

A SEMANTIC STUDY OF SONG LYRICS OF *FOSTER THE PEOPLE*

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Abstrak

*Studi ini difokuskan kepada analisis aspek semantik dari lirik-lirik lagu di album *Torches* dari band *Foster the People*. Tujuan dari studi ini dibagi menjadi dua. Pertama, studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi fitur-fitur semantik diantaranya hiperbola, personifikasi, dan simile yang ditemukan pada lirik-lirik lagu di album *Torches* dari band *Foster the People*. Kedua, studi ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan makna kata dari fitur-fitur semantik diantaranya hiperbola, personifikasi, and simile yang digunakan di dalam lirik-lirik lagu tersebut. Metode yang digunakan untk memilih data pada studi ini adalah metode observasi dan teknik pengambilan catatan. Studi ini menganalisis secara kualitatif berdasarkan teori figuratif dari Perrine (2005) dan teori makna kata dari Geoffrey Leech (1974).*

*Hasil analisis dalam studi ini menunjukkan bahwa lirik-lirik lagu di album *Torches* mengandung fitur-fitur semantik diantaranya hiperbola, personifikasi, dan simile. Makna kata diantaranya makna konseptual, stylistik, and afektif juga dipresentasikan di dalam fitur-fitur semantik tersebut. Fitur-fitur semantik dan makna kata tersebut digunakan oleh penulis lagu dengan tujuan untuk menghibur pendengar dari lagu-lagu tersebut.*

Kata kunci: Lirik lagu, fitur-fitur semantik, makna kata.

1. Background of the Study

Language is the medium for people's communication. Specifically, people express their thoughts through the language in written or spoken forms. Song lyrics are also being the way in order to express the thoughts of people as the development of art in today's life. Nowadays, song lyric is merely like poetry since composing song lyric is not a simple and easy thing. Moreover, song lyric have stanzas and lines like poetry does. It can be assumed that song lyric and poetry are similar things that are only separated by their names and the way how

they are delivered by its users. Every lyric absolutely have meanings within. Those meanings are much related with the study of semantic. There are several linguistic aspects of the songs such as semantic aspects and their meanings are discussed in this study. Those semantic aspects are hyperbole, personification and simile, and those meanings are conceptual meaning, stylistic meaning, and affective meaning. The data that were used in this study are the song lyrics from the album *Torches* by an American band, *Foster the People*.

2. Problems of the Study

Referring to the background illustrated previously, two research questions are the focus of the current study:

- a) What semantic features are found in the song lyrics in album “Torches” by Foster the People?
- b) What meanings of the semantic features are expressed in the song lyrics in the album?

3. Aims of the Study

- a) To identify the semantic features such as hyperbole, personification, and simile those are found in the song lyrics in album “Torches” by Foster the People.
- b) To explain the meanings of semantic features, among others hyperbole, personification, and simile, which are used in the song lyrics in the album.

4. Research Method

The data used in this study were obtained from song lyrics of Foster the People’s album “torches” that consists of 10 songs, namely “Helena Beat”, “Pumped Up Kicks”, “Call It What You Want”, “Don't Stop (Color on the Walls)”, “Waste”, “I Will Do Anything for You”, “Houdini”, “Life on the Nickel”, “Miss You”, and “Warrant”. The method and technique used in

collecting data is observation method and note taking technique. The data in this study were analyzed qualitatively based on the theory of figure of speech by Perrine (2005) and the theory of meaning by Geoffrey Leech (1974).

5. Result and Discussion

This part deals with the result and the discussion of the data. The data analysis is divided into two parts; analysis of semantic features such as hyperbole, personification, simile, and the analysis of its meanings.

a) Hyperbole

According to Perrine (Arp, T. R., & Johnson, 2005: 113) overstatement or hyperbole is simply exaggeration, but exaggeration in the service of truth. Like all figure of speech, overstatement may be used with a variety of effects. It may be humorous or grave, fanciful or restrained, convincing or unconvincing. Understatement or saying less than one means, may exist in what one says or merely in how one says it.

1. “Cause **I’ll be a listening ear** to everything you say” (line 5)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “I Will Do Anything for You”. The hyperbole is found in the sentence above as the person in the song lyric says that he will be a listening ear to his speaking partner. If it is taken literally, nobody can change themselves to be another form including an ear. What the person in this song lyric says is an exaggeration.

Thing that the person in this song lyric means is that he will be a best listener by saying ‘I’ll be a listening ear’ as an ear is a part of our body that we use to listen to something. As this song is about a relationship between person and God, the person in this song says that he will be God’s listener by doing what is written in “God’s way”.

Furthermore, as what is written in this song lyric, it also talks about the person that has a bad life and bad relationship with God before. The hyperbole in this lyric is used in order to give a convincing effect. By using an exaggerated sentence, the writer of this song lyric tries to convince God that he will be a good man. Those exaggerated words are

delivered in the service of truth. It can be seen that the writer of this song lyric writes an exaggerated word to support his plead in saying a truth to God as the person in this song is a reflection of himself and his life.

b) Personification

According to Perrine (Arp, T. R., & Johnson, 2005: 73) personification consists in giving the attributes of a human being to an animal, an object, or a concept. It is really a subtype of metaphor, an implied comparison in which the figurative term of the comparison is always a human being. In other words, an animal, object, or a concept is given human characteristic.

