

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE MEANING IN BOB MARLEY'S SONG LYRICS

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Abstract

This study explores the cognitive meanings in Bob Marley's selected songs—*One Love*, *Three Little Birds*, and *Could You Be Loved*—through a semantic approach. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, it identifies meaning relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy within the lyrics. Findings reveal that Marley's songs embody profound cognitive meanings, reflecting human experience, social values, and the struggle for justice. His poetic and symbolic language communicates universal messages of peace, solidarity, and resilience. The study demonstrates how cognitive semantics can illuminate the intersection of language, music, and social consciousness. Through a qualitative descriptive method and semantic analysis, the study identifies various meaning relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy that are embedded within the lyrics. Findings reveal that Marley's songs embody profound cognitive meanings, reflecting human experience, social values, and the struggle for justice. His poetic and symbolic language communicates universal messages of peace, solidarity, and resilience. The study demonstrates how cognitive semantics can illuminate the intersection of language, music, and social consciousness.

Keywords: *Antonymy; cognitive meaning; hyponymy; meaning relations; polysemy; semantics; song lyrics; synonymy*

1. Introduction

A song is a rhythmic combination of human voice and musical instruments. Songs as works of art have the ability to inspire, entertain, and arouse emotions through their rhythm, melody, and lyrics. In addition, songs also play an important role in various social interactions, such as parties, concerts, and celebrations, which are able to unite individuals from diverse backgrounds (Nugraha: 2016). Songs function as a medium of communication between the creator and the listener. In the song there are lyrics or arrangement of words that usually consist of verses and refrains, functioning as an expression of the writer's thoughts and feelings. Lyrics can convey messages or stories that can influence the listener's attitudes and emotions, building deeper connections through shared experiences (Firdaus:2013)

The relationship between songs and semantics has high significance, considering that semantics focuses on the analysis of meaning contained in language, including song

lyrics. Each verse in a song not only contains denotative meaning, but also contains connotative meaning that can be understood through context and word choice. Therefore, semantic studies play an important role in helping listeners interpret the meaning and complexity of emotions that the song writer wants to convey. According to Keraf (2002), lexical structure includes various semantic relations found in words. The relationships between words can be synonyms, polysemy, homonyms, hyponyms, and antonyms. Every song lyric has the potential to experience a significant shift in meaning in its meaning relations. The relation of meaning in each song lyric has the potential to experience a significant shift in meaning. However, previous studies on song lyrics often focus on figurative or emotional meaning, rather than cognitive meaning. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how Bob Marley's lyrics convey cognitive meanings through semantic relations, contributing to understanding the linguistic expression of social consciousness in music.

This study investigated how Bob Marley's songs as a significant source for exploring cognitive meaning, as well as providing deeper insights into how language can reflect and influence human experience in social and cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

Cognitive refers to things related to or involving the process of cognition. Cognition itself is an activity or process carried out to obtain knowledge, which includes individual awareness, feelings, and experiences. Djajasudarma (1999) explains that "cognitive meaning," also known as descriptive or denotative meaning, is a meaning that shows the relationship between concepts and reality. Cognitive meaning is clear and reflects the meaning as it is. Cognitive meaning can be defined as a mental process related to understanding, processing, and storing information. In the realm of psychology and cognitive science, cognitive meaning includes how individuals interpret and give meaning to the experiences, concepts, and phenomena they encounter in everyday life. This process involves various elements, such as perception, attention, memory, and problem solving, which overall contribute to how individuals understand their surroundings. According to Croft and Cruse (2004), cognitive semantics emphasizes the relationship between linguistic form and conceptual structure. This framework supports the semantic exploration of lyrics as reflections of human cognition.

Furthermore, cognitive meaning can be seen as an essential link between language and thought processes. In the dynamics of communication, individuals not only convey information literally, but also actively construct meaning through a series of complex cognitive interactions. Therefore, a deep understanding of cognitive meaning has crucial significance in various disciplines, including education, psychology, and linguistics. This is because such understanding has the potential to significantly influence the way individuals acquire knowledge, communicate, and interact with other individuals in a social environment.

