

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general descriptions of the paper. It consists of research background, statement of problem, research objectives, research significances, and previous study

1.1 Research Background

Language is essential to human existence as a means of contact, communication, and meaning-making. Language is a symbolic and socio-semiotic tool that people use to create identities, communicate feelings, navigate social interactions, and make sense of their social and cultural realities. It is not just a means of conveying facts. People use language to both form their own comprehension of the world and to affect how others see them. Since language functions as a meaning potential influenced by social context, Halliday (1978) contends that every linguistic decision reflects underlying cultural values, social conventions, power dynamics, and interpersonal goals. From this perspective, language is seen as a dynamic cognitive and social activity that changes through interaction, rather than simply a structural system controlled by grammatical rules. This dynamic nature highlights the complex relationship between language, society, and human cognition by allowing language users to change meaning in response to situations and communication demands.

Semantics is a field of linguistics that aims to explain how linguistic structures are used to create, interpret, and arrange meaning in communication. It is concerned with the methodical study of meaning in language. Semantic analysis examines meaning both at the lexical level and in larger discourse contexts where words, phrases, and sentences are used. The communication intents of speakers, the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of listeners, and situational factors all influence meaning, which is dynamic and context-dependent by nature. As a result, meaning cannot be regarded as constant or permanent across situations. According to Lyons (1977), the distinction

between sense and reference can be used to analyze lexical meaning, which arises from the link between words and their use within grammatical and communicative contexts. This perspective emphasizes that meaning is relational and flexible, constantly shaped by linguistic structures and social interactions. One linguistic phenomenon that clearly demonstrates the flexibility of lexical meaning is polysemy, which shows how a lexical word can have different meanings depending on the context and purpose of communication.

According to Lyons (1977), polysemous meanings allow language users to choose between multiple interpretations without losing the underlying relationship between the meanings, as they are conceptually connected within a single semantic framework. Polysemy is a key phenomenon in lexical semantics, as it shows how speakers extend existing meanings to meet changing communicative demands while preserving a motivated, traceable link between those meanings.

Cruse (2000) suggests a classification based on the internal links among senses inside a single lexical word, in order to give a more methodical explanation of the structure of polysemous meanings. Cruse contends in *Meaning in Language* that polysemy is not a result of chance meaning variation, but rather of ordered and motivated semantic links. Based on the connections between meanings in a lexical network, he separates polysemy into two main patterns: linear polysemy and non-linear polysemy. Linear polysemy refers to the hierarchical and sequential interaction between meanings, where one meaning is a specialization or generalization of the other. The meanings form a structure that can be followed step by step for example, from a whole-to-part relationship, or from a general meaning to a specific meaning.

According to Cruse (2000), internal semantic relations called autohyponymy, automeronymy, autosuperordination, and autoholonymy are part of linear polysemy. Autohyponymy occurs when a single lexical unit expresses a default general meaning that, in certain contexts, also yields a more

specific meaning functioning as a subtype of it. For example, the word "drink" can refer to drinking in general, or specifically to consuming alcoholic beverages, as in John doesn't drink he'll have an orange juice. Automeronymy involves part-whole interactions, where a lexical word can refer to an entity as a whole or to a specific part of it for example, the word "door" can refer to the entire door structure or just the door panel, though distinguishing this relationship from its counterpart is not always straightforward. Autosuperordination, by contrast, occurs when a lexical item with a typically specific meaning as its default sense is extended to denote a more general category for example, the word "man," whose default sense is "male human," is also used to mean "humanity" as a whole. Autoholonymy refers to the reverse connection: a term that, by default, denotes a part is used in certain contexts to refer to the entire structure it belongs to. These connections show how linear polysemy's meanings are organized in a methodical, hierarchical fashion.

