

Connotative and Denotative Meanings of Justin Bieber's Song Lyrics *Ghost* and *Hold on* in the Album *Justice*

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Abstract

A lyrical analysis of Justin Bieber's album reveals how emotional interpretation and literal meaning are intricately intertwined. Words such as 'I miss you more than life' in particular convey a deep emotional bond that can be connoted with feelings that go beyond words, relating to memories and loss that are relevant to the listener's experience. With an emphasis on the use of denotative and connotative meanings and the use of qualitative methods, this research examines how connotations and denotations are used in the lyrics of Justin Bieber's song. After analyzing the data collected from the song lyrics, this study identified three positive, two neutral, and one negative connotation types. Additionally, emotional power in song lyrics conveys difficult concepts such as love, regret, and self-determination that can be found in the lyrics. This method makes music an effective medium to convey emotional experiences.

Keywords: *Connotation and Denotation, Emotional Expression in Song Lyrics, Justin Bieber.*

Abstrak

Sebuah studi lirik dari album Justin Bieber menunjukkan bagaimana interpretasi emosional dan makna harfiah saling terkait. Kata-kata seperti 'I miss you more than life' khususnya, menyampaikan ikatan emosional yang mendalam yang dapat dikonotasikan dengan perasaan yang lebih dari sekedar kata yang berhubungan dengan memori dan kehilangan yang relevan dengan pengalaman pendengar. Dengan penekanan pada penggunaan makna denotative dan konotatif serta penggunaan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana konotasi dan denotasi digunakan dalam lirik lagu Justin Bieber. Setelah melakukan analisa terhadap data yang dikumpulkan dari lirik lagu, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa terdapat tiga positif, dua netral dan satu negatif dalam tipe konotasi. Selain itu daya emosional dalam lirik lagu untuk menyampaikan konsep sulit seperti cinta, penyesalan, dan determinasi diri dapat ditemukan dari lirik lagu tersebut. Metode ini menjadikan musik sebagai media efektif untuk menyampaikan pengalaman emosional.

Kata Kunci: *Konotasi dan Denotasi, Emosi dalam Lirik Lagu, Justin Bieber.*

INTRODUCTION

Music is one of the important things for some people, people who listen to music as a companion to do tasks or work. Music acquired various meanings and connotations. Other than that, according to (Kokkidou May, 2022) music holds sociability and individuality, freedom, and limits. Some emphasize or focus on music's structural components, while others concentrate on the emotional response to music, its interactions, and its meanings in people's lives. Song is a medium that conveys the ideas and emotions of its creator.

Conveying language directly is the speaking process, but conveying language indirectly is realized, such as in the writing process or other media of language delivery, such as song. Language is used for communication; in other words, language is used to drive someone's thoughts or feelings, which can be embodied through words (Gee et al., 2022). The linguistic study of meaning is known as semantics. From that, the study of the relationship between linguistic form and meaning might be more accurate in terms of semantics (Kroeger, 2019). Thus, lexical and grammatical meaning can be

distinguished using semantic type. Depending on whether meaning value is present, a word can be classified as having either a connotative or denotative meaning. There is no necessary relationship between the phoneme order that makes up a word and its meaning; rather, the relationship between the words and their meaning is arbitrary. When words get their meaning from social consensus, the relationship between words and meanings is unchangeable absent a change in the way culture and society develop.

Semantics involves the deconstruction of words, signals, and sentence structure. It influences our reading comprehension, our comprehension of other people's word meaning in everyday conversation, and language learning without us even realizing it (Saeed, 1997). Semantics is the study of meaning, but what do we mean by 'meaning'? Meaning has been given different definitions in the past. It can be used for individual words or large texts. Semantics is the branch of linguistics that focuses on meaning. Meaning at the level of words, phrases, sentences, or more extensive discourse units can be addressed by semantics (Betti & Igaab, 2021).

