



***THE SEMIOTICS OF GEN Z EMOTION: A BARTHESIAN
ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN SZA'S KILL BILL
AND NOBODY GETS ME LYRICS***

Intan Yulia Hafifah, Ana Widiyanti*

Universitas Sains Al-Qur'an, Wonosobo, Indonesia

***Corresponding E-mail: anawidiyanti@unsiq.ac.id**

Phone Number: 082226622029

ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO												
This research explores the complex emotional landscape of Generation Z in the United States through a semiotic analysis of SZA's songs' lyrics. The chosen songs in this study are Kill Bill and Nobody Gets Me. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this study meticulously unpacks denotative and connotative meanings, as well as the use of figurative language to explain how these lyrics depict the complex emotional experiences of Generation Z in the digital age. The analysis reveals that Kill Bill employs metaphors, hyperbole, and paradoxes to depict ambiguous jealousy, obsession, and longing, reflecting Generation Z's tendency to express emotions dramatically, amplified through social media. Meanwhile, Nobody Gets Me utilizes metaphors, paradoxes, and symbolism to convey deep vulnerability, regret, and emotional isolation, resonating with Generation Z's struggles in facing powerlessness amid hyperconnectivity. Through Barthes' lens, SZA's lyrics emerge as powerful cultural artifacts, blending everyday language with evocative figurative expressions to capture the spirit of Generation Z's emotionally complex era—marked by vulnerability, nostalgia, and the tension between rebellion and self-reflection. This research not only enriches literary analysis by applying semiotics to music lyrics but also offers a deep understanding of how popular culture articulates the emotional pulse of a generation shaped by digital and social dynamic.	<table><tr><td>Article</td><td>History</td></tr><tr><td>Received:</td><td>—</td></tr><tr><td>Received in revised:</td><td>—</td></tr><tr><td>Accepted:</td><td>—</td></tr><tr><td>Keywords:</td><td></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Semiotics; Roland Barthes; Figurative language; Generation Z</td></tr></table>	Article	History	Received:	—	Received in revised:	—	Accepted:	—	Keywords:		Semiotics; Roland Barthes; Figurative language; Generation Z	
Article	History												
Received:	—												
Received in revised:	—												
Accepted:	—												
Keywords:													
Semiotics; Roland Barthes; Figurative language; Generation Z													

ABSTRAK	Histori	Artikel
Penelitian ini mengkaji lanskap emosional kompleks Generasi Z di Amerika Serikat melalui analisis semiotik terhadap lirik lagu SZA. Penelitian berfokus pada lagu “Kill Bill” dan “Nobody Gets Me” dari album SOS dengan menggunakan kerangka semiotika Roland Barthes untuk menguraikan makna denotatif dan konotatif serta penggunaan bahasa figuratif dalam merepresentasikan pengalaman emosional Generasi Z di era digital. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa “Kill Bill” menggunakan metafora, hiperbola, dan paradoks untuk menggambarkan kecemburuan, obsesi, dan kerinduan yang ambigu, sedangkan “Nobody Gets Me” menggunakan metafora, paradoks, dan simbolisme untuk menyampaikan kerentanan, penyesalan, dan isolasi emosional. Melalui perspektif Barthes, kedua lirik tersebut tampil sebagai artefak budaya yang memadukan bahasa sehari-hari dengan ekspresi figuratif untuk menangkap dinamika emosional generasi yang dibentuk oleh lingkungan digital dan media sosial.	Diterima: — Direvisi: — Disetujui: —	
	Kata Kunci:	
	Semiotika; Roland Barthes; Bahasa figuratif; Generasi Z	

© 2026 Intan Yulia Hafifah, Ana Widiyanti

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

A. Introduction

Music in the digital era has become one of the most universal art mediums for expressing complex human emotions, especially for young people who face emotional challenges such as falling in love, heartbreak, and self-discovery amidst the influence of social media advancements. Generation Z, as a group that has grown up with technology, often expresses their emotional struggles through music, which is not only a means of entertainment but also an expression related to their life experiences.

Meanwhile, song lyrics are a part of literary work. Moeliono explains that the definition of song lyrics is a literary work that contains the outpouring of the heart and the composition of a song or melody (Wahyudiansyah & Sulistina, 2022). (Rais & Fadillah, 2025) In the development of modern music, many artists have explored complex themes in their works. One album that stands out is SOS. It was released on December 9, 2022 by SZA, an American R&B singer and songwriter whose real name is Solána Imani Rowe. Released globally through the Top Dawg Entertainment and RCA Records labels, the SOS album achieved great success with Grammy nominations and popularity on media platforms such as TikTok, reflecting its strong cultural resonance with Generation Z. SZA is known for her

honest and emotionally vulnerable lyrics, drawing on both personal and Generation Z experiences through lyrics that depict modern relationship dynamics, self-doubt, and the hope to rise above.

