

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM *A CONVERSATION WITH MY MOTHER ABOUT THE BLOODSTAINS ON MY SHIRT* BY DARIUS SIMPSON

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Abstract

Leech's semantic theory plays a crucial role in analyzing meaning in a poem, as it highlights the multiple layers of interpretation embedded in poetic language. The aim of this study is to analyse the types of meaning in the poem "A Conversation with My Mother about the Bloodstains on My Shirt" by Darius Simpson. This study employs Leech's semantic theory as the primary theoretical framework for interpreting the semiotic meanings present in the poem's text. The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach, using content analysis of Leech's semantic categories. The findings reveal six distinct types of meaning in the poem. They are conceptual meaning (16 %), connotative meaning (27 %), affective meaning (18%), thematic meaning (16 %), social meaning (18%), and reflected meaning (4%). The dominant meaning is connotative, emphasizing the emotional burden and sociopolitical critique of the poet. While the least is reflected meaning, because the poem prioritizes clarity, emotional resonance, and sociopolitical truth, rather than wordplay or associative ambiguity. Therefore, this study provides a comprehensive lens for interpreting how poets use linguistic creativity to communicate meaning in subtle, layered, and aesthetic ways.

Keywords: *Darius Simpson's poem; Leech's semantic theory; types of meaning.*

1. Introduction

Race, racism, and discrimination are central themes in studies of the African American culture, particularly in literature. Research reveals a clear divide between the lives of Black and White Americans, not only in social, political, and cultural aspects but also in rights and opportunities. During this period, Black Americans were denied equal status and access, resulting in deeply rooted inequality between the two groups (Seputri, et al., 2022).

Black poetry is deeply rooted in Afrocentric culture and draws on techniques from Black folklore. Baker, a key figure in African American literary criticism, traces its origins to blues music, slave narratives, spirituals, and Black vernacular traditions. By linking the blues to broader American cultural and literary history, Baker highlights how African American expression operates at a vernacular level. As a result, much Black poetry developed spontaneously and was preserved through oral tradition rather than written forms (Jindal, 2022).

The poem "A Conversation with My Mother about the Bloodstains on My Shirt" by Darius Simpson presents a lively dialogue that explores the intersections of race, identity, trauma, and generational pain within the African American experience. Through its emotional tone and layered imagery, the poem reflects not only the personal struggle of the speaker but also a collective history of racial injustice and survival. Feagin (2006) argues that racism in the United States was intentionally constructed through centuries of slavery, segregation, and institutional practices that created enduring racial hierarchies privileging white people while disadvantaging Black Americans.

The title of the poem establishes a framework of intimacy and confrontation, as the act of conversing with one's mother becomes a metaphor for connecting personal wounds to inherited memory. The "bloodstains" emerge as a central semiotic sign, representing violence, endurance, and the inescapable mark of systemic oppression, making the poem a rich text for semiotic interpretation (Danesi, 2004).

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior, offers an insightful lens for analyzing Simpson's poem. Drawing upon the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, semiotic analysis focuses on how meaning is constructed through the relationship between signifier and signified, denotation and connotation. In this context, Simpson's choice of imagery, language, and structure functions as a system of signs that communicates deeper meanings about identity, racialized existence, and emotional inheritance. The analysis of these signs allows for a deeper understanding of how the poet encodes his lived experience within symbolic and cultural frameworks (Danesi, 2004).

The problem addressed in this study lies in the limited exploration of African American poetry through a semiotic framework, particularly works that articulate contemporary experiences of racial identity and generational trauma. While Simpson's poem is widely recognized for its emotional depth and social critique, a systematic semiotic reading can reveal new dimensions of meaning, especially regarding how symbols and language are used to resist marginalization and reclaim agency. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap between literary aesthetics and cultural semiotics by decoding the poem's layers of signification. Thus, this study addresses the gap by employing a semiotic framework to decode the symbolic elements, revealing what kind of meaning within Simpson's poem.

