

## DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS IN “ALL TOO WELL” BY TAYLOR SWIFT

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in the song All Too Well by Taylor Swift. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method and is based on the semantic theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech, focusing specifically on denotative and connotative meanings. The data of this study are taken from selected lyrics of the song, which are analyzed to identify both literal and implied meanings. The findings reveal that denotative meanings present the surface or dictionary definitions of the words, while connotative meanings convey deeper emotional nuances related to love, memory, and heartbreak. Furthermore, the study shows that the use of figurative language enhances the emotional impact of the song, allowing listeners to connect more deeply with its themes. It can be concluded that connotative meaning plays a dominant role in expressing the songwriter’s personal experiences and emotions. This study contributes to the field of semantics by demonstrating how meaning is constructed and interpreted in song lyrics.

### **Keywords**

**Semantics, Denotative Meaning, Connotative Meaning, Taylor Swift**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Language plays a crucial role as a primary tool of human communication, enabling individuals to express ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences in both spoken and written forms. In linguistic studies, meaning becomes one of the most essential aspects, as communication is not only concerned with language structure but also with how meaning is conveyed and interpreted. This area of study is known as semantics, which focuses on analyzing how words, phrases, and sentences carry meaning in different contexts.

In semantics, meaning is not always limited to its literal interpretation. Words may contain deeper, implied meanings influenced by context, culture, and personal experience. Therefore, the distinction between denotative and connotative meanings becomes significant. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary definition of a word, while connotative meaning involves emotional, associative, or symbolic interpretations. Understanding both types of meaning allows a more comprehensive interpretation of language, especially in literary and artistic works such as song lyrics. Song lyrics represent one of the most expressive forms of language. They function not only as a combination of melody and rhythm but also as a medium for conveying messages, emotions, and personal experiences. Songwriters often employ figurative language, imagery, and symbolic expressions to create deeper meanings that resonate with listeners. As a result, semantic analysis of song lyrics can reveal layers of meaning that are not immediately visible on the surface.

Previous studies have examined song lyrics using semantic approaches, particularly in analyzing figurative language and implied meanings. However, most of

these studies tend to focus broadly on general semantic features, with limited attention to the detailed distinction between denotative and connotative meanings in specific songs. This indicates a gap in research that requires a more focused analysis of how these two types of meaning interact in constructing emotional depth within a song.

The song "All Too Well" by Taylor Swift is selected as the object of this study due to its strong emotional intensity, poetic language, and complex narrative structure. The song is widely recognized for its vivid storytelling and detailed imagery, reflecting themes of love, memory, and heartbreak. The lyrics contain various examples of both denotative and connotative meanings, making it an appropriate subject for semantic analysis. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings in the song "All Too Well" and to identify how these meanings contribute to the overall emotional expression of the song. This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in song lyrics, particularly through the interaction between literal and implied meanings.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze denotative and connotative meanings found in the song "All Too Well" by Taylor Swift. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding phenomena through interpretation rather than measurement, making it suitable for linguistic and literary analysis (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive approach is applied to describe and explain the meanings found in the lyrics systematically and in detail, without manipulating or altering the data.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the semantic theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech (1974), particularly his classification of meaning which distinguishes between conceptual meaning (denotative) and associative meaning (connotative). Denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary definition of a word, while connotative meaning encompasses the emotional, cultural, and contextual associations attached to a word beyond its literal sense. This framework is considered appropriate for analyzing song lyrics, as it provides a structured basis for identifying both surface-level and implied meanings.

The data source of this study is the lyrics of the song "All Too Well" by Taylor Swift, originally released in 2012 and re-released in an extended version in 2021. The lyrics were obtained from a verified and publicly accessible source to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The song is selected as the object of analysis due to its rich poetic language, complex emotional narrative, and extensive use of figurative expressions, making it a representative example for semantic analysis.

The data collection technique used in this study is documentation. The researcher systematically read and reviewed the entire lyrics to gain a comprehensive understanding of the song's overall context, theme, and narrative structure. Subsequently, specific words, phrases, and lines that potentially contain denotative and connotative meanings were identified and selected as the primary data. The selected data were then organized into thematic categories to facilitate a more focused and structured analysis.

The data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, each selected lyric excerpt was examined to determine its denotative meaning based on its literal or dictionary definition. Second, the connotative meaning of each excerpt was interpreted by considering the emotional tone, contextual situation, and figurative language used. Third, the data were classified into thematic categories, namely love and intimacy,

memory and nostalgia, and loss and heartbreak, in order to provide a more organized and comprehensive interpretation. Finally, the findings were described and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework to explain how these meanings contribute to the overall emotional expression of the song.

To ensure the credibility and consistency of the analysis, the researcher conducted repeated readings of the lyrics and cross-checked the interpretations with relevant literature on semantics and song lyric analysis. This process aimed to minimize subjectivity and strengthen the validity of the findings.