Non-linear polysemy, on the other hand, does not create meaning in a hierarchical or sequential manner. Rather, meanings are connected through figurative relationships rather than a specialization-generalization chain. Cruse identifies metaphor, metonymy, and a miscellaneous category as the three patterns that produce non-linear polysemy. Metaphor is figurative usage based on resemblance Cruse's example is the word "position," whose readings (a sleeping position, a position at a company, a position on an issue) are all linked through an abstract similarity in the underlying concept. Metonymy, in contrast, is figurative usage based on association rather than resemblance for example, the word "mouths" in There are too many mouths to feed, where mouths stands for "people" because of their direct association with eating. The miscellaneous category covers senses that are clearly related but do not fit comfortably under either metaphor or metonymy, such as the calendric versus non-calendric readings of words like "month."

Because a single polysemous word can simultaneously activate more than one related meaning, both linear and non-linear polysemy naturally give

rise to semantic ambiguity, a condition in which an utterance permits more than one reasonable interpretation at once. This ambiguity is closely linked to the idea of incongruity in the study of linguistic humor. According to Raskin (1985), humor arises when two conflicting meanings, or scripts, are both present within a single statement and compete for the listener's attention — a condition he terms script opposition. When the audience encounters such an expression, they typically form an initial interpretation based on the most common or literal reading, which is then challenged by a second, contextually appropriate meaning that the ambiguity has made available; the shift between these conflicting interpretations is what produces the comedic effect. Polysemy, then, functions as a key linguistic resource for generating the semantic ambiguity that gives rise to script opposition.

In contemporary media discourse, humor increasingly relies on wordplay, cultural references, and semantic creativity. Television comedy programs offer a rich environment for observing how polysemy and incongruity operate simultaneously in real-time communication. One prominent example is *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), an American sketch comedy show that has aired since 1975. SNL is widely known for its satire, parody, political commentary, improvisation, and sharp social critique. The program frequently exploits wordplay, double meanings, irony, and semantic shifts to produce humor that reflects current social, cultural, and political issues. Its live performance format and fast-paced dialogue allow polysemous words to emerge naturally within spoken discourse. Among the various types of sketches produced by the show, political sketches stand out as a particularly rich source of polysemous language, as they consistently rely on wordplay and double meanings to comment on social and political issues in a satirical manner; this study therefore narrows its focus to SNL's political sketches as the primary data source.

Therefore, *Saturday Night Live*'s political sketches provide an authentic and relevant linguistic corpus for examining how polysemy functions in the

creation of humor. Analyzing polysemy in these sketches makes it possible to observe how lexical meanings are negotiated, manipulated, and reinterpreted to achieve comedic effects. This study not only contributes to semantic research, particularly the study of polysemy as proposed by Cruse, but also enhances understanding of the role of ambiguity and incongruity in language-based humor. Consequently, investigating polysemy in Saturday Night Live's political sketches is expected to offer a more comprehensive insight into the relationship between language, meaning, and humor in contemporary media discourse.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The research's problem statement centers on the Saturday Night Live YouTube channel's usage of polysemy to create humor. Polysemy gives speakers the ability to interpret meaning in a variety of ways, which can be amusing. As a result, this study examines the use of polysemy as a linguistic device in humorous performances. This assertion serves as the foundation for the following research questions:

1. What types of polysemy are found in the political sketches of Saturday Night Live?
2. How do these polysemy word meanings create humor in the political sketches of Saturday Night Live?

1.3 Research Objectives

In this research, the researcher got the objectives as follows:

1. To classify the types of polysemy in the political sketches of Saturday Night Live.
2. To analyze how the meanings of polysemy words create humor in the political sketches of Saturday Night Live.

1.4 Research Significance

This research provides important contributions to the study of semantics, particularly in understanding polysemy through the classification proposed by Alan Cruse (2000), while still drawing on the foundational concepts introduced by Lyons (1977). Polysemy allows a single lexical item to carry multiple related meanings, and this characteristic becomes a powerful linguistic resource in spoken humor. By examining how polysemous words function in Saturday Night Live sketches, this study demonstrates how meanings shift creatively and dynamically in real-time conversational discourse.

