A Semiotic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in The Hustle Movie

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Abstract

This study investigates the denotative and connotative meanings in *The Hustle* movie using Barthes's semiotic theory. The main objective is to describe how both levels of meaning—denotation and connotation—are represented throughout the film. To enrich the analysis, Dickins's framework is also employed to identify the types of connotative meanings that appear. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative method with data sourced from *The Hustle* movie. The data collection process involves downloading, watching, reading, identifying, and coding scenes. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data presentation, description, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that denotative meanings in the film represent the literal elements of the scenes, while connotative meanings unveil deeper symbolic messages. The characters' personalities are reflected through these meanings: Penny is portrayed as casual and humorous, whereas Josephine appears formal and refined. Furthermore, the study identifies several scenes that visually depict cultural stereotypes, emphasizing social norms and values prevalent in specific contexts. These elements contribute to a range of emotional responses from the audience. The study concludes that *The Hustle* effectively employs semiotic elements to convey layered meanings and stimulate audience engagement.

Keywords: ***connotative, denotative, movie***

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social creatures that in daily life cannot live without any other human being, and communication is an important part of it. When people communicate, they are frequently stuck by the symbols and variety of signals that are used while interpreting communication. Sometimes people forget that a symbol or sign has a complex meaning, not only to stand for one meaning. When people try to figure out what the meaning of the sign is, there is a study called semiotic. Semiotics has many focuses; the focus of this research is to reveal the meaning of the denotative and

connotative that manifested in the character's utterances and pictures of the scenes in this movie and to identify the types of connotative meanings that appear.

Denotation refers to a sign's literal meaning, which is identical to the definition given in a dictionary and is obvious to the reader. Connotation, as defined by Chandler (1994), is the phrase used to describe a word's sociocultural and "personal" connections (ideological, affective, etc.), which are frequently connected to the interpreter's class, age, gender, race, and other traits. Connotation is more than just personal meanings; it also has a context that a culture creates, meaning that some implications are known by all of its members but may not be comprehended by individuals from other cultures. A positive connotation is a word that has a good association, it makes the word seem pleasant in the context it's used. A negative connotation is a word that depicts the subject or object in an unflattering light. Neutral connotation is when a word expresses its meaning without subjectivity, positive or negative connotation. According to Dickins (2018) in his book entitled *Discourse in Translation,* connotative meanings have some types, such as associative meaning, attitudinal meaning, affective meaning, allusive meaning, reflected meaning, selection restriction-related meaning, collocative meaning, geographical dialect-related meaning, temporal dialect-related meaning, sociolect-related meaning, social register-related meaning, emphasis (emphatic meaning), thematic meaning (theme–rheme meaning), grounding meaning and locution-overriding illocutionary meaning. This research focused on the denotative and connotative because the researcher is interested in what denotative and connotative words that are used by the character who is a con artist, which is also the reason for choosing *The Hustle* movie because the movie is about women con artists. There are lots of denotative and connotative aspects in this movie that are mostly used to lie and deceive.

This research is considered to be important because it makes it possible to analyze how audiences accept, reject, or reframe the real meanings and the message that the movie author tried to tell the audience. Finding something's true meaning is crucial. Because if a misunderstanding happens, people would find it hard to realize the real message that the author tried to point out. Understanding the true meaning of symbols or signs utilized in communication processes requires the application of semiotics. This research is also important because this research investigates the other aspects of denotation and connotation with the types of connotations and the emotional terms that have not been answered in previous research.

