

Associative Meaning Analysis in a Selected Song from The Rolling Stones

Prihatin Puji Astuti¹

Ria Antika²

¹²Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

¹dosen00019@unpam.ac.id

²dosen01053@unpam.ac.id

Abstract

This research titled "*Associative Meaning Analysis in a Selected Song from The Rolling Stones*" examines the presence and function of associative meaning in selected lyrics from the Rolling Stones' recent works. The objective is to identify and analyze the types of associative meaning found in the lyrics. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis as the primary method. The data source consists of selected lyrical lines, which are analyzed using Leech's (1985) theory of associative meaning. The analysis reveals six types of associative meaning: connotative, reflective, social, affective, collocative, and thematic. Connotative meaning adds emotional and symbolic depth, such as the phrase "sweet scents of Heaven," which suggests peace beyond literal scent. Reflective meaning is observed in lyrics that express personal and collective emotions, including nostalgia and national pride mixed with disillusionment. Social meaning reflects cultural values embedded in the lyrics, while affective meaning evokes emotional responses such as joy and innocence, as seen in phrases like "the sweet sounds of children." Collocative meaning is shown through word combinations like "Heaven" and "earth," which carry spiritual associations. Thematic meaning is present in repeated contrasts, such as between the divine and the worldly, or between chaos and calm, giving unity to the overall message. These meanings are expressed through imagery, symbolism, and emotional variation, encouraging deeper engagement from listeners. In conclusion, the selected lyrics demonstrate how associative meaning is effectively employed to produce layered, meaningful messages. The use of associative meaning allows the Rolling Stones to connect with listeners on both emotional and intellectual levels.

Keywords: *associative meaning, semantics, song lyrics, The Rolling Stones, Leech's theory*

Introduction

Songs play a significant role in everyday life, offering more than just entertainment. They accompany daily routines, shape moods, and create shared experiences among individuals. With powerful lyrics and captivating melodies, songs often express deep emotions, social concerns, and personal reflections. Songwriters use music as a meaningful form of communication, combining language and sound to deliver messages that resonate with listeners. These messages are often embedded in poetic and symbolic language, making songs a rich source for linguistic and literary analysis (Murphey, 1992; Yule, 2020).

To understand the deeper layers of meaning in song lyrics, the study of semantics becomes essential, particularly the concept of associative meaning introduced by Leech (1985). These categories are not only well-established but have been effectively applied in modern linguistic studies (e.g., Bahri & Lubis, 2021; Fauziyah et al., 2024; Putri & Purnamasari, 2024). Unlike literal or dictionary meanings, associative meaning involves

emotional, cultural, and social associations that words can carry. This includes connotative, affective, social, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings, which are commonly found in artistic works such as songs. This research focuses on exploring these types of meaning in the lyrics of The Rolling Stones' 2023 album, aiming to reveal the underlying messages and emotions conveyed by the band through their latest musical expressions.

Leech's theory (1985) remains applicable and widely used in recent linguistic studies, particularly in analyzing associative meanings in song lyrics. Several previous studies have explored these meanings using Leech's framework, highlighting the richness and diversity of meanings beyond literal interpretations. Kurniawan (2017), in the study "*Interpretation of the Associative Meaning in the Lyric of Maher Zain's Selected Song*," identified five types of associative meaning in Maher Zain's lyrics, such as connotative and collocative meanings, which conveyed emotions of gratitude and happiness related to fatherhood. Similarly, Masriyah, Aziz, and Samad (2019), in their research "*An Associative Meaning in Two Song's Album of Lorde*," found multiple associative meanings, with social meaning dominating through idiomatic and colloquial expressions in Lorde's songs. Jeaniver (2020), in "*Associative Meaning Found in Ardhito Pramono Song*," also revealed four types of associative meanings, with affective meaning prevailing as it expressed the singer's personal feelings and attitudes.

While previous studies have applied Leech's 1985 theory to analyze associative meanings in song lyrics, they tend to focus on individual artists or albums with clear religious, emotional, or conversational themes. For example, Kurniawan examined spiritual expression in Maher Zain's lyrics, Masriyah and colleagues analyzed social meaning in Lorde's songs, and Jeaniver explored personal emotions in Ardhito Pramono's work. However, there has been limited attention given to legendary rock bands with a long cultural legacy, especially in relation to their recent album.

