

The Meaning of Time Appreciation in the Lyrics of “Ima -Even If The World Ends Tomorrow- (今-明日 世界が終わっても-)” by SEVENTEEN: A Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes

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Abstract. This study examines the meaning of time appreciation in the lyrics of the song “Ima -Even If The World Ends Tomorrow- (今-明日 世界が終わっても-)” performed by SEVENTEEN, through the analysis of denotative, connotative, and myth meanings. This study applies a qualitative interpretative method using Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory as the analytical approach. The data of this study consist of song lyrics analyzed through the interpretation of signs and meanings within the lyrics. The results indicate that the lyrics represent an awareness of the finiteness of life, the limitations of time, and the importance of appreciating the present moment. The song emphasizes that the meanings of love, togetherness, and protection are not merely oriented toward the future, but rather toward existential values that exist in the present.

Keyword: semiotics; seventeen; roland barthes; song lyrics

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Literary works are an art form that contain the author’s ideas, imagination, and aesthetic values. Literary works are created to be enjoyed, appreciated, understood, and utilized by society (Damono, 2002). As an art form, the songs also possess great power in conveying messages through the combination of melody and lyrics. A song is a sung text derived from written literary works and performed with musical accompaniment (Ifadah & Aimah, 2012). According to Nugraha (2016) song lyrics are a form of verbal communication that carries a message. When carefully selected, song lyrics can represent meanings equivalent to thousands of words or events and capture the attention of listeners.

The analysis of song lyrics is important because the word choice, symbols, and signs within them often hold hidden meanings. A semiotic approach can be used to uncover these meanings, because semiotics itself is a discipline that deals with signs and the relationships between signs (Santoso & Wahyuningsih, 2019). Roland Barthes states that every text has two dimensions of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation is the actual meaning or a phenomenon that can be perceived by the senses, and can also be described as a basic description (Saleh et al., 2023). Connotation, on the other hand, is the meaning hidden within a word or expression that goes beyond the literal or denotative meaning and is often associated with emotions, culture, or personal experiences (Pohan et al., 2023). Furthermore, Barthes also introduced the concept of myth, which refers to a narrative used by a social group to explain or understand certain aspects of their environment, functioning as a value system that lives and develops within society (Aulianisa & Fairuz, 2020).

SEVENTEEN is a South Korean boy band under Pledis Entertainment, a subsidiary of HYBE Corporation. They are known for their “self-producing” concept, in which the members are directly involved in songwriting, composition, and choreography. Their Japanese song titled “Ima – Even If

The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても –)” reflects themes of love, sacrifice, and an appreciation of life amid extreme circumstances.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several previous studies have shown that semiotic analysis of song lyrics can reveal complex meanings. Pramesti & Oemiati (2022) in “*The Meaning of the Song Lyrics ‘Kataomoi’: A Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes’ Theory*” found that the connotative meaning in the song “Kataomoi” represents deep emotional sacrifice in love and the idealism of a balanced relationship. Aulianisa & Fairuz (2020) in “*The Myth of Sake in Three Enka Song Lyrics by Hibari Misora*” explains that the symbol “sake” functions as a representation of loneliness and emotional escape, reflecting sociocultural myths in Japan regarding how individuals cope with grief. Meanwhile, Dewi & Mustafa (2020) reveals that the connotative meaning and myth within song lyrics represent sincere yet unexpressed love.

These three studies suggest that semiotic analysis has been widely applied in the study of Japanese song lyrics, particularly in relation to the themes of love, grief, and self-sacrifice. Although semiotic studies of Japanese song lyrics have been extensively conducted, most studies still focus on classical songs or traditional romanticism. Research on Japanese songs within the context of contemporary popular music across cultures (Korea–Japan) remains relatively limited. Furthermore, this study examines existential meanings and worldviews rather than focusing solely on personal love, thereby expanding the scope of semiotic analysis within the context of modern culture.