This research focuses the analysis on two selected songs from the SOS album, namely Kill Bill and Nobody Gets Me. The songs were chosen because they express complex emotions, including love, heartbreak, hope, and sadness. The main objective of this research is to explore and interpret how the complexity of emotional states is reflected in the lyrics of the songs in SZA's SOS album seen from the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotic approach.

1. Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Semiotics is a field of study concerned with signs. In semiotics, social phenomena in society and culture are viewed as signs. Semiotics itself studies the systems, rules, and conventions that allow these signs to have their own meanings. The etymology of semiotics comes from the Greek word *Semion*, which means "sign". According to Van Zoest (Sobur, 2001:96), semiotics is "The science of the sign (sign) and everything related to it: the way it functions, its relationship with other words, its delivery, and its acceptance by those who use it". Roland Barthes is a French semiotician, literary theorist, critic of the mediocrity of literary criticism and of ideology, writer, and painter. He stated that semiology is part of linguistics (Cobley, 2005).

Roland Barthes also known as one of the structuralist thinkers who applied Saussure's linguistic and semiological model. He argued that language is a system of 6 signs that reflects the assumptions of a particular society at a specific time (Sobur, 2013:63). Barthes' idea is famously known as the Two Orders of Signification, which includes denotation the level of signification that explains the relationship between the signifier and the signified, producing a direct, definitive, or literal meaning that is fixed and closed. In semiotics, denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and the signified.

The concept of Roland Barthes' semiotics represents that the denotative sign (3) consists of a signifier (1) and a signified (2). However, the denotation sign is also the connotative signifier (4). At this level there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. Connotation is the second order of significance that takes the denotative sign as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signifier. In this framework connotation is a sign that is derived from the denotative sign signifier. In short, the text is the signifier, whereas the environment of the sign is the signified, according to Barthes (Susilowati, Endang, 2013:60).

However, denotative signs are also connotative signs. Connotation is defined as the meaning of a word or set of words produced by the speaker (writer) and the listener (reader). For example, the sign "lion" can be connotative of self-respect, pride, fury, and courage (Cobley & Jansz, 1999). (Ishar & Irawan, n.d.)

Beside denotation and connotation, Barthes also introduces figurative language. In Roland Barthes' semiotic context, figurative language acts as a sign that produces connotative meaning. Barthes state that all signs, including symbols and figurative language, consist of two elements: the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept represented). Barthes' semiotic approach is used to analyze how symbols and figurative language work in literary texts, both at the explicit and implicit levels, so that readers can understand the deeper meaning of a work. Tocharoen & Pataraporn Tapinta (n.d.)

2. Complex Emotional State

Emotions are sometimes more complex than the words used to express one's feelings. Aesthetic emotions are feelings experienced when someone enjoys something beautiful, such as nature, art, or music. Someone can also experience aesthetic emotions when he or she has a spiritual experience or enlightenment. These emotions are very complex as they involve many different feelings. For example, when listening to beautiful music, someone may feel amazement, awe, and happiness all at once. Someone may also feel sad or nostalgic if the lyrics of the song describe something sad. These experiences are a form of emotional complexity, mostly because of the multiplicity of emotions involved and the difficulty in circumscribing them using single emotional words (Ortony et al., 1988: Keltner and Haidt, 2003).

3. Generation Z Cultural Context

Generation Z, often called Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is a group that grew up in the digital age and has different cultural characteristics from previous generations. This generation is known for its tendency to express and understand complex emotions such as ambivalence, vulnerability, and nostalgia. Generation Z is recognized for its commitment to authenticity, its attentiveness to the nuances of contemporary relationships, and its active participation in popular culture through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (Katz et al., 2021: 47). Generation Z has been raised in an environment of digital technology, which affects the way they interact and express their feelings. According to Katz et al. (2021), Generation Z tends to value honesty and authenticity in popular culture, including in verbal texts such as song lyrics. They often

use social media to share emotional experiences. Their emotional landscape is marked by ambivalence, vulnerability, nostalgia, jealousy, loneliness, and insecurity, driven by the dynamics of digital connectivity (Twenge, 2017).