There is already some research that discusses the semiotic analysis of denotative and connotative meaning, one of which is made by Wulandari (2020) *Analysis of Denotation, Connotation, And Myth In The Gentlemen Movie.* That research is focused on describing denotation, connotation, and myth represented through The Gentlemen Movie's characters' utterances. Therefore, to complete the previous research, the researcher uses the semiotic theory by Roland Barthes to examine the denotative and connotative meanings conveyed by the character's utterances and pictures of the scene in the movie, also as another approach to complete the previous study, the researcher adds additional theory retrieved from James Dickins to identify the types of connotative meanings that appear.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted using the qualitative descriptive method. According to Punch's (1998:29) explanations, qualitative research does not use numerical data. Additionally, he claims that the research question and methodology are first more general and then get more specific as the study goes on. According to Creswell (1994), the purpose of the descriptive technique of research is to gather data on the current state of the environment. Descriptive statistics enable researchers to give a different context, a richer picture, or an improved representation in qualitative research in order to study the phenomenon of interest, that is why the researcher uses the descriptive qualitative method.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The topic of the research is to describe the denotative and connotative meanings in characters' utterances and the pictures of the scene in the movies based on the Barthes (1978) theory, also the types of connotations based on Dickins (2019) and the terms of connotation in *The Hustle* movie. The researcher analyzes the characters' utterances and the picture of the scenes in the movie.

Denotation and Connotation in the Characters' Utterances



Picture 1
(Penny talks to a rich man and tried to con him)

The man : *Tiffany is the slut?*
Penny : *So, I roughed up these guys and they said to me, "Premium-grade Australian* ***meat is on auction*** *tomorrow." That fits my sister's description perfectly, don't you think?*

The denotative meaning of meat is the flesh of an animal. The connotative meaning of *meat* refers to the human body. The "*meat"* that Penny mentions refers to her sister who got kidnapped. So, meat means human's body and "*Australian meat"* means that Penny's sister is an Australian. The connotative type of *meat* has a sociolect-related meaning. Sociolects-related generally emerge over time among people who share similar social backgrounds or surroundings, such as a profession or an education. When people spend a lot of time with people or groups of people, the language may alter and become more like those around us. The word *meat* has a negative connotation because it is representing the human body not in a good way.



Picture 2
(Penny and Josephine talk about Medusa)

Josephine : *Yes, clearly you're in a class of your own.*
Penny : *Uh, except, of course there's* ***Medusa****.*

The denotative meaning of *Medusa* is a monster in Greek mythology, one of the Gorgons with snakes for hair like her sisters and the ability to turn anyone who looks at her stone. The connotative meaning of *Medusa* is that it was a name for a woman who is a professional con artist. The connotative type of *Medusa* is an allusive meaning. When a phrase refers to a related word or quotation and thus the sense of the word or quotation becomes part of the overall sense it is called allusive meaning. The word *Medusa* refers to a professional woman con artist. The word *Medusa* has a neutral connotative because the word *Medusa* is a term that means without judgment and without a positive or negative connotation, so it is said to be neutral.



Picture 3
(Josephine was asked where will be Penny's next journey)

Josephine : *Where will the **wind** take you next?*
Penny : *I'm going to this town on the Med… Beaumont-Sur-Mer. Get this, apparently, it's crawling with rich dudes.*

The denotative meaning of *wind* is the discernible, natural flow of air, particularly as an air current flowing in a specific direction. The connotative meaning of *wind* is that according to the context of the sentence that Josephine uses, it is "*Where will the wind take you next?"*. In this context, the wind means "the move without prior thought or planning". So, the sentence means where is the next destination. The connotative type of *wind* is a social register-related meaning. As the speaker's way of using language differently under different circumstances. In the data, Josephine uses the word *wind* as the term to talk with Penny, because the circumstances are not too formal, but also not too casual either, it is their first time meeting each other. The word *wind* has a neutral connotation, because it does not have judgmental meaning, and does not have positive or negative associations.



Picture 4
(Josephine told to Brigitte that she met another con artist)

Brigitte : *May I ask the reason for their involvement?*
Josephine : *I encountered a sort of pale **gypsy**, who thought herself something of a grifter.*

The denotative meaning of *gypsy* is a person who belongs to a historically nomadic people that originated in northern India and is now mostly found in Europe and in minor numbers elsewhere in the world. The connotative meaning of gypsy is that gypsy is an exonym for people who are thieves and dishonest. The connotative type of *gypsy* has an allusive meaning. When the expression refers to a related word or quotation and thus the sense of the word or quotation becomes part of the overall sense, it is spoken of as having a figurative sense, it is called allusive meaning. The word *gypsy* has a negative connotation because it has a judgmental meaning, *gypsy* is a term that represents a thief.



