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CONNOTATIVE MEANING IN SELECTED SONGS "ME & MR. JONES; REHAB; BACK TO BLACK" FROM BACK TO BLACK ALBUM OF AMY WINEHOUSE

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ABSTRACT

Song lyrics often convey meanings beyond their literal sense, making connotative meaning an important focus in semantic analysis. However, studies examining connotative meaning in selected songs from Amy Winehouse's Back to Black album remain limited. This study therefore aims to identify and classify the connotative meanings found in Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab, and Back to Black. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the data consisted of song lyrics collected through documentation and note-taking techniques and were analyzed using Geoffrey Leech's concept of connotative meaning and Abdul Chaer's classification of positive, negative, and neutral connotations. The results show a total of 36 connotative meanings, consisting of 6 positive, 23 negative, and 7 neutral, indicating a clear dominance of negative connotation. The dominant negative connotations reflect themes of betrayal, heartbreak, addiction, emotional conflict, and psychological struggle, while positive and neutral connotations appear less frequently to support the emotional and contextual meanings of the lyrics. This numerical pattern demonstrates that connotative meaning plays a significant role in expressing emotional experiences and enriching the interpretation of song lyrics beyond their literal meanings.

Keywords: *Amy Winehouse, Associative Meaning, Back to Black, Connotative Meaning, Semantics, Song Lyrics*

Introduction

Language plays a central role in human life as a medium for expressing ideas, emotions, and experiences. In everyday communication, people rarely rely solely on literal meaning; instead, they often convey implied meanings that require interpretation. In the field of Linguistics, this aspect is studied under Semantics, which focuses on how meaning is constructed and understood in different contexts. Semantics, as a branch of linguistics, specifically deals with how meaning is constructed and interpreted in language (Sarafoglou et al., 2026). Semantics is concerned with the systematic study of meaning, including how words, phrases, and sentences convey both literal and non-literal interpretations. This suggests that meaning is not always confined to its dictionary definition, but can expand through contextual and associative influences. In this regard, one important aspect of semantic study is connotative meaning, which refers to the additional or implied meanings associated with a word beyond its conceptual meaning. These connotations are often shaped by emotional, cultural, and experiential factors. Therefore, analyzing connotative meaning becomes essential in understanding texts such as song lyrics, where meaning is frequently expressed indirectly and enriched with emotional nuances.

Meaning in language is often complex and multi-layered. A single word or expression can carry different meanings depending on how it is used (Stella et al., 2024). This becomes more apparent in expressive texts such as song lyrics, where meaning is rarely delivered directly. Instead, songwriters tend to use symbolic and indirect language to communicate ideas and emotions. One of the key theories in semantic studies is proposed by Geoffrey Leech. Leech (1990) classifies meaning into several types, including conceptual and associative meaning. Conceptual meaning refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of a word, which is considered the core meaning and is relatively stable across contexts. In contrast, associative meaning includes several subtypes that reflect how meaning is influenced by personal experience, culture, and context (Tamariz et al., 2023). These subtypes consist of connotative meaning which relates to the additional associations attached to a word; social meaning which reflects

the social context or level of formality, affective meaning which expresses the speaker's emotions or attitudes, reflected meaning which arises when one sense of a word evokes another meaning, collocative meaning which is based on the habitual co-occurrence of words, and thematic meaning which relates to how information is organized or emphasized in a sentence. Among these types, connotative meaning becomes the main focus of this study, as it allows words to convey implied meanings beyond their literal definitions.

