

Unveiling Hidden Meanings in the Lyrics of One Direction's *Story of My Life*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Ferdinand de Saussure; Hidden Meanings, Semiotic Analysis; Song Lyrics</p> <p>Received: 17 Sep 2024 Revised: 30 Oct 2024 Accepted: 04 Nov 2024</p>	<p>This study delves into the hidden meanings in the lyrics of <i>Story of My Life</i> by One Direction, utilizing Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic framework, specifically the concepts of signifier and signified. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research examines the song's lyrics as the primary data, complemented by secondary data from scholarly sources to provide additional insights. The analysis reveals themes of emotional vulnerability, resilience, and memory, articulated through symbolic and metaphorical expressions in the lyrics. Key findings highlight the interplay between individual emotions and universal human experiences, such as love, loss, and perseverance, making the song relatable to a broad audience. The study demonstrates how the lyrics transcend mere entertainment, offering profound reflections on personal and cultural narratives. By applying semiotics, this research underscores the significance of song lyrics as a form of literary and cultural expression. It also paves the way for future studies to explore similar frameworks in analyzing music and its impact on audiences.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is widely known as the study of signs and symbols. It is also known as semiology as an alternative term in which it is used to communicate and to convey the meaning of the language used. Semiotics is not just a method for analyzing texts; it can also encourage readers to delve into various interesting philosophical issues raised by semioticians. The book *Semiotics: the Basics*, (Chandler, 2022) states that semiotics is more than just a method for analyzing text. It is "the study of the meanings and applications of signs and symbols" (Sulistiawati et al., 2024).

Semiotic analysis is "a scientific or analytical approach to evaluating signs, where a sign is a tool that people use to interpret the world around them" (Cahyani & Hasbi, 2024). The analysis seeks to reveal an implied or explicit meaning in a text. Therefore, people often say that semiotics is an attempt to find the hidden meaning of "news behind the news" (Wibowo, 2013). It will also encourage readers to investigate some of the interesting philosophical issues raised by semioticians. This science considers social phenomena, society, and culture as signs (Dunleavy, 2020).

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics is usually used to define a category of signs that can only represent something if the reader of the sign has experience with its representation. According to Saussure's semiotic model, anything that can be observed if there is a signifier and signified can be considered a sign. A sign is the union of an idea or signified and a form of signifier. The signifier and signified are interrelated, and both are necessary for meaning. The main question in Saussure's theory is explained by (Erlangga et al., 2021), they state that language is a sign system consisting of two parts:



signified and signifier. The signifier is in terms of form in a sign while signified is in terms of the meaning of sound (Fatimah, 2022).

Over the past few decades, semiotic theory has developed rapidly and become an important analytical tool in many fields, from linguistics to cultural studies. Ferdinand de Saussure, often dubbed the “Father of Semiotics”, is the main creator of this theory. Saussure introduced the basic concepts underlying the study of signs and meaning, such as signifier and signified, in the book *Introducing Semiotics*, written by (Cobley, 2014). According to Saussure, the signifier is the physical form of the sign, such as a spoken word or a picture, while the signified is the concept or meaning represented by the signifier.

Saussure divided four theoretical concepts: signifier and signified, langue and parole, synchronic and diachronic, and syntagmatic and paradigmatic. “The signifier and the signified are a unity, like two sides of a piece of paper,” Saussure said. The signifier, or sign, on the other hand, is the meaning or message we have in mind about something that everyone who uses the language seems to agree on. According to Sobur (Fanani, 2013), the signified is the mental aspect while the signifier concept is the material element that has meaning. Saussure saw language as a sign system composed of two parts, namely signifier and signified.

According to Mattozzi (2019), the signifier is a mental representation of psychological sounds or feelings in the human mind. According to Dunleavy (2020), a sign is a perception or mental understanding of significance. Many people think of signifiers as words, signifiers as “meaning”, and signifiers as language sounds in a certain sequence of phenomes. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is very close because they are each other. In other words, “significant” refers to the actual components of language, such as spoken, heard, and written. The signifier signifies while the signified signifies.

