

SIGNS THROUGH SONGS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE LYRICS

Denisa Cevania¹⁾, Diah Merrita²⁾

¹⁾²⁾English Department, Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing LIA Jakarta, Jl. Pengadegan Timur
Raya No.3 Jakarta Selatan 12770, Indonesia
diahmer@stbalia.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of three songs using Barthes' notion of semiotics. It is conducted in order to find out the meaning of self-confidence within them by unpacking the messages appeared. This study employs descriptive qualitative research. The result reveals that all three songs contain self-confidence meanings through the denotative and connotative meanings within the song lyrics in each stanza. The lyrics implied that listeners should be able to build their self-confidence in order to face the challenges ahead and support others so that they can live peacefully without having no conflict with others.

Keywords: Connotative, Denotative, Semiotics, Signs, Song Lyrics

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis makna denotasi dan konotasi dalam tiga lirik lagu dengan menggunakan teori Semiotika yang diprakarsai oleh Barthes. Penelitian dilakukan untuk menemukan makna kepercayaan diri dalam lirik dengan membongkar pesan yang muncul menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga lagu mengandung makna kepercayaan diri melalui denotasi dan konotasi dalam lirik lagu di tiap-tiap bait. Lirik tersebut juga menyiratkan pesan bahwa pendengar lagu sebaiknya mampu membangun kepercayaan diri untuk menghadapi tantangan dan mendukung satu sama lain sehingga mereka dapat hidup dengan damai tanpa konflik dengan orang lain.

Kata kunci: Denotasi, Konotasi, Semiotika, Tanda, Lirik Lagu

INTRODUCTION

Language is simple to discover in life, one of which is found in literature. Literature is an art frame that was born from the expression of one's considerations and feelings through wonderful language, profound thoughts and messages which are the creation of the author (Faoziah, 2018). Literature is a creative platform for people to communicate their beliefs and messages to the masses. It is an art that was created using the creative use of words as the main basis of the media, and it can be applied to written media such as books and novels and spoken media such as songs and screenplays (Wellek & Warren, 1970).

However, words are not the only profound messages of literature, artistic works have a range of different dictions and can be more artful than a conventional language. The use of the artistic language is what distinguishes literature as a work of art from the use of daily language (Kusumadewi et al., 2020). Language itself is related to semiotics, which is a study field that investigates the meaning of signs. The use of language within the signs is related to semiotics study in order to find the messages and the meaning of them. Therefore, semiotics is used in order to determine the meaning of signs. It is derived from the Greek, *semainon* (signifier) and *semainomenon* (signified). It is the study of signs in societal life (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Eco (1976) also contributes his thought on semiotics that it is

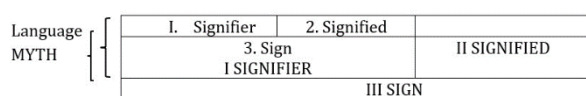
concerned with everything which can be taken as a sign.

One type of media that has meanings construed using semiotics is songs or music, defined as a tool to deliver someone's thoughts and feelings through the use of musical elements to be dissected by the masses (Doni & Timu, 2018). Music can also be interpreted as a communication medium through the creative use of audio, in which parts of the music contained messages that can be found within the music itself or within the song lyrics. They are used by the lyricists as a tool to express their beliefs and emotions to listeners through the combination of different language types. Lyricists see them as something that symbolizes their individual characteristics as the reflection of themselves (Knowles & Moon, 2006). Therefore, lyrics have similar functions to poetry as each verse of the lyrics contains messages and meanings that the lyricists wanted to convey. It is often related to tunes, which are a combination of symbolic languages that contained expressions or statements that the producer would like to convey (Bryantoro, 2020).

Saussure introduces the term 'semiology', while Peirce proposes the term 'semiotic'. Saussure's theory is concerned with a dichotomy, a sign encompassing two components, which are signifier and signified. While Peirce's notion is concerned with three-dimensional system classified into sign, object, and interpretant (Yakin & Totu, 2014). On the other hand, Barthes defines

the two orders of signification, the first order consisted of reality, signs, denotation, signifier and signified. The second order consisted of culture, shape substance, connotation and myth. The overall result of signifier and signified would produce signs under two forms, verbal signs such as discourse and talks and visual signs such as the use of pictures and imageries. Both of these forms of sign contained signifier and signified within them. In addition to both signifier and signified, the order also defined denotation and connotation, to which Barthes (1967; 1957) described denotation as an explicit relation between the signifier and the meanings within everyday life occurrences. These meanings are often literal and construed with the usual meaning of the sign itself, which is constrained under the dictionary definitions. Unlike denotation, the connotation meaning is hidden and indirect meanings are interpreted through background contexts, such as culture, perception, and someone's attitude (Barthes, 1967). Barthes' semiological process is presented as follows.