B. Method

In this study, a qualitative method used as the primary approach in the research evaluation process. This approach is intended to provide a clearer insight into Roland Barthes' semiotics perspective used in the songs' lyrics. As believed by Jason and Glenwick (2016:14), the characteristics of the qualitative method are the data used to investigate, explore, obtain, and explain knowledge, approaches, methods, and objectives of facts or events not related to numbers, such as observations, pictures, and the use of words. This method can also be used based on the view of someone who has experienced certain events, which can be developed with certain, distinctive, and various aspects.

According to Kothari (2004: 3), descriptive type research is research that aims to explain and interpret the real situation or facts. The researcher in this study is only able to explain something that is happening related to certain topics without being able to adjust the related variables. (Kothari, 2004). Based on Jason and Glenwick (2015), qualitative method focuses on interpretive analysis of non-numerical data, such as lyrics, to uncover deeper meanings. Descriptive research, Kothari (2004), aims to explain phenomena without manipulating variables, making it suitable for analyzing the emotional content of song lyrics.

The primary data in this study are the lyrics of Kill Bill, and Nobody Gets Me songs. These songs were selected for their rich depiction of complex emotions relevant to Generation Z. The method of collecting data in this research is by doing observation. The procedures as follow, listening, reading, identifying, classifying, and selecting. After the data are collected, the next step is analyzing data by following: Displaying the data, explaining data, and interpreting data.

C. Result and Discussion

SZA is an American R&B singer and songwriter whose real name is Solána Imani Rowe, she was born on November 8, 1990 in Saint Louis, Missouri, United States. On December 9, 2022 through the label Top Dawg Entertainment and RCA Records, SZA released the 23-track album SOS which has gained huge popularity, especially among Generation Z in the United States. The album topped the Billboard 200 chart for several weeks and a Grammy nomination with popularity on platforms such as TikTok and Spotify,

the album's popularity is not only due to its unique musical style, but also driven by its honest and emotional lyrics, which capture inner turmoil such as love, heartbreak, sadness, and hope, which are very relevant to the emotional experiences of the younger generation, especially in the context of American pop culture.

The popularity of SOS albums among Generation Z is due to its authentic and relatable lyrics, which reflect the emotional turmoil and vulnerability of the younger generation, such as the tendency to feel emotions intensely or get carried away easily due to complicated romantic relationships or the uncertainty of the future. In the context of American culture, Generation Z often experiences social and emotional stress, so SOS albums are a relevant cultural reflection.

This analysis not only aims to understand how complex emotions such as love, heartbreak, and longing are conveyed through the lyrics, but also how the lyrics reflect the emotional characteristics of Generation Z in the United States, such as the tendency to express feelings dramatically or get caught up in emotional conflicts.

1. Generation-Z's Emotional State in SZA's "Kill Bill" Lyrics from Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Table 1. Data Matrix of the First Stanza of "Kill Bill"

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
I'm still a fan even though I was salty	Metaphors and slang: "I was salty" is a metaphor that uses slang terms indirectly to describe jealousy or resentment. The word "salty" comes from American pop culture, which refers to an annoyed or sensible attitude that is often used to disguise raw emotion.	The speaker says she still likes her ex's despite feeling "salty"	In Barthes' semiotics, "salty" as a sign creates a rich connotative meaning, implying an inner conflict between being 20 21 amazed "fan" and being jealous, without expressing the emotion directly
Hate to see you with some other broad, know you happy	Slang and euphemisms: "Some other broad" is a slang term that demeans or belittles the ex's new partner, functioning as a euphemism to hide jealousy	The speaker doesn't like it when seeing her ex's with his new partners and know that her ex's are happy.	In Barthes' semiotics, "broad" as a sign reflects the defensive attitude of the speaker who is trying to belittle her ex's new partner to reduce her inferiority complex.
Hate to see you happy if I'm not the one drivin'	Metaphor: "Driving" is a metaphor that describes control or influence over the former's life, like driving a car that sets the direction.	The speaker hates seeing the ex's happy if her the ones "drivin'" it	In Barthes' framework. "drivin'" as a connotative sign implies possessiveness and a desire to stay involved in her ex's life.

In the first stanza, Kill Bill song depicts complex emotions such as jealousy, resentment, possessiveness, and loss, through the use of rich figurative language. The lyrics express feelings of jealousy, inferiority, and a desire to stay involved in her ex's life, reflecting post-breakup emotional conflict.

