

An Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Adele's Song Lyrics "My Little Love": A Semantic Analysis

Wulan Dari¹, Fadhlur Rahman², M. Nazar³

^{1,2,3}, English Language Teaching, Faculty, UIN Sultanah Nahrasiyah Lhokseumawe, Indonesia

Submission Track:

Received: 19-11-2025, Final Revision: 05-04-2026, Available Online: 01-06-2026

Copyright © 2026 Authors



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the semantic dimensions in Adele's song "My Little Love" through an analysis of the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the lyrics. The research aims to identify the types of meaning present and explore how these meanings represent emotional interpretations in musical works. The theoretical framework used is James Dickins' theory of connotative meaning to dissect the layers of meaning behind the lyrics. The results show that the song lyrics contain two main categories of meaning. First, the denotative meaning, which presents literal and explicit communication between Adele and her child. Second, connotative meaning, which consists of five subtypes: (1) affective meaning, which expresses deep emotions, (2) attitudinal meaning, which describes the singer's psychological position, (3) basic meaning, which refers to fundamental values, (4) illocutionary meaning that overrides locution, and (5) associative meaning that builds symbolic connections. The findings reveal that denotative meaning serves as the foundation of verbal communication, while connotative meaning presents emotional complexity that includes guilt, vulnerability, maternal love, and loneliness. The interaction between these two types of meaning collectively reflects Adele's personal experience of dealing with divorce and the challenges of being a single mother. This study contributes to the understanding of the use of figurative language in contemporary music and opens up opportunities for further semantic studies of other popular music works to enrich the linguistic discourse in the music industry.

Keywords: *Semantics, Denotative Meaning, Connotative Meaning, Adele, Emotional Interpretation.*

INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, language is the main communication tool used to convey information and ideas. The goal is to produce sentences and words that have meaning that can be understood by others (Chowdhary, 2020). Language communication falls into two main forms: oral communication and written communication. Oral communication involves speaking and listening, such as in speeches, interviews, or everyday conversations. Whereas written communication involves the use of writing, such as in news publications, advertisements, or slogans. By using these two forms of communication, people can convey their messages clearly and effectively to others in a variety of situations (Dimpleby & Burton, 2020).

The ability to articulate meaning is the most significant feature of language learning, and without it, language loses one of its most important aspects (Yule, 2022). English is important because it is an international language that affects many aspects of life in different countries (Rahman & Saputra, 2021). Education is also affected by this language as it is an important part of learning. Humans use language to communicate with each other in everyday social interactions. It helps us express our thoughts, emotions, and feelings with others. Language also plays an important role in the development of technology and human civilization (Alakrash & Abdul Razak, 2021).

Human communication is not merely the exchange of information but the co-construction of meaning in context. Therefore, everyone in a conversation or any interaction needs to understand the meaning behind the words spoken. When we talk about meaning, there are different ways to convey it, such as talking, singing, or reading poetry. Listeners do not just parse words; they feel them (songs). This is particularly salient in contemporary confessional pop, where autobiographical cues (names, dates, events) and affective textures (prosody, metaphor, and production choices) arrive simultaneously, making the boundary between denotation and connotation less a line to be drawn than a dynamic interface to be analyzed (Kumar et al., 2022; Welch et al., 2020).

Thus, treating songs as a poetic form foregrounds this interface. According to Rockwell (2023), literature is a work of fiction created based on spontaneous emotional outbursts that are able to display beauty or aesthetics, both in terms of language and meaning. The meaning in songs is the way songwriters express their thoughts through a distinctive language, which reflects their soul and personality. Thus, understanding the meaning of a song is not merely matching words to dictionary entries but rather how textual, musical, and contextual cues are mixed to shape what is heard and what is felt (Pristianingrum & Damayanti, 2022; Fitria, 2023).

Instead of assuming a fixed division between "what is said" and "what is felt," the analysis will articulate how confessional pop makes meaning through these two elements in tandem, where denotation is imbued with autobiographical significance, and connotation serves as a form of reference. This reframing brings the description of semantics in line with the multimodal, media-rich environment in which song interpretation by listeners nowadays takes place (Hadi, 2021; Talan et al., 2025; Sianturi & Damanik, 2025).

