

A Semiotic Analysis on LAY's and EXO's Selected Music Videos

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Abstract—This study describes the semiotic signs and implied meanings of two music videos. The videos studied were “*Goodbye Christmas*” by Lay and “*Universe*” by EXO. The writer focused on the study of denotation, connotation, and myth in these videos by using Barthes’ theory. In this case, all scenes such as properties, gestures, expressions, and activities in both music videos are called denotation. This analysis used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze scenes in both music videos. Based on the analysis done, it can be affirmed that music videos can be analyzed using Barthes’ theory. The results find that the visual images communicate implied meaning conveyed through the visual images. These images communicate feelings of sadness and separation as well as friendship and affection. The messages implied in the whole scenes of both music videos are the representation of problems that shackle humans, realization, efforts, and results of the efforts done to solve the problems.

Keywords: *connotation, denotation, music video, semiotics, sign*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a perfect medium to facilitate communication among people. It is a system of communication either spoken or written used and understood by a particular community or country to express thoughts and feelings. Language has also interpersonal functions to establish social relations. Sapir (1921) defines, “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through voluntarily produced symbols”. Indeed, language is an essential supporting media of verbal communication.

Humans do not only use verbal communication to communicate with each other but also use nonverbal communication to express feelings and thoughts. It uses gestures, facial expressions and body movements instead of speaking. Mayinger (2001) divides nonverbal communication into four categories. They are physical, aesthetic, signs and symbolic. Based on the categorization, it is clear that one of the focuses of nonverbal communication categories is signs. Any image, pattern, movement, and gesture that create meaning can be classified as signs.

The study of signs called semiotics focuses on the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects. It involves anything that stands for something else. There are terms called denotation and connotation to describe the relationship between signifier and its signified as well as myth as a mode of signification.

Denotation, connotation, and myth can also be found in a music video if it is observed closely. Semiotics signs are used by creative workers in the music video to convey the message of a song. According to Webster’s (New World College Dictionary, 2014), the music video is a recorded performance of music accompanied by synchronized actions, such as a dramatic interpretation of the lyrics or a series of, sometimes surreal, images. In addition to this, the music video was created to bring music to television and was created to promote and increase the sales of the song. According to Austerlitz (2007), music videos are “first, last, and always about commerce,” as they are essentially created to promote and support the sales of the song. However, along with the evolving era, a music video is created as a creative work to convey some messages of a song.

“*Goodbye Christmas*” by LAY and “*Universe*” by EXO from their winter albums are also the songs that have messages. The music videos were created for both songs not only to promote the singles from their new album but also to convey the messages of the songs. In conveying the messages, the creative teams of the music videos presented some signs to the viewers as a clue.

Based on the above background, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What signs are found in LAY’s music video entitled “*Goodbye Christmas*” and in EXO’s music video entitled “*Universe*”?
2. How are the description of denotation, connotation, and myth in LAY’s music video entitled “*Goodbye Christmas*” and in EXO’s music video entitled “*Universe*”?
3. What are the implied meanings of LAY’s music video entitled “*Goodbye Christmas*” and in EXO’s music video entitled “*Universe*”?

A. Semiotics

The usage of the semiotic terms in the non-medical field was started to be used by some philosophers around the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) which explored the relationship between signs and the world. The study of signs appeared again almost four centuries later in John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) called *semeiotics*. He introduced it to allow philosophers to study the relation between concepts and reality much more precisely.

Saussure and Peirce are considered as the pioneers of semiotics who established two major theoretical traditions of semiotics. Saussure introduces the analysis of language as a system of signs. He offered a dyadic or two-part model of the sign consist of a sign vehicle and its meaning. It is a signifier (the form made up of something physical such as sounds, letters, gestures, etc) and signified (the image or concept to which the signifier refers) (Sebeok, 2001). He then called the relation that holds between the two significations. Saussure considered the connection between the signifier and the signified an arbitrary one that human beings and/ or societies have established at will.

Moreover, focusing on semiotics study, this study employs Roland Gérard Barthes's theory who was well-known for his ideas about the system of signification which focuses on act or process of meaning representation of signs or other symbols. Levels of representation or levels of meaning often describe connotation and denotation. He adopted the concept of Louis Hjelmslev that there are different orders of signification. Barthes, as shown in Figure I. proposes a concept to understand the function of the sign.

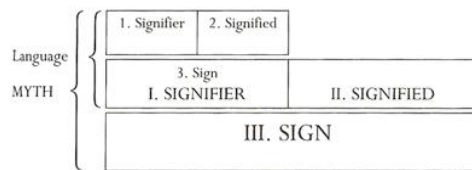


Fig. 1. (Source: Roland Barthes (1957, Trans Annette Lavers, Vintage: New York, 1991), 113.