The objectives of this study are to identify and interpret the types of meaning present in Simpson's poem, and to analyze how these signs convey themes of racial trauma, resilience, and identity. By doing so, this study highlights the importance of symbolic language in articulating lived realities and contributes to broader discussions on the role of poetry as a vehicle for cultural and political commentary.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to literary scholarship by demonstrating the applicability of semiotic analysis to poetry. It emphasizes how poets like Darius Simpson use symbolic language not merely to describe experiences but to reconstruct and challenge dominant narratives of race and history. Furthermore, this study enriches the discourse on African American literature by illustrating how meaning operates through both the text and the context embedded within it. Ultimately, this semiotic analysis underscores the power of poetic language as a tool for consciousness, resistance, and transformation.

2. Literature Review

Semiotics etymologically comes from the Greek word "semion," which means "sign." Semiotics is the study of signs. This study is not limited to language alone, but extends to

include social phenomena such as culture and society, all of which can be analyzed as sign systems (Jadou & Al Ghabra, 2021). These signs can have meaning because of agreed-upon systems, norms, and conventions. Therefore, all forms of language are fundamentally dependent on the use and interpretation of symbols and signs (Suroso et al., 2024).

Chandler (2007) emphasizes that semantics in semiotics deals with the relationship between the signifier (form) and the signified (concept), stressing that meaning is not fixed but shaped by cultural and contextual factors. He argues that language operates as a system of differences, where each sign gains meaning in relation to others rather than through intrinsic properties. This relational nature of meaning, drawn from Saussurean linguistics, allows for multiple interpretations depending on cultural codes, individual experience, and social positioning, a perspective particularly relevant to interpreting poetry that engages with race and identity, such as Simpson's.

Semiotics can be used to explore the hidden meanings in symbols and linguistic signs (Behiery, 2025). The study of semantics is also at the core of understanding human thought processes, cognition, and conceptualization, all of which are closely related to how humans classify and convey expressions about the reality of the world through language. Poetry has a unity that is not only formal but also semantic, and is full of signs that need to be interpreted in order to convey the intended meaning and ideas of the poet (Ibragimova, 2024).

Meanwhile, Cobley (2005) argues that meaning is co-constructed through processes of encoding and decoding, where audiences actively interpret signs based on shared conventions and cultural frameworks. His perspective underscores the dynamic interaction between text and reader, suggesting that meaning is neither wholly embedded in the text nor entirely subjective, it emerges through a negotiated process. This framework is especially useful in analyzing performance poetry, where verbal, emotional, and cultural signs interact to produce layered significance.

Danesi (2004), on the other hand, approaches semantics from a cognitive and cultural semiotic standpoint. He views meaning-making as a human cognitive activity rooted in metaphor, symbolism, and cultural experience. In his work *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, Danesi highlights how semantic systems mirror human thought patterns and how metaphors function as central cognitive tools that connect abstract ideas with lived experience. His perspective deepens the understanding of poetic language by framing it as a site where emotion, memory, and cultural identity converge. Through this lens, Simpson's poem can be read not only as linguistic expression but also as a cognitive and cultural act of meaning-making that transforms personal trauma into shared understanding.

Generally speaking, semiotics is one of the most interpretive methods of literature research in terms of the way signs and symbols are deployed to build meaning, disrupt conventional language usage, and respond to cultural and historical contexts (Behiery, 2025).

According to Leech (1981), semiotic theory is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of meaning, both conceptual meaning and meaning that arises from social, emotional, and cultural relationships in language use. In Leech's semantics theory, meaning in language can be categorized into seven main types, namely conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. The explanation as follows.

a. Conceptual meaning

Conceptual meaning is the basic or denotative meaning of a word or expression. This meaning is directly related to the reference or object referred to in the real world. Leech

emphasizes that conceptual meaning is the basis of the semantic system of language because it forms the basis for understanding linguistic communication.

b. Connotative meaning

Connotative meaning relates to the added value or emotional, social, and cultural associations attached to a word. This meaning not only describes the literal reference, but also reflects the public's attitude and views towards the word.

c. Social meaning

Social meaning arises from the social context of language use. Word choice, dialect, or style of speech convey social information such as status, regional origin, level of education, or the relationship between speaker and listener.

