



A Semantic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meaning in the Song Lyrics "Anti Hero" by Taylor Swift

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings in the song lyrics "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift. The research applies a qualitative descriptive method, focusing on semantic analysis to interpret the meanings conveyed in the lyrics. The data are collected from the official song lyrics and analyzed based on the theory of meaning proposed by Geoffrey Leech, particularly the distinction between denotative (literal) and connotative (associative) meanings. The findings reveal that the denotative meanings in the song are generally straightforward and reflect the literal interpretation of the words. However, the connotative meanings expose deeper emotional and psychological themes, including self-criticism, insecurity, anxiety, and inner conflict. The lyrics demonstrate how simple expressions can carry complex implied meanings through figurative language and personal reflection. In conclusion, the study shows that connotative meaning plays a dominant role in conveying the overall message of the song. The use of semantic analysis helps uncover the hidden meanings behind the lyrics and provides a deeper understanding of the artist's expression. This study contributes to the field of Semantics by illustrating how meaning is constructed and interpreted in contemporary song lyrics.

Keywords: connotative meaning, song lyrics, Anti-Hero, denotative meaning, semantics.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna denotatif dan konotatif dalam lirik lagu "Anti-Hero" karya Taylor Swift. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, dengan fokus pada analisis semantik untuk menafsirkan makna yang tersirat dalam lirik tersebut. Data dikumpulkan dari lirik lagu resmi dan dianalisis berdasarkan teori makna yang dikemukakan oleh Geoffrey Leech, khususnya perbedaan antara makna denotatif (harfiah) dan konotatif (asosiatif). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa makna denotatif dalam lagu tersebut umumnya lugas dan mencerminkan interpretasi harfiah dari kata-kata. Namun, makna konotatif mengungkap tema emosional dan psikologis yang lebih dalam, termasuk kritik diri, ketidakamanan, kecemasan, dan konflik batin. Lirik tersebut menunjukkan bagaimana ekspresi sederhana dapat mengandung makna tersirat yang kompleks melalui bahasa kiasan dan refleksi pribadi. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa makna konotatif memainkan peran dominan dalam menyampaikan pesan keseluruhan lagu. Penggunaan analisis semantik membantu mengungkap makna tersembunyi di balik lirik dan memberikan pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang ekspresi sang artis. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bidang Semantik dengan menggambarkan bagaimana makna dibangun dan ditafsirkan dalam lirik lagu kontemporer.

Kata kunci: makna konotatif, lirik lagu, Anti-Hero, makna denotatif, semantik.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an essential role in human communication, not only in daily interaction but also in artistic expression such as songs. Song lyrics are a form of literary work that convey messages, emotions, and experiences through carefully chosen words. In many cases, the meaning of song lyrics is not always directly understood because it involves both literal and implied meanings. This is where Semantics becomes important, as it studies how meaning is constructed and interpreted in language.

One important aspect of semantics is the distinction between denotative and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of a word, while connotative meaning relates to the emotional, associative, or implied meaning that goes beyond the literal interpretation. According to Geoffrey Leech, meaning in language can be categorized into several types, including conceptual (denotative) and associative (connotative) meanings. Understanding these two types of meaning is crucial in analyzing texts, especially song lyrics, which often contain figurative language and deeper emotional expressions.

The song "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift is an example of a contemporary song that presents rich semantic elements. The lyrics of this song reflect personal struggles, self-awareness, and emotional conflict, which are expressed through both direct and indirect language. Many lines in the song appear simple on the surface but carry deeper meanings when analyzed semantically. This makes the song an interesting object for studying how denotative and connotative meanings are used to convey complex messages.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in the song lyrics of "Anti-Hero." The research focuses on identifying the literal meanings of selected lyrics and interpreting their implied meanings in context. Therefore, the research questions of this study are: (1) What are the denotative meanings found in the lyrics of "Anti-Hero"? (2) What are the connotative meanings expressed in the lyrics? and (3) What messages are conveyed through these meanings?

The objectives of this study are to identify and analyze the denotative and connotative meanings in the song lyrics and to reveal the deeper messages embedded within the song. This study is expected to provide benefits for students, especially those studying linguistics, by enhancing their understanding of semantic analysis. In addition, it can serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in analyzing meaning in song lyrics or other literary works.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Semantics

Semantics is a branch of Linguistics that focuses on the study of meaning in language. It examines how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning in different contexts. According to Geoffrey Leech, semantics is concerned with the interpretation of

meaning and how language expresses ideas, feelings, and experiences. Understanding semantics is essential in analyzing texts, especially literary works such as song lyrics, where meaning is often layered and implicit.