The sign (3) is the denotative sign which is made from signifier (1) and signified (2). It can be called the *first order of signification* is that of denotation. Then, the signifier (I) is the connotative signifier which uses the denotative sign. It is connotation as a *second order of signification*. Afterward, the connotative signifier must create a connotative signified (II) to produce the sign (III) or connotative sign. In addition to denotation and connotation, Barthes (1957, as cited in Chandler, 2007) also relates them with myth.

Barthes did not see the myths of contemporary culture as simply a patterned agglomeration of connotations but as ideological narratives, and, following Hjelmslev, he saw mythical form as a metalanguage (Barthes 1957), which he defined as 'a

system whose plane of content is itself constituted by a signifying system' (1967a). Whereas in the case of connotation, the denotative sign becomes the signifier of the connotative sign, in the case of myth, 'the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it) . . . which myth gets hold of to build its own system' becomes the signified of the mythical metalanguage (1957; Hjelmslev, 1961; & Lévi-Strauss, 1969). (Chandler, 2007).

It means that myths are the dominant ideologies that influence the description or analysis of signs culturally.

B. Denotation, Connotation, Myth

Denotation refers to the most basic or literal meaning of a word. It can as a dictionary meaning. In contrast, connotation refers to an idea that is associated with a certain word or suggested by emotion related to that word. In semiotics, denotation, and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signified: a *denotative* signified and a *connotative* signified.

Fiske (1990) points out the connotation theory of Barthes, when the meaning of a sign is influenced by the feeling or emotion and cultural values of the interpreter. The meaning is established by customs and grown in society. Meanwhile, the term topography was used by Barthes to elaborate on what *denotation* is. The image that was captured by a camera reflects the object inside the camera. The object of an image of a photograph and abstract values may be associated with a resultant picture which is a matter of *connotation*. For example, a photograph of a face that denotes face has the connotation that will depend on the genre of photography such as surveillance, fashion, news, art and on stylistic manipulation of composition, color, and so on. It means that the same face can connote 'criminal' 'beauty' and 'supermodel'. (Hartley, 2002).

Myth is a folklore genre associated with sacred narratives about gods and heroes in society. However, in semiotics, myth is like metaphors that relate signs to the cultural values, historical events, attitudes, norms, and beliefs of a society. Hartley (2002) defines signification based on cultural values and beliefs. It is the representation of meaning is based on the cultural values and beliefs of a region.

In referring to the object of the study, music video which is used as the source of data is taken since the recorded video of song or music performance, usually accompanied by dance and/or visual images such as a sequence of scenes to interpret the lyrics. According to Austerlitz (2007), "music videos are short films intended to serve as an accompaniment to their musical soundtracks." Saul Austerlitz describes that the function of the music video is about commerce in order to promote the music and support the sales of music products (Austerlitz, 2007:6).

C. Semiotics in Music Video

Khairunnisa (2013) discussed fashion domination through Sign in music videos which used qualitative and descriptive approaches by applying the theory of Barthes (1977), in Chandler (2007) about myth and ideology to describe the ideologies of fashion domination issues in the music videos. She analyzed the denotative, connotative and mythical meanings of signs in the selected scenes of the music videos that show a fashion domination issue, such as “*I Will Show You*” by Ailee, “*You Belong with Me*” by Taylor Swift, and “*Super Girl*” by Super Junior M. Based on her analysis, it was found that a change of appearance emerges in the music video as a form of domination to maintain the dominant ideology.

Pratama (2015) also discussed a similar study that was about mandarin pop music video on Wandering Poet by Jolin Tsay. He used a qualitative approach by applying Pierce’s theory about the typology of signs (1958) to describe the denotative and connotative meanings of each sign. He used Guimei He’s theory about color (2009) to describe the meaning of a symbol based on Chinese culture. The study found signs merge to deliver a story. Most signs in the music are also influenced by Chinese culture since there are many Chinese elements.

In addition to this, Darmayanti, Sudipa, and Widiastuti (2016) used a descriptive qualitative approach in her thesis which discussed visual and verbal sign of Taylor swift’s music video by applying the theory of Dyer (1993) to identify the element of visual signs and the theory of Leech (1983) to analyze the meaning of verbal signs in the music video. Based on her analysis, it showed that the visual signs in the music video have the elements which included some categories such as age, gender, hair, body size, clothes, look, expression, eye contact, poise, touch body movements, prop and settings. The results found that verbal signs in song lyrics of the music video implied. There were three types of meanings found such as conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, and affective meaning.