Connotative meaning plays an important role in how language conveys deeper messages. Through connotation, language can suggest meanings indirectly, allowing the reader or listener to interpret ideas beyond what is explicitly stated. Words in a text may evoke certain images, feelings, or attitudes depending on the context in which they are used (De Deyne et al., 2021). This makes connotative meaning especially important in texts that aim to express emotional or symbolic meanings, such as song lyrics. According to (Deepika, 2024), connotative meaning refers to the additional associations and values attached to a word that go beyond its literal meaning, often influenced by social and cultural contexts. Similarly, Flusberg et al., (2024) explain that connotation involves the emotional and evaluative meaning of a word, which can shape how a message is perceived by the listener or reader. To support a more systematic analysis of connotation, this study also adopts the perspective proposed by Chaer. According to Chaer (2009), connotative meaning can be classified based on its evaluative sense into positive, negative, and neutral connotations. According to Mbon & Mabiala, (2022) a positive connotation evokes favorable emotions, respect, or commendable attributes. Conversely, a negative connotation triggers disparaging impressions or unpleasant cultural associations. Meanwhile, a neutral connotation functions strictly on a factual level, conveying the core denotative information without inciting any emotional bias. To illustrate these conceptual variations, consider the following linguistic iterations regarding financial management: "My mother is very thrifty with her monthly budget."(+), "My mother is very stingy with her monthly budget."(-), "My mother is very frugal with her monthly budget."(Neutral). In datum (1), the lexical choice "thrifty" carries a positive connotation, portraying the subject as a wise, responsible, and prudent manager of family resources. In contrast, substituting the term in datum (2) with "stingy" shifts the utterance into a negative connotation, thereby casting the subject as overly parsimonious and ungenerous. To eliminate subjective judgment and maintain an objective stance, datum (3) utilizes the term "frugal" as a neutral connotation. This final variation merely presents the empirical fact of low-cost financial management without assigning moral praise or social criticism. This classification is important because it helps the researcher categorize and interpret the associative meanings found in the data more clearly.

Song lyrics are a form of artistic expression that combines language, emotion, and creativity. Unlike everyday language, lyrics often rely on figurative expressions, symbolism, and personal experiences (Purves et al., 2023) . This makes them rich in connotative meaning, as words are deliberately chosen to evoke certain feelings or ideas. Through lyrics, songwriters are able to express complex emotional experiences in a condensed yet meaningful way (Montanari, 2024). In the context of English language education, song lyrics can function as authentic learning materials. They provide real examples of how language is used in expressive contexts, allowing students to explore meaning beyond the literal level. Understanding connotative meaning helps learners interpret implicit messages and recognize how language conveys emotions and attitudes (Radhi, 2023). This contributes to the development of students' critical thinking and interpretative skills in learning English. One of the most significant works that provides rich material for this type of analysis is Back to Black by Amy Winehouse. This album is widely recognized as one of the most influential albums of the 21st century. According to The Guardian, it was ranked as the number one album in the list of "100 Best Albums of the 21st Century", highlighting its major cultural and artistic impact (https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/sep/13/100-best-albums-of-the-21st-century). In addition to its critical success, the album has also achieved remarkable commercial success. It has been reported as one of the best-selling albums of the 21st century, reflecting its global influence and widespread acceptance (https://musik.kapanlagi.com/berita/album-amy-winehouse-album-terlaris-abad-21.html). The combination of artistic recognition and commercial achievement makes this album a strong and relevant object for academic research. Furthermore, according to the Grammy Awards report (https://www.grammy.com/news/amy-winehouse-back-black-record), several songs from this album, including "Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab and Back to Black" are considered key works that represent the

album's identity and impact. These songs are known for their emotional intensity and meaningful lyrics, making them suitable for semantic analysis, particularly in exploring connotative meaning.

