



## **ROLAND BARTHES'S THEORY OF SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS IN THE KOREAN DRAMA *LOVELY RUNNER***

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**Abstract:** This study examines the application of Roland Barthes's semiotic theory in analyzing the Korean drama "Lovely Runner," focusing on the emotional dynamics and character development of Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol. The research aims to uncover how various visual signs, including the total solar eclipse scene, *yeonji gonji* (rouge on the cheeks) scene, the umbrellas, Sunjae's wristwatch, the sunflowers, and *samgyetang*, convey the characters' feelings and emotional journeys. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative method, the analysis highlights the denotative and connotative meanings of these symbols, revealing their significance in the narrative. The findings indicate that one visual sign can articulate the emotions of both characters simultaneously, while also expressing the emotional states of a character across different scenes and settings. This study contributes to the literature on semiotics, particularly within the context of Korean dramas, and emphasizes the importance of visual symbols in conveying emotional depth and character development. Ultimately, the research underscores the potential of visual storytelling as a powerful medium for exploring the character's feelings and emotions.

**Key Terms:** *semiotics, Korean drama, Lovely Runner*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Semiotics is the study of signs and the process of constructing meaning through these signs, in the form of symbols used by humans (and animals) (Balme, 2008). According to Eco (1979), more than just the study about what we call 'signs' in everyday speech, semiotics encompasses the study of anything that functions as a representation of something else, which can expand understanding of the process of construction and interpretation of meaning in various communicative contexts (Allawi, 2024). A sign refers to any entity that represents or symbolises anything other than its own existence. In semiotic terms, signs can be form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects (Chandler, 1994). On the other hand, in Pierce's theory, a symbol is a conventional form of sign, relying on cultural agreement to be understood (Balme, 2008). Therefore, the meaning of symbols is highly dependent on cultural, psychological, and even emotional contexts.

A movie or drama is made not only as entertainment but also as a medium for the author to convey messages or ideas to the audience. A movie or drama becomes a space of expression through signs and symbols such as facial expressions, lighting, costumes, props, and stage design that not only function aesthetically but also have additional layers of meaning that can illustrate a particular emotional or cultural context. According to Polish semiotician, Kowzan (1968), signs are categorized into two categories, which are visual signs and auditive signs. The visual signs include facial signs, gestural signs, proxemic signs, makeup, hair, costume, props, stage design and lighting. While the auditive signs include language, sound effects and music. Semiotics helps identify the elements that contribute to the communication of a particular meaning to the audiences (Eco, 1979). Thus, semiotics not only enriches the audience's understanding of certain films and dramas but also provides insight into how culture and society interact through media (Chandler, 1994). In communication, semiotics plays an important role in understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted in visual and narrative media (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). In semiotics, a sign is defined as anything that communicates meaning or feeling. Consequently, semiotics is an important approach in interpreting visual communication/language in movies so as to feel and understand the story.

Semiotics became the dominant approach to cultural studies in the late 1960s. Roland Barthes was the first to apply semiotic ideas derived from linguistics to visual elements (Curtin, 2009). Roland Barthes, as a central figure in the development of semiotic theory Roland Barthes further expanded upon Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of connotation and denotation, introduced the important concept of the separation between denotation (shows an objective meaning, and has a real, general, or actual meaning/literal meaning) and connotation (is the meaning based on cultural values meaning/cultural meaning), which became an effective framework for analyzing media texts (Ramadania & Arifin, 2019). This theory is particularly useful for uncovering hidden messages conveyed through visual elements, making it an essential tool for exploring how stories are told beyond words or dialog. Roland Barthes' technique is extensively utilized in media studies that focus on the semiotic evaluation of several media domains, including advertising, movie theatres, films, footage, and caricatures (Mazeree et al., 2023).