Denotatively, the lyrics state that the speaker still likes her ex despite feeling upset, dislikes seeing her ex with her new partner, and wants to control her ex's happiness. Connotatively, the lyrics express feelings of jealousy, inferiority, and a desire to stay involved in her ex's life, reflecting post-breakup emotional conflict. Figurative language such as the metaphors "I was salty" and "driving" and the slang "some other broad" function as signs that create connotative meanings. "I was salty" uses slang to disguise jealousy, reflecting the Generation Z culture in the United States that often hides raw emotions with humor or casual language. "Some other broad" as a euphemism suggests a defensive stance to protect the ego, while 'driving' symbolically describes possessive desire. This figurative language amplifies the intensity of emotions in a non-vulgar way.

In the context of Generation Z in the United States, the lyrics reflect their tendency to still monitor or stalk their ex-partner through social media despite the end of their relationship, such as seeing posts of their ex and their new partner, which triggers feelings of jealousy and inferiority.

Table 2. Data Matrix of the Second Stanza of "Kill Bill"

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
I'm so mature, I got me a therapist to tell me there's other men.	Irony and Hyperbole: "I'm so mature"	The speaker still unable to move on	The emotional lability behind the attempt to appear mature.
I don't want none, I just want you.	Repetition and affirmation: "I just want you"	Don't want to be someone new, just want with the ex	Reflect longing and possessiveness
If I can't have you, no one should I might.	Hyperbole: "No one should I might"	Don't want to be with someone else.	Expressing extreme obsession and possessiveness.

Lyrics of the second stanza in Kill Bill song denotatively depicts the speaker emotional struggle in dealing with heartbreak, focusing on irony, possessiveness, and the inability to move on. Connotatively, the lyrics express irony, deep longing, and obsession, reflecting a complex inner conflict. The figurative language such as irony "I'm so mature", repetition "I just want you", and hyperbole "no one should" function as signs that create connotative meanings. The irony of "I'm so mature" highlights the contradiction between trying to look mature and being emotionally unstable, reinforcing emotional complexity. The repetition of "I just want you" emphasizes the recurring obsession, while the hyperbole of "no one should" in a threatening tone deepens the intensity of possessiveness.

The lyrics reflect the experiences of Generation Z in America who often show intense emotional attachment in romantic relationships. Many young people have difficulty letting go of their ended relationships that have ended seek professional help such as therapists, where they constantly monitor the lives of their exes. The possessiveness and obsession

with exes in the lyrics reflect the tendency of Generation Z in the United States to often do implausible things such as stalking or even worse commit murder.

Table 3. Data Matrix of the Third Stanza of “Kill Bill”

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
I might kill my ex, not the best Idea	Hyperbole and Affirmation	The speaker expresses his/her emotion that lead the desire to kill his/her ex	Expressions of anger and reflecting deep heartbreak make for impulsive impulses that are restrained by self-awareness.
His new girlfriend's next, how I get here?	-	The speaker wants to kill the new girlfriend of her ex too	Showing feelings of jealousy, loss of emotional control, and confusion over one's own feelings.
I might kill my ex, I still love him, though	Paradox and repetition: “I might kill my ex; I still love him though”	The speaker feel confuse and depress	A complex emotional struggle of ambivalence, of hate yet love
Rather be in jail than alone	-	The speaker rather chose to be in jail than being alone	Fear of loneliness that reflects emotional dependency and hurt from lost relationships.

The third stanza in Kill Bill song lyrics depict the culmination of Generation Z's complex emotions, focusing on ambivalence, anger and fear of loneliness. Denotatively, the lyrics express a desire of the speaker to kill her ex because of uncontrol emotion and loneliness she feels. Connotatively, the lyrics express anger, jealousy, ambivalence, and a deep fear of loneliness. In Roland Barthes' semiotics, figurative language such as hyperbole “I might kill my ex”, repetition “how I get here”, paradox “I still love him, though”, comparison “rather be in jail” function as signs that create connotative meaning. Hyperbole amplifies the intensity of anger and jealousy, while repetition accentuates the repetitive confusion. The paradox “I still love him, though” reflects a rich emotional ambivalence, the comparison “rather be in jail” portrays loneliness as a great threat.

The lyrics reflect Generation Z in the United States, who often feel loneliness and emotional uncertainty in the digital age. The lyric “rather be in jail than alone” reflects Generation Z's tendency to avoid loneliness by maintaining a relationship, even if the relationship is toxic. Paradoxical expressions and hyperbole reflect Gen Z's tendency to use dramatic narratives on digital platforms as an emotional outlet.