There are a few expert-identified categories of meaning. Categories in semantics in terms of meaning are, meaning in accordance with the dictionary, either denotative or conceptual (1), connotative meaning or meaning suggested by the intellect (2), charitable context or social meaning (3), meaning that is affective or emotional meaning confessing personal feeling (4), double conceptual meaning, or reflective meaning (5), thematic meaning or meaning of the message (6), and collocative meaning (Leech, 1974). Connotative meaning, also referred to as an erroneous meaning, could be a meaning that goes beyond the conceptual meaning and is not specifically connected to the goal or anything else. As stated by (Leech, 1981), connotative meaning is something related to the study of communication. Beyond its merely intellectual substance, connotative meaning is the expressive significance that a word possesses simply by virtue of what it refers to. Connotative meaning is said to be secondary to conceptual meaning, depending on the culture, historical era, and personal experience of the individual. In accordance with this, it is possible to conclude that connotation is a meaning that occurs in addition to the dictionary or the actual meaning. Denotative meaning is the initial objective meaning that can be assigned to symbols. It is the direct connection between symbols and a reality or a defined phenomenon (Saifuddin, 2018; Zuhdah et al., 2020). In line with this, denotative meaning is a real meaning based on the dictionary that can be interpreted directly from a word, phrase, or sentence (Sari & Kusumawardhani, 2001).

When interpreting language in a real-world setting, pragmatics is helpful. Additionally, semantics tends to concentrate on the actual objects or concepts that a term refers to, but pragmatics seeks to comprehend the link between signs and users (Sinha, 2021). Consistent with this, pragmatics examines how the subject appears related to the applied sign and how the sign affects the subject (Makhamadaliyevna, 2020). Another source is pragmatics, which examines how language signs are understood by the human mind. Pragmatics, which explains different aspects of meaning that are not found in the plain sense of words or structure, like semantics. The utilization of pragmatics theory in the analysis of language shows how a certain sector of how meaning is expressed. Context and pragmatics are two influentially interrelated concepts (Indrawati, 2009). Context helps understand a word or sentence to be interpreted. The relationship between pragmatics and context requires the use of language in pragmatics aspects.

The theory confessed by Kokkidou in her book aligned with several comments on the music video for Justin Bieber's songs "Ghost" and "Hold On." Listeners feel connected to what Justin conveys through these two songs. These comments indicate a connection between the music video and the listener's personal lives that we are unaware of. Thus, the author decided to find out the denotative and connotative meanings of the song's lyrics. Giving an explanation of pop music, Pop music is essentially the same as popular music because the word pop is an acronym for "popular." To make a song more fascinating, the lyrics typically contain both explicit and inferred meanings. And from there, the author chose the songs "Ghost" and "Hold On" because many people feel connected to what is conveyed through those two songs. By investigating these meanings, education can gain a deeper grasp of the deep emotional landscape of popular music and how it speaks to and emotionally connects with people. Apart from that, analyzing the meaning of song lyrics can demonstrate how language can evoke a variety of feelings in the context of songwriting (Risjad & Putra, 2024).

One of the popular Canadian singer-songwriters writer Justin Drew Bieber, or known as Justin Bieber, released his album named Justice on March 19th, 2021. His mom uploaded his videos of him singing R&B songs to the platform called YouTube, which led him to land a contract deal with Scooter Braun and Usher. With the help of Usher, Justin received his first record contract. Becoming a viral hit with "Baby" in 2010, Justin Bieber rose to worldwide fame after his debut single "One Time" was released.

Following the information above, the author concentrated on examining the connotative and denotative meanings of the two chosen songs from Justin Bieber's album "Justice", "Ghost" and "Hold On", as the objects of this study. The author chose those songs as the object of the study because they tell a compelling story in their music videos and are loved by listeners because of their catchy melody and meaningful lyrics, which could result in a lot of listeners. Additionally, based on how the public connects with and enjoys the songs, the author decides to examine the connotative and denotative meanings in the selected songs. Other than that, the author is interested in studying the implied message that lies in the lyrics of the stated songs. In this study, the author will analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found using the related theories. Thus, the author chose "Connotative and Denotative Meaning of Justin Bieber's Song Lyrics "Ghost" and "Hold On" in the Album "Justice" as the title of this research.

Based on the previous study conducted on song lyrics *Film Favorit*, it gives a clearer picture of the character being mentioned in the songs about their feelings and interpersonal relationships (Fauzan & Sakinah, 2020). In the other study conducted from Adele's song lyrics *Easy On Me*, it is concluded that the song lyrics include many figurative meanings and incorrect meanings (Srinawati, 2021). It is found that from the previous study, connotative and denotative meaning This research aims to find out the use of connotative and denotative in the lyrics of the song Ghost and Hold On. Other than that, this research also aims to explain the context of the connotative meaning found in the selected song lyrics.