The selection of these songs allows this study to focus on representative data while still capturing the essence of the album. Each song reflects different emotional experiences and themes, which are expressed through connotative language. By analyzing these selected songs, this study aims to identify patterns of meaning and examine how language is used to convey deeper messages. Despite the richness of song lyrics as an object of study, many previous studies tend to focus on figurative language or general meaning rather than specifically analyzing connotative meaning. This indicates a clear gap in research, particularly in studies that systematically examine how connotative meaning operates in song lyrics using a well-defined theoretical framework. In fact, connotative meaning is not merely an additional layer of meaning, but a crucial element that shapes how messages are emotionally and culturally interpreted (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). Without analyzing connotation, the deeper significance of song lyrics especially those expressing complex emotional experiences may remain overlooked. Therefore, the researchers deliberately chooses to focus on connotative meaning, as it provides a more comprehensive understanding of how language conveys emotional depth, personal experience, and implied meaning beyond literal interpretation (Syazwina et al., 2024). This focus becomes even more significant when applied to songs performed by Amy Winehouse, particularly in the album Back to Black. The album portrays themes such as love, heartbreak, addiction, and self-reflection, which are often expressed through indirect and symbolic language. These themes are discussed in critical reviews, where Back to Black is described as an emotionally intense and deeply personal record that reflects Amy Winehouse's experiences with relationships and personal struggles (https://www.grammy.com/news/amy-winehouse-back-black-record). Furthermore, music critics highlight the album's exploration of romantic turmoil and emotional vulnerability, reinforcing its strong thematic focus on love and heartbreak (https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/sep/13/100-best-albums-of-the-21st-century). These characteristics make connotative meaning highly relevant as an analytical approach, since many of the emotional messages in the lyrics are not explicitly stated but implied through word choice and expression. Therefore, analyzing connotative meaning in this album allows the researchers to uncover deeper layers of interpretation that reflect the emotional and experiential complexity embedded in the lyrics.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the connotative meaning found in selected songs titled "Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab and Back to Black" from the album Back to Black by Amy Winehouse. This research specifically focuses on identifying and classifying connotative meanings into positive, negative, and neutral categories using the semantic theory proposed by Leech and supported by the classification of connotation proposed by Chaer. Through this approach, the study is expected to not only clarify how connotative meaning functions in song lyrics, but also to demonstrate its significance in revealing the emotional and interpretative depth embedded within the lyrics. By focusing on connotative meaning, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed beyond the literal level. It also aims to show how language can express emotional and cultural meanings in a subtle yet powerful way. In addition, this research is expected to contribute to English language education by providing insights into the use of authentic materials, such as song lyrics, in developing students' interpretative skills.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because the focus of this study is on interpreting meaning rather than measuring it numerically. In this case, the researcher aims to explore how connotative meaning is constructed and conveyed in song lyrics. As stated by (Chand, 2025), qualitative research is used to understand and interpret meanings in texts and human expressions. In addition, this study uses a semantic approach, particularly focusing on connotative meaning as proposed by Leech (1990). The analysis is also supported by the classification of connotation introduced by Chaer (2009), which categorizes connotative meaning into positive, negative, and neutral connotations. By combining these perspectives, this study aims to provide a more structured analysis of meaning in selected song lyrics. The data source of this study is the songs taken from the album Back to Black by Amy Winehouse, which has 12 songs. However, this study does not include all 12 songs from the album. Instead, it focuses on 3 selected songs, namely "Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab and Back to Black". These songs are selected because they represent the major themes of the album, such as love, heartbreak, self-reflection, and personal struggle. Moreover, the

selection of 3 songs from the total of 12 was due to the manuscript's word limit, which allows a maximum of 5,000–7,000 words, limiting the scope of the analysis. In addition, these songs are recognized for their strong emotional expression and lyrical depth, making them suitable for analyzing connotative meaning. The selection of these songs is supported by their prominence and recognition in discussions of the album, as highlighted in a GRAMMY Awards report (https://www.grammy.com/news/amy-winehouse-back-black-record), which emphasizes the significance of Back to Black as a record that reflects Amy Winehouse's personal experiences and emotional struggles. However, the selection of the 3 songs in this study is based on purposive sampling, in which the researchers deliberately chooses songs that contain rich and expressive language. These songs are considered appropriate for analyzing connotative meaning because their lyrics frequently convey implied meanings through emotional and symbolic expressions rather than direct statements.