Table 4. Data Matrix of the Fourth Stanza of “Kill Bill”

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
You was out of reach	Metaphor: “Out of reach”	The speaker considers her ex is now someone who is no longer able to be hers.	The implication of desperate feeling, isolation, loss of emotional aces, and unfulfilled longing for the ex.
You was at the farmer's market with your perfect peach	Metaphor and simile: “Perfect peach”	The Ex's was at the farmers' market with his new partner,	Expressing feelings of jealousy and inferiority because the ex-already has a new partner who is

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
			considered ideal, deepens the singer's sense of loss.
Now I'm in the basement, planning home invasion.	Hyperbole and imagery: "Planning home invasion"	The speaker comes to her Ex's house to attack him	Showing extreme obsession, anger, and unrealistic revenge fantasies.
Now you laying face-down, got me singing over a beat	Hyperbole and imagery: "Laying face-down" and "singing over a beat"	The speaker is fantasizing to do something extreme to her Ex,	Describes an extreme revenge fantasy, where the singer imagines an ex being defeated, accompanied by a bittersweet feeling of victory.

The lyrics in the fourth stanza of Kill Bill song depicts the culmination of Generation Z's complex emotions, focusing on jealousy, obsession, and revenge fantasies expressed through rich figurative language.

Denotatively, the lyrics show the situation where the speaker feel so jealous watching her Ex with his new girlfriend. The situation led her to fantasizing doing extreme revenge that is to kill his ex. The figurative language use in the fourth stanza, such as the metaphor "out of reach", describes a painful emotional distance, reinforcing the sense of loss in a symbolic way. The metaphor and simile "perfect peach" creates an idealized image of the new partner, deepening the jealousy by accentuating the painful comparison. The hyperbole of "planning a home invasion" and "laying face-down" exaggerate obsession and revenge, creating a dramatic effect that accentuates the intensity of emotions without literal intent. The imagery of "in the basement" and "lying face down" adds a visual dimension, reinforcing the dark and obsessive atmosphere. while "singing over a beat" metaphorically describes the song itself as a medium of emotional expression. The figurative languages mention above creates connotative meaning of sense of isolation, jealousy, low self-esteem, extreme obsession, and revenge fantasies, reflecting deep emotional conflicts post-breakup. In Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the figurative language in this stanza functions as a sign that creates connotative meaning.

In the context of Generation Z in the United States, these lyrics reflect their tendency to compare themselves to others through social media, such as seeing posts of exes with new partners, which triggers jealousy and low self-esteem.

2. Generation-Z's Emotional State in SZA's "Nobody Gets Me" Lyrics from Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Table 5. Data Matrix of the First Stanza of "Nobody Gets Me"

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Took a long vacation, no makeup, just Jay Z	Symbolism and contrast: "No makeup" and "Jay-Z"	The speaker taking a long vocation. She goes without make-up on her face, just	Vulnerability without social mask and comfort feeling

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
		accompanied by Jay-Z music.	
You were balls deep, now we beefin', had me butt-naked on the sofa	Slang, metaphor, and contrast:	The couple, who were very intimate, are now fighting, leaving the singer naked on the sofa.	The transition from physical intimacy turns into emotional conflict, exposing total vulnerability due to betrayal. Reflecting regret over lost trust and unrequited love.
So wasted screamin', "fuck that"	Slang and hyperbole: "Wasted" is slang for drunk, and "screamin'" is hyperbole that describes excessive emotion.	The speaker screaming while swearing.	Expressions of anger and escape from emotional wounds through impulsive behavior.
Love me now, but I'm anythin'	Paradox and Affirmation: "Love me" vs. "I'm anything"	The speaker demanding for love but feel insecure.	The contradiction between the need for love and feelings of worthlessness. Implies unrequited love due to feelings of unworthiness and self-disappointment.
Hurry now, baby, stick it in	Slang and metaphor: "Stick it in" is slang for sexual intercourse, while the metaphor refers to emotional escape through physical means.	Asking the singing ex's to hurry up and engage in physical intimacy.	The impulsive desire for intimacy as an escape from emotional pain reflects an urgent need for temporary connection. It implies a longing for past intimacy and emotional vulnerability.
For the memories go to kickin' in	Metaphor and personification: "Memories kickin' in" personifies memories as a painful force.	Before memories of the past resurface.	Fear of painful nostalgia that will exacerbate emotional wounds, with an urgency to avoid reflection. Implies regret for the past and uncontrollable longing.

