



The Meaning of Turtle Symbols in the Lyrics of the Song *Geobugi* by Davichi

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ABSTRACT

Song lyrics are literary works that comprise linguistic symbols that possess meaning. This study examines the meaning of the turtle symbol used in the lyrics of a Korean song by Davichi named *Geobugi*. The purpose of this study is to describe the meaning of turtle in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi* by Davichi. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to systematically describe the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth using the theory of semiotics by Roland Barthes. The research results showed that the turtle in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi* symbolizes cautiousness, patience, self-reflection, hope, and self-defense. The turtle symbol depicted in the lyrics of this song conveys the message that humans can move slowly and patiently, do self-reflection, remain optimistic in difficult times, and have their defense mechanisms. The discovery of the meaning of myth provides a new perspective that something contradictory can be perceived as an option rather than a negative thing, which differs from the general perception of the dynamic and fast-moving Korean society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A song is a form of literary work that is used to express thoughts and feelings through a harmonious blend of rhythmic sounds, the strains of musical instruments, and spoken lyrics. An important part of the creation of a song is the lyrics of the song, which consist of an arrangement of words that have meaning. Structurally, song lyrics and poetry have similarities in the element of beauty. According to [Hermintoyo \(2014, p. 1\)](#), song lyrics are essentially poetry because it incorporates components like sound, rhyme, diction, and others. Poetry and music lyrics are literary works, and they also contain symbols that signify something ([Ratna, 2014, p. 112](#)). The difference is that song lyrics are presented with tone, melody, and rhythm, while poetry is performed without music. Therefore, song lyrics can be an important object to be studied to reveal the meaning of a sign. Semiotics is the science that studies these signs.

Semiotic analysis is an attempt to study linguistics and language, as well as all human behaviors that can carry a certain meaning or function as a sign ([Samsu, 2017, p. 113](#)). In this research, the author uses signs from literary texts to create song lyrics that are more alive and poetic. As a result, the sign in song lyrics is used in many languages, including Korean. One of the South Korean songs that contain symbols in the lyrics is "Geobugi (거북이)" performed by the duo group Davichi. *Geobugi* means "turtle" in English. *Geobugi* is a ballad song from Davichi's 4th album "MYSTIC BALLAD Part 2," which was released in 2013.

A turtle is one of the animals that have special meanings and philosophies in various cultures. The most common and popular meaning of turtle is longevity. According to [Kim \(in Hwang, 2020\)](#), the turtle symbolizes longevity because it is believed to live for thousands of years. The turtle also represents immortality and eternity because of its condition, which lasts for a very long time and does not change quickly. Meanwhile, in Korea, there are ten symbols of longevity known as *Shipjangsaeng* (십장생) in which the turtle is included ([Bailey, 2016](#)). *Shipjangsaeng* was popularized in the late Joseon Dynasty as a form of patterns and motifs on objects such as paintings, ceramics, textiles, metalwares, and domestic items. This demonstrates the significance of turtles in Korean culture and history. However, research on this subject is limited since the use of the turtle symbol is still uncommon in popular Korean songs. This is what led to the selection of the *Geobugi* song as the corpus in this study.

The research question in this study is how the meaning of the turtle is used in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi* by Davichi. This study aims to describe the meaning of the turtle in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi*. This research is expected to help shed light on the meaning of the turtle symbol in Korean popular culture.

Previous research regarding this study can be divided into two areas: the study of the turtle symbol in Korean society and the study of the symbols in songs. Research that focuses on the turtle symbol can be found in [Yu \(2016\)](#), [Lee \(2018\)](#), and [Roh \(2018\)](#). [Yu \(2016\)](#) conducted research on the iconography and symbol of the turtle represented in Korean folk paintings. In folk painting, turtles are frequently depicted as symbols of longevity and luck. Turtles are frequently seen alongside cranes or goldfish in its applications, which both represent immortality and success in life. Meanwhile, [Lee \(2018\)](#) and [Roh \(2018\)](#) discuss the meaning of the turtle symbol in a play. [Lee \(2018\)](#) discusses the meaning of turtle in the traditional Korean play, '*Geobugnori* (거북놀이)' and discovers that turtle represent miraculous, lucky, and longevity. [Roh \(2018\)](#) also examines the meaning of the turtle symbol in the sand play therapy '*Moraenorichiryo* (모래놀이치료)' and concludes that the turtle that appears in the sand play therapy box expresses the desire for a long life and symbolizes the source of sacred power and mother figure. [Yu \(1998\)](#) conducted another study on the meaning of the turtle symbol in the ancient Korean song *Gujiga*. *Gujiga* is a collective song that has existed from ancient times to the Three Kingdoms period of Korea. This study analyzes turtle in *Gujiga* as a symbol of dreams, revelations, and irrationality in Korean society.

