AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AMBIGUITY AND TYPE OF MEANING IN @WENDYS INSTAGRAM CAPTIONS

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Abstract: *This study aimed to analyze language ambiguity in Instagram captions of the @wendys account, focusing on the types of linguistic ambiguity and the meanings of ambiguous words or phrases. The research used a descriptive qualitative method with observation and documentation techniques. Data in the form of 30 captions were taken purposively from uploads between April 2024 and April 2025. The results showed that all five types of linguistic ambiguity lexical, structural, semantic, referential, and pragmatic were found, with pragmatic ambiguity being the most dominant. Wendy's captions contained many meanings that depended on the social context and popular culture, such as humor, sarcasm, and wordplay. In addition, most captions contained connotative meanings that were emotional, contextual, or cultural in nature, while denotative meanings were only found in captions that conveyed information directly. These findings suggested that Wendy's strategically utilized ambiguity and connotative meaning as part of its digital communication style to build a creative, relaxed, and engaging brand image on social media.*

Keywords: *ambiguity, caption, semantics, @wendys, pragmatics.*

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who require communication to interact and survive. Language serves as the primary tool for conveying information, and it must be used clearly to avoid double meanings or confusion (Setiawan & Zyuliantina, 2020).

The digital era has expanded the function of language, particularly in social media, which has become a primary medium for entertainment, self-expression, and digital marketing. Instagram, with over one billion active users, combines the power of visuals and text through captions that can foster interaction and shape perception. However, the casual nature of social media language often results in captions with more than one possible meaning, a phenomenon known as language ambiguity.

Wendy's, an American fast-food chain, strategically employs ambiguity on its @wendys account by blending denotative and connotative meanings to create humor, sarcasm, and social commentary. This approach effectively attracts audience attention while reinforcing the brand's identity.

This study analyzes five types of language ambiguity (lexical, structural, semantic, referential, and pragmatic) as well as denotative and connotative meanings in 30 captions posted on @wendys from April 2024 to April 2025, using a descriptive qualitative method. The research addresses two questions: (1) What types of language ambiguity are found in the @wendys captions? and (2) What types of meaning of ambiguous sentences are found in @wendys Instagram captions. The findings are expected to contribute to semantic and pragmatic studies and offer practical insights for digital communication strategies on social media.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Related Theory

Communication

Communication is an interaction process between humans aimed at delivering messages effectively so they can be understood, evoke pleasure, influence attitudes, improve relationships, and change behavior. Communication effectiveness is achieved when there is a common frame of mind between the communicator and the communicant. Shannon and Weaver, as cited in Karyaningsih (2018), explain that communication involves not only verbal language but also facial expressions, images, and technology. Karyaningsih emphasizes that the essence of communication is a human activity to convey the content of messages to others in order to achieve specific goals, with the process directed toward creating effective message delivery.

Instagram

Instagram with about 62 million users in Indonesia is a leading platform for sharing photos, videos, and conducting business (Helianthusonfri, 2020; Jubilee, 2021). Its features such as Stories, Reels, Live, Direct Messages, and Posts enable

personal expression, audience engagement, and digital marketing.

Instagram Captions

Captions provide context to visual content, helping clarify messages, attract attention, and boost engagement on platforms like Instagram (Musman, 2023). With a 2,200-character limit but only the first 125 visible in the feed, captions require concise, engaging writing. They also enable direct communication, conveying messages that visuals alone cannot (Sopyan, 2025).

Linguistic

Linguistics, from the Latin *lingua* meaning "language," is the scientific study of human language (Unsiah & Yulianti, 2018). Modern linguistics is rooted in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose 1916 *Course de Linguistique Générale* laid the foundation for contemporary linguistic theory.

Semantic

Semantics, a branch of linguistics, studies the relationship between linguistic signs and their meanings, including how meanings relate to each other and affect society (Chaer in Amilia & Anggraeni, 2017).

Ambiguity

Ambiguity is often defined as a word having multiple meanings, but unlike polysemy which involves multiple meanings within a single word ambiguity arises from larger grammatical units like phrases or sentences that allow different interpretations due to their structure. Linguistic ambiguity can be classified into five types: lexical, structural, semantic, referential, and pragmatic. Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word has multiple meanings, while structural ambiguity arises from sentence arrangements that permit more than one interpretation. Semantic ambiguity involves uncertainty in meaning based on context. Referential ambiguity happens when pronouns or references are unclear. Pragmatic ambiguity depends on social context and speaker intention, allowing for multiple interpretations. Additionally, it is important to distinguish denotative meaning, which is literal and direct, from connotative meaning, which is influenced by emotional, cultural, and social factors. Understanding these distinctions is essential for analyzing language ambiguity effectively.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to examine linguistic ambiguity in @wendys Instagram captions. The method was selected to explore the contextual application of ambiguity and its role in shaping meaning within digital marketing communication

Location, Object of Study

The research focused on captions posted by the official @wendys Instagram account between April 2024 and April 2025. The object of study comprised only the textual elements of captions, excluding visual components and audience interaction, to ensure a concentrated linguistic analysis of ambiguous expressions and their literal and implied meanings.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was document analysis of purposively selected captions. Ambiguity was classified into lexical, structural, semantic, referential, and pragmatic categories, with interpretations based on denotative and connotative meanings to capture both literal and contextual layers of message construction.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through observation, with all captions from the specified period documented and coded. The analysis excluded non-textual elements and focused solely on linguistic features, ensuring systematic identification and categorization of ambiguous expressions.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: (1) examining captions to identify ambiguity types and interpret meanings, (2) categorizing captions according to established ambiguity classifications, and (3) drawing conclusions regarding the strategic use of ambiguity as a stylistic device. The findings revealed that various ambiguity types, each carrying denotative and connotative meanings, were employed to create engaging and creative brand communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The analysis of @wendys Instagram captions reveals that linguistic ambiguity is deliberately used as a communication strategy to build a strong and appealing brand identity. The captions frequently employ wordplay and double meanings, creating humor and inviting multiple audience interpretations. Clear denotative meanings are combined with connotative meanings influenced by cultural, social, and emotional contexts, fostering emotional closeness

especially with younger audiences familiar with slang and meme culture.

Additionally, ambiguity in sentence structure, vague references, and context-dependent meanings enrich the creativity and flexibility of the messages. Pragmatic ambiguity, relying on shared cultural knowledge, effectively enhances audience interaction and engagement on social media. Thus, Wendy's successfully uses ambiguity not only to convey product information but also to create a relaxed, modern, and relatable brand persona that strengthens positive brand perception and distinguishes the brand in the digital space.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study concludes that the captions on the official @wendys Instagram account contain five types of linguistic ambiguity with pragmatic and semantic ambiguities being the most dominant. Wendy's strategically uses these ambiguities such as wordplay, ambiguous sentence structures, unclear pronouns, and culturally coded language to create humorous, culturally relevant, and

engaging messages that resonate with digital audiences. The captions also convey both denotative and connotative meanings with connotative meaning playing a major role by reflecting emotional, cultural, and social contexts. Wendy's intentionally leverages connotative meaning to foster humor, sarcasm, and emotional closeness resulting in a distinctive communication style that not only promotes products but also strengthens emotional connections and reinforces a strong brand identity in the competitive social media environment.

Suggestion

Social media professionals and brand managers are advised to use language ambiguity creatively while considering audience and cultural context to avoid misunderstandings. Readers should develop critical awareness to grasp both literal and implied meanings in social media content. Future researchers are encouraged to expand studies to other brands and platforms, and apply quantitative methods to measure the impact of ambiguity on marketing effectiveness, contributing to digital communication and applied linguistics.

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