Picture 5
(Penny found out that Josephine is also a con artist)

Brigitte : *Do we have a problem?*
Penny : *Ah, Captain Pantsuit, in on it as well? All wrapped up in this **kebab** of lies?*

The denotative meaning of *kebab* is a dish that came from Turki, it consists of ground meat and vegetables that are put together in a stick. The connotative meaning of kebab is that in the context of what Penny has said, the ground meat and the vegetables in the kebab represent every lie that Penny got from Josephine. The connotative type of *kebab* is a social register-related meaning. As the speaker's particular method of employing language in various situations. It is called social register-related meaning when you behave substantially differently when talking to a friend than when talking to a formal dinner party or during a job interview. The word *kebab* has a neutral connotation because this term does not have any positive or negative association. The word *kebab* does not judge anything.



Picture 6
(Josephine teaches Penny about how to be a great con artist)

Penny : *Why all the theatrics? You're hot. That's enough.*
Josephine: *It is not enough.* ***"Hot"*** *is not a career.*

The denotative meaning of *hot* is a high degree of heat. Hot could also contain spices or peppers in food which produce a burn sensation. The connotative meaning of hot is that according to the context, hot means sexy or pretty. Americans commonly use the word "hot" to express attractive or sexy people. The connotation type of *hot* is an attitudinal meaning. It is an expression that does not merely denote the referent in a neutral way. The word *hot* literally means a high degree of heat, but in this context, it means sexy or attractive. The word *hot* has a positive connotation because it has a positive association, this term has the meaning of telling someone that they are pretty or attractive.



Picture 7
(Josephine and Penny act as a royal family to con a rich man)

Josephine: *Oh, once the eldest daughter consummates her marriage, it is the second daughter's divine right, either to the bed with the groom or fight him in a duel. In either case, your performance shall be judged by a panel of courtiers. But you don't mind, do you, darling?*
Penny : (Penny started singing) *Second sister gets* ***sloppy*** *seconds.*

The denotative meaning of *sloppy* is messy or untidy. The connotative meaning of *sloppy* is that in the context of the sentence that Penny said, she sings "*Second sister gets sloppy seconds."* The song is about the tradition that Penny and Josephine made up, sloppy means coitus, and the song means the second sister gets to have coitus after the older sister. The connotation type of *sloppy* is attitudinal meaning. It is a term that does more than simply denote the referent. The word *sloppy* has a negative connotation because this term has a negative association, it represents messy and untidy.



Picture 8
(Josephine paid her assistants except for Penny)

Josephine : *Albert, you're 10.*
Penny **:** *Still wouldn't* ***bang*** *you, Albert.*

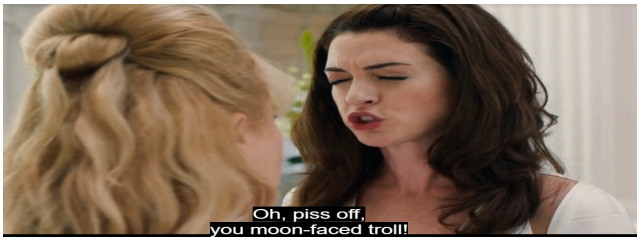
The denotative meaning of *bang* is an abruptly loud noise. The connotative meaning of *bang* is having coitus. In the context of the sentence that Penny used, it means that, even though Albert gets 10,000 bucks, Penny still would not have coitus with Albert, whatever it is. The connotation type of *bang* is an attitudinal meaning. It is a term that denotes more than just the referent. The word *bang* means abruptly loud noise, but according to the context of the data, it means having coitus. The word *bang* has a neutral connotation because the term *bang* does not give a positive association or even a negative association.



Picture 9
(Penny asked about her payment)

Penny : *What do you mean, "thank you all"? Where's my cashola? Where's my* ***cut?*** *Where's the big chunk of... uh-uh... To come in to me, of the cash?*
Josephine : *The student doesn't earn wages until after graduation.*

The denotative meaning of *cut* is to take something or a component of something away, using a sharp thing such as a knife. The connotative meaning of *cut* is that in the context of the conversation that Penny has with Josephine, Josephine does not give the money to Penny, and that makes Penny say "*Where's my cut",* in this context, cut means "part". So, Penny means "Where is my part?" The connotation type of *cut* is sociolect-related meaning. Sociolects develop throughout time among people who have similar social origins or circumstances, such as a career or an education. The word *cut* has a neutral connotation. The word *cut* does not have a negative association or even a positive association.