From this research, it is hoped that this research can show the use of connotative and denotative meaning in Justin Bieber's song lyrics. Other than that, to explains to the listeners the context of the meaning behind each song's lyrics. From this research, it is hoped that this research can expand academic discussion in the field of linguistics, particularly regarding denotative and connotative meaning in song lyrics, and also give insight into audience interpretation that can be vary based on individual experiences. Thus, this research can enhance songwriter and musicians' ability to craft more impactful and relatable lyrics, which can evoke stronger connections with the audience.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative method. Through the use of a qualitative methodology, this study allowed the researcher to better understand perspectives, experiences, and communication in order to look deeper into the phenomenon being examined from the viewpoints of the participants. In this research, the main data will be collected from lyrics from the song Ghost and Hold On which provide the information about connotative and denotative. The author conducted an online research using databases from the internet that we can easily find related to Justin Bieber, his songs, or other related information. Using Leech theory, there are seven types of meaning, including conceptual meaning and connotative meaning which will be used in this study. Conceptual meaning is the meaning that can be found in the dictionary, literal and objective. For instance, whale is mamals in the oceans and sea. Meanwhile, connotative meaning is a meaning that can be assosiate to social, cultural and even emotion. For instance, Home is where someone feels safety, warmth and comfort, not pointing to the building itself but pointing to the feels inside with family members. Using textual analysis in order to maintain consistency of the interpretation, furthermore the chosen category of meaning helping in restricting interpretation to be objective.

Qualitative approaches have become essential for gaining a profound understanding and comprehending intricate processes. By capturing contexts and further details, examining the depths of social phenomena, qualitative research explores the complex textures of human experience and perspective. It provides a distinctive lens through which to examine and comprehend the intricate details and comprehension of social phenomena because of its emphasis on context, existence, experience, perspective, meaning, and subjectivity (Lim, 2024).

Data collection and analysis case study research typically includes multiple data collection and data are collected from multiple sources. According to (O. V. Ajayi, 2017), whereas secondary data is information that has already been gathered or created by others, primary data is information that the researcher collects for the first time. While secondary data is simply the analysis and interpretation of primary data, primary data is factual and unique. The procedure of gathering primary data is highly complex. The secondary data collection process, however, is quick and simple. Surveys, observations, experiments, questionnaires, and in-person interviews are examples of primary data sources. Websites, books, journal articles, internal records, and so on are examples of secondary data gathering sources (V. O. Ajayi, 2023).

The author used these stages in the data collection technique: Firstly, text song lyrics from the internet will be downloaded. Secondly, discover connotative meanings, watching the music video related to the chosen songs, reading the song lyrics, and listening to the chosen songs. Thirdly, picking words or sentences that have both connotative and denotative meaning before being thickened. Using the lyrical texts and music videos can be helpful to interpret the connotative meaning and link them to the context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses findings and discussion regarding the connotative and denotative meaning found in Justin Bieber's selected songs Ghost and Hold On. The discussion presented in this chapter was the result of solving the problem, as the purpose of the research was to find out the use of connotative and denotative meaning in song lyrics. The data taken for this analysis was taken from several lyrics of the song Ghost and Hold On in the album Justice, released on March 19th, 2021, that can be found and collected from the internet.

Table 1. The Data of The Research

No	Songs Title	Lyrics	Type			
			Denotation	Connotation		
				Positive	Negative	Neutral
1.	Ghost	Young blood thinks there's always tomorrow		-		
2.	Ghost	I know you crossed a bridge that I can't follow				-
3.	Ghost	I miss you more than life			-	
4.	Hold On	You know you can call me if you need someone	-	-		
5.	Hold On	I'll pick up the piece if you come undone				-
6.	Hold On	Take my hand and hold on	-	-		

The analysis of data 1

Young blood thinks there's always tomorrow

In the data shown above, this sentence is connotative. The connotative meaning of Young blood indicates youth, inexperience that often overlooks the fragility of time, assuming that they can always do things 'later' that can lead to missed opportunities and regret. In line with this, according to the Cambridge dictionary, young blood refers to someone who has a lot of energy and ideas. In this case, the use of "young blood" means that the person has a lot of energy, and a lot of ideas, making them reckless towards their surroundings, or overlook something. As in Justin's song, which conveys that his youth is what makes him pay less attention to the people around him, so that at the moment he realizes that he doesn't have many memories with the person he loves, that person is gone, which ends with a feelings of regret in the context from the lyrics.

The analysis of data 2

*I know you cross a **bridge** that I can't follow*

In the data shown above, this sentence is a connotative sentence. The connotative meaning of bridge is the transition between life after death, and its denotative meaning is a structural building that connects one side to the other to span an obstacle, such as a river, road, or valley. In this case, the bridge represents between life and death as Justin Bieber tries to confess in the music video, between the lyrics and scenes, it is known that in the context, 'bridge' points to life after death, where living humans can not follow. It is supported by the next lyrics, 'that I can't follow.'