The data in this study are collected using documentation and note-taking techniques. First, the researchers collects the lyrics of the selected songs from trusted sources, namely the official lyrics of "Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab, and Back to Black" which are widely available on reliable lyric platforms such as Genius (https://genius.com/). Then, the researchers reads the lyrics repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and context. After that, the researchers identifies words, phrases, or expressions that potentially contain connotative meaning. These data are then recorded and organized systematically. The note-taking process is important because it allows the researcher to focus only on relevant data and avoid unnecessary information. The main instrument of this study is the researchers. According to Danford (2023), the researcher is considered the primary instrument in qualitative research, as they directly engage with the data and interpret its meaning based on their understanding and perspective. Therefore, the researchers' understanding of semantic theory and context is essential in determining the meaning of the data. In addition to the researchers, this study also employs document-based instruments, particularly lyric transcripts, which serve as stable and analyzable sources of textual evidence. Recent research by Ebbers et al., (2022) emphasizes that documents function not only as repositories of information but also as textual artefacts that reflect social processes, contextual meanings, and interpretive patterns, making them essential instruments in qualitative inquiry. Document analysis allows researchers to systematically examine inscribed texts to uncover semantic, contextual, and thematic structures relevant to the research focus. As stated by Lim (2025), supporting instruments in qualitative research are needed to assist researchers in systematically organizing and analyzing data, so that the findings can be presented clearly and logically.

The data analysis in this study is conducted using theory from Fernandes et al., (2024), which include data reduction, in this stage, the researchers selects and focuses only on the relevant data that contain connotative meaning. The selected data are then presented in the form of tables to make the analysis clearer and more organized. Each data entry includes the lyric, in the lyrics column the code entered is S for songs and L for the line of lyrics, then its context, and its connotative meaning classification (positive, negative, or neutral). In the final stage, the researchers interprets the data and draws conclusions based on the patterns found in the analysis (Fife & Gossner, 2024). This includes identifying how connotative meaning is used and what types of connotation are most dominant in the selected songs. In addition, each lyric is analyzed through several steps, starting from identifying its literal meaning, then interpreting its connotative meaning, and finally classifying it into positive, negative, or neutral connotation.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the connotative meanings identified in the three selected songs Back to Black (Winehouse, 2006), namely Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab, and Back to Black. Through this analysis, the researchers seek to reveal how connotative meaning contributes to the emotional depth and thematic messages expressed in the selected song lyrics. The analysis is conducted using Leech (1990) theory of connotative meaning as part of associative meaning. The identified data are then classified into positive, negative, and neutral connotations based on Chaer (2009) classification. In addition, the interpretation of each expression is supported by Le (2024) which emphasizes that connotative meaning is closely related to the emotional, cultural, and associative values attached to linguistic expressions rather than their literal meanings. The findings are presented separately for each selected song in the form of tables. Each table contains the lyric excerpt, its code, the identified connotative meaning, its category, and its interpretation. A brief summary is provided after each table before presenting the findings of the next song. Following the presentation of the findings, the discussion

synthesizes the results obtained from all three songs. This section examines the overall patterns of connotative meaning, compares the distribution of positive, negative, and neutral connotations, and relates the findings to the theoretical framework and previous studies.

