

Analysis of Denotation and Connotation Meanings in the Song Lyrics "XXL" by LANY

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Abstract: Song lyrics function as linguistic signs that convey both literal and implied meanings through symbolic expressions. Although previous studies have applied Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze song lyrics, limited attention has been given to how ordinary lexical items and everyday expressions function as emotional symbols in contemporary pop music. This study aims to identify the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of "XXL" by LANY and to examine how ordinary expressions are transformed into symbolic representations of intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment through Barthes' second-order signification. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. The data source consisted of the official lyrics of "XXL" by LANY. The entire lyrics were examined, while five representative lyric lines were purposively selected for detailed analysis. The data were analyzed using Barthes' concepts of first-order and second-order signification. The findings reveal that expressions such as *small-town dreams*, *hoodie*, *Miss Americana*, *California*, and *double-XL* possess both denotative and connotative meanings. Through second-order signification, these ordinary lexical items function as symbolic signs representing shared aspirations, intimacy, admiration, nostalgia, and enduring emotional attachment. These findings demonstrate that contemporary pop lyrics communicate emotional experiences not only through literal meanings but also through symbolic associations. The study contributes to semiotic studies by providing a deeper understanding of emotional signification in contemporary pop song lyrics through Barthes' semiotic framework.

Keywords: song lyrics, semiotics, denotation, connotation, meaning.

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Introduction

Language is a system of signs used by humans to communicate meaning, thoughts, and emotions. As a system of signs, language enables individuals to represent and interpret experiences through meaningful forms of communication (Fodor, n.d.). Through language, individuals express ideas, feelings, and experiences in ways that can be understood and interpreted by others. Beyond its everyday communicative function, language is also used artistically to convey subjective experiences and implied meanings, one of the most prominent forms being song lyrics. In song lyrics, language functions not merely as a medium of expression but also as a symbolic system in which words, phrases, and figurative expressions act as signs that carry multiple layers of meaning. Therefore, song lyrics can be examined linguistically to understand how meaning is constructed and represented through language. From a linguistic perspective, meaning is not solely determined by literal definitions but is also shaped by social and psychological interpretation. Ferdinand de Saussure explains that every linguistic sign consists of two inseparable components: the signifier, which refers to the sound-image or written form, and the signified, which refers to the concept represented by that form (Salam & Sakinah, 2024). Meaning emerges from the relationship between these two components rather than from the physical form of language itself. This concept is particularly relevant

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to song lyrics, where the same linguistic expression may generate different interpretations depending on context and listeners' experiences. Saussure's theory forms the basis of semiotics, the study of signs and meaning-making. Building upon this framework, Roland Barthes expanded the concept of signification by proposing two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of a sign, while connotation involves associative, emotional, and contextual meanings that arise through interpretation (Barthes, 1977). In Barthes' model, the denotative meaning serves as the first order of signification, and this literal meaning can function as a new signifier that produces connotative meanings at a second level. Thus, meaning is not fixed at the surface level but continues to develop through readers' or listeners' interpretations. This concept is especially relevant to song lyrics, as lyrical expressions often operate on multiple levels of signification, conveying both literal meanings and deeper emotional or symbolic messages that listeners may interpret differently.

In the context of song lyrics, denotative meaning represents what is directly stated in the text, whereas connotative meaning reflects how listeners interpret the lyrics based on their personal experiences and emotions. This study focuses on denotation and connotation because these two levels of meaning are most relevant examining how song lyrics communicate both explicit messages and implied emotional meanings. Denotation provides the literal basis for understanding the lexical meaning of the lyrics, while connotation reveals the symbolic and affective meanings associated with particular expressions (Work & Text, 2014). The concept of myth, which in Barthes' theory refers to broader cultural ideologies, is excluded from this study because the analysis is limited to linguistic meaning and listeners' interpretations within a single song rather than to wider sociocultural narratives. The focus of this research is to explore the representation of personal emotions, intimacy, and interpersonal memory in the song lyrics.

