

A Semantic Analysis of Associative Meaning in the Song “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro

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Article Info

Article history:

Received April 30, 2026

Revised May 19, 2026

Accepted June 03, 2026

Available online July 01, 2026

Keywords: associative meaning;
semantic analysis; song lyrics;
emotional expression; Sienna Spiro

Abstract. This study entitled “A Semantic Analysis of Associative Meaning in the Song ‘The Visitor’ by Sienna Spiro” investigates how associative meanings are expressed in the song lyrics and how they contribute to the emotional and thematic interpretation of the song. The objective of this study is to identify the types of associative meaning found in the lyrics and explain their roles in conveying implied meanings and emotional experiences. This study applied a descriptive qualitative method using content analysis. The data consisted of 24 lyric excerpts selected from the song lyrics based on their relevance to Leech’s theory of associative meaning. The findings revealed that all six types of associative meaning were found in the lyrics, namely connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings. Among these types, affective meaning appeared as the most dominant because the lyrics mainly expressed emotional attachment, longing, sadness, and inner conflict. Connotative meaning was reflected through symbolic expressions that conveyed deeper emotional interpretation, while reflective meaning appeared through words containing multiple interpretations. In addition, the findings indicated that associative meanings in the song often overlapped and worked together in expressing psychological and emotional experiences.

Introduction

Songs are not only a form of entertainment, but also a medium for expressing emotions, experiences, and social realities. Through lyrics, songwriters communicate meanings that often go beyond literal interpretation. In everyday life, people listen to songs while studying, relaxing, or dealing with emotional situations, which makes songs closely connected to human experiences. Because of that, song lyrics can be analyzed as meaningful linguistic texts that reflect emotions, thoughts, and cultural values (Murphey, 1992; Yule, 2020).

In linguistic studies, semantics plays an important role in understanding how meaning is constructed through language. Semantics is concerned with the study of meaning in words, phrases, and sentences, including both literal and implied meanings. In song lyrics, meaning is often expressed indirectly through imagery, symbolism, emotional expressions, and figurative language. Therefore, semantic analysis is widely used to explore how listeners interpret messages hidden behind lyrical expressions.

One important aspect of semantics is associative meaning, proposed by Leech (1981). Associative meaning refers to meanings that are connected to feelings, social context, personal interpretation, and emotional associations rather than dictionary definitions alone. According to Leech, associative meaning consists of six categories: connotative, social, affective, reflective,

collocative, and thematic meanings. These categories help explain how language creates emotional and symbolic effects in communication, especially in literary works and song lyrics.

Recently, several studies have discussed associative meaning in songs. Bahri and Lubis (2021) analyzed associative meaning in Minangkabau song lyrics and found that connotative and affective meanings were dominant in expressing cultural identity and emotional experience. Fauziyah, Prastiwi, and Tirtanawati (2024) examined connotative meaning in Ben Howard's songs and showed that figurative expressions strengthened emotional interpretation in the lyrics. Putri and Purnamasari (2024) also found that associative meaning in movie soundtracks contributed significantly to emotional atmosphere and audience interpretation. These studies indicate that associative meaning is important in understanding how lyrics communicate feelings and implied messages.

However, most previous studies mainly focused on several songs or full albums. As a result, the analyses often became broader rather than deeper. Only a limited number of studies examine one specific song intensively to explore how each type of associative meaning contributes to the emotional and psychological interpretation of the lyrics. In addition, some previous studies mainly identified types of associative meaning without discussing their relationship to emotional conditions and interpersonal experiences reflected in the songs.

Therefore, this study focuses specifically on one song entitled "The Visitor" by Sienna Spiro. The song was chosen because its lyrics contain emotional expressions, symbolic language, and psychological nuances related to memory, loss, emotional attachment, and loneliness. These characteristics make the song relevant for semantic analysis, particularly associative meaning.

This study aims to identify the types of associative meaning found in the song lyrics and explain how those meanings contribute to the emotional and thematic interpretation of the song. Through this analysis, the study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how associative meaning functions in song lyrics and how listeners may interpret emotional messages through language.

