SEMIOTIC SIGN IN THE SONG LYRICS OF *BLUE JEANS, TO THE BONE, AND WAKING UP TOGETHER WITH YOU*

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Abstract:
This research analyzes semiotic signs and the emotional themes of longing and loss in three songs: Blue Jeans *by Gangga,* To the Bone *by Pamungkas, and* Waking Up Together with You *by Ardhito Pramono. These songs were selected because their lyrics strongly convey expressions of longing and loss, making them relevant for semiotic analysis. The study applies Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory (1998) to identify three types of signs (icon, index, and symbol) and to categorize how these signs represent longing and loss in the lyrics. This research uses a qualitative method, with documentation as the technique of data collection and content analysis as the technique of data analysis. The findings reveal two main results. First, three types of semiotic signs were identified, with a total of twenty six data across all songs: icon (eight), index (thirteen), and symbol (five). Second, one fourty six data were found to represent the emotional themes, consisting of longing (twenty seven) and loss (nineteen). Finally, this study highlights that song lyrics function as semiotic media that not only express personal emotions but also resonate with universal human experiences of love, longing, and loss.*

Keywords: *semiotic, icon, index, symbol, lyric*

A. INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics in recent years have became more than marely a medium of entertainment. They often serve as a reflection of personal feelings, social issues, and cultural identities. Many listeners find themselves emotionally connected to songs because of the meaningful messages hidden behind poetic expressions. Lyrics that talk about love, loss, longing, or personal struggles often carry symbolic meanings that are not always explicit, making them rich subjects for deeper analysis. According to Barthes (1977) states that "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (p. 146). This highlights that a text including song lyrics can be seen as a *tissue of signs*, open to diverse interpretations depending on the reader or listener. Songs such as "Blue Jeans" by Gangga, "To the Bone" by Pamungkas, and "Waking Up Together with You" contain expressions of emotional depth, particularly the themes of longing, intimacy, and emotional connection. These songs are not just musical pieces they are texts filled with signs that communicate meaning beyond the literal words. Each lyric can represent a sign that evokes feelings, memories, and interpretations depending on the listener's experience.

This research uses a semiotic approach from Charles Sanders Peirce's theory to explore the meaning more accurately, who defines a sign as "something used to convey knowledge of something else, which can be referred to as an abbreviation or representation" (Peirce, 1998). Pierce categorized signs into three main types: icons, which takes after their objects; indeces, which are physically related to their objects; and symbols, which are related to their objects through convention or agreement. Chandler (2007) supports this by explains that semiotics "is concerned with how meaning is constructed and understood" (p. 2), which allows researchers to decode how meanings are shaped, reinforced, or challenged through signs in cultural texts such as song lyrics. In this context, music and lyrics are not only artistic expressions but also structured systems of signs that communicate human emotions and social experiences. This framework allows us to examine how lyrics function not only as artistic language, but also as systems of signs that convey emotions and meaning. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how signs in the lyrics of these three songs represent the themes of emotional longing and connection, using Peirce's semiotic theory as the analytical foundation.

Music, as a cultural and emotional medium, plays a significant role in conveying human feelings through structured sound. Blacking (1973) states, "Music is a structured form of sound organized in culturally significant ways, often used to convey human experiences and emotions" (p. 10). This view is echoed by Rebecchini (2021), who highlights that "Music is an important part of everyday life and is found in every culture," and further notes that it can influence both the body and mind in ways that improve health, showing music's role in human adaptation and well-being. Similarly, Study.com (2023) defines music as a collection of sounds or tones harmoniously arranged, organized with a specific purpose to create a certain atmosphere or convey ideas and emotions. This perspective emphasizes the intentional and meaningful arrangement of sound to evoke emotions and communicate human experiences, aligning closely with both Blacking's and Rebecchini's views. Given its deep emotional and cultural resonance, music serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for emotional expression and social reflection. This is particularly evident in **pop music,** which has long been an important part of global culture, especially among young people. According to Kumparan (2022), pop music can be understood as a music genre that emphasizes simplicity and mass appeal, often with easily understandable lyrics and catchy

melodies. This music genre has rapidly developed since the mid-20th century and continues to be a favorite in the music industry. Kompasiana (2024) adds that pop music is not only entertainment but also has the ability to influence the feelings and emotions of its listeners, including feelings of nostalgia and longing, which often appear in pop song themes. This is especially true for songs that talk about loss and longing, which become a way for young people to express their emotions in both personal and social relationships. Pop music that focuses on these themes often becomes a medium for its listeners to reflect and cope with these feelings, creating an emotional closeness between the song and the listener.

