# A Semantic Analysis of Meaning Variations in the Song Lyrics by Selena Gomez

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language, both literal and implicit meanings that are shaped through context and the use of figurative language. In song lyrics, figurative meanings are often used to convey emotions and complex messages, allowing listeners to engage with the song more deeply. This study aims to identify the various types of meanings contained in song lyrics and to analyze the role of semantic aspects in constructing emotional and social messages. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a semantic analysis approach. The findings show that the lyrics of both songs contain various types of semantic meanings, including lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, contextual meaning, referential meaning, non-referential meaning, denotative meaning, connotative meaning, conceptual meaning, associative meaning, terminological meaning, idiomatic meaning, and proverbial meaning. These diverse meanings function to strengthen the delivery of themes such as self-empowerment and feelings of alienation or being forgotten, which are central to both songs. Thus, the semantic meanings within the lyrics not only enrich the content of the songs but also build an emotional connection between the singer and the listener. |

## INTRODUCTION

Music is sound produced by musical instruments that creates rhythm and melody. Music is not only a form of entertainment, but also serves other functions as a medium for conveying ideas, thoughts and emotional experiences. Through lyrics and melody, a song can create an emotional connection between the songwriter and the listener. In

everyday life, music plays an important role as a medium of expression and communication, connecting individuals with a variety of feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Song lyrics, as an integral part of music, often convey a deeper message than just the words spoken. By using lyrics, singers are able to express their personal emotions or even reflect broader social conditions, providing a powerful emotional effect on their listeners.

Research on song lyrics, particularly from a semantic perspective, allows us to understand how meaning is conveyed not only in a literal form, but also encompasses more complex and sometimes hidden meanings behind the words. The meaning in a song is the core message conveyed through lyrics and music that complement each other to evoke emotional and cognitive responses from listeners. The meaning of a song can be seen as a multi-dimensional construction involving linguistic, musical, and socio-cultural aspects, which together form interpretation and aesthetic experience. This shows that semantic analysis of song lyrics needs to consider dynamic and subjective aspects of meaning, in addition to explicit meaning.

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language, inviting us to look more deeply at how words function in a particular context. Song lyrics, with all their structures and word choices, are a representation of these meanings. Sahrul, N. (2024) states that semantics is a field of linguistics that studies meaning in language, whether at the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level. Therefore, song lyrics not only convey messages directly, but can also open up a wider space for interpretation, depending on the perceptions and experiences of each listener. In the semantic analysis of song lyrics, it is very important to understand the various meanings contained within them in order to reveal all layers of meaning comprehensively.

Based on Chaer's theory (1994), the variety of semantic meanings includes: Lexical Meaning, Grammatical Meaning, Contextual Meaning, Referential Meaning, Non-referential Meaning, Denotative Meaning, Connotative Meaning and Conceptual Meaning, Associative Meaning, Term Meaning, Idiomatic Meaning and Proverbial Meaning. Understanding these various meanings is very important in analysing song lyrics, because lyrics not only serve as conveyors of literal information, but also as a medium for expressing feelings and social experiences. Through this diversity of meaning, songwriters such as Selena Gomez are able to convey deep emotional and social messages that influence how listeners feel and appreciate the song.

Similarly, Selena Gomez is one of the most famous pop singers, often using song lyrics as a means to express deep emotional and social themes, such as self-empowerment, loneliness, and the search for identity. The songs she creates not only tell stories about personal experiences, but also speak about issues that are relevant in the lives of many people. As explained by Meyer (2020), 'song lyrics can serve as a means to evoke strong emotions and create deep social awareness.' Therefore, by analysing semantics, we can explore more deeply how the choice of words and meanings in song lyrics can influence listeners' feelings and shape their social views.

This study aims to analyse the various meanings found in Selena Gomez's song lyrics. Using a semantic approach, this study will explore how the meanings in song lyrics can produce strong emotional and social messages, and how this can influence

listeners' perspectives on various issues, such as self-identity, beauty, and social acceptance. In addition, this study will also show how semantic elements play an important role in shaping the emotional and social experiences of listeners, connecting them to universal themes in everyday life. The author hopes that this paper will provide an understanding of the challenges involved in translating the meaning of these songs.