d. Affective meaning

Affective meaning relates to the speaker's feelings, attitudes, or emotions towards something that is said or towards the interlocutor. This meaning describes the psychological dimension of language communication.

e. Reflected meaning

Reflective meaning occurs when a word has more than one meaning, and one of those meanings influences the interpretation of the other meanings. This often happens with words that have taboo, religious, or symbolic meanings.

f. Collocative meaning

Collocative meaning is the meaning that arises from the habit of a word being paired with another word in a particular context. This relationship indicates the tendency of words to appear together with certain words that are semantically supportive of each other.

g. Thematic meaning

Thematic meaning is determined by how the sentence structure is arranged and which elements are emphasized. This meaning is related to the focus, order of information, and communicative purpose in the discourse.

Leech (1981) divides meaning into seven types because he argues that language is multidimensional and cannot be fully understood through literal meaning alone. In communication, words do more than convey factual information. They also express emotions, reflect social relationships, evoke cultural associations, follow habitual patterns, and shape interpretation through structure. By separating meaning into conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic categories, Leech demonstrates that meaning is influenced by both linguistic form and social context. This classification helps explain why the same word or sentence can communicate different messages depending on tone, culture, context, or intention. Essentially, Leech's division allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning operates at cognitive, cultural, emotional, and structural levels, making the analysis of language richer and more accurate (Leech, 1981).

3. Research Method

The research method applied in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Emzir (2009), qualitative research in literature is a type of research that focuses on interpreting and understanding literary texts through descriptive and analytical methods rather than numerical or statistical analysis. Besides that, this study also focuses on semantic-semiotic analysis using Leech's theory of the types of meaning (Leech, 1981). This method is chosen because it allows the researchers to interpret the poem "A Conversation with My Mother About the Bloodstains on My Shirt" by Darius Simpson beyond its literal surface, exploring deeper linguistic and socio-cultural meanings. The primary data source is the poem itself, while secondary sources include journals, books, and theoretical references on semiotics and semantics.

3.1 Data Collection Technique

Data collection technique are divided into three steps:

- a. Acquiring the full poem text. The first step in collecting data is to acquire the full text of poem
- b. Close Reading. Repeated reading for initial comprehension, understand its structure, tone, and thematic focus, and to get the main point and gain a comprehensive of the poem's content
- c. Identifying and marking the linguistic units for analysis. After close reading, then mark important linguistic elements related to Leech's semantic categories; and note-taking, where observations about language use, signs, and symbols are recorded. Additionally, supporting data such as books, journal articles, and previous research on semiotics and Leech's semantic theory are collected as secondary sources to strengthen the interpretation.

3.2 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis technique are divided into four steps

- a. Categorizing. Separating each identified word/phrases into one of Leech's seven categories of meaning; conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning.
- b. Coding/Labelling. Assigning codes to each data unit. Each coded element is then analyzed to interpret how meaning is constructed and how linguistic choices contribute to the deeper message of the poem. This process involves identifying literal meanings, emotional connotations, cultural references, symbolic associations, and linguistic patterns.
- c. Calculating Frequency. Counting the number of occurrences for each meaning type
- d. Interpreting. Providing a qualitative interpretation of the findings, focusing on the dominant meaning (connotative), and other types of meaning, and linking them to the poem's themes of trauma and ideology. Each linguistic sign and symbol is analyzed to uncover how meaning is constructed and how the poem conveys themes of race, identity, trauma, and personal experience. Through this analytical framework, the study interprets how the poem communicates complex emotional and cultural messages by using language not only as a system of communication but also as a carrier of social history and lived experience.

