

An Analysis of Meaning in Adele's Songs in The Album 21

Nadia Salim ^{a *} , Rahman Taufiqrianto Dako ^b , Haris Danial ^c 

^{a,b,c} English Language Study Program Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

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KEYWORDS

Semantic approach, Meaning analysis, Lyrics in song.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the types of meaning found in the lyrics of Adele's song from the album 21, based on the theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech. Employing a qualitative method, the study analyzed selected song lyric to uncover various types of meaning conveyed through Adele's expressive and poetic language. The analysis focuses on Leech's seven types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic. The data were taken from six song in the album, with a total of 17 data points analyzed. The results show that conceptual meaning is the most frequently found, appearing in 7 data points, while collocative meaning appears the least, with only 2 data found. This indicated that context plays an important role in his song lyrics are interpreted. Through this study, it is expected that readers can gain insight into how meaning in song lyrics can be analyzed from a linguistic, particularly semantic perspective.

KATA KUNCI

Pendekatan semantik, Analisis makna, Lirik dalam lagu.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis makna yang ditemukan dalam lirik lagu Adele dari album 21, berdasarkan teori yang diajukan oleh Geoffrey Leech. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis lirik lagu terpilih untuk mengungkap berbagai jenis makna yang disampaikan melalui bahasa ekspresif dan puitis Adele. Analisis difokuskan pada tujuh jenis makna Leech: konseptual, konotatif, sosial, afektif, reflektif, kolokatif, dan tematik. Data diambil dari enam lagu dalam album, dengan total 17 titik data yang dianalisis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa makna konseptual adalah yang paling sering ditemukan, muncul dalam 7 titik data, sementara makna kolokatif muncul paling sedikit, dengan hanya 2 data yang ditemukan. Ini menunjukkan bahwa konteks memainkan peran penting dalam bagaimana lirik lagu ditafsirkan. Melalui penelitian ini, diharapkan pembaca dapat memperoleh wawasan tentang bagaimana makna dalam lirik lagu dapat dianalisis dari perspektif linguistik, khususnya semantik.

* Corresponding author name: Nadia Salim, Rahman Taufiqrianto Dako, Haris Danial
E-mail address: mtdako@ung.ac.id

Introduction

Language is a complex tool of communication, rich with meaning. In linguistics, semantics the study of meaning is an important branch that aims to understand how meaning is transmitted through language. One medium that is rich in semantic value is song lyrics. Similar to poetry, song lyrics contain layers of meaning that reflect the emotions, culture, and personal experiences of the writer. Popular music, as a form of cultural expression, is closely tied to people's lives. Song lyrics often carry profound meanings, both literal and figurative.

Adele, a British singer, is known for her ability to convey emotion through powerful and poetic lyrics. Her album *21*, released in 2011, is one of her most iconic works, exploring universal themes such as love, loss, and healing. In linguistic studies, the semantic theory developed by Leech (1981) provides a systematic approach to analyzing meaning. This theory categorizes meaning into seven types: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings. This study aims to identify and analyze the types of meaning Adele's song lyrics based on Leech's semantic theory.

The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on six selected songs from the *21* album. The unit of analysis is the song lyrics, particularly those that contain meaning classified by Leech. This research focuses on identifying, classifying, and analyzing the various types of meaning found within the lyrics of Adele's *21* album.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative content analysis method, focusing deeply on the meanings found in the lyrics of Adele's album *21*. The choice of this method is grounded in Creswell's explanation of qualitative research as a process of understanding human or social problems through detailed inquiry, involving multiple stages of data collection and analysis to ensure validity and richness of insight (Creswell, 2018). Thus, this method fits perfectly to uncover and characterize the different types of meaning expressed in Adele's songs.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this research is the lyrics of selected songs from Adele's *21* album, which were downloaded from the internet. The researcher carefully selected songs that contain significant meanings, extracting information from verses, stanzas, and individual words to serve as the foundation for analysis.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through a note-taking method that involved several steps:

- First, the researcher downloaded the full lyrics of the album's songs.
- Second, five songs were chosen for detailed analysis based on their meaningful content.

□ Third, the researcher read and immersed herself in the lyrics, aiming to understand the various types of meanings conveyed.

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the researcher applied Leech's (1981) theory of seven types of meaning: logical (conceptual), connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings. The analytical process included:

- Observing the lyrics to grasp their overall significance.
- Classifying the data according to Leech's categories of meaning.
- Systematically organizing the findings into descriptive paragraphs.
- Supplementing the analysis with literal meanings from the Cambridge Dictionary to clarify terms.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This chapter unfolds the heart of the research detailed findings and discussions that answer the research question: What types of meaning emerge from Adele's songs in the album 21? Guided by the theories explained in Chapter 2, each piece of data is carefully analyzed to reveal the layered meanings behind the lyrics.

Presentation of Data

Using Leech's (1981) seven types of meaning as a lens, the researcher examined five songs from Adele's 21: Set Fire to the Rain, Take It All, Turning Tables, I'll Be Waiting, and He Won't Go. The data collected includes selected lyrics ten in total that showcase a spectrum of meanings. These findings are systematically presented and discussed to illuminate the rich emotional and semantic layers embedded in the songs.

Types of Meaning Found

The analysis unveiled a beautiful tapestry of meaning in Adele's lyrics, categorized into conceptual, connotative, affective, reflected, collocative, social, and thematic meanings per Leech's framework. However, in this study, five types were predominantly found and will be explored in detail below.

1. Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning, also known as denotative or cognitive meaning, refers to the literal, dictionary-based sense of words and phrases as they function in communication (Leech, 1981). In Adele's songs, conceptual meanings form the foundation upon which deeper emotions and stories are built.