One branch of linguistics that studies meaning is semantics, which divides meaning into two types: literal (denotative) meaning and non-literal (connotative) meaning (Adiansyah et al., 2023). Connotative meaning is the additional meaning or sense value contained in a word, whereas denotative meaning is the meaning that does not contain any other meanings or values (Nasution, 2025). Yet, a professional pop singer problematizes the neat separation. For instance, consider the lyric "you are my guiding star", in ordinary discourse, "star" can denote "a celestial body" and connote "guidance". However, in a confessional tract released after breakup, the same line may denote (a specific addressee recognizable to militant fans) and connote (cultural scripts of salvation and destiny) something differently.

According to Barker, connotation is "the part of the meaning of a word and he says that connotation has an implicit meaning. For example, if I say "The stars twinkle in the night sky" (1). In this sentence, the word "stars" (1) denotes the celestial bodies that emit light and appear as tiny dots in the night sky. But if I meet my friend, then I say "She is my guiding star" (2). Both of these sentences use the same word, but do they have the same meaning? In this

sentence, the word "star" (2) is used connotatively to describe someone who provides guidance and direction in life, similar to how a star provides light and direction in the night sky.

Denotative meaning is the meaning that aligns with direct experience, what is seen and heard, making it the real or dictionary meaning. For instance, the denotative meaning of the word "woman" is specified as a human, female, girl, or adult. All these definitions align with the pure meaning of "woman." The use of language where the meaning is exactly what is being stated is known as denotation. For example, when someone says "dog," the word signifies concepts like having four legs, being a mammal, and engaging in behaviors such as biting and barking. Conceptual meaning, or meaning that can also be called denotative or cognitive meaning, is the most important factor in the language of communication. This meaning still refers to the basic reference or can also be referred to as pure meaning in a speech of the language."

Denotative or conceptual meaning refers to the literal and fundamental meaning of a word that can be found in a dictionary without requiring additional interpretation. In Barthes' semiotic framework, denotation is the first level of the signifying system that explains the interaction between the signifier and the signified in actual reality, using simple and objective language.

Initial observations of English Department students reveal a lack of comprehensive understanding of the application of denotation and connotation in text analysis. In fact, mastery of these two concepts is a fundamental prerequisite for unraveling the complex layers of meaning in musical works, where each song conveys a profound message that requires careful analysis. Denotation and connotation function as analytical instruments to reveal layered meanings through nuanced descriptions. Based on this phenomenon, this study examines the denotative and connotative meanings in Adele's song "*My Little Love*" through the perspective of semantic analysis.

This study is based on five relevant studies that provide methodological and theoretical foundations. First, Hidayah and Bustam (2023) analyzed NIKI's song "La La Lost You" using

Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This qualitative descriptive study identifies connotations of post-breakup introspection and visual denotations such as sunset scenes. Second, Gee, Laiya, and Telaumbanua (2023) examine the collaboration between Justin Bieber and Kid Laroi using qualitative descriptive methods, finding variations in favorable, negative, and neutral connotations alongside denotative meanings. Further, Amaelia (2022) researched the song "Lathi" by Weird Genius using Geoffrey Leech's semantic theory, revealing the dominance of connotative interpretations over denotative ones. Furthermore, Wismawati (2022) analyzed BTS's "Permission to Dance" with a focus on semantic nuances related to the COVID-19 pandemic context through a qualitative descriptive approach. Last, Dorsae (2017) examined three Creed albums (1997-2009) to identify the relationship between language, literal-associative meaning, and emotional-spiritual expression in a cultural context. These studies share a common methodology of qualitative descriptive analysis applied to song lyrics, each contributing unique insights into how denotative and connotative meanings are expressed through music. While they vary in focus from individual artists like NIKI, Kid Laroi, and Creed to groups like Weird Genius and BTS in the specific semantic theories applied, collectively, they enrich our understanding of language and emotion conveyed through contemporary music lyrics.