1. “My **smokes** have **come** and **gone**” (line 33)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “Life on the Nickel”. The sentence above is indicated a personification. The word “smokes” in the sentence above is given the attributes of human being as it is said in the sentence that the smokes have come and gone. Word “smokes” in this sentence is an object that did an action like human being. What the writer means by “my smokes have some and gone” is his bad habit in using drugs. As we can see in some movies, drugs are available in many variants. It can be in form of hard or liquid. In its using process, sometimes drugs produce smokes if it is used by burned or steamed. Since this song is about the life of the song writer, Mark Foster, a former drug addict, who struggles and hustles whatever to get his drugs, but it is never enough, the sentence “my smokes have some and gone” in this lyric means that sometimes he gets his drugs but sometimes he cannot have it. He always gets something lower than what he expects. He does not have the money to feed his wrong habit.

An implied comparison of this sentence as it is a personification with human being is the word “smokes” in this sentence does something like what it is used to be done by human being. The word “smokes” is illustrated like it can come and go like human being. In fact, smokes can do nothing. It is just an object that is controlled by the air. However,

with a sense of personification, the word “smokes” in this song lyric can do something like human being.

c) Simile

According to Perrine (Arp, T. R., & Johnson, 2005: 70) metaphor and simile are both used as a means of comparing things that are essentially unlike. The only distinction between them is that in simile the comparison is expressed by the use of some word or phrase, such as like, as, than, similar to, resembles or seems; in metaphor the comparison is implied – that is, the figurative term is substituted for or identified with the literal term.

1. “Beat stroking this **like** things I think are right” (line 21-22)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “Miss You”. In the sentence above, the existence of the word “like” is indicating a simile. The word “like” in the sentence above is used as a means of comparison as it is written in the song lyric that the person in song lyric believes that his “strike” is the same like things he thinks are right. He compares those two essentially unlike things to convince himself about his action and his mind.

What the “beat stroking” means in this sentence is actually the person’s habit as the person in the song lyric is the reflection of the song writer, Mark Foster. This song is about a guy who tries drugs despite he fears of using it at the beginning. At first, the person believes that what he does is right. However, in the end of the song lyric, it is described that the person in the song lyric changes his habit for his loved one.

d) Conceptual meaning

Leech (1974: 11) states that the aims of conceptual meaning is to provide, for any given interpretation of a sentence, a configuration of abstract symbol, that shows exactly what we require to know if we are to distinguish that meaning from all other possible sentence meanings in the

language. In other words, this meaning is referring to the dictionary meaning without any implied meaning or secondary meaning.

1. “Beat stroking this **like** things I think are right” (**line 21-22**)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “Miss You”. In the sentence above, the writer only illustrates a comparison without referring to any other special meaning in the language. He describes a comparison of an action he does with his thought. The listener of this song will be easier to understand the meaning of this sentence in the song lyric as it is only has literal meaning.

The sentence above shows what is required to know by the listener of the song lyric and it describes an exact meaning despite if it is distinguished from all other possible meanings in the language.

e) Stylistic meaning

Leech (1974: 14) states that stylistic meaning is that which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances or its use.

1. “My smokes have come and gone” (**line 33**)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “Life on the Nickel”. In the sentence above, a sense of stylistic meaning can be easily detected as there is a word “smoke”. The smoke in the song lyric above is not the smoke that is produced by cigarette, but the smokes that is produced by drugs. As we know drugs can be in form of hard or liquid. In its using process, sometimes drugs produce smokes if it is used by burned or steamed.

The word “smokes” in the sentence above conveys the circumstance of the writer, Mark Foster, a former drug addict, who struggles and hustles whatever to get his drugs, but it is never enough. This sentence can be easier to be understood by the listener of this song if they already understand about the background of the song lyric writer.

f) Affective meaning

Leech (1974: 16) states that affective meaning is one type of meaning that reflects the personal feeling of the speaker, including his attitude to the listener, or his attitude to something he is talking about.

1. “Cause I'll be a listening ear to everything you say” (**line 5**)

This sentence is written in the song lyric “I Will Do Anything for You”. The sentence above is containing an affective meaning as in the sentence above written the good attitude of the writer as the speaker to the listener in the song lyric. There is an impression of politeness in the song lyric, as we know politeness is basically referred to self-sacrifice. In the song lyric above, the writer sacrifices himself to be a good listener to the person he talks to, especially to God.

As this song is similar with a worship song, the writer politely tries to communicate with God through this song by saying that he will listen to everything God said. What this sentence really means is that the writer will be God’s best listener by doing what is written in “God’s way”.

6. Conclusion

The existence of semantic features in the song lyrics such as hyperbole, personification, and simile as the parts of figure of speech helps the listeners of this song to get the clear imagination about the song lyrics in their minds. On the other hand, the figure of speech which is related with the special way in using words makes the song lyrics become more interesting to the listeners. The listeners of the song lyrics will be entertained while they also get the knowledge about the figure of speech that is used in the song lyrics. Each part of figure of speech in the song lyric has its own important roles in building the song lyric and listeners’ imagination.

This study also analyzes the meanings those are contained in the semantic features in the song lyrics in the album *Torches*. The meanings those are found are conceptual meanings, stylistic meaning, and affective meaning. Each part of meanings in the semantic features in the song lyrics has its own important roles in helping the listeners to get the hidden messages behind the song lyrics.

7. Bibliography

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