Songs, especially in poetry, are the most favored literary works. Many people love song lyrics, which are one of the most beloved literary works. Lyrics are a collection of words arranged in such a way as to form a song, which usually consists of several stanzas. Song lyrics can be included in the category of poetry because they have almost identical forming elements and structures. Lyrics, like poetry, function as a series of singing words and an expression of personal emotions (Rahadian, 2022). The symbols in the strung words can indicate that these song lyrics may contain the feelings of the creator. Many people listen to music because they are drawn to its meaningful lyrics.

We often hear words and songs in our daily lives. People from ancient times to the present have always been involved in music and songs. Listening to music can increase the human spirit to do their daily activities. There are even some people who feel their life is incomplete if they don’t listen to music at least once every day. Music can give a unique feel to the listener. When we hear a song, the music can also describe the feelings we are feeling at that time. Songs are a type of literary work where one can use songs as a platform to express their feelings, such as happiness, sad, anger, gratitude, or anything that may not be able to express directly through conversation (Agusetyaningrum & Suryadi, 2022; Anshory et al., 2022). Being able to give an impression or meaning to the listener through the words in the song lyrics. Songs, which are poems, have been around for a long time. The song has many genres, and the lyrics describe longing.

Songs can show the feelings and anxieties of the author. Song lyrics are meaningful words (Harnia, 2021). Language is a very important part of the communication process. Saussure said that language is a systematic structure through which humans express their thoughts and feelings. Signs are components of language. Song lyrics today are evolving and influenced by social, cultural, and technological trends. They address more daring, diverse, and sometimes controversial themes, including mental health issues, social criticism, hopes, and aspirations, as well as controversial and provocative self-identities and personal life stories. This development has resulted in new musicians who have their genres and characteristics.

Music lyrics created by humans are spoken symbols. Song lyrics created by authors are intended to convey the message they want to convey efficiently. Song lyrics, according to (Sitorus, 2019), serve as a tool to communicate well because they convey the composer's emotions and thoughts to describe thought, such as peace, love, and jealousy. Lyrics use language rich in connotations, graphic power, and sensual beauty to convey ideas and themes and evoke corresponding images. Lyrics that generate perceptions and describe something are then filled with emotions, visual power, and sensations of beauty. By combining the relationship between song lyrics and literary works. Iryanti (2010) defines literature as the language of society, culture, and tradition. However, literature is not just a work of history or culture. Because some sentences or words of the songwriter (song lyrics) can be understood by the listener, it is necessary to study the substance of the song lyrics.

One of the most famous boybands in the world is One Direction. Many of One Direction's songs focus on the lives of young people with different stories and problems, so they can represent the feelings of their fans. This research aims to interpret the messages contained in the lyrics of the song *Story of My Life* by One Direction because it is considered to provide a message to the audience about the importance of taking initiative in life, even if it is just entertainment. The purpose of this study is to interpret the hidden meaning contained in the lyrics of the song *Story of My Life* by One Direction by using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic concept.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the hidden meanings within the lyrics of *Story of My Life* by One Direction. A qualitative approach was chosen due to its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of linguistic and cultural phenomena, particularly in uncovering implicit meanings embedded in literary texts. Qualitative research is effective for analyzing complex, nuanced aspects of human experiences and expressions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Moleong, 2007), making it well-suited for semiotic analysis. The primary data for this research comprises the lyrics of *Story of My Life*, while secondary data includes scholarly articles, books, and credible online sources. These secondary resources are used to contextualize and support the interpretation of the primary data, ensuring a well-rounded analysis. The process of data collection involved identifying key lines in the lyrics that exhibit symbolic or metaphorical language. Each line was analyzed through the lens of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, focusing on the interplay between the signifier (the tangible or literal element) and the signified (the abstract concept or deeper meaning it represents). The analysis began with a systematic breakdown of the song's lyrics, identifying signifiers in the form of keywords and phrases. For example, the line "written in these walls" was examined as a signifier, with the signified interpreted as a representation of emotional memories or unresolved past experiences. This process was repeated for each lyric, revealing recurring themes such as emotional vulnerability, resilience, and love. The findings were then cross-referenced with relevant literature to ensure consistency and to enrich the interpretations with broader theoretical insights.

3. FINDINGS

The data obtained from the *Story of My Life* song lyrics was analyzed to find the hidden meaning contained in the song. By using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic concept, the researchers present the data as follows:

Data 1

Written in these walls are the stories that I can't explain

Signifier: Written in these walls



Signified: It deals with deep emotional memories or experiences that have occurred during the singer's life, which may be too difficult or painful to express in words. The walls of this place serve as a representation of the location or state in which this memory is stored.