The songs analyzed in this study are English-language pop songs sung by Indonesian artists: *Blue Jeans* by Gangga, *To the Bone* by Pamungkas, and *Waking Up Together With You* by Ardhito Pramono. Given the Indonesian cultural background, which is different from European culture, this adds a unique element to this study. The way Indonesian culture is translated into English will certainly create a unique way of conveying emotions through the lyrics of these songs.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics is the subject of signs and symbols, which helps uncover meaning in cultural texts such as music and song lyrics (Media Theory, 2023). Charles Sanders Peirce (1998) defines semiotics as the study of signs, which are anything that can represent something else to someone. Peirce classifies signs into three main categories: icon, index, and symbol. An icon functions through resemblance, an index through causal or existential connection, and a symbol through convention or cultural agreement. In the context of song lyrics, these signs appear in various forms, including metaphorical expressions, concrete objects, and emotional utterances that can be interpreted more deeply.

Ferdinand de Saussure (2020) offers another foundational view of semiotics by defining the sign as a combination of the signifier and the signified. The signifier points to the physical form (e.g., word or image), while the signified points to the idea it manifests. This relationship highlights how language in music can carry deep emotional and cultural significance. Saussure's theory complements Peirce’s by focusing on how meaning is constructed linguistically. Together, these views support the semiotic analysis of song lyrics.

Daniel Chandler (2022) reinforces the importance of semiotic theory by stating that it helps us understand how meaning is built and interpreted in cultural texts. According to him, semiotics analyzes not only language but also visual and symbolic forms such as music. This approach reveals how certain symbols in lyrics can communicate themes like love, longing, and emotional struggle. Semiotic tools help decode the hidden messages in poetic expressions found in songs. Thus, semiotics becomes essential for interpreting emotions in popular music.

In everyday life, signs are also present in familiar experiences such as traffic signals or gestures. For instance, the color green in a traffic light signals "go," and this meaning is learned culturally, not naturally. Similarly, a thumbs-up gesture means "okay" in many cultures, though its meaning can differ across societies. These examples show that meaning often comes from shared cultural understanding. This idea also applies to how we interpret emotions in music through symbolic signs.

In this research, Peirce’s semiotic theory is applied not only to identify the types of semiotic signs in the lyrics (Research Problem 1) but also to interpret the emotional

meanings embedded within them (Research Problem 2). The analysis was carried out in several steps. First, the researcher identified lyrics containing semiotic signs and classified them as icons, indexes, or symbols. Second, each sign was analyzed by examining the relationship among the *representamen*, *object*, and *interpretant* within Peirce's triadic model. Third, the interpreted meanings were then connected to the emotional themes under investigation, namely *longing* and *loss*.

According to Charles Sanders Peirce, an icon is a sign that represents its object through resemblance or similarity in form, structure, or certain qualities. The relationship between the *representamen* (sign) and the *object* in an icon is analogical, in which the sign imitates or displays characteristics that are also possessed by the object it refers to. Burks (1949) explains that an icon shows its object "by exhibiting its object," that is, by displaying or reproducing the structure of the represented object. For example, in a *scale drawing* of a machine, the iconic relationship is evident when the drawing represents the parts of the machine in proportional form—if one wheel has twice the diameter of another, it is drawn twice as large.

Burks (1949) also adds that in Peirce's system of signs, onomatopoetic words such as *buzz* or *whisper* are icons because the sound of the word imitates the sound it represents. Peirce, in his unpublished notes, also gives an example of a form of handwriting he called *art chirography*, in which he visually conveys meaning through the shape of the letters. In this example, Peirce wrote Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven" in a style that reflected the dark atmosphere and poetic rhythm of the poem through its handwriting.

In the context of this research, the concept of the icon serves as the foundation for analyzing how song lyrics can represent emotions such as longing and loss through their resemblance to human emotional experiences. Lyrics that imitate actions, feelings, or real-life situations can be considered icons because they show qualities or experiences similar to the reality they depict. Thus, icons are not limited to visual forms such as images or diagrams but may also appear in linguistic forms, including words, phrases, or expressions in song lyrics that qualitatively mirror emotional reality.