The first stanza of the song Nobody Gets Me describes someone's complex emotions after a breakup, focusing on vulnerability, longing, regret, unrequited love, and self-disappointment, expressed through rich and introspective imagery.

Denotatively, the lyrics tell us about the speaker's condition after her break-up. She tried to escape from her miserable life by taking a long vacation. In Roland Barthes' semiotics, metaphorical language functions as a sign that creates rich connotative meaning. The figurative languages use in the lyrics such as "No makeup" as a symbol of emotional honesty creates a signifier of inner vulnerability, reinforcing the myth of the importance of authenticity in expressing emotions. In contrast, "Jay-Z" as a symbol of cultural comfort reflects efforts to seek stability amid emotional chaos. "Butt-naked" as a metaphor for emotional exposure depicts total fragility, with signs of lost inner security due to betrayal. The paradox of "love me now, but I'm anything" highlights the contradiction between the need for love and self-doubt, while the personification of "memories kickin' in" depicts nostalgia as a painful force, reinforcing the myth of past trauma that haunts. Slang terms like "wasted" and "stick it in" create a casual tone that masks emotional intensity, reflecting a communication style that hides vulnerability behind a rebellious facade. This figurative

language deepens emotional complexity by highlighting the ambivalence between impulsive escape and deep emotional needs.

The lyrics of this song deeply reflect the experiences of Generation Z in the United States who often face emotional pressures in romantic relationships in the modern era. Escape behaviors like “long vacation” and “wasted screamin” reflect Generation Z’s tendency to seek release through hedonism, such as parties or spontaneous vacations, often documented on social media. The vulnerability implied in “no makeup” mirrors the “raw authenticity” trend on TikTok, where Generation Z posts unfiltered content to show their vulnerable side, though often disguised with a casual aesthetic. The use of slang like “balls deep” and “beefin” reflects Generation Z’s expressive yet indirect communication style, often seen on Twitter or memes that hide emotional wounds with humor. Phrases like “I’m anythin” and “memories kickin’ in” depict Gen Z’s struggles with low self-esteem and painful nostalgia, often expressed through social media content, reflecting how they process the loss of love on digital platforms.

Table 6. Data Matrix of the Second Stanza of “Nobody Gets Me”

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
How am I supposed to tell ya?	Rhetorical Question: “How am I supposed to”	The singer feels confuse about how to convey his feeling.	Confusion vulnerability Figurative Language and in expressing complex emotions reflect barriers to emotional communication.
Nobody gets me like you	Repetition and Emphasis: “Nobody gets me”	Nobody understands the speaker like her Ex.	Feelings of emotional isolation due to loss of connection, with deep nostalgia for a special relationship.
How am I supposed to let you go?	Rhetorical Questions and Affirmations: “How am I supposed to”	The speaker confused about how to let go of her ex’s from her life.	The inability to move on, with intense longing and feelings of being trapped in past emotions.
Only like myself when I’m with you	Paradox and Metaphor: “Like myself”	The speaker feel that she is able to be herself when she is with her boyfriend	Emotional dependence on an ex’s and feeling valued and able to be herself when with him.

The second stanza of Nobody Gets Me deepens the complex emotions of post-breakup heartbreak, focusing on vulnerability, longing, unrequited love, regret, and self-disappointment, expressed through figurative language rich in meaning. Denotatively, the lyrics depict the speaker confusion in expressing her feelings, emotional isolation due to the loss of a special connection, the inability to move on, and dependence on the ex for self-worth.

Connotatively, the lyrics reveal intense emotional struggle, vulnerability arising from communication barriers, longing and unrequited love from idealizing the ex, regret over failing to let go, self-disappointment due to low self-esteem, and ambivalence between

possessiveness and the need to move on. The rhetorical questions “how am I supposed to tell ya?” and “how am I supposed to let you go?” depict helplessness, with signs of emotional isolation and separation. trauma, reinforcing the myth of the difficulty of expressing or letting go of emotions. “Nobody gets me like you” as a repetition emphasizes isolation, with signs of a lost ideal connection, reflecting the myth of an irreplaceable relationship. The contrast in “anyone but me” shows bitter possessiveness, with signs of idealizing past relationships. The paradox of “only like myself when I’m with you” depicts emotional dependence, marked by fragile self-esteem, illustrating an identity dependent on love. This figurative language deepens emotional complexity by highlighting the contradiction between the desire to reconnect and the inability to move on, creating a powerful introspective narrative.