Geobugi was chosen as the research corpus because there haven't been many studies of turtle symbols that focused on contemporary song lyrics. Previous research findings indicate that Korean research on the turtle symbol focuses primarily on parts of buildings or palaces, old songs, folk

paintings, plays, and patterns and motifs on ancient objects. Meanwhile, there haven't been many studies that look specifically at the meaning of the turtle symbol in modern Korean song lyrics. Therefore, this study aims to examine the meaning of the turtle symbol used in the lyrics of the Korean song *Geobugi* by Davichi using the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method by implementing the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes (1977) to examine the meaning of the turtle symbol. According to Yusuf (2014, p. 329), qualitative research is an inquiry strategy that emphasizes the quest for meaning, definitions, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols, and descriptions of a phenomenon. Samsu (2017, p. 105) also stated that one of the data analyses frequently used in qualitative research is semiotic analysis.

This research procedure consists of several steps. First, collect research data in the form of words, phrases, or clauses related to the characteristics of turtles from *Geobugi's* song lyric. These items are all regarded as signs that will be examined in this study. The second step is data analysis, which includes determining the meaning of denotation and connotation as well as describing myths using the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes. The third step is drawing conclusions from the analysis that has been done.

2.1. Symbol in the Semiotic Theory of Roland Barthes

Every literary work generally presents a different meaning and message since it involves the author's identity, such as their feelings, thoughts, or imagination. On the other hand, not every word that is directly communicated may always be understood by the reader. As a result, according to Lantowa et al. (2017, p. 7), semiotics in this context has a responsibility to precisely examine signs in literary works. Semiotics, as a process for deriving meaning, can help readers better understand the messages in a literary work.

Semiotics is a study that emphasizes the meaning of a sign itself, as opposed to structuralism, which focuses on signs in the structure of a literary work. According to Ratna (2014, p. 115), symbols are generally equated with emblems in Indonesian, and more broadly, symbols are synonymous with signs. Fontana (in Roh, 2018) emphasizes that symbols are deep expressions of human nature, and symbolic expressions imply deep intuitive conceptions about the human mind. Furthermore, Jung (in Roh, 2018) claims that symbols have a hidden meaning and represent something that cannot be directly represented.

A literary work, as a sign, is a compilation of words that serve as a link between the reader and the author. A semiotic system is required to comprehend the variety of signs mentioned in the text. This system is comprehensive in its examination of various types of literary texts and is not limited to certain things, such as linguistic scope. This statement was emphasized by Roland Barthes one of the famous semiotic figures who contributed to develop and apply the science of semiotics from the figure of Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Hoed (2014, p. 96), the sign system introduced by de Saussure primarily concentrates on two interrelated concepts, namely *signifiant* (signifier) and *signifié* (signified). However, Barthes believes that the de Saussure interpretation process is still in its early stages. Barthes (in Hoed, 2014) develops the meaning of signs into two stages since he believes that it needs to go through further process. The first stage, also referred to as the primary system, is an initial system of meaning whose meaning is commonly understood (denotation), whereas the second stage, also known as the secondary system, is a development that generates metalanguage or connotations, which then leads to myths.

In his theory, Barthes (1977, p. 49) formulates the connotation as ERC. He analogizes the signifier to "E (expression)," the signified to "C (content)," and there is a "R (relation)" that forms a sign between the two (E-C). According to Barthes, R (relation) between E (expression) and C (content) occurs at more than one stage. The first stage, denoted by the letters E1, C1, and R1, is where the denotation process is formed, or when a sign is first observed. The meaning process

continues in the second stage, which is indicated by the presence of E2, C2, and R2. The secondary system continues to develop aspects E and C.

The process of developing E (expression) is known as the metalanguage process, or synonymy in linguistics. A sign is believed to have more than one E (expression) for the same C (content). For example, according to Hoed (2014, p. 97), the E (expression) of the meaning of "a person who can use the occult" is a shaman, yet it can also be described as a person who has psychic power. The development of C (content), in the meantime, indicates that a sign has more than one C for the same E. The result of this process is what is known as connotation, a specific meaning that develops as a result of the thoughts and feelings of the sign user.