In addition, semantics does not only deal with literal meanings but also explores how meanings can change depending on context, culture, and speaker intention. This makes semantic analysis a useful approach for uncovering deeper messages in song lyrics, which often contain figurative language, symbolism, and personal expression.

2. Denotative Meaning

Denotative meaning, also known as conceptual meaning, refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of a word. It is the most direct and objective meaning, without any emotional or cultural associations. According to Geoffrey Leech, denotative meaning is the core meaning of a word that is universally recognized and remains relatively stable across different contexts.

For example, the word “mirror” denotatively refers to an object that reflects an image. This meaning does not change regardless of how the word is used. In semantic analysis, identifying denotative meaning is the first step before interpreting deeper meanings. It provides a foundation for understanding how language conveys basic information in a text.

3. Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to the additional meaning of a word that goes beyond its literal definition. It is often associated with emotions, cultural values, personal experiences, and social contexts. According to Geoffrey Leech, connotative meaning is part of associative meaning, which reflects how individuals interpret words differently based on their background and perspective.

For instance, the word “mirror” can connotatively represent self-reflection, identity, or even fear of confronting oneself. Unlike denotative meaning, connotative meaning is subjective and can vary from one person to another. In song lyrics, connotative meaning plays a significant role in expressing deeper emotions and hidden messages.

4. Song Lyrics as Literary Texts

Song lyrics are considered a form of literary expression because they use language creatively to convey meaning, emotion, and artistic ideas. Lyrics often include figurative language such as metaphor, symbolism, and imagery, making them rich sources for semantic analysis. Through lyrics, songwriters can express personal experiences and connect with listeners on an emotional level.

The song "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift is a contemporary example of how lyrics can reflect complex psychological and emotional themes. The use of simple yet powerful language in the song allows listeners to interpret meanings both literally and symbolically.

5. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have analyzed semantic meaning in song lyrics. For example, some researchers have focused on identifying denotative and connotative meanings in popular songs to reveal hidden messages and emotional expressions. These studies generally use qualitative descriptive methods and show that song lyrics often contain deeper meanings beyond their literal interpretation.

Other studies have found that connotative meaning plays a dominant role in conveying themes such as love, identity, struggle, and self-reflection. However, each song has unique characteristics, and therefore, analyzing different songs can provide new insights into how meaning is constructed in language.

Based on these previous studies, it can be concluded that semantic analysis is an effective approach for understanding song lyrics. However, there is still a need for further analysis of contemporary songs like "Anti-Hero" to explore how modern songwriters use language to express complex ideas and emotions.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative research is used because the data analyzed are in the form of words rather than numbers. The descriptive approach aims to describe and interpret the meanings found in the song lyrics without manipulating any variables. This design is considered appropriate for semantic analysis, as it focuses on understanding and interpreting language meaning in context.

2. Data Source

The primary data source of this study is the song lyrics of "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift. The lyrics are selected because they contain rich expressions and meaningful language that reflect both literal and implied meanings. The song is analyzed as a textual document to identify semantic elements, particularly denotative and connotative meanings.

3. Data Collection Technique

The data in this study are collected through a documentation method. The researcher obtains the lyrics of the song from a reliable source and carefully reads them multiple times to gain a thorough understanding. The following steps are used in collecting the data:

Reading the song lyrics thoroughly

Identifying significant words, phrases, or sentences

Selecting lyrics that contain potential denotative and connotative meanings

Classifying the selected data for further analysis.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The data are analyzed using semantic analysis based on the theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech. The analysis is conducted through the following steps:

Identifying selected lyrics from the song

Determining the denotative (literal) meaning of each lyric

Interpreting the connotative (implied) meaning based on context

Explaining the relationship between denotative and connotative meanings

Drawing conclusions about the overall message of the song.

5. Research Instrument

The main instrument of this research is the researcher themselves, as this study involves interpretation and analysis of textual data. Supporting tools include note-taking and data classification tables to organize the findings systematically.