Picture 10
(Josephine yelled at Penny)

Penny : *Well, you don't really affect my life that much.*
Josephine : *Oh, piss off, you moon-faced* *troll!*

The denotative meaning of the *troll* is a hideous being portrayed as either a giant or a dwarf. The connotative meaning of the *troll* is a person who purposely creates a disagreement or makes inflammatory or harsh comments in an effort to annoy, disturb, or physically harm individuals. The connotation type of *troll* has an affective meaning. Affective meaning is the type of meaning sent by the tonal register, or "the speaker's tone of voice." The way Josephine says *troll* is by screaming at Penny, it shows how Josephine felt. She was angry at Penny which is why she said *troll* in a high tone of voice. The word *troll* is a negative connotation because the word *troll* casts the person or thing in an unfavorable light. The word gives a negative association.



Picture 11
(Josephine drags Penny outside)

Penny **:** *Hands off the* ***merchandise****. I bruise like a peach.*
Josephine : *Shall we settle this with a friendly wager?*

The denotative meaning of *merchandise* is the process of attempting to sell something by promoting or showing it. The connotative meaning of merchandise is that in the context of the sentence and the situation, merchandise means body. "*Hands off the merchandise"* is a phrase that means a command made by a person when they do not want to engage or be touchy in some physical contact with another person. The connotation type of *merchandise* has an affective meaning. Affective meaning is transmitted by the tonal register, or "the speaker's tone of voice." The way Penny says "*Hands off the merchandise"* is in a high tone of voice, she was feeling hurt by Josephine who squished her arm to drag her out of the building. The word *merchandise* is a neutral connotation because the word does not give any positive association or even negative association.



Picture 12
(Penny is shocked after knowing that the boy is the inventor of Yaburnt)

Guillaume : *Yes, that is Thomas Westerburg. He is the inventor of YaBurnt.*
Penny **:** *Shut my* ***back door.***

The denotative meaning of the *back* is the rear part of the human body, extending from the shoulders to the hips. The denotative meaning of the *door* is a barrier that is hinged, sliding, or rotating and is located in the framework of a cabinet or at the entry to a building, room, or vehicle. The connotative meaning of the *door* means Penny's bottom. The context of Penny's utterance is showing how surprised she was by saying "*Shut my back door"*. The back door means Penny's bottom. Such as "Oh My God", or "Shut up!" These are some phrases to express the surprise feeling. The connotation type of *back door* has a collocative meaning. When it gets additional significance to its denotative meaning due to the significance of another phrase that it regularly co-occurs with to form a well-known phrase. The phrase *back door* has a collocative meaning because together, it means bottom. The word *back door* in the "*shut my back door"* phrase, has a neutral connotation. The word does not have a negative association or positive association, the phrase is just to express the feeling.



Picture 13
(Josephine doing an experiment on Penny)

Josephine **:** *Okay, Penny. Here comes the* ***choo-choo train.*** *Open wide. What is that?*
Penny : *A French fry. Can I have another one?*

The denotative meaning of *train* is a group of connected carriages, automobiles, or trucks that travel together along a railway while being propelled by an engine. The denotative meaning of *choo-choo* is the sound of a railroad train utilized by young children or adults speaking to young children. The connotative meaning of *train* according to the context of the situation, means food. "Choo-choo train" is a phrase that people use when they want to feed their children. Penny plays the role of a blind person, which is why Josephine said "*Here comes the choo-choo train",* so Thomas, who watched all of that, could believe that Penny is really blind. The connotation type of *choo-choo train* has a collocative meaning. The word *choo-choo* is an imitating sound of a train and *train* means a group of connected carriages. Together, it is collocative and is a phrase called *choo-choo train.* The phrase *choo-choo train* has a neutral connotation, it does not give a favorable association or even a judgmental association.