This study aims to analyze the significance of temporal awareness in the lyrics of “*Ima – Even If The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても –)*” in terms of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings, using Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach. This study is expected to contribute to the expansion of semiotic studies in the context of contemporary crosscultural music.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an qualitative interpretive approach. Qualitative research is an approach based on inductive reasoning, which involves drawing conclusions from the specific to the general without statistical analysis. This method focuses on an in-depth understanding of the meanings held by individuals or groups attribute to social or humanitarian issue (Sumja, 2020). Therefore, one of the approaches used in qualitative research is the interpretive approach. The interpretive approach views reality as subjective, shaped through experiences and meanings constructed by the participants. In this study, the researcher plays an active role in understanding the participants’ perspectives, focusing on the interpretation of meaning rather than absolute objectivity (Harnia, 2021).

The data for this study consists of the lyrics to the song “*Ima – Even If The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても-)*” by SEVENTEEN. The study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory, which focuses on identifying denotation, connotation, and mythical meanings. The application of this theory aims to explore the implicit meanings within the song lyrics. Roland Barthes states that language is a system of signs that reflects the views and assumptions prevailing in a society at a given time. He introduces the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth as the foundation of his semiotic analysis (Wibowo, 2013). Denotation refers to the explicit meaning that is directly observable, representing the primary level of meaning. Connotation refers to the meaning embedded within certain signs, which are open to interpretation and can be understood as implicit meanings.

Myth refers to a system of meaning that develops within society as a result of the influence of customs, traditions, and social culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Song Lyrics

Line 1

たったひとつを守りたいんだ

Tatta hitotsu wo mamoritai nda

“There's just one thing I want to hold onto”

Denotatively, this lyric describes how the songwriter wishes to defend something that they hold close to their heart. It demonstrates a stern determination, and never tells us what that something is. Connotatively, it expresses sincerity and unblinking will to cling to what is most important. The word “*Tatta hitotsu*” is used to stress that it is unique, that it cannot be substituted by anything as there are many different ones, but only one which is really significant. Meanwhile, “*mamoritai*” has a feeling of desire to protect, maintain and shelter the love. The element “*nda*” further gives the piece a sense of seriousness, as though the song writer is bleeding his or her heart.

Line 2

少し上がった唇その笑顔を

Sukoshi agatta kuchibiru sono egao wo

“That hint of a smile that plays on your lips”

Denotatively, this lyric paints a picture of someone's smiling face, the person who has captured the songwriter's attention. Connotatively, it portrays that the songwriter admires a smile he/she feels is really something special. *Sukoshi agatta kuchibiru* is a gentle touch of a truly happy face. *Sono egao wo* gives a feeling of comfort, tenderness and love when you are around that smile, giving an idea of affection and wonder over something that may be small yet significant.

Line 3

平凡な日々集め 大人へと

Heibon na hibi atsume otona e to

“We live out our ordinary days and grow up”

Denotatively, this lyric tells about the process of living in everyday life and maturing. Connotatively, it addresses human emotional and personal development that is not defined by one particular moment, but through the silent summation of everyday days. “*Heibon na hibi*” is a term used to refer to that banal everyday existence that when a person thinks about it, has its own meaning. “*Otona e to*”, is indicating the change of emotions that comes with maturity; which is not due to any single event, but a gradual change over time due to experience in life.

Line 4

大変だけど後悔はない

Taihen dakedo koukai wa nai

“It's not easy, but I have no regrets”

Denotatively, this lyric talks of a person who can accept that the journey that they took was not smooth but still has no regrets about it. Connotatively, it displays a feeling of strength, integrity and tolerance. Here there is a hopefulness, a recognition that the trip was difficult, but was worth the effort. The line “*koukai wa nai*” suggests that everything was worthwhile and there is nothing to regret.

Line 5

今日を経て明日に巡り会う喜び

Kyou wo hete ashita ni meguriau yorokobi

“The joy of tomorrow's encounters after today's journey”

Denotatively, this lyric tells about the joy that the songwriter experiences at the end of the day, just because he lived it and had an opportunity to see tomorrow. Connotatively, it is an expression of profound gratitude to the continuation of life, not of great things, but of the unspoken miracle of time going by and another day dawning. It is an ode to normal living.

Line 6

この想い全部が美しい

Kono omoi zenbu ga utsukushii

“This whole feeling is so lovely”

Denotatively, this lyric talks of a person who perceives beauty in all the emotions they experience and an appreciation of emotion itself. Connotatively, it addresses acceptance and appreciation of the full range of human emotions. The term “*utsukushii*” here transcends the mere meaning of beautiful. It stresses that all the emotions, be it happiness or sorrow, have their value in the eyes of the songwriter.