This focus is particularly appropriate in the study of music because songs communicate meaning not only through sound but also through language. Music is not merely a form of entertainment but also a medium of communication that conveys human ideas, experiences, and emotions. Feelings such as sadness, joy, longing, and hope can be perceived by listeners through various musical genres. These emotions are conveyed not only through melody, rhythm, and arrangement but also through lyrics that are rich in figurative language and personal expression. (Tagg, 2012) states, music functions as a form of human communication that transmits emotional and expressive meanings through organized sound structures. Consequently, analyzing denotative and connotative meanings enables researchers to uncover both the literal narrative and the deeper emotional messages embedded in song lyrics.

Previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of Barthes' semiotic theory in analyzing song lyrics. Several previous studies have explored semiotic analyses of song lyrics. For instance, (Rahim, 2021) investigated the denotative and connotative meanings in Naomi Scott's "Speechless", focusing on themes of female empowerment and resistance against institutional or patriarchal constraints through Barthesian semiotics. Additionally, (Nurjanah & Nirwana, 2023) analyzed Olivia Rodrigo's "Happier" to uncover layered emotional expressions, while (Salam & Sakinah, 2024) explored the denotative and connotative systems in the song lyrics of "Sandals" by Khai Dreams. Another foundational approach by (Hidayatullah, 2008) examined the leksikal denotative and connotative dimensions within Creed's song lyrics, highlighting how musical texts are heavily saturated with symbolic meanings. These studies confirm that Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation are effective analytical tools for uncovering the multiple meanings embedded in song lyrics.

Although previous studies have applied Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze denotative and connotative meanings in various song lyrics, most of these studies have focused on themes such as social issues, empowerment, heartbreak, and personal struggles. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how ordinary lexical items and everyday expressions in contemporary pop songs

function as emotional and symbolic signs. As a result, the processes through which familiar words, objects, and place names construct meanings related to intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment remain insufficiently explored. Without examining these symbolic meanings, the emotional dimensions embedded in contemporary pop lyrics may be overlooked, leading to a limited understanding of how language represents personal experiences through Barthes' second-order signification.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the lyrics of "XXL" by LANY and to examine how ordinary lexical items and everyday expressions function as symbolic signs that communicate emotional experiences through Barthes' second-order signification. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of emotional signification in contemporary pop song lyrics and to address the existing gap concerning the symbolic role of ordinary expressions in representing intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach because it focuses on understanding and interpreting textual data. (Plano clark et al., 2014) state that qualitative research aims to understand and interpret social phenomena through detailed examination of textual or contextual data. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting phenomena within a particular context. This method was chosen because the study emphasized the interpretation of literal and implied meanings conveyed through song lyrics. This study used descriptive qualitative research. The research focused on identifying and explaining denotative and connotative meanings contained in selected lyric lines of the song. The analysis was conducted descriptively without involving statistical calculation. Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation was applied to interpret how linguistic signs in the lyrics communicate emotional and symbolic meanings related to longing, intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment.

The entire lyrics of "XXL" by LANY were read and interpreted to understand the overall context of the song. However, five lyric lines were purposively selected for detailed analysis because they represent the dominant themes of longing, intimacy, nostalgia, emotional attachment, and memory. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and other scholarly references related to semiotics, denotation, connotation, and song lyric analysis. The primary data of this study were obtained from the official lyrics of "XXL" by LANY available on Spotify Lyrics. To ensure data accuracy, the lyrics were cross-checked with the song's official audio release. The verified lyrics were then used as the primary data source for the semiotic analysis. These lyrics served as the main source for analyzing the denotative and connotative meanings based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

The data collection process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher obtained the official lyrics of the song from a reliable source. Second, the lyrics were read repeatedly to understand the context and identify expressions related to the research objectives. Third, five lyric lines containing symbolic and emotional expressions were selected for detailed analysis. Fourth, the selected lyrics were classified using a data sheet to record their denotative and connotative meanings.

After the data had been collected, they were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The analysis began by identifying the denotative meanings based on the literal meanings of the selected lyrics. Next, the connotative meanings were interpreted by examining the emotional and symbolic associations conveyed in each expression. The findings were then interpreted using Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation to explain the layered meanings communicated through the lyrics. The analysis model employed in this study followed Barthes' two levels of signification. First, the researcher identified the signifier and signified contained in each selected lyric line to determine their denotative meanings as the first-order signification. Second, these denotative meanings were further interpreted to reveal their connotative meanings as the second-order signification. Through this

process, ordinary lexical items and expressions were analyzed as symbolic signs that represent emotional experiences, intimacy, nostalgia, and longing. Finally, the results were presented descriptively in the form of explanations and tables. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the interpretations were supported by relevant theories and previous studies.