Picture 14
(A woman approaching Josephine)

The woman **:** *That colour looks* ***best*** *on you.*
Josephine : *Danke.*

The denotative meaning of *boss* is a person in command of a team, organization, or group of employees. The connotative meaning of *boss* is that according to the context of the utterance, it is a

compliment, which means the word *boss* means "good" or "cool". The connotation type of *boss* is an attitudinal meaning. It is a broad phrase that refers to more than just the referent. The word *boss* means a profession, but in this context, it is a compliment. The word *boss* has a positive connotation. The word has a positive connotation because it is used to compliment, the word has a positive connotation because it has a positive association and means complementing.



Picture 15
(Josephine mad at Penny)

Josephine : *Honey, I'm home. Oh, please. You think I can't handle the Real* ***Housewives of Essex?*** *It took a considerable amount of limoncello and several rounds of arm wrestling, but c'est la vie.*
Penny : *The bet's off, Jo.*

The denotative meaning of *Housewives* is a woman who spends her days taking care of her family. The denotative meaning of *Essex is* an English county in the southeast that borders the North Sea and the Thames Estuary. The connotative meanings of *Housewives of Essex* represent a stereotype in the United Kingdom that applies to a lady who is considered promiscuous and stupid, traits jokingly associated with ladies from Essex. The connotation type of *Housewives of Essex* is a Sectional restriction-related meaning. It is a semantic constraint that a word imposes on the environment in which it occurs are known as sectional constraints. The word *housewives* mean a woman whose primary occupation is caring for her family. Essex is an English county in the southeast. *Housewives of Essex* turns into a representation of a stereotype in the United Kingdom that applies to a lady who is considered promiscuous and stupid, traits jokingly associated with ladies from Essex. The phrase *Housewives of Essex* has a negative connotation because the phrase is basically a judgmental stereotype that is popular in the United Kingdom, it refers to a promiscuous and stupid lady.

Denotation and Connotation in the Picture of the Scenes



Picture 16
(The Dress)

The denotative meaning of the dress is a one-piece outfit, often worn by women and girls. It comprises a top piece that hangs down over the legs and covers the body. The connotative meaning of the dress is that from the color of the dress, it makes Penny could use it as a camouflage into a garbage bag. This is Penny's unique skill as a con artist. That means, before doing her action, she already knows what to prepare by analyzing the location of her target and choosing the perfect outfit not only to look great but also to camouflage just in case some of her previous victims found him like what happens in this situation.



Picture 17
(The Novel Book)

The denotative meaning of a novel is a fictional book-length prose tale that portrays character and action with a certain amount of realism. It has many genres. The connotative meaning of a novel that Josephine read is the French edition entitled *Le bizarre incident du chien pendant la nuit* by Mark Huddon. The novel showed that the character Josephine is not only smart and likes literature, but she also knows another language in this situation, French. Knowing more than one language makes you a better con artist because it can increase your victims.



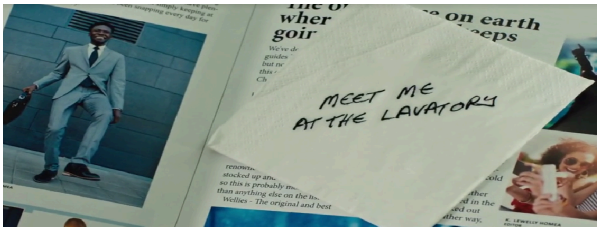
Picture 18
(The Cheers Gesture)

The denotative meaning of champagne is a white sparkling wine produced in the former Champagne region of France. The connotative meaning of the "cheers" gesture while holding a glass of champagne is an expression of joyful exclamation to applaud someone or show appreciation for a job well done, in this situation Josephine applauds Penny because as a fellow con artist, Penny succeeds in deceiving the rich man.



Picture 19
(The Casual Restaurant)

The denotation meaning of a casual restaurant or a sit-down restaurant establishment delivers reasonably priced food in a relaxed setting. Table service is often offered in informal dining establishments, with the exception of those that provide buffets. The connotative meaning of it is that the casual restaurant in the picture above seems pricey because the waiters seem to be using a uniform the same as the uniform in the fancy restaurant. The view of yachts owned by rich people also shows that this location is filled by rich people. It means there will be many new targets for Josephine.