The object of study in semantics is the meaning contained in the smallest units of speech, ranging from words, phrases, clauses, to sentences. Thus, every sentence contains meaning, which can vary depending on the position of the unit and its use in the sentence. Wulandari and Santosa (2018) explain that the meaning of a song is greatly influenced by the context of the listener, so that the meaning received can vary based on the cultural background, emotions, and experiences of each individual.

The term 'meaning' has a very broad definition in linguistic studies. In general, meaning refers to the relationship between a linguistic form, such as a word, phrase, or sentence, and the thing or object it represents. However, more than that, meaning also reflects the relationship between language and the outside world, namely the social and cultural realities that surround us. In other words, meaning is not only individual but also social, as it involves a shared understanding that enables mutually understandable communication between language users. According to Chaer (1994), semantic studies focus on meaning. There are several types of meaning. There are 12 types of semantic meaning, including: lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, contextual meaning, referential meaning, non-referential meaning, denotative meaning, connotative meaning and conceptual meaning, associative meaning, terminological meaning, idiomatic meaning and proverbial meaning.

1. Lexical meaning is the actual meaning, the meaning as it is, and the meaning found in the dictionary. Lexical is a form derived from the noun lexicon (vocabulary, word stock). The term meaning in the dictionary refers to the basic meaning or concrete meaning. Example: My eyes hurt because of the dust. The word 'eyes' in lexical meaning refers to the sense of sight.

2. Grammatical meaning is the meaning that is formed after going through a grammatical process (affixation, reduplication, and compounding). Grammatical meaning emerges as a new meaning when the word is used. Example: The child is running. The word 'running' has a grammatical meaning because the prefix 'ber-' indicates an action or activity.

3. Contextual meaning is the meaning of a lexeme or word within the context of a sentence. Example: The punishment was very light for such a serious crime. The word 'light' in its contextual meaning means not severe in terms of justice or punishment, not in terms of physical description.

4. Referential meaning is a word that has a reference or reference point. So a word can be said to have referential meaning if it has a reference or reference point. Example: The farmer rode a horse when he went to the field. The word horse is a word with referential meaning because it has a reference point in the real world.

5. Non-referential meaning is a word that has no reference in the real world. Example: He bought a book and a pencil. The word 'and' in non-referential meaning does not refer to an object but only functions as a connector.

6. Denotative meaning is the basic, original, or actual meaning of a word. A word contains denotative meaning if it refers to or indicates the actual meaning or understanding. Words with denotative meaning are used in scientific language, because in scientific language, a person wants to convey their ideas. In order for the ideas conveyed not to cause multiple interpretations, they must be conveyed using words with denotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the basic, general, factual, neutral meaning that does not involve values or feelings and is not figurative. Example: The fire burned the kitchen. The word fire in its denotative meaning is an element of heat that can burn.

7. Connotative meaning is the additional meaning of a word that is related to the feelings or values felt by a person or group. Words can have connotative meanings if they contain certain emotions. Connotative meanings are figurative and involve feelings, attitudes, views, or personal experiences. If denotative meanings are general and neutral, then connotative meanings are more personal and specific. Example: The word black (Connotative meaning: something bad, gloomy or sad) That day was a black day in my life. Black can be interpreted as a day full of sadness.

8. Conceptual meaning is the meaning that a lexeme has regardless of context or association. Example: Mum is cooking in the kitchen. Mum in its conceptual meaning is a woman who gives birth to or raises children.

9. Associative meaning is the meaning that relates to the connection between the word and something outside of language. Example: My mum is my heaven. The word heaven in its associative meaning is not a place after death, but means the most comfortable and loving place.