The data found were:

- "I set fire to the rain" (from Set Fire to the Rain) Here, flames literally mean burning gas but metaphorically symbolize passion, destruction, and letting go. The

singer metaphorically burns her memories and emotions to free herself from a painful relationship.

2. Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning goes beyond the dictionary it captures the emotional, cultural, or symbolic values that words carry. It's where the feelings and subtle messages hide. The data found were:

□ The word “rose” in “And as it fell, you rose to claim it” (from *Turning Tables*) symbolizes love, hope, and rescue. While a rose literally is a flower with thorns, here it becomes a metaphor for support and emotional salvation.

3. Affective Meaning

Affective meaning channels the speaker's emotions, coloring the words with feelings that influence the listener's mood and reaction. The data found were:

□ “Don't look back at this crumbling fool” (from *Take It All*) carries a raw sense of heartbreak and finality. Crumbling here conveys emotional collapse, painting a picture of devastation and the painful decision to move on.

4. Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning occurs when a word's multiple meanings interact, producing a layered effect. The data found were:

□ The phrase “under your thumb” reflects both literal and metaphorical meanings: the thumb as a finger and as a symbol of control and oppression. This shows the singer's struggle to breathe under her partner's dominance.

5. Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning explores how words' meanings are shaped by the company they keep. The data found were:

□ “Burn” and “dust” in the lyrics evoke destruction and finality burning something down until it turns to dust, symbolizing the end of pain and memories.

These associations add texture to the lyrics, creating new layers of interpretation from familiar words. The rich meanings embedded in Adele's 21 reveal her journey through love, heartbreak, hope, and self-discovery. Each layer of meaning from the literal to the emotional, from the symbolic to the interactive and tells a story that resonates deeply with listeners, transforming simple words into powerful expressions of human experience.

Discussion

The researcher found that Adele's lyrics often tell real stories, mixing her emotions with clear contextual meanings. For example, in *Turning Tables*, the word “war” isn't just about literal battle; it's a metaphor for the emotional conflict and dilemmas inside a troubled relationship. This shows how conceptual meaning grounds the song's message in something listeners can relate to.

Next is connotative meaning, which is the opposite of literal or denotative meaning. This type carries emotional and figurative weight, adding layers beyond just dictionary definitions. Take the word “sky” in *He Won't Go* it's not just a blue

expanse, but a symbol of endless possibilities and hope for the future of the relationship. This emotional coloring gives the song more depth and connection.

Then, we find affective meaning, which flows from the singer's feelings and attitudes toward the listener. In *Take It All*, the phrase "crumbling fool" carries powerful emotional weight it reflects Adele's raw feelings of vulnerability and pride in the face of heartbreak. Reflected meaning appears when words carry multiple layers or responses to previous meanings. For example, in *Set Fire To The Rain*, the lyric "Just cause I said it, don't mean I meant it" reflects back on the earlier line "People say crazy things." Here, the wordplay creates a deeper, self-critical tone, showing how past actions or words influence present feelings.

Finally, collocative meaning shows how words influence each other through their connections. In *He Won't Go*, "burn" and "dust" hang out in the same lyric "To watch them turn to dust." The word "burn" literally means setting something on fire, while "dust" is what's left afterward. Together, they paint a vivid picture of destruction and letting go.

All in all, Adele's 21 is packed with deep, multi-layered meanings. Her lyrics invite listeners to explore different interpretations and emotions, making her music resonate on many levels. This research hopes to help readers better understand semantic meaning, especially in theory and practice, by showing how one artist's work can embody complex layers of language and feeling.

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify and analyze the types of meanings found in the lyrics of Adele's 21 album using Leech's (1981) semantic theory. The findings reveal that five types of meanings : conceptual, connotative, affective, reflected, and collocative are present throughout the selected songs, with conceptual meaning being the most dominant. This indicates that Adele's lyrics primarily communicate clear, concrete emotions and experiences, while also weaving figurative and emotional layers that deepen listener engagement.

The research contributes valuable insight into how semantic meanings function in popular music lyrics, demonstrating the power of language to express complex human emotions and stories. Understanding these meanings enriches not only academic discourse in semantics and linguistics but also enhances listeners' appreciation of song lyrics as meaningful art forms.

However, this study has some limitations. The analysis focused on only six songs from one album, which may not fully represent the entirety of Adele's work or the diversity of semantic meanings in other musical genres or artists. The subjective nature of interpreting meaning, especially connotative and affective types, also poses challenges to complete objectivity.

Future research is recommended to expand the scope by analyzing a broader range of songs across different albums, artists, and genres to verify whether similar patterns of meaning emerge. Additionally, integrating listener reception studies could provide a richer understanding of how audiences perceive and emotionally connect with these meanings. In conclusion, this research highlights the intricate layers of

meaning embedded in Adele's lyrics and encourages further exploration into the relationship between language, emotion, and music as a powerful cultural expression.

Suggestion

After conducting the research, the researchers hope that this research will be useful to all readers and will provide a new perspective on a similar topic about meaning in song lyrics. The research suggested that those who are interested in this research to explore more about types of meaning in different objects since it does not only exist in songs or movies but also in everyday life. On top of that, the research also suggests that future researchers conduct similar research but focus to the factors related to meaning in song lyrics.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future studies incorporate a wider variety of data sources, such as songs from different genres, cultural backgrounds, and time periods, to enrich the analysis and capture broader perspectives. Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the meanings conveyed in lyrics. Lastly, examining how audiences interpret these meanings in various contexts may offer valuable insights into the relationship between artistic expression and social perception.

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