4. Results and Discussion

The poem:

A Conversation with My Mother about the Bloodstains on My Shirt

by Darius Simpson

do you remember in fifth grade
when i was all of eighty pounds
soaking wet and fully clothed
i told you there was a boy on the bus
twice my size and three grades ahead
he liked to throw his weight every which way
and i had little to no weight to throw back
with all the reasons to get out of his path
you sent me back to that narrow aisle
with slim chances of victory you told me
you gotta stand up to people like that
so they know they don't own the world
there's a Palestinian student
who waited all night for me when pigs snatched me
from an action and she taught me about genocide
about the PLO and Black Panther Party
said our struggles share goals and enemies
i met a Congolese dancer who said slavery didn't separate us completely
he told me of Nkrumah and Lumumba and Garvey and Cabral
and how brutal belgium and all of europe is to Africans
did you know we been fighting back
since before the slave ships docked
did you know the shore tried to wash our footprints
away but some of us walked here on air
did you know there are traces of us
in every speck of dust in this dirty world
Ma we are thousands of miles apart but there are Black women
who look just like Granny braving floods in makeshift tents up the street
there's an east side where the sun shines all night
and there's no shade in the daytime and no grocery stores year round
if a bully must be stopped then what are we to do about biden or obama
or congress or Chevron or Firestone or Apple or Nike
these cowards push buttons and traffic in drone strikes and slave labor
and pandemics and extinctions and mass slaughter and apartheid
ain't they just some wooden giants
don't they got toothpick ankles
won't they fall like all weak effigies
must eventually with enough gasoline
believe me your baby is still your baby but (un)fortunately
now he sees himself in handcuff scars and collapsed mines
i stay up late all week studying
every other night a new corpse who looks

like me falls off the pages and onto my floor
 a whole human gone before i knew them
 who loved me enough to offer their life
 what am i to do with all this sand in my chest
 i read about another political prisoner last night
 and nearly drowned in salt water
 i can't keep crying for dead and dying people
 without doing something about the death
 i'm trying to say it's fifth grade again
 and the aisle is getting more narrow
 the bus is headed off a cliff
 if we don't knock
 this stubborn giant off its course
 i hope you can understand
 why i haven't called
 why i still think of you daily

The findings are as follows:

Tabel 1

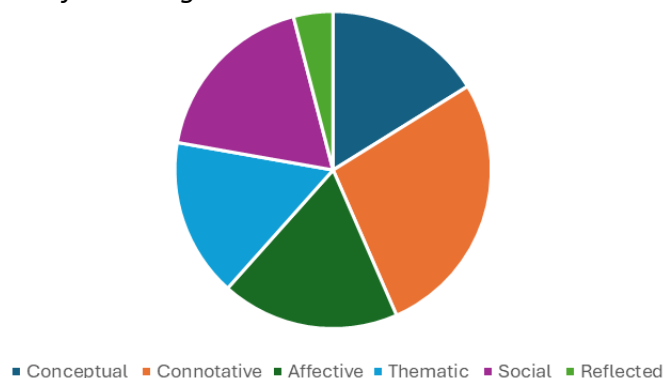
The Occurrences of types of meaning

No.	Type of Meaning	Occurrences	Percentage	Description
1	Conceptual	8	16 %	Literal or denotative meanings
2	Connotative	13	27 %	Emotional, social, or associative meanings
3	Affective	9	18 %	Feelings and emotions
4	Thematic	8	16 %	Central themes or moral focus
5	Social	9	18 %	Social or cultural context meanings
6	Reflected	2	4 %	Symbolic or ideological reflection
Total		49	100%	

Based on the table above, six out of seven types of meaning were found. The conceptual meaning is 16 %. It represents literal or denotative meanings. Then connotative meaning is 27 %. It represents emotional, social, or associative meanings. The affective meaning is 18 %. It represents feelings and emotions. Next, the thematic meaning is 16 %. It represents central themes or moral focus. The social meaning is 18 %. It represents social and cultural nontext meanings. And the last, the reflected meaning is 4 %. It represents symbolic or idiological reflection.

Figure 1

The Occurrence of Types of Meaning



Based on the figure 1 above, the occurrence of connotative meaning is the highest, because it emphasizes the *emotional burden* and *socio-political critique* of the poet. While the affective and social meanings are the same (18%). The conceptual and thematic meanings are also having the same occurrences (16%). And the least is reflected meaning. The reflected meaning is low because the poem prioritizes *clarity, emotional resonance, and socio-political truth*, rather than wordplay or associative ambiguity. The language is used not to mask or complicate meaning but to expose harsh realities directly.