According to Charles Sanders Peirce (as cited in Goudge, 1965), "Identification is accomplished only by means of an index. It is the sign which fixes what is represented, or what is being talked, written, or thought about (CP 2.295; 8.41)." Furthermore, Peirce (as cited in Goudge, 1965) explains that an index possesses several distinctive characteristics. First, it has a direct physical connection with its object or is affected by it, independent of the interpreter's involvement. Second, it compels the interpreter's attention toward the indicated object. Third, it necessarily involves the existence of its object, forming an inseparable relation. Fourth, the object of an index is always an individual entity. Fifth, an index does not assert or describe anything but merely shows its object. Finally, it indicates a non-rational and factual connection between itself and its object, which Peirce describes as a relation of Secondness.

These examples demonstrate the essential nature of the index as a sign that directly points to its object (Peirce, as cited in Goudge, 1965). First, an index has a direct physical connection with its object; it arises through contact or a causal relationship with that object. One example given by Peirce is a weathercock, which indicates the direction of the wind because it is physically moved by the wind itself. Second, an index compels the interpreter's attention toward its object. This can be seen in the prolonged sound of a radio time signal that points to a specific moment, or in words such as "this," "that," and "look," which

immediately draw the listener's focus to something present in the surrounding context. Third, an index always involves the actual existence of its object, as the sign cannot function without the object it refers to. For instance, in the sentence "That is Newton's First Law," the word "that" serves as an index that points to a specific concept or statement. Fourth, the object of an index is always an individual entity, since an index refers to something particular rather than something general. Fifth, Peirce also emphasizes that indices can exist in the domain of mathematics or ideal concepts. For example, the number "7" in the statement "7 is a prime number" or the letters A, B, and C in a geometric diagram function as indices that identify abstract objects. Thus, although an index originates from a real connection with its object, its function may extend into conceptual or ideal contexts, as long as it maintains its essential nature as a sign that directly points to its object.

Peirce (in Burks, 1949) said that symbols are signs in which the relationship between the sign and its object is determined by agreement, rules, or social conventions, not by physical resemblance. Thus, the meaning of symbols depends on linguistic or cultural agreements understood by the sender and receiver of the message. Burks (1949) gives the example of the word 'red' in the sentence 'The book is red' as a symbol because the word denotes the colour red based on agreement in the English language, not because the appearance of the word resembles the colour red.Every form of language, including abstract words and metaphors, is a symbol because its meaning is learned through social habits and agreements.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher uses a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a method that analyzes text or language, visuals, and social aspects to explore perspectives and gain a deep understanding of specific phenomena. According to Tenny et al. (2022), qualitative research explores real-world problems through participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, rather than numerical data. It focuses on answering the "how" and "why" questions and helps generate hypotheses for further research. This approach is especially suitable for analyzing emotions and symbolic meanings that are difficult to quantify. This interpretative nature of qualitative research is also emphasized by Busetto et al. (2020), who state that it is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena and evaluating multi-component interventions. Bhandari (2024) explains that qualitative research collects non-numerical data such as text, audio, or video to gain insight into human experiences and viewpoints. ATLAS (n.d.) supports this by noting that qualitative research helps interpret meanings, emotions, and social realities. Lim (2024) further adds that this method answers the "5W1H" (what, why, when, where, who, and how) by accommodating the diversity of human perspectives, making it ideal for linguistic and semiotic studies.

The flexibility and adaptability of qualitative research allow researchers to choose suitable techniques such as documentation, interviews, or observation to collect rich, descriptive data. In this study, the researcher applies documentation and content analysis to interpret the emotional and symbolic aspects of song lyrics. Despite its open-ended and subjective approach, Bhandari (2024), Lim (2024), and ATLAS (n.d.) all stress the academic rigor of qualitative research through standards like credibility, dependability, and transferability. Collectively, these perspectives show that qualitative research is a rigorous

and powerful method for uncovering the symbolic and emotional dimensions in cultural texts like music.

One of the main methods in qualitative research for collecting data from written texts is the documentation technique. In the context of collecting data from several songs, the documentation technique involves steps or processes that help structure the data more systematically. Astuti (2022, p. 16) explains that data collection techniques play an important role in research because they are necessary for obtaining data that aligns with the research objectives. In this study, the researcher collects data through documentation techniques without involving external participants. This technique is used to promote the completeness and data credibility.