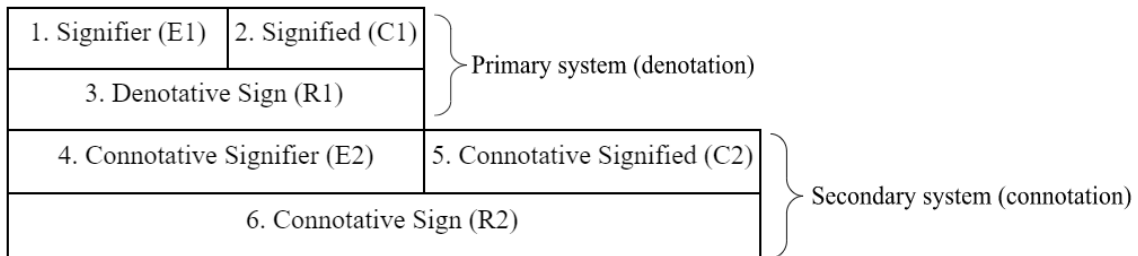


Figure 1. Denotation-Connotation Map of Roland Barthes as mentioned in Cobley, P. & Jansz, L (1999, p. 51)

Hoed (2014, p. 97) uses "Mercy" as a signifier (E), which in the primary system has the meaning of signified (C) as "short for Mercedes Benz," and denotative sign (R1) as "a car brand made in Germany," to illustrate the process of denotation-connotation according to Barthes. Then, in the secondary system (*secondary signification*), the process of meaning continues as the denotative sign (R1) becomes a connotative signifier (E2) for another connotative signified (C2). This denotative sign (R1), "a car brand made in Germany," can also be a connotative signifier (E2), "the price of mercy cars is more expensive than other cars," according to the connotative signified (C2). In the end, the E2 and C2 merged to generate new meanings, such as the connotative sign (R2) "luxury car," "conglomerate car," "car of the rich," or "car of high social economic symbol." According to Barthes, the process of meaning development (C) is a process of connotation formation. This procedure leads Barthes to the conclusion that connotations are the cause of myth.

The definition of a myth that the general public is familiar with differs from the one offered by Roland Barthes. The term "myth" is frequently used in the context of literature to describe old stories that explain the meaning of the origin of something involving supernatural beings or events. However, Barthes (in Hoed, 2014, p. 78) advances a particular meaning that myth is language, which is the development of connotations in the context of semiotics. Barthes went on to say that myth is a semiological system, that is, a system of signs that people interpret. The process of meaning is arbitrary, so it is open to various possibilities. Connotations are formed by the majority power, which assigns certain connotations to something, leading to the formation of a myth (Hoed, 2014, p. 79).

Because connotation processing can be affected by a wide variety of factors and modifications, Barthes's perspective offers a more comprehensive definition of what connotation means. A text is compared to a game where the literal meaning (denotation) and cultural or fictitious meaning are interrelated (connotation). Thus, connotative meaning is the meaning whose existence is still closely connected to denotation and connotation. Barthes (in Hoed, 2014, p. 26) connects the concept of connotation with wine to further describe this. Wine is an alcoholic beverage in denotation, yet it is a "French drink" in connotation (Frenchness). This is driven by French culture, which values wine as a particular drink that has a long-term effect on social life. For centuries, the connotation of wine has had its roots in French culture and has become a myth.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The word "turtle" appears four times in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi*. Moreover, words, phrases, and clauses referring to the characteristics of the turtle were identified. The meaning of the turtle symbol in the song *Geobugi* was found based on these indications: cautiousness, patience, self-reflection, hope, and self-defense.

3. 1. Turtle as a Symbol of Cautiousness and Patience

The cautiousness of turtles can be seen in the following lines. These four lines describe the situation of a sick turtle that is moving slowly.

