
Exploring Denotation, Connotation, and Myth in Adele's Album 30: A Semantic and Semiotic Study

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Abstract: Song lyrics often convey multiple layers of meaning that extend beyond their literal interpretations, making them valuable objects of semantic and semiotic inquiry. While previous studies have examined denotative and connotative meanings in song lyrics, limited research has integrated Geoffrey Leech's semantic theory with Roland Barthes' concept of myth to analyze Adele's 30 album. This study aims to investigate the denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths represented in selected songs from the album. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using five songs (Easy on Me, My Little Love, I Drink Wine, Hold On, and To Be Loved) as the data source. The data were collected through documentation and analyzed using Leech's theory of meaning and Barthes' semiotic framework. The findings identified 25 lyric excerpts containing denotative and connotative meanings. Among the connotative meanings, neutral connotations were the most dominant (52%), followed by positive (32%) and negative (16%) connotations. Beyond their literal meanings, the lyrics construct broader myths related to self-acceptance, emotional healing, resilience, family relationships, personal growth, and overcoming life's challenges. These findings demonstrate that Adele's lyrics employ figurative and symbolic language to transform personal experiences into universal narratives that resonate across cultural contexts. This study contributes to semantic and semiotic scholarship by illustrating how the integration of Leech's and Barthes' frameworks provides a more comprehensive understanding of meaning construction in contemporary song lyrics..

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a means of constructing and interpreting meaning within social and cultural contexts. Meaning is often expressed implicitly through figurative language, symbolism, and emotional expression, allowing

readers and listeners to derive interpretations that extend beyond the literal meaning of words. Among various literary forms, song lyrics occupy a unique position because they combine linguistic creativity with musical expression to communicate personal experiences, cultural values, and emotional narratives. Consequently, song lyrics have become an important object of linguistic inquiry, particularly in semantics and semiotics, as they frequently contain multiple layers of meaning that invite diverse interpretations.

In language studies, is the scientific study of language. Linguistics addresses various aspects of language, ranging from structure and sound to the meaning contained within it Losi et al., (2023). Linguistics encompasses several branches, such as morphology, syntax, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. Each branch has a different analytical focus, yet they are interrelated in understanding how language is used by humans as a communication tool.

From a semantic perspective, meaning can be understood at different levels. Leech (1981) distinguishes between denotative meaning, which refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of an expression, and connotative meaning, which encompasses the emotional, cultural, and associative meanings attached to linguistic expressions. While denotative meaning provides the foundation for understanding a text, connotative meaning enables readers and listeners to interpret deeper emotions, attitudes, and experiences embedded within language. This distinction is particularly evident in song lyrics, where literal meanings often interact with figurative language to create richer and more nuanced interpretations.

Beyond semantics, the interpretation of song lyrics can be further enriched through a semiotic perspective. According to Barthes (1972), signs operate on multiple levels of signification, progressing from denotation to connotation and ultimately to myth, which represents broader cultural and ideological meanings that become naturalized within society. Rather than functioning merely as entertainment, song lyrics can therefore be understood as cultural texts that reflect social beliefs, emotional experiences, and collective values. Combining semantic and semiotic approaches enables researchers to examine not only what song lyrics literally express but also how they construct wider cultural meanings.

Among contemporary musicians, Adele is widely recognized for her emotionally expressive songwriting, which explores themes of divorce, self-reflection, emotional healing, family relationships, and personal growth. Her album *30* (2021) is particularly notable for its introspective narratives and symbolic language, allowing listeners to engage with the lyrics on multiple interpretive levels. The emotional depth and figurative richness of the album make it an appropriate corpus for investigating how denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths interact to construct meaningful representations of universal human experiences

Several previous studies have analyzed denotative and connotative meanings in song lyrics. Pratiwi et al., (2020) analyzed denotative and connotative meanings in Ariana Grande's song lyrics and found that song lyrics often contain meanings beyond their literal interpretations. Cevania et al., (2023) examined the meaning of song lyrics and revealed that figurative language plays an important role in delivering messages to listeners. Furthermore, Andisti et al., (2025) analyzed connotative meanings in Adele's album *21* and found that Adele frequently uses emotional and symbolic expressions to represent personal experiences and relationships. In terms of semiotic analysis, Rais et al., (2025) found that Roland Barthes' theory is effective in uncovering deeper cultural and emotional messages hidden within song lyrics.

