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Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Book of Celoteh R.A. Kartini

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Abstract

This study examines the denotative and connotative meanings in the book *Celoteh* R.A. Kartini, which represents a collection of Kartini's thoughts reflecting women's experiences during the colonial era. Although Kartini's ideas have been widely discussed in literary and historical studies, research specifically focusing on the analysis of denotative and connotative meanings in this work remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify, analyze, and describe the forms and meanings of denotative and connotative expressions in the text. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a semantic approach. Data were collected through close reading and note-taking, and then analyzed using classification and interpretation based on semantic categories. The findings reveal 24 data points, comprising 12 denotative and 12 connotative instances. Denotative meanings tend to convey explicit, literal ideas, while connotative meanings reflect deeper emotional, cultural, and ideological nuances, particularly regarding the oppression and struggles of women in the colonial period. These findings indicate that Kartini's language is not only informative but also expressive, implicitly conveying criticism of social injustice and gender inequality. The connotative meanings, in particular, strengthen the rhetorical power of Kartini's expressions in articulating resistance and hope. This study contributes to semantic and literary studies by enriching the analysis of meaning in historical texts and providing insights into how language functions as a medium for expressing women's voices and social realities.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary means by which humans convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Language is processed through external knowledge, such as the meaning of words or sentences, as well as their relationship with the context of the user (Marizal *et al.*, 2021). In scientific studies, language is understood as an arbitrary system of sound symbols that humans use to communicate, think, and express ideas, feelings, and experiences. Language has an important role in giving meaning to the emotional characteristics that exist in each individual (Nova & Winarti, 2024). Therefore, language serves not only as a means of communication, but also as a medium of representation of social and cultural reality (Yulian & Mandarani, 2023; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In practice, meaning in language is not singular, but dynamic and contextual. The meaning of a speech can change depending on the situation, cultural background, and experience of the speaker and speaking partner (Bhrata, 2024; Fauziyah *et al.*, 2024). This shows that language has multidimensional properties that include phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects that interact with each other in forming meaning (Billah *et al.*, 2023; Cruse, 2011). Thus, it is not enough to understand meaning based only on the structure of the language, but one must also consider the social and cultural context behind it (Fairclough, 2015).

The study of semantics is a branch of linguistics that specifically studies meaning in language. Semantics is a field of science that focuses on the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, both lexically and contextually (Muzdalifah *et al.*, 2023; Ramadani *et al.*, 2025). In the development of modern linguistic studies, semantics not only studies meaning statistically, but also pays attention to the relationship of meaning to the context of language use in society (Lyons, 1995; Wierzbicka, 2010). This makes semantics a relevant approach to examining texts that contain layers of explicit and implicit meaning. In semantic studies, the meaning of a linguistic unit can be distinguished into denotative and connotative meanings. In this study, denotative meaning is defined as a conceptual meaning or basic meaning that refers directly to the referent without involving the association of flavor values, while connotative meaning is understood as an additional meaning that arises as a result of emotional, social, and cultural associations inherent in a word (Maharani & Hartati, 2024; Muzdalifah *et al.*, 2023; Anggraini & Marwan, 2024; Nasution & Kartolo, 2024; Leech, 1998). The determination of this operational definition is carried out to avoid conceptual

ambiguity due to differences in definitions from various sources, so that the analysis carried out in this study is consistent and systematic (Cahyastri *et al.*, 2025; Utami & Hidayah, 2025).

Denotative meanings function as the basis of communication because they provide an objective and direct understanding of a referent. Meanwhile, connotative meanings enrich communication by adding the value of taste, emotions, and cultural associations attached to a word. These two types of meanings complement each other in forming a complete understanding of a speech. In many cases, especially in literary texts and the thoughts of characters, connotative meanings are more dominant because they contain implicit messages that cannot always be captured through literal meaning (Goddard, 2018; Allan, 2021). Therefore, analyzing these two types of meaning is important for uncovering deeper meanings.

The object of study in this study is the book *Celoteh R.A. Kartini: 232 Wise Speech of the Emancipation Fighter* compiled by Ahmad Nurcholish and published by PT Elex Media Komputindo (Gramedia) in 2018. This book is a collection of excerpts from Kartini's thoughts, edited from previously published letters. Thus, this book does not include Kartini's primary work directly, but rather secondary texts that represent Kartini's thoughts through the editor's selection and preparation. Nevertheless, the content of this book still has credibility because it is sourced from Kartini's authentic letters that have been recognized in the study of Indonesian history and literature (Toer, 2011; Gouda, 2008). In substance, this book contains 232 speeches that reflect Kartini's ideas about women's emancipation, education, humanity, and the social conditions of Javanese society at her time. These sayings not only convey explicit denotative meanings but are also laden with connotative meanings that reflect the social, cultural, and emotional conditions of their time. In this context, the language used by Kartini not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a medium for social criticism and reflection of thought (Blackburn, 2004; Taylor, 2016). This makes the book relevant for analysis using a semantic approach to uncover its layers of implied meaning.