Figure 1. Barthes' Semiological Process (Barthes, 1957)



There were many scholars discussing the analysis of song lyrics, one

of them was Fauzan & Sakinah (2020). They investigated the denotation and connotation meanings and the myth within Sheila on 7's song, *Film Favorit*. They applied Barthes's theory using a qualitative method. The results of the research revealed that the song lyrics featured the meaning of love, and how someone must commit to protect others to keep his relationship. In addition, the song reflected modern society by presenting the daily routines and the romance of people that lived during the millennium generation.

Another study was from Wati et al., (2022) who investigated denotation and connotation meanings contained in the Arabic song, *Kun Fayakun*. This research also adopted Barthes's theory. It was revealed that *Kun Fayakun* song was the embodiment of how we, as the servant of God, must plead and pray to Him to avoid punishment and suffer for not following God's rules. This was shown in the song in which a servant that does not believe in Him will get punished and be humiliated by the power of God. Furthermore, since lyrics could be a reflection of belief and emotions (Knowles & Moon, 2006), using Barthes' theory of semiotics, this study investigates the denotation and connotation meanings of self-confidence implied in the lyrics of the three selected songs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. Creswell (2018) opines that qualitative approach is a research method conducted by collecting information from the data in the form of text or images and drawing a conclusion by explaining the data between the participants and the events becoming part of the research. Tracy (2020) defines the three cores of qualitative research, such as self-reflexivity (the events, experiences, and roles that the researcher faced), context (the process of building the phenomenon and acquiring the contextual information), and thick description (the method used to engage).

The data are three song lyrics sung by Andra Day ("Raise Up") released in 2015, Demi Lovato ("Confident") released in 2015, and Sia Furler ("Unstoppable") released in 2016. Those three songs are obtained by surfing the internet and are analyzed using Barthes' semiotic model as follows:

- a. all stanzas are analyzed to find out denotative meanings;
- b. after analyzing the denotative meanings, further analysis is to find out the connotative meanings.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The three songs used as the data of the research contained meanings that are related to self-confidence. They are about

a story of how important it is to be confident in order to be stronger and able to overcome all the challenges ahead. These song lyrics encourage listeners to build their self-confidence in order to face all kinds of struggles as well as to support them to build a peaceful life. There are thirty two signs which were classified into denotations meaning and connotations meaning.

The lyrics *Are you ready? Ha!* in the first datum means an invitation to all of the women to step up and be confident and face people who mocked them. The connotative meaning for this line is to call out the people who had faced terrible fate on their lives to be brave in order to stand with all the obstacles they have to face. In this part, the lyrics *Are you ready? Ha!* shows the singer's invitation and encouragement to her listeners to be courageous and confident to face the negative circumstances that were caused by the people that made them uncomfortable with their lives.

In the following lyrics, the word *boss* denotatively means that she is a leader of her business or her life, she is the only one who is able to take over what she wants to do. Connotatively, this refers to the fact that she is the one who control everything in her life as she just wanted to be herself without any pressure or restrain from everyone in order to live her lives to its fullest with no obstacles or troubles ahead of her. This lyric has the meaning in self-confidence, which showed

how the singer convinces her listeners that there will always be someone who took a major role in their lives to keep them confident without any worries about others.

Moreover, the lyrics *Now I'm letting go*, denotatively means she would like to let go all of her acts that bring everyone down and make a change in her personality. While, connotatively, it shows she already realized what she has to do in order to be herself and became a much better person with her own ways in order to bring peace to everyone. The self-confidence meaning in this lyric encouraged everyone to let go all of the past grudges that affected their lives and look ahead in order to become a better person. By letting go of their past experiences, they can build their self-confidence to make a change in their personalities to live a peaceful life.

The following lyric, *Bitch, I run this show. So leave the lights on*, means she keeps to live her own life and "leave the lights on" means that other people should not intervene with her situation. In connotative meaning, the word *show* refers to her life after being treated badly by someone else, which followed with the line *leave the lights on*, which means that she wants everyone to not interfere so they will not share the same fate with the girl. This data also contains self-confidence meaning where she

encouraged everyone to be able to stand against the people who treat their lives badly, as the singer believed that the people who bullied someone have no right to interfere the people that were not guilty from their wrong reasons. Everyone should be able to stay confident and protect others from harm to avoid the terrible fate that can affect their lives.