The five previous studies show methodological consistency in using a qualitative descriptive approach to explore denotative and connotative meanings in song lyrics. Although they share methodological similarities, each study applies a different theoretical framework, such as Barthes' semiotics, Leech's semantics, or general qualitative analysis to examine the semantic nuances and emotional depth conveyed through music. The main focus of these studies lies in the interaction between literal meaning and associative interpretation, reflecting how lyrics connect with the emotions, personal experiences, and cultural context of listeners. Substantial differences lie in the subjects and contexts of analysis: Hidayah and Bustam (2023) and Gee et al. (2023) examine contemporary artists with post-breakup themes; Amaelia (2022) highlights the dominance of connotative meaning using Leech's theory; Wismawati (2022) connects BTS lyrics to the context of the

COVID-19 pandemic; while Dorsae (2017) explores the evolution of Creed's spiritual-emotional themes over a decade through a linguistic and cultural perspective.

Unlike previous studies that examined various artists from NIKI to Creed, this study specifically focuses on Adele's song "*My Little Love*" with themes of maternal love and personal growth. The unique contribution of this study lies in its semantic analysis of the emotional expressions of a mother facing divorce and the challenges of being a single parent, a perspective that has not been explored in previous studies. Using a systematic semantic analysis framework, this study aims to uncover the deeper layers of meaning in Adele's lyrics, particularly how the use of denotative and connotative language conveys emotional complexities that include vulnerability, guilt, and unconditional love. The findings of this study are expected to provide new insights into the use of figurative language in contemporary music and enrich the semantic discourse in the study of popular song lyrics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies an interpretive semantic analysis from a qualitative perspective to the study of Adele's "*My Little Love*" to determine and model the denotative and connotative levels. Although the song is publicly framed—the message through media interviews, the album paratexts, and the credited voice-note materials (as being about divorce and single motherhood), neither the analysis does not assume authorial intention as a final ground of explanation in this case. Rather, the biographical is contextualizing information treated as one of several layers (linguistic structure, musical form, paratexts, and reception), and it is heuristic, not deterministic. This position allows for the retention of the polysemy of lyrics and recognizes that co-valuing of meaning occurred between text and performance and performance and listener across a variety of contexts (Lewis et al., 2003).

Using triangulation, this study avoids the pitfall of biographical determinism and supports contextual claims. The text here is the official lyrics of "*My Little Love*," analyzed as the key analytic object. In addition to borrowing musical style, musical source, and performative gestures from different musical genres, performative cues are also analyzed to

see whether and how vocal timbre, prosody, mix decisions, and inclusion of voice notes serve as indexical markers of intimacy and stance outside of lexical items. Further, paratext (some of the publicly accessible album notes and interviews) is employed to create a reasonable interpretative distance, without setting authorial intent or elevating biographical as justificatory evidence. Furthermore, reception traces such as the critical reviews- listener readings are to interpretive diversity in a sample are the recorded analyses among other interpretations, bound to multiple listeners and for multiple uses. These sources simultaneously anchor claims in text and performance, and diffuse interpretive authority across contexts. Triangulation, therefore, safeguards against privileging any one fragment (especially biographical materials) to form a monolithic grid and advocates narrating that is methodologically sanguine about how denotative and connotative layers of meaning co-present among diverse audio tones.

From an analytical perspective, the lyrics were obtained from official sources and divided into musical sections to reflect the form–meaning relationship. The beginning of the coding process separated denotative information from connotative concepts (emotional tone, societal narratives such as care, guilt, resilience), and then open coding for metaphors and idioms, and axial coding for semantic themes were also employed. The semantic modeling was based on a qualitative semantic approach (Goddard, 2011; Ryan & Bernard, 2003), differentiating overt lexical meanings and affective and cultural meanings, while tracing indexical features. Contextual bracketing aligned biographical interpretations (divorce, single motherhood) as ‘hypotheses’ made plausible by paratexts and design; each was countered by a non-biographical variant (e.g., general parent–child care, self-soothing following loss) to maintain polysemy. Reflexive memos signaling potential intention-ascription reframed claims as text- and cue-based. The safeguards are: minimal intention principle, paratext as horizon and not proof, systematic polysemy, and audience similarity/diversity.

This strategy allows for the significance of divorce and single motherhood as contextual frames of reading without dictating specific interpretations. It illustrates how

denotative features (e.g., explicit kinship terms, conversational voice notes) and connotative textures (e.g., intimacy, lexical decisions sharing comfort or regret) generate meanings for particular audiences. By distilling contextual plausibility from authorial certainty, this thesis keeps the polysemic potential of “*My Little Love*” intact for biographical application in a way that it may inform but not confine the semantic scope of interpretation. This strategy allows for the significance of divorce and single motherhood as contextual frames of reading without dictating specific interpretations. It illustrates how denotative features (e.g., explicit kinship terms, conversational voice notes) and connotative textures (e.g., intimacy, lexical decisions sharing comfort or regret) generate meanings for particular audiences. By distilling contextual plausibility from authorial certainty, this thesis keeps the polysemic potential of “*My Little Love*” intact for biographical application in a way that it may inform but not confine the semantic scope of interpretation.