Although previous studies have examined denotative and connotative meanings in song lyrics and several have applied Barthes' semiotic theory to uncover symbolic messages, these studies have generally treated semantic and semiotic analyses separately or focused on different artists and albums. Studies on Adele's works have predominantly analyzed her earlier albums or

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concentrated solely on figurative language and connotative meanings, leaving limited attention to how literal meaning, associative meaning, and myth interact to construct broader cultural and emotional narratives. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis integrating Geoffrey Leech's semantic theory and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework remains underexplored, particularly in relation to Adele's *30*, an album widely recognized for its themes of divorce, self-reflection, emotional healing, and personal transformation.

This study addresses this gap by integrating semantic and semiotic perspectives to examine how denotative meanings serve as the foundation for connotative interpretations and how these meanings further develop into myths that represent universal human experiences. Rather than merely identifying literal and figurative meanings, this study demonstrates the relationship between different layers of meaning and their contribution to the construction of broader cultural messages. By applying both Leech's and Barthes' theoretical frameworks to selected songs from Adele's *30*, this study contributes to semantic and semiotic scholarship by offering a more comprehensive understanding of meaning construction in contemporary popular music and highlighting the value of interdisciplinary approaches in song lyric analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language. Meaning plays a central role in communication because it enables people to convey ideas, emotions, experiences, and intentions. According to Leech (1981), semantics is concerned with the study of meaning and how meaning is expressed through language. Similarly, Kroeger (2023) states that semantics examines how linguistic expressions represent concepts and experiences. Through semantic analysis, researchers can understand both literal and implied meanings contained in linguistic expressions, including literary works such as song lyrics.

One important aspect of semantics is denotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the literal, conceptual, or dictionary meaning of a word or expression without any additional emotional or cultural associations (Leech, 1981). It represents the basic meaning that members of a language community generally understand. Denotative meaning serves as the foundation for interpreting language because it provides the primary reference of words, phrases, and sentences used in communication. In song lyrics, denotative meaning helps listeners understand the surface meaning before exploring deeper interpretations.

Another important aspect is connotative meaning. Connotative meaning refers to the additional meaning associated with emotions, experiences, values, attitudes, and cultural backgrounds beyond the literal meaning of a linguistic expression. According to Leech (1981), connotative meaning is the communicative value that an expression possesses because of what it refers to, beyond its conceptual meaning. Unlike denotative meaning, connotative meaning is subjective and may vary depending on personal experiences and cultural contexts. Therefore, connotative meaning is frequently found in literary works and song lyrics because songwriters often use figurative and symbolic language to express deeper messages and emotions.

Besides semantic analysis, this study also employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes developed the concept of signification into two levels: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the first-order meaning or literal meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the second-order meaning shaped by cultural, emotional, and ideological associations (Barthes, 1972). Furthermore, Barthes introduced the concept of myth, which represents cultural messages or ideologies that emerge from connotative meanings and become accepted as natural truths

within society. Myths function as a way of communicating values, beliefs, and social perspectives through language and signs.

In the context of song lyrics, Barthes' semiotic theory helps reveal meanings that extend beyond literal interpretations. Through the analysis of denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth, researchers can uncover the emotional messages, cultural values, and life experiences represented in song lyrics. Therefore, Geoffrey Leech's theory of meaning and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory provide an appropriate framework for analyzing the denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and messages found in the selected songs from Adele's album *30*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths represented in selected song lyrics from Adele's *30* album. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to interpret linguistic meanings and symbolic representations embedded in literary texts rather than to measure variables quantitatively. As Creswell and Poth (2018) argue, qualitative research enables researchers to investigate how meaning is constructed and interpreted within particular social and cultural contexts.

The primary data consisted of lyric excerpts selected from five songs in Adele's *30* album, namely *Easy on Me*, *My Little Love*, *I Drink Wine*, *Hold On*, and *To Be Loved*. These songs were purposively selected because they represent the album's dominant themes, including self-reflection, emotional healing, family relationships, personal growth, and resilience. Such thematic diversity provides a rich corpus for examining the interaction between literal meaning, associative meaning, and broader cultural narratives. The unit of analysis in this study was individual lyric excerpts containing lexical items, phrases, clauses, or sentences that potentially conveyed denotative and connotative meanings. A total of 25 lyric excerpts were identified as relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected using documentation techniques. The official song lyrics were obtained from authorized lyric sources and were read repeatedly while simultaneously listening to the corresponding songs to understand both their linguistic and contextual meanings. During this process, lyric excerpts containing semantic and symbolic expressions were identified, coded, and organized according to the research objectives.