The analysis of data 3

*I miss you **more than life***

In the data shown above, this sentence is a connotation. The connotative meaning of more than life is feelings beyond all else, which can imply a profound emotional attachment that can be overwhelming. In this case, the phrase 'more than life' points to where Justin feels overwhelmed by the feelings of missing someone he loves, which is supported by the music video where he tries to rewind or recall their moment together. It also points to the moment where Justin tries to keep the memory of both of them together, which can make his heart swell with love and sadness at the same time, making him overwhelmed with feelings.

The analysis of data 4

*You know **you can call me if you need someone***

The data shown above indicates that the person can call the speaker if they need someone to talk to, and its connotative meaning is emotional support, reassurance from someone to rely on when needed. In the context of the music video, it is known that 'she' is someone Justin loves more than anything, and being vulnerable after they know she's sick, from that moment, Justin is willing to do everything in terms of keeping her being his side. In this case, when the person being talked about needed some reassurance or emotional support when she's being vulnerable or having a breakdown, Justin is always ready to be near her when needed. It also points to how Justin willingly being around her, giving support, and doing everything that can keep her alive, including robbing a bank for financial aspects.

The analysis of data 5

*I'll pick up the **piece** if you come undone*

The data shown above indicates that this sentence is connotative. The connotative meaning of piece is supporting that is broken, emotionally or physically. Thus, this sentence implies that someone has the will to assist someone who is in distress or struggles. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, piece refers to a part of a whole or fragments. In the context, the word 'piece' refers to how the person feeling vulnerable, that whatever they do it will never work. Additionally, it is implies to however this person feelings, Justin willing to give support, picking the vulnerable feeling to be taken care of.

The analysis of data 6

*Take my hand and **hold on***

The data above indicates that this sentence is connotative. The denotative meaning of hand is the body part at the end of the human arm. The connotative meaning of this sentence is offering hands that can imply giving support or care, and it can also refer to a connection. In this case, the word 'take my hand' has a literal meaning of asking to hold their hand, as a gesture of friendship or love. In this case, it signifies offering help or support in overcoming obstacles in the context of the song. According to Cambridge University Press (n.d.), the term Hold On refers to making yourself continue to do what

you are doing or stay where you are, although it is difficult or unpleasant. Additionally, in the context of the music videos, "hold on", refers to Justin's desire to hold onto something or suggests that 'she' has to hold on to the circumstances where she is dying.

From the Hold On song lyrics, "You know you can call me if you need someone / I'll pick up the pieces if you come undone," he sings. It can be interpreted that he is willing to support to encourage his partner that he will always be with them, no matter what. Additionally, from the Ghost song lyrics, "Young blood thinks there's always tomorrow / I know you crossed a bridge that I can't follow / I miss your touch on nights when I'm hollow / I miss you more than life," he sings. It can be interpreted that he feels regret for wasting time, and it makes the happy memory with them is the only joy he can feel after losing them to the other side of life (Philo, n.d.).

The message of the two songs is simply conveyed to the listeners. The lyrics of the songs contain many connotative meanings if being deconstructed more complex. From this research, it is found that the words contain two positive meanings, one negative meaning, two neutral meanings, and two words of denotation or have a dictionary meaning. The first song, Ghost tells a story where Justin Bieber loses someone he loves, due to death in the first scene of its music video. The first song is like a reminder for listeners not to overlook or underestimate times when everything can happen in a second without warning. This song also acts like a reminder for listeners to spend more time with their loved ones and cherish every moment possible, so as not to feel regret in the future. The second song, Hold On, tells a story where Justin Bieber is willing to give connection, always by their side, giving emotional support even when they feel broken emotionally or physically. The second song is also like a meditation or reminder about being physically and emotionally available for someone we love, supporting them in every up and down, and willing to do everything for their loved one, based on the music video where his partner is sick and hospitalized.

The messages found from the song lyrics in line with the third category, Leech stated, which is social meaning, and the fourth category, emotional meaning, confessing personal feelings conveyed by Justin Bieber in his song lyrics, which can imply difficult concepts such as love, regret, and self-determination. Justin Bieber often uses connotative meaning in the selected songs, making his song lyrics more profound and expressing emotions that can connect the song with the listener through emotional and some human experiences. Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that analyzing song lyrics can deepen or gain knowledge, and expand how readers can get another perspective. Additionally, it is also aligned with Kokkidou's theory about songs that music holds sociability, individuality, and freedom, which convey the ideas or emotions of its creator. Besides that, it can also help understand how music is used as a tool to communicate and express feelings through the use of connotative meanings in song lyrics.