Theoretically, this research expands the application of Cruse's polysemy classification by analyzing linear and non-linear polysemy within spontaneous comedic discourse rather than in structured or written texts, which have been the focus of many previous studies. In addition, this study integrates semantic theory with humor theory by applying the script opposition framework proposed by Raskin (1985). Through the analysis of SNL sketches, this research highlights how polysemy generates the kind of script opposition that ultimately produces humorous effects in modern entertainment media.

Practically, this research offers insights for English learners, educators, translators, and media practitioners. Understanding how polysemy contributes to humor can enhance communicative competence, especially in contexts where meaning depends heavily on wordplay and contextual interpretation. For comedians, scriptwriters, and content creators, the findings illustrate how multiple related meanings can be strategically manipulated to strengthen humor and audience engagement.

Overall, this research is significant because it bridges semantic theory, humor theory, and real-life spoken discourse. It demonstrates that polysemy is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a crucial element in contemporary comedic communication, particularly in influential media platforms such as Saturday Night Live.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study explains the relationship between polysemy and humor creation in Saturday Night Live (SNL) sketches by demonstrating how linguistic meaning operates dynamically in spoken comedic discourse. This study begins with language in use as the primary object of analysis, particularly spoken interactions presented in SNL sketches. Language in this context is viewed not merely as a system of grammatical structures, but as a functional tool used by speakers to construct meaning, convey intentions, and create social interaction. Through this perspective, language is analyzed using a semantic approach that focuses on lexical meaning as the foundation for understanding how words can generate multiple interpretations in communication. By examining lexical meaning, this study attempts to reveal how speakers intentionally manipulate language to produce humorous effects.

This research focuses on polysemy, a concept in lexical semantics that Lyons (1977) defined as a lexical item having several related meanings. Since polysemy illustrates how meanings are not fixed but can change and grow based on the communication situation, it becomes the primary linguistic phenomenon studied in this study. The ability to understand and reinterpret words based on situational needs is shown in polysemy, which is a reflection of language users' cognitive and cultural flexibility. Because polysemy offers the language capacity to produce numerous levels of meaning inside a single term, it becomes especially important in humorous conversation. Speakers can make subtle semantic alterations that the listener might not notice right away because polysemous words preserve conceptual linkages between meanings.

To systematically classify polysemous meanings, this study applies Cruse's (2000) theory, which categorizes polysemy into two main types: linear polysemy and non-linear polysemy. Linear polysemy refers to a hierarchical relationship between meanings, where one meaning is a specialization or generalization of the other in a structured way. This type illustrates how