Data analysis technique is the process of systematically collecting data to facilitate researcher in drawing conclusions. Conclusions can be easily obtained when the data analysis technique is applied correctly. To ensure accuracy in data analysis, content analysis is employed, which helps make this process more detailed and refined. The researcher uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach to interpret the meaning in song lyrics. *What is content analysis?*. Krippendorff (2004, pp. 21-22) explains that content analysis focuses on interpreting the meaning found in various forms of communication, including written texts, audio recordings, visual media, artworks, and artifacts. Unlike physical events that can be observed objectively, texts have meanings that can be understood by various individuals, not just the analyst. Therefore, in content analysis, it is important to consider how texts are produced, understood, and applied within their social contexts.This aligns with the researcher's study, which analyzes texts in songs with a focus on semiotic theory.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the detailed results of data analysis. This research aims to answer two major research questions related to the semiotic analysis of song lyrics. The first research problem concerns the identification of the types of semiotic signs icon, index, and symbol based on Charles Sanders Peirce's framework. The second research problem explores how these signs signify the emotional themes of *longing* and *loss* within the lyrics of three selected songs: *Blue Jeans* by Gangga, *To the Bone* by Pamungkas, and *Waking Up Together with You* by Ardhito Pramono.

To make the data more accessible and systematically organized, the researcher presents the findings using tables. These tables provide a structured overview of the distribution of semiotic signs across the songs. By presenting the data in this way, readers can easily identify and compare how the three types of signs appear across the songs and how they contribute to the representation of meaning. This organization also allows the researcher to provide clear and detailed answers to the research questions. Based on the researcher's analysis, it can be concluded that three types of semiotic signs were identified, with a total of seventy data across all songs: icon (twenty-three), index (twenty-three), and symbol (twenty-four). Second, one hundred fifteen data were found to represent the emotional themes, consisting of longing (sixty-four) and loss (fifty-one).

Table 1. The list of types of semiotic used

No	Song	Type Of Semiotic	Data
1.	*Blue Jeans* by Gangga	Icon	4
		Index	5

		Symbol	2
2.	*To the Bone* by Pamungkas	Icon	2
		Index	3
		Symbol	1
3.	*Waking Up Together With You By Ardhito Pramono*	Icon	1
		Index	5
		Symbol	2
Total			25

*"**Calling you late at night***
Talking 'bout nothin'
But we're always laughing"

There is a lyric snippet showing the text *"Calling you late at night"* with a visual of the singer holding a phone while lying on the bed. This lyric has been categorized into an **icon** sign system, because the action portrayed in the video directly resembles the meaning of the lyric. The representation of holding a phone and calling someone at night visually mirrors the literal sense of the phrase. The relationship between the representamen and the object is based on similarity, where the visual scene reflects the real-life act of longing communication. The meaning of this icon system is to express the emotional closeness and habitual action of contacting someone special despite the late hour. It shows the sincerity of affection and the persistence of emotional connection even after physical separation. The night setting and the act of calling symbolize solitude and the emotional warmth that comes from reaching out to the person missed. This icon reflects how memories and actions of love are intertwined through ordinary, relatable gestures.

*"**Your voice were lullabies***
I would be listenin'
'Til I was sleeping"

There is a lyric snippet showing the words *"Your voice were lullabies"* with a scene of the singer touching a record player. This has been categorized as an **icon** sign system, because the act of playing a record visually represents the auditory memory of a soothing voice. The similarity between the sound of the record and the voice of the loved one forms the basis of the icon. The meaning of this icon is to show that the lover's voice remains in memory as a comforting presence, much like a lullaby that brings calmness and safety. It reflects how auditory memories can provide solace and serve as emotional reminders of affection.

"'Cause maybe the greatest love of all
Is who the eyes can't see, yeah
Take me home, I'm fallin'"

The lyric *"Is who the eyes can't see, yeah"* can be categorized as an **iconic** sign because it conveys meaning through resemblance between the linguistic expression and the visual imagery. The lyric itself evokes the idea of something invisible to the physical eye but deeply felt within mirroring the emotional depth often associated with unseen yet strongly sensed love or connection. The phrase "the eyes can't see" functions metaphorically as an image of inner perception, where true understanding or love transcends visual experience.

The iconic quality of this lyric is visually represented through the image of the singer (Pamungkas) with his eyes closed and a calm expression, suggesting introspection and emotional awareness that go beyond physical sight. The posture and lighting reinforce the lyric's meaning emphasizing the beauty of inner connection over outward appearance. Together, the visual and verbal signs form an icon of spiritual intimacy and emotional depth, illustrating that what truly matters in love lies beyond what the eyes can perceive.