Results and Discussion

Five lyric lines were purposively selected because they represent the dominant themes found in the song. These lyrics contain expressions that demonstrate both denotative and connotative meanings. The selected data are presented below.

Lyrics of “XXL” – LANY

[Verse 1]

*All my favorite songs are from 2018
We flew around the world with our small-town
dreams
You're a superstar and you wear it so well
But nothin' like you in my hoodie, double-XL*
[Pre-Chorus]
*Bloodstream
Full of desert lightnin'
Thank God I'm not drivin'
A blur the whole way home*
[Chorus]
*I still remember
I will forever
Backseat secrets we won't ever tell
I miss you double-XL
Miss Americana
And all my friends love ya
Back patio at the Bowery Hotel
I miss you double-XL*

[Verse 2]

*You've been goin' out in the glitter and glow
Hollywood fades and it's startin' to show
I'm barely hangin' on and I'm lookin' for help
Every night without you, hurtin' double-XL*
[Pre-Chorus]
*Bloodstream
Full of desert lightnin'*

*Thank God I'm not drivin'
A blur the whole way home (Yeah)*
[Chorus]
*I still remember
I will forever
Backseat secrets we won't ever tell
I miss you double-XL
Miss Americana
And all my friends love ya
Back patio at the Bowery Hotel
I miss you double-XL*

[Bridge]

*Baby, we'll always have California
Half of me will always be waitin' for ya*
[Chorus]
*I still remember
I will forever
Backseat secrets we won't ever tell
I miss you double-XL
Miss Americana
And all my friends love ya
Back patio at the Bowery Hotel
I miss you double-XL*
[Outro]
*Baby, we'll always have California
Half of me will always be waitin' for ya
Baby, we'll always have California
Half of me will always be waitin' for ya (I miss
you double-XL)*

Denotative and Connotative Meaning of The Song “XXL” by LANY

Five lyric lines were selected because they are the most representative expressions in the song and contain clear denotative and connotative meanings. These lines capture the main themes of longing, intimacy, and cherished memories, making them sufficient to represent the overall meaning of the song and to support a focused semiotic analysis.

Table 1. Translation of The Song “XXL” by LANY

In English	In Indonesia
We flew around the world with our small-town dreams	<i>Kita berkeliling dunia dengan mimpi-mimpi kota kecil kita</i>
But nothin' like you in my hoodie, double-XL	<i>Tapi tak ada yang seperti dirimu mengenakan hoodieku yang berukuran double-XL</i>
Miss Americana and all my friends love ya	<i>Miss Americana dan semua temanku menyayangimu</i>
Baby, we'll always have California	<i>Sayang, kita akan selalu memiliki California</i>
I miss you double-XL	<i>Aku sangat merindukanmu</i>

After translating the selected lyrics, the data were analyzed using Barthes’ concepts of denotation and connotation. Five representative lyric lines were selected because they reflect the central themes of longing, intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Signifier, Signified, Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the song lyric “XXL”

No.	Signifier	Signified	Denotative	Connotative
1	Small-town dreams	Simple aspirations and hopes	Describes two people traveling around the world while carrying their simple dreams.	Symbolizes humble beginnings, innocence, and shared aspirations.
2	Hoodie double-XL	An oversized hoodie worn by someone	Nothing compares to seeing someone wearing the speaker's hoodie.	Represents intimacy, warmth, comfort, and emotional closeness.
3	Miss Americana	An admired and idealized woman	A woman admired by the speaker and accepted by his social circle.	Represents admiration and social acceptance.
4	California	A shared place	Shared memories in California.	Represents memories, nostalgia, and emotional permanence.
5	Double-XL	Extreme intensity of feeling	Strong feeling of missing someone.	Represents overwhelming longing and enduring attachment.

The findings reveal that the selected lyrics contain both denotative and connotative meanings. The dominant connotative meanings identified in the data include longing, intimacy, nostalgia, admiration, and emotional attachment. Through Barthes’ second-order signification, ordinary lexical items such as “hoodie,” “California,” and “double-XL” function as symbolic signs that represent emotional experiences.