- (a) 거북아 그 속도론 멀리 못 도망가
Geobuga geu sokedoron meolli mot domangga
Dear turtle, you won't go far at that speed
- (b) 게다가 그 길은 더 멀고 험하잖아
Gedaga geu gireun deo meolgo heombajanha
On top of that, the road is far and dangerous
- (c) 상처가 아물고 다 나으면 떠나가
Sangcheoga amulgo da naemyeon tteonaga
Go after your wounds have closed and healed
- (d) 진심이야 그럼 그때 보내 줄 테니까
Jinsimiya geureom geu ttae bonae jul tenikka
I'm serious, then I will let you go

The denotative meaning in lines (a), (b), (c), and (d) is that the turtle is an injured animal that moves slowly and cannot go far. Furthermore, the turtle is described as going through a long and dangerous road. This is indicated by the words 'sokedo' (속도, speed) and 'sangcheo' (상처, wound), which are related to the turtle's physical characteristics, as well as by the description of the road, namely 'geu gireun deo meolgo heombajanha' (그 길은 더 멀고 험하잖아, the road is far and dangerous). Overall, the denotative meaning of these four lines is that the character "I" advises the turtle to treat its wound before leaving, because it is thought that a turtle cannot go far while physically injured.

Lines (a-d) connote that someone who is injured is generally not in the best condition, making it challenging to perform significant activities like traveling a long distance. Therefore, to be able to go this far requires the recovery of the injured physical condition. This meaning can also be reflected in the singer of the song or the character "I," who is in the same situation as the turtle, being injured, unable to move forward, and facing a difficult road. Connotatively, the wound in the line represents sadness and disappointment. Meanwhile, the road represents a future reality that may be worse than imagined. As a result, healing heart wounds is an important thing that needs to be done in order to take a new step and be prepared to face a tougher reality.

The meaning of denotation and connotation is related to myth in Korean society, which is dynamic and accustomed to a fast-paced lifestyle. This turtle-like movement may be regarded as unnatural and different from Korean society. One of the defining characteristics of Korean culture is this 'ppali ppali' (빨리 빨리, quickly) behavior. People in Korea are used to doing everything quickly. In addition, the environment influences and pressures Korean society to act quickly in all circumstances, even when someone is injured. As a result, people who behave slowly are frequently perceived as being cautious. The lyrics of this song also indirectly show the opposite of the myth

that exists in Korean society since it encourages individuals to act slowly like turtles, such as people who have been hurt to recover slowly.

Lines (e) and (f) below provide additional evidence in favor of being patient and slow.

(e) 조금 늦어도 좋아

Jogum neujeodo joha

It's okay if it's a little late

(f) 한 걸음 한 걸음 천천히

Han georeum han georeum cheoncheonhi

Step by step, slowly

According to the denotative meaning of lines (e) and (f), the turtle is an animal that moves slowly and walks step-by-step. The turtle is late or lagging behind the others, as indicated by the word '*neutda*' (늦다, late) in '*neujeodo*' (늦어도). The word '*han georeum*' (한 걸음, one step) on the other hand, denotes that the turtle is not able to move quickly and cannot control its speed, unlike other four-legged animals. Denotatively speaking, the character "I" tells the turtle that it doesn't matter that it doesn't move as quickly as the others because, in reality, the turtle does move slowly, especially when it is hurt.

The connotation of the turtle in lines (e) and (f) is a consolation to the injured person not to hastily leave the situation. It also highlights the importance of healing a broken heart before starting anything else. This situation emphasizes the importance of making the effort to start new things in the future, even if it takes time. The turtle, which always goes step by step when on land, represents the hard work that took a long time to overcome problems. A problem or difficulty will be successfully resolved if it is approached slowly and calmly. On the other hand, if the situation is forced, the problem could turn out badly. The word '*cheoncheonhi*' (천천히, slowly) describes the efforts of the character "I" as she slowly works her way through this bad situation while healing wounds to rise from the past.

The myth that can be seen in lines (e) and (f) has to do with the patience and steadfastness of someone who moves slowly in a society where things move quickly. Everybody lives their life at a different pace. Some people are able to do something quickly, while others need more time. However, a person can be considered to be late if they take longer to do something. In other words, even though everything that happens quickly does not always mean better, failure or delay are typically perceived as negative things. Some difficulties respond better and more effectively if they are handled carefully and patiently.

According to Hwang (2020), in folktales and narratives, the turtle represents patience in moving forward without stopping. This shows that the individuation process requires clear direction and unending patience throughout one's life. This turtle's patience, turtle-like calm, and step-by-step way of thinking is thought to be useful when trying to decide on something that is not convincing or when faced with problems that are difficult to understand clearly. Therefore, in the midst of the fast-paced dynamics of Korean society, a patient and slow way of thinking is needed in order to view a phenomenon wisely.