Table 1. Result of Analysis the song Me & Mr. Jones

No	Lyrics	Connotative Meaning	Category	Interpretation
1	S1-L1 “Nobody stands in between me and my man”	The lyrics conveys loyalty, love, and devotion	Positive	The singer emphasizes her strong commitment and determination to stay with her partner.
2	S1-L3 "What kind of fuckery is this?"	The word fuckery does not merely refer to profanity. It connotes betrayal, deception, and disbelief toward the partner’s behavior.	Negative	This expression carries an unfavorable emotional evaluation and evokes emotional associations beyond its literal meaning, expressing anger and frustration.
3	S1-L4 “You made me miss the Slick Rick Gig”	Although the event itself is literal, the line carries symbolic weight: the missed concert represents a disruption in the singer’s cultural rhythm..	Neutral	The singer notes how the partner’s actions intrude upon their artistic and social life. The tone is observational rather than accusatory, highlighting lifestyle disturbance rather than emotional injury.
4	S1-L6 "Can't believe you played me out like that"	Played me connotes being manipulated or emotionally deceived rather than literally being involved in a game	Negative	The expression conveys betrayal and emotional exploitation. It carries a clearly unfavorable association..
5	S1-L7 "No, you ain't worth guest list"	Not worth guest list symbolizes that the person no longer deserves respect, importance, or access to the speaker’s life	Negative	Rather than discussing an actual guest list, the phrase evaluates someone’s social and emotional worth negatively.
6	S1-L8 “Plus one of all them girls you kiss”	The lyric implies repeated infidelity and emotional unfaithfulness rather than merely describing kissing	Negative	The association created is betrayal and broken trust. Therefore, the connotation is negative.
7	S1-L9 "You can't keep lying to yourself like this"	Lying to yourself connotes self-denial and refusal to face reality	Negative	The phrase criticizes the addressee’s psychological state rather than literal lying, expressing unfavorable judgment.
8	S1-L10 "Can't believe you played yourself like this"	Played yourself suggests self-destruction or ruining one’s own reputation because of one’s actions	Negative	The expression evaluates the person’s behavior as damaging to themselves. This carries a negative associative meaning.
9	S1-L14 "What kind of fuckery are we?"	Here fuckery connotes confusion and dysfunction within the relationship itself	Negative	The speaker questions the unhealthy condition of the relationship. The association remains unfavorable.
10	S1-L15 "Nowadays you don't mean d*ck to me"	Don’t mean d*ck connotes complete emotional detachment and loss of value	Negative	The phrase does not literally refer to anatomy but emphasizes that the partner has become emotionally insignificant.
11	S1-L17 "Who's playing Saturday?"	The question indirectly refers to replacing or moving on from the relationship	Neutral	The expression functions contextually without strong positive or negative evaluation. Its connotation depends on the surrounding discourse rather than direct emotional judgment.
12	S1-L18 "What kind of fuckery are you?"	The speaker associates the partner with deception, chaos, and unacceptable behavior	Negative	Rather than insulting literally, the phrase conveys intense emotional condemnation toward the partner’s actions.
13	S1-L19 "Side from Sammy you're my best black Jew"	Best black Jew is an ironic personal label referring to identity and closeness within the speaker’s unique relationship with the addressee	Neutral	Although culturally marked, the expression mainly serves as a contextual nickname rather than expressing

				favorable or unfavorable evaluation in this lyric.

The findings indicate that Me & Mr. Jones predominantly contains negative connotative meanings, 1 positive connotation with only a few neutral connotations identified. Most of the expressions symbolically represent betrayal, disappointment, anger, and emotional conflict, reflecting the deteriorating relationship portrayed in the song.

Table 2. Result of Analysis the song Rehab

No	Lyrics	Connotative Meaning	Category	Interpretation
1	S2-L2 "Yes, I've been black, but when I come back you'll know, know, know"	"Been black" is figurative, connoting hardship, darkness, or struggle. The promise of "coming back" conveys resilience and recovery. .	Positive	The singer acknowledges past difficulties but asserts that she will return stronger. This line carries positive connotations of survival, recognition, and emotional strength.
2	S2-L5 "I'd rather be at home with Ray"	"Ray" here is not just a literal person but symbolizes comfort, familiarity, and emotional refuge.	Positive	The singer emotionally conveys that home (with Ray) represents warmth and security. It highlights preference for intimacy and comfort over external intervention.
3	S2-L7 "Cause there's nothing there's nothing you can teach me"	Figurative defiance. Claiming "nothing you can teach me" connotes arrogance, resistance, and rejection of authority.	Positive	The singer emotionally asserts self-sufficiency, but the connotation is negative because it reflects denial and stubbornness.
4	S2-L9 "I didn't get a lot in class"	Class symbolizes formal education rather than merely referring to a classroom	Neutral	The phrase criticizes the addressee's psychological state rather than literal lying, expressing unfavorable judgment.
5	S2-L10 "But I know it don't come in a shot glass"	Shot glass symbolizes alcohol as a false solution to life's problems rather than simply a drinking glass	Negative	The expression evaluates the person's behavior as damaging to themselves. This carries a negative associative meaning.
6	S2-L17 "I'm gonna lose my baby"	Figurative fear of loss. "Lose my Baby" connotes emotional devastation, not just literal separation.	Negative	The phrase "I'm gonna lose my baby" shows a deep fear of heartbreak and emotional pain. It means singer is scared that her bad lifestyle choices will ruin her relationship and make her lose the person she loves most.
7	S2-L18 "So I always keep a bottle near"	Figurative dependence. "Keep a bottle near" connotes reliance on alcohol as emotional support. It symbolizes addiction and avoidance.	Negative	The singer emotionally reveals her coping mechanism: alcohol as a substitute for stability. This carries negative connotation because it reflects dependency and self-destructive behavior.
8	S2-L27 "It's not just my pride"	In this line, "pride" isn't just talking about basic self-respect. It works figuratively as a symbol of ego and stubbornness. .	Negative	The singer admits that ego plays a role in rejecting rehab. This gives the line a negative tone, because pride is connected to denial. It shows that emotional stubbornness is part of the problem and makes recovery even harder.