The lyric *What's wrong with being confident?* means there is nothing wrong with being confident, and everyone should be able to voice his opinion. Connotatively, she feels disappointed that she is not able to voice her opinion because she thinks that her opinion mattered the most. This lyric is related to self-confidence as the singer tells everyone that he should be able to voice his opinions without being worried about people against his. Everyone should be confident and fight back from all the grudges.

The following lyric, *It's time to get the chains out. Is your tongue tied up?*, means someone is practically speechless after someone else is able to make a dramatic change to his social life. Connotatively, it is sarcasm meaning someone who is surprised. She proves to everyone that she can be a better person and able to shock everyone with her positive change to her life. In summary, denotative and connotative meanings in "Confident" song are presented as follows.

Table 1. "Confident" Song

| Number of Stanza | Lyrics | Denotation | Connotation |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| 1 | Are you ready? Ha! | The lyric "Are you ready? Ha!" means an invitation to all of the women to step up and be confident. | The connotative meaning for this line is to call out the people who had faced terrible fate on their lives to be brave. |
| 2 | It's time for me to take it. I'm the boss right now. | The word 'boss' in denotative meaning, means that she is a leader of her business or her life. | This refers that she was the one who controls everything in her life, and she will not allow everyone that has mocked her to take control. |
| 5 | Now I'm letting go. I make my own choice. | It means she wants to let go all of her acts that bring everyone down and make a change in her personality. | The connotative meaning showed that she already knows what to do in order to be herself, and became a better person with her own ways. |
| 6 | Bitch, I run this show. So leave the lights on. | It means she kept to live her own life and "leave the lights on" means that other people should not intervene with her situation. | The word "show" refers to her life after being treated badly by someone else. |
| 9 | What's wrong with being confident? | This means there is nothing wrong to be confident, and everyone should be able to voice their opinion without everyone consents. | This means she felt disappointed that she was not able to voice her opinion. |
| 10 | It's time to get the chains out Is your tongue tied up? | The words 'tongue tied up' means someone practically speechless after someone was able to make a drastic change to the social life. | The connotative meaning is a sarcasm of someone who was surprise after witnessing someone that has changed the social life. |

As the second song title, the song "Raise Up" appears with the following analysis. The first stanza in the second datum contains denotation and connotation as well. Denotatively, the word *broken down and tired* means she feels distressed after hearing all of the bad reasons surrounding herself by the people who despise her. While connotatively, *broken down and tired* refers to her weaken mental and depression after hearing all of the bad talks from others. She would like to move on and forget all of the criticism from them who hate her.

Meanwhile, the lyrics *life on merry go round* means the life is full of arrogant people and it keeps happening within her life. Connotatively, it symbolizes complicated life as a merry go round where there are a lot of people who insult others, including the woman herself. While the word *fighter* means a person who is able to defend her from all of the people who harassed her. Connotatively, the word *fighter* means someone that defends and supports her as well as protect her from other people who insult her.

Moreover, the fourth stanza, denotatively means that she is brave enough to face and fight against people who criticized her, and she will do the same as an act of revenge for all of the bad feelings in the past. From the connotative meaning, the lyric is still related to the previous lyrics implying that she has realized that the *fighter* is actually herself. This lyric has relation with self-confidence by telling her listeners that they can be brave and face all the criticism and bad

treatments by everyone who judge them. The word *fighter* in the lyric refers to someone's self-confidence to fight back from the harassment in order to create a peaceful life.

Denotation and connotation are also found in the fifth stanza. Denotatively, she wants to rise up to get rid of those who make themselves miserable.

Connotatively, the word *mountains* is a symbolization of obstacles that lied in her path represented as the people who harassed her. This lyric implied that she is brave enough to fight against the people who treated her badly in order to change her life. This lyric is related to self-confidence and is connected to the previous lyric. The word *mountains* refers to the challenges that someone has to face after being harassed by the people who criticized him. These lyrics encourage the listeners that they have the confidence in order to 'move mountains', which means to be brave and able voice their opinions against the others who harassed them in the past.

In addition, the lyrics *And I'll rise up. I'll rise like the day* implied that she will rise from all of her grievances by the people who insults her and live peacefully without hating each other. In connotative meaning, the word *day* refers to a sun or a peaceful life, which is the life that she wants everyone to support, standing higher like a sun. She wants herself as the brightest star that can guide people to live peace without hating each other. The relation with the self-confidence for this lyric is how being confidence can vow the

path in creating a peaceful life. The singer encourages the listeners to stand and rise from all of the bad experiences in order to live peace without any arguments between the people. They should be able

to support with others in order to keep their self-confidence and live for the better and peaceful life. In summary, denotative and connotative meanings in “Raise Up” song are presented as follows.

