

A Semantic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Lyrics of a Million Dreams

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the lyrics of *A Million Dreams* using semantic theory, particularly Geoffrey Leech's differentiation between denotative (conceptual) and connotative (associative) meaning. Leech's framework is applied to examine how symbolic meanings and literal details coexist in poetic language. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis as the type of research. The data used in this research consists of the lyrics of the song *A Million Dreams*, supported by several books and journal articles as references for semantic theory. The analysis reveals that the lyrics contain denotative meanings that reflect clear and literal interpretations, such as specific imagery or events. However, the connotative meanings associated with feelings, imagination, and values are more dominant throughout the song. These connotative elements enrich the emotional depth of the lyrics. In conclusion, the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of *A Million Dreams* are interrelated and complement each other in conveying the inspirational and hopeful message of the song.

Keywords: *Denotative meaning; Connotative meaning; Song lyrics; Semantic.*

INTRODUCTION

In linguistic studies, the meaning of words in language is found in the discussion of semantics. Semantics addresses how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning. Semantics is usually defined as the study of meaning. It may be more appropriate to describe it as studying how linguistic forms interact with meaning. Just like the other components of linguistic structure, these relationships are also governed by rules. In semantics, meaning in English is different from sense. Meaning is an internal relationship between language elements, especially words. Meaning is related to interlanguage, which is to examine and hand over the meaning of a word by looking at how words relate to each other and distinguish them from others (Ratna Dewi, 2018). While lexical meaning is related to dictionary meaning, semantic studies include denotative and connotative meanings.

Denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning as listed in the dictionary. Denotative meaning is also called true meaning, while connotative meaning is untrue. Authors usually use denotative meaning to convey messages directly. Chaer states that denotative meaning is the same as referential meaning because this denotative meaning generally explains the actual meaning according to sight, smell, hearing, feeling, or other experiences (Hayati & Jadidah, 2022). Although connotative meaning has additional meanings influenced by context, feelings, and

cultural principles. To convey a message indirectly, writers often use connotative meaning. According to Djajasudarma, connotative meaning is meaning derived from cognitive meaning and combined with other elements of meaning. It is often referred to as "connotative meaning" for connotative meaning. If a word has a "taste value," whether positive or negative, then the word has connotation. If not, the word does not have connotation. However, this term is also referred to as neutral. (Hayati & Jadidah, 2022).

The study of meaning can be used to interpret a message in a word, phrase, or sentence, including song lyrics. Song lyrics created by the author are not just song lyrics; the author makes the lyrics have a message, and it is essential to understand how a lyric can convey a complex meaning. Complex song lyrics contain many layers of meaning that can be studied using linguistic analysis. In music, song lyrics are critical; lyrics function as a series of words arranged to accompany the melody, and lyrics are also a place for singers or songwriters to express themselves, their thoughts, and their experiences. One of the popular songs that became the official soundtrack of the movie *The Greatest Showman* in 2017 is the song "A Million Dreams," performed by Ziv Zaifman, Hugh Jackman, and Michelle Williams, which describes a dream, hope, and strong determination to achieve a better future. The lyrics are inspirational and full of meaning.

The song *A Million Dreams* presents many opportunities to be analyzed through semantic studies. The lyrics convey hope for a better future and create a strong visual image of dreams and hope. Using poetic and symbolic language, the lyrics can evoke emotions and build a connection with the listener. Therefore, it is essential to analyze how the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics contribute to the overall message.

Some previous studies have discussed denotative and connotative meanings in song lyrics from various genres and singers. For example, research by (Indah Lestari & Dwi Nitisari, 2022) analyzed the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of the song "Mockingbird" by Eminem. This study found that some lyrics contain denotative and connotative meanings that refer to emotional objects, and the connotative meaning of these lyrics relates to the context of family relationships in Eminem's real life.

An additional study by Pandu explain the literal meaning and figurative meaning in the lyrics of Pamungkas' song "To The Bone". The researcher found that the denotation tells about a man who really likes a woman and has a feeling of love that reaches his bones. Pamungkas, the ssinger also expresses the phrase using the sentence in the lyrics of this song: "Because maybe the greatest love of all is the one that the eyes can't see" this sentence expresses that how much love can be seen, love

will be much greater if it is not seen, like the love of parents to their children (Prasasti, 2023).

Niki Zefanya's song "La La Lost You" has denotative and connotative implications that are examined in another study (Hidayah & Bustam, 2023). This study came to the first conclusion that the song "La La Lost You" by NIKI depicts the bitterness of being in a relationship with a lover who must end it. But he frequently wants to know how his ex-lover is doing. Second, the song's denotative meaning describes enjoying a stunning sunset while wondering, "If I take the subway and if I drive, will she take the L train?"

From these three studies, the songs' themes are love, family, and heartbreak. However, no research has analyzed song lyrics' denotative and connotative meanings with universal and motivational themes, such as "A Million Dreams," highlighting hopes, dreams, and visions for the future. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill the gap by analyzing the denotative and connotative meanings in the song "A Million Dreams" more deeply through a semantic approach to find the messages implied in the lyrics.