The findings of Rehab show that negative connotative meaning also dominates the song, although positive and neutral connotations are identified in several expressions. The lyrics mainly portray themes of addiction, denial, psychological struggle, and resistance to external intervention, while positive connotations represent comfort, admiration, and emotional support.

Table 3. Result of Analysis the song Back to Black

No	Lyrics	Connotative Meaning	Category	Interpretation
1	S3-L2 “Kept his d*ck wet”	The vulgar phrasing intensifies the negativity. It conveys disrespect, infidelity, and a crude disregard for the relationship.	Negative	The singer expresses the hurt in blunt terms, showing how deeply the betrayal cuts. The crude wording reflects the singer’s anger and humiliation.
2	S3-L3 “With his same old safe bet”	The phrase implies a repeated pattern of infidelity. It carries a dismissive tone, suggesting the partner relies on another person as a fallback.	Neutral	The singer sees the partner’s cheating as something familiar and predictable. Returning to the “safe bet” makes the singer feel replaced by someone who has always been waiting in the background.
3	S3-L4 “Me and my head high”	The line conveys dignity and emotional strength. It suggests resilience and a refusal to be defeated by the situation.	Positive	The singer chooses to stand tall despite the pain. Keeping the head high becomes a way to reclaim self-respect.
4	S3-L6 “Get on without my guy”	The line expresses independence and the ability to continue life without the partner. It carries an empowering tone.	Positive	The singer decides to move forward alone. It’s a declaration of strength: even though the hurt remains.
5	S3-L7 “You went back to what you knew”	The line carries a descriptive tone without strong emotional judgment. It simply states a return to something familiar, without labeling it as good or bad.	Neutral	The singer acknowledges the partner’s decision to return to something familiar, and expresses it in a calm, matter-of-fact tone. There is no strong emotional judgment here..
6	S3-L10 “I tread a troubled track”	Troubled track symbolizes a difficult emotional journey rather than a literal path	Negative	The metaphor represents emotional suffering and hardship, creating an unfavorable evaluative meaning.
7	S3-L11 “My odds are stacked”	Odds are stacked symbolizes overwhelming obstacles and hopeless circumstances	Negative	The expression evokes disadvantage and despair, which are negative emotional associations.
8	S3-L12 “I’ll go back to black”	Back to black symbolizes returning to deep grief, depression, and emotional darkness after losing a relationship	Negative	Rather than referring to the color black, the phrase represents profound emotional suffering and hopelessness, making it a negative connotation.
9	S3-L14 “We only said goodbye with words”	Goodbye with words symbolizes an emotional separation that remains unresolved despite the absence of physical distance	Negative	The expression reflects emotional pain and an incomplete ending, producing an unfavorable evaluative meaning.
10	S3-L15 “I died a hundred times”	Died a hundred times symbolizes repeated emotional devastation rather than physical death	Negative	The hyperbolic expression intensifies the feeling of heartbreak and psychological suffering, giving it a negative connotation.
11	S3-L16 “You go back to her”	Go back to her symbolizes abandoning the speaker and returning to a previous lover	Negative	The expression conveys betrayal and emotional rejection, resulting in a negative evaluative meaning.
12	S3-L17 “And I go back to us”	Back to us symbolizes memories and emotional attachment to the past relationship	Neutral	The phrase recalls a shared past without explicitly expressing favorable or unfavorable evaluation, making it neutral.
13	S3-L21 “You love blow and I love puff”	Blow and puff symbolize cocaine use and smoking as coping mechanisms rather than merely literal actions	Negative	These expressions are associated with addiction and self-destructive behavior, giving them negative connotations.
14	S3-L22 "Life is like a pipe"	Pipe symbolizes a fragile and unstable path of	Negative	The comparison portrays life as vulnerable and

