CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study covering some general information of the study. It includes the background of the study, statement of problems, aims of the study, scope of the study, research method, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, the use of the Internet has grown rapidly. The Internet has become a part of people's daily lives. All people in the world use the Internet every day, either to find information or entertainment. There are many Internet users who browse through the Internet to entertain themselves by looking at jokes or some humorous things on the Internet. The jokes on the Internet are presented not only in written form but also in the form of videos or images. One of the humorous aspects that can be found on the Internet is Internet memes. The term Internet memes is common to the Internet users since it has become quite popular on the Internet, especially in social media and certain comedy websites.

The term meme was first introduced by an evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, which is derived from the Greek root denoting "small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread by copying or imitation" (Shifman, 2011, p. 2). However, the term memes on the Internet has expanded to also refer to videos, images, or phrases which are created and spread by the Internet users via the Internet.

The spread of the term memes on the Internet has led to a better understanding of the term. An Internet Basic Expert from *netforbeginners.about.com*, Gil (2013), defines Internet memes as a symbol or social idea which is transmitted virally like a virus from person to person. Another definition comes from Grossman (2007) who states that Internet memes are a running gag that does not stop running but instead reproduce and mutate. It can be inferred that memes on the Internet can be defined as a form of Internet artefacts

1

which contain gag that reproduce and spread like a virus by the Internet users. As the Internet artefacts that can spread easily, memes unavoidably become a part of people's daily lives, especially those who can easily access the Internet.

There are many meme-sharing websites that use Internet memes to share ideas, thoughts, or opinions (Achadiat, 2013) one of which is *9gag.com*. In *9gag.com*, the Internet users are allowed to create their own memes because *9GAG* features memes or rage comics submitted by the netizens (Ren, 2012). Memes in *9GAG* are divided into different categories which are typically displayed as humorous images or comic strips with their captions conveying certain messages, such as *Trending, Hot, Memes,* etc.

As mentioned before, memes are usually created in the form of image. Typically, memes in the form of image are presented along with captions. Thus, it can be said that memes are presented with the combination of two different semiotic modes: language (verbal) and image (visual). Since memes have two different semiotic modes, they can be treated as multimodal texts. Therefore, the meaning of memes can be understood by looking at the interplay between the visual and verbal modes. As multimodal texts, the relation between the different modes of the memes to make meaning becomes a research interest in multimodal analysis. It is because multimodal analysis, as suggested by Nugroho (2009), provides the tools and techniques to analyze multimodal texts. In conducting multimodal analysis, it is suggested to use more than one tool of analysis (Cheng & Liu, 2014).

Related to the present study, multimodal analysis can be an appropriate analysis procedure in analyzing Internet memes. As Iedema (2003) argues multimodality (multimodal analysis) is known as a counterbalance to monomodal approaches such as those which consider only language, or those which consider visual meaning largely in isolation from material manifestation. However, the previous studies on Internet memes tend to apply monomodal approaches either visual or verbal, such as the studies conducted by Sayani (2013) and Kariko (2013), which focus on visual text analysis of memes. Sayani (2013) conducts semiotic analysis to analyze two typical memes which are "Poker Face" and "Okay" memes in *9gag*.com. By using Saussure's and Chandler's theory of

semiotics, this study aims to explore the signifiers and signified of the memes and to identify the function of each memes. In the study, it is shown that each meme has different signifiers, and it leads to different signified and different function when it is used in the posts. Meanwhile, Kariko (2013) applies semiotic analysis to analyze how the relation between images, text, and meanings on the Internet memes connect with each other to form social or political messages, universal emotions, or just to be funny and entertain its users. To fulfill the aims of his study, Kariko draws on Barthes' order of signification in analyzing the data. The analysis shows that images, text, art, language, creativity, myths, and popular culture are related to each other. Furthermore, it is shown that Internet memes contain humor and they reflect universal emotions, social message, cultural message, etc. Both of the study focus mainly on the visual elements, especially facial expression.

While visual analysis usually focuses on facial expression, verbal analysis on Internet memes mainly focuses on the sentences and clauses. Lefler (2011) conducts a linguistic analysis to examine the Internet dialect of English in the Internet meme *Lolspeak* which is considered as a recent dialect of English. By using multi-modal discourse transcription technique and Grounded Theory, the study reveals that language play, sentence structure change, and the process of altering Standard English spelling are involved in *Lolspeak*. Furthermore, there is a tendency that a co-occurrence of nonstandard English is found in *Lolspeak*.