Research on denotative and connotative meanings has been conducted in various contexts. Research by Salsabila & Budi (2022) examines the meaning in the verse, while Ma'arif & Widadt (2023) analyze it in news texts, and Yaskur (2024) in audiovisual media. These studies show that analyzing denotative and connotative meanings can be applied across different types of texts to reveal explicit and implicit meanings. However, most

research still focuses on popular objects and has not delved deeply into the texts of the thought of Indonesian historical figures. In addition, previous research has tended to describe only the types of meaning without relating them to the social and historical context behind their emergence. In fact, in texts such as Kartini's, historical and cultural context play a very important role in shaping the meaning of the speech (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2011). Therefore, a study is needed that not only identifies the type of meaning but also understands the relationship between meaning and its social context.

Based on this description, a research gap can be identified: the absence of research specifically examining the denotative and connotative meanings in the book *Celoteh R.A. Kartini*, particularly given its status as a secondary text that reproduces Kartini's thoughts. In addition, the semantic study of the texts of women's thought in the historical context of Indonesia is also still relatively limited. Thus, this research is here to fill this gap by examining the meaning of Kartini's speech more comprehensively (Wierzbicka, 2010; Goddard, 2018). Based on this background, this research is focused on the analysis of speech forms that include words, phrases, and sentences, as well as the classification of denotative and connotative meanings contained in them. The purpose of this study is to systematically identify, classify, and describe the denotative and connotative meanings in Kartini's speech. The urgency of this research lies in understanding the implicit meaning in Kartini's text, which may shift due to differences in social and cultural contexts between Kartini's time and today's readers. In addition, this research contributes to the development of semantic studies and of research on women's discourse in Indonesia. A comprehensive understanding of the meaning of denotative and connotative meanings is expected to enrich the interpretation of Kartini's thought and prevent misinterpretations in understanding the messages she conveys (Rizkiah & Bashori, 2025).

METHODS

This study uses complementary theoretical and methodological approaches to examine the denotative and connotative meanings in the book *Celoteh R.A. Kartini*. Theoretically, this study uses a lexical semantic approach, which is a branch of semantics that focuses on the meaning of words and linguistic units in relation to referents and associated meanings (Ramadani *et al.*, 2025; Cruse, 2011; Lyons, 1995). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the analysis of denotative (conceptual) and connotative (associative) meanings in Kartini's speech.

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach with a *textual analysis* design. The qualitative approach is used because research data in the form of language (text) is contextual, interpretive, and cannot be measured statistically (Muzdalifah *et al.*, 2023; Creswell, 2018; Miles *et al.*, 2014). The design of text analysis enables researchers to examine the meaning of speech in depth by considering the linguistic and social contexts that shape it.

The data in this study are R.A. Kartini's speeches, which contain indications of denotative and connotative meanings. The source of research data is the book *Celoteh R.A. Kartini: 232 Wise Words of the Emancipation Warrior* compiled by Ahmad Nurcholish and published by PT Elex Media Komputindo in 2018. This book was chosen because it presents Kartini's thoughts in the form of short, richly meaningful speeches, both explicit and implicit. The data collection technique in this study uses the purposive sampling technique, which is the deliberate selection of data based on certain criteria that are in accordance with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2017; Patton, 2015). From a total of 232 utterances in the book, the researcher selected several data (e.g. 12 or 24 utterances) based on the following criteria: (1) utterances contain the potential for multiple meanings (denotative and/or connotative), (2) utterances have a strong social or emotional context, (3) utterances are relevant to research themes such as emancipation, education, and humanity, and (4) utterances have clarity of language structure (words, phrases, or sentences) to analyze. The determination of this criterion aims to ensure that the data analyzed are representative and relevant to the research's focus.