These findings are in line with the previous study (Hadi, 2021). It is known that connotative and denotative meanings have an important role in finding and knowing the message behind song lyrics. Thus, this research shows that songs would help to send a message to the listeners. Connotative meaning is influenced by interpretation, social and culture that require high understanding beyond the lexical or denotative meaning (Sudar et al., 2023). The use of connotative and denotative study also aims to make listeners not only listen to the songs themselves, but also the feelings behind lyrical words, expressing emotion, thoughts, and the ability to make an effect on the listeners. Additionally, each lyric has its messages that can help listeners to feel the messages from the song (Ishar & Irawan, 2023; Nabila et al., 2022; Purnamasari, 2018). It is in line with research conducted by Saifuddin that the connotation of bridge in particular refers to cultural values about the afterlife in some cultural backgrounds like Indonesia, where some believe that the spirit will walk through the bridge to the other side, which is heaven. From the lyrical that can be used to be relatable with listeners, Justin uses connotative language in his songs to build the connection and relation, highlighting emotional vulnerabilities caused by loss or despair. Through this connotation, the song would be able to provide a meaningful relationship and experience to the listeners that can be relevant (Kirom et al., 2025). On the other hand, it is known that these songs have a relation with Justin's personal experience, emotions, and feelings. Despite there being no message about religion in particular, it is clear that Justin wants people to have good memories, to cherish their time. Compared to (Novianingsih et al., 2020) research.

The result of her research shows that the dominant data were positive connotations, which means that Maher Zain wants his listeners to always prioritize worship and have a good relationship with God and other human beings. She shows that the use of connotative meaning in songs is to create an effect for listeners through the songwriter's ability to create beautiful lyrics.

Compared to (Gladys et al., 2022) the result from her research shows that in the Taylor Swift selected songs tend to use negative connotative meaning from 14 songs, it is in contrast to the number of selected songs and negative connotative meaning from this research. From the results conducted by (Sujarwati & Pandan Sari, 2021), it is important to interpret the song lyrics based on the context. In this case, an individual's background and experience can influence their interpretation of connotative meaning. Thus, connotative can show endurance and persistence through love, their commitment, and also the complexities and struggles that can be found in the depth of the song lyrics (Salam & Sakinah, 2024). Additionally, denotative and connotative meanings can be related and intertwine with one another based on the context, and lyrics can be elevated beyond the plain comprehension of the song's substance.

Analyzing song lyrics has various benefits, including increasing the interest level of learning activities and providing an opportunity to enhance knowledge. It also makes learning more interactive. The connotative and denotative meanings contained in Justin Bieber's selected songs can be used as sources for further study. The interpretation of connotative meaning in this research might be subjective and may vary based on listeners and readers based on cultural, personal emotions or feelings, which can affect how song lyrics are interpreted by this research. Furthermore, the analysis focused on a limited selection of songs and artists, which may not represent the broader use of connotative and denotative meaning across cultures. Furthermore, song can be a useful medium for student to learn and investigate connotative meaning beyond its literal meaning to broaden their critical thinking.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research, it is concluded that these songs contain many connotative meanings used to express the singer's emotion. Two of Justin Bieber's songs consist of three positive, two neutral, and one negative type of connotation. Additionally, two denotative terms are used in the lyrical text of the songs. From this research, it is concluded that singers, musicians, or even songwriters use connotation to explore their thoughts, feelings, and emotions implicitly. While they still use the denotative words that can be found in the dictionary, connotative meaning can bring a more wide-open interpretation based on the listener's experience, or simply an interpretation based on the context. In order to help readers better comprehend the various meanings that exist in language, the author believes that this research will help the reader better understand the connotative and denotative meanings found in each sentence that has been chosen to broaden knowledge, song lyrics also can be used as a medium to widen vocabulary from the wide interpretation that depends on how individuals would interpret. Furthermore, future researchers could benefit from more diverse song lyrics samples, cultural comparisons, or personal interpretation to broaden understanding of how connotative and denotative influence feelings, and sociability with music to the listeners. From the wide-open interpretation, songs or song lyrics can be one of the media to learn new vocabulary for English learners, creativities, students motivation and widen our knowledge on how to understand the meaning beyond words by using connotation, denotation, and their context in the class.

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