As stated before, the previous studies on memes often focus on monomodal approaches. To date, there are only few studies which analyze both visual and verbal modes in the memes, even these few studies mostly use semiotics analysis. Considering multimodal analysis is still rarely used to analyze memes, the present study attempts to examine both the visual and verbal representation of 'being single' in Internet memes by applying multimodal analysis. Nowadays, the topic of 'being single' is very popular especially in the social media, and this topic has also been used as a joke in Internet memes. The present study focuses on the representation of 'being single' in memes since memes as a new popular Internet artefact over the years, give everyone an easy and fast way of sharing thought expressions and opinions on world affairs with just putting some words on top of

a meaningful image (Alvarez, 2015). Thus, memes can describe how an issue is depicted through their verbal and visual modes. To explore the representation of 'being single' in the memes, the present study uses Visual Grammar and Systemic Functional Linguistic to analyze the two modes (written language and visual images). The visual modes of the memes is analyzed by using Visual Grammar proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen in their work *Reading Images* (1996, 2006). In the present study, Visual Grammar is used to analyze the visual modes of the memes which is analyzed by revealing the representational meaning, the interactive meaning, and the compositional meaning of the memes. Meanwhile, Systemic Functional Linguistic is used to analyze the verbal modes of the memes. Under the guidance of SFL, the captions of the memes are analyzed through the system of transitivity.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Based on the background above, the present study attempts to reveal how 'being single' is represented in selected *9GAG* memes. Therefore, the study is carried out to answer these two following research questions:

1. How is 'being single' visually and verbally represented in the selected *9GAG* memes?
2. What do the representations mean?

1.3 Aims of the Study

The purposes of the study are to:

1. Examine the representations of 'being single' in selected *9GAG* memes by analyzing the visual and verbal modes of the memes.
2. Examine the meaning behind the representations of 'being single' in the memes.

1.4 Scope of the Study

In the present study, the representation of 'being single' in selected *9GAG* memes is examined. This study only focuses on analyzing the verbal and visual elements

of 9GAG memes to reveal the ideational meaning which deals with representation of 'being single' and also to discover the significance behind the representations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to enlighten some aspects. In terms of multimodal analysis, this study is expected to contribute a clear explanation of the representation of being single on Internet memes through its visual and verbal modes. This study is also expected to be a reference or a guideline for further research. In addition, this study is expected to enrich literature about the multimodal analysis of Internet memes and make people aware of it.

1.6 Research Method

1.6.1 Research Design

This study employs qualitative descriptive research design by collecting and analyzing the data. According to Mason (2002), qualitative design is concerned with how the phenomena of interest are interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted. Since the study focuses on description, explanation and interpretation, qualitative descriptive research design seems to be the most relevant research design because it concerns detail interpretations and description of a phenomena.

1.6.2 Data Collection

The data in the present study are Internet memes taken from *9gag.com*. The memes chosen in the study are those which talk about 'being single' consisting of both image and caption. Since the memes about 'being single' in *9GAG* are mostly viewed from men's perspective, the study only focuses on how men represent 'being single' through memes. To comprehensively understand the memes, there are 10 'being single' memes which consist of image and caption analyzed in the study. These 10 memes contain different theme which represent 'being single' from man's perspective such as the effect of being single, the

5

benefit of being single, the despair of being single, etc. Furthermore, the 10 memes are selected because they are considered to be relevant to the problems and the aim of the present study.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

The analysis is divided into two parts: visual analysis and verbal analysis. The visual modes of the memes are analyzed by using visual grammar from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The visual analysis includes the analysis of vector, gaze, size of frame, and perspective to know the representational meaning and interactive meaning, and the analysis of informational value to know the compositional meaning. While the visual modes are analyzed by using visual grammar, the verbal modes which are the captions of the memes are analyzed by using Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The verbal analysis focuses on the analysis of participants, processes, and circumstances of the captions.

1.7 Clarification of Terms

In this study, there are some terms that need to be clarified in order to avoid misconception or misunderstanding. Some of which are:

- Internet Memes

  Internet memes are content items such as jokes, rumors, videos, or websites which are propagated from one person to others via the Internet (Shifman, 2013).

- Representation

  Representation is "the production of meaning through language" (Hall, 1997, p. 16).

- Multimodality

  Multimodality is "the combination of different semiotic modes" (Van Leeuwen, 2005, cited in Liu, 2013, p. 1259). In text analysis context, Multimodality can be defined as a procedure of analysis that combines tools

or steps of linguistic analysis such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with the tool to analyze images (visual modes) such as Kress and Van Leeuwen's Reading Images in which the analysed text has more than one modes such as verbal and visual (Hermawan, 2013).

- Systemic Functional Linguistics

  Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) which is also known as Functional Grammar is a theory proposed by Halliday which focuses on the purposes and uses of language. SFL can be used to analyse how language is used and its effect. (Gerot & Wignell, 1994).

- Visual Grammar

  Visual Grammar or Grammar of Visual Design is a theory proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) in their work *Reading Images* that "describe the way in which depicted elements—people, places and things—combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 1).

1.8 Organization of the Paper

This study will be organized into six sections below:

1. Abstract

   This first section gives brief summary and explanation of the whole study.

2. Introduction

   This section as the introduction of this study consists of the background of this study which provides the description of the topic, the topic that will be discussed in the study and the research problem. This chapter also contains research questions, purpose of the study, research method, significance of the study, and organization of the paper.

3. Literature Review

   This section consists of the previous studies and some related theory regarding the topic of the study such as multimodality, visual grammar, transitivity system, and representation.

4. Methodology

This section will define the methodology which is used in the study. The methodology contains of research design, research method, sample, data collection, and data analysis.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section will define the results of the study after analyzing the data and it also presents a discussion of the results which aims to answer the research questions.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

This final section will conclude the results of the study and provide some suggestions for further research.