

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Music is a universal phenomenon that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries. More than merely a sequence of notes, music carries complex messages, emotions, and ideologies. Lyrics, in particular, serve as a powerful medium of expression, where a singer or songwriter can convey personal experiences, social perspectives, or even critiques of existing realities (Adorno, 1973).

In recent decades, Taylor Swift has emerged as one of the most influential figures in the global music industry. With her distinctive songwriting abilities and honest narratives, Swift has captured the attention of millions of listeners from diverse backgrounds. Her albums frequently top the charts and become subjects of extensive discussion among music critics and fans alike (Perone, 2017).

The album "Red" (2012) and its re-recorded version "Red (Taylor's Version)" (2021) stand out as Swift's most iconic and impactful works, marking a broader musical exploration and raising questions about artistic ownership in the digital age (Kusek, 2011). The lyrics in this album are rich with metaphors, symbolism, and other figures of speech. The meanings in these lyrics are not always explicit or literal; rather, they are often implied and depend on the listener's interpretation. This is where the importance of semantic analysis comes in, particularly the distinction between denotative meaning (the literal or dictionary meaning) and connotative meaning (the

associative or emotional meaning) (Leech, 1981).

Analyzing Taylor Swift's lyrics is important for several reasons. First, her lyrics blend denotative and connotative meanings, inviting varied interpretations. Second, Swift's songs address universal themes such as love, heartbreak, and identity, making them relatable to a broad audience. Third, her use of figurative language, including metaphors and symbolism, enriches the semantic layers of her songs (Chandler, 2017). For example, in the song "Red", the lyric "Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street" literally describes driving a car down a street with no exit, but connotatively, it suggests a passionate but doomed relationship. In "All Too Well", the line "You call me up again just to break me like a promise" literally refers to a broken promise, but connotatively, it evokes the pain of betrayal and emotional devastation. Another example, "Now I'm lying on the cold hard ground" from "I Knew You Were Trouble", literally means lying on the ground, but connotatively expresses the feeling of being emotionally destroyed after a failed relationship.

Despite the popularity and critical acclaim of Taylor Swift's lyrics, there is still a lack of in-depth analysis on how she uses language to convey both denotative and connotative meanings. Understanding these layers of meaning can provide insight into how Swift's songs connect with diverse audiences and how language in popular music reflects broader cultural and emotional themes (Nasution et al., 2025).

This research aims to deeply analyze the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of the songs on the "Red (Taylor's Version)" album.

Using a semantic approach, this study will attempt to uncover how Swift uses language to create layered and complex meanings, and how these meanings resonate with listeners. The goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of how Swift's lyrics function as a form of communication and artistic expression.

Taylor Swift is one of the musicians known for her extraordinary ability to create song lyrics that convey emotions and complex messages to her listeners. In the album *Red (Taylor's Version)*, Swift utilizes various literary devices, such as metaphors, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism, to create deep and aesthetic figurative meanings. Previous research has shown that Swift's lyrics often serve as a form of emotional communication that not only reflects her personal experiences but also resonates widely with audiences. Using a semantic approach, this study aims to analyze how the denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics of this album contribute to its narrative strength and emotional appeal.

1.2 Problems of the Study

Based on the background above, the research questions in this study are as follows:

1. How are denotative and connotative expressed in the lyrics of selected songs from Taylor Swift's "Red (Taylor's Version)" Album?
2. How are these meanings represented at the word phrase clause and sentence levels?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In this study, there are five songs that were purposefully selected from the album *Red (Taylor's Version)*. This selection is based on specific criteria

that include thematic relevance, popularity, and the use of figurative language in the lyrics. These songs are expected to represent various emotions and experiences expressed by Taylor Swift in this album.

1. To analyze how denotative and connotative meanings are expressed in the lyrics of selected songs from Taylor Swift's "Red (Taylor's Version)" album.
2. To describe how denotative and connotative meanings are represented at the word phrase clause and sentence levels in the selected song lyrics.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is expected to provide the following benefits:

A. Theoretical Significance:

This study hopefully will contribute to the field of semantics by providing a deeper understanding of denotative and connotative meaning in contemporary song lyrics, specifically in Taylor Swift's "Red (Taylor's Version)".

B. Practical Significance:

The findings offer insights for both music enthusiasts and students on how language can be utilized to craft lyrics that are multi-layered and emotionally resonant.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to the analysis of denotative and connotative meaning in five purposively selected songs from Taylor Swift's "Red (Taylor's Version)" album. The study focuses solely on semantic analysis and acknowledges that interpretations are supported by textual evidence

and relevant theory

This limitation is justified for several reasons:

1. **Research Focus and Depth:** By narrowing the scope to only denotative and connotative meanings, the study can explore these two types of meaning in greater depth and detail, rather than providing a shallow overview of all seven types.
2. **Feasibility and Manageability:** Analyzing all songs in the album or all types of meaning would exceed the scope of an undergraduate thesis and compromise the clarity, consistency, and manageability of the research.
3. **Theoretical Relevance:** Denotative and connotative meanings are the most directly relevant to lyrical interpretation, as they represent the literal and emotional layers that are central to artistic and poetic expression in songs.
4. **Academic Significance:** Focusing on these two aspects provides a solid contribution to the field of semantics, particularly in how language in popular music can be both informative (denotative) and expressive (connotative).