DISCUSSION

Denotative

This section presents the denotative meanings found in the selected lyrics of Adele’s *My Little Love*. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary definitions of words, independent of emotional or cultural associations. The analysis focuses on the direct interpretation of three significant lines from the song.

Table 1. Denotative Meaning in Selected Lyrics

Lyrics	Denotative Meaning
My little love, I see your eyes widen like an ocean.	The singer observes that the child’s eyes are opening wide, like an ocean.
Tell me you love me	A direct request for the child to verbally express love.
I love your dad cause he gave you to me	A literal statement of gratitude to the father for being the source of the child.

Each lyric line in Table 1 conveys a clear, literal message. For example, the phrase “Tell me you love me” is a straightforward request for affection, without metaphorical

intention. Similarly, “I love your dad cause he gave you to me” refers to the biological fact of parenthood. These lines serve as linguistic expressions grounded in observable or factual reality, thus qualifying as denotative in nature.

Connotative

Beyond literal interpretation, *My Little Love* also conveys rich layers of emotional and contextual meaning. According to James Dickins’ theory, connotative meaning encompasses fifteen categories. However, only five types were found in Adele’s lyrics. These types contribute significantly to the emotional resonance of the song. To broaden insight, alternative frameworks can complement Dickins, Leech’s (2014) associative meaning refines stylistic and social nuances, while Barthes’ denotation/connotation and myth illuminate cultural scripting and authenticity effects; cognitive semantics (conceptual metaphor, frame semantics) models’ somatic metaphors (“heavy”) and parent–child frames as embodied schemas (Nata et al., 2025). These can reveal pragmatic force, intertext, and listener cognition underexplored by Dickins alone.

Table 2. Selected Lyrics with Connotative Meaning

Lyrics	Connotative Type	Connotative Meaning
Mama’s got a lot to learn (it’s heavy)	Affective Meaning	Expresses emotional burden and guilt in motherhood.
You’re half me, and you’re half daddy	Grounding Meaning	Emphasizes the child’s emotional identity between two separated parents.
Do you like-like me?	Locution-Overriding Illocutionary Meaning	Reveals insecurity and emotional need masked under a playful question.

Data 1: “Mama’s got a lot to learn (it’s heavy)”

Following Dickins et al. (2016), the paper conceptualizes affective meaning as connotative that rhetorically marks emotional stance beyond the referential surface. Since affect is always personal and context-dependent, the study refrains from reconstructing the

psychology of the author. Rather, it operationalizes affect as the convergence of multiple publicly observable signals—lexical selections (e.g., metaphors), prosody and vocal timbre, production characteristics, and paratextual framing that all permit interpretations that are plausible but not certain. Affective interpretations are therefore treated as intersubjective: They emerge from the convergence of multiple indices and are consumable by a variety of audiences. This position retains polysemy in that it makes a distinction between what the text and performance afford in terms of options, and what any one interpreter (the researcher included) personally experiences.

Think about the lyric's use of "heavy." Instead of referring to physical weight, "heavy" serves as an affective sign of stress or guilt. The assertion is corroborated through triangulation: (1) co-textual presence of apologetic and care/guilt lexicon within immediate lines; (2) performances manifestations e.g., breathy phonation, deceleration of tempo and close-mic distance indicative of emotional strain; (3) paratextual horizon constituted by publicly known album notes and voicenotes' aural packaging mirroring family exchanging; and (4) reception through a sampling of reviews and user comments that reveal similar interpretation. These signals co-occur, supporting an intersubjective inference, but alternative interpretations (e.g., generalized overwhelm) are possible, which enables the analysis to remain sensitive to multiple positions vis-à-vis the audience.