2.1 Meaning Relations

Meaning relation is a meaningful relation or semantic relation between a word or other language unit with another word or language unit (Suwandi, 2011). Chaer (2009) also said that "Meaning relation is a meaningful relation or semantic relation between a word or other language unit". Meaning relations include contingency (adjacent relation), synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, homonymy/homography. The research

conducted discusses meaning, so the research uses semantic studies. In this context, the relationship between words, phrases, and sentences that interact with each other can produce various meaning phenomena, such as conflict, expansion, similarity, and meaning coverage. Meaning relations can be defined as semantic relationships that occur between a word or language unit with another word or language unit.

2.1.1 Synonym

Wijana (1999) explains that synonymy is a relation of similarity of meaning. A linguistic unit may have the same meaning as another linguistic unit. Synonyms are known as words that have the same or almost the same meaning. For example, the word father is synonymous with the word father, mother with mother, brother with brother. Another example, the words "big" and "wide" can be considered synonymous in certain contexts, although they are not always interchangeable.

2.1.2 Antonym

Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. Chaer (2009) states that antonyms can be understood as terms that refer to different objects. In semantic studies, antonyms are often defined as expressions, usually words, phrases or sentences, whose meanings are considered to be the opposite of other expressions. This shows that antonyms are not always absolutely opposite, but are only considered to be opposites. The meaning relation between two antonymous words is reciprocal or two-way.

2.1.3 Hyponym

Hyponym refers to words that have a more specific meaning in a more general category, known as hypernym. Thus, hyponym can be understood as a subcategory of hypernym. The relationship between hyponym and hypernym can be illustrated as the relationship between part and whole. Semantically, Verhaar in Chaer (2009) states that hyponym is an expression which is generally a word, but can also be a phrase or sentence whose meaning is part of the meaning of another expression.

2.1.4 Polysemy

Polysemy is a linguistic phenomenon in which a word has more than one meaning or understanding, but all of these meanings are interrelated and relevant to each other. In the context of polysemy, different meanings usually come from the same basic concept.

3. Research Method

The study applied a qualitative approach to explore and analyze the cognitive meaning contained in Bob Marley's song lyrics. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an opportunity for writer to understand the context and nuances contained in the lyrics. Understanding the type of qualitative research is a research step that produces descriptive data in the form of writing or speech, as well as the behavior of people being observed (Bogdan & Biklens, 1992). Data were analyzed using semantic content analysis. Each lyric line was examined for meaning relations based on Chaer's (2009) semantic classification. The data were then categorized and interpreted to reveal cognitive meanings using descriptive analysis. Thus, this study can provide in-depth insight into the meaning contained in the song lyrics.

4. Discussion

4.1 Cognitive Meaning in Bob Marley's Song Lyrics

An analysis is conducted on the lyrics of three of Bob Marley's works, namely *One Love*, *Three Little Birds*, and *Could You Be Loved*. Through a semantic approach, the exploration focuses on cognitive meanings that reflect human experience, social values, and justice for the struggle, which are described universally. The recurrence of antonymic pairs such as "love/hate" reflects cognitive contrast as proposed by Croft and Cruse (2004), where conceptual opposition constructs social critique.

4.1.1 Reflecting Human Experience

The song *One Love* by Bob Marley conveys a universal message of unity and love. Marley invites all individuals to unite and respect each other regardless of differences, as an effort to create peace and overcome divisions in society. "One love, one heart, let's get together and feel all right". The lyrics above reflect the hope for unity in the face of differences. Marley invites listeners to build collaboration and peace, emphasizing that happiness can be achieved through love and togetherness. The cognitive meaning contained can be interpreted as a call to overcome fragmentation and build an inclusive community.

The song *Three Little Birds* reflects the theme of hope and serenity. The simple yet meaningful lyrics invite listeners not to worry and to believe that everything will go well. This message is very relevant in everyday life, where individuals often face various challenges and pressures. The lyrics "Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing gonna be alright". In semantic analysis, the cognitive meaning of this lyric describes the human experience which is often filled with anxiety and uncertainty. Marley invites listeners to remain calm and believe that hope will bring peace and a better future, and conveys a message of optimism amidst life's challenges.

Could You Be Loved reflects the theme of love and acceptance. The lyrics describe a longing for a supportive relationship, and encourage listeners to open their hearts to love, both from themselves and others. Love is described as a force that forms emotional bonds and plays an important role in everyday life. One significant lyric is: "You could be loved, but you must be true to yourself." The cognitive meaning of these lyrics invites listeners to reflect on their relationships with themselves and others and the importance of being honest with themselves as the basis for true love.

