



An Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meaning in the Song "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" by The Script

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Abstract. A fundamental area of linguistics that investigates the various ways meanings arise and operate is semantics, which is commonly described as the study of meaning in language. This study focuses on song lyrics, which use subtle expression to effectively communicate feelings, narratives, and concepts. In particular, it examines the lyrics of "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" by The Script, a moving song about unwavering love and perseverance, for both denotative (literal, dictionary-based) and connotative (implied, associative) meanings. The study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology based on Geoffrey Leech's groundbreaking semantics theory, which identifies seven meaning categories, including conceptual, connotative, and affective. This approach uses in-depth textual analysis to identify common linguistic devices found in the songs, such as inference and metaphor. Results show that denotative meanings (two occurrences) are less common than connotative meanings (three instances). The song's use of metaphorical language—such as symbolic waiting on a street corner—instead of direct narration to elicit emotional depth is reflected in connotative dominance, despite the narrow margin. This demonstrates how lyrics emphasize interpretive, evocative layers in order to connect with listeners.

Keywords: Denotative meaning; Connotative meaning; Semantics; Song Lyrics

Abstrak. Sebuah bidang dasar dalam linguistik yang menyelidiki berbagai cara makna muncul dan beroperasi adalah semantik, yang umumnya dijelaskan sebagai studi tentang makna dalam bahasa. Penelitian ini fokus pada lirik lagu, yang menggunakan ekspresi halus untuk secara efektif mengkomunikasikan perasaan, narasi, dan konsep. Secara khusus, penelitian ini mengkaji lirik lagu "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" oleh The Script, sebuah lagu yang menyentuh tentang cinta yang teguh dan ketekunan, baik dalam makna denotatif (harfiah, berbasis kamus) maupun konotatif (tersirat, asosiasi). Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif berdasarkan teori semantik Geoffrey Leech yang terobosan, yang mengidentifikasi tujuh kategori makna, termasuk konsep, konotatif, dan afektif. Pendekatan ini menggunakan analisis tekstual mendalam untuk mengidentifikasi perangkat linguistik umum yang ditemukan dalam lagu-lagu tersebut, seperti inferensi dan metafora. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna denotatif (dua kejadian) lebih jarang dibandingkan makna konotatif (tiga kejadian). Penggunaan bahasa metaforis dalam lagu—seperti menunggu simbolis di sudut jalan—daripada narasi langsung untuk menggugah kedalaman emosional tercermin dalam dominasi konotatif, meskipun dengan selisih yang sempit. Hal ini menunjukkan bagaimana lirik lagu menekankan lapisan interpretatif dan evokatif untuk terhubung dengan pendengar.

Kata kunci: Makna denotatif; Makna konotatif; Semantik; Lirik lagu

1. Introduction

Language functions as a primary means of communication in everyday life, enabling people to convey ideas and messages through words and sentences that carry various meanings. Communication itself can take two forms: spoken, such as in speeches or interviews, and written, as seen in media like magazines, advertisements, and slogans. As noted by Riemer (2010), meaning is a crucial element in language learning, since

without it, language would lose one of its essential purposes. This study focuses on meaning from a semantic perspective, particularly denotative and connotative meanings found in song lyrics. Lyrics often serve as a medium for expressing thoughts and emotions, frequently employing diverse stylistic features, while songwriters may also use music to reflect their personal identity (Moon et al., 2006). The data analyzed in this research comes from the song "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" by The Script, released on June 23, 2008, a widely popular song whose title and lyrics suggest deeper, implicit meanings. This study aims to uncover those meanings so that listeners can better understand the messages embedded in the song.

Semantics, as a branch of linguistics, deals with the study of meaning and plays a central role in communication (Leech, 1981). While semantic meaning can be classified into several types, this research limits its scope to denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary definition of words, phrases, and sentences, whereas connotative meaning involves implied or associative interpretations beyond the literal sense (Sari & Kusumawardhani, 2016). Both types are closely related to the relationship between words and their meanings (Mangewa, 2012). Understanding meaning also helps in determining whether expressions are meaningful, ambiguous, or contextually appropriate (Fromkin et al., 2017). The theoretical framework of this study is mainly based on Leech (1981), supported by other scholars such as Yule (1985), who defines semantics as the study of meaning in linguistic units, and Goddard (2011), who highlights its central role in understanding language. Riemer (2010) further emphasizes that the concept of meaning provides a foundation for semantic theory and helps people interpret everyday language effectively.

Denotative meaning, also known as conceptual or cognitive meaning, represents the most basic and direct meaning of a word, grounded in observable reality and consistent with dictionary definitions (Leech, 1981). For instance, the word "woman" can be defined in terms of human, female, and adult, reflecting its literal meaning. In contrast, connotative meaning goes beyond this basic level, encompassing additional emotional or associative values. As explained by Leech (1981), connotation refers to the communicative value that extends beyond purely conceptual content. For example, the word "police" may suggest strength, while "teacher" may evoke the idea of a hero. Connotative meaning allows language users to connect expressions with personal or

social experiences (Masriyah et al., 2019), often producing meanings that exceed their literal definitions (Zuhdah & Alfain, 2020).