Discussion

Analysis of Selected Lyric

Data 1 - “*We flew around the world with our small-town dreams*”

The signifier in this lyric is the expression “small-town dreams,” while the signified refers to simple aspirations and hopes originating from humble beginnings. At the denotative level, the lyric describes two individuals traveling around the world while pursuing their dreams. However, through Barthes’ second-order signification, the expression acquires meanings beyond its literal reference and symbolizes humble beginnings, innocence, and shared aspirations. This finding indicates that the contrast between small-town dreams and flew around the world constructs a narrative of transformation and personal growth experienced collectively. Rather than representing individual success, the lyric emphasizes how shared aspirations strengthen emotional bonds and preserve

memories of the relationship. The symbolic meaning suggests that emotional attachment is rooted not only in affection but also in experiences and dreams developed together.

This finding supports Yuliana (2023), who argues that memories and shared experiences often function as symbolic representations of emotional continuity in contemporary music. Similar to the present study, symbolic expressions rooted in ordinary experiences can preserve emotional attachment and nostalgia. The expression *small-town dreams* demonstrates how simple aspirations and shared experiences are transformed into signs that represent enduring affection and collective memories. These findings suggest that emotional meanings are frequently constructed through symbolic associations rather than explicit statements.

Data 2 - “*But nothin' like you in my hoodie, double-XL*”

The signifier in this lyric is the expression “hoodie, double-XL,” while the signified refers to an oversized hoodie belonging to the speaker and worn by the loved one. At the denotative level, the lyric literally describes someone wearing the speaker’s hoodie. At the connotative level, however, the hoodie becomes a symbol of intimacy, comfort, affection, and emotional closeness. These findings demonstrate that everyday objects can acquire emotional significance through second-order signification. Rather than functioning solely as an item of clothing, the hoodie represents warmth, trust, and shared memories. Its significance lies not in the object itself but in the emotional associations attached to it by the individuals involved. The songwriter deliberately uses a familiar object to make emotional experiences more relatable to listeners.

This finding is consistent with Salam and Sakinah (2024), who found that ordinary lexical items in song lyrics often function as symbolic signs carrying meanings beyond their literal references. Similar to the symbolic meanings identified in *Sandals* by Khai Dreams, the hoodie in *XXL* represents intimacy, warmth, and emotional attachment. Both studies demonstrate that familiar objects may acquire emotional significance through personal memories and experiences. These findings indicate that ordinary objects can preserve emotional bonds and maintain a sense of connection between individuals.

Data 3 - “*Miss Americana and all my friends love ya*”

The signifier in this lyric is the expression “Miss Americana,” while the signified refers to an admired and idealized woman appreciated by the speaker and his social circle. Denotatively, the lyric describes a woman who is loved by both the speaker and his friends. Connotatively, the expression symbolizes admiration, attractiveness, and social acceptance. The result suggests that cultural labels can function as symbolic signs conveying meanings beyond their literal references. The expression Miss Americana portrays the woman as an idealized figure occupying a special position in the speaker’s emotional world. Furthermore, the phrase all my friends love ya suggests that the relationship is validated not only by personal affection but also by social recognition. The symbolic meaning implies that romantic attachment is closely associated with feelings of belonging and acceptance.

Similar findings were reported by Nurjanah and Nirwana (2023), who explain that connotative meanings in song lyrics contribute to the representation of emotions and interpersonal relationships. In the present study, the expression Miss Americana symbolizes admiration and social acceptance, while the phrase all my friends love ya emphasizes the role of social recognition in romantic attachment. These findings demonstrate that emotional meanings are not only constructed through individual feelings but are also influenced by social interactions and collective perceptions.

Data 4 - “*Baby, we'll always have California*”

The signifier in this lyric is the word “California,” while the signified refers to a place associated with shared memories and experiences. At the denotative level, the lyric states that the speaker and the addressed person will always have California as part of their memories. Through Barthes’ second-order signification, however, California transcends its geographical identity and becomes a symbol of nostalgia, emotional permanence, and cherished memories. The symbolic meaning implies that places can function as repositories of emotional experiences. Rather than emphasizing physical characteristics, the songwriter uses California to represent meaningful moments shared within the relationship. These findings demonstrate that memories associated with particular places continue to shape emotional experiences even after the relationship has changed. By employing a geographical reference, the songwriter transforms an ordinary place name into a representation of emotional continuity.