The data analysis followed four stages. First, each lyric excerpt was examined to identify its denotative meaning based on Geoffrey Leech's (1981) semantic framework. Second, the same excerpts were analyzed to determine their connotative meanings by considering emotional associations, cultural values, and contextual interpretations. Third, the identified connotative meanings were further interpreted using Roland Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory to reveal myths or broader ideological and cultural messages constructed through the lyrics. Finally, the findings were synthesized to explain how denotative meaning functions as the basis for connotative interpretation and how these meanings collectively construct myths that represent universal human experiences throughout the selected songs.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the interpretation of the data was conducted systematically through repeated reading and constant comparison among lyric excerpts. The interpretations were continuously evaluated against the theoretical concepts proposed by Leech and Barthes to ensure consistency between the textual evidence and the analytical framework. Representative lyric excerpts were then selected to support each interpretation presented in the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to analyze the denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth contained in five selected songs from Adele's album *30*, namely *Easy on Me*, *My Little Love*, *I Drink Wine*, *Hold On*, and *To Be Loved*. The analysis was conducted using Geoffrey Leech's theory of meaning and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Through these theories, the writer examined both the literal meaning and the deeper meanings embedded in the song lyrics. The selected songs were chosen because they represent major themes found throughout the album, including self-reflection, emotional healing, family relationships, acceptance, and personal growth. These themes frequently appear in Adele's songwriting and reflect experiences that many listeners can relate to in their own lives. By combining semantic and semiotic approaches, this study seeks to reveal how language is used not only to express personal emotions but also to communicate broader messages and values through song lyrics.

Based on the findings, a total of 25 data points containing denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths were identified in the selected songs from Adele's album *30*. The denotative meanings found in the lyrics function as the literal meanings of words, phrases, and sentences. In contrast, the connotative meanings reveal deeper interpretations related to emotional experiences, self-reflection, healing, family relationships, acceptance, and personal growth. The analysis shows that many expressions in the lyrics carry meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions and reflect Adele's personal experiences as well as broader human experiences. This finding supports Leech's theory that connotative meaning reflects emotional and associative values attached to linguistic expressions beyond their conceptual meaning (Leech, 1981). The findings also indicate that the selected songs contain various symbolic expressions that allow listeners to interpret the lyrics from different perspectives depending on their own experiences and emotional backgrounds. Through the interaction of denotative and connotative meanings, the lyrics communicate not only the surface message of the songs but also symbolic and emotional meanings that strengthen the overall narrative of the album. As a result, the songs in Adele's album *30* can be understood not merely as artistic expressions but also as representations of emotional journeys, personal struggles, resilience, and self-discovery.

The analysis of the selected songs from Adele's album *30* resulted in 25 data containing denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths. Several representative findings are presented below to illustrate how the meanings were identified and interpreted. At the denotative level, the lyric "I was still a child" refers to someone who was young and inexperienced. According to Leech's theory, the lexical item *child* acquires a connotative meaning by evoking associations of innocence, vulnerability, and emotional immaturity rather than merely indicating biological age. Following Barthes' model of second-order signification, this connotation develops into a myth that questions the cultural expectation that adulthood necessarily entails emotional certainty and flawless decision-making. Thus, the lyric challenges the socially constructed belief that adults should always possess maturity and wisdom regardless of their personal circumstances.

In *My Little Love*, the lyric "My little love, tell me, do you feel the way my past aches?" literally describes a mother asking her child whether he can feel her pain. At the connotative level, the phrase *my past aches* represents emotional wounds and painful experiences that continue to affect the present. The lyric also reflects the myth that parents should always be able to protect their children from emotional suffering. Another example can be found in *I Drink Wine* through the lyric "We're in love with the world, but the world just wants to bring us down". Denotatively, the lyric describes people who love the world but feel disappointed by it. Connotatively, *the world* symbolizes social expectations, pressures, and challenges that often

influence individual happiness. The myth embedded in this lyric is the belief that society imposes standards that may prevent individuals from living authentically.

In *Hold On*, the lyric “*When all your hopes are gone*” literally refers to a condition in which a person has lost all hope. Connotatively, *hopes* symbolize dreams, goals, and motivation to continue living. The myth conveyed through this lyric is the belief that hope serves as a source of strength that helps individuals endure difficult circumstances. Similarly, in *To Be Loved*, the lyric “*Let it be known that I tried*” denotes a desire for others to recognize one’s efforts. Connotatively, the phrase symbolizes responsibility, acceptance, and perseverance despite failure or disappointment. The myth reflected in this lyric is the cultural belief that personal value is often associated with persistence and the willingness to keep trying despite challenges. These findings demonstrate that the selected songs contain multiple layers of meaning. While denotative meanings provide a literal understanding of the lyrics, connotative meanings and myths reveal deeper emotional, cultural, and social messages embedded in Adele’s songwriting.