To handle subjectivity and ensure validity of analysis it applies: a codebook that differentiates denotative markers from affective signals (stance verbs, intensifiers, somatic metaphors); if possible intercoder reliability checks will be performed with disagreements mediated through explicit criteria; the cue-convergence principle which mandates the presence of at least two independent cues (lexical plus prosodic/production) or one cue complemented by a reception cue; a counter-reading procedure in which each affective statement is contrasted against a non-biographical one; and reflexive memos kept on assumptions and limitations. Cross-references to confessional pop (e.g., somatic metaphors

such as “empty,” “broken” in NIKI’s “Lose”) act as pattern-based anchors, demonstrating typical mappings but without dictating (Hidayah & Bustam, 2023).

Data 2: “You’re half me and you’re half daddy”

Grounding meaning is when a linguistic expression anchors emotional or identity-related weight. Here, the lyric is denotatively factual: the child is biologically half from the mother and half from the father. Connotatively, however, Adele emphasizes the child as the symbolic link between estranged parents. The child’s identity becomes an emotional anchor in a fractured family context, demonstrating grounding meaning. This lyric embodies grounding because it assigns symbolic importance to a literal fact, highlighting the child’s role as the emotional and relational bridge between parents who are no longer together. This mirrors the concept found in Hervey and Higgins (1992), where grounding occurs when specific words gain symbolic significance due to their relational or situational context. Thus, Adele’s lyric is not only factual but also a symbolic anchor that frames the child as a living connection of love and separation.

Data 3: “Do you like-like me?”

Locution-overriding illocutionary meaning, according to Dickins, occurs when the intended meaning of an utterance goes beyond its literal locution. In this lyric, the literal form is a simple, childlike question. However, Adele uses it to seek emotional reassurance and validation of love from her child. Therefore, although denotatively it is a question, connotatively it reveals a vulnerable plea for acceptance, illustrating how illocutionary force overrides the locution. The repetition of the word “like” strengthens the sense of insecurity and the need for validation. Comparable findings were noted in research on BTS’s song ‘Epiphany’, where seemingly simple utterances carry deeper illocutionary functions related to identity and self-worth. Adele’s lyric shares this phenomenon, illustrating how language masks emotional vulnerability. Thus, this lyric is classified as locution-overriding illocutionary meaning, where the deeper function of the utterance overtakes its surface form.

Table 3. Type of Connotative Meaning Found in the Lyrics

Type of Connotative Meaning	Occurrences	Lyric
Affective Meaning	5	Mama’s got a lot to learn (it’s heavy)
Attitudinal Meaning	2	I feel so bad to be here when I’m so guilty
Grounding Meaning	2	You’re half me and you’re half daddy
Locution-Overriding Illocutionary Meaning	2	Do you like-like me?
Associative Meaning	1	Mommy doesn’t like anyone else like I like you, right?

The analysis shows that Adele uses language not only to deliver literal messages to her child but also to convey deep psychological struggles associated with divorce, guilt, and motherhood. The denotative meanings form the factual foundation of her communication, while the connotative meanings enrich the lyrics with affective, attitudinal, associative, and symbolic layers that project Adele’s emotions and vulnerabilities. From the beginning of the song, Adele addresses her son with the lyric “My little love, I see your eyes widen like an ocean.” Denotatively, this line simply describes the child’s widened eyes. However, connotatively, the metaphor of an ocean suggests depth, vastness, and emotional intensity, which reflects Adele’s awareness of her child’s sensitivity and her own feelings of responsibility. This establishes the emotional tension of the song: maternal love intertwined with guilt. Similarly, the lyric “Tell me you love me / I love you a million percent” appears denotatively as an exchange of affection, yet the exaggerated phrase “a million percent” signals the connotative intensity of unconditional love. Here, Adele’s longing for reassurance from her child reveals her insecurity and her dependence on his validation as a source of strength.