4.1.2 Reflecting Social Values

The song *One Love* by Bob Marley reflects the values of solidarity and social concern. Through his lyrics, Marley invites listeners to unite differences in order to build an inclusive and harmonious community, as a response to injustice and discrimination. One of the lyrics that reflects these social values "Let's get together and feel all right." From a semantic analysis perspective, these lyrics reflect social values about relationships and solidarity between fellow human beings to support each other in facing social challenges and contributing to creating solid and positive relationships.

Three Little Birds by Bob Marley conveys a message about the importance of optimism, solidarity, and mutual support, especially in difficult situations. The lyrics that can reflect social values. "Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing gonna be all right." In the lyrics, Marley conveys an invitation to stay calm and believe that all problems will be resolved. These lyrics reflect a form of social solidarity, where

individuals provide emotional support to each other so as not to drown in worry. This kind of support is essential in building an environment full of hope and togetherness.

Could You Be Loved conveys a moral message about the importance of solidarity, empathy, and mutual respect in social life. Through his lyrics, Marley invites listeners to build harmonious relationships based on love and support for each other. "Could you be loved, and be loved?" The lyrics emphasizes the importance of love and mutual support in building healthy relationships. Marley invites us to create an inclusive and empathetic community, where love is the basis of social solidarity.

4.1.3 Reflecting Justice for Struggle

Bob Marley's song *One Love* not only voices love and unity, but also conveys criticism of injustice and social oppression. Through his lyrics, Marley invites society to unite against discrimination and inequality, reflecting the values of solidarity and resistance against injustice. Lyrics "Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon" reflect an explicit call for unity in the face of oppression and social injustice. Cognitively, these lyrics show that the struggle for justice requires collective cooperation, where love and solidarity are important elements in driving constructive social change.

The song *Three Little Birds* conveys a powerful message of optimism and hope in the face of injustice and social challenges. Through his lyrics, Marley invites us to stay positive and believe that everything will be fine, even though we face difficulties. "Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing gonna be all right." This lyric implies the importance of an optimistic attitude in the face of injustice. This optimism functions as a psychological strength that can encourage individuals to continue fighting, even when faced with difficult situations. In the context of social struggle, the belief that everything will improve reflects collective hope and a spirit of solidarity in overcoming challenges.

The song *Could You Be Loved* by Bob Marley not only raises the theme of love, but also conveys a message of resistance against injustice. Marley emphasized that social struggle must be based on love and solidarity as human values that strengthen the spirit of resistance.

4.2. Bob Marley's Song Lyrics Based on Meaning Relations in Cognitive Meaning

Bob Marley's song *One Love* emphasizes love, unity, and solidarity as the foundation of a peaceful society. The lyrics call for unity against division and injustice, making it a symbol of hope and protest against social oppression, with love as the main force. *Three Little Birds* conveys a message of optimism and serenity, assuring the listener that everything will be okay. Through the metaphor of little birds and sunshine, Marley encourages the listener to remain calm in the face of life's challenges, emphasizing the value of mental resilience and hope. While the song *Could You be Loved* depicts love as a liberating force that builds solidarity and self-confidence. Marley emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and healthy social relationships, as well as love as a basis for fighting injustice.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the applicability of cognitive semantics in music analysis. Future studies may extend this framework to other genres or cross-cultural lyrical studies to deepen understanding of linguistic universality in song discourse. Marley uses

synonyms to emphasize love and positive emotions, such as in the words "love," "heart," and "feel all right." In *Three Little Birds*, phrases such as "don't worry" create a calm and optimistic atmosphere. Antonyms, such as "love" vs "hate" and "stay alive" vs "give up," emphasize moral and emotional conflicts. In *Three Little Birds*, calmness is opposed to worry, reflecting the dynamics of human psychology. Words such as "thanks" and "praise" in *One Love* show religious meaning in social struggles. In *Three Little Birds*, symbols such as "little birds" represent hope in everyday life. Marley uses polysemy to add depth to meaning, such as "heart" which symbolizes love and humanity. The phrase "road of life" in *Could You Be Loved* describes a life journey full of challenges.

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