The lyrics of this song are highly relevant to the experiences of Generation Z in the United States who often face emotional challenges in relationships in the digital age. Phrases like “nobody gets me like you” reflect the common feelings of emotional isolation among Generation Z, who often feel misunderstood despite being digitally connected through social media. The jealousy in “I don’t wanna see you with anyone but me” mirrors Generation Z’s tendency to monitor their exes’ lives through social media, where posts about new partners trigger possessiveness and low self-esteem. The rhetorical question “how am I supposed to let you go?” resonates with Generation Z’s difficulty in moving on, often expressed through content as well. The paradox of “only like myself when I’m with you” reflects Generation Z’s struggle with self-esteem dependent on external validation, particularly from romantic relationships.

Table 7. Data Matrix of the Third Stanza of “Nobody Gets Me”

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Took me out to the ballet	Symbolism: “Ballet”	The speaker demanding of the happy and romantic situation or time with her boyfriend.	Nostalgia for romantic moments that are now painful, signifying the loss of a dream relationship.
You proposed, I went on the road	Contrast and Conflict: “Proposed” vs. “went on the road”	The speaker and her boyfriend are fighting.	The conflict between commitment to love and personal ambition, with regret over choices that led to separation.
You was feelin’ empty, so you left me	Metaphor and Causality: “Feelin’ empty”	The speaker understands why her boyfriend left her	The betrayal by her ex’s partner due to inner dissatisfaction deepened the singer’s emotional wounds.
Now I’m stuck dealin’ with a deadbeat	Slang and Metaphor: “Deadbeat”	The singer is now stuck with her new irresponsible partner	Disappointment with a new bad relationship, contrasted with idealization of the ex’s, reflects emotional regression. It describes self-

Lyric	Figurative Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
			disappointment and longing for the ex.
If I'm real, I deserve better	Conditional and Affirmation: "If I'm real"	The speaker is doing a self-reflection	Self-reflection on self-esteem, with ambivalence between the courage to demand better and self-doubt.
If I was you, I wouldn't take me back	Conditional and Paradoxical: "If I were you"	The speaker is doing self-reflection and wondering.	Extreme self-doubt and acknowledgment of past mistakes, as well as deep feeling of regret.
I pretend when I'm with a man, it's you	Metaphor and Affirmation: "Pretend... it's you"	The speaker pretended that her new partner was her ex when she was with them.	The inability to move on makes the singer see his new lover as the same person from the past.

The third stanza of the lyrics in *Nobody Gets Me* reaches the peak of complex post-breakup emotions, focusing on longing, regret, unrequited love, self-disappointment, vulnerability, and ambivalence in relationships, expressed through figurative language that is rich in meaning and introspective. Denotatively, the lyrics recount the speaker's romantic nostalgia for moments spent with her ex at a ballet performance. Connotatively, through the figurative languages used in the lyrics reveal a deep emotional struggle: longing for an idealized past romance, regret over choices that led to the breakup, unrequited love due to betrayal and idealization of the ex, self-disappointment for being trapped in a bad relationship and self-esteem doubts, vulnerability from being abandoned, and ambivalence between the courage to demand better and self-destructive regret.

The figurative language in this stanza functions as signs that create rich connotative meanings. The symbolism of "ballet" as a signifier refers to a cultural event, but its signified is the painful romanticism of the past, reinforcing the myth of lost ideal love. The contrast between "proposed" and "went on the road" depicts inner conflict, with "road" as a signifier of physical travel but a signified of escape from emotional commitment, reflecting the myth of sacrificing love for ambition. The metaphor "feelin' empty" shows the emotional emptiness of the ex, with the signifier of betrayal leaving a deep wound, reinforcing the connotative meaning of vulnerability due to being abandoned.

The slang "deadbeat" as a signifier refers to the new irresponsible partner, but the signified is SZA's emotional regression, reflecting the contradiction between nostalgia for the ex and current disappointment. The conditional "if I'm real, I deserve better" asserts self-worth, but is balanced by the paradox "if I was you, I wouldn't take me back," where "take me back" as a signifier of reconciliation carries the signifier of extreme self-regret, creating a myth about the struggle of identity post-breakup. The metaphor "pretend... it's you" depicts emotional fantasy, with "it's you" as a marker of a new partner but a symbol of idealizing the ex, reinforcing the connotative meaning of the inability to move on and

longing that hinders healing. This figurative language deepens emotional complexity by highlighting the contradictions between nostalgia, regret, and efforts at self-acceptance.