The findings of this study indicate that Adele frequently employs figurative and symbolic language to express themes of loss, self-reflection, emotional healing, family relationships, acceptance, and personal growth. These themes are closely related to the main concept of the album *30*, which reflects Adele’s experiences following major changes in her personal life. Through the selected songs, Adele presents emotional situations that are not always expressed directly but are conveyed through symbolic expressions and implied meanings. As a result, listeners are encouraged to interpret the lyrics beyond their literal meanings and connect them with broader emotional experiences. Similar findings were reported by Sermiah et al. (2023), who found that Adele’s songs contain various connotative meanings related to emotional experiences, relationships, and personal struggles. Both studies demonstrate that Adele’s songwriting style often relies on language that carries meanings beyond its literal interpretation. This similarity suggests that Adele consistently uses song lyrics as a medium to communicate personal experiences while allowing listeners to construct their own interpretations of the messages conveyed.

The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of Setyaningsih et al. (2025), who discovered that song lyrics frequently contain hidden meanings that represent personal development and emotional experiences. In the present study, the connotative meanings found in the selected songs reveal messages about resilience, self-acceptance, emotional maturity, and the process of overcoming difficult life circumstances. Many of the lyrics reflect a journey from emotional struggle toward acceptance and personal growth, which becomes one of the dominant themes throughout the album. The finding support Iveland (2024) view that song lyrics function as a medium through which songwriters communicate experiences, emotions, and perspectives about life. The selected songs in Adele’s album *30* demonstrate how personal experiences can be transformed into meaningful lyrical expressions that remain relevant to a wide audience. Although the songs are rooted in Adele’s own experiences, the messages conveyed through the lyrics reflect universal emotions and situations that listeners from different backgrounds can understand.

At the semiotic level, Roland Barthes’ theory helps reveal the myths embedded within the lyrics. Barthes argues that myths represent broader cultural and ideological messages that emerge from connotative meanings. The myths identified in this study largely revolve around emotional healing, perseverance, self-discovery, acceptance of change, and the importance of continuing life despite suffering. These myths demonstrate that Adele’s songs do not merely narrate personal stories but also represent universal human experiences. Through the selected songs, personal emotions such as sadness, disappointment, regret, and hope are transformed into messages that

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can be understood and experienced by a wider audience. The myths found in the lyrics suggest that emotional struggles are a natural part of life and that personal growth often develops through difficult experiences. In this way, the songs encourage listeners to view challenges as opportunities for self-understanding and emotional development. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Fabbri et al. (2022), which found that song lyrics often contain deeper messages regarding life struggles and emotional resilience that can be uncovered through Barthes' semiotic framework. Both studies highlight that song lyrics function not only as artistic expressions but also as cultural texts that communicate values, beliefs, and perspectives about human life.

Positive connotations appear in lyrics that communicate hope, recovery, courage, and emotional strength. Expressions such as hold on, I'll always survive, and easy on me symbolize optimism and resilience despite life's challenges. These findings support Dewi (2022) who argues that Adele's lyrics frequently function as a medium for expressing personal growth and emotional transformation.

Through positive connotations, Adele encourages listeners to embrace healing and continue moving forward despite painful experiences.

The analysis also reveals different types of connotative meaning. Based on Leech's classification, the writer identified positive, neutral, and negative connotations in the selected lyrics. Among the 25 data points analyzed, 8 data points (32%) contain positive connotations, 13 data points (52%) contain neutral connotations, and 4 data points (16%) contain negative connotations. The dominance of neutral connotations indicates that Adele tends to express her experiences through reflective and descriptive language rather than highly evaluative expressions. Neutral connotations are particularly evident in lyrics discussing self-reflection, acceptance, and personal understanding. These expressions allow listeners to interpret the lyrics based on their own experiences without being directed toward a strongly positive or negative perspective. Positive connotations are generally associated with hope, resilience, emotional recovery, and personal strength, while negative connotations reflect feelings of loss, loneliness, disappointment, and emotional pain. The presence of these three types of connotation illustrates the complexity of emotions represented throughout the album and contributes to the authenticity of Adele's storytelling. Similar observations were found by Hasan et al., (2022), who noted that song lyrics often convey meanings through descriptive language that allows listeners to construct their own interpretations. This similarity indicates that connotative meaning plays an important role in creating emotional connections between songwriters and listeners. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of positive, neutral, and negative connotations identified in the selected lyrics.