The data collection technique uses documentation and reading note-taking. The researcher carefully reads the entire book, then identifies the speech that meets the research criteria. The selected data is then recorded and classified in the form of a data card or data table containing data numbers, speech quotes, context, and indications of the type of meaning. This technique is considered more relevant for text-based research than field linguistic techniques such as free and capable involvement. The validity of the data in this study was tested through theoretical triangulation and discussion between researchers (*peer debriefing*). Theoretical triangulation is carried out by comparing the analysis results with various relevant semantic theories (Leech, 1998; Lyons, 1995; Cruse, 2011), so that the interpretation of meaning is not purely subjective. In addition, the researcher also conducted discussions with colleagues to test the consistency

of the analysis results (Miles *et al.*, 2014; Creswell, 2018). This step was taken to improve the validity and reliability of the research findings.

The data analysis technique in this study uses an interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles *et al.*, 2014). Operationally, the analysis steps are carried out as follows:

- (1) Data reduction, namely selecting and focusing speech data that has been collected in accordance with the research criteria;
- (2) Data encoding, which is coding each utterance based on the type of meaning (denotative or connotative); (3) Analysis of meaning, namely determining the denotative meaning by referring to the meaning of the dictionary (e.g., KBBI) and determining the connotative meaning by considering the social, cultural, and emotional context in speech;
- (3) Data interpretation, namely explaining the relationship between denotative and connotative meanings in the context of Kartini's thought;
- (4) Drawing conclusions, which is formulating the overall research findings.

The data presentation technique in this study uses an informal presentation method, which is the presentation of the results of the analysis in the form of narrative descriptions supported by data citations (Sudaryanto, 2015). In addition, the data are presented in a table to make it easier for readers to understand the classification of the meanings identified.

To clarify the research flow, the following is presented: a flow diagram of the research process:



Figure 1. Research Flow

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the process of data reduction and coding of books, *Celoteh R.A. Kartini: 232 Ujaran Bijak Sang Pejuang Emansipasi* (Nurcholish, 2018) 12 speech data that met the research criteria were obtained through purposive sampling. The data were chosen because they have the potential for both lexical (denotative) and contextual (connotative) meanings relevant to the research focus.

The results of the analysis show that all data have two layers of meaning: denotative meaning, the basic meaning that refers to lexical meaning, and connotative meaning, an additional meaning influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. However, it was found that connotative meanings were more dominant, both in terms of frequency and depth. This aligns with Damayanti *et al.* (2024), who state that connotative meanings encompass a broader range than denotative meanings.

In general, the language used in Kartini's speech is dominated by metaphorical words and phrases, such as pen, road, typhoon, and bitterness, which have concrete meanings but, in context, have expanded to become social and ideological symbols.

To clarify the results of the analysis, the research data are presented in the form of a table containing data codes, speech forms, lexical meanings (denotative), and contextual meanings (connotative). This presentation aims to show the difference between the basic meanings of words and the meanings used in the context of Kartini's speech, to avoid misinterpretations.

Table 1. Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meanings of R.A. Kartini's Speech

Code	Speech	Shape	Lexical Meaning (Denotative)	Meaning in Context (Connotative)	Types of Dominant Meanings	Remarks
D01	"A teacher is not only a sharpener of the mind, but also an educator of ethics."	sentence	Sharpener = a tool for sharpening	Shaping and developing intellectuals	Konotative	Educational metaphors
D02	"Confiscate all my possessions, as long as you do not have my pen ."	sentence	Pen = stationery	Symbol of freedom of thought	Konotative	Ideological symbols
D03	"That knowing, understanding, and wanting is a sin for girls."	sentence	Sin = religious violation	Social prohibition against women	Konotative	Social criticism
D04	"Either way , never tire of trying hard to defend all that is good."	sentence	Road = a place of traffic	Life process/struggle	Konotative	Metaphors of life
D05	"When talking about other people, you can add spices , but make sure the spices are good."	sentence	spices = seasoning	Extras in communication	Konotative	Metaphor language
D06	"Only people of strong hearts and minds can survive such a typhoon ."	sentence	Typhoon = major hurricane	Severe trials	Konotative	Social pressure
D07	"A girl whose mind has been intellectual, whose outlook has been expanded, will no longer be able to live in the world of her ancestors ."	sentence	Ancestor = ancestor	An old tradition that restricts	Konotative	Cultural criticism
D08	"How miraculous is the feeling of affection, love is heaven and hell that become one."	sentence	Heaven/hell = the hereafter	Happiness & suffering	Konotative	Emotional duality
D09	"If I am proficient in Dutch, it will definitely be my fate in the future."	sentence	Fate = the conditions of life	Social future	Konotative	Context colonial
D10	"Every sentence he mentions must be finished with prayer ."	sentence	Sembah = penghormatan	Kepatuhan mutlak	Konotative	Relasi kuasa
D11	"What could be more miserable than that children as young as that have to endure the bitterness of life ?"	sentence	Bitter = bad taste	The suffering of life	Konotative	Experiential metaphors