The utilization of semiotic approach as a theoretical foundation in film and drama analysis is very common. Through semiotic analysis, audiences can dig deeper into how symbols and signs are used to create meaning and the emotional experience a character has for the audience. Several researchers used Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to analyze symbols in films and dramas. To illustrate, Shiddiq et al. (2023) explore the moral messages embedded in the animated movie *Luca* by Disney Pixar. The research reveals the meaning of symbols in the movie in the form of key scenes in the films. Through this symbol analysis, there are seven types of moral messages that are very useful for our daily life, which are honesty, a helping attitude, kindness and caring, courage and self-confidence, self-control, teamwork, and hard work. Similarly, Putri et al. (2023), in their analysis of the movie *Aladdin*, focus on signs and symbols that appear visually within specific scenes. The type of semiotics by Roland Barthes in this movie also has different meanings in describing something. Using Barthes' theory, this study shows that each sign has a unique meaning that is influenced by context, thus helping the audience understand the narrative spoken by the characters in the film. Overall, the studies show that the meaning of symbols in movies or dramas helps the audience understand the message or narrative conveyed in the film through the analysis of signs and symbols in the form of dialogue or conversation.

In addition, previous studies that analyzed visual elements focused more on analyzing social issues that show how movies can be a powerful medium for social commentary. For instance, Dianiya (2020) analyses the social class differences depicted in the South Korean film *Parasite*. The research reveals the meaning of symbols in the movie in the form of scenes,

properties and cinematography. Through this symbol analysis, it is found that social class differences can be assessed from several aspects such as ease of living, fashion, boundaries, body scent, and color. Kirana and Permaludin (2020), used a qualitative method to analyze color denotations in the *Trolls* Movie by Mike Mitchell to uncover hidden messages. Although there is previous study about visual elements, the research above shows that Roland Barthes' previous semiotic study focused more on the moral message that the author wanted to convey.

One of the dramas that exhibits a multitude of semiotic elements is the Korean drama entitled *Lovely Runner*. The drama uses various symbols in the form of visual elements that reflect the emotional journey of its characters. For example, in the first episode scene, Sunjae carries a black umbrella. The umbrella has a meaning that depicts a character who is expressing sadness. Therefore, in this study, the researchers use Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the symbols that appear in *Lovely Runner* through a semiotic approach. The symbols that reflect the feelings and emotions of the characters in this drama are interesting aspects that we examine in depth.

*Lovely Runner*, released in 2024 is a Korean drama adapted from the webtoon entitled *Tomorrow's Best* by Kim Bbang. This drama, which has timeslip, fantasy, comedy, romance genres, tells the story of Im Sol (Kim Hyeyoon), a girl who was a fan of a K-pop idol named Ryu Sun Jae (Byeon Wooseok) who allegedly died by suicide due to depression and insomnia. Im Sol accidentally goes back 15 years, she meets Ryu Seon Jae who is 19 years old. This journey began because the watch Sunjae bought turned into a time machine. Im Sol struggles to change Sunjae's destiny in the future so he doesn't die. This 16-episode drama received a positive response from the audience and was ranked first in more than 130 countries as the most watched drama, because of the interesting storyline, as well as the use of various visual and symbolic elements to describe the feelings and emotions of the main characters.

Although there have been many studies that explore semiotics in movies and dramas, studies that specifically analyze the representation of main characters' feelings and emotions through visual signs in Korean dramas are still missing. Most prior studies focus more on symbols in dialog, social issues or moral messages, leaving a gap in understanding how individual emotional states are represented through visual elements. In addition, some other studies mostly only focus on analyzing symbols that reveal the message the author wants to convey. This study fills the void by combining Barthes' semiotic theory and Kowzan's classification of visual signs to analyze the emotional meaning of two main characters, Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol in *Lovely Runner* and create a character-based semiotic interpretation.

Based on the explanation above, the reason for conducting an in-depth semiotic analysis of the symbols used in the Korean drama *Lovely Runner* is based on two reasons. First, there is ambiguity and variation in audience interpretations regarding the visual signs used in *Lovely Runner*, as many of these signs are not yet widely understood or analyzed from a semiotic perspective. Second, through a systematic semiotic analysis of these visual signs, can offer deeper insight into the feeling states and emotional development of the main characters, Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol. By uncovering the denotative and connotative meanings of these signs, this research aims to help audiences better comprehend the feeling and emotional depth of the drama. Accordingly, the research problems formulated in this study are:

1. What visual signs are found in the Korean drama *Lovely Runner* that reflect the feelings and emotions of the main characters, Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol?
2. What are the denotative and connotative meanings of the visual signs based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory?