I leave my heart open

Signifier: I leave my heart open

Signified: It shows emotional vulnerability and readiness to accept the love or emotions of others despite the risk of getting hurt.

But it stays right here empty for days

Signifier: Empty for days

Signified: It describes the feeling of remaining empty or lonely despite emotional openness. It could indicate that love is not coming or is not fulfilled despite the singer being willing to receive it.

She told me in the morning

Signifier: She told me in the morning

Signified: The emotional disclosure or honesty that comes in the morning is often associated with new enlightenment or clarity.

She don't feel the same about us in her bones

Signifier: In her bones

Signified: It shows a significant and fundamental shift in the way couples view relationships. "In his flesh" indicates that this shift is very real and strong.

These words will be written on my stone

Signifier: These words will be written on my stone

Signified: This suggests that these emotions and experiences will be attached to the singer's memory or legacy forever.

Data 2

And I'll be gone, gone tonight

Signifier: And I'll be gone, gone tonight

Signified: It indicates that the decision to leave has already been made and will be done soon, perhaps by tonight. It could indicate a feeling of desperation or an urgent need to leave a situation that is no longer acceptable.

The ground beneath my feel is open wide

Signifier: The ground beneath my feel is open wide

Signified: Describes a deep feeling of uncertainty or unpredictability. It may indicate a major life change or a feeling of losing a strong foundation, such as a loss of support or security.

The way that I've been holding on too tightly

Signifier: The way that I've been holding on too tightly

Signified: Indicates an enormous or excessive effort to hold on to something, usually out of fear of loss or change. It can indicate a fear or inability to let go of something that is important but may no longer be healthy or functional.

With nothing in between

Signifier: With nothing in between

Signified: Indicates that between two things there are no barriers or obstructions. In this situation, it can mean the desire to have clarity or full openness without barriers in the relationship or communication.

Data 3

The Story of My Life, I take her home

Signifier: *The Story of My Life*

Signified: Their personal lives, the events that shaped their identities, and important events in their lives.

Signifier: *I take her home*

Signified: One of the signs of intimacy and responsibility in a relationship is taking someone to a place of safety or comfort.

I drive all night to keep her warm

Signifier: *I drive all night to keep her warm*

Signified: Showing deep sacrifice and care to keep loved ones warm and safe throughout the night, and showing great dedication and effort to do so.

And time is frozen

Signifier: *And time is frozen*

Signified: Depicts time seemingly stopping at an important moment. It can show how precious a particular moment is, thus keeping the memory alive.

The Story of My Life, I give her hope

Signifier: *I give her hope*

Signified: Showing how important it is to give support and hope to others is a part of who the singer is who always seeks to inspire.

I spend her love until she's broken inside

Signifier: *I spend her love until she's broken inside*

Signified: Describes an unbalanced dynamic in the relationship where one party gives too much to the point of leaving the other party exhausted or emotionally drained, indicating vulnerability in the relationship.

Data 4

Written on these walls are the colours that I can't change

Signifier: *Written on these walls are the colours that I can't change*

Signified: This phrase represents the past or memories that cannot be repaired. Here, "colours" describe various emotions and experiences that have occurred and left a significant impact on one's life. These walls serve as a representation of the place in the heart that holds these memories.

Leave my heart open

Signifier: *Leave my heart open*

Signified: Showing emotional openness or being ready to receive feelings and love. While there may be a risk of getting hurt, there is an intention to remain vulnerable and honest.

But it stays right here in its cage

Signifier: *But it stays right here in its cage*

Signified: Describes feeling emotionally isolated or limited. Although there is a desire to open up, something is holding the heart back. This could be due to fear or trauma from the past.

I know that in the morning

Signifier: I know that in the morning

Signified: "Morning" is often used as a symbol for new beginnings or fresh hope and depicts the expectation of change or improvement in the future.

I'll see us in the light up on the hill

Signifier: I'll see us in the light up on the hill

Signified: This phrase symbolizes a better and hopeful future. "Light up on the hill" shows a bright and beautiful future, a goal that can be achieved after facing difficulties.