### 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of denotative and connotative meanings found in selected lyrics of the song “All Too Well” by Taylor Swift. The analysis is based on the semantic theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech, focusing on the distinction between denotative and connotative meanings. Instead of analyzing all stanzas, this study selects the most representative data and organizes them into thematic categories to provide a more focused and in-depth interpretation.

#### 3.1 Love And Intimacy

Lyric Excerpt	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Interpretation
“Felt like home”	Feeling comfortable in a place	Emotional warmth, safety	Represents emotional acceptance and a sense of belonging in the relationship.
“Dancing ’round the kitchen in the refrigerator light”	Moving playfully in a kitchen	Intimacy, joy, simplicity	Illustrates a private and genuine moment of happiness shared between two people.

The findings show that simple expressions are used to represent deep emotional intimacy. The phrase “felt like home” does not only describe physical comfort but also reflects emotional security and acceptance. Similarly, everyday moments such as “dancing ’round the kitchen” symbolize genuine happiness and closeness, suggesting that intimacy is built through small, meaningful experiences.

#### 3.2 MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA

Lyric Excerpt	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Interpretation
“I left my scarf there”	Leaving an item behind	Emotional attachment, memory	Symbolizes a lingering emotional connection that remains after the relationship.
“I remember it all too well”	Recalling past events clearly	Strong emotional memory	Indicates that the memories are deeply embedded and difficult to forget.
“Wind in my hair”	Air moving through hair	Freedom, vivid memory	Represents a moment that feels alive and emotionally significant.

The analysis indicates that memory plays a central role in the song. Objects such as “scarf” function as symbols of emotional attachment rather than merely physical items. The repetition of “I remember it all too well” emphasizes the persistence of memory, showing how past experiences continue to affect the speaker emotionally.

### 3.3 LOSS AND HEARTBREAK

Lyric Excerpt	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Interpretation
"I'm not fine at all"	Not in a good condition	Emotional pain	Reveals the speaker's true emotional state after the relationship ends.
"Break me like a promise"	Breaking something	Betrayal, emotional destruction	Represents deep emotional hurt caused by broken trust.
"Crumpled up piece of paper"	Damaged paper	Loss of self-worth	Symbolizes emotional damage and feelings of worthlessness.

The findings reveal that connotative meaning becomes more dominant in expressing emotional pain. Expressions such as "break me like a promise" and "crumpled up piece of paper" do not function literally but symbolically, reflecting betrayal and emotional destruction. These expressions highlight the intensity of heartbreak experienced by the speaker.

### 3.4 DISCUSSION

The overall findings demonstrate that both denotative and connotative meanings are present in the song. However, connotative meaning is more dominant, as it allows the songwriter to convey complex emotional experiences beyond literal interpretation.

The use of figurative language and symbolic expressions plays a crucial role in strengthening connotative meaning. Simple words and everyday situations are transformed into emotionally rich representations of love, memory, and loss. This indicates that meaning in song lyrics is constructed not only through linguistic structure but also through emotional and contextual associations. In addition, the analysis reveals a clear emotional progression, starting from intimacy and happiness, moving toward memory and nostalgia, and ending with loss and heartbreak. This progression reflects how language is used to construct a narrative of a relationship over time.

These findings support the theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech, which emphasizes that meaning is not limited to literal definitions but also includes emotional and associative aspects. Therefore, connotative meaning plays a crucial role in expressing the songwriter's personal experiences and emotional depth in the song.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This Study analyzes the denotative and connotative meanings found in the song *All Too Well* by Taylor Swift using a semantic approach based on the theory proposed by Geoffrey Leech. The findings show that both types of meaning are present in the lyrics; however, they function in different ways in constructing the overall message of the song.

Denotative meaning provides the literal and surface-level understanding of the lyrics, allowing the audience to follow the narrative of a romantic relationship from its beginning to its end. These meanings are reflected in everyday actions and objects described in the song, such as walking together, driving, and keeping personal belongings. Despite their simplicity, these elements form the structural foundation of the story.

Connotative meaning plays a more dominant role in conveying the emotional depth of the song. Through the use of imagery, symbolism, and metaphor, the lyrics express complex feelings such as love, nostalgia, heartbreak, betrayal, and loss. Recurring symbols, such as the scarf, demonstrate how objects can carry evolving meanings, shifting

from representations of intimacy to reminders of lingering memory and emotional attachment.

The analysis reveals a clear emotional progression throughout the song, beginning with nostalgic memories, followed by conflict and imbalance, leading to emotional collapse, and ending with reflection and partial self-awareness. This progression highlights how meaning is not static but develops dynamically within the context of the narrative.

This study confirms that connotative meaning is essential understanding the deeper message of song lyrics, as it allows for the expression of emotions and experiences beyond literal interpretation. The song *All Too Well* serves as a strong example of how language can be used artistically to convey complex emotional realities. Therefore, semantic analysis proves to be an effective approach in uncovering the layered meanings embedded in literary and musical texts.

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