Method

This study applied a descriptive qualitative method using content analysis to examine associative meaning in the song "The Visitor" by Sienna Spiro. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting meaning, emotional expressions, and contextual language use found in the song lyrics rather than measuring numerical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The source of data in this study was the lyrics of the song "The Visitor" performed by Sienna Spiro. The song was selected purposively because it contains emotional expressions, symbolic diction, and figurative language that potentially represent associative meanings. In addition, the song discusses themes of memory, emotional distance, loneliness, and attachment, which are closely related to semantic interpretation.

The data of this study consisted of 24 lyric excerpts containing associative meaning. The excerpts were selected based on their relevance to Leech's theory of associative meaning, including connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings.

The data collection process was conducted through several steps. First, the researcher listened to the song repeatedly to understand the emotional tone and general meaning of the lyrics. Second, the researcher read and reviewed the lyrics carefully from official lyric sources. Third, the researcher identified and selected lyric lines that potentially contained associative meaning. Finally, the selected data were categorized based on the six types of associative meaning proposed by Leech (1981).

In analyzing the data, the researcher used Leech's theory of associative meaning as the main analytical framework. The analysis process followed several stages adapted from Dornyei (2007). First, coding was conducted by marking lyric lines containing associative meaning. Second, the data were classified into categories based on the dominant type of associative meaning. Third, the researcher interpreted the contextual, emotional, and semantic functions represented in each lyric excerpt.

To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation theory was applied by comparing the findings with previous semantic studies and relevant theoretical references. In addition, peer checking was conducted through discussion with academic supervisors to reduce subjective interpretation and improve the reliability of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to the additional meaning that a word carries beyond its literal or dictionary definition. In song lyrics, this type of meaning is very common because songwriters often use words to suggest emotions, ideas, or experiences that are not directly stated. Instead of saying something in a straightforward way, they choose words that can create certain feelings or images in the listener's mind. Because of that, connotative meaning helps make the lyrics feel deeper and more expressive.

In the song "The Visitor" by Sienna Spiro, connotative meaning appears in several lines, especially in words that relate to presence, memory, and emotional distance. These words may look simple at first, but when seen in context, they carry more complex meaning.

Datum 1

"You're just a visitor in my mind"

The word "visitor" literally means someone who comes for a short time and does not stay permanently. However, in this lyric, the meaning goes beyond that simple definition. The word suggests that the person being referred to is not truly part of the speaker's life, but only exists temporarily, possibly in thoughts or memories. It can also imply relational detachment, as if the person is present but not fully connected. The expression implies that the relationship lacks emotional permanence and stability, which strengthens the atmosphere of uncertainty throughout the song. So, instead of just meaning "someone who visits," the word "visitor" here carries the idea of something temporary, distant, and not fully real.

Datum 2

"You came like a shadow in the night"

The word "shadow" does not only refer to a dark shape caused by light. In this context, it suggests something unclear, hidden, or difficult to understand. A shadow can also represent something that is there but cannot be fully seen or touched. When combined with the phrase "in the night," the meaning becomes even stronger. Night is often associated with silence, loneliness, or even confusion. Because of that, the whole line gives the impression of a presence that feels distant, mysterious, and emotionally uncertain. It is not just about someone coming, but about how that presence feels unclear and hard to hold onto.

Datum 3

"I'm still holding on to something gone"

The phrase "holding on" usually means trying to keep something or not letting it go. In this lyric, it carries a deeper emotional meaning. It suggests that the speaker is trying to keep a memory, a feeling, or a person that is no longer there. The word "gone" strengthens this idea, showing that

what the speaker is holding onto does not exist anymore in reality. This creates a sense of emotional struggle, where the speaker is caught between the past and the present. So, the connotative meaning here is not just about holding physically, but about emotional attachment and difficulty in letting go.

Datum 4

“Your voice still echoes in the silence”

The word “echoes” literally refers to a sound that is repeated or reflected. However, in this lyric, it suggests something more emotional. It can be understood as a memory that keeps coming back, even when everything is quiet. The phrase “in the silence” adds another layer of meaning. Silence is often linked to loneliness or absence, so the idea that a voice still “echoes” in silence suggests that the memory is strong and hard to forget. This creates a feeling of longing and emotional presence, even when the person is no longer there.