II. METHOD

To obtain the messages of the videos, the descriptive qualitative approach was used to conduct the study in terms of data collection and data analysis. Woods (2006) defined a qualitative approach as an attempt to ensure that the data and analysis will closely reflect what is happening:

“Qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and situation as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events. In general, they try not to disturb the scene and to be unobtrusive in their methods. This is an attempt to ensure that data and analysis will closely reflect what is happening.”

It is clear that qualitative research takes the data from events and issues linked to what happens in daily life and explains the reflection of what is happening based on their experience as they observe the real situation as represented in the literary works.

Therefore, the data are taken from LAY’s music video entitled “*Goodbye Christmas*” and EXO’s music video entitled “*Universe*” was identified based on the concept of semiotics and Roland Barthes’ theory as one of the phenomena occurs in communication.

The signs on both music videos that are supposed to be semiotics signs were identifying such as properties, actions of models, locations, colors and so on. They were categorized into three levels of signification; Denotation, Connotation, and Myth. After that, the signs were listed in the table and analyzed. The implied meanings were determined based on the levels of signification. Finally, the result of the analysis was written in the form of an essay.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Music videos of “*Goodbye Christmas*” by LAY and “*Universe*” by EXO, which were uploaded on the SMTOWN YouTube account, were analyzed. The music videos show properties, actions of models, gestures, expressions, colors, and location. These can be classified as signs which convey meanings. To make it more understandable, Barthes produced a map of sign functioning:


TABLE I. MAP OF SIGN FUNCTIONING BY ROLAND BARTHES

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Signifier | 2. Signified |
| 3. Denotative Sign | |
| 4. Connotative Signifier | 5. Connotative Signified |
| 6. Connotative Sign | |

(Source: adapted from Barthes as cited in Cobley and Jansz, 2010:51)


From Table I, it can be seen that the denotative sign (3) is made from the signifier (1) and the signified (2). They both produce the denotative sign which is also being the connotative signifier (4) on the second level of the semiotic system. The connotative signifier must engender a connotative signified (5) to produce a connotative sign (6). That is where the kind of systematic approach to signs that Barthes wished to pursue becomes very problematic. (Cobley & Jansz, 2010).

DATUM 1. Men in the Darkness

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| A man in the darkness. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Lay is trapped in the darkness. | Sadness, mourning. |
| SIGN | |
| Black generally connotes fear, depressing, scary and evil. While the black suit is generally used for attending funeral or mourning events. | |


Goodbye Christmas by LAY delivers sad vibes through darkness and black suit. Standing alone with a black suit in the darkness gives gloomy and lonely impressions. This scene is presented to show negative feelings and situations that are felt by the lead male named LAY.

DATUM 2. Fallen Leaves

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| Activities on some objects in a dark place. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Lay is immersed in his memories. | Emptiness, flashback of separation. |
| SIGN | |
| Touching the empty chair and then staring at the screen which shows the fallen leaves indicate the loneliness that is being felt by LAY and the flashback of his separation. | |


The appearance of fallen leaves on the screen is to represent separation as the cause of the negative feelings that are felt by LAY. The leaves are kind of leaves that fall in Autumn. This season is a period when leaves become wither and dry. Then they separate from their tress and fall to the ground. A season when the branches and trunks are dry and bald. This season symbolizes separation from the beautiful things which brings sadness. It is like a break up that causes sadness on both sides of lovers.

DATUM 3. Reflecting Gestures

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
| Activities of two people in different places and times. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Both of them are thinking about something. They seem in deep thought. | Reflection, anxiety, problems. |
| SIGN | |
| The screen indicates an event in the past. It shows the girl's problems in the past. While the bed that is sat by LAY represents the present. The screen that is placed in front of LAY's bed reminding him of what has happened in the past. | |

As mentioned on the map, the screen showed the girl who only sat on the bed. Her gesture looks like she is in deep thought over something. It could be about the separation between her and LAY. As for the LAY's bed, it represents the present of LAY as the screen is placed in front of it as things to watch in the time after the past. It is a reminder of what happened in the past. LAY sits on the bed and bows his head which indicates that he is in deep thought reflecting something. This gesture is usually used when someone is in deep or serious thought or about something or reflecting something. Therefore, the scene has the purpose to show LAY who is reflecting on what happened in the past that involves the girl. The incident in the past could be a separation that brought sadness.

