example of this can be seen on the Instagram account @wendys, which often posts intentionally ambiguous captions.

Wendy's is one of the largest American international fast food restaurant chains, known for its iconic square-shaped burgers, chicken sandwiches, crispy fries and Frosty desserts. Founded by Dave Thomas in 1969 in Columbus, Ohio, the brand has grown globally, with thousands of locations and a reputation for quality and freshness, as reflected in its slogan: "Quality is Our Recipe." Beyond its products, Wendy's has gained significant attention for its unconventional and creative approach to digital marketing, especially on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. The company has embraced a humorous, witty, sarcastic and often ambiguous tone in its online presence, which sets it apart from more traditional competitors. This use of humorous language not only entertains followers, but also reinforces brand identity and engagement.

From the researcher's observation of Wendy's Instagram account, it can be seen that many captions show unique language characteristics and give rise to multiple interpretations. As explained by Trismanto (2018, p. 43), ambiguity arises when readers or listeners have difficulty understanding one fixed meaning, indicating more than one interpretation. This ambiguity can be intentional or unintentional, and it plays a strong role in how messages are perceived and discussed. Wendy's intentionally incorporates ambiguity as part of its communication strategy on social media. Rather than relying solely on straightforward promotional language, the brand often creates captions that allow for multiple interpretations. This approach utilizes the linguistic phenomenon of ambiguity to construct messages that operate on more than one level. On the surface, a caption may appear to convey a literal product message, but on closer inspection, it often has a deeper second meaning - one that draws from social, emotional or cultural references.

This multi step use of language demonstrates the close relationship between ambiguity and types of meaning, specifically denotative and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the basic dictionary-level interpretation of a word or phrase, while connotative meaning involves implied, emotional, or culturally

influenced associations. In ambiguous expressions, these two meanings often coexist. Wendy's captions are designed to play in that space - where literal product descriptions can simultaneously convey humor, sarcasm or cultural commentary. As a result, the content becomes more engaging and not only enriches the audience's interpretive experience, but also reinforces the brand's identity as a smart, culturally aware and socially responsive brand.

The connection between ambiguity and these two types of meaning is at the core of semantic analysis. Ambiguous language challenges readers to choose between or recognize multiple interpretations, thus making content more engaging. When brands like Wendy's incorporate ambiguity intentionally, they invite audiences to interpret creatively, encouraging discussion, sharing and deeper emotional responses. This strategy is not only linguistically appealing, but also effective from a branding and marketing perspective. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of language ambiguity and how denotative and connotative meanings are constructed in @wendys' Instagram captions, using a descriptive qualitative approach.

This research further helps explain how Wendy's, as a global brand, uses language ambiguity on Instagram as a creative way to communicate with its audience. By analyzing the meaning behind ambiguous captions, this research shows how words can have literal and emotional meanings that affect how people understand a message. It also shows that using ambiguous language can make a brand feel more relatable, strengthen its identity, and encourage people to interact more with its content on social media. As such, this research is useful for understanding language and seeing how companies use language effectively in digital marketing.

## **1.2 Formulation of the Problem**

The formulation of the problem in this study is as follows:

1. What types of language ambiguity are found in the @wendys Instagram captions?
2. What type of meanings of ambiguous sentences are found in @wendys Instagram captions?

## **1.3 Limitation of the Problem**

This research is limited to analyzing the captions uploaded by the @wendy Instagram account from April 2024 to April 2025. Of all the uploads during that period, only 30 captions were purposively selected for analysis. The selection of captions is based on the potential appearance of ambiguity elements in the text. This research does not include other activities such as comments, replies, or other forms of interaction with followers. The main focus of the research is on identifying and analyzing words or phrases that contain ambiguity in the caption text.

## **1.4 Objective of Study**

This study aims to analyze the use of ambiguity in the Instagram caption of @wendys account. The specific objectives of this research include two main aspects. First, this study aims to identify type of ambiguous words, namely by finding and categorizing words or phrases that have multiple meanings in @wendys Instagram captions. Second, this study aims to analyze the meaning of ambiguous words in the Instagram captions of the official @wendys account.

## **1.5 Significance of Study**

This research is very important to several linked parties.

### **1.5.1 Significance for the Readers**

This research provides readers with important insights into the phenomenon of ambiguity in texts used on social media, especially in Instagram captions. Readers will be more critical in understanding the meanings that may be

hidden behind ambiguous words, which will help them avoid misunderstandings or wrong interpretations.

#### 1.5.2 Significance for the Researcher

For the researcher, this research serves as a means to develop skills in analyzing language ambiguity, especially in the context of social media. The researcher also gained practical experience in applying linguistic theories in relevant case studies, while deepening her understanding of digital communication.

#### 1.5.3 Significance for Academic

This research provides significant benefits to the English for Business and Professional Communication study program of the Language Department at State Polytechnic of Bengkalis, by contributing relevant data, references and information for the development of digital communication science. In addition, this research provides a solid foundation for further research on effective communication strategies in various digital platforms. The results of this study can be an important reference for academics who are interested in exploring the role of ambiguity in language on social media.