Based on the analysis above, connotative meaning in the song mainly functions to express emotional uncertainty, temporary presence, and psychological attachment through symbolic expressions. The use of figurative diction allows the lyrics to communicate deeper emotional meanings beyond literal interpretation.

Social Meaning

Social meaning is related to how language reflects social context, relationships, and situations between people. It shows how certain words or expressions can represent interactions, roles, or conditions that are familiar in real life. In song lyrics, social meaning often appears through lines that suggest relationships, distance between individuals, or how people respond to each other emotionally.

In the song “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro, social meaning can be seen in several lines that reflect interpersonal relationships, especially those characterized by uncertainty, relational detachment, or imbalance. These expressions make the lyrics feel closer to real-life experiences, particularly in how people deal with presence, absence, and emotional connection.

Datum 1

“You never really stayed, did you?”

This line shows a form of interaction between two people. It is not just a simple statement, but also a question that carries emotional weight. The phrase suggests that one person feels the other was never fully present in the relationship. The use of “did you?” at the end creates a tone of doubt and reflection, as if the speaker is trying to confirm their own feeling. From a social perspective, this line reflects a relationship where connection is weak or incomplete. It also shows how language can be used to express disappointment without stating it directly.

Datum 2

“You’re always passing through”

The phrase “passing through” usually refers to someone who does not stay in one place for long. In this context, it reflects a social situation where a person is not committed or does not have a stable role in the relationship. It suggests that the person comes and goes without building something lasting. This kind of expression is often used in real life to describe temporary relationships or emotional distance between individuals. So, the social meaning here relates to instability and lack of attachment.

Datum 3

“I waited, but you never came back”

The lyric illustrates an interpersonal relationship marked by disappointment and unequal emotional involvement, where one person expects something from another, but that expectation is not

fulfilled. The word “waited” shows patience and hope, while “never came back” shows disappointment and absence. From a social point of view, this line represents an unbalanced relationship, where one person is more emotionally invested than the other. It also reflects how people deal with broken expectations in real life.

Datum 4

“You don’t belong here anymore”

The phrase “don’t belong” is strongly connected to social meaning. It suggests that someone no longer fits into a certain place, situation, or relationship. This can reflect emotional distance, rejection, or a change in connection between individuals. In real-life situations, this kind of expression is often used when relationships change or when someone is no longer part of a group or environment. So, the line carries a sense of separation and shifting social roles.

Based on the analysis above, social meaning in the song reflects interpersonal relationships characterized by emotional distance, instability, and unfulfilled expectations. Through conversational expressions and relational language, the lyrics portray social interactions that resemble real-life emotional experiences and relational conflicts.

Affective Meaning

Affective meaning is related to the feelings or emotions expressed in language. It shows how a speaker conveys personal attitudes, emotions, or reactions through certain words or expressions. In song lyrics, affective meaning is very important because songs are often used to express emotions such as sadness, longing, love, or confusion. Instead of stating feelings directly, songwriters usually express them through images, tone, and word choice, which makes the emotions feel more natural and relatable.

In the song “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro, affective meaning appears quite strongly in several lines. The lyrics reflect emotional experiences such as longing, loss, confusion, and emotional attachment. These feelings are not always stated directly, but they can be clearly felt through the way the lines are written.

Datum 1

“I tried to hold on, but you slipped away”

The expression represents emotional struggle through contrasting semantic associations related to attachment and loss. The phrase “tried to hold on” shows effort and desire to keep something meaningful, while “slipped away” suggests loss and lack of control. The contrast between these two parts creates a feeling of helplessness. The speaker seems to realize that no matter how hard they try, they cannot keep the person or situation. This evokes sadness and frustration, which are common emotional experiences in relationships.

Datum 2

“I’m still waiting in the same place”

The word “still” gives a strong emotional effect. It suggests that time has passed, but the speaker has not moved on. The phrase “waiting in the same place” reflects a feeling of being stuck, both physically and emotionally. This line expresses longing and hope, but at the same time, it also shows a kind of quiet sadness. This expression suggests emotional attachment toward something that may never return.