Table 2. “Raise Up” Song

| Number of Stanza | Lyrics | Denotation | Connotation |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| 1 | You're broken down and tired | In denotative meaning, broken down and tired means she feels distressed after hearing all of the bad reasons surrounding herself by the people who despise her. | In connotative meaning, broken down and tired refers to her weakened mental state and depressed after hearing all of the bad talks from the people. |
| 2 | Of living life on a merry go round | The denotative meaning "of living life on merry go round" means the life is full of arrogant people and it keeps happening within her life. | In connotative meaning, it symbolizes complicated life as a merry go round where there are a lot of people who insult others, including the woman herself. |
| 3 | And you can't find the fighter | In denotative meaning, it means she cannot find a person who is able to defend her from all of the people who harassed her. | In connotative meaning, “the fighter” refers to someone that defend and support her. |
| 4 | But I see it in you so we gonna walk it out | In denotative meaning, she understands that she was brave enough to face people who unjustly criticized and insulted her. | In connotative meaning, this lyric still related to the previous lyrics, it implied that she has realized that the “fighter” was actually herself. |
| 5 | And move mountains | In denotative meaning, she wants to rise up to get rid of those who make themselves miserable. | in connotative meaning is that she was able to be brave and fight against the people who treated her badly in her life. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | And I'll rise up. I'll rise like the day | In denotative meaning, It implied that she will rise from all of her grievances by the people who insulted her. live peace without hating each other. | In connotative meaning, the word "day" refers to a sun or a peaceful life, which is the life that she wanted everyone to support. |
|---|---|---|---|

The last song title, *Unstoppable*, also contain denotative and connotative meaning regarding self-confidence. In the first stanza, the lyrics implied that someone who is seen always smiling throughout all day is the one who was able to hide his traumatizing experiences behind as indicated by the line "I'll do it till the sun goes down and all through the night time." The word *town* in the lyrics has a denotative meaning that symbolizes as if other people can be tricked easily by smiling. The lyric gives personification to the word *town* by implicating that the town or the people can be fooled by staying positive.

In the second stanza, the lyrics is *I'll tell you what you wanna hear. Leave my sunglasses on while I shed a tear. It's never the right time.* The word *sunglasses* has both denotative and connotative meaning. The denotative meaning implied the tool to hide her sad emotions, particularly her eyes in which no one would be able to see that she is actually teary eyed from all the past experiences. Connotatively, it signifies her lack of strength to face against all of the troubles from the past, and she has to use her sunglasses as her happy face, and she always smiles all day to hide her emotions from everyone.

In the third stanza, the word *armor* has denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotatively, it means her protection that she used to keep her away from the danger and abuse by everyone who despised her. Connotatively, *armor* refers to her being weak and able to be emotionally damaged by the treatment from those who are against her opinions. This lyric has a relation to self-confidence, as the word *armor* refers to her confidence to fight against those who had harassed her. Therefore, the lyric implied that everyone should put his armor by building self-confidence in order to face challenges and troubles ahead.

While, in the fourth stanza, the word *Porsche* means a luxury, classy, and expensive brand of a car. The connotative meaning of the word *Porsche* implied that she is unstoppable and can withstand all of the pain and treatment without any sign of rest. The relation with self-confidence is that her confidence can stand all of the harassment and pain from all the bad treatments from others, as by building self-confidence, she can be brave and able to voice her opinions. The lyric implied that she can be unstoppable because she has the confidence to fight back. The table of denotative and connotative meaning regarding this analysis is as follows.

Table 3. "Unstoppable" Song

| Number of Stanza | Lyrics | Denotation | Connotation |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | All smiles, I know what it takes to fool this town. I'll do it 'til the sun goes down and all through the night time. Oh yeah. | The denotative meanings implied that someone that smiled all day were able to hide their past experiences behind. | The word "town" in the lyrics has a connotative meaning that symbolized the people, as if they can be tricked easily by smiling. |
| 2 | I'll tell you what you wanna hear. Leave my sunglasses on while I shed a tear. It's never the right time. | The denotative meaning implied the tool to hide her sad emotions, so that no one would be able to see her actual feelings. | Connotatively, it signified her lack of strength to face against all of the troubles from the past. |
| 3 | I put my armor on, show you how strong how I am. | Denotatively, the word "armor" it symbolized her protection that she used to keep her away from the danger and the abuse. | Connotatively, "armor" refers to her being weak and able to be emotionally damaged. |
| 4 | I'm a Porsche with no brakes. | The word "Porsche" in denotative meaning symbolized that she represents a classy and expensive car. | The connotative meaning of the word "Porsche" implied that she was unstoppable and can withstand all of the pain and treatment without any sign of rest. |