10. Terminological meaning is a definite, clear, unambiguous meaning, even without the context of a sentence. Terminological meaning is only used in certain fields of science or activities. Example: Green plants make food through the process of photosynthesis. The word photosynthesis is a term in biology that means the process of making food in plants with the help of sunlight.

11. Idiomatic meaning is a meaning that cannot be predicted from the meaning of its elements, either lexically or grammatically. Example: He immediately flew into a rage when he heard the news. The word flew into a rage in an idiomatic sense means angry, not that his blood actually rose.

12. Proverbs have meanings that can still be traced or traced from the meanings of their elements. This is because there is an association between the original meaning and its meaning as a proverb. Example: His attitude is like water on a taro leaf, impossible to grasp. The meaning of 'like water on a taro leaf' describes a person who has no principles and is easily changed.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with semantic analysis. This approach was chosen because it is capable of describing and analysing the meanings contained in song lyrics in a deep and contextual manner. According to Sugiyono (2022), descriptive qualitative research is research based on postpositivism philosophy used to examine the natural conditions of objects where the researcher functions as a key instrument. Hardani et al. (2020) state that qualitative research aims to discover the characteristics and phenomena included in a category; subsequently, researchers seek relationships between phenomena by comparing the differences/similarities in characteristics of various symptoms found.

The data used in this paper are two songs entitled 'Who Says' and 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten'. These songs were analysed by the author to determine the meaning used in the semantic method. These songs were chosen for analysis and also for their word and meaning equivalence and the role of the songs for listeners. Furthermore, all the data obtained was grouped based on the meaning contained in each lyric and then presented in a more complete description with a literal translation of the lyrics that is easy for listeners to understand.

## FINDINGS

The author found that the analysis of the song lyrics showed a dominance of connotative, contextual, lexical and idiomatic meanings. The song Who Says describes empowerment and self-confidence, while the song How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten describes loss and emotional neglect.

a) Lyrics of the song 'Who Says'

Songs are not just entertainment, but can also be a medium for conveying important messages about life. One song that conveys a positive message is 'Who Says' by Selena Gomez. This song encourages listeners to accept themselves and not be influenced by beauty standards or negative judgements from others. Through simple but meaningful lyrics, Selena encourages teenagers to be confident and proud of who they really are. This song also highlights social issues such as bullying and pressure from the environment. Therefore, this study will discuss the meaning of the lyrics of 'Who Says' using a semantic approach to understand the messages and social values conveyed in the song. The data is presented in table form to make it easier to understand each meaning in the song. The following is a table of research in the song Who Says.

**Table 1. Meaning of the Song**

| No | Lyrics | Type of Meaning | Explanation |
|----|--------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 | You made me insecure | Lexical | The word *insecure*, according to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), refers to feelings of lack of self-confidence, inferiority, fear, and anxiety caused by dissatisfaction with oneself and doubt about personal abilities. These feelings usually arise when someone compares themselves to others or feels unable to meet |

