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DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS IN CONAN GRAY'S SONG *"THE CUT THAT ALWAYS BLEEDS"*

Elza Salsabillah Arriyaha Lawaqih Taufik[1], Otong Setiawan Djauharie[2]
[1,2]English Literature Department Faculty of Adab and Humanities,
University of Islamic State Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung
[1]salsabillahelza1321@gmail.com, [2]otongsetiawandjuharie@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in the lyrics of the song "The Cut That Always Bleeds" by Conan Gray. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method, with the song lyrics as the object of analysis. The data were obtained by collecting the lyrics from various online sources such as YouTube, Spotify, and Google. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by repeatedly reading and listening to the song in order to understand the linguistic meaning, emotions, and context contained in the lyrics. The collected data were then classified into denotative and connotative meanings. The results of the study show that connotative meaning is more dominant than denotative meaning. The connotative meaning in the song lyrics represents emotional suffering, dependency, and an unbalanced relationship, while the denotative meaning functions to convey meaning directly according to the literal text of the lyrics. This study indicates that the lyrics of "The Cut That Always Bleeds" are able to convey deep emotional experiences and build a strong connection between the song and its listeners.

Keywords: Conan Gray, denotative meaning, connotative meaning, song lyrics

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna denotatif dan makna konotatif yang terdapat dalam lirik lagu "The Cut That Always Bleeds" karya Conan Gray. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan objek penelitian berupa lirik lagu. Data diperoleh melalui pengumpulan lirik dari berbagai sumber daring, seperti YouTube, Spotify, dan Google. Selanjutnya, data dianalisis dengan cara membaca dan mendengarkan lagu secara berulang-ulang untuk memahami makna bahasa, emosi, dan konteks yang terkandung dalam lirik. Data yang telah diperoleh kemudian diklasifikasikan ke dalam makna denotatif dan makna konotatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna konotatif lebih dominan dibandingkan makna denotatif. Makna konotatif dalam lirik lagu ini menggambarkan penderitaan emosional, ketergantungan, dan hubungan yang tidak seimbang, sedangkan makna denotatif berfungsi untuk menyampaikan makna secara langsung sesuai

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dengan teks lirik. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa lirik lagu "The Cut That Always Bleeds" mampu menyampaikan pengalaman emosional yang mendalam serta membangun keterhubungan antara lagu dan pendengar.
***Kata kunci**: Conan Gray, makna denotatif, makna konotatif, lirik lagu*

INTRODUCTION

Songs are one form of verbal artistic expression that have the ability to convey messages, experiences, and emotions to listeners (R. Rahmawati & Dewi, 2025). A song is inseparable from the lyrics that accompany it. The lyrics in a song not only complement the music but also function as a communication tool that allows the songwriter to express feelings or respond indirectly to social phenomena. In this way, lyrics enable interaction between the songwriter and the listener (Cahya et al., 2021).

Lyrics and music are linked and form a whole. The words in the lyrics are carefully chosen to convey meaning, both literally and figuratively, so that they are easy to remember and captivate listeners. The choice of language or diction that is relevant to the social context and life phenomena is one of the factors in the success of a song (Trimo Wati et al., 2022). According to Aritonang (2019), the language in song lyrics is "condensed, simplified, and wrapped in rhythm, with the help of imaginative words," so that each song can be considered an expression of the songwriter's feelings wrapped in music (Harnia, 2021).

Therefore, each song has a different meaning according to what the writer wants to convey. This meaning is then divided into denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the original meaning of a word, which has not undergone any changes or shifts. According to the KBBI, denotative meaning is the meaning of a word or group of words that directly refers to something in the real world or is in accordance with general agreement, and is clear and objective. According to Leech (1981), denotative meaning is the meaning of a word or phrase as it is, that is, the literal meaning without any additional meaning (Levia et al., 2025). Meanwhile, connotative meaning refers to the ideas, feelings, or additional meanings attached to a word beyond its literal meaning. Barker (2001) explains that connotative meaning is part of the meaning of a word that conveys implied meaning (Levia et al., 2025). Connotative meaning is subjective and can be interpreted differently by each person, depending on their personal experiences and the social factors that influence them (C. D. Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Connotative meanings often appear in literary works, especially in song lyrics, because music is a powerful medium for expressing emotions, thereby deepening the connection between words and feelings (Levia et al., 2025).