METHODS

Subjects of Research

The research approach used in this study is descriptive qualitative research. According to Creswell, qualitative research is a research and understanding process based on a methodology that investigates social phenomena and human problems. In this approach, researchers create in-depth descriptions, examine vocabulary, provide detailed reports on respondents' perspectives, and conduct research in a natural environment (Murdiyanto, 2020). Descriptive research is an approach in which the researcher examines events and phenomena in a person's life and asks them to tell their story. The researcher then conveys this story chronologically (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021). The type of this research used is content analysis. Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make replicable and valid inferences from data by considering the context (Jumal Ahmad, 2018).

Instruments and Interview Questions

The research instruments used in this research are "A Million Dreams" song lyrics documents as the main object of analysis materials, the researchers utilized an online English dictionaries, and several books and journal articles semantic theory references.

Data Collection

The data collection technique used in this research is documentation. The analysis technique used by researchers is to justify the song, read the lyrics, and

connect the lyrics to the semantic meaning. Finally, the researcher presents the data in a table to make it easier for researchers to discuss the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers categorize words or phrases according to the type of meaning in order to better understand the use of denotative meaning and connotative meanings in the lyrics of A Million Dreams. Based on Geoffrey Leech's theory of meaning, this classification process is performed by identifying each lyric that contains both literal meaning (denotative) and additional meaning that is emotional, symbolic, or cultural (connotative). To facilitate further analysis and discussion, the classification results are presented in the following table:

Table. 1 The Classification of Denotative and Connotative Meaning

No	Lyrics	Word/Phrase	Types of Meaning	
			Denotative	Conotative
1	I close my eyes	Close my eyes	✓	
2	And I can see	See	✓	✓
3	The world that's waiting up for me	World, waiting		✓
4	That I call my own	Call my own		✓
5	Through the dark, through the door	Dark, door		✓
6	Through where no one's been before	No one's been before	✓	✓
7	But it feels like home	Home		✓
8	They can say it all sounds crazy	Crazy		✓
9	I don't care, call me crazy	Call me crazy	✓	✓
10	We can live in a world that we design	World, design		✓
11	Every night I lie in bed	Lie in bed	✓	
12	The brightest colors fill my head	colors fill my head		✓
13	A million dreams are keeping me awake	Dreams, keeping awake		✓
14	I think of what the world could be	Think, world	✓	✓
15	A vision of the one I see	Vision		✓
16	A million dreams is all it's gonna take	Million dreams		✓
17	There's a house we can build	House, build	✓	✓
18	Every room inside is filled	Room, filled	✓	✓
19	Each one there to make you smile	Smile		✓
20	However big, however small	Big, small	✓	✓
21	You may be right, you may be wrong	Right, wrong	✓	
22	Say that you'll bring me along	Bring me along	✓	✓

23	To the world I close my eyes to see	Close eyes to see	✓
	Frequency	11	20

Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Song Lyrics

This section obtained from the data table analysis of the song A Million Dreams lyrics shows that the frequency of the denotative meaning is 11 lyrics, and the connotative meaning is 20. The meaning of words with only one meaning, namely denotative meaning, totals three lyrics with no connotation meaning. In contrast, the denotative meaning, which also has connotative meaning, amounts to 8 lyrics. The analysis results in the table above show that connotative meaning here looks more dominant with 20 lyrics.

The lyrics of the song A Million Dreams include denotative meaning or meaning that does not contain symbolic or figurative meaning, only represents literal meaning. Leech states that a word or sentence that directly refers to a real thing from the word or sentence without any emotional, cultural, or personal meaning is said to be conceptual meaning (Umagandhi et al., 2017). The following lyrics include denotative meaning or conceptual meaning, namely:

1. "*I close my eyes*": This sentence can be categorized into denotative meaning because it does not have a figurative meaning. The sentence "I close my eyes" here means the action of someone physically closing their eyes. "I" is the subject, "close" is the action, and "eyes" is the object of the action.
2. "*Every night, I lie in bed*": This sentence also includes a denotative meaning that describes a person's routine activities. Every night I lie in bed means an activity that has been done regularly: someone who routinely lies in four beds every night.
3. "*You may be right, you may be wrong*": It is also categorized as a denotative word with no other figurative meaning. This sentence expresses the possibility that someone could be right or wrong. The words "right" and "wrong" indicate two possibilities that can be understood logically, and this word is factual.

In addition to the denotative meaning, the song A Million Dreams has more connotative meaning, which is a meaning that has an additional meaning, such as a sure hope, feeling, or culture. Leech mentions that connotative will exist when a word or phrase carries a social or emotional meaning other than its literal meaning (Alexander, 2018). Here are some lyrics that fall into the category of connotative meaning, namely:

1. "*But it feels like home*": This sentence is categorized as connotative because it has a figurative meaning. "home" generally means a house or a place to live. In the context of these lyrics, the word "home" does not indicate a physical building but expresses a feeling of comfort and security. The phrase "feels like home" is more precisely like saying that the place feels like a place that is missed, even though

the form is not necessarily the physical building of a house. The word "home" here contains an emotional meaning that, if explained literally, the impression is not conveyed.