3.2 Turtle as a Symbol of Self-reflection and Hope

The turtle is made into an animal that is reflected in the singer or the character "I" in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi*. Take a look at the following lines.

(g) 마음을 둘 곳도 없고 더 갈 곳도 없는 슬픈 거북이 한 마리

Maemuul dul gotdo eobgo deo gal gotdo eobneun seulpeun geobugi han mari

A sad turtle who has nowhere to put his heart in or nowhere to go

(h) 거북아 널 볼 때면 내 모습 같아
Geobuga neol bol ttaemyeon nae moseub gata
 Dear turtle, I see myself when I see you

(i) 눈물 나 미친 듯이 계속 흘러나와
Nummul na michin deusi gyesook heulleonawa
 Tears come and flow like crazy

Denotatively, the turtle is shown in the lyrics (g, h, i) as a lonely character who is alone and has nowhere to go. This can be seen in the clauses '*maeumeul dul gotdo eobda*' (마음을 곳도 없다, no place to put his heart) and '*gal gotdo eobda*' (갈 곳도 없다, nowhere to go). As a result, denotatively, a turtle without a mate is a sad turtle, and this becomes a self-reflection for the character "I", whose life is similar to that of a turtle.

Connotatively, lines (g-i) imply that the absence of a partner and a sense of purpose in life is the cause of sadness. In other words, a partner is an important figure in a person's life whose absence can cause sadness and disappointment. This relates to the myth that is pervasive in Korean society that having a partner is one of the things that lead to happiness and that having a partner is what most people want out of life. As a result, meeting someone on a blind date is popular in Korea. Various applications have also been created to ensure the safety of this blind date meeting (Jeong et al, 2016). This blind date meeting's goal is to find a romantic interest.

Another myth concerns self-reflection activities that are undertaken during difficult times. Korean society is used to intense competition to be the best. As a result, comparing oneself to others is something that Koreans do unconsciously in their daily lives. This competitive power exists in Korean society on both a domestic and global scale (Kim, 2011). However, the lyrics of this song show that self-reflection can be a positive activity during difficult times. Instead of comparing one's development to that of others, self-reflection can help to build optimism and hope.

As shown in the following lines, turtle can also symbolize hope in addition to self-reflection.

(j) 새싹이 나겠지 꽃이 보이겠지
Saessagi nagetji kkochi boigetji
 Buds will grow, flowers will bloom

(k) 내 눈물의 사랑은 씨앗을 꼭 품겠지
Nae nunmurui sarangeun ssiaseul kekok pumgetji
 My love of tears will contain the seeds

The denotative meaning in the lines (j-k) is that buds and flowers will bloom, which is indicated by the clauses '*saessagi nagetji*' (새싹이 나겠지, buds will grow), '*kkochi boigetji*' (꽃이 보이겠지, flowers will bloom), and '*ssiaseul kekok pumgetji*' (씨앗을 꼭 품겠지, will contain seeds). Overall, the denotative meaning of the above lines is that the character "I" believes that buds and flowers will appear after going through a difficult time.

Connotatively, the lines of buds and flowers in (j) and (k) express the hope for a better life. The words "buds" and "flowers" are used to describe spring in Korea, which has four seasons. Since the season that follows winter is naturally warm, it is during this time that new buds and flowers usually begin to bloom. Therefore, after experiencing difficult times, buds and flowers might symbolize the emergence of new hope. The use of words related to spring shows that the character "I" is optimistic about the perceived delay. This is related to the myth that believes that things are better done quickly. In fact, being slow does not imply being bad, and hope remains even if you are in a situation that is not ideal.

Another myth relates to the emergence of hope in the spring. Spring is a time that is considered precious for both humans and turtles. Spring is a time for humans to hope for a happy new beginning, while spring is also a time for turtles to finally be able to start a new life by being outside and mating with their mates. After facing winter, the temperature will begin to warm. As if life had returned, plants started to sprout and flowers started to bloom. There will be goodness at the end of one's patience process, so slow life won't last forever. This is seen by the arrival of spring, which is associated with happiness.

3.3 Turtle as a Symbol of Self-defense

The next meaning found in the lyrics of this song is the turtle as a symbol of self-defense. Take a look at the line below.