Conan Gray is known as a singer and songwriter who often combines denotative and connotative meanings in his lyrics to describe emotions more deeply. Many of his works show that a word does not only have a literal meaning, but also carries an emotional impression that enriches the message of the song (Yustika Astrimulyani & I Gusti Agung Sri Rwa Jayantini, 2024a).

This is clearly reflected in *"The Cut That Always Bleeds."* Denotatively, the song title refers to a wound that continues to bleed. However, connotatively, the phrase describes emotional pain that never heals, relationships that repeatedly cause hurt, and emotional attachments that are difficult to end. The combination of literal and implied meanings makes this song relevant for analysis from the perspective of denotative and connotative meanings.

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The novelty of this study arises because the song *"The Cut That Always Bleeds"* has rarely been analyzed using a denotative and connotative approach. Most previous studies have focused on Conan Gray's more popular songs or the use of metaphors, so an in-depth study of the literal and emotional meanings of this song has not been widely conducted. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of denotative and connotative meanings in Conan Gray's work (Levia et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative descriptive method is a research method that aims to describe and analyze data systematically, factually, and in depth regarding the object of research (Septiana, n.d.). In this study, the object analyzed is the lyrics of the song *"The Cut That Always Bleeds"* by Conan Gray, with a focus on grouping the denotative and connotative meanings contained within it.

The data collection method in this study was carried out in several stages (Yustika Astrimulyani & I Gusti Agung Sri Rwa Jayantini, 2024b). The first stage was to access and collect song lyrics from various online sources, such as YouTube, Spotify, and Google, in order to obtain complete and accurate lyrics from the songs being studied. The second stage involved reading the lyrics in depth to understand the intent, message, and meaning contained in each word and sentence. Next, the researchers listened to the songs repeatedly to complement the text analysis. This process aimed to capture the meaning of the language, emotions, and situational context that were not always conveyed through the written lyrics. After that, the researchers noted and grouped the parts of the lyrics that contained denotative and connotative meanings. The final stage of this data collection method was to analyze the meaning of the song lyrics that had been classified based on the categories of meaning found.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The song *"The Cut That Always Bleeds"* by Conan Gray describes the emotional experience of someone trapped in a one-sided relationship. Through simple yet meaningful diction, this song expresses pain, emotional dependence, and helplessness in loving someone who does not feel the same way. The following analysis explains the denotative and connotative meanings of each of the song's main lyrics.

Lyrics Analysis:

a. I don't love you anymore
   A pretty line that I adore
   Five words that I've heard before

Denotative meaning: The lyrics in this verse state that the narrator in the lyrics admits that he no longer loves someone, calling the statement a beautiful line that he adores, and emphasizing that he has heard the line many times before.

Connotative Meaning: The lyrics in this verse contain irony and emotional denial. The statement *"I don't love you anymore"* does not reflect a sincere letting go, but rather an attempt by the narrator in the lyrics to convince themselves to stop loving someone who has hurt him. Referring to the sentence as *"a pretty line"* shows that the beauty of the lyrics lies in the false hope they contain, not in the truth of the feelings. Meanwhile, the phrase *"five words that I've heard before"* emphasizes a recurring emotional pattern, in which the narrator is trapped in the same cycle of relationships and pain that repeats itself without resolution.

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b. 'Cause you keep me on a rope
   And tied a noose around my throat
   You're gone, then back at my door

Denotative Meaning: In these lyrics, the narrator is described as being held with a rope, tied with a noose around the neck, then abandoned and revisited. This description literally depicts the actions of tying, strangling, leaving, and returning.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics describe a restrictive and unstable relationship. The phrase *"keep me on a rope"* symbolizes emotional control and dependence, while *"tied a noose around my throat"* indicates intense psychological pressure that makes the narrator feel emotionally strangled. The pattern *"you're gone, then back at my door"* represents a push-and-pull relationship, where the partner leaves and returns as they please. This situation creates emotional uncertainty and strengthens the narrator's position as the one who continues to be hurt but remains trapped in a toxic relationship.

c. 'Cause if you're gonna leave
   Better leave, better do it fast
   Can't live a little longer
   Sitting on your lap

Denotative Meaning: This verse states that if the partner really intends to leave, then it should be done quickly, because the narrator cannot bear to stay close to or depend on that person any longer.