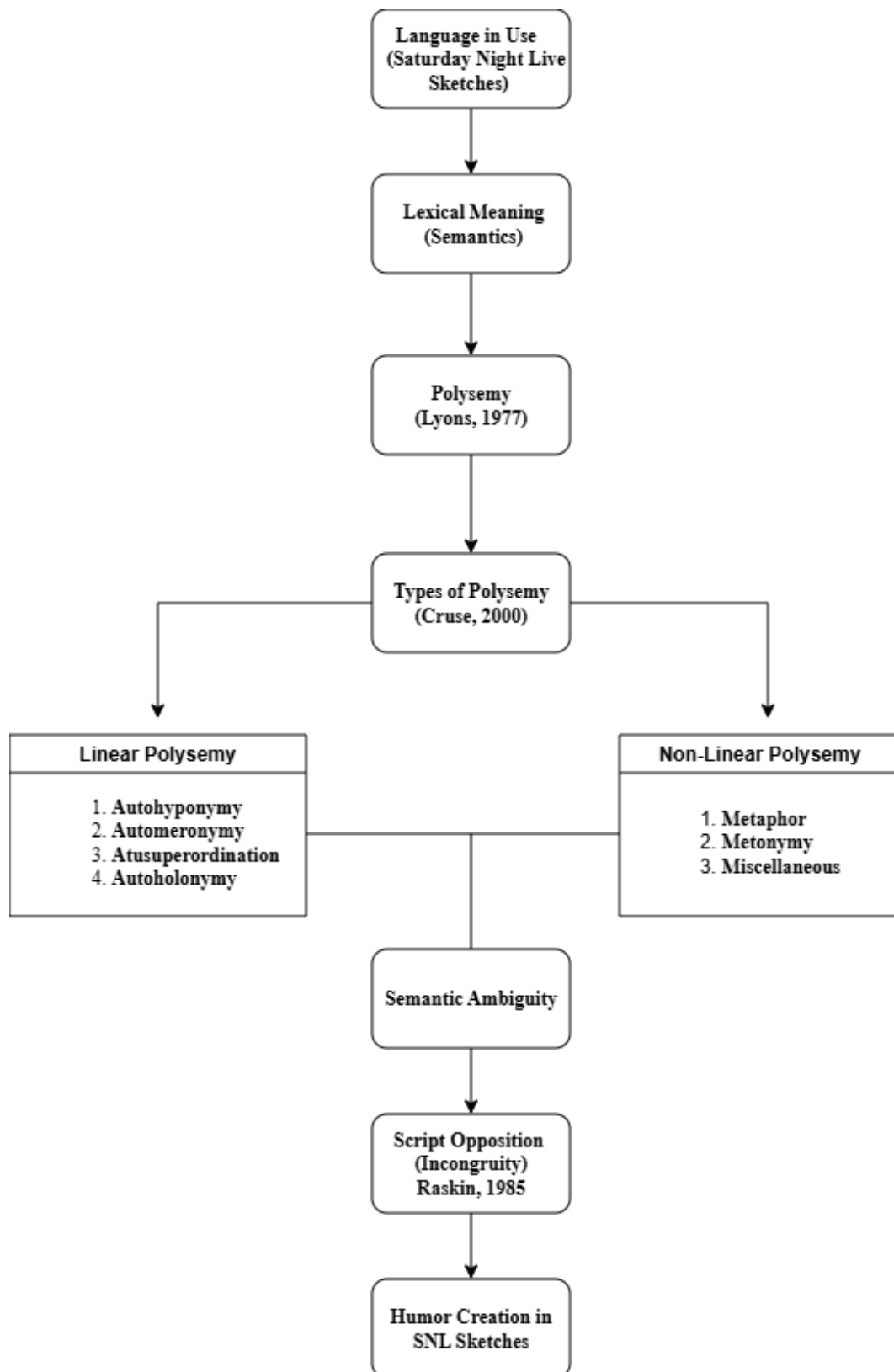
meanings are connected through a clear conceptual path based on hyponym or meronym relations. Linear polysemy includes several internal semantic relationships, namely autohyponymy, automeronymy, autosuperordination, and autoholonymy. Autohyponymy occurs when a lexical word has a default general meaning that, in certain contexts, also expresses a more specific meaning that is a subtype of it. Automeronymy represents a part-whole relationship, where a lexical word can refer to an entity as a whole or to just one of its components although distinguishing this from its counterpart is not always straightforward. Autosuperordination refers to the reverse case, where a lexical item with a specific meaning as its default sense is extended to represent a broader, more general category. Autoholonymy, in turn, describes the opposite of automeronymy: a lexical item that primarily denotes a part is, in certain contexts, used to refer to the whole structure it belongs to. This hierarchical semantic relationship suggests that linear polysemy develops through systematic conceptual expansion.