Datum 3

“Your voice won’t leave my head”

This line shows how strong a memory or feeling can be. The phrase “won’t leave” suggests something that stays and cannot be controlled. It creates a sense of emotional persistence, where

the speaker is unable to forget. This can reflect longing, attachment, or even emotional confusion. The line creates a strong sense of emotional persistence and psychological attachment.

Datum 4

“I don’t know how to let you go”

This line directly expresses emotional difficulty. The phrase “don’t know how” shows confusion, while “let you go” relates to acceptance and moving on. Together, they create a feeling of emotional conflict. The speaker understands that something needs to end, but does not know how to deal with it. This reflects a very human experience, where emotions are not always easy to control or understand.

Based on the analysis above, affective meaning becomes an important element in expressing the speaker’s emotional condition throughout the song. The lyrics strongly convey feelings of longing, sadness, emotional dependence, confusion, and inner conflict, allowing listeners to emotionally connect with the experiences represented in the song.

Reflective Meaning

Reflective meaning appears when a word or expression has more than one sense, and those meanings are connected or “echo” each other. In other words, a single word can trigger different interpretations at the same time, depending on how it is understood in context. In song lyrics, this kind of meaning is quite common because writers often choose words that are slightly ambiguous, so listeners can interpret them in different ways.

Unlike connotative meaning, which focuses on implied emotional associations, reflective meaning emphasizes multiple interpretations that emerge from a single lexical expression.

In “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro, reflective meaning can be seen in several lines where certain words carry both literal and symbolic meanings. These words do not give just one clear interpretation, but instead allow listeners to think about more than one possibility.

Datum 1

“You’re just a visitor in my mind”

The word “visitor” can be understood in more than one way. On the surface, it simply means someone who comes and goes. But in this context, it can also refer to a memory, a thought, or even a feeling that appears temporarily. So, the word does not only describe a person, but also something abstract that exists in the speaker’s mind. This creates a double layer of meaning, where the listener can interpret the “visitor” as both real and symbolic.

Datum 2

“You came like a shadow in the night”

The word “shadow” also shows reflective meaning. Literally, it is something created by light and darkness. But in this lyric, it can also represent something hidden, unclear, or emotionally distant. At the same time, it may suggest a presence that is felt but not fully understood. Because of these overlapping meanings, the word allows different interpretations, depending on how the listener connects with the image.

Datum 3

“You’re a ghost I keep believing”

The word “ghost” is a clear example of reflective meaning. It can be understood literally as a supernatural figure, but in this context, it is more likely symbolic. It may represent a past relationship, a memory, or something that no longer exists but still feels real to the speaker. The idea of “believing” in a ghost adds another layer, suggesting that the speaker is emotionally attached to something that may not actually be there anymore.

Datum 4

“Your voice still lives in the silence”

The phrase “lives in the silence” creates a contrast that leads to reflective meaning. “Voice” usually represents sound, while “silence” represents the absence of sound. Putting these two ideas together creates a meaning that is not literal. Instead, it suggests that the memory of the voice is still present even when everything is quiet. This allows the listener to interpret the line both as a real experience and as an emotional or mental state.

Based on the analysis above, reflective meaning in the song emerges through words and expressions that contain multiple interpretations simultaneously. These overlapping meanings encourage listeners to interpret the lyrics not only literally, but also symbolically and psychologically, which enriches the emotional depth of the song.

Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning refers to the association a word has because it commonly appears together with other words. Certain words tend to “pair up” naturally in a language, and when they are used together, they create a specific impression or meaning that feels familiar to the listener. Because of that, collocation is not only about vocabulary, but also about how meaning is strengthened through word combinations.

In song lyrics, collocative meaning helps build imagery and emotional tone without needing long explanations. When familiar word pairings are used, listeners can immediately understand the situation or feeling being described.

In “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro, collocative meaning appears through several word combinations that create a sense of loneliness, memory, and emotional distance.