Barthes' semiotic theory and Tadeusz Kowzan's classification of visual signs are applied in this study because they clearly provide an analytical framework for identifying how

meaning is constructed through visual signs. They distinguish between denotation (literal appearance) and connotation covering cultural, emotional, or symbolic meaning attached to it. Also, they help the researchers to analyze hidden messages through properties, costumes, colors, lighting and other visual elements. Accordingly, Barthe's theory and Tadeusz Kowzan's classification of visual signs are considered well suited for revealing how *Lovely Runner* expresses the characters' emotional states through visual elements.

## METHOD

This study used a descriptive-qualitative method where researchers analyze data descriptively and present the results through explanations of words rather than statistical figures. This method was employed to describe semiotic analysis based on Roland Barthes' theory to examine the visual signs used to portray the main character's emotions and feelings within the Korean drama *Lovely Runner*. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting the denotative and connotative meanings of various visual elements, providing insights into how these symbols contribute to the emotional depth, character development, and overall narrative of the drama. It emphasizes in-depth exploration and description of non-numerical data, such as cultural and emotional nuances conveyed through signs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research in semiotics is concerned with uncovering meanings that are frequently layered and implicit, relying on the researcher's interpretative skills to decode these elements (Simanjuntak et al., 2023). This type of research is particularly well-suited to the analysis of cultural products such as Korean dramas, where the focus is on the uncovering of the symbolic meaning and emotional impact of visual elements.

The data sources in this study include 16 episodes with a duration of approximately one hour per episode in the drama to understand the meaning of the visual symbols, which reflect the feelings and emotions of the main characters, namely Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol. The data of this research is taken from scenes that use visual elements such as facial signs, gestural signs, proxemic signs, makeup, hair, costume, props, stage design and lighting that have implied meanings.

The data collection technique in this research was carried out using the following steps: First, the researchers watched the drama *Lovely Runner* in its entirety through a streaming platform called VIU (<https://www.viu.com/ott/id>) to identify and collect data. After that, they collected data by taking screenshots scenes that show symbols or visual elements that reflect the main character's feelings and emotions. Finally, they analyzed data in the form of symbols using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory using various reference sources from relevant journals or articles.

In this analysis, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is used to distinguish between the denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural or symbolic meaning) of the symbols in the drama, so that the researchers can provide a deeper understanding of the emotional journey of the characters through the use of symbolism through the visualization of the drama. Finally, the researchers conclude the results of the data analysis obtained to provide a deeper understanding of the story and characters in *Lovely Runner*.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the semiotic analysis conducted on selected scenes from the Korean drama *Lovely Runner*. The analysis focuses on visual signs that reflect the feelings and emotions of the main characters, Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol. Each visual symbol is interpreted by using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach that distinguishes between denotation

and connotation, as well as Tadeusz Kowzan's classification of visual signs. By examining specific objects and visual elements such as umbrellas, clocks, traditional props, and others.

### The Total Solar Eclipse Scene



Figure 1. The total solar eclipse scene  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 1, time code: 00:00:33)

Table 1. Visual sign analysis of the total solar eclipse scene

| Kowzan's Category         | Denotation   | Connotation                                    | Emotional Meaning  |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| Lighting and stage design | A natural phenomenon where the moon temporarily blocks the sun | Darkness, interruption of life's normal rhythm | Ryu Sunjae: feelings of depression, fear, and uncertainty.<br><br>Im Sol: unchangeable fate, evokes despair and a sense of downfall. |

The total solar eclipse, as a natural and rare event, is denotatively a natural phenomenon where the moon temporarily blocks the sun. Connotatively, however, its meaning for characters like Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol is multifaceted. Based on Kowzan's classification, this moment involves lighting and stage design, with emotional emphasis supported by facial signs, especially from Sunjae. The dim lighting in this scene mirrors Sunjae's descent into depression and symbolizes feelings of fear and uncertainty in his life. On the other side, based on Barthes, this kind of sign represents a sudden change of fate that cannot be changed by humans and controlled, causing the despair and downfall of Im Sol's character.