Line 7

「もしも世界最後の夜が来たら」

"Moshimo sekai saigo no yoru ga kitara"

" If the last night of the world were to come”

Denotatively, this lyric talks about the songwriter dreaming of having a last night in this world. It has a connotative meaning of a final moment and the limitations of time. The expression "*sekai saigo no yoru*" does not simply imply the end of the world. It embodies the sense of being on the brink of something, a moment of parting.

Line 8

「僕は君のために何ができる？」

"Boku wa kimi no tame ni nani ga dekiru?"

"What would I be able to do for you?"

Denotatively, this lyric is a question to a beloved one, what can be done to them. Connotatively, it speaks to sincerity, selflessness, and dedication. This sentiment is not simply the result of curiosity, but originates from profound readiness to give, despite the uncertainty or unknown outcome.

Line 9

君に *last dance*

Kimi ni last dance

"To you, the last dance"

Denotatively, this lyric describes of a person who desires to have a final dance with their lover. Connotatively, it's a deeply emotional farewell. The term "last dance" does not only refer to physical movement, but an icon of a beautiful farewell, a last minute with a loved one and is done with utmost sincerity. "Dance" turns out to be an indelible symbol of an approaching separation.

Line 10

まぶしすぎるその笑顔を

Mabushisugiru sono egao wo

"That absolutely blinding smile"

Denotatively, the poem speaks of the light of a smiling face of a lover, which is so bright, it almost blinds. Connotatively, it describes the emotional warmth that radiates from a loved one. The phrase "*Mabushisugiru sono egao wo*" is more than being described as a smile. It turns into a symbol of true warmth, drawing the songwriter in and evoking a sense of awe, while carrying emotional significance.

Line 11

守れるなら もしできるなら

Mamoreru nara moshi dekiru nara

"If I could hold onto that, if I could just do that"

Denotatively, this lyric speaks of how the songwriter desires to guard something, they just needed to have the power or opportunity to do so. Connotatively it shows pure, genuinely, heart-felt love and the willingness to defend what is dear. However, there is more to the wish to protect than there is also the mute consciousness of restriction, a love that is full of hope and is based on the reality of that which is not always under control.

Line 12

僕ら *last dance and last chance*

Bokura last dance and last chance

“Our last dance and last chance”

Denotatively, this lyric talks about a last-minute experience between the songwriter and a person in love with, dancing together in their last time. In connotation, it conveys the emotional value of a parting. The words last dance and last chance go beyond the literal meaning of the words. They address the wish to spend as many more seconds together as possible, and to a melancholic cognizance that time is running out.

Line 13

今夜 世界が終わっても

Konya sekai ga owatte mo

“Even if the whole world ended tonight”

Denotatively, this lyric is the world ending this night the writer of the song imagines it. Connotatively, it exudes a feeling of conclusion and time constraints. “*Sekai ga owatte mo*” goes beyond a literal end of the world. It may symbolize the end of a chapter, the end of a relationship, or the final moments of a journey together.

Line 14

大事にしたいのは 僕らの「今」

Daiji ni shitai no wa bokura no "ima"

“I just want to cherish what it is we have ‘now’”

Denotatively, this song talks about how the songwriter desires to love, defend and preserve the current moment with someone they love. Connotatively, it is an understanding of how precious time together can be. The “*ima*” word (now) is used to emphasize the point that this moment will never be repeated. The writer of the song is subtly yet emphatically stating that he or she has to cherish what they have when they have it.

Line 15

今日を経て明日に巡り会う喜び

Kyou wo hete ashita ni meguriau yorokobi

“The joy of tomorrow's encounters after today's journey”

This is a reiteration of Line 5, serving to drive home the ideas of gratitude and happiness in the life that is being lived, and appreciation of the opportunity to continue on to another day.

Line 16

この想い全部が美しい

Kono omoi zenbu ga utsukushii

“This whole feeling is so lovely”

This restatement of Line 6 reiterates the theme of acceptance and appreciation and how all feelings, the good ones as well as the bad ones are beautiful and should be embraced.