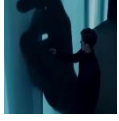
DATUM 4. Sad and Realization Gestures

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
| Two people did different activities in different places and times with particular gestures and facial expressions. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Lay is immersed in his past memories. | Guilt, realization |
| SIGN | |
| His gestures which get up from the chair and touch the screen represent his guilt feeling of what has happened in the past and what if he had solved the problem. | |

The gestures of the female lead which covered her eyes and touched her ear indicate that she is restless over something. She tries to reject the truth that she does not like. Meanwhile, LAY who is about to stand and touch the screen symbolizes his

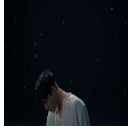
realization of something in the past that hit LAY and his willingness to fix it. In conclusion, these scenes have a purpose to show LAY's realization of what has happened in the past that involves the girl's feeling and his thought about what if he had solved the problem.

DATUM 5. Blue Curtain

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
| Activities of a man in a dark place with specific orders. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| LAY does not find what he is looking for. | Realization |
| SIGN | |
| He realizes that it is the past that he cannot fix. | |

The curtain has a purpose to delimiter between the past (the girl) and the present (LAY). The screens that were covered by curtains indicate that the girl has moved on from their separation. She chooses to start a new chapter of her life without LAY. However, he seems disbelief about this fact that can be seen from his actions that kept checking how the girl is now. He is hit by the fact that she has moved on. He realizes that it is only him that is trapped in the past.

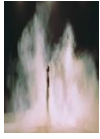
DATUM 6. Bowing Head in the Darkness

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| An action and face expression in dark place with white things. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| LAY gives up. | Sadness and realization. |
| SIGN | |
| Looking down represents a revelation of his mistakes and realizes that he cannot fix what has happened. While snow is often used to represent sadness. | |

Bowing his head indicates that he is in deep thought reflecting something. This gesture is usually used when someone is in deep or serious thought or about something or reflecting something. He bows his head because he realizes his mistake in the past and it cannot be fixed any longer. Darkness symbolizes a person's emotions such as sorrow, loneliness, death, and depression. While snow is often used to represent sadness. Therefore, this scene represents the realization that LAY feels towards his separation


from his former lover and the sad feeling that he still feels after the separation.

DATUM 7. A Man in the Midst of Darkness

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
| A man in the midst of ash and darkness. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| D.O. seems trapped in the darkness and ash surrounding him. | Grief, depression |
| SIGN | |
| Ash generally symbolizes grief while black symbolizes depressing. | |
| Wandering in darkness means in a messy situation. | |


Darkness symbolizes a person's emotions such as sorrow, loneliness, and depression. Wandering alone in the darkness means that D.O. is in a state of depression due to problems that surround him. These are the perfect signs to represent how messy the situation faced by D.O.

DATUM 8. Long Branching Ropes

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| Specific ropes towards a man. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Kai is sitting on the chair with long branching ropes binding him. The darkness surrounds the place he is sitting. | A bind, problems |
| SIGN | |
| Many problems bind Kai's soul and mind. | |


Ropes have a function to bind something. The act of binding can mean punishment, enslavement, illness, or even death for the bounded one. In this scene, long branching ropes have a purpose to represent problems that surround Kai. The problems that bind Kai's soul and mind which bring him to the powerless state. Whilst darkness behind him symbolizes a person's emotions such as sorrow, loneliness, death, and depression. It is emphasized by Kai's gesture that bowed his head and tightened his hands to show how powerless he is. These combinations are to represent how many problems binding him to the point he is incapable to fight them.

DATUM 9. Crumpled Paper

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| An action towards a paper and glasses of water in specific orders. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Xiumin is squeezing the paper in a depressed condition. There are glasses of water in front of and around him that are ignored. | Broken promise, lose trust, renewal, and transformation. |
| SIGN | |
| Crumpled paper connotes the trust that is broken. While water connotes renewal and transformation. When someone focuses on the crumpled paper and ignores the water, it means a second chance to fix the problem is ignored. | |

The white paper connotes trust, so when it is squeezed, it means that there is a trust that is broken or betrayed. When Xiumin squeezes the white paper, there is a glass of paper in front of him which is ignored by him. A glass of water connotes renewal and transformation. It represents the second chance to fix a problem that is ignored. Therefore, this scene tells about the broken promise which causes lost trust and the second chance to fix the fault that is ignored.


DATUM 10. Coffee Liquid

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| Brown Liquid |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Coffee is a mood gesture. | Friendship, sociability, warmth, and affection. |
| SIGN | |
| Coffee is something that wakes us in the morning. It offers warmth and energy. | |

Coffee is widely known as an energy booster, something that wakes up most people in the morning and something that most people look for to boost their mood when they are tired. Besides that, coffee is also associated with comradeship and companionship. It is generally drunk when people are having a conversation with friends and discussions with clients. The


appearance of the coffee liquid indicates the warmth and affection in friendship, just like coffee that offers warmth and energy.