The examples and explanations are as follows:

1. Conceptual meaning

Data 1

Stanza 1 line 1: *do you remember in fifth grade*

Analysis:

The conceptual meaning of the phrase “do you remember in fifth grade” refers to its literal and dictionary-level meaning, which is the act of asking someone—here, the mother—to recall an event or experience that happened when the poet was in fifth grade. Conceptually, the phrase signals a shift into a past memory or a specific moment in childhood without implying emotion, judgment, or symbolism. It functions as a reference point in time and serves to introduce a past experience that is relevant to the present conversation.

In Leech’s terms, this meaning is objective, factual, and informational, focusing solely on the basic temporal reference rather than emotional or cultural associations (Leech, 1981). In terms of meaning, it shows a literal memory that becomes the initial emotional background before moving on to larger social issues. The mention of *fifth grade* not only serves as a time reference, but also describes a period of moral formation and life values. Then, the use of the words *do you remember* depicts an intimate and nostalgic impression, reinforcing the emotional dimension and the closeness of the mother-child relationship.

Data 2

Stanza 1, lines 4-5: *I told you there was a boy on the bus, twice my size and three grades ahead*

Analysis:

The conceptual meaning of the sentence “I told you there was a boy on the bus, twice my size and three grades ahead” is its literal informational content. At this level, the sentence simply describes a situation in which the poet informed their mother about an older and physically larger boy on the school bus.

Conceptually, the sentence communicates measurable and factual details: the boy’s size is significantly bigger than the poet’s, and his school level is three grades higher. There are no implied emotional associations or symbolic interpretations at this stage, only a straightforward statement of a past event involving two individuals and their physical and academic differences.

Data 3

Stanza 3 line 1: *there's a Palestinian student who waited all night for me*

Analysis:

The conceptual meaning of the sentence “there’s a Palestinian student who waited all night for me” is its literal and factual meaning. At this level, the statement simply conveys that a student of Palestinian background spent the entire night waiting for the poet. The

phrase identifies three basic pieces of information; the presence of a student, the student's nationality or identity as Palestinian, and the action of waiting throughout the night. In conceptual terms, it does not yet imply emotional, cultural, or symbolic meaning, only a straightforward description of an event involving a specific person and a prolonged act of waiting.

2. Connotative meaning

Data 4

Stanza 1 lines 2-3: *when I was all of eighty pounds soaking wet and fully clothed*

Analysis:

The connotative meaning of the phrase "when I was all of eighty pounds soaking wet and fully clothed" goes beyond the literal reference to body weight. Connotatively, the phrase evokes a sense of vulnerability, fragility, and childhood innocence.

The expression "soaking wet and fully clothed" intensifies the idea that the poet was not only physically small but also defenceless and easily overpowered, emphasizing emotional helplessness rather than simply stating a number. It suggests a moment in life when the poet lacked physical strength, protection, or power, and therefore may have been exposed to bullying, harm, or intimidation. Overall, the connotation reinforces themes of weakness, youth, and power imbalance within the context of racial and personal struggle.

Data 5

Stanza 1 line 6: *he liked to throw his weight every which way*

Analysis:

The connotative meaning of the phrase "he liked to throw his weight every which way" suggests more than physical movement, it implies abuse of power, aggression, and dominance. While the literal words describe someone using their body forcefully, the connotation paints the boy as someone who enjoys exerting control or intimidation over others, especially those who are smaller or weaker.

The phrase evokes the image of someone reckless and unapologetic, using physical strength as a form of superiority rather than in a neutral or harmless way. In this context, it reflects not only bullying behaviour but also the broader theme of power imbalance, where strength becomes a tool of fear and control rather than merely a physical characteristic (Dar, 2024).

Data 6

Stanza 1 line 7: *and I had little to no weight to throw back*

Analysis:

The connotative meaning of the phrase "and I had little to no weight to throw back" suggests more than just lacking physical strength. Beyond its literal meaning, the phrase conveys a deeper sense of powerlessness, inferiority, and lack of defence. It implies that the poet was not only physically unable to fight back but also socially or emotionally unprepared to respond to aggression or injustice.

