

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of several subtopics: the background of the research, the statements of the problem, the objectives of the research, the significance of the research, and the synthesis of previous studies establishing the research gap.

1.1 Background of the Research

In the contemporary era of digital communication, social media platforms have transformed into primary spaces for the production, negotiation, and interpretation of complex cultural meanings. TikTok, as a leading short-form video platform, relies heavily on multimodal elements—combining visual graphics, text, motion, and audio—to convey dense narratives within a limited timeframe (Jewitt, 2014; Prosenjit & Anvesa, 2021). Unlike traditional, one-way mass media, TikTok fosters a highly interactive ecosystem where creators and followers engage in a continuous, reciprocal cycle of communication through comment sections and video responses (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). One of the most unique linguistic and cultural phenomena emerging from this digital landscape is the creation of visual responses to user-generated requests, a practice masterfully exemplified by the Indonesian digital artist account, Wiinart.

The digital interactions on Wiinart's TikTok account present a distinct linguistic phenomenon where the boundary between literal and figurative meaning is intentionally subverted. When followers leave text comments requesting specific drawings, Wiinart responds by providing illustrations that technically fulfill the literal words of the request but completely subvert the user's implicit intent. From a semiotic perspective, this dynamic triggers a direct tension between denotative (literal) and connotative (associated/cultural) meanings (Barthes, 1967). While the user's request carries a clear denotative instruction, Wiinart's visual response deliberately shifts the final sign toward an unexpected connotative interpretation, producing a "visual pun." This intentional mismatch deconstructs the conventional expectations of digital interaction, transforming a standard question-and-answer exchange into a space for creative humor and linguistic play.

To unpack how these shifting signs operate within digital interactions, Ferdinand de

Saussure's (1916/1985) foundational structural semiotics provides a vital baseline. Saussure posits that a sign is a dyadic unity consisting of a signifier (the material form or image-sound) and a signified (the mental concept it represents), bound by an arbitrary relationship. In Wiinart's videos, the netizen's text request acts as the initial signifier. However, contemporary digital signs are no longer static; they are multimodal and highly contextual (Kress, 2010). Wiinart exploits this flexibility by isolating the material signifier of the request, detaching it from its conventional signified, and attaching it to an entirely alternative, literalist mental concept through the final drawing. This process shows that in interactive digital spaces, meaning is not a fixed entity but an ongoing, structured construction open to strategic subversion.

However, structural semiotics alone cannot fully explain the communicative dynamics, intentions, and addresser-addressee relationships that drive this humor. Therefore, this study integrates Roman Jakobson's (1960) Functional Perspective of language to analyze the communicative mechanics behind these visual puns. Jakobson establishes that every speech event involves six factors that give rise to six corresponding linguistic functions: Referential, Emotive, Conative, Phatic, Metalingual, and Poetic.

In the context of Wiinart's TikTok interactions, a unique functional friction occurs:

- The follower's initial request is driven heavily by the Conative function (aimed at influencing the actions of the receiver) and relies on the Referential function to convey the factual context of what they want drawn.
- In sharp contrast, Wiinart receives the conative input but responds by prioritizing the Poetic function—the focus on the message for its own sake—alongside the Emotive function.

By treating the language of the request as raw aesthetic material rather than a straightforward instruction, Wiinart manipulates the visual-verbal signs to emphasize the code itself, subverting the referential alignment expected by the audience.

While existing scholars have extensively explored semiotics and language functions on social media, a notable research gap persists. The majority of current studies focus either broadly on semantic ambiguity in static internet memes (Müller & Schmidt, 2026) or look

exclusively at verbal slang trends on TikTok without assessing visual interplay (Chen, 2025). Little attention has been dedicated to how dynamic, creator-follower video interactions serve as a playground for shifting denotative signs into complex, connotative visual puns through specific functional linguistic changes.

Understanding this mechanism is essential, as it highlights how digital literacy and linguistic subversion drive contemporary online engagement. Therefore, this research aims to bridge this gap by conducting a rigorous semiotic and functional analysis of the denotative and connotative meanings constructed within Wiinart's TikTok interaction responses through the lens of Roman Jakobson's framework.

A. Review and Synthesis of Previous Studies (Research Gap)

To avoid thematic duplication and clearly delineate the empirical boundary of this study, five closely related previous studies have been selected and analyzed:

- 1) Garcia & Roberts (2024) – "The Power of Visual Signs: A Denotative and Connotative Analysis of Instagram and TikTok Promotional Content."
 - Similarities: Both studies utilize the TikTok platform and employ a semiotic method analyzing the denotative and connotative meanings of visual signs.
 - Differences: Garcia & Roberts focus exclusively on commercial, corporate promotional content aimed at consumer persuasion.
 - Research Gap: Their study investigates how visual signs are deployed to reinforce brand trust and sell products, whereas this research examines how visual signs are manipulated to subvert logic and generate humor within non-commercial social interactions.
- 2) Chen (2025) – "From Literal to Metaphorical: Denotative and Connotative Meanings of Digital Slang on Global TikTok Trends."
 - Similarities: Both papers investigate how basic, denotative meanings shift into layered, connotative meanings within the modern TikTok digital environment.
 - Differences: Chen's linguistic analysis is strictly bound to verbal language, textual scripts, and spoken digital slang.