Adele's inner conflict becomes more evident in the lyric "I don't recognize myself in the coldness of the daylight." Literally, she claims to feel different during the day, but connotatively, the "coldness" embodies emptiness and alienation. This lyric reflects her depression and loss of identity after divorce, transforming daylight—typically a symbol of clarity into a harsh and isolating presence. A similar reflection appears in "Mama's got a lot to learn (it's heavy)." On the denotative level, Adele admits that she still has much to learn as a mother, but connotatively, the word "heavy" functions effectively to portray her guilt and emotional burden. This admission demonstrates how Adele transforms a simple phrase into an expression of psychological weight. The song also reveals Adele's vulnerability through childlike language, as in "Do you like-like me?" While denotatively it resembles a playful question, connotatively it carries a locution-overriding illocutionary meaning, masking a deeper plea for reassurance. This lyric reflects Adele's fear of rejection and her fragile need for acceptance, even from her child. The emotional weight of motherhood is further emphasized in the line "You're half me and you're half daddy." Denotatively, this states a biological fact, but connotatively, it functions as grounding meaning. The child becomes a symbolic link between estranged parents, embodying both unity and separation. This lyric reflects Adele's bittersweet recognition that her child carries the essence of both parents, reminding her of love and loss simultaneously.

Expressions of sorrow also dominate the song, as illustrated in the lyric "When you lay on me, can you hear the way my heart breaks?" Denotatively, Adele refers to her heartbeat, yet connotatively, the phrase "heart breaks" symbolizes grief and maternal suffering. This lyric reflects Adele's fear that her child will absorb her pain, thereby portraying the intergenerational transmission of trauma. The acknowledgment of her ex-husband also appears in "I love your dad 'cause he gave you to me." On the surface, this is a statement of gratitude, but connotatively it reflects Adele's conflicted acceptance. Although her marriage ended in sadness, she admits that it produced her most precious gift: her child. This lyric illustrates her ability to reconcile bitterness with gratitude. The rawest moments

of the song appear when Adele narrates her struggles directly: “I’m having a bad day, I’m having a very anxious day.” Literally, she confesses anxiety, but connotatively, this expression reveals her emotional collapse. This openness portrays how stress and insecurity permeate her daily life as a mother. The vulnerability continues in “I feel like today is the first day since I left him that I feel lonely.” While the denotative meaning refers to her loneliness, connotatively it reveals the aftermath of divorce and the emptiness that follows separation. Adele’s self-awareness deepens when she says, “I always preferred being on my own... but I feel like maybe I’ve been overcompensating.” Here, solitude is no longer true independence but a defense mechanism. The connotative meaning shows that her coping strategy masks her deeper wounds, reflecting her psychological struggle to appear strong while internally fragile (Marey-Sarwan et al., 2022).

The song culminates in a confession of despair: “I just feel really lonely... I feel a bit frightened that I might feel like this a lot.” Denotatively, Adele admits loneliness and fear, but connotatively, this lyric conveys abandonment, vulnerability, and hopelessness. It reflects her anxiety that loneliness might become a permanent condition, intensifying the emotional resonance of the song. Through this final revelation, Adele exposes the core of her emotional journey: fear, guilt, and longing for stability. The reflection of emotional interpretation in Adele’s “*My Little Love*” demonstrates that the denotative and connotative meanings work together to reveal the psychological depth of her experience. Denotative meanings provide literal expressions of communication with her child, while connotative meanings highlight emotions such as guilt, vulnerability, maternal love, and loneliness. Collectively, these meanings construct a narrative of Adele’s inner turmoil as a mother navigating the aftermath of divorce. The lyrics serve not merely as a story but as an emotional self-disclosure, inviting listeners to empathize with her pain while also recognizing the universal struggles of love, separation, and motherhood. Thus, the second research problem is fully answered, showing that Adele’s language choices reflect both the literal and symbolic dimensions of her emotional state.

The results of this study answer both research questions and highlight the semantic depth of Adele's *"My Little Love."* The first problem focused on identifying the types of denotative and connotative meanings present in the lyrics. The analysis revealed that Adele employs denotative expressions to state factual realities, such as expressing gratitude to her ex-husband for giving her a child, or plainly describing her child's existence as "half me and half daddy." These literal meanings form the surface level of communication and establish the foundation upon which more complex interpretations are built. On the other hand, the study discovered that the song is dominated by connotative meanings, as categorized by James Dickins' framework. Several types were identified, including affective meaning, as in "Mama's got a lot to learn (it's heavy)," where the word "heavy" carries the connotation of guilt and burden. Attitudinal meaning is reflected in lyrics such as "I feel so bad to be here when I'm so guilty," which expresses Adele's moral evaluation of herself. Grounding meaning appears in "You're half me and you're half daddy," which situates the child's identity within the context of parental separation. The lyric "Do you like-like me?" demonstrates locution-overriding illocutionary meaning, where a childlike form conceals a deeper emotional plea for validation. Associative and reflected meanings also emerge in words such as "My heart breaks" and "My Little Love," which transcend literal communication and evoke universal images of sorrow, heartbreak, and maternal affection. These findings confirm that Adele's language choices are semantically rich, merging literal and symbolic layers to communicate complex emotions (Santangelo, 2023).