Line 17

「もしも世界最後の夜が来たら」

"Moshimo sekai saigo no yoru ga kitara"

"If the last night of the world were to come”

This lyric repeats Line 7 further intensifying the feeling of awareness of the boundaries of time and the likelihood of an eventual goodbye.

Line 18

「僕は君のために何ができる？」

"Boku wa kimi no tame ni nani ga dekiru?"

"What would I be able to do for you?"

Restating the Line 8, this lyric enhances emotional nature of the song, and makes the songwriter sincere, willing to sacrifice and devote everything to the person he/she loves.

Line 19

君に *last dance*

Kimi ni last dance

“To you, the last dance”

This repetition of Line 9 reinforces the emotionality, especially in describing a parting that is sweet and full of pure emotion.

Line 20

まぶしすぎるその笑顔を

Mabushisugiru sono egao wo

“That absolutely blinding smile”

Echoing Line 10, this repetition reinforces the image of a loved one's smile as a symbol of warmth and sincerity, something that continues to move and captivate the songwriter.

Line 21

守れるなら もしできるなら

Mamoreru nara moshi dekiru nara

“If I could hold onto that, if I could just do that”

This repetition of Line 11 confirms the intensity of the songwriter in hope and readiness to safeguard what is important, despite their understanding that there are things that are out of their reach.

Line 22

僕ら *last dance and last chance*

Bokura last dance and last chance

“Our last dance and last chance”

Returning to Line 12, this repetition highlights the importance of the last moment, considering it something valuable that should be respected in the light of a scarcity of time.

Line 23

今夜 世界が終わっても

Konya sekai ga owatte mo

“Even if the whole world ended tonight”

This repetition of the Line 13 supports the theme of time limitations and the end of something that is shared.

Line 24

大事にしたいのは 僕らの「今」

Daiji ni shitai no wa bokura no "ima"

“I just want to cherish what it is we have ‘now’”

Once again, following Line 14, this lyric reminds the importance of being there, to keep now as something that cannot be replaced, particularly when time together is slipping away.

Line 25

世界最後の夜が来たら

Sekai saigo no yoru ga kitara

“If the last night of the world were to come”

This repetition of the lyric (also present in Lines 7 and 17) develops on the repetition of the theme of impermanence and the silent necessity of parting.

Line 26

大事にしたいのは 僕らの「今」

Daiji ni shitai no wa bokura no "ima"

“I just want to cherish what it is we have ‘now’”

This last repetition of Lines 14 and 24 is a complete circle back to the beginning, a reminder at the end that it is the present moment that we are fully present in that we will never have it again.

Mythical Meanings in the Song Lyrics

The mythical meaning found in the lyrics of “*Ima – Even If The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても)*” emphasizes the concept of modern romanticism, namely that true love is not measured by promises of eternity or certainty about the future, but is found in the the present moment. The love depicted transcends time and space, representing a form of “existential love” that can only be understood through lived experience. From the perspective of Barthes’s semiotic, the myth constructed in this song illustrates how modern society interprets love as an emotional and spiritual force that gives meaning to life, even when faced with the possibility of the world’s destruction. Therefore, the lyrics of “*Ima – Even If The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても)*” are not merely a musical work, but also a symbol that reflects the human understanding of love, time, and existence in a transient world.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the denotative, connotative, and mythical analysis of the song lyrics “*Ima – Even If The World Ends Tomorrow – (今 – 明日 世界が終わっても)*”, it can be concluded that the song conveys the importance of valuing time through an awareness of its finitude and the significance of cherishing shared moments in the present.

At the denotative level, the lyrics depict simple everyday life, such as going through ordinary days, personal growth, and interaction with loved ones, including expressions such as smiles and moments of togetherness. This shows that, on a literal level, the song focuses on realistic life experiences.

At the connotative level, however, the lyrics convey deeper meanings such as sincere love, emotional maturity, and an awareness of the significance of every shared moment with loved ones. Through Roland Barthes’s semiotic approach, the mythical meaning constructed in the song forms the concept of modern romanticism, in which love is understood as a meaningful experience in the present.

Therefore, the song emphasizes that valuing time means acknowledging the finitude of life and making every moment precious, especially in light of the possibility of separation.

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