		life shaped by addiction and emotional struggle		uncertain, creating an unfavorable emotional association.
15	S3-L23 "I'm a tiny penny rollin' up the walls inside"	Tiny penny rolling up the walls inside symbolizes feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and emotional instability	Negative	The figurative expression portrays psychological distress and helplessness, which carry negative evaluative meaning.

The findings reveal that Back to Black contains the highest number of connotative expressions among the selected songs, with negative connotation remaining the dominant category. The identified expressions largely symbolize heartbreak, emotional suffering, betrayal, and loneliness, while a small number of positive and neutral connotations provide contextual and emotional balance. To provide a clear overview of the connotative meanings identified in the selected songs, the quantitative distribution of positive, negative, and neutral connotations is presented before the detailed qualitative interpretation. heartbreak, emotional suffering, betrayal, and loneliness, while a small number of positive and neutral connotations provide contextual and emotional balance.

Table 4. Contextual and Emotional Balance

Song Title	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Me & Mr. Jones	1	9	3	13
Rehab	3	4	1	8
Back to Black	2	10	3	15
Overall Total	6	23	7	36

Discussion, The findings of this study show that connotative meaning is not only present across the three selected songs from Amy Winehouse's Back to Black album but also functions as a central mechanism through which the songs construct their thematic and emotional depth. Drawing on Leech's associative meaning, the connotative expressions identified in the lyrics operate beyond literal interpretation, enabling listeners to access layers of emotional nuance, personal identity, and social commentary embedded within the songs. Meanwhile, Chaer's classification of positive, negative, and neutral connotations provides a structural lens for understanding how these meanings interact to shape the album's narrative world. The predominance of negative connotation, reflected in expressions of betrayal, disappointment, addiction, denial, and emotional suffering, plays a crucial role in constructing the album's overarching themes of unstable relationships, psychological vulnerability, and self-destructive behavior. Lines such as "What kind of fuckery is this?", "They tried to make me go to rehab," and "I go back to black" illustrate how Winehouse uses connotative language to articulate emotional turmoil and fractured identity. These expressions do more than describe events; they build an affective landscape that positions the speaker within cycles of conflict, dependency, and loss. In this senseAmong the three categories, negative connotation is the most dominant. This dominance is evident in Me & Mr. Jones, Rehab, and Back to Black, where many expressions symbolize betrayal, disappointment, emotional suffering, addiction, denial, and psychological conflict rather than their literal meanings. For instance, expressions such as "What kind of fuckery is this?" in Me & Mr. Jones, "They tried to make me go to rehab" in Rehab, and "I'll go back to black" in Back to Black illustrate how Amy Winehouse employs connotative language to communicate complex emotional experiences. According to Baymukhanov (2025), such meanings emerge from the emotional and associative values attached to linguistic expressions rather than from their dictionary definitions. Consequently, listeners are encouraged to interpret the lyrics beyond their literal meanings.

Although negative connotations dominate, the presence of positive connotations, such as references to Ray Charles or "head high", introduces moments of resilience, admiration, and emotional grounding. These expressions contribute to the construction of counter-themes of hope and self-respect, suggesting that the speaker's identity is not defined solely by suffering but also by intermittent strength and inspiration. According to Chaer (2009), these expressions evoke favorable emotional evaluations because they represent hope, admiration, and inner strength. Their presence indicates that Amy Winehouse balances themes of suffering with moments of emotional support and personal resilience. Neutral connotations, meanwhile, serve as contextual anchors that enrich the narrative without imposing emotional judgment, allowing the lyrics to maintain semantic flexibility while supporting the album's storytelling. In addition, several expressions are categorized as neutral connotation because they function primarily as contextual or symbolic references without expressing explicit positive or negative evaluations. Examples include "my guy," "back to us," and "class," whose meanings depend

on the communicative context rather than on evaluative associations. These findings suggest that not every connotative expression carries an emotional judgment; some simply enrich the contextual understanding of the lyrics while maintaining semantic flexibility.