The second research problem examined how denotative and connotative meanings reflect the emotional interpretation of the song. The findings suggest that the literal layer (denotative meaning) allows Adele to establish intimacy with her child by communicating in direct terms, while the connotative layer transforms those interactions into a confession of guilt, vulnerability, and longing. For example, the lyric "Tell me you love me" is a literal request for reassurance, yet its connotative meaning reflects Adele's insecurity and dependence on her child's affection (Riviera & Trihastuti, 2024). Similarly, the phrase "Do

you like-like me?” transforms playful language into a desperate cry for validation, symbolizing her fear of rejection. Other lines, such as “When you lay on me, can you hear the way my heart breaks?” reveal how maternal affection is interwoven with sorrow, illustrating the emotional burden Adele carries in her role as a mother after divorce. These reflections emphasize that semantics is not merely about word meaning in isolation but about how meaning is experienced and interpreted in context. Adele’s lyrics demonstrate how literal statements gain emotional force when infused with connotative associations. The interplay between the two dimensions of meaning illustrates how language functions as a medium of emotional self-disclosure (Reuel et al., 2022). Adele’s denotative statements of fact are inseparable from the connotative meanings that express her psychological struggles, making the song a powerful testimony of love, guilt, and resilience. The discussion shows that both research problems have been answered: Adele’s “*My Little Love*” contains identifiable types of denotative and connotative meanings, and these meanings together reflect the emotional interpretation of the song. The findings confirm the significance of semantic analysis in uncovering not only the literal content of language but also the emotional truths embedded within it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Adele’s song *My Little Love* reflects a rich interplay between denotative and connotative meanings. reveals a continuous oscillation between semiotic planes as signifiers of kinship terms, dialogic turns, and situational markers on the one hand, and affective stance, attitudinal shading, grounding, locution-overriding illocutionary force, and associative or reflected meanings on the other. Within the frame of Dickins’ taxonomy, five connotative categories appear on lines such as “Mama’s got a lot to learn (it’s heavy)”, “Do you like-like me?,” and “When you lay on me, can you hear the way my heart breaks?” All these meanings combine to create an emotionally charged interpretation, delivered face to face with the listener, emphasizing care, guilt, vulnerability, and healing. Denotation frames explicit actions (love, reassurance, acknowledgement),

connotation models psychological texture (pressure, validation-seeking, loneliness post-divorce). The key contribution is to illustrate how textual, performative, and paratextual signals converge to produce emotional resonance, without collapsing interpretive meaning into authorial intention, and enables the model to retain polysemy across audiences.

These semantic claims are in principle transferable, but modified by genre, culture, and reception. They are most generalizable to confessional, ballad-heavy pop with intimate vocal production, conversational lexicon, and paratexts (e.g., voice notes). Transfer is diminished where conventions are to recode affect: trap, hyperpop, or dance-pop might invest in irony, bravado, and sound design; culturally specific subgenres harness local metaphors, discourse norms. Further, the analysis elucidates how denotation and connotation co-produce meaning affectively within the context of current popular music while allowing for constitutive limitations in transferability. This research confirms that semantic analysis is essential not only for identifying literal and figurative meanings but also for uncovering the emotional truths embedded within language.

REFERENCES

- Adiansyah, R., Sofia, A., Bensar, M., Adams, A., & Barakat, M. A. (2023). Roland Barthes Semiotic Study: Understanding The Meaning Word Of'Azab, A Reinterpretation For Modern Society. *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies*, 2(3), 255-274.
- Alakrash, H. M., & Abdul Razak, N. (2021). Technology-based language learning: Investigation of digital technology and digital literacy. *Sustainability*, 13(21), 12304.
- Amaelia, F. (2022, March). An Analysis of Denotative and Conotative Meaning on Weird Genius Song's Lathi Lyrics: A Semantic Perspective. In *Proceeding of English Teaching, Literature and Linguistics (ETERNAL) Conference* (Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 163-169).
- Chowdhary, K. (2020). Natural language processing. *Fundamentals of artificial intelligence*, 603-649.