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| | | | certain standards. Therefore, *insecure* is classified as lexical meaning because its interpretation is based on dictionary definitions that describe a negative emotional condition, where a person feels unsafe, restless, and unworthy in various social situations. |
| 2 | It's like the work of art | Connotative | The phrase *work of art* in this lyric carries a figurative meaning and does not refer to an actual piece of artwork. It is used as a metaphorical comparison to describe someone who possesses beauty, value, and uniqueness similar to a work of art. *Work of art* is considered connotative meaning because it does not literally refer to paintings or sculptures, but instead implies an individual who is beautiful either emotionally or physically, created with uniqueness and great potential. Thus, the connotative meaning of this lyric strengthens the main message of the song about accepting and loving oneself as one truly is. |
| 3 | That never gets to see the light | Idiomatic | The phrase *see the light* is an idiomatic expression, meaning its interpretation cannot be understood literally from the individual words. It does not mean physically seeing light, but rather refers to something that never gets the chance to be seen, recognized, or appreciated by the world. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *see the light* means to realize or understand something clearly or to emerge from being hidden or unknown. Therefore, this lyric reflects inner emotions or experiences that are concealed or never shared with others. The idiomatic meaning reinforces the sense of loneliness and alienation expressed in the song. |
| 4 | You're a diamond in the rough | Connotative | This lyric contains connotative meaning because it is interpreted figuratively rather than literally. The word *diamond* does not refer to a physical gemstone, but symbolizes someone who is valuable and has great potential. Meanwhile, *in the rough* refers to a state of being unfinished, unpolished, or having hidden qualities. This meaning illustrates hidden value and evokes admiration, hope, and recognition of abilities that have not yet been fully realized. |
| 5 | I'm no beauty queen | Connotative | The phrase *beauty queen* carries connotative meaning. It does not merely refer to an actual pageant winner, but symbolizes socially accepted standards of ideal beauty. When someone says *I'm no beauty queen*, it is not simply a physical statement, but an expression that they may not meet society's expectations of perfect appearance. In this context, *beauty queen* conveys emotional and social meaning, reflecting feelings of insecurity or rejection of narrow beauty standards. |
| 6 | I'm just beautiful me | Connotative | The lyric *I'm just beautiful me* contains connotative meaning because the word *beautiful* does not only refer to physical appearance, but also reflects self-confidence and inner value. In |

| | | | this sentence, *beautiful* has strong emotional meaning, indicating that true beauty does not have to conform to societal standards, but comes from being oneself. This phrase conveys the message that a person remains beautiful despite differences or imperfections, because uniqueness and authenticity are the true sources of beauty. |
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| 7 | You're the only one that's hurting | Lexical | This song lyric contains lexical meaning. The word *hurting* means experiencing pain or suffering. Lexical meaning refers to the basic definition of a word as found in dictionaries, without involving contextual interpretation. The word *hurting* derives from the base word *hurt*, which according to dictionaries such as Oxford and Cambridge, refers to physical or emotional pain. In this sense, *hurting* describes a condition in which someone is suffering, either physically or emotionally. The lexical meaning in this lyric conveys a message of empathy and emotional solidarity for anyone who feels marginalized. |

b) Lyrics of How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten

This song carries a more emotional and heartbroken vibe. It describes the feelings of loss and sadness when someone feels forgotten, especially after the end of a relationship. The lyrics describe deep inner experiences and questions about the meaning of existence. The following is a table of research on the song How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten.

**Table 2. Deep Inner Experiences and Questions**

| No | Lyrics | Type of Meaning | Explanation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | On the edge, paradise | Connotative | This lyric has a connotative meaning. The phrase *on the edge* does not literally mean being on a physical edge, but symbolically describes an unstable emotional or psychological condition. Meanwhile, *paradise* literally means heaven, but connotatively refers to a state of perfect happiness. Together, these phrases depict a paradoxical situation in which happiness exists alongside emotional instability. |
| 2 | I hope one day you heal | Connotative | The word *heal* carries a connotative meaning because it involves feelings, attitudes, and emotional perspectives. Although *heal* literally means to recover from physical injury, in this lyric it does not refer to physical healing but to emotional or inner wounds such as heartbreak or loss. Therefore, the lyric expresses hope and care for someone who is emotionally hurt. |
| 3 | You move on | Connotative | The lyric *you move on* is classified as connotative meaning because the phrase *move on* has an emotional connotation, |

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| | | | referring to letting go of a past relationship. This meaning arises from the implied emotional situation involving sadness and abandonment. |
| 4 | Forgotten | Lexical | The word *forgotten* represents lexical meaning because it conveys the basic meaning of a word without relying on a broader context. It means something that has been forgotten, and this definition can be found directly in the dictionary. |
| 5 | You're so embarrassing | Connotative | This lyric contains connotative meaning. The word *embarrassing* is associated with feelings of shame, disappointment, and anger toward someone whose behavior causes humiliation in front of others. The meaning goes beyond the literal definition and reflects emotional judgment and social reaction. |
| 6 | Ruby red, locking eyes | Connotative | This phrase has a connotative meaning because it conveys emotional associations beyond its literal sense. The phrase *ruby red* is often associated with passion, love, and attraction, symbolizing strong and intense feelings. Meanwhile, *locking eyes* refers to intense eye contact that suggests a deep emotional connection between two people. Together, these expressions create a profound emotional meaning that implies intimacy and strong emotional engagement. |