This song reflects the culture of Generation Z in the United States in dealing with heartbreak through nostalgia, regret, and complex ambivalence. Nostalgia is a common trait among American Generation Z who enjoy reminiscing about romantic moments, such as sitting in a car listening to an old playlist that reminds them of a special date with their ex. The conflict between “proposed” and “went on the road” reflects Generation Z dilemma between love and ambition, where they ponder life choices that lead to the breakdown of relationships. Betrayal and disappointment with “deadbeat” depict their experiences of being trapped in a bad relationship after a breakup. The ambivalence of self-worth in “if I’m real, I deserve better” and “wouldn’t take me back” reflects Generation Z introspection in America, which sometimes emerges spontaneously, reflecting on identity and past mistakes under the night sky. The fantasy in “pretend... it’s you” resonates with Generation Z’s tendency to struggle with moving on, pretending their new partner is their ex to ease their longing.

D. Conclusion

This study analyzed the denotative, connotative, and figurative meanings in the lyrics of the songs Kill Bill, and Nobody Gets Me from SZA's album SOS using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The two songs contain various types of figurative language, with metaphors, hyperbole, paradoxes, and irony being the dominant elements in conveying the emotional complexity of Generation Z in the United States. In addition, this study has analyzed how the complex emotions of Generation Z in the United States are represented through denotative, connotative, and figurative language in these lyrics, as well as the meanings contained within them.

The Kill Bill song represents complex emotions such as jealousy, obsession, and ambivalence through the portrayal of a narrator struggling with feelings toward a former partner. Denotatively, the lyrics describe actions such as spying on an ex or planning revenge, while connotatively, the lyrics reflect the inner conflict between love and hate. Figurative language such as hyperbole and paradox reinforces the intensity of emotions, reflecting the tendency of Generation Z in the United States to express dramatic feelings through social media.

While the song Nobody Gets Me represents vulnerability, longing, and regret through a narrator mourning the loss of a special relationship. Denotatively, the lyrics tell of escapism, post-intimacy conflict, and painful nostalgia, while connotatively, they reveal

emotional isolation and low self-esteem. Figurative language such as metaphors and paradoxes highlights the contradiction between the desire to be loved and feelings of worthlessness, resonating with the experiences of Generation Z in the United States who often feel isolated despite being digitally connected.

This study shows that the lyrics in the SOS album serve not only as entertainment, but also as a cultural reflection that depicts the emotional experiences of Generation Z in the United States in the digital age. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, the connotative meanings and figurative language in these lyrics reveal how SZA captures emotional dynamics such as ambivalence, vulnerability, and nostalgia, which are relevant to the cultural context of Generation Z in the United States.

E. References

- Berrios, R. (2019). What Is Complex/Emotional About Emotional Complexity? *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 1606. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01606>.
- Huyler, D., & McGill, C. M. (2019). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, by John Creswell and J. David Creswell. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc. 275 pages, \$67.00 (Paperback). *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *31*(3), 75–77. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20258>
- Ishar, R., & Irawan, A. M. (n.d.). E-Journal of English Language & Literature Semiotic Analysis of The Denotative and Connotative Meaning on The Beatles' Songs Lyrics. *E Journal of English Language* <http://ejournal.unp.ac.id/index.php/jell> and Literature, *12*(1).
- Jason, L. A., & Glenwick, D. S. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780190243654.001.0001>
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: methods & techniques*. New Age International (P) Ltd.
- Nabila, I., Thamrin, H., & Rusmana, E. (2022). An Analysis of Bts's Selected Song Lyrics: A Study of Denotative, Connotative and Myth Meaning. In *English Education and Applied Linguistic (EEAL) Journal* (Vol. 5, Issue 3).
- Rais, F. M., & Fadillah, D. (2025). Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes on the Lyrics of "HOPE" by XXXTENTACION. *Jurnal Audiens*, *6*(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jas.v6i1.459>

Rohmaniah, A. F., Uin,), & Semarang, W. (n.d.). Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang
Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes.
<https://ejournal.iaiskjmalang.ac.id/index.php/akad/article/view/207>.

Tocharoen, S., & Pataraporn Tapinta, A. (n.d.). A Study of Figurative Language Used in the
Composition of National Anthems 1 F FFFFFFFFFF Thesis advisor.

Twenge, J. M. (2017). iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less
rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood (p. 92).
Atria Books. 65