

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

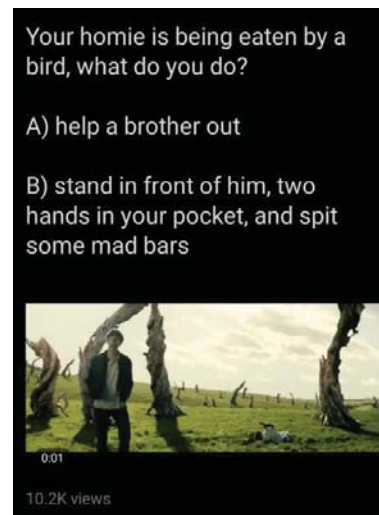
Language exists in many forms, one of it is in the jokes we produce. The complexity of language is portrayed in the way people create and deliver the strings of punch line and witty remarks. In this modern era, as the use of internet takes an integral part of our life, new ways of joking are represented in the form of internet memes. Fandoms residing on the internet, especially in social media such as Twitter, are keen in the act of creativity for memes-making. The production and transmission of memes by a fandom is also a part of the participatory culture, as the memes become their way of expressing their opinions and reactions based on the content produced by the idols.

Initially, the term meme was coined with no intention of it being related in any way to its humorous aspect today. The definition of meme was brought by Dawkins (1976) as he started by comparing the spreading of human ideas to the concept of evolution in biology. He then proposed the term meme as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation”. This resulted in the emerging of memes’ developed concept as a transmission of culture, which consists of copying and imitating something inside a community. Thus, in internet meme culture, the transmission is done by the replication of the meme pictures, jokes, and punchlines.

The internet memes produced in Twitter has different characteristics to what we usually find in various meme websites or other social medias. Even though they still carry similarities with the widely known format of memes, as described by Oxford English Dictionary to be containing of “an image, a video, a piece of text, etc.”, Twitter memes have “phrasal template” as the key linguistic feature that contains “witty modification, metalanguage and inversion” (Zappavigna 2012). Therefore, they are categorized into verbal memes, where the jokes tend to be delivered through longer text. Nonetheless, the humorous aspect is still able to be communicated concisely through many forms and layouts, such as in a tweet’s usual few phrases or sentences, or even creative conversational and multiple choices layouts.



**Picture 1.1** Example of internet meme 'ermahgherd'.



**Picture 1.2** Example of Twitter meme.

Source: Know Your Meme website, accessed 23 October 2019.

This part will exhibit and highlight the differences based on form comparison of Twitter memes to the other commonly known internet memes

provided by renowned websites such as KnowYourMeme and 9GAG. The example of Twitter memes above is categorized into the multiple choice layout. The brevity of memes produced here is ensured with the tweet post limitation of not more than 280 words, at the same time still giving the user a lenience to compose meme tweets creatively. In contrast, the internet memes commonly have stagnant layout of widely used meme-worthy picture, inserted with two punchlines placed on above and below. From linguistic point-of-view, Twitter's convention in producing vast forms of verbal memes ensures a better chance to be proceeded into an in-depth linguistic analysis.

Since the language of memes in general contain symbolic aspects, the Indexicality approach is suitable to extrapolate the way certain words and phrases refer to specific events or aspects surrounding the world of the community or group-of-people where the memes are transmitted. Ahearn (2016) has laid down the concept of Indexicality in the sense of Anthropolinguistic, of which it progressed from the direct referential indexes, to semiosis or meaning-making by the contribution of Saussure's "signified" and "signifier" with Peirce's addition of "interpretant" to relate both aspects, then finally Silverstein's approach of indexicality in more nuanced social and culturally bound cases, such as investigating specific usage of words by high school students to index their youth state and sign of belonging to certain social groups, and the study on Taiap language in Papua New Guinea and its decline due to the decrease in value amongst the villagers.

As a product of language, memes contain the functions to reflect and shape the life values of a community. The specific aspects in Twitter memes' forms as well as the choices of word included can refer towards a bigger picture of the ideas which are accepted and embraced by the whole fandom. In Twitter, the comeback period of KPOP groups has invited high amount of fandom participations and engagements, one of which is in the form of meme production. Thus, in order to celebrate and support their idols' comeback, KPOP fandoms create and share memes referencing new contents and events that occur in the comeback period.

Many of these memes made it to the trending topics, while some also went viral with high number of engagements. For instance, in BTS' ARMY fandom, the jargon "PAVED THE WAY" in the phases of Western comeback promotion ("Butter" and "Permission to Dance" in 2021) garnered the most dominant use, as it made into the Twitter trending list for several times. The emergent of this jargon was adjacent with the band's achievements of hitting the 1<sup>st</sup> position in Billboard HOT100 chart, as well as being nominated and winning Western major award shows. The use of "PAVED THE WAY" jargon then spread throughout the fandom, modified with humorous aspects, and even engaged the other fandom's attention to join in the jargon's discussion.

Therefore, knowing how impactful such use of meme language is, big corporates, leading role of mass medias, and even the idols themselves start to create memes. As a case in point, during BTS' comeback back in February 2020, as they were invited to James Corden's "The Late Late Show" Carpool Karaoke segment, the main host, Corden himself had taken into his own Twitter to personally

promote and hype the show in its on-air time. He posted various meme material contents such as referring to himself as Jimin’s “Papa Mochi”, generating the member’s funny moments videos, and engaging with ARMY directly to post and react accordingly to specific moments from the show.