Though I am broken, my heart is untamed still

Signifier: Though I am broken, my heart is untamed still

Signified: There is a spirit that cannot be tamed or eliminated despite hardships or emotional wounds. The heart remains vibrant and strong despite having suffered much damage.

Data 5

And I've been waiting for this time to come around

Signifier: And I've been waiting for this time to come around

Signified: It shows longing and hope for the moment to look forward to. There is a feeling of patience and hope that the desired moment or opportunity will come. This waiting can be related to various aspects of life, such as time with loved ones or achieving something desired.

But, baby, running after you

Signifier: But, baby, running after you

Signified: It denotes an attempt to pursue or gain the attention and love of someone one loves. It also shows someone who is constantly trying to get the attention or positive response of others, but these efforts are sometimes not successful or easy.

Is like chasing the clouds

Signifier: Is like chasing the clouds

Signified: It indicates that your efforts are futile or will not succeed. Since clouds cannot really be caught and are always moving, chasing clouds is a metaphor for something difficult or impossible to achieve. It shows how difficult it is to pursue someone who may not succeed or not respond in the expected way.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to uncover the hidden meanings embedded in the lyrics of *Story of My Life* by One Direction using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic framework. The primary findings demonstrate that *Story of My Life* employs rich symbolic language to convey complex emotional narratives. For instance, phrases such as "written in these walls" and "empty for days" reflect themes of emotional isolation and the burden of unresolved memories. Similarly, expressions like "chasing the clouds" serve as metaphors for unattainable desires, while "I drive all night" depicts sacrifice and dedication in relationships. These interpretations suggest that the song transcends its surface-level appeal to explore deeper, more relatable aspects of the human condition. Notably, the recurring use of metaphors and symbols emphasizes the song's literary quality, aligning it with poetic traditions.



When compared to previous research, this study aligns with the findings of Rahadian (2022), who argued that song lyrics function as poetic texts, capable of expressing complex emotional and cultural themes. Furthermore, the results resonate with Iryanti's (2010) assertion that literature, including music lyrics, serves as a reflection of societal and individual experiences. However, this study diverges from earlier research by focusing specifically on the semiotic dimension of *Story of My Life*, providing a more structured and theoretical analysis of its lyrical content. While prior studies often relied on thematic or stylistic analysis, the use of Saussure's signifier-signified framework allowed for a detailed exploration of how meaning is constructed through language and imagery.

The implications of this research are multifaceted. First, it underscores the importance of semiotics as a methodological tool for analyzing song lyrics and other forms of literary expression. By revealing the symbolic depth of *Story of My Life*, the study highlights the potential for music to communicate universal themes, making it a valuable resource for understanding cultural and emotional narratives. Second, the findings suggest that songs like *Story of My Life* can serve as pedagogical tools in teaching literary analysis, helping students appreciate the interplay between language, emotion, and culture. Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The analysis was restricted to a single song, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, while the research focused on Saussure's semiotics, incorporating perspectives from other semioticians, such as Barthes or Peirce, could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the song's symbolic complexity. Future studies could address these limitations by examining a broader range of songs or integrating multiple semiotic frameworks to enrich the analysis.

5. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the hidden meanings embedded in the lyrics of *Story of My Life* by One Direction through the lens of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic framework. By examining the interplay between signifiers and signifieds, the research revealed how the song conveys complex themes of emotional vulnerability, resilience, love, and longing. The findings demonstrate that the lyrics employ rich symbolic language, allowing listeners to connect with the song on both personal and universal levels. The study contributes to the field of literary and cultural studies by demonstrating the applicability of semiotic theory to popular music analysis. It also emphasizes the role of music as a bridge between personal emotions and collective cultural experiences, offering new perspectives on how audiences engage with and interpret artistic works. However, the research acknowledges its limitations, particularly in its focus on a single song and its reliance on Saussure's framework. Future studies could expand the scope by analyzing additional songs or incorporating diverse semiotic theories to further explore the interplay between lyrics, meaning, and culture. Finally, *Story of My Life* exemplifies how song lyrics can transcend entertainment to function as meaningful texts that resonate with listeners. This study not only enriches our understanding of the song but also reinforces the value of semiotics as a tool for uncovering the deeper significance of artistic and cultural expressions.

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