Datum 1

“Empty room, quiet walls”

The combination of “empty room” and “quiet walls” is a common collocation that suggests loneliness and silence. The word “empty” is often associated with a room to show that there is no one there, while “quiet” naturally pairs with “walls” to emphasize stillness. When these words are used together, they create a clear image of isolation without needing further explanation. The expression creates an image of emotional emptiness rather than merely physical isolation.

Datum 2

“Fading memories”

The phrase “fading memories” is another example of collocation. The word “fading” is commonly used with abstract nouns like “memories”, “dreams”, or “feelings”. It suggests something slowly disappearing over time. This combination creates a sense of loss and distance from the past. Even though the words are simple, together they carry a strong emotional association.

Datum 3

“Broken silence”

The phrase “broken silence” shows how collocation can create a strong effect. “Silence” is usually associated with calmness or stillness, while “broken” suggests interruption. These two words often appear together to describe a moment when something suddenly changes. In this context, the phrase can reflect emotional tension, where quietness is interrupted by a memory, a thought, or a feeling.

Datum 4

“Hold on to you”

The phrase “hold on” is commonly paired with something abstract like “hope”, “love”, or a person. It does not always mean physically holding something, but more about emotional attachment. In this lyric, “hold on to you” suggests that the speaker is trying to keep a connection, even if it is difficult. This collocation makes the emotional meaning clearer without needing a direct explanation.

Based on the analysis above, collocative meaning contributes to the emotional atmosphere of the song through familiar word pairings associated with loneliness, memory, silence, and emotional attachment. These natural lexical combinations strengthen imagery and help listeners easily understand the emotional situation presented in the lyrics.

Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning is related to how a message is organized in a sentence, especially in terms of focus, emphasis, and structure. It shows which part of the sentence is given more attention and how the information is arranged to guide the listener’s understanding. In simple terms, thematic meaning is not just about what is said, but also how it is presented.

In song lyrics, thematic meaning is often used to highlight certain ideas or emotions. By placing specific words at the beginning of a line, repeating phrases, or delaying important information until the end, the songwriter can control how the message is received. This makes the lyrics feel more expressive and intentional.

In the song “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro, thematic meaning can be seen through repetition, emphasis, and the way certain ideas are structured in the lines.

Datum 1

“You’re just a visitor in my mind”

In this line, the structure places “You” at the beginning, making it the main focus of the sentence. This shows that the attention is directed toward the person being talked about. After that, the phrase “just a visitor” adds limitation, suggesting that the person does not have a strong or permanent role. The placement of “in my mind” at the end gives emphasis to where this presence exists, which is not in reality but only in thoughts. This structure guides the listener from the person, to their role, and finally to the realization that everything happens only in the speaker’s mind.

Datum 2

“Still, I let you stay inside my thoughts”

The word “Still” at the beginning plays an important role. It gives emphasis before the main message appears, suggesting that something is not quite right, but continues anyway. This creates a sense of contrast, as if the speaker knows the situation is not ideal but chooses to accept it. The focus then moves to “I let you stay”, showing the speaker’s decision, and ends with “inside my thoughts”, which again highlights the mental or emotional space. This arrangement shows inner conflict and acceptance at the same time.

Datum 3

“I tried to forget, but you remain”

This line is structured in two parts that contrast each other. The first part, “I tried to forget”, shows effort and intention. The second part, “but you remain”, shows the result, which is the opposite of what was expected. The use of “but” in the middle creates a strong contrast and shifts the focus from effort to reality. This structure emphasizes the idea that no matter what the speaker does, the feeling or memory is still there.

Datum 4

“You come and go without a sound”

In this line, the repeated idea of movement (“come and go”) is placed at the center of the sentence, making it the main theme. It highlights instability and lack of permanence. The phrase “without a sound” is placed at the end, giving a quiet and subtle emphasis. This makes the action feel unnoticed and almost invisible, which strengthens the idea of emotional distance. The structure leads the listener to focus first on the action, then on how it happens.