The expression evokes vulnerability and imbalance, highlighting a situation where one person holds power while the other is left without the means to resist. In the poem's context, this connotation reinforces themes of oppression, helplessness, and the broader experience of being marginalized or overpowered (Zhang, 2023).

3. Affective meaning

Data 7

Stanza 1 line 8: *with all the reasons to get out of his path*

Analysis:

The affective meaning of the phrase “with all the reasons to get out of his path” reflects the speaker’s emotional state and attitude in the situation. Rather than simply stating that avoidance was possible, the phrase conveys feelings of fear, anxiety, and intimidation, suggesting that the poet felt pressured or compelled to move aside because of the perceived threat.

It expresses a sense of emotional burden, implying that avoiding confrontation seemed not only logical but necessary for safety. The wording carries an undertone of resignation and emotional discomfort, revealing how the poet felt overpowered and emotionally affected by the encounter, rather than merely observing it as a neutral event (Niaz et, al., 2019).

Data 8

Stanza 4 line 16: *and how brutal Belgium and all of Europe is to Africans*

Analysis:

The affective meaning of the phrase “and how brutal Belgium and all of Europe is to Africans” reflects strong emotional expression rather than just a factual statement. The phrase conveys feelings of anger, pain, injustice, and historical trauma, suggesting deep emotional response to colonial violence and ongoing racism faced by Africans in Europe (Feagin, 2006).

The word “brutal” intensifies these emotions, implying cruelty, oppression, and dehumanization, rather than neutral or objective criticism. It reveals the poet’s emotional stance, one shaped by awareness of suffering, discrimination, and systemic racism, while also evoking empathy and shared collective memory among those who have experienced similar histories. In this context, the affective meaning emphasizes not only personal feelings but also the emotional weight of historical wounds carried across generations.

Data 9

Stanza 8 line 27: *believe me your baby is still your baby but (un)fortunately*

Analysis:

The affective meaning of the phrase “believe me your baby is still your baby but (un)fortunately” conveys a complex emotional tone involving reassurance mixed with discomfort or irony. On one level, the poet is offering comfort by affirming that they are still the mother’s child (“your baby”), suggesting love, connection, and emotional closeness.

However, the insertion of “(un)fortunately” introduces a conflicting emotional layer, implying that although the relationship remains intact, circumstances, such as life experiences, racial realities, or personal growth, have changed the poet in ways that may be painful or difficult. This creates an emotional blend of sadness, resignation, and perhaps a subtle critique of the world that forced the poet to mature prematurely. The phrase expresses tenderness toward the mother while simultaneously acknowledging the harsh realities shaping identity, suggesting emotional tension between innocence and harsh lived experience (Masyhur et, al., 2023).

4. Thematic meaning

Data 10

Stanza 1 line 7: *you sent me back to that narrow aisle*

Analysis:

The phrase “you sent me back to that narrow aisle” thematically conveys enforced social marginalization, restricted identity, and systemic power imbalance. It symbolizes how individuals—especially those from oppressed groups—are repeatedly pushed back into confined roles rather than allowed to exist freely, equally, or fully. However, metaphorically, it signifies a social space that restricts and oppresses weak individuals, especially those who live under unjust power structures (Feagin, 2006).

Data 11

Stanza 2 line 12: *so they know they don't own the world*

Analysis:

The line “so they know they don’t own the world” thematically signifies a challenge to social hierarchy, privilege, and oppression. It encapsulates the poem’s broader message of resisting silence, asserting identity, and confronting systems that marginalize others. It also emphasizes the pursuit of justice, dignity, and equal belonging in a world historically shaped by power imbalance. However, thematically, this sentence expands into a symbol of liberation from oppressive power, whether in a social, racial, or political context (Jindal, 2022).