### Yeonji Gonji (Rouge on the Cheeks) scene



Figure 2. Yeonji gonji (Rouge on the cheeks) scene  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 1, time code: 00:09:08)



Figure 3. Yeonji gonji (Rouge on the cheeks) scene  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 7, time code: 00:31:30)

Table 2. Visual sign analysis of *yeonji gonji* (rouge on the cheeks) scene

| Kowzan's Category | Denotation   | Connotation                          | Emotional Meaning |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Makeup            | Red dots applied to the bride's cheeks and forehead during a | Ward off evil spirits and bring good | Ryu Sunjae: -     |

|  |                            |                              |   |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
|  | traditional Korean wedding | fortune, symbolic transition | Im Sol: emotional awakening and hope for positive things. |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|

In *Lovely Runner*, the use of *yeonji gonji* has a deep meaning despite the different time settings, especially in the context of the relationship between Im Sol and her grandmother. The scene where Im Sol's grandmother applies *yeonji gonji* on her granddaughter's cheeks and forehead appears in episode 1 and episode 7. As seen in Figure 2-3, the application of *yeonji gonji* in Episode 1 (00:09:08) and 7 (00:31:30). The Episode 1 scene shows the time setting in the first timeline where Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol's real destiny is, while the Episode 7 scene shows the second timeline after Im Sol time traveled for the first time.

In terms of Kowzan's classification, the scene draws on makeup signs. In the first episode, when Im Sol wakes up, her grandmother gently rubs *yeonji gonji* on her cheeks. Denotatively, refers to the red dots or rouge applied to a Korean bride's cheeks as part of her traditional wedding ornaments. These dots, often resembling small circles, can either be drawn or painted on or be cut out pieces of paper that are stuck on. Connotatively, these red dots are believed to "protect against evil spirits" and "ward off evil" (Geum & DeLong, 1992). This scene symbolizes Im Sol's transition from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness. It signifies Im Sol's readiness to face the challenges ahead, especially after she gets involved in time travel to change Ryu Sunjae's fate. In this context, *yeonji gonji* is not just a decoration, but also a symbol of hope and awakening.

In episode 7, a similar scene occurs when Im Sol's grandmother again applies *yeonji gonji* to her granddaughter. However, in this context, the symbolic meaning is deeper. After going through various challenges on her first time travel, Im Sol has grown emotionally. In this episode, *yeonji gonji* serves as a reminder to Im Sol of the importance of maintaining her spirit and confidence, despite adversity.

### The Black Umbrella



Figure 4. The black umbrella  
(Source: *Lovely Runner* episode 1, time code: 00:29:57)

Table 3. Visual sign analysis of the black umbrella

| Kowzan's Category     | Denotation  | Connotation   | Emotional Meaning  |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Property and lighting | Black: color of darkness<br><br>Umbrella: object providing shelter from rain or sun | Seen as a cold and negative aspect suggesting death, evil or mystery. | Ryu Sunjae: represents sadness and reflects Sunjae's struggles with depression.<br><br>Im Sol: - |

In Episode 1 of *Lovely Runner*, there is a silent yet very emotional scene when Ryu Sunjae shields Im Sol with a black umbrella by the Han River, just as the first snow begins to fall (00:29:57). According to Kowzan's theory (1968), the black umbrella in this scene is categorized as a property supported by lighting (dark tones), which denotes a functional item for shelter from various weather conditions, such as rain, sun, or even snow. However, in the framework of Roland Barthes' semiotics, this sign has a deep connotation, the color black is often associated with sadness, death, mystery, or negative emotions (Qizi, 2024), while an umbrella signifies protection and comfort, especially in a cold and harsh environment. The act of Sunjae holding the umbrella over Im Sol indicates a gesture of care and concern. In contrast, in this scene, for Sunjae, the umbrella visually isolates him from others and shows the barrier between his internal emotions and the outside world. It reflects Sunjae's loneliness and his tendency to suppress emotional pain, especially during moments of personal crisis.