Non-linear polysemy, on the other hand, characterizes associative meaning creation that does not establish a sequential hierarchy out of a general or specific meaning, but instead connects senses through figurative relationships. Metaphor, metonymy, and a miscellaneous category are the three sub-types of non-linear polysemy identified by Cruse. Metaphor occurs when a lexical term's meaning is extended based on a perceived resemblance between two concepts. Metonymy occurs when a lexical item is used to refer to a closely associated concept through contextual or functional connection rather than resemblance. The miscellaneous category covers cases where two meanings are clearly related, but the relationship cannot be neatly explained through either metaphor or metonymy. This type of polysemy shows how language can be associative and creative, especially in spontaneous spoken discourse such as that found in SNL sketches.

Because a single polysemous word can simultaneously activate more than one meaning within the same utterance, both linear and non-linear

polysemy naturally create the conditions for what Lyons (1977) terms lexical ambiguity a sentence's capacity to be interpreted in more than one way due to a word carrying multiple related senses. This kind of ambiguity, in turn, provides the conflicting meanings that linguistic humor depends on. According to Raskin (1985), humor arises when two such conflicting meanings, or scripts, are both present within a single statement and compete for the listener's attention, a condition he terms script opposition, which serves as the linguistic basis of incongruity. When the audience encounters a polysemous expression of this kind, they typically form an initial interpretation based on the most common or literal reading, which is then challenged by a second, contextually appropriate meaning made available by that ambiguity. This shift between conflicting interpretations, and the cognitive effort involved in resolving it, is what produces the comedic effect.

In the context of Saturday Night Live, the use of polysemy plays a significant role in constructing humor because the program heavily relies on wordplay, satire, and spontaneous dialogue. SNL sketches provide authentic examples of how polysemous words are used in real-time spoken interaction. The fast-paced and performative nature of SNL dialogue encourages the strategic use of ambiguous expressions that allow comedians to manipulate audience expectations. By analyzing polysemy in SNL sketches, this study aims to observe how lexical meanings are negotiated, manipulated, and reinterpreted within comedic performance.



1.6 Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined lexical meaning and humor, although they were conducted in different contexts and with varying research focuses. Romadlani (2021), in the study entitled *A Manipulation of Semantic Meanings as a Humor Construction Strategy*, explores how humorous expressions are constructed through the manipulation of semantic meanings. This research emphasizes that lexical semantics contains multiple meaning relationships between words, and these relationships can be strategically exploited to trigger humor. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes data from the sitcom *Mind Your Language* and finds that five categories of lexical semantic relations contribute to humor creation: polysemy, homonymy, homophony, hyponymy, and synonymy. The findings suggest that speakers intentionally create incompatible or conflicting interpretations between themselves and listeners, leading to incongruity, which the study frames through Attardo's (1994) incongruity theory of humor as a key mechanism in humor construction.

Samongilailai and Damanik (2025), in the study entitled *The Role of Semantics in Humor: A Study of Wordplay and Double Meanings*, investigate how semantic mechanisms contribute to humor construction through wordplay and double meanings. Using a qualitative literature review approach, the study synthesizes findings from various linguistic and pragmatic studies related to humor strategies and emphasizes that semantic ambiguity, particularly lexical ambiguity involving homonyms and polysemy, serves as the primary foundation of verbal humor. The study draws on Raskin's Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor and Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor as foundational insights into script opposition and script switching in humor. The findings reveal that humor frequently emerges when a single lexical expression activates multiple interpretations simultaneously, allowing listeners to shift from literal to alternative meanings. The study also identifies several linguistic strategies that support humor creation, including phonological wordplay,

morphological manipulation, and semantic shifts, which enable speakers to produce incongruity by creating unexpected reinterpretations of meaning. Furthermore, the research highlights the important role of context and pragmatic knowledge in interpreting humor, explaining that listeners must actively engage in cognitive processing to resolve ambiguity and recognize the intended humorous meaning. Overall, the study concludes that humor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cognitive and interpretative process that involves semantic flexibility and contextual understanding.