Table 1. Distribution of Connotative Meaning in Selected Songs from Adele's Album 30

Type of Connotation	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Connotation	8	32%
Netral Connotation	13	52%
Negative Connotation	4	16%
Total	25	100%

Based on the findings and analysis, the first research question regarding the forms and interpretations of denotative meaning has been answered. The study found that the denotative meanings in the selected songs from Adele's album 30 are represented through words, phrases, and sentences that convey their literal or dictionary meanings. These denotative meanings provide the basic understanding of the lyrics and serve as the foundation for interpreting deeper

meanings contained in the songs. The denotative meanings identified in the selected songs generally describe situations, actions, feelings, and relationships in their most literal sense. Expressions such as references to childhood, family, love, and personal experiences provide a direct understanding of the context presented in the lyrics. Although these meanings appear simple on the surface, they play an important role in helping listeners understand the storyline and emotional background of each song. Therefore, denotative meaning serves as the initial stage of interpretation before deeper meanings can be explored through connotative analysis.

The second research question concerning the forms and interpretations of connotative meaning has also been answered. The analysis revealed that the selected songs contain various connotative meanings that reflect Adele's emotional experiences, personal struggles, self-reflection, family relationships, healing processes, and personal growth. The connotative meanings were classified into positive, negative, and neutral connotations. Among the 25 data analyzed, neutral connotation was the most dominant type, followed by positive and negative connotations. This finding indicates that Adele tends to use reflective and descriptive expressions to communicate her emotions and life experiences. The connotative meanings found in the selected songs demonstrate Adele's tendency to express emotions indirectly through figurative and symbolic language. Many words and phrases carry meanings that go beyond their literal definitions and represent emotional conditions such as sadness, hope, regret, acceptance, and resilience. The dominance of neutral connotation suggests that Adele often presents her experiences reflectively, allowing listeners to interpret the lyrics according to their own perspectives and life experiences. As a result, the songs provide space for multiple interpretations while maintaining their emotional depth.

The third research question regarding the messages interpreted from the denotative and connotative meanings has also been addressed. The messages found in the selected songs include the importance of self-acceptance, emotional healing, resilience in facing life's difficulties, maintaining family relationships, learning from past experiences, and personal growth. These messages are represented through the myths identified using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Therefore, the songs in Adele's album *30* not only convey personal experiences but also communicate universal messages that listeners from different backgrounds can understand and relate to. The messages conveyed through the lyrics are closely related to the themes that dominate Adele's album *30*. Through the combination of denotative and connotative meanings, the songs encourage listeners to accept life changes, learn from painful experiences, and continue moving forward despite emotional difficulties. The myths identified in the lyrics strengthen these messages by presenting them as universal experiences shared by many people. Consequently, the selected songs not only function as personal narratives but also offer meaningful reflections on human life, relationships, and emotional development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of five selected songs from Adele's album *30*, namely *Easy on Me*, *My Little Love*, *I Drink Wine*, *Hold On*, and *To Be Loved*, it can be concluded that the songs contain various denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths that represent Adele's personal experiences and emotional journey. Through the application of Geoffrey Leech's theory of meaning and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the study was able to uncover both the literal meanings and the deeper messages embedded in the lyrics. The findings indicate that song lyrics can function as meaningful texts that communicate emotions, experiences, values, and perspectives on life.

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The study identified 25 data points containing denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meanings function as the literal meanings of words, phrases, and sentences, while connotative meanings reveal deeper emotional, symbolic, and cultural interpretations. The findings also show that neutral connotation is the most dominant type, with 13 data points (52%), followed by positive connotation with 8 data points (32%) and negative connotation with 4 data points (16%). This dominance suggests that Adele tends to express her experiences through reflective and descriptive language, allowing listeners to interpret the lyrics from their own perspectives and emotional backgrounds.

The myths identified through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory reflect themes of self-acceptance, emotional healing, resilience, family relationships, sacrifice, and personal growth. These myths demonstrate that Adele's songs convey not only personal stories but also universal messages that listeners from different backgrounds can understand. The analysis shows that the meanings contained in the lyrics extend beyond their literal interpretations and represent broader human experiences related to change, struggle, recovery, and self-discovery. This study contributes to the understanding of how semantic and semiotic approaches can be applied to song lyrics to reveal multiple layers of meaning. The findings support the view that song lyrics are not merely forms of entertainment but also mediums through which songwriters communicate complex emotions and life experiences.

This study is limited to five selected songs from Adele's album *30* and focuses only on denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth. As a result, the findings cannot fully represent all songs contained in the album. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze a larger number of songs or apply different linguistic and semiotic theories to obtain broader perspectives. Future studies may also explore other aspects such as metaphor, symbolism, discourse analysis, or pragmatics in song lyrics to enrich the understanding of meaning in musical texts.

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