The setting is the first snow, which in traditional Korean culture represents a sign of a new beginning and a fate that influences the depth of the emotional meaning of the characters. This scene indirectly signifies the start of the challenges and difficulties ahead in their journey, including depression and the struggle against despair. For Sunjae, the use of a black umbrella in this scene subtly conveys the weight of the emotional burden of depression and the inner turmoil he silently endures, while also expressing his commitment to protect Im Sol from similar pain. This scene also serves as a turning point in the narrative, marking the beginning of their journey together. For Im Sol, although she is not fully aware of Sunjae's inner condition at this point in the story, the gesture is received as a signal of warmth and protection. This scene becomes a form of wordless communication, where emotions are encoded in visual symbols rather than dialogue.

### The Blue Umbrella



Figure 5. The blue umbrella  
(Source: *Lovely Runner* episode 2, time code: 00:01:00)



**Table 4. Visual sign analysis of the blue umbrella**

| <b>Kowzan's Category</b>    | <b>Denotation</b>  | <b>Connotation</b>  | <b>Emotional Meaning</b>   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Property and gestural signs | Blue: color of the sky/waters<br><br>Umbrella: object providing shelter from rain or sun | primarily linked to calmness/peace or it can also represent loyalty.<br>Traditionally, based on Korean culture, blue symbolises immortality and hope. | Ryu Sunjae: shows a high level of care and empathy in a calm character.<br><br>Im Sol: signifies hope and the potential for healing. |

In the opening scene of Episode 2 (time code 00:01:00), where Sunjae holds a blue umbrella over Im Sol who is crying while looking at him in the school yard. This scene is not only a symbolic repetition of the black umbrella scene from the first timeline, but also a very important emotional and symbolic transformation in the second timeline. This scene takes place after Sol's first-time travel back to 2008, where she is overwhelmed with emotion as she recalls the tragic news of Sunjae's death in 2023. The act of Sunjae holding the umbrella over Sol as she cries not only serves as a protective gesture but also represents the emotional development related to themes of hope and loyalty.

Denotatively, a blue umbrella is a tool for protection from rain. However, when analyzed using Roland Barthes' framework, its meaning develops connotatively, it carries deeper meanings, such as protection and care, especially in emotional contexts, it reflects the emotional state of the character Sunjae in his youth. A study by Qizi (2024) has stated that the color blue is often associated with the sky and water, symbolizing peace and loyalty. In Korean culture, blue represents immortality and hope (Shin et al., 2012), suggesting a longing for continuity and a brighter future. Blue is also the visual identity color of Ryu Sunjae in this drama, as it appears in various aspects of his life, including his clothing like jackets, room interior, and personal belongings, thus reinforcing the impression that this color is not only an indicator of the character's mood but also a pillar of characterization. The blue color, which is identical to the color of water, also defines Ryu Sun Jae's favorite color and is often worn by him during high school. At that time, he was an accomplished swimmer. However, water is the main element that caused him to get injured and had to bury his dreams, as well as being the intermediary of his death in three timelines, caused by him falling into the water. For Im Sol, this moment becomes very symbolic. She is in an emotionally fragile state after witnessing Sunjae's death in the future. Sunjae's appearance with the blue umbrella becomes a form of healing for the trauma and grief she harbors over Sunjae's death. Her reaction shows shock mixed with relief, as if the universe is giving him a second chance, and Sunjae, who technically knows nothing, becomes a form of calm and hope for Sol. This scene reinforces the narrative through the use of visual signs in the form of props with soft lighting, and the silent gaze between the two.



## The Yellow Umbrella



Figure 6. The yellow umbrella



Figure 7. The yellow umbrella

(Source: Lovely Runner episode 2, time code: 00:55:21) (Source: Lovely Runner episode 8, time code: 00:08:32)

Table 5. Visual sign analysis of the yellow umbrella

| Kowzan's Category           | Denotation   | Connotation  | Emotional Meaning  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Property and gestural signs | Yellow: color of the sunlight and gold.<br>Umbrella: object providing shelter from rain or sun | represents happiness and hope (Sehee & Hyewon, 2011), in some contexts, yellow is used to indicate caution or warning, like on traffic signs. Derived from traditional Korean colors, it symbolizes light and the essence of vitality. | Ryu Sunjae: -<br>Im Sol: depicting her cheerful and energetic personality and her important role as an active agent of change for Sunjae |

The yellow umbrella used by Im Sol in two different moments within *Lovely Runner*. In Figure 6 (Episode 2, timecode: 00:55:21), Im Sol mistakenly recognizes Ryu Sunjae as a delivery worker and offers her yellow umbrella to him during the rain. The denotative meaning of the umbrella is simple, a functional object shielding from the rain. Yet, according to Roland Barthes' connotative theory, the yellow color stands for light and joy, but can also indicate caution. In this context, the yellow umbrella captures Im Sol's lively and warm-hearted personality, while foreshadowing the critical role she will play in saving Sunjae's life in future timelines.