Connotative Meaning: These lyrics reflect emotional exhaustion due to uncertainty in a relationship. The narrator's request for their partner to leave immediately shows that brief pain is considered more bearable than prolonged suffering due to an unclear relationship. The phrase *"sitting on your lap"* symbolizes a position of dependence and false closeness, where the narrator is passive and has no control. These lyrics emphasize the narrator's desire to escape from a relationship that places him in a position of emotional dependence without any real certainty or commitment.

d. 'Cause you know what you're doing
   When you're coming back
   And I don't wanna have
   Another heart attack

Denotative Meaning: The lyrics in this verse describe that the partner is aware of their actions when they return, and the narrator does not want to experience another heart attack.

Connotative Meaning: These lyrics show the narrator's awareness of the pattern of emotional manipulation in the relationship. The phrase *"you know what you're doing"* emphasizes that the partner's return is not a spontaneous act, but rather something deliberate because they know that the narrator will accept them back. The phrase *"another heart attack"* is used to describe extreme and repeated emotional pressure. These lyrics describe the serious psychological impact of an unhealthy relationship, where each time the partner returns, it triggers anxiety, fear, and deep emotional suffering for the narrator.

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e. Oh, I can't be
Your lover on a leash
Every other week
When you please

Denotative Meaning: This set of lyrics states that the narrator cannot be a lover who is bound or controlled, who is only present occasionally according to their partner's wishes.
Connotative Meaning: These lyrics emphasize a rejection of unequal and manipulative relationships. The phrase *"lover on a leash"* is a statement that describes a lover as a controlled figure, lacking freedom, and only called upon when needed. Meanwhile, the expressions *"every other week"* and *"when you please"* emphasize the inconsistency and one-sided dominance in the relationship. The narrator realizes that they are being treated as a temporary choice, not as a valued partner, so these lyrics reflect an attempt to set emotional boundaries and reject the role of being an object in a toxic relationship.

f. Oh, I can't be
The kiss that you don't need
The lie between your teeth
The cut that always bleeds
The cut that always bleeds

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, this series of lyrics states that the narrator cannot be an unwanted kiss, a spoken lie, or a wound that continues to bleed.
Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics emphasize feelings of being unappreciated and rejection of the role as an object in an unhealthy relationship. The phrase *"the kiss that you don't need"* symbolizes affection that is not truly desired, while *"the lie between your teeth"* describes lies that are spoken easily and repeatedly. The phrase *"the cut that always bleeds"* is the main image representing the emotional wounds that remain open due to the relationship. The repetition of this phrase strengthens the meaning of never-ending suffering, while also emphasizing the narrator's awareness of the destructive impact of the relationship he is in.

g. Say you love somebody new
And beat my heart, to black and blue
And they leave, and it's me
You come back to

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, this set of lyrics states that the partner admits to loving someone else, breaking the narrator's heart until it turns black and blue, but still returning to the narrator after the other person leaves.
Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics describe the narrator's position as an emotional escape. Declaring love for someone else signifies betrayal and emotional unfaithfulness, while the phrase *"beat my heart, to black and blue"* is an expression of deep and repeated emotional wounds. The line *"it's me you come back to"* shows that the narrator is not the first choice, but rather a place to return to when other relationships fail. This confirms the imbalance in the relationship and shows how the narrator continues to be trapped in a cycle of accepting painful treatment in order to maintain an emotional bond.

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h. To say you loved me all along
And kiss the bruises 'til they're gone
Bittersweet, 'cause I can't breathe
Inside your arms

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, this series of lyrics describes a couple who claim to have loved the narrator from the beginning, kissing their wounds until they healed, which evokes both sweet and bitter feelings when the narrator is in their arms.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics represent a cycle of toxic relationships. The confession of love, *"you loved me all along,"* serves as justification for previous hurtful behavior and becomes a tool to maintain emotional bonds. The act of *"kissing the bruises"* symbolizes the partner's role as a healer after causing the wounds, creating an increasingly strong emotional dependence. The expression *"bittersweet"* indicates the ambiguity of feelings between comfort and suffering, while the phrase *"I can't breathe inside your arms"* indicates that the closeness that should provide a sense of security instead causes emotional pressure and suffocation. This confirms that love in this relationship is both soothing and painful.

i. 'Cause if you're gonna leave
Better leave, better do it fast
Can't live another minute
Bleeding from my back