This study addresses that gap by applying Leech's theory to the latest album by the Rolling Stones. It explores how associative meanings are used not only to convey emotion but also to express complex ideas related to society, identity, spirituality, and human experience. Unlike earlier studies that emphasize only a few types of associative meaning, this research provides a broader analysis by identifying multiple types such as connotative, social, reflective, affective, collocative, and thematic meanings. It also highlights the role of vivid imagery, symbolism, and emotional contrasts, offering a deeper understanding of how meaning is layered and constructed in contemporary rock lyrics.

This study aims to identify and analyze the types of associative meaning found in the lyrics of The Rolling Stones' latest album released in 2023. The analysis is grounded in Leech's (1985) theory, specifically his classification of associative meaning, which includes connotative, stylistic, affective, social, collocative, and reflective meanings. These categories provide a theoretical basis to investigate how language in song lyrics conveys implicit emotional, cultural, and social messages. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on individual artists from particular genres or themes, this research examines the recent work of a globally recognized rock band that has rarely been studied from a linguistic perspective. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to semantic analysis by offering new insights into how associative meanings are constructed and interpreted in the context of contemporary popular music, and how lyrics function as a medium to reflect broader human experiences and cultural values.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the associative meanings collected from chosen excerpts of lyrics featured in The Rolling Stones' latest album released in 2023. Descriptive qualitative research was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding and interpretation of phenomena within their natural context, focusing on the meanings that people attach to them (Denzin, 1994).

The data were taken from selected lyrical excerpts from The Rolling Stone album "*Hackney Diamonds*" released in 2023, which were accessed through official YouTube Account. Data collection involved multiple steps: listening carefully to the songs, obtaining the lyrics from reliable online sources, and identifying instances of associative meaning within the lyrics. The identified meanings were then classified according to Leech's (1985) six categories of associative meaning, which include connotative, reflective, social, affective, collocative, and thematic meanings. For data analysis, the study followed procedures adapted from Dornyei (2007), including coding the data by labeling significant instances of associative meaning, organizing these findings by frequency and type, and interpreting the results within the framework of Leech's theory. The final analysis was presented descriptively in essay form, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of how associative meanings are expressed in the lyrics of The Rolling Stones' new album.

Findings

The data for this research were obtained from selected lyrical excerpts taken from a song featured in *Hackney Diamonds*, the 2023 album by The Rolling Stones. Based on Leech's (1985) theory of associative meaning, the analysis identified six types of meaning embedded in the lyrics: connotative, affective, social, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning. These meanings frequently appear together within individual lines, adding semantic depth and multiple layers of interpretation.

From the beginning of the lyrics, repeated lines such as "*I hear the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven*" show connotative, collocative, reflected, and thematic meanings, with the word "*sweet*" suggesting pleasure and calmness, and "*Heaven*" introducing spiritual associations. In several lines such as "*Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth*" and "*Driftin' down, driftin' down to this earth*", the image of descent is loaded with connotative, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning, suggesting both a spiritual and emotional surrender.

Other lines, such as "*Bless the Father, bless the Son, hear the sound of the drums*", evoke reflected meaning through religious imagery while also carrying affective, social, and thematic meaning. The phrase "*As it echoes through the valley and it bursts*" shows an emotional charge through affective, reflected, and thematic meaning, reinforcing the idea of divine energy or spiritual presence. Humanitarian concerns are reflected in lines like "*Let no woman or child go hungry tonight*" and "*Please protect us from the pain and the hurt*", which include social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning.

Several expressions engage the senses directly, such as "*I smell the sweet scents*" and "*Sweet scents of Heaven*", which combine connotative, affective, collocative, and thematic meaning. The phrase "*Tumblin' down*" demonstrates collocative meaning, and its extension "*Tumblin' down to the earth*" introduces a thematic dimension. The line "*The sweet sounds of children*" contains social, reflected, and thematic meaning, symbolizing innocence and hope. Similarly, expressions like "*And they're praisin'*", "*The land of their birth*", and "*Let the old still believe that they're young*" deliver a sense of

collective identity and emotional resilience, associated primarily with thematic, affective, and social meaning.

The lyric *"No, I'm not, not goin' to Hell"* embodies reflected and social meaning, reflecting both spiritual conviction and public morality. Phrases such as *"In some dusty motel"* carry social meaning, potentially referring to marginal experiences or socio-economic reality. The lines *"I'm gonna laugh"* and *"I'm gonna cry"* are emotionally expressive and include connotative, affective, and reflected meaning, conveying human vulnerability.