In Figure 7, Episode 8 (00:08:32), the umbrella reappears but has a very different background compared to Figure 6. Figure 7 shows a second timeline, after Im Sol's first-time travel where she accidentally prevents her own tragic injury. In this scene, the yellow umbrella replaces the previously black umbrella scene from Episode 1 as seen in Figure 4. The roles are reversed, with Sol now shielding Sunjae. It marks her transition into an empowered protector and symbol of hope.

In both instances, the yellow umbrella is not merely a weather accessory but a message that signifies Sol's identity as the bearer of light in Sunjae's darkness, a narrative inversion of the black umbrella motif previously used to depict his depression. Thus, the visual sign of the yellow umbrella in Kowzan's classification as a property becomes a strong visual marker to represent Im Sol's feelings and emotions. Although she uses the same umbrella in both scenes,

the emotional nuances are significantly different. This is very apparent from the two very contrasting backgrounds in Image 6 and Image 7.

### The Sunjae's Wristwatch



Figure 8. The Sunjae's wristwatch  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 4, time code: 00:16:35)

Table 6. Visual sign analysis of the Sunjae's wristwatch

| Kowzan's Category                    | Denotation                    | Connotation                                       | Emotional Meaning   |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Property, costume and gestural signs | A personal timekeeping device | A metaphor for second chances, control over time. | Ryu Sunjae: -<br>Im Sol: Represents her agency in trying to rewrite Sunjae's future |

The wristwatch that Im Sol uses is a Sunjae's wristwatch from the past that he obtained through an auction. This object is not only a prop but also an emotional symbol. From Kowzan's perspective, this sign is categorized as a Prop, as an accessory worn by the character, it also falls under costume. The character, Sol often clutches or activates it, looking at a watch and winding it are gestures categorized under gestural signs. The wristwatch, denotatively a device worn on the wrist for telling time and an accessory. In this context, this object is a time machine that allows Sol to travel through time. On a connotative level, it signifies second chances and hope. A tool that represents Sol's second chance to intervene in fate or escape dangerous situations. Emotionally, the watch becomes a symbol of Im Sol's determination to rewrite Sunjae's future and save him from a tragic future, reflecting her inner strength and resolve to protect him from his destined tragedy and the desire to overcome loss. This sign also represents active struggle against or manipulation of destiny.

### The Sunflowers



Figure 9. The sunflowers  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 8, time code: 00:39:45)



Figure 10. The sunflowers  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 8, time code: 00:40:01)



**Figure 11. The sunflowers**  
(Source: Lovely Runner episode 8, time code: 00:40:04)

**Table 7. Visual sign analysis of the sunflowers**

| <b>Kowzan's Category</b>              | <b>Denotation</b>                                   | <b>Connotation</b>   | <b>Emotional Meaning</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Property, gestural signs and lighting | A tall bright flower known to turn toward sunlight. | Symbol of longing, yearning, and enduring affection. In the same way, it also represents constancy and hope in the face of despair and unfulfilled desire. | Ryu Sunjae: represents deep yearning. Sunflowers act as a symbol of his undying love and inability to move on.<br><br>Im Sol: - |

Figures 9, 10, and 11 depict the scene where Ryu Sunjae is holding sunflowers during his drunken visits to Im Sol's old home while grappling with his feelings of loss and nostalgia in Episode 8. These moments occur in the second timeline, where Sunjae has entered adulthood, serving as a significant symbol reflecting his emotional state and character development. As stated in Kowzan's classification, sunflowers fall into the category of property, supported by other visual signs such as gestural signs and lighting.