DATUM 11. Cups of Coffee on the Table

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| Cups filled with liquid on the table and an activity on them. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| Kai lays down his head on the table with cups of coffee that surround him. | Friendship, affection, warmth, and ignorance. |
| SIGN | |
| Ignoring friendship and affection that are offered. | |


As discussed previously, coffee is widely known as an energy booster to boost mood in the morning and lighten up the mood when fatigue comes. People usually go to a coffee shop to have a conversation with friends or have a meeting with clients. This habit is associated with comradeship and companionship. Meanwhile, laying head down represents negative gestures like ignoring something. Therefore, ignoring cups of coffee that are around him means he ignores friendship and affection that are being offered to him.

DATUM 12. Offering a Cup of Coffee

| Signifier | Signified |
|---|---|
| A hand gesture to a cup and a person in a specific order. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| A man is offering a cup of coffee. | Friendship, warmth, affection. |
| SIGN | |
| Friendship is being offered. | |


As explained several times, coffee is generally known as something that gives warmth and energy. It also relates to sociability. Meanwhile, the hand gesture indicates offering something to someone. The appearance of the cup of coffee and offering gesture portrays a friendship that is being offered.

Datum 13. Broken Ropes

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|---|
| Certain conditions of ropes on a man in a dark place. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| A clip of ropes that binds Kai is broken. | Freedom, unravelment. |
| SIGN | |
| Kai is free from suffering and messy feeling and mind. | |

Kai's freedom is signed by the break of the ropes. The broken ropes connote freedom from something that binds. The appearance of this is to show Kai's problems are solved and he is free from them. Furthermore, Kai was also seen lifting his head when the ropes were broken. It means the courage to welcome a new day.

DATUM 14. Conversation Between Two Groups

| Signifier | Signified |
|--|--|
| An activity with certain gestures and facial expressions between people. |  |
| Sign → Signifier | Signified |
| EXO members look in a good mood and warm talk. | Letting go, move on, problem solved, warmth, friendship, affection. |
| SIGN | |
| Problems that pressure EXO members have been solved. They are now in a good situation. | |

Smile face expression indicates EXO members are happy because of something. To emphasize the problems that had been solved, the cups of coffee were showed up to create a warm and friendly atmosphere between EXO members. This scene represents all of them who finally resolve their problems and get ready for the new chapter with positive vibes.

The music videos may look simple, but they deliver many messages through signs presented in the music videos. Although viewers do not understand the languages of the songs, they can

still understand the messages of the songs by paying attention to the signs.

Korean wave, known widely as the Hallyu wave keeps going strong in Indonesia as the growth of social media. One of the Korean waves is Korean pop as known as Kpop that is gained much popularity in Indonesia marked by Korean groups that keep coming to Indonesia for holding concerts and fan meetings, attending Indonesian awards, being product ambassadors and so on and enthusiasm of huge amount Indonesian fans in those Kpop events.

The research questions concern the relationship between signs, denotation, connotation, and myth, and the implied meanings of LAY's music video entitled "Goodbye Christmas" and in EXO's music video entitled "Universe". Interestingly, the finding in the previous studies yielded similar results. The previous study shows that a change of appearance emerges in the music video as a form of domination to maintain the dominant ideology. Khairunnisa (2013), signs merge to deliver a story. Most signs in music are also influenced by culture (Pratama, 2015).

However, Darmayanti (2016) obtained a different result. She found that verbal signs in song lyrics of the music video were found in three types of meanings found such as conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, and affective meaning.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the music video analysis of "Goodbye Christmas" by LAY and "Universe" by EXO, it can be affirmed that the semiotics approach on both music videos consists of Denotation, Connotation, and Myth that based on Barthes' theory. The viewers of both music videos can understand the messages of the songs by paying attention to the signs presented on both music videos. The obvious signs such as properties, gestures, expression, and activities in both music videos that can be seen by the viewers are denotation.

Meanwhile, the connotation portrays the communication that happens when the sign meets the emotions of users. In this analysis, the emotional suggestions of the viewers towards the signs influenced the production of connotation meanings. The properties, gestures, expression, and activities in both music videos produced connotation meanings. In addition to this, there is an order signification called myth meanings. It refers to social overtones and cultural implications that influence the description or analysis of signs. The myth meanings were produced from cultural values, historical events, attitudes, norms, and beliefs of a society.

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