(1) 상처가 많아 너 혼자서 매일 외롭게 숨는 거니

Sangcheoga manha neo honjaseo maeil werobge sumneun geoni

Are you hiding alone every day because you are alone and have too much pain?

According to the denotative meaning of line (1), the turtle has a shell that serves as a powerful defense mechanism when a dangerous situation threatens. In comparison to other soft-bodied animals that don't have them, the heart, lungs, and other organs are safe inside the shell and strong enough to prevent injury. [Global World Encyclopedia \(in Hwang, 2020\)](#) stated that the body of a turtle is surrounded by a hard shell, and its carapace and plastron form a unique pattern. When turtle is in a stake of shock or at rest, it retracts its head, legs, and tail into the shell for protection. The shape of the heavy shell, which was large around the body, gave the impression that it had disappeared and was hiding. This habit of the turtle is not a behavioral flaw but a successful defensive strategy used during its long life.

Furthermore, denotatively, "hidden turtle" can also refer to a camouflaged turtle. According to [Nafus, et al \(2015\)](#), turtles are slow-moving herbivores that often use camouflage as a main defense to avoid detection by other animals. Thus, denotatively speaking, the turtle seen by the person in this song seems to be in bad condition, which causes it to frequently use its shell to hide.

Turtles that frequently hide inside their shells connote someone who is hiding and withdrawn. When someone feels afraid and uncomfortable, they tend to withdraw from their surroundings. Being in a protected and safe place can help ease the uncomfortable feelings in these situations. Thus, the turtle shell is compared to a secure and comfortable place where a person might hide away while healing their wounds.

This meaning relates to the myth that a person who prefers to be alone and hides from others is considered a person who withdraws from problems. Because of their inability to face a situation that makes them uncomfortable, the person's tendency to withdraw is also seen as an effort on their part to protect themselves. A turtle with a heavy shell on top of its body represented all the many burdens that someone carried with them. Additionally, the personality of someone who frequently prefers to separate themselves from their surroundings might be seen as timid, shy, and comfortable doing alone in their comfort zone. They often withdraw from their surroundings, avoid interactions, and deny reality. People that express these characteristics are often thought of as "hiding behind their shells," but as they begin to dare to be more open, they are seen as "coming out of their shells." Therefore, the turtle that puts its entire body into its shell is a symbol of self-defense.

Based on the results of this meaning, it can be seen that there is a slightly difference between the meanings of turtles produced by previous research that has been mentioned earlier. Previous research on the turtle symbol in society revealed that the meaning of the turtle is still closely tied to Korean culture, history, and beliefs, such as symbols of longevity, luck, immortality, and strength. This contrasts with the meaning of the turtle in this study, which was derived from song lyrics because it is more obtained from the view of modern Korean society in seeing turtle's

characteristics as well as a reflection of the human personality, which is also reflected in the turtle's behaviour.

Therefore, there is a difference between the turtle symbol in folk literature and contemporary literature. The meaning of the turtle symbol in folk literature comes from the common turtle symbol that has existed for a long time and which is influenced by philosophy, history, and culture. Meanwhile, the meaning of the turtle symbol in contemporary literature is impacted by people's increasingly advanced lives and how humans as sign users can continue to build up new perspectives or myths about things as long as human civilization exists.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a semiotic analysis of song lyrics using the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, specifically the meanings of denotation, connotation, and myth, it is possible to conclude that the turtle in this modern Korean song symbolizes cautiousness, patience, self-reflection, hope, and self-defense. Overall, the meaning of the turtle denotation in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi* is an animal with the characteristics of not being able to move quickly, moving slowly, looking lonely because it has no mate, and having a shell to hide in, according to lyrics of the song *Geobugi*. The description of this turtle reflects the experiences of people living in Korean society. In spite of the pressures of Korean society to always move quickly, it is explained in this song that people can choose to move slowly. Humans also require their protection mechanisms, as well as optimism and hope for the future.

Based on the context contained in the lyrics of the song *Geobugi* by Davichi, the analysis of the turtle symbol's meaning in this study was conducted. This study shows how animal symbols can be used in literary works to express human life experiences. The creation of myths tends to lead to the Korean people's perception of the characteristics of the turtles seen in the lyrics of this song. The discovery of different meanings of myths in conjunction with the views prevalent in Korean society in general provides a new perspective that something contradictory can be viewed as an alternative rather than a negative thing.

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