6. Data Presentation

The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive form. Each selected lyric is analyzed and explained in terms of its denotative and connotative meanings. The findings are then discussed to reveal the deeper messages conveyed in the song.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of selected lyrics from the song “Anti-Hero” by Taylor Swift. The analysis focuses on identifying the denotative (literal) and connotative (implied) meanings of each lyric, followed by an interpretation of the message conveyed.

1. Lyric: “It’s me, hi, I’m the problem, it’s me”

Denotative Meaning:

The speaker introduces herself and states that she is the problem.

Connotative Meaning:

This lyric reflects self-blame and personal accountability. It suggests feelings of guilt, insecurity, and awareness of one's own flaws.

Discussion: The repetition emphasizes internal conflict and highlights the theme of self-criticism. It shows how the speaker perceives herself negatively, which connects to broader issues of identity and mental struggle.

2. Lyric: “I’ll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror”

Denotative Meaning:

The speaker looks at the sun but avoids looking in a mirror.

Connotative Meaning:

This implies avoidance of self-reflection. The speaker may be uncomfortable confronting her true self or inner identity.

Discussion: The contrast between the sun (something dangerous) and the mirror (self-reflection) suggests that facing oneself is more difficult than facing external risks. This line reinforces the theme of self-denial and emotional discomfort.

3. Lyric: “I have this thing where I get older but just never wiser”

Denotative Meaning:

The speaker gets older but does not become wiser.

Connotative Meaning:

This reflects frustration with personal growth. It suggests a feeling of being stuck, repeating mistakes, or failing to learn from experiences.

Discussion: This lyric highlights a sense of self-doubt and disappointment. It conveys the idea that maturity does not always guarantee wisdom, emphasizing internal struggle and dissatisfaction.

4. Lyric: "Midnights become my afternoons"

Denotative Meaning:

Midnight is treated like afternoon time.

Connotative Meaning:

This suggests disrupted routines, possibly insomnia or emotional distress. It may indicate that the speaker is awake at night due to overthinking or anxiety.

Discussion: The reversal of normal time patterns symbolizes imbalance in life. It reflects mental unrest and supports the theme of inner turmoil.

5. Lyric: "When my depression works the graveyard shift"

Denotative Meaning:

Depression is described as working during the night shift.

Connotative Meaning:

This personifies depression as something active and persistent, especially during nighttime. It suggests loneliness, overthinking, and emotional struggle.

Discussion: The use of personification strengthens the emotional impact of the lyric. It shows how mental health issues can feel overwhelming and continuous.

6. Lyric: "I wake up screaming from dreaming"

Denotative Meaning:

The speaker wakes up screaming after dreaming.

Connotative Meaning:

This suggests nightmares or emotional distress. It may symbolize anxiety, fear, or unresolved inner conflict.

Discussion: This lyric emphasizes the intensity of the speaker's mental state. It reflects how internal struggles can affect even subconscious experiences.

7. Overall Discussion

Based on the analysis above, it can be seen that the denotative meanings of the lyrics are generally simple and straightforward. However, the connotative meanings reveal deeper emotional and psychological themes, such as insecurity, self-criticism, anxiety, and identity conflict.

The song "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift uses everyday language combined with figurative expressions to convey complex personal experiences. The dominance of connotative meaning in the lyrics shows that the song is not only telling a story but also expressing the inner struggles of the speaker.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the song "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift, it can be concluded that both denotative and connotative meanings play important roles in conveying the overall message of the lyrics. The denotative meanings found in the song are generally simple and reflect the literal interpretation of the words used. These meanings provide a basic understanding of the lyrics and serve as the foundation for deeper analysis.

However, the connotative meanings reveal more complex emotional and psychological aspects. The lyrics express themes such as self-criticism, insecurity, anxiety, and inner conflict. Through figurative language and symbolic expressions, the song conveys the speaker's personal struggles and self-awareness. The dominance of connotative meaning indicates that the song is rich in implied messages that go beyond the surface level.

In addition, this study shows that semantic analysis is an effective approach for understanding song lyrics, especially in identifying hidden meanings and emotional depth. By analyzing both denotative and connotative meanings, readers or listeners can gain a more comprehensive interpretation of the song.

In conclusion, the song "Anti-Hero" is not only a form of entertainment but also a meaningful expression of personal experience. This study is expected to help readers

better understand how language is used creatively in song lyrics and encourage further research in the field of Semantics, particularly in analyzing modern music.

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