The predominance of negative connotation reflects the central themes of the selected songs, which revolve around unstable romantic relationships, emotional vulnerability, addiction, and personal identity. Rather than expressing these experiences directly, Amy Winehouse consistently employs figurative and symbolic language that invites listeners to construct meaning through emotional associations. This finding supports Leech (1990) view that connotative meaning forms part of associative meaning, where interpretation is influenced by individual experience, cultural knowledge, and emotional response. Critically comparing these findings with previous studies reveals both convergence and divergence. Similar to Akbar et al., (2025) this study confirms that connotative meaning is a powerful tool for expressing emotional complexity in song lyrics, particularly through negative connotations. However, unlike Akbar et al., who focus on single-song analysis, the present study examines multiple songs within one album, enabling the identification of recurring connotative patterns that contribute to album-level thematic cohesion. In contrast to Sari et al., (2025), who found a more balanced distribution of positive and negative connotations, this study demonstrates a clear dominance of negative connotation, indicating that Winehouse's lyrical style leans more heavily toward emotional intensity and psychological conflict. This divergence suggests that connotative distribution is highly dependent on the songwriter's thematic intent and the emotional tone of the album.

The theoretical implications of these findings highlight the role of connotative meaning as a semantic resource for constructing identity, emotional narrative, and social meaning in musical texts. Winehouse's use of connotation aligns with broader linguistic theories that view language as a medium for encoding personal experience, cultural knowledge, and emotional resonance. By integrating negative, positive, and neutral connotations, the songs create a multidimensional portrayal of love, addiction, vulnerability, and resilience, demonstrating how connotative meaning enriches lyrical interpretation and deepens listeners' engagement with the text. The results of this study are also consistent with previous studies conducted by Akbar et al., (2025); Dari et al., (2026); Fauziyah et al., (2024); Ompusunggu & Damanik, (2026); Sari et al., (2025), which found that connotative meaning enables songwriters to express emotions and experiences more effectively than literal language. However, unlike those studies, the present research examines multiple songs from a single album, allowing the researchers to identify recurring patterns of connotative meaning across interconnected themes. The findings reveal that Amy Winehouse consistently employs negative connotative expressions as a stylistic strategy to portray emotional complexity throughout the Back to Black album. Overall, the analysis confirms that connotative meaning plays a crucial role in constructing the emotional depth of Amy Winehouse's lyrics. Through the interaction of negative, positive, and neutral connotations, the selected songs communicate experiences of love, loss, addiction, and resilience in ways that transcend literal meaning. Therefore, semantic analysis of connotative meaning not only facilitates a deeper understanding of song lyrics but also demonstrates how language functions as a powerful medium for expressing human emotions and personal experiences.

Conclusion

This study examined the connotative meanings in three songs from Amy Winehouse's Back to Black album by applying Leech's connotative meaning and Chaer's classification. The analysis demonstrates that connotative meaning is not only present but functions as a central semantic device through which the songs construct emotional depth, thematic coherence, and identity representation. Rather than conveying emotions through literal language, Winehouse relies on symbolic, associative, and affective expressions that allow listeners to interpret psychological experiences such as heartbreak, addiction, and self-conflict with greater nuance. The predominance of negative connotation, supported by explicit counts across the dataset, reveals how the album's emotional atmosphere is shaped primarily through associative meanings linked to suffering, betrayal, and vulnerability. Positive and neutral connotations, though less frequent, contribute to counter-themes of resilience, admiration, and contextual grounding. These patterns highlight the role of connotative meaning in shaping not only emotional tone but also the construction of identity, as the speaker oscillates between fragility, resistance, and

self-reflection.

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