> *"Thinking of fantasy when there's no more privacy*
> ***Faking a smile there's no reason to cry***
> *It's breaking my mind to see the truth is a lie"*

There is a lyric snippet *"Faking a smile there's no reason to cry"* accompanied by a visual showing a man outside a car with an intense facial expression, his mouth wide open as if shouting, indicating extreme anger or urgency, while the man inside the car appears shocked or frightened, evident from his facial expression and his hand touching the window, reflecting panic or surprise in response to the man outside; the interaction and text "woy! woy! woy! woy!" adds to the impression of chaos, conflict, or an emergency situation. This lyric is categorized into an **index** sign system because it shows a direct existential connection between the representamen (the act of faking a smile) and the object (suppressed emotions and underlying turmoil). According to Peirce, an index has a real connection with its object; the visual and lyrical combination indicates a cause–effect relationship between forced positivity, emotional denial, and escalating distress. The meaning of the index system in this context is to show how the intense facial expression of the shouting man and the panicked expression of the man inside the car directly point to the emotional weight of faking happiness and the futility of denying pain. The lyric *"Faking a smile there's no reason to cry"* thus becomes an indexical representation of emotional repression and impending breakdown, reflecting how pretense is perceived as a fragile mask over real suffering and conflict.

> *"It stopped our relations*
> ***Why did we end it?***
> *Don't want to believe it"*

There is a lyric snippet showing the text *"Why did we end it?"* along with a visual of a person closing a book, which signifies the closure of a chapter in life. This lyric is categorized into a **symbol** sign system because it does not only express a literal question about ending a relationship but symbolizes a deeper emotional reflection on loss and unresolved feelings. According to Peirce, a symbol represents its object through social or cultural convention in this case, the act of questioning becomes a symbol of longing for understanding and closure. The meaning of this symbol system is to show that the question

"Why did we end it?" symbolizes the human desire to make sense of emotional pain after separation. The closing of the book reinforces the symbolic act of ending, where the book represents the story of a relationship. This lyric thus reflects how the past relationship, though finished, continues to exist as an emotional symbol of confusion, reflection, and longing for what once was.

> ***"Calling you late at night***
> *Talking 'bout nothin'*
> *But we're always laughing"*

The phrase *"Calling you late at night"* functions as both an *icon* and an *index*. It iconically mimics the real habit of calling a loved one before sleep, while indexically pointing to the intimacy that used to exist between the speaker and the partner. In terms of *longing*, this lyric represents the speaker's deep desire to relive those habitual late-night conversations that once brought closeness. From the perspective of *loss*, the act of calling is no longer a real practice but only a memory, signaling the absence of a partner who is no longer emotionally or physically present.

> "*Now all I've got is*
> ***The stain on my blue jeans***
> *The only way I could*"

The phrase *"The stain on my blue jeans"* serves as a *symbol* and *index*. *Symbolically*, it represents a lasting trace of the past relationship, while *indexically*, it points to a physical reminder of moments once shared. From *longing*, the lyric illustrates the speaker's emotional attachment to even the smallest trace left behind, desiring to hold on to it as proof of intimacy. From *loss*, the stain is a painful reminder that the person is gone and what remains is only a mark never the living presence.

E. CONCLUSION

The researcher identified three types of semiotic signs from a total of twenty seven data across three songs: *Blue Jeans* by Gangga, *To the Bone* by Pamungkas, and *Waking Up Together with You* by Ardhito Pramono. These types include Icon (eleven data), Index (thirteen data), and Symbol (five). This analysis was presented in chapter four, where the researcher categorized the semiotic signs based on Peirce's framework. The findings revealed that each type of sign plays a distinctive role in representing meaning within the lyrics. Among them, indexical signs appeared as the most significant in indicating emotional states and experiences, particularly through their direct connection to feelings of presence, absence, and memory. The researcher also analyzed the emotional themes of longing and loss as represented through semiotic signs (Representamen → Object → Interpretant). There are one fourty-six data in total, consisting of Longing (twenty seven data) and Loss (nine teen data). Based on the researcher's analysis, the theme of longing appears slightly more frequently than loss across the three songs, showing how the lyrics emphasize emotional yearning and desire for connection. However, the theme of loss is also strongly present, highlighting the inevitability of separation and absence. Both themes are deeply intertwined in the lyrics, showing how songwriters express human vulnerability and emotional depth through the semiotic layers of their work.

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