

A Historical Analysis of Chairul Anwar's Poetries Entitled "Aku" and "Tak Sepadan"

Komang Sathya Yogindra Aditia^{1*}, Syamsurijal Syamsurrijal², Sutarman Sutarman³, Agus Syahid⁴, Hilda Hastuti⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas Bumigora

Corresponding Author:

Komang Sathya Yogindra Aditia¹

¹2004020003@universitasbumigora.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the semantic elements in Chairil Anwar's poems "Aku" and "Tak Sepadan" by applying theories from linguistic semantics. Semantics, as described by Leech (1981), is the study of meaning in language beyond its surface structure. The poems were selected due to their emotional intensity and their reflection of personal and national identity during a time of political upheaval. Using Leech's classification of meaning, including denotative, connotative, and affective meanings. This study explores how language in Anwar's poetry functions beyond literal interpretation. The method used is qualitative descriptive, where each line of the poems is analyzed based on its lexical choices and semantic implications. Palmer (1981) states that semantics focuses on how meaning is structured through language, especially in poetic texts where context and association are key to interpretation. The findings reveal that "Aku" expresses resistance and self-assertion through strong connotative expressions, while "Tak Sepadan" uses affective meanings to convey personal loss and emotional disillusionment. This research contributes to understanding how semantic analysis can be applied to Indonesian poetry and offers insight into the historical and ideological contexts embedded in linguistic expression...

Keywords: *semantics, lexical meaning, Chairil Anwar, denotation, connotation, Indonesian poetry.*

Introduction

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language, both literal and implied. In literary studies, semantics plays an important role in helping readers and researchers interpret the underlying messages embedded in an author's linguistic choices. It allows for communication to be more complex and layered, particularly in poetry, where messages are often indirect and emotionally charged. Leech (1990) defines semantics as the study of meaning communicated through language, encompassing both denotative (literal) and connotative (associative) aspects. Palmer (1990) supports this by stating that semantics focuses on how meaning is constructed and understood through word choice and context. Yule (1996) emphasized that semantics provides the foundation for understanding how language users interpret signs, symbols, and sentence structures to uncover intended meaning.

Chairil Anwar's poetry, especially "Aku" and "Tak Sepadan", presents a rich field for semantic analysis. These two poems represent distinct emotional tones, one asserting defiance and identity, the other expressing loss and disillusionment. Known as a leading figure of *Angkatan '45*, Chairil Anwar's writing reflects not only his personal experiences

but also Indonesia's sociopolitical climate in the aftermath of colonialism. His poetic style is known for being direct yet multilayered, allowing for multiple interpretations that are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts. Semantics helps to uncover how these layers of meaning are constructed and communicated.

This study is particularly relevant because although Chairil Anwar's poetry has been widely discussed, most analyses have focused on philosophical or stylistic aspects without a deeper examination of how **semantic theory** can explain the meaning of his language. Sibagariang et al. (2024) conducted a semantic analysis of "*Aku*", highlighting the poem's lexical and grammatical meanings and their contribution to the overall interpretation. Meinanda and Arsanti (2024) explored the semantic aspects of "*Aku*", focusing on lexical, grammatical, referential, and figurative meanings, revealing the poet's subjective feelings and social unrest. Hartono (2020) explored meaning fields in nationalist Indonesian literature using semantic theory but excluded Chairil Anwar from the analysis. Meanwhile, Nurhalimah and Setiawan (2022) applied semantic concepts to modern Indonesian poetry, showing how affective and associative meanings reveal the poet's intent, but focused on works by Sapardi Djoko Damono.