- Research Gap: Chen's research overlooks graphic and visual semiotic language (such as illustrations and digital art processes) and completely omits the bidirectional interactivity component (the prompt-response dynamic).

3) Thompson (2023) – "Multimodal Meaning Making: Analyzing Denotative and Connotative Signifiers in User-Generated Content."

- Similarities: Both studies adopt a multimodal semiotic approach, analyzing the simultaneous combinations of text, imagery, and audio layout on social media platforms.
- Differences: Thompson analyzes user-generated videos broadly across multiple platforms without applying a specific functional linguistic model, leading to wide cultural observations rather than structural linguistic depth.
- Research Gap: This research addresses the gap by integrating Roman Jakobson's Language Functions to explicitly map out why and how the structural intersection of a text request and a visual response causes a humorous semantic shift.

4) Müller & Schmidt (2026) – "Visual Puns and Semantic Ambiguity: A Semiotic Study of Internet Meme Interpretations."

- Similarities: Both studies examine the nature of "visual puns," semantic ambiguity, and how unexpected shifts in sign interpretation generate internet humor.
- Differences: Their research data consists entirely of static internet memes (still images), ignoring the temporal flow, audio tracks, and sequential drawing processes inherent to video content.
- Research Gap: Müller & Schmidt do not consider real-time, reciprocal creator-follower communication. In Wiinart's case, the interaction features an active user trigger that involves specific Conative and Referential functions, which this study directly addresses.

5) Lee (2024) – "The Referential and Poetic Functions of Language in Creator-Follower Interactions on Social Media."

- Similarities: Both studies utilize Roman Jakobson's communication framework (specifically the tension between referential and poetic language functions) within creator-follower social spaces.
- Differences: Lee focuses strictly on the creator's verbal speaking style and spoken vocabulary choices used to build communal intimacy and parasocial engagement.
- Research Gap: Lee provides no integration between functional linguistics and structural semiotics (denotation-connotation) applied directly to punbased digital artwork, a crucial synthesis that forms the core of this study.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

Based on the background of the research outlined above, the problems to be investigated are formulated through the following research questions:

1. What are the denotative and connotative meanings represented through the visual and verbal signs in Wiinart's TikTok interaction response videos?
2. How are the denotative and connotative meanings structurally constructed into visual puns through the shifts in Roman Jakobson's functions of language within Wiinart's TikTok interaction response videos?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

Correlating directly with the statements of the problem above, the specific objectives of this research are:

- 1) To identify and categorize the distinct denotative and connotative meanings represented within both the verbal text requests and the corresponding visual signs of Wiinart's TikTok videos.
- 2) To analyze the systemic construction process of visual puns by examining how Wiinart utilizes and manipulates Roman Jakobson's functions of language to purposefully shift literal meanings into humorous connotative interpretations.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is expected to provide valuable insights and contributions to both the academic discourse of linguistics and the practical world of digital content creation. By unpacking the visual-verbal mechanisms of digital humor, the contributions of this study are categorized into theoretical and practical significances as follows:

1) Theoretical Significance

From a conceptual and academic standpoint, the findings of this study are expected to enrich the existing literature on linguistics and visual culture through the following contributions:

- 1) **Advancing Multimodal Semiotics:** This research contributes to the expanding field of contemporary digital semiotics by providing empirical models of how verbal signs (text comments) and visual signs (digital illustrations) interact fluidly to generate subversive meanings on mobilecentric platforms.
- 2) **Refining Functional Linguistics in Digital Spaces:** This study strengthens and adapts Roman Jakobson's classic communication framework by demonstrating its structural utility in explaining informal, interactive, and highly dynamic internet humor phenomena.

2) Practical Significance

On a practical level, this study serves as a functional resource and empirical reference for various stakeholders in the digital creative environment, detailed as follows:

1. **For Future Linguists and Researchers:** This study establishes a clear, structural framework combining Saussurean semiotics and Jakobsonian functionalism that other researchers can implement to analyze humor-based content, visual wordplay, and meme structures on short-form video platforms.
2. **For Digital Content Creators:** The findings provide a structural reference on how linguistic ambiguity, semantic gaps, and functional shifts can be

deliberately employed as a creative content strategy to boost viewer interactivity and maximize audience engagement.