2. "*We can live in a world that we design*": In the lyrics of this part, it is also included as a connotative meaning with other meanings, such as freedom or hope for the future. The word "world" here does not mean the real world but a world found in imagination that can be imagined or fantasized about. This meaning is connotative because the sentence gives a broader picture than the literal meaning.
3. "*A million dreams are keeping me awake*": This sentence is included in the connotative meaning because it symbolizes a great desire or aspiration in life. 2 words are highlighted in this lyric: the first is the word "dreams," which can be interpreted as dreams while sleeping, and the second is the word "awake" which means awake. However, in the context of this song, it is interpreted as hopes or dreams that mean there are many desires so that they cannot sleep or are always awake. Sentences are emotional and contain intense, uplifting desires.

Furthermore, lyrics have double meanings, namely the lyrics of the song A Million Dreams, which have denotative meanings and connotative meanings. It can be interpreted that these words or phrases can be understood literally but, on the other hand, contain deep meanings when examined from the context of the song, emotions, and symbolic values. Leech calls this a combination of denotative and connotative meanings. Here are some examples of the lyrics, namely:

1. "*And I can see*": Like the original lyric Close My Eyes, both have physical actions on the sense of sight; the word "see" here means to see physically. But in the context of this song, the phrase symbolizes a hope or vision. So, the phrase can tell that someone can imagine or describe future hopes. It is an imaginative and emotional phrase that shows something that is not yet real.
2. "*There's a house we can build*": This lyric can also be interpreted literally, but the phrase can also symbolize other meanings. A "house" is a physical building as a place to live, or the sentence can be interpreted as a house someone can build. The word "house," in its connotative meaning, symbolizes a shared future or a dream that can be built with someone. Building a house here means not only creating a place to live but can also be interpreted as creating a future goal or desire.
3. "*However big, however small*": This lyric also includes the double meaning, which can be interpreted literally as meaning that this phrase expresses the physical size of something big or small. Connotatively, in the context of this song, the words "big" and "small" here indicate hopes or dreams that cannot be measured or judged by how big or small they are but by how deeply a person interprets

their hopes. So, big or small hopes or dreams here should not be underestimated and should be appreciated.

The Role of Songs in Conveying Messages through Denotative and Connotative Meanings

Denotative and connotative meanings in a song can form a whole emotionally rich and thematically strong message. Denotative meaning describes something real or an action that can be interpreted literally by the character in the song. This can provide a picture of reality and help you feel closer to the situation or condition of the song. The connotative meaning is more in a song because it forms a meaningful song message. The song A Million Dreams conveys a dream that exists in our subconscious while sleeping, but as a vision of life that can be designed and believed. Thus, the combination of denotative meaning and connotative meaning in a song lyric forms the song's central message. Song messages are not only conveyed literally, but figurative or connotative meanings can convey messages from symbolic, emotional, social, and cultural aspects. The song A Million Dreams conveys that no matter how small or big a dream is, it can be fought for, is worthy of respect, and can be a person's future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research above, the lyrics of A Million Dreams contain denotative meanings that reflect literal meanings or meanings that can be understood directly without symbolism or figures of speech. Some lyrics, such as "I close my eyes," "Every night I lie in bed," and "You may be right, you may be wrong," describe physical actions or real situations performed or experienced by someone. These meanings are factual and concrete and do not contain emotions or additional values. The denotative meaning in this song serves to present reality and form a setting or atmosphere that is easy for listeners to understand. The connotative meaning in the lyrics of A Million Dreams is more dominant. Examples of lyrics such as "But it feels like home," "We can live in a world that we design," and "A million dreams are keeping me awake" contain emotional and symbolic meanings. The words or phrases not only refer to the literal meaning but also reflect hope, comfort, freedom, and enthusiasm in achieving future dreams. These connotations enrich the song with deep, emotionally, and culturally relevant meanings, creating a depth that cannot be conveyed through denotative meaning alone. The denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of A Million Dreams complement each other in conveying the whole message of the song. The denotative meaning provides a literal foundation that helps listeners understand the context and situation experienced by the characters in the song. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning forms an emotional depth and conveys the song's central message: dreams and hopes, no matter how

small, are worth fighting for and believing in as part of the future. Combining these two meanings reinforces the song's theme of faith, imagination, and the power of dreams in shaping one's life.

SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study essentially show that the song "A Million Dreams" can effectively teach English students denotative and connotative meanings. To enrich the reference of teaching materials, further research should investigate other songs using comparable semantic methods. This song can be helpful for English teachers as it can improve students' semantic understanding and motivate them contextually and emotionally. For learners, this kind of song analysis can help them expand their vocabulary and gain a more interesting and meaningful knowledge of meaning..

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