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, this set of lyrics states that if the partner really intends to leave, then it should be done immediately, because the narrator cannot endure being wounded and suffering any longer.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics reflect the peak of emotional exhaustion experienced by the narrator in the lyrics. The request for the partner to leave quickly shows that the uncertainty and back-and-forth in the relationship is far more painful than the breakup itself. The phrase *"bleeding from my back"* is a powerful depiction of betrayal and deep emotional wounds, as if the narrator continues to be attacked from behind. These lyrics emphasize that the relationship has reached a point where emotional suffering can no longer be tolerated, so that separation is seen as the only way to stop the ongoing pain.

j. 'Cause I don't have another one
For you to stab
And I don't wanna have
Another heart attack

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, these lyrics states that the narrator has nothing left to stab, and does not want to experience another painful wound.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics describe emotional limits that are almost exhausted. The phrase *"don't have another one for you to stab"* is a depiction that shows that the narrator has been hurt so often that they have no emotional strength left to bear another wound. The expression *"another heart attack"* again serves as a depiction of extreme and repeated psychological pressure. These lyrics emphasize the narrator's awareness of the destructive impact of the relationship on their emotional state, while also reflecting a desire to end the cycle of suffering that keeps repeating itself.

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k. But even though you're killing me
I, I need you like the air I breathe
I need, I need you more than me
I need you more than anything
Please, please

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, these lyrics states that even though the partner hurts the narrator extremely, he still desperately needs his partner's presence, even more than himself and everything else, followed by a request not to be abandoned.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics represent an intense and unhealthy emotional dependence. The phrase *"you're killing me"* depicts the deep emotional suffering caused by the relationship. The phrase *"like the air I breathe"* shows that the partner has become a basic need for the narrator, so that their presence is vital to their survival. The statement *"I need you more than me"* indicates a loss of identity and self-esteem, as the narrator places the partner's needs above their own. The repetition of the word *"please"* emphasizes helplessness and despair, showing how love in these lyrics has turned into a painful but difficult-to-break form of dependence.

l. 'Cause I could be
Your lover on a leash
Every other week
When you please

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, these lyrics states that the narrator acknowledges the possibility of becoming a bound lover who is only present periodically according to their partner's wishes.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics reveal a strong inner conflict. Unlike the previous section, which rejects this position, in this section the narrator expresses their willingness to return to a restrictive relationship. The phrase *"lover on a leash"* again symbolizes emotional control and domination, while *"every other week"* and *"when you please"* emphasize the imbalance in the relationship. This willingness reflects a deep emotional dependence, in which the narrator is willing to sacrifice their freedom and self-esteem in order to avoid separation and maintain their partner's presence in their life.

m. Oh, I could be
Anything you need
As long as you don't leave
The cut that always

Denotative Meaning: Denotatively, these lyrics states that the narrator is willing to be whatever their partner needs, on one condition: that their partner does not leave. The phrase *"the cut that always"* refers to a wound that continues to hurt.

Connotative Meaning: Connotatively, these lyrics reflect the peak of emotional dependence and excessive self-sacrifice. The narrator's willingness to *"be anything you need"* shows the loss of identity and self-esteem in order to maintain the relationship. The phrase *"as long as you don't leave"* confirms a deep fear of separation, so that love turns into a form of emotional negotiation. The phrase *"the cut that always"* reaffirms the song's main symbol, namely an emotional wound that remains open and never heals, indicating that even though the narrator is willing to sacrifice everything, the relationship still leaves behind ongoing pain.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the lyrics of Conan Gray's song *"The Cut That Always Bleeds"* contain strong denotative and connotative meanings that complement each other. The denotative meaning in the lyrics serves as the literal meaning that describes an unstable and conflictuous relationship. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning is more dominant and plays an important role in expressing deep emotional experiences, such as pain, emotional dependence, betrayal, and inner conflict experienced by the character.

Through the use of emotional diction, this song represents a toxic romantic relationship, in which the character is in an unbalanced position and continues to experience repeated emotional pain. Expressions such as "the cut that always bleeds" describe inner suffering that never heals due to a painful relationship.

In the lyrics of his songs, Conan Gray successfully expresses deep and complex emotional experiences, thereby establishing a strong emotional connection with listeners.

Thus, this study confirms that song lyrics not only serve as a means of entertainment, but also as a medium for expressing feelings and emotional experiences through figurative language.

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