D12	"Eddie's opinion is correct, that the Javanese nation is a nation that lives in fairy tales and stories ."	sentence	Fairy tales/hikayat = fictitious stories	Something unrealistic	Konotative	Reality criticism
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Based on the data presented in Table 1, all of R.A. Kartini's analyzed speeches show a clear distinction between lexical (denotative) and contextual (connotative) meanings. However, the meanings that are actually used in speech tend to be connotative. To understand these findings more deeply, a discussion is needed that not only describes meaning but also interprets the function of using meaning in social, cultural, and ideological contexts. Therefore, in the following section, we will discuss the pattern of findings, the tendency to use meaning, and their relationship with previous research.

Discussion

The Dominance of Connotative Meanings in Kartini's Speech

Based on Table 1, all data (D01–D12) show that the meaning used in the context of R.A. Kartini's speech tends to be connotative. Although each word has a lexical meaning that can be looked up in the dictionary, in practice, Kartini does not take that meaning literally. This shows that the language used is not solely referential but has expanded its meaning through social, cultural, and historical contexts. Thus, the meaning that appears in Kartini's speech is better understood as a dynamic, contextual meaning.

The dominance of this connotative meaning shows that Kartini consciously uses language as an indirect means of expression. A word is said to have a connotative meaning if the word has a sense value, both positive and negative (Hayati & Jadidah, 2022). In social conditions that limit women's movement, the use of connotative language is a strategy to convey ideas without directly confronting the applicable norms. Connotative language allows for a wider space of interpretation, so that the message conveyed can be received without causing excessive resistance. In other words, connotative meaning functions as a medium of communication that is adaptive to social pressure.

These findings align with research (Salsabila & Budi, 2022), which indicates that reflective and literary texts tend to convey connotative meanings because they are laden with emotional and ideological values. In addition, Yaskur (2024) found that connotative meanings in narrative media are used to convey messages implicitly, making them

more effective at influencing readers. In this context, Kartini's speech can be seen as a reflective text that conveys information and contains strong ideological content.

Theoretically, the dominance of connotative meaning reinforces the view in semantic studies that language meaning is not singular but multi-layered and contextual. Meaning is determined not only by the relationship between the word and its referent, but also by the speaker's experience, culture, and social situation. Therefore, the analysis of Kartini's speech cannot be limited to a lexical approach; it must also involve contextual interpretation to yield a more accurate and comprehensive meaning.

Metaphorical Patterns as Language Strategies

Analysis of the data shows that metaphor is the dominant pattern in the formation of connotative meanings in Kartini's speech. Words such as *sharpener* (D01), *road* (D04), *typhoon* (D06), and *bitterness* (D11) lexically refer to concrete objects but, in context, represent abstract concepts. This shows the process of transferring meaning from the concrete to the abstract, a characteristic of metaphor.

The use of metaphors in Kartini's speech is not a coincidence, but a systematic language strategy. Metaphors allow Kartini to simplify complex concepts such as struggle, suffering, and education into a more understandable form. In this case, the metaphorical pattern used is a meaning that is manifested as a parable (Damayanti & Latief, 2024). In addition, metaphors provide a strong rhetorical effect by arousing the reader's imagination and emotions. Thus, metaphors not only serve as a language style, but also as a cognitive tool for building understanding.

These findings align with research (Ma'arif & Widadt, 2023) indicating that metaphors in texts can reinforce meaning and influence how readers interpret an event. In Kartini's context, metaphors frame social reality in a more dramatic and meaningful way. This shows that language not only reflects reality but also shapes a perspective on it.

Furthermore, the use of metaphors in Kartini's speech can be understood as a form of linguistic creativity that reflects the intellectual intelligence of the speakers. The use of metaphors is a form of creating value for sense in expressing

the essence of life (Komalasari *et al.*, 2025). Through metaphor, Kartini was able to package social criticism and the idea of emancipation in a more subtle but still sharp form. Thus, metaphors become an effective means of conveying the message in restrictive social conditions.

Connotative Meaning as a Representation of Social Criticism

The connotative meaning in Kartini's speech serves not only as an emotional expression but also as a tool for social criticism. Data such as *sin* (D03), *ancestor* (D07), and *worship* (D10) show that these words have shifted from lexical meanings to meanings related to social structure and power relations. This shift suggests that the meaning of language is strongly influenced by the social context in which the language is used.