Based on the analysis above, thematic meaning in the song is reflected through sentence structure, emphasis, and information arrangement that guide listeners toward particular emotional interpretations. The placement of certain words and contrasting structures helps emphasize emotional tension, instability, and psychological attachment throughout the lyrics.

Some lyric excerpts were analyzed in more than one category because associative meaning in song lyrics often overlaps semantically depending on contextual interpretation. Although several expressions may contain multiple associative meanings simultaneously, the classification in this study was determined based on the dominant semantic function represented in each lyric excerpt.

Frequency of Associative Meaning

The following table presents the frequency of associative meanings found in the lyrics of “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro based on Leech’s theory.

Types of Associative Meaning	Frequency
Connotative Meaning	4
Social Meaning	4
Affective Meaning	4
Reflective Meaning	4
Collocative Meaning	4
Thematic Meaning	4
Total	24

Based on the findings presented in the table above, all types of associative meaning appeared with the same frequency in the song lyrics. This indicates that the song contains balanced semantic expressions that contribute to emotional, psychological, and social interpretation. Each type of associative meaning plays an important role in shaping the overall message and emotional atmosphere of the song.

Although all categories appeared with equal frequency, affective meaning was considered the most dominant in terms of emotional intensity and thematic contribution. The lyrics consistently emphasized feelings of longing, sadness, emotional attachment, and psychological conflict, which strongly shaped the emotional atmosphere of the song as a whole. Therefore, the dominance of affective meaning in this study is interpreted qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

The findings of this study are in line with Jeaniver’s (2020) research, which showed that associative meaning in song lyrics is closely related to emotional expression and personal experience. Likewise, Bahri and Lubis (2021) explained that associative meaning in songs often functions to strengthen emotional connection between singers and listeners.

The song also reflects psychological and social experiences related to unstable relationships and emotional loneliness. Expressions such as “You never really stayed, did you?” and “I’m still

waiting in the same place” illustrate emotional dependence and disappointment caused by uncertain relationships. Psychologically, these lyrics represent feelings of loss and the inability to move on from past emotional experiences.

From a social perspective, the lyrics describe interpersonal relationships characterized by relational detachment and emotional uncertainty. The repeated use of words such as “visitor,” “shadow,” and “ghost” symbolically represents temporary presence and weak emotional connection. These expressions strengthen the interpretation that the speaker experiences emotional isolation despite still being emotionally attached to the other person.

Several categories of associative meaning also overlap in the lyrics. For example, the word “visitor” may reflect connotative, reflective, and affective meanings at the same time. Connotatively, it symbolizes temporary presence; reflectively, it creates multiple interpretations between a real person and a memory; affectively, it expresses emotional distance and sadness. However, the classification of the data in this study was based on the dominant semantic function found in each lyric excerpt. This overlap indicates that associative meaning in song lyrics is often interconnected rather than completely separated.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the song “The Visitor” by Sienna Spiro contains all six types of associative meaning proposed by Leech, namely connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings. Among these types, affective meaning appears as the most dominant because the lyrics strongly emphasize emotional experiences such as longing, sadness, emotional isolation, psychological attachment, and inner conflict.

The findings show that associative meaning helps create deeper interpretation in the lyrics by allowing listeners to understand implied emotions and symbolic expressions beyond literal meaning. In addition, several meanings overlap within the same lyric line, indicating that associative meaning in songs is interconnected and flexible.

This study also reveals that the lyrics reflect psychological and social experiences related to unstable relationships, memory, and emotional distance. Through symbolic language and emotional expressions, the song represents how individuals deal with loss and emotional attachment.

Therefore, associative meaning plays an important role in making song lyrics more expressive, meaningful, and emotionally relatable. This study is expected to contribute to semantic and literary linguistic studies, particularly in explaining how associative meaning operates in song lyrics to convey emotional and psychological experiences.

This study is limited to the analysis of one song and focuses only on associative meaning based on Leech’s theory. Because of that, the findings cannot fully represent associative meaning in all song lyrics or musical genres. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze a wider range of songs or combine semantic analysis with other linguistic approaches such as stylistics, discourse analysis, or pragmatics in order to produce broader interpretations of meaning in song lyrics.

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