Song lyrics, as a form of poetic and emotional expression, are designed to evoke deeper feelings and convey messages that resonate with listeners. They often contain multiple layers of meaning, including figurative or implied interpretations. This is evident in "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" by The Script, where the surface meaning may describe a man refusing to leave a place, but a deeper semantic analysis reveals broader connotative interpretations related to emotional attachment and persistence. Like many songs, it reflects personal experiences and perspectives of the songwriter, making it a meaningful object of study. Therefore, this research seeks to explore and analyze the denotative and connotative meanings within the song's lyrics to better understand the messages conveyed.

2. Method

In this study, the authors used a qualitative descriptive analytic approach, which entails data collection, item examination, and description. The denotative and connotative meanings found in song lyrics are the phenomenon under examination. The qualitative descriptive method is used to examine commonplace events, according to Creswell (2014). The descriptive approach is described by Nazir (1985) in his book *Research Methods* as a method for examining the present condition of human collections, a subject, a set of facts, a style of thinking, or even a class of events. The objective of this descriptive study is to methodically explain, depict, or show the connection between the phenomena being studied.

3. Finding and Discussion

The song "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" from the 2008 album *The Script* provided the data for this research.

3.1 The Data Analysis 1

"Going back to the corner where I first saw you"

The lyric above tells the story of a man who goes back to the same street corner where he first met the person he loves. In its denotative meaning, the line only describes a simple action of returning to a real place, which is a street corner in the city.

On the other hand, the connotative meaning is much more emotional and meaningful. The "corner" does not only represent a physical location, but also symbolizes the special memory of their first meeting and the beginning of love. The man keeps coming back because he feels nostalgic and emotionally connected to that moment. It shows that he still cannot forget the past and hopes to relive the happiness he once felt there. This lyric proves how strong romantic memories can affect a person's feelings and actions.

3.2 The Data Analysis 2

"I'm gonna camp in my sleeping bag, I'm not gonna move"

The lyric above describes someone planning to stay and sleep in that place by using a sleeping bag. In its denotative (literal) meaning, the line simply refers to physically camping or remaining at that location with a sleeping bag.

Nevertheless, the lyric also contains a deeper connotative meaning, representing loyalty, strong determination, and the willingness to keep waiting for the person he loves despite sacrificing personal comfort. The phrase "I'm not gonna move" reflects a hope that is both fragile and powerful, symbolizing an emotional promise to remain there faithfully until his loved one comes back.

3.3 The Data Analysis 3

"Maybe if I stay here long enough, she'll come back"

The lyric above shows the hope that if he stays in the same place for a long time, the woman he loves may come back. In its denotative (literal) meaning, the line simply describes a person believing that waiting physically in one place could make her return.

However, the lyric also contains a deeper connotative meaning, which reflects naive optimism and emotional denial. The word "maybe" suggests uncertainty and hidden doubt behind his hope, while the phrase "long enough" represents an unrealistic belief that time alone can fix his broken feelings. This lyric symbolizes the man's difficulty in accepting the end of the relationship and his inability to move on from the past.

3.4 The Data Analysis 4

"Maybe I'll get famous as the man who can't be moved"

The lyric above describes the possibility of becoming famous for continuing to stay in the same place. In its denotative (literal) meaning, the line simply refers to someone gaining attention because of his unusual act of remaining there for a long time.

However, the lyric also contains a deeper connotative meaning filled with tragic irony. The phrase "the man who can't be moved" is not only a physical description, but also a symbol of unwavering and unshakable love. It represents a man whose pain and loyalty become his identity, showing that he is willing to sacrifice everything for love, even if it leaves him heartbroken.

3.5 The Data Analysis 5

"If one day you wake up and find that you're missing me"

The lyric above imagines a situation where she realizes that he is no longer there. In its denotative (literal) meaning, the line simply describes someone noticing another person's absence and beginning to miss them.

However, the lyric also carries a deeper connotative meaning. It reflects the hidden hope that his ex will eventually regret losing him and finally understand the value of his love. The phrase "wake up and find" symbolizes an emotional awakening or realization, while "missing me" represents emotional validation, showing his desire to prove that his love was meaningful and important to her. This creates a bittersweet feeling of longing, regret, and hope.

4. Conclusion

This analysis shows that the song *The Man Who Can't Be Moved* by The Script contains more connotative meanings than denotative ones, with three examples of connotative meaning and two examples of denotative meaning found in the lyrics. Many of the lyrics use figurative language that goes beyond literal interpretation, such as portraying a man who remains at a street corner like an unmoving figure while continuing to wait even though his hope is slowly fading. In general, the main character represents strong loyalty in love and the emotional pain of heartbreak. The findings also prove that song lyrics often use implied meanings to express deep and complex emotions. Through

this study, the writer hopes to increase readers' understanding of Geoffrey Leech's theory of semantics and encourage further analysis of meanings in other songs. In the end, this research can help readers better understand the hidden meanings found in everyday language and works of art.

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