Other lines use religious references metaphorically, such as *"Eat the bread, drink the wine"*, which reflects connotative, social, and collocative meaning, and *"finally quenching my thirst"*, which echoes affective, social, and collocative meaning. Metaphors like *"You can't have a light without a little shadow"* and *"Always need a target for your bow and arrow"* express philosophical insights, combining connotative, social, and affective meaning. Longing and spiritual devotion are presented in *"I want to be drenched in the rain"* and *"Of your heavenly love"*, which both convey affective, connotative, and social meaning.

Lastly, several lines, such as *"Let the music play loud," "Let it burst through the clouds," "We all feel the heat of the sun," "Let us sing," "Let us shout,"* and *"Let the old still believe they're young"* demonstrate consistent thematic meaning, underscoring the overarching messages of renewal, celebration, unity, and hope.

Discussion

Leech (1985) introduced associative meaning as the additional layers of meaning a word or expression can have beyond its literal sense. He identified six types of associative meaning: connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic. This research applies Leech's theory to analyze The Rolling Stone's New Selected Album.

Connotative meaning

According to Leech (1985), connotative meaning refers to the additional, implied meanings or associations a word carries beyond its literal definition. He identified three types of connotative meaning: social connotation, emotive connotation, and stylistic connotation.

Datum 1

I hear the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven

The term "sweet" in this context goes beyond its literal meaning of taste. In dictionary, 'sweet' means 'the basic taste sensation induced by sugar'. There are some more meaning of taste in dictionary based on its class of words such as: noun, adjective, adverb. However, 'sweet' carries connotations pleasantness, goodness, and delight. The repetition of "sweet" emphasizes the positive and harmonious nature of the sounds. Additionally, "Sounds of Heaven" not only denotes aural experiences but also connotes something divine, pure, and spiritually uplifting. The use of "Heaven" suggests a connection to a higher realm, adding a layer of holiness and positivity to the imagery.

Datum 2

Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth

The word, "fallin down" suggests the connotative meaning. In dictionary "fallin down" means to drop from a higher level to a lower level. However the words, "fallin' down to this earth" creates connotative meaning. The connotative meaning could

include a sense of divine grace or blessings coming down to Earth. The repetition of "fallin' down" creates a visual and auditory image of something descending. It implies a connection between the heavenly and earthly realms, enhancing the spiritual and positive connotations.

Social Meaning

This type of meaning relates to the social circumstances in which a word or phrase is used, and how these circumstances shape the interpretation of the message. It involves considering the cultural, societal, and interpersonal implications of the language used.

Datum 5

Bless the Father, bless the Son, hear the sound of the drums

This excerpt carries social meaning in a religious and cultural context. This phrase is reminiscent of a religious prayer or blessing. It refers to the act of invoking divine favor and protection upon both the Father (God) and the Son (Jesus Christ). It reflects a belief in the Holy Trinity and the importance of seeking blessings for both entities. "Hear the sound of the drums": This part of the line introduces a cultural element, specifically the sound of drums. Drums are often associated with celebrations, rituals, and gatherings in many cultures around the world. The mention of drums suggests a joyful and festive atmosphere, where people come together to celebrate or participate in a communal activity. Overall, the line combines religious and cultural elements to convey a sense of reverence, spiritual connection, and communal celebration. It highlights the importance of blessings and the power of music in bringing people together.

Datum 7

Let no woman or child go hungry tonight

This data expresses a social meaning centered on empathy and concern for vulnerable groups in society. It highlights the issue of hunger affecting women and children and calls for collective responsibility to address this problem. The phrase urges action to ensure that no one, especially the disadvantaged, suffers from hunger. This line conveys compassion and care, emphasizing the importance of supporting those in need. It reflects values of solidarity and promotes the idea that everyone deserves access to basic necessities, advocating for a more just and caring society.

Affective Meaning

Affective meaning involves the personal feelings and attitudes that individuals express or aim to evoke in others. It adds an emotional dimension to communication, allowing for the expression of subjective experiences and influencing the emotional responses of the audience. In other words, affective meaning is associated with the emotions or feelings expressed or implied by a word. For example, the word "home" may evoke feelings of comfort and security.