5. Social meaning

Data 12

Stanza 1 line 10: *you told me you gotta stand up to people like that*

Analysis:

The line “you told me you gotta stand up to people like that” socially conveys a learned expectation to resist oppression and defend one’s dignity. It reflects cultural values of strength, resilience, and self-assertion, especially within a community that has historically faced discrimination. The statement is not just advice. This meaning represents a social norm about how to survive, be respected, and claim one’s rightful place in society (Danesi, 2004). The choice of the word “you gotta”, the informal form of *you have got to*, indicates formal and informal language, emphasizing emotional closeness and a warm but firm family relationship.

Data 13

Stanza 2 line 11: *when pigs snatched me from an action*

Analysis:

The line “when pigs snatched me from an action” in the sentence *pigs snatched me* has a strong social meaning because it reflects the political and social slang of the African American community during the civil rights movement. The word *pigs* in this context does not literally mean pigs, but is an idiomatic term for repressive police officers who use violence to silence popular protests. The sentence describes forced arrests during protests, thus containing social meaning about the tension between the people and state power (Seputri et al., 2022). The use of informal and idiomatic language signifies the voice of the lower classes or activists, rather than the official discourse of institutions.

6. Reflected meaning

Data 14

Stanza 6 line 3-4: *did you know there are traces of us in every speck of dust in this dirty world*

Analysis:

This line contains reflective meaning through the use of metaphors that describe the relationship between human identity and a morally corrupt world. The phrase *traces of us* symbolizes the traces or remnants of black people in a world that has long been marked by injustice and colonialism (Asmasika, 2022). Meanwhile, *dust* has a reflective meaning because, in addition to its literal meaning, it also has spiritual and philosophical connotations, reminding us of the origin and end of human life. The phrase *dirty world* reinforces the reflective meaning by describing a world that is *dirty* not physically, but morally and socially, full of oppression and racism (Chandler, 2007).

Data 15

Stanza 9 line 3-4: *what am I to do with all this sand in my chest*

Analysis:

The line “what am I to do with all this sand in my chest” displays a reflective meaning through the emotional metaphor *sand in my chest*, which figuratively describes psychological burdens, sadness, and inner exhaustion due to social and personal suffering. A word can carry emotional associations that reflect other meanings. In this case, *sand* reflects an image of dryness, destruction, and heaviness, signifying the inability to breathe freely amid the pressures of life. The word *chest* is reflexively associated with the soul and the center of human emotions, so this metaphor implies a chest filled with sadness and inner wounds. This line is not merely a physical expression, but a form of deep inner reflection on suffering and humanity (Asmasika, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, six out of seven types of meaning were found. The conceptual meaning is 16 %. It represents literal or denotative meanings. Then connotative meaning is 27 %. It represents emotional, social, or associative meanings. The affective meaning is 18 %. It represents feelings and emotions. Next, the thematic meaning is 16 %. It represents central themes or moral focus. The social meaning is 18 %. It represents social and cultural meanings. And the last, the reflected meaning is 4 %. It represents symbolic or ideological reflection.

The semiotic analysis of Darius Simpson’s poem *A Conversation with My Mother About the Bloodstains on My Shirt* using Leech’s Semantic Theory reveals that the poem operates on multiple layers of meaning, transforming a personal memory into a powerful commentary on racial identity, violence, and resilience. Through conceptual and connotative meaning, the poem exposes the harsh realities faced by Black individuals in a society where power and identity are unequally distributed. Affective meaning captures the emotional weight of fear, pain, and strength woven into the poet’s experience, while social and thematic meanings highlight cultural expectations, generational teachings, and the struggle against systemic oppression. Reflective and collocative meanings further enrich the poem by linking language to historical trauma and collective memory within the African American community. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Simpson’s poem is not only a personal narrative but also a symbolic act of resistance, where language becomes a tool for reclaiming identity, asserting dignity, and speaking truth to power.

Future research on Darius Simpson's poem *A Conversation with My Mother about the Bloodstains on My Shirt* could benefit from applying additional frameworks such as Critical Race Theory or discourse analysis to deepen understanding of its racial and ideological themes. Additionally, educators may incorporate the poem into classroom discussions to encourage critical awareness of systemic racism and lived experience through literary analysis.

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