This research aims to fill that gap by using semantic theory to examine how Chairil Anwar conveys complex meaning through lexical and structural choices in "*Aku*" and "*Tak Sepadan*". The objectives of this research are to identify the types of meaning; denotative, connotative, and affective found in these poems, to analyze how these meanings contribute to the poet's emotional and ideological expression, and to explore the relevance of semantic theory in interpreting Indonesian modern poetry. The novelty of this research lies in its focused application of Leech's and Palmer's semantic frameworks to a pair of poems that, when read together, represent the full emotional spectrum of Chairil Anwar's poetic identity. By combining linguistic theory with literary analysis, this study offers a new approach to understanding how meaning is encoded and interpreted in Indonesian literature.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is interpretive in nature and focuses on understanding the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or cultural phenomenon. This method is appropriate for analyzing literary texts such as poetry, where the aim is to uncover implied, symbolic, and layered meanings beyond literal interpretation. The analysis centers on semantic theory, particularly the classification of meaning proposed by Leech (1990), which includes denotative, connotative, affective, and thematic meaning. Palmer (1981) emphasizes that semantics involves examining how meaning is expressed and interpreted through language, especially in figurative and poetic forms.

The data source in this study is two poems by Chairil Anwar, "*Aku*" and "*Tak Sepadan*", which were chosen due to their lexical richness and relevance to historical and personal themes. The texts were obtained from verified literary anthologies and digital poetry databases. The technique of data collection refers to the documentation method, where written texts are selected and analyzed based on specific linguistic criteria. Sugiyono (2022) states that document analysis is useful for gathering data in language studies because it provides access to naturally occurring textual evidence.⁴ The collection process involved: (1) determining selection criteria (published poetic works by Chairil Anwar that show lexical complexity and thematic depth), (2) obtaining and authenticating the poem texts, (3) conducting repeated readings to identify prominent semantic features, and (4) marking lines or words with significant denotative, connotative, or affective potential.

The data analysis technique is based on content analysis using the framework of semantic classification by Leech (1990). The researcher first segmented each poem into lexical units (words or phrases) and coded them according to the types of meaning, conceptual, affective, connotative, and thematic. Each lexical unit was then interpreted within the context of the poem's overall theme, Chairil Anwar's biography, and the socio-historical background of 1940s Indonesia. This was followed by interpretative comparison between the two poems to observe how each poem uniquely expresses rebellion, identity, alienation, and longing.

To ensure the credibility of interpretation, triangulation was applied by reviewing multiple sources: literary analyses, historical records of Anwar's time, and academic discussions of his poetic style. Denzin and Lincoln (2023) explain that triangulation enhances validity by comparing diverse sources and perspectives, especially when interpreting literary or symbolic data.⁶ Discussions with literary scholars and linguistic experts were also conducted to confirm the categorization and interpretation of the semantic elements found in the poems.

This method ensures that the study captures the full depth of meaning in Chairil Anwar's poetry and aligns with the purpose of the research to examine how semantic meaning is constructed in Indonesian modern poetry and how it reflects personal and national identity.

Results

Language Style Findings in *The Mourning Bird*

Table 1. Language Style Findings in *The Mourning Bird*

No.	Poem Source	Line / Lexical Item	Identified Semantic Meaning
1.	<i>Aku</i>	"Aku ini binatang jalang"	Connotative Meaning
2.	<i>Aku</i>	"Dari kumpulannya terbang"	Affective Meaning
3.	<i>Aku</i>	"Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi"	Thematic Meaning
4.	<i>Aku</i>	"Biar peluru menembus kulitku"	Affective / Connotative Meaning
5.	<i>Tak Sepadan</i>	"Kau sangka duka dalam dada dapat terpisah kata semata?"	Affective Meaning
6.	<i>Tak Sepadan</i>	"Kau kecewakan cinta yang kupupuk"	Connotative Meaning
7.	<i>Tak Sepadan</i>	"Hanya tinggal kenangan yang menyisahkan"	Affective / Conceptual Meaning
8.	<i>Tak Sepadan</i>	"Cinta kita telah usai di batas mimpi"	Thematic / Connotative Meaning

Discussion

Data 1 Identified as Connotative Meaning

Poem: *Aku*

Line: "*Aku ini binatang jalang*"

Analysis

This line is one of the most iconic expressions in Indonesian modern poetry. The lexical item "*binatang jalang*" does not refer to an animal in the literal sense, but instead conveys a symbolic rejection of societal norms and an assertion of individual identity. This connotative meaning arises from the cultural and emotional associations the phrase carries. According to Leech, connotative meaning involves the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content.¹ The word "*jalang*" (wild/untamed) amplifies the speaker's rebellious nature and positions him outside of conventional society. This line aligns with the poet's image as a nonconformist figure during Indonesia's struggle for independence, and its connotative impact cannot be separated from the sociopolitical context of the 1940s.