- Dimbleby, R., & Burton, G. (2020). *More than words: An introduction to communication*. Routledge.
- Dorsae, M. S. (2017). *The analysis of denotative and connotative meaning found in Creed's song* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung).
- Fitria, T. N. (2023). A Sufistic Interpretation in Letto's Songs: Exploring the Relationship between Humans and God through Religious, Philosophical, and Spiritual Elements. *JETLEE: Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature*, 3(2), 87-102.
- Gee, R., Laiya, R. E., & Telaumbanua, T. (2022). An analysis of denotative and connotative meaning selected Justin FT kid Laroi songs lyric. *Research on English Language Education*, 4(2), 40-46.
- Goddard, C. (2011). *Semantic analysis: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Hadi, I. (2021). Denotative and connotative meaning analysis in the Greatest Showman album. *Jurnal Bahasa Indonesia Prima (BIP)*, 3(2), 325-333.
- Hidayah, A. G. D., & Bustam, M. R. (2023). Analysis of Denotation and Connotation Meanings in The Song Lyric "La La Lost You" By Nicole Zefanya (NIKI). *Mahadaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, 3(1), 41-48.
- Kumar, T., Akhter, S., Yunus, M. M., & Shamsy, A. (2022). Use of music and songs as pedagogical tools in teaching English as foreign language contexts. *Education Research International*, 2022(1), 3384067.
- Leech, G. (2014). *Language in literature: Style and foregrounding*. Routledge.
- Lewis, J., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R., & Morrell, G. (2003). Generalising from qualitative research. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, 2(347-362).
- Marey-Sarwan, I., Hamama-Raz, Y., Asadi, A., Nakad, B., & Hamama, L. (2022). "It's like we're at war": Nurses' resilience and coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nursing Inquiry*, 29(3), e12472.

- Nasution, A. S. (2025). Denotative and Connotative Meanings in The Truman Show: A Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes' Theory. *Mahadaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya*, 5(1), 137-148.
- Nata, I. G. A. K., Alfiansyah, L. E. A., Putrajip, M. Y., Qatrunnada, Q., & Lazuardi, A. B. (2025). Analysing the Interconnectedness of Cultural Values in Fine Art Works with Roland Barthes' Semiotic Approach. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Sahombu*, 5(04), 606-618.
- Pristianingrum, S., & Damayanti, R. (2022). Pragmatic Dimension of Semiotics in Song Lyrics. *Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Research*, 2(2), 98-107.
- Rahman, F., & Saputra, N. (2021). English as International Language Revisited: Implications on South Korea's ELT Context. *Scope: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 08-15.
- Reuel, A. K., Peralta, S., Sedoc, J., Sherman, G., & Ungar, L. (2022, May). Measuring the language of self-disclosure across corpora. In *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: ACL 2022* (pp. 1035-1047).
- Riviera, T., & Trihastuti, N. (2024). An Understanding Emotion Representation in Lauv ft Lany Mean It: Semantic Analysis. *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies*, 12(3).
- Rockwell, J. (2023). *Fact in fiction: The use of literature in the systematic study of society*. Routledge.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Santangelo, P. (2023). 74 The role and symbolic meanings of emotion in literary language. *Language and Emotion*. Volume 3, 1558.
- Sianturi, J. S., & Damanik, B. A. R. (2025). Deconstructing Duality: A Semiotic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Common English Proverbs. *Young Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(2), 195-207.
- Talan, A. K., Gude, A., & Suardana, I. P. E. (2025). An Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in College Students' Interaction. *Focus Journal: Language Review*, 3(1).

Welch, G. F., Biasutti, M., MacRitchie, J., McPherson, G. E., & Himonides, E. (2020). The impact of music on human development and well-being. *Frontiers in psychology, 11*, 1246.

Wismawati, N. I. I., Noer, M. U. U., & Bazergan, E. (2022). Conotative And Denotative Meanings In The Lyrics Of The Bts Song "Permission To Dance" (Semantic Analysis). *Karya Ilmiah Mahasiswa (KIMA), 1*(2), 10-16.

Yule, G. (2022). *The study of language*. Cambridge university press.