This finding supports Yuliana (2023), who argues that memories and loss are frequently represented symbolically in contemporary music. Similar to the present study, geographical references can function as signs that preserve emotional experiences and nostalgia. The word *California* no longer refers merely to a physical location but becomes a symbolic representation of shared memories and emotional permanence. These findings suggest that place names can evoke emotional continuity and maintain personal connections despite changes in relationships.

Data 5 - “*I miss you double-XL*”

The signifier in this lyric is the expression “double-XL,” while the signified refers to an intensified degree of longing beyond ordinary feelings. Denotatively, the lyric expresses a strong feeling of missing someone. Connotatively, the expression transforms a clothing size into a metaphorical sign representing overwhelming longing and enduring emotional attachment. This finding indicates that language can communicate emotions indirectly through symbolic expressions. Instead of explicitly describing the depth of longing, the songwriter employs the expression double-XL to emphasize the intensity and persistence of emotional attachment. The symbolic meaning suggests that familiar lexical items can acquire additional meanings when interpreted through emotional experiences and personal memories.

This finding is in line with Rahim (2021), who explains that symbolic language enables songwriters to express emotions indirectly through ordinary expressions. Similar to the present study, lexical items that initially possess literal meanings may develop additional symbolic meanings through emotional associations. The expression *double-XL* illustrates how a clothing size is transformed into a metaphorical sign representing overwhelming longing and enduring emotional attachment. These findings demonstrate that Barthes’ second-order signification allows simple expressions to communicate profound emotional experiences.

Taken together, the five selected lyrics demonstrate that meaning in “XXL” is constructed not only through literal descriptions but also through symbolic associations attached to ordinary expressions. The recurring use of personal objects, place names, and familiar lexical items indicates that emotional experiences are represented through second-order signification. As a result, themes of intimacy, nostalgia, admiration, and longing emerge as interconnected meanings that shape the overall narrative of the song. These findings highlight the ability of contemporary pop lyrics to communicate complex emotions through simple and relatable expressions.

Interpretation Based on Roland Barthes’ Theory

According to Barthes’ semiotic theory, meaning is produced through two levels of signification. At the first level, denotation refers to the literal relationship between the signifier and the signified. In

the present study, expressions such as small-town dreams, hoodie, Miss Americana, California, and double-XL initially function as ordinary lexical items that describe aspirations, objects, cultural labels, places, and measurements. Their denotative meanings correspond to their direct and commonly understood references.

However, through second-order signification, these denotative meanings are transformed into connotative meanings that communicate emotional experiences and symbolic associations. Rather than merely referring to dreams, clothing, places, or clothing sizes, these expressions become representations of shared aspirations, intimacy, admiration, nostalgia, and enduring emotional attachment. This process demonstrates Barthes' view that signs are not fixed but are culturally and emotionally constructed through individual experiences and social contexts.

These findings confirm Barthes' proposition that meaning extends beyond literal definitions and emerges through cultural and emotional associations. In the present study, ordinary lexical items initially function as denotative signs, but through second-order signification they acquire additional meanings that represent shared aspirations, intimacy, admiration, nostalgia, and enduring emotional attachment. This process demonstrates that song lyrics operate as systems of signs in which emotional experiences are communicated indirectly through symbolic expressions. Therefore, Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation provide an effective framework for explaining how contemporary pop lyrics construct multiple layers of meaning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the lyrics of "XXL" by LANY contain layered meanings in which ordinary expressions such as "small-town dreams," "hoodie," "California," and "double-XL" function as symbolic signs representing intimacy, nostalgia, and emotional attachment. Through Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, the study reveals that contemporary pop lyrics communicate emotional experiences not only through literal meanings but also through implied symbolic associations. These findings confirm that Barthes' semiotic theory provides an effective framework for uncovering the multiple meanings embedded in contemporary song lyrics and for explaining how ordinary expressions function as symbolic representations of human emotions.

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