Data 2 Identified as Affective Meaning

Poem: *Aku*

Line: "*Dari kumpulanannya terbangun*"

Analysis

This line expresses a strong affective meaning. The phrase "*terbangun*" (cast out) evokes a deep sense of exclusion and loneliness. Leech explains that affective meaning relates to the emotional effect intended by the speaker toward the listener or reader. This sense of being exiled from a group suggests that the speaker feels alienated or disconnected from society, which mirrors Anwar's own personal struggles with identity and acceptance. The use of passive voice (*terbangun*) adds to the speaker's feeling of being acted upon not in control thus increasing the emotional weight.

Data 3 Identified as Thematic Meaning

Poem: *Aku*

Line: "*Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi*"

Analysis

Here, the poet conveys a thematic meaning. Leech states that thematic meaning is influenced by how information is organized and emphasized in a text.¹ The line places emphasis on immortality, endurance, and legacy. "*Seribu tahun*" (a thousand years) is not meant to be interpreted literally but symbolically, as a desire to transcend time and mortality. Thematically, it reflects the speaker's longing to be remembered a sentiment often associated with artists and revolutionaries. The placement of this line at the end of the poem reinforces its thematic role as a declaration of self-worth and ambition.

Data 4 Identified as Affective / Connotative Meaning

Poem: Aku

Line: “*Biar peluru menembus kulitku*”

Analysis

This line delivers both affective and connotative meanings. On the one hand, it expresses emotional intensity, a readiness to face death which is affective. On the other hand, the image of a bullet piercing the skin carries symbolic meaning of bravery and sacrifice, reflecting connotative meaning. Leech classifies such expressions as carrying dual semantic loads, both emotional impact and associative richness. This language portrays the speaker's resistance to oppression and his willingness to endure physical harm for the sake of his beliefs.

Data 5 Identified as Affective Meaning

Poem: Tak Sepadan

Line: “*Kau sangka duka dalam dada dapat terpisah kata semata?*”

Analysis

This rhetorical question challenges the listener's assumptions about grief. “*Duka dalam dada*” (sorrow in the chest) is a metaphor for deep internal pain, while “*kata semata*” (mere words) implies the inadequacy of verbal comfort. This line expresses affective meaning by conveying strong emotional frustration and disappointment. Leech highlights affective meaning as the speaker's emotional attitude encoded in language. Chairil's use of sarcasm in the question also adds emotional tension, reinforcing the depth of heartbreak being expressed.

Data 6 Identified as Connotative Meaning

Poem: Tak Sepadan

Line: “*Kau kecewakan cinta yang kupupuk*”

Analysis

The verb “*kupupuk*” (I nurtured) carries connotative meaning suggesting effort, care, and time. It adds emotional weight to the word “*cinta*” (love), portraying it not as a fleeting emotion but as something cultivated. This imagery aligns with Leech's view of connotative meaning as extending beyond the literal to include associated ideas and feelings. The disappointment (*kecewakan*) felt by the speaker is intensified by the metaphor of nurtured love being destroyed. It reveals betrayal and the loss of something the speaker valued deeply.

Data 7 Identified as Affective / Conceptual Meaning

Poem: Tak Sepadan

Line: “*Hanya tinggal kenangan yang menyesakkan*”

Analysis

This line combines affective and conceptual meaning. Conceptually, it refers to memory (*kenangan*) as something that remains, while affectively, “*menyesakkan*” (suffocating)

implies emotional pain. The semantic value lies in how the abstract concept of memory is given a physical sensation, suffocation to express grief and emotional burden. Leech explains that affective meaning often overlaps with conceptual meaning in literature, where concrete and abstract ideas are merged for expressive effect. This line reflects lingering pain and unresolved emotion in the aftermath of lost love.