Denotatively, sunflower is a bright and tall flower, it is often associated with the sun due to its vibrant yellow color and its tendency to turn towards sunlight. The sunflower connotes feelings of hope, happiness, and remembrance (Jesudas, 2024). The sunflower represents Sunjae's internal struggle with his emotions. The gesture of holding and carrying the sunflowers while intoxicated suggests a yearning for the past and a desire to reconnect with the happiness that Sol brought into his life. The lighting also contributes when Sunjae appears under dim or evening light, further emphasizing the sense of despair and longing he experiences. The sunflower also reflects Sunjae's hope for healing and redemption. Consequently, the flower symbolizes Sunjae's hope for brighter days in the future with Sol.

## Samgyetang (삼계탕 / Korean Chicken Soup)



Figure 12. *Samgyetang* (삼계탕 / Korean Chicken Soup)  
(Source: *Lovely Runner* episode 4, time code: 00:09:25)



Figure 13. *Samgyetang* (삼계탕 / Korean Chicken Soup)  
(Source: *Lovely Runner* episode 4, time code: 00:49:26)

Table 8. Visual sign analysis of *samgyetang* (삼계탕 / korean chicken soup)

| Kowzan's Category | Denotation   | Connotation                                     | Emotional Meaning  |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Property          | Korean chicken soup filled with sticky rice, ginseng, red dates, and garlic, then boiled in broth. | Symbol of care and intimate gesture of concern. | Ryu Sunjae: feels emotionally supported, valued, and comforted.<br><br>Im Sol: shows active concern. |

This drama presents two scenes involving property in the form of *samgyetang*. These moments take place in the second timeline, where Sol's first time travel occurs. The first scene (Figure 12) happens during Sunjae and Sol's dinner together to celebrate after Sunjae's victory in a swimming competition when he is 19 years old (episode 4, time code: 00:09:25). The second scene (Figure 13) depicts Sol giving two out of three *samgyetang* dishes made by her grandmother to Sunjae through his father while he is in the recovery period from a shoulder injury (episode 4, time code: 00:49:26).

Denotatively, *samgyetang* is a traditional Korean dish made with chicken, ginseng, and various herbs, often consumed for its health benefits, particularly during the summer months. Connotatively, *samgyetang* connotes care, support and comfort. Emotionally, in the first scene, *samgyetang* has a deep meaning for Ryu Sunjae, not just as a dish but also as a ritual of togetherness. The shared meal symbolizes the joy of his victory and the support he receives from those around him, particularly from Sol. In the second scene, the act of receiving food from Sol through his father reflects the importance of Sol's care in his healing process and his reliance on her support during difficult times. For Im Sol, the act of sharing *samgyetang* in both scenes highlights her nurturing and caring personality. In Figure 12, her presence during Sunjae's celebration signifies her role as a supportive figure in his life, contributing to his happiness. In Figure 13, her decision to give him the *samgyetang* represents her desire to take care of him and provide emotional support at a distance. It illustrates Sol's role as a supporter and comforter, even without physical presence.

## CONCLUSION

This study has addressed the research question by examining the emotional dynamics and character development of Ryu Sunjae and Im Sol in the Korean drama *Lovely Runner* through Roland Barthes's semiotic theory and Tadeusz Kowzan's classification of visual signs.

The analysis of various visual elements, including the total solar eclipse, *yeonji gonji* (rouge on the cheeks) scene, the umbrellas, the Sunjae's wristwatch, the sunflowers, and *samgyetang*, reveals how these signs effectively convey the main character's feelings and emotional journeys in dramas or movies.

The findings indicate that one visual sign can articulate the emotions of both characters simultaneously, as demonstrated in the scenes involving the total solar eclipse scene, the blue umbrella and *samgyetang*. Additionally, the analysis shows that one visual sign, such as *yeonji gonji*, the yellow umbrella and *samgyetang*, can express the emotional states of a character across different scenes and settings.

These results provide a novel contribution to the literature on semiotics in drama or movie, particularly within the context of Korean dramas. The practical implications of this research extend to media studies and cultural analysis, can understand the interpretation of the feelings and emotions of the characters, as well as strengthen the deep understanding of the characters portrayed on screen in a drama or film.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of visual symbols in conveying emotional depth and character development, reinforcing the notion that visual storytelling is a powerful medium for exploring the character's feelings and emotions.

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