Additionally, Sa'adah, Kustanti, and Ruminda (2024) conducted a study entitled *The Use of Puns to Generate Humor in Dad Jokes: A Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor Analysis*, which focuses on humor construction in contemporary dad jokes. Using data collected from the X (formerly Twitter) account @Dadsaysjokes, this study applies a descriptive qualitative approach to examine how puns function in humor creation. The analysis combines Delabastita's (1996) classification of puns with Raskin's (1985) Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH): puns are first categorized according to Delabastita's framework, then analyzed through SSTH to explain how the resulting ambiguity generates a humorous effect. The results reveal four major types of puns: homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy, all of which generate humor through ambiguity and double meanings. This research further supports the idea that semantic ambiguity, operationalized through Raskin's concept of script opposition, plays a central role in humor production, particularly in short-form digital comedic texts.

Despite the fact that earlier research has significantly advanced our understanding of lexical meaning, semantic ambiguity, and humor formation, there are still a number of crucial research gaps. For example, Romadlani (2021) uses a variety of lexical semantic relations, including synonymy, homonymy, and polysemy, to study comedy. However, this study does not thoroughly analyze polysemy's internal semantic structure, treating it as only one category among others. Similarly, Samongilailai and Damanik (2025) highlight wordplay and semantic ambiguity as key components of comedy, but

they take a broad, literature-based approach to these phenomena without distinguishing between the structural ways in which various forms of polysemy operate in humorous language, and without analyzing primary data of their own. Additionally, the study by Sa'adah, Kustanti, and Ruminda (2024) focuses on pun-based humor in short-form digital texts, which mainly rely on phonological similarity (homophony, homography, paronymy) and surface-level ambiguity rather than the deeper internal semantic relationships within a single polysemous lexical item.

The research context is another significant gap. In contrast, this study analyzes spoken comedic discourse in Saturday Night Live sketches, where humor emerges through the interaction between speakers, contextual cues, performance, and audience expectations. Although the sketches are scripted, their live-performance format and conversational delivery allow lexical meanings to be negotiated and reinterpreted dynamically throughout the dialogue. This kind of comedy is a wonderful place to study how polysemy functions in real-time speech because meaning is frequently contested dynamically through dialogue. However, little attention has been paid to sitcom-style or sketch-based comedic discourse in semantic research, particularly when considering polysemy specifically.

Furthermore, Cruse's (2000) structural classification of polysemy has hardly ever been used as the primary analytical framework in humor studies. Although Raskin's (1985) script opposition framework is already used in recent humor research, as shown by both Samongilailai and Damanik (2025) and Sa'adah, Kustanti, and Ruminda (2024), few studies have examined how the semantic ambiguity feeding into that script opposition arises specifically from different polysemy patterns, such as linear and non-linear polysemy. When these structural distinctions are ignored, our comprehension of how semantic links within a single lexical item contribute to the formation of humor remains limited. As a result, little is known about the specific connection between the structural types of polysemy, semantic ambiguity, and incongruity, especially in spoken, situation-based comedy.

In order to fill these gaps, this study applies Cruse's (2000) classification of linear and non-linear polysemy to analyze polysemy in Saturday Night Live sketch comedy. In contrast to other research that primarily examines lexical ambiguity or wordplay in general, this study focuses on the unique roles played by various structural forms of polysemy in dialogue-based humorous scenarios. This study illustrates how polysemous meanings generate lexical ambiguity (Lyons, 1977), interpretive conflict, and eventually script opposition (Raskin, 1985) in spoken discourse by fusing semantic analysis with script-based humor theory.

This study is innovative because it treats polysemy as a primary process for producing laughter in situational comedy rather than as a byproduct. Furthermore, the study makes theoretical contributions by expanding the use of Cruse's polysemy paradigm in humor studies and empirical contributions by examining modern television comedy that reflects contemporary social and cultural situations. This study shows how polysemy serves as a strategic linguistic tool in the construction of humor in contemporary entertainment media by focusing on spoken discourse in Saturday Night Live sketches.