Picture 20
(The Note)

The denotative meaning of the note is a quick record of information, subjects, or ideas put down as a memory help. In that note there is a message "*Meet me at the lavatory*" which means that the person who wrote the note wants to meet Penny at the lavatory. The connotative meaning of the note "Meet me at the lavatory", western people usually flirt in many different ways. In this situation, it is common for some people to flirt and "have fun" even with new people. That is Penny got misunderstood and thought that the man who sent the message wanted to "have fun" with her.



Picture 21
(The Cry)

The denotative meaning of crying is an action that produces tears from your eyes because you are unhappy or hurt. The connotative meaning of crying is that, when a con artist does their action to deceive people, crying will be useful to make people believe what you said. Con artists commonly use sadness to move people's hearts because many people have empathy. The urge to help other people, and crying will make people believe whatever you say.



Picture 22
(The Yellow Teeth)

The denotative meaning of yellow teeth is teeth that turn yellow because of bad oral hygiene, tobacco use, specific medications, particular meals and drinks, and aging. The connotative meaning of yellow teeth is that it is a common joke in the United States that British people have bad teeth. This stereotype is based on the fact that the British historically did have poor dental hygiene. Until now, some people still picture the Briton as a person who has yellow teeth, for example, in one of the episodes in *The Simpson* series, there is a book with horrifying images of British people with big, crooked teeth, like Prince Charles, Sherlock Holmes, and guards at Buckingham Palace.



Picture 23
(The Iron Underwear)

The denotative meaning of underwear is clothes that are generally worn adjacent to the skin underneath other garments. The connotative meaning of the iron underwear is that according to European history around 1400, when medieval men were thousands of miles away fighting in other lands, they could be guaranteed their wives wouldn't have sex with anyone else because of this invention. Men's perception of women's sexual desires is shaped by the iron underwear, which suggests that women are so desperate that only confinement can keep them in check. In women's perception, it represents a vision of masculine dominance and harshness towards women.



Picture 24
(The Ring)

The denotative meaning of the ring is a little circular band worn on a finger as an adornment or a symbol of power, usually made of costly metal and frequently set with one or more jewels. The connotative meaning of the ring is that ring is a symbol of a relationship, in this situation Howard wanted to live together with Josephine as his husband, but when he finds out that they have to live together with Josephine's crazy sister, he suddenly cancelled the engagement and leave Josephine with the ring still in her finger. It means that Howard was not truly in love with Josephine, he also left the ring for her, because Howard is a rich man and he did not even care if he did not get his ring back.

According to the findings the researcher found out that the character Penny is the one who uses the most connotation in her dialogue. Connotations create the tone and define one's objectives when

speaking; they can provoke specific emotions or reactions or serve to provide distinct impressions of objects. It makes the character Penny personality a casual person, who is likely to talk informally by using connotation words often to light up the conversation. Unlike the character Josephine, Josephine only uses connotation phrases several times. It is shown that the personality of Josephine is more like a formal person who likes to speak properly. According to the findings, the characters in the movie mostly use the type of connotation of attitudinal meaning in their conversation. Furthermore, the emotional term that mostly appears is a neutral connotation and negative connotation, which means that the character elicits negative feelings in other characters. The number of positive connotations is very small.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the researcher found out that in The Hustle movie, the denotation describes the literal meaning of things that the researcher found in this movie, and connotation describes the underlying messages. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the researcher found out that in The Hustle movie, the denotation describes the literal meaning of things that the researcher found in this movie, and connotation describes the underlying messages or feelings that a film causes, which would make the audience of the movie would feel several emotions while watching it. The connotation that appears in the movie describes the character's trait which is Penny’s personality is a casual person, who is likely to talk informally by using connotation words often to light up the conversation. Unlike the character Josephine, who only uses connotation phrases several times. It is shown that the personality of Josephine is more like a formal person who likes to speak properly. According to the research findings, there is a connotation that the researcher found in this movie that describes a stereotype. Through the picture, it describes a stereotype that is popular in a country. Messages or feelings that a film causes, which would make the audience of the movie feel several emotions while watching it.

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