Data 8 Identified as Thematic / Connotative Meaning

Poem: Tak Sepadan

Line: “Cinta kita telah usai di batas mimpi”

Analysis

The phrase “*batas mimpi*” (edge of dreams) functions as a metaphor for an unreachable reality, a love that has ended not in life, but at the threshold of hope. Thematic meaning is conveyed through the structure of the line, which places finality (*telah usai*) before the metaphor, creating a tone of closure. At the same time, “*batas mimpi*” carries a connotative meaning, suggesting death, illusion, or impossibility. As Leech describes, connotation enriches the semantic load of poetic language by engaging readers’ imagination and associations. This line encapsulates the tragic end of a once-hopeful relationship..

Conclusion

This study has examined the semantic meanings embedded in Chairil Anwar’s poems “*Aku*” and “*Tak Sepadan*” using Leech’s theory of meaning, which categorizes lexical interpretation into denotative, connotative, affective, and thematic meanings. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, it was found that Anwar’s poetic expressions carry multiple layers of meaning that extend far beyond their literal wording. In “*Aku*”, connotative and thematic meanings are dominant, constructing a voice of rebellion, identity, and immortality. Meanwhile, “*Tak Sepadan*” is rich in affective meaning, revealing emotional depth, loss, and unresolved sorrow. These findings demonstrate that semantic analysis is a valuable tool for unpacking the emotional and ideological dimensions of modern Indonesian poetry.

The use of semantic theory, particularly Leech’s categories, has allowed this research to bridge literary analysis with linguistic precision. The results highlight that meaning in poetry is not confined to textual definitions but is shaped by context, tone, and symbolic resonance. Chairil Anwar’s lexical choices reflect not only his personal struggles but also the sociopolitical climate of Indonesia in the 1940s, making his poetry both individual and national in scope.

However, this study has certain limitations, including its focus on only two poems and its exclusion of prosodic and stylistic elements such as rhythm and visual layout, which may also influence meaning. Future research may expand this analysis by examining a larger body of Anwar’s works or by integrating additional linguistic theories such as stylistics or discourse analysis. Investigating reader interpretation across different demographics could also provide valuable insights into how semantic meaning is received and reconstructed.

Ultimately, this study affirms that semantics provides a rigorous and insightful framework for understanding how poets like Chairil Anwar construct powerful messages through language, messages that continue to resonate across time, emotion, and national history.

References

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications.
<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=EbogAQAAQBAJ>
- Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., Giardina, M. D., & Cannella, G. S. (2023). The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.).
- Hartono, T. (2020). Analisis Medan Makna dalam Sastra Nasionalis Indonesia. *Jurnal Linguistik Dan Sastra*, 12–21.
- Leech, G. N. (1990). *Semantics: The Study of Meaning* (2nd, Reprint ed.). Penguin Books, 1990.
- Meinanda, C., & Arsanti, M. (2024). Analisis Semantik Puisi “Aku” Karya Chairil Anwar. *Jurnal Akselerasi Merdeka Belajar Dalam Pengabdian Orientasi Masyarakat (AMPOEN)*.
- Nurhalimah, A., & Setiawan, T. (2022). Makna Konotatif dan Afektif dalam Puisi Indonesia Modern. *Jurnal Semantik*, 34--46.
- Palmer, F. R. (1981). *Semantics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Sibagariang, A., Anggi Rahmawati, A., Tarigan, R. A. B., Sagala, V. M., & Sari, Y. (2024). Analisis Makna Semantik Dalam Puisi “Aku” Karya Chairil Anwar. *BLAZE: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Dalam Pendidikan Linguistik Dan Pengembangan*, 2(2), 126–135.
<https://doi.org/10.59841/blaze.v2i2.1204>
- Sugiyono. (2022). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif*. Bandung Alfabeta.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.