A day prior to Corden’s show, Jimmy Fallon as the host of “The Tonight Show” also used this strategy to engage with fans by tweeting a hashtag ‘#BTSRubberDuckChallenge’ for fans participation in the game segment. Later on, to celebrate BTS newest single charting in 4<sup>th</sup> position of Billboard Top 100, Big Hit (BTS’ agency) released sets of ‘BTS EmoticON’ in the form of lowly edited pictures resembling the appearance of usual internet memes.



**Picture 1.3** James Corden’s tweet referring to himself as “Papa Mochi”.  
Source: Official Twitter account @latelateshow, accessed 27 February 2020.

All in all, all of these confirmed the rise in demands of memes as not only a necessity for casual banter between fandom members, but an effective tool of promotions by the big corporates to target specific group of its content consumers.



**Picture 1.4** Jimmy Fallon's tweet of #BTSRubberDuckChallenge.  
Source: Official Twitter account @jimmyfallon, accessed 25 February 2020.



**Picture 1.5** BTS memes 'BTS emoticon' made by Big Hit.  
Source: Official Twitter account @bts\_bighit, accessed 4 March 2020.

Aside from its benefit and wide impact as a tool for internet-based promotion, the issue with meme tweets is most of the popular ones also gain massive popularity through the references of inappropriate or taboo topics. These memes are found to be openly exposing the topic of sexuality, self-condescending

or inferiority, and even touching on religious themes in an unethical way. Those are in accordance with the wide and commonly found internet memes' topics, such as the normalization of enacting certain odd behavior as a form of bullying and "self-deprecating and depressing memes" (Scott 2014; Kariko and Anasih 2019). This becomes a concern as these contents are consumed and spread by active ARMYs in their 20s and even younger of age. As a result, such repetitive nature of meme could be internalized into a fandom ideology and impacted to real life behavior in a long run.

As a way of acknowledging the problems above, a proper approach to understand memes as fandom language has to be initiated. Even so, using textual approach to the memes text is not sufficient enough in helping us comprehend the thought-provoking core issue of the internet memes, contextual aspect is also needed to perceive a bigger picture of the memes' influences and references. As a community of practice, fandoms residing in social media show continuous online behavior which produce unique forms of language, the fandom memes for this matter, and practice in accordance to their collective fandom values.

Most previous meme studies gathered the data from wide social media users as a collective (Fitrie et. Al 2016; Donzelli and Bugden 2019; Dynel 2020; Vicari and Murru 2020; Dynel 2021). Prior studies only choose specific category of meme, such as parody font (Donzelli and Bugden 2019) and COVID-19 multimodal mask memes (Dynel 2021), while this research focuses on gathering the trending memes which feature various memetic devices. Previous analysis was taken from the perspective of the corporate account with their tweets aimed at the consumer (Dynel

2020), conversely the perspective of this research was taken from the fandom as public content consumer.

Therefore, this study specifically focuses on the fandom memes produced by BTS ARMY fandom in Twitter . BTS (in Korean 방탄 소년단/Bangtan Sonyeondan or Bangtan Boys) is the popular K-POP (Korean Pop) boygroup. On the other hand, ARMY (Adorable Representation of M.C for Youth) is their fandom. In Twitter ARMY fandom, meme tweets are consumed almost everyday, with its volume of quantity wave being dependent to the release of BTS related contents such as new released music videos or albums, live videos, reality shows, and tweets from their official account; which are able to evoke certain emotions or reactions from the fandom. Through the utilization of anthropolinguistic approach and observation of the fandom's dynamic in communicating as well as overall online behavior, proper interpretation towards the memes is achievable.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problems

Adhering to the background of the study, the writer formulizes some statements which explain the problem of this research as follows:

1. What are the indexical aspects of the memes that circulate in BTS ARMY fandom community around comeback promotion period in Twitter?
2. What are the shared values reflected by the memes that circulate in BTS ARMY fandom community around comeback promotion period in Twitter?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out the indexical aspects of the memes that circulate in BTS ARMY fandom community around comeback promotion period in Twitter.
2. To explain the shared values reflected by the memes that circulate in BTS ARMY fandom community around comeback promotion period in Twitter.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

In theoretical aspect, this research will contribute to the study of anthropolinguistics. The key terms of linguistic anthropology as proposed by Ahearn (2016) which include Language Ideologies and Indexicality, as well as the Communities of Practice will be incorporated in this research. They will be used to bridge the textual and social-based contextual aspects of Twitter fandom memes analysis. In order to enrich the interpretation of providing legitimate contextual aspect, the researcher will proceed to observe the fandom's linguistic behavior and culture, gather the insiders' perspective by interviews and gain the shared values of the fandom community in Twitter. Practically, the researcher aspires to open the door for more anthropolinguistic studies in English language and literature department of Universitas Airlangga Surabaya. This study is intended to be a useful insight towards memes studies as a fandom language practice. Therefore, in the future, the result can be a beneficial reference for the corporations or various instances that aim to study fandom community and refine better humor marketing that cater towards Twitter audience.

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Meme : An image, a video, a piece of text, etc. that is passed very quickly from one internet user to another, often with slight changes that make it humorous (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2020).
2. Social Media : Websites and software programs used for social networking (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2020).
3. Indexicality : A contextually based form of language which points to specific times, places, individuals, objects or concepts (Ahearn 2016)