Datum 2

Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth

The data depicts the feeling of falling to the earth. Falling can signify a sense of loss, vulnerability, or difficulty. However, in the context of these lyrics, "falling to the earth" can also carry the meaning of a journey or transformation. It can evoke a sense of

awe and curiosity towards the diverse experiences of life. The line "Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth" portrays the act of descending or falling towards the earth. In a literal sense, falling can often be associated with negative connotations such as loss, vulnerability, or difficulty. It can represent a sense of losing control or experiencing a downfall.

However, in the context of these lyrics, the act of falling to the earth takes on a deeper meaning. It can symbolize a journey or transformation, where one is descending from a higher realm or state to engage with the earthly realm. This descent can be seen as an exploration or immersion into the human experience. The phrase "fallin' down to this earth" can evoke a sense of awe and curiosity towards the diverse experiences that life on earth has to offer. It suggests a willingness to embrace the challenges, joys, and uncertainties that come with being part of the human existence. The act of falling can be seen as an act of surrender or acceptance, where one embraces the journey of life with all its ups and downs.

Datum 3

I hear the sweet, sweetest sounds of Heaven

This excerpt evokes feelings of beauty, peace, and happiness by describing a sensory experience of heavenly sounds that bring comfort and tranquility. It creates a sense of awe and wonder, suggesting a connection to a higher, serene realm filled with harmony. The affective meaning aims to inspire deep emotions such as joy, serenity, and transcendence, conveying a sense of delight and enchantment as if the listener is transported to a blissful, peaceful place through the power of these sounds.

Reflected Meaning

According to Leech, the reflective meaning in semantics refers to the expression of the speaker's attitudes, beliefs, or subjective experiences through language. It involves the speaker's reflection on their own thoughts, emotions, or perceptions, and the communication of these reflections to the listener.

Datum 1

I hear the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven

From the lyric above, the repetition of "sweet" enhances the reflective meaning by emphasizing the delightful and positive qualities of the heavenly sounds. This repetition creates a rhythmic pattern, drawing the listener's attention to the repeated emphasis. The reflective element involves contemplating the emotional impact and beauty associated with the sweetness of the sounds. The use of "sweet" and the association with Heaven adds an emotional layer to the reflective meaning. Listeners may engage in introspection, contemplating their emotional responses to the described auditory experience. Reflection involves exploring personal feelings, emotions, and the resonance of the sounds within the listener's inner world.

Datum 6

As it echoes through the valley and it bursts, yeah

Besides, the lyric above mentions the echoes and bursting sounds invites reflection on the expansive and dynamic qualities of the auditory experience. The listener may contemplate the imagery of sound resonating through a valley, contributing to a sense of wonder and enchantment. Reflection here involves connecting with the vividness and intensity of the auditory imagery.

Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning refers to the associations and relationships between words that tend to occur together in a language. It is the idea that certain words have a natural tendency to be used in combination with specific words or within specific contexts. These word combinations create a unique meaning that is different from the individual meanings of the words themselves. For example, "strong coffee," "make a decision," or "take a shower" are collocations where the words have a strong tendency to occur together. In the context of analyzing lyrics, collocative meaning can be observed by examining the words and phrases that frequently appear together and the associations they create.

Datum 1

I hear the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven

The repetition of the word "sweet" in the lyric above intensifies the collocative meaning by highlighting the pleasant and enjoyable nature of the sounds, while also adding a rhythmic and melodic quality to the lyric. The combination of "sweet" with "Heaven" further enhances this meaning by linking the delightful sounds to a divine, spiritual realm, suggesting an extraordinary and otherworldly auditory experience. This collocation creates a sense of wonder and reverence, enriching the imagery and allowing listeners to vividly imagine and emotionally connect with the ethereal beauty of the sounds described.

Datum 7

Let no woman or child go hungry tonight

In the collocation formed by pairing "go hungry", the combination creates a powerful and direct expression related to the basic human need for sustenance. The collocative meaning is characterized by the urgency and significance associated with the phrase "go hungry." It implies a state of deprivation and emphasizes the critical nature of the issue being addressed. The collocative meaning of "go hungry" captures the essence of the social concern in a succinct manner, making it a memorable and compelling statement.

Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning is what is communicated by the way in which a speaker or writer organizes the message, in terms of ordering, focus, and emphasis. It can also be expressed by means of stress and intonation to highlight information in one part of a sentence. In Leech's framework, thematic meaning concerns how words and elements in a sentence are arranged to indicate the central theme or topic of the sentence. It focuses on how words assume roles like "theme" and "rheme" to establish the flow and organization of information in a sentence. So, in essence, thematic meaning is about the structure and organization of a sentence, and how that contributes to conveying the main theme or topic.