This study is conducted in order to fulfill the purpose of the research, which is to determine the meaning of self-confidence that is contained in the lyrics of the three selected songs using semiotic theory. From the result of the research, this study uses semiotic theory to find out the messages contained within the three songs. Parker stated (Doni & Timu, 2018) that song was a form of melodic frequency which contained messages that affected the human's neurological emotions and feelings. Furthermore, the message within the songs can also be reinterpreted through the use of lyrics, which

manifested the feelings and perception that the singer wanted to express to his listeners. This is supported by a statement from Sudjiman (Briyantoro, 2020), that song lyrics composed of rhymes or series of sentences that carried the song writer's state of mind to be perceived by the masses. Therefore, song lyrics present meanings and messages that the song writers wanted to convey to their listeners. This research also supports what have been conducted by Fauzan & Sakinah (2020) and Wati et al., (2022) that denotative and connotative meaning implied through song lyrics.

CONCLUSION

All three song lyrics reveal that the singer tends to convey to her listeners that signs appear in the lyrics in form of denotative and connotative meanings. These meanings have a relation with self-confidence in order to encourage them to build their self-confidence to face all kinds of challenges in life which were described as follows. The first song title is "Confident" which was released in 2015 contained meanings that invites her listeners to build their confidence within themselves in order to face the challenges ahead, build a peaceful life, and is able to fight back all the negative thoughts in order to be stand out against the others. While the second song is "Raise Up" is about the grudges and the bad memories that came from someone with no confidence to fend off the people who harassed someone's opinion. From the lyrics, the singer expressed that the people

should be able to rise up and build their confidence to fight all of the people that harass others and show utmost care towards those who really need help from the others. Those who have enough self-confidence can become the figure for the people in order to strive for the world without any conflicts. Furthermore, the third song, "Unstoppable", also brings meaning of self-confidence based on the denotation and connotation. The lyrics reveal that those with enough confidence can become unstoppable and be very brave in order to voice their opinions. Also, the lyrics implied how self-confidence can make the listeners be able to go through their lives without any issues and troubles that can affect daily life. Those that have built their self-confidence can fight through all kinds of challenges on their path and are superior enough to help others build their bravery to fight back.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. The Noonday Press.
- Barthes, R. (1967). *Elements of semiology*. Hill and Wang.
- Bryantoro, R. A. (2020). Analisis semantik

stilistika gaya bahasa dalam lirik lagu

Hikaru Nara karya Goose House.

Japanese Research on Linguistics, Literature, and Culture, 2(2), 126–142.

<https://doi.org/10.33633/jr.v2i2.39>
92

Creswell, J. W. & C. J. D. (2018). *Research*

- design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publishing.
- Doni, M. Y. D. E., & Timu, A. H. (2018). Analisis semiotika pesan sosial dalam lagu Awas Dong Dengar. *Jurnal Communication, 1*, 10–22.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.
- Faoziah, I. (2018). Gaya bahasa pada lirik lagu dalam album Gajah karya Tulus. *Pendidikan, Kebahasaan, Dan Sastra Indonesia, 2*(2), 140–149.
- Fauzan, F., & Sakinah, M. N. (2020). The denotative and connotative meaning in Sheila on 7 song lyrics “Film Favorit.” *SOSIOHUMANIORA: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora, 6*(1), 9–18.
<https://doi.org/10.30738/sosio.v6i1.6339>
- Knowles, M., & Moon, R. (2006). *Introducing metaphor*. Routledge.
- Kusumadewi, N. L., Sudana, D., & Imperiani, E. D. A. (2020). The portrayal of women in selected billboard’s top 100 chart songs (2015-2018): A semiotic analysis. *Passage, 8*(1), 59–86.
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wati, T., Ikmaliana, D. S., & Mustolehudin, M. (2022). Representasi makna denotasi dan konotasi dalam lirik lagu Kun Fayakun (Analisis semiotika Roland Barthes). *Alibbaa’: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, 3*(1), 73–102.
<https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v3i1.5172>
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1970). *Theory of literature*. Penguin Books.
- Yakin, H. S. M., & Totu, A. (2014). The semiotic perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A brief comparative study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 155*(October), 4–8.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.247>