Lyric analysis of both songs reveals that connotative meaning is most dominant because both songs emphasise emotions, self-esteem, and personal experiences. The song 'Who Says' contains messages about self-affirmation and empowerment, while 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten' describes emotional wounds and self-reflection, with the use of contextual and idiomatic meanings reinforcing the nuances and messages conveyed.

**DISCUSSION**

a) Emotional Meaning in the Songs 'Who Says' and "How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten

Upon deeper examination, there is a very profound meaning in the lyrics of 'Who Says' and 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten'. The song 'Who Says' is semantically rich in positive words and affirmations. Lyrics such as 'Who says you're not perfect? Who says you're not worth it?' utilise rhetorical questions that serve to reject negative perceptions that originate from outside oneself. Diction such as perfect, worth it, and beautiful becomes a kind of semantic strategy to boost self-confidence and strengthen the self-esteem of listeners, especially teenagers who often experience social pressure.

According to Smith (2018), pop songs like 'Who Says' are not only a form of art, but also a representation of positive identity in popular culture. The use of rhetorical structures and positive connotations creates a strong emotional connection between

the singer and the listener. Therefore, the semantic aspects of the song play a significant role in creating a profound emotional experience. In contrast, the song 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten' conveys a darker and deeper emotional atmosphere. The semantics of the lyrics are dominated by terms that convey loss and neglect, such as 'forgotten,' 'left me in the dark,' and 'nothing left to say.'

This choice of diction creates a semantic field that suggests pain, rejection, and loneliness. Martinez (2022) explains that ballads like this use a strong semantic field to express emotional vulnerability. In other words, the lyrics of this song not only describe individual feelings, but also reflect universal feelings of alienation and loss of meaning in social relationships. This semantic aspect allows the song to touch the emotions of its listeners on a personal and social level.

b) Social Meaning in Both Songs

Socially, both songs also convey messages that are relevant to the realities of modern life, especially for teenagers and the younger generation. The song 'Who Says' reflects criticism of beauty standards and social pressures often imposed by the media. The social message conveyed is the importance of self-recognition and rejection of anyone who can demean an individual's dignity. The semantics of the song's lyrics reinforce this message by emphasising the values of self-affirmation.

On the other hand, 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten' depicts the social reality of emotional alienation that is often experienced in interpersonal relationships. This song represents the experience of being forgotten or ignored by someone, which is a common phenomenon in both digital and direct social interactions. Diction such as 'forgotten' and 'nothing left to say' shows the impact of a lack of empathy or connection in human interactions.

It can be concluded that the emotional and social meanings of the two songs are deeply connected to each other. However, the two songs have different focuses. 'Who Says' conveys a profound social message, where the role can build self-confidence. Meanwhile, 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten' reinforces deep emotional expression. These two songs show that music not only provides entertainment but also reflects the meaningful social and emotional realities experienced by many people.

## CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of the lyrics of Selena Gomez's songs 'Who Says' and 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten', it can be concluded that semantic aspects play a significant role in shaping the emotional and social messages in song lyrics. Through the choice of affirmative and self-supportive diction in 'Who Says', a message is created that builds self-confidence and resistance to social pressure. Conversely, in 'How Does It Feel to Be Forgotten', diction that expresses feelings of alienation and sadness is used to voice personal emotions and darker social dynamics. In general, the use of semantic strategies in both songs shows how language functions not only as a tool for artistic expression, but also as an effective means of emotional and social communication.

Therefore, a deep understanding of the semantic meaning in song lyrics is essential for interpreting the message being conveyed and its impact on the listener.

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