Datum 1

I hear the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven

In terms of thematic meaning, Datum 1 places the focus on the speaker ("*I hear*") as the theme, and the rheme "*the sweet, sweet sounds of Heaven*" functions as new information. This structure emphasizes the speaker's role as a perceiver of something significant. The repetition of "*sweet*" and the delayed placement of "*of Heaven*" at the end

of the clause builds suspense and climactic effect, placing emphasis on the source of the sound "Heaven". The word order guides the listener to focus first on the act of hearing, then shifts to what is heard, and finally where it comes from. This sentence structure reflects a thematic focus on divine revelation received by an individual, establishing a personal spiritual tone.

Datum 2

Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth

Datum 2 begins directly with "*Fallin' down, fallin' down to this earth*", omitting the subject and starting with the verb phrase. This fronting of the verb ("*fallin' down*") makes the process itself the act of descent as the theme of the sentence. By doing so, the lyricist draws attention to the movement or action, rather than who is involved in it. The repetition ("*fallin' down, fallin' down*") also emphasizes the continuous or overwhelming nature of the descent. The phrase "*to this earth*" is the rheme, specifying the target or destination of that descent. This arrangement shifts the listener's attention from perception (in Datum 1) to movement and impact (in Datum 2), thematically highlighting the idea of something divine entering the earthly realm.

Conclusion

The research titled "*Associative Meaning Analysis in a Selected Song from The Rolling Stones*" identifies and explores the various types of associative meaning present in the lyrics of the Rolling Stones' latest album. The findings reveal that the lyrics employ connotative meaning, carrying emotional and symbolic significance beyond the literal interpretation of the words, for example, phrases like "sweet scents of Heaven" evoke a sense of divine peace and happiness beyond just pleasant aromas. Reflective meaning is also evident, as the lyrics mirror personal and collective experiences, evoking nostalgia, patriotism, and disillusionment. For instance, "praising the land of their birth (No)" reflects a sense of appreciation for one's homeland, mixed with elements of disillusionment. In addition, Social meanings emerge through the lyrics' reflection of societal values and norms, adding layers of cultural significance.

Furthermore, the lyrics utilize affective meaning, triggering specific emotional responses from listeners, such as happiness and innocence. For example, "the sweet sounds of children" evokes feelings of happiness and innocence. Collocative meaning is present through the frequent pairing of words that create additional context and depth. The use of words that frequently appear together in certain contexts, creating additional meaning. For example, the combination of "Heaven" and "earth" often associates with the concepts of divinity and the worldly. Thematic meanings are apparent in the recurring motifs and overarching messages that unify the songs, such as the interplay between divine and earthly elements.

These associative meanings manifest through vivid imagery, contrasting themes, mixed emotions, and powerful symbolism. Sensory descriptions like "sweet scents" and "sweet sounds" create mental images that enhance the emotional dimension of the songs. The contrast between the divine and worldly elements, as well as the interplay between chaos and tranquility, contributes to a harmonious thematic experience. Furthermore, interjections within the lyrics convey mixed feelings of pride and disappointment, reflecting the complexities of life. Symbols such as "Heaven" and "earth" add broader meanings related to spirituality and the human connection to the universe.

In conclusion, the Rolling Stones effectively use associative meanings in their lyrics to create rich, layered, and emotionally resonant songs, offering listeners a deeper and more meaningful experience. This research concludes that the Rolling Stones use various types of associative meaning in their song lyrics to create rich and complex layers of meaning. These manifestations of associative meaning help listeners connect with the lyrics emotionally and intellectually, providing a deeper and more meaningful listening experience.

Suggestion

For future research on associative meaning analysis using songs, several innovative approaches could be considered. Firstly, leveraging natural language processing techniques and sentiment analysis to identify patterns of meaning associated with specific lyrics or melodies. Secondly, exploring neuroscience to understand how the human brain responds to and associates music with emotions and specific memories, focusing on how this influences the perception of song meanings. Thirdly, employing cross-cultural approaches to understand how songs from different traditions may have different or similar associative meanings among different communities. Lastly, developing analytical methods that harness big data to explore the relationships between specific musical elements (such as tempo, pitch, or harmony) and the associative meanings that emerge from listener experiences. By integrating these elements, future research can uncover new ways in which songs influence human perception and experience through their associative meanings.

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