For example, the word *sin* in the context of Kartini's speech does not refer to a violation of religious norms, but to a social prohibition imposed on women. This shows that the social norms of the time had almost equal power to religious norms, so that violations against them were considered something "forbidden". Thus, the use of the word *sin* in this context reflects a critique of the social system that restricts women's freedom.

These findings are relevant to the research (Ma'arif & Widadt, 2023), which states that connotative meanings in texts are often used to represent certain ideologies. In addition, Yaskur (2024) shows that connotative meanings can convey social criticism indirectly. In this case, Kartini's speech can be understood as a form of critical discourse that seeks to expose social injustice through language.

Furthermore, the use of connotative meanings as a form of social critique suggests that language plays an important role in shaping social consciousness. Connotative meanings occur because the speaker wants to evoke feelings of wanting to agree-disagree, happy-displeasure, and so on (Fauziyah *et al.*, 2024). Through her speech, Kartini not only described the prevailing social conditions but also invited readers to reflect on and question the prevailing norms. Thus, language serves not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument of social change.

Language Symbolism in Kartini's Speech

In addition to metaphor, symbolism is an important aspect of connotative meaning in Kartini's speech. Data such as *pen* (D02) and *fate* (D09) show that words not only have lexical meaning but also broader symbolic meaning. This symbolism allows a word to represent a more complex and abstract concept.

The word *pen*, for example, does not only refer to stationery, but symbolizes freedom of thought, self-expression, and intellectual struggle. In this context, *the pen* becomes a symbol of the power of ideas capable of transcending physical and social boundaries. This shows that Kartini views knowledge and writing as the primary tools for fighting for change.

These findings align with research (Salsabila & Budi, 2022), which indicates that connotative meanings are often used as symbols to convey a deeper message. Symbolism allows the speaker to convey complex ideas in a concise yet meaningful way. In the context of Kartini, language symbolism serves to articulate the broader idea of emancipation.

Furthermore, the use of symbols in Kartini's speech demonstrates an awareness of language's power as a means of representation. The symbols represented can also differ over time. If in ancient times a word could be represented as a meaning with a negative connotation, over time the word could be represented as a positive connotation, and vice versa (Ananda & Widayati, 2025). In this case, symbols not only enrich the meaning but also expand the range of interpretation. Thus, the symbolism in Kartini's speech can be understood as a discursive strategy that effectively conveys ideological messages.

Implications of the Findings on Semantic Studies

The results of this study show that meaning analysis cannot be carried out solely based on dictionary definitions. The meaning of language is highly context-dependent, so semantic analysis must consider pragmatic and sociocultural factors. This confirms that language's meaning is dynamic and cannot be separated from its context.

The use of KBBI as a reference for lexical meaning remains important, but it cannot serve as the sole basis for determining the meaning of speech. In this study, many words have a specific lexical meaning but shift in meaning in context. This shows that understanding the meaning must involve contextual interpretation to avoid analysis errors.

These findings reinforce previous research (Salsabila & Budi, 2022; Ma'arif & Widadt, 2023; Yaskur, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of context in the analysis of meaning. These studies show that connotative meanings have an important role in shaping readers' understanding of the text. Thus, semantic analysis must be carried out comprehensively, taking into account various aspects that affect meaning.

Overall, this study contributes to the study of semantics by showing that connotative meanings do not function solely as complements but as a core of text meaning. In addition, this study also shows that language can be used as a tool to convey ideology and social criticism. Thus, the study of semantics is relevant not only in the linguistic sphere but also in understanding social and cultural phenomena.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify and describe the form and meaning of denotative and connotative in R.A. Kartini's speech in the book *Celoteh R.A. Kartini*. Based on the analysis, the dominant meaning in the context of speech is connotative, while the denotative meaning serves as the basis for lexical meaning. Kartini's speeches make use of many metaphorical and symbolic forms of language, so that the meanings that emerge cannot be understood literally but must be interpreted in the context of that time's social, cultural, and historical context. Thus, this study shows that the meaning of Kartini's speech does not depend solely on lexical definitions but also on contextual interpretations that reveal the ideological values and social realities behind it.

This research has limitations: the amount of data analyzed is limited, and the study focuses only on semantic aspects, omitting the pragmatic dimension and broader discourse analysis. Therefore, further research is suggested to expand the data set, adopt an interdisciplinary approach, and examine Kartini's speech from a more diverse perspective, such as critical discourse analysis or semiotics. In addition, follow-up research can compare various versions or sources of Kartini's text to strengthen data validity and enrich interpretation.

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