

Analysis of the Song Try Everything by Shakira: A Semiotic Study Based on Ferdinand de Saussure

Iin Afriyanti

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: afriyanti.iin18@gmail.com

Abstract

In contemporary society, songs are not only a form of entertainment but also a medium to convey cultural, moral, and educational values. The song "Try Everything" by Shakira, featured in Disney's Zootopia (2016), communicates messages of perseverance, courage, and learning from mistakes, making it a relevant object for semiotic analysis. This study aims to examine how the relationship between signifiers and signifieds in the lyrics constructs meanings of resilience, self-motivation, and character development. A qualitative descriptive approach with Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory was employed. The official lyrics document was analyzed through a process of identifying signifiers, determining signifieds, and grouping them into connotative themes. Data validity was ensured through document triangulation and peer discussions. The findings show that the lyrics convey three main themes: failure as part of learning, persistence to rise again, and courage to take risks. Linguistic signs such as "I messed up tonight, I lost another fight" and "I always get up now to see what's next" represent human experiences of failure and the effort to improve oneself. In conclusion, the song constructs a coherent system of meaning that promotes optimism, resilience, and self-reflection. Practically, these findings suggest that song lyrics can be used in educational contexts to foster positive character traits, including perseverance, confidence, and courage to face challenges.

Keywords : *Semiotics, Song Lyrics Analysis, Resilience, Character Education, Ferdinand de Saussure*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, songs have become more than entertainment. They function as cultural texts that mirror human emotions, struggles, and values. The global music industry continuously produces works that engage listeners not only through melody but also through meaningful lyrics that convey social, emotional, and moral reflections. Popular songs, in particular, have evolved into tools for emotional communication and moral education, especially among young audiences. Language in

artistic forms such as songs represents a system of meaning that mediates between human experience and cultural context. In this light, studying song lyrics provides valuable insights into how individuals construct meaning, identity, and moral orientation through linguistic expression.

The song “Try Everything” by Shakira, featured in Disney’s *Zootopia* (2016), shows how music can help people become stronger, more motivated, and more confident. The lyrics encourage perseverance, courage, and self-acceptance, which are important for personal growth and learning. For example, the lines “I messed up tonight, I lost another fight” and “I always get up now to see what’s next” show that making mistakes is a normal part of learning and can help people improve. From a semiotic point of view, these lyrics act as signs that represent human determination and optimism. Every word and phrase helps build meaning that communicates hope, moral strength, and the courage to keep trying. The music itself, with its rhythm and melody, also adds to the feeling of motivation and encouragement, showing that music works not only through words but also through sound and emotion.

In education, songs like “Try Everything” can be useful tools to help students learn important life values (Kumar et al., 2022). By analyzing song lyrics in class, students can improve their understanding of language while also learning about moral ideas. They do not only learn the literal meaning of words, but they also learn to understand the feelings and cultural ideas behind them. For instance, the idea of “getting up after failure” in the song can teach students how to face challenges in real life. Looking at lyrics this way can help students develop patience, confidence, and a positive attitude. Using songs in learning can support both thinking skills and emotional growth at the same time.

This research uses Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic theory as the main framework. Saussure explains that language is a system of signs made of two parts: the signifier, which is the sound or written form of a word, and the signified, which is the idea or meaning in the mind (Fanani, 2013). Meaning comes from the connection between the signifier and the signified, and also from the difference between one sign and another. In song lyrics, each word or image works as a sign that shows cultural and emotional meaning. In Shakira’s “Try Everything,” the connection between signifiers and signifieds shows messages about motivation and morals. Simple words in the song become symbols of courage and perseverance. Looking at the song this way helps understand how lyrics communicate not only ideas but also feelings and values, and it shows how music can teach positive attitudes like persistence and hope.

Semiotics also allows the researcher to uncover connotative meanings, or second-order meanings, that go beyond the literal message of the song. Barthes (1977) expanded Saussure’s idea by explaining that connotation connects signs with cultural

values, myths, and ideologies (Hatam & Al-Ghabra, 2021). Thus, the lyric “Birds don’t just fly, they fall down and get up” can be read as a metaphor for human learning processes, where failure is not a defeat but an opportunity for growth. This theoretical approach provides the foundation for interpreting the symbolic dimensions of the lyrics and understanding how linguistic elements shape moral messages.

Several previous studies have applied semiotic analysis to songs and other media with varying focuses. Phonetics as a means of nationalizing art songs has been examined (Ying et al., 2022). Language styles in songs with different themes have also been analyzed (Rahmatika, 2021; Heni et al., 2022). Semiotic analyses have been conducted on movie posters, such as the *Gundala* poster (Persada, 2020) and the *Suspiria* poster (Mega & Tawami, 2022), as well as on comic strips from Instagram accounts (Saefudin et al., 2025), showing the versatility of semiotic approaches in both visual and musical texts. Studies on song lyrics include analyses of moral messages of separation in Idgita’s “Berakhir di Aku” using Roland Barthes’ theory (Rejeki, 2025), motivational meanings in Ariel Noah’s “Walau Habis Terang” through Ferdinand de Saussure’s model (Rusadi & Rohamniah, 2024), social class representation in Iwan Fals’ songs using Barthes’ semiotics (Suparman, 2024), and values of self-reflection in Tulus’ “Diri” through Peirce’s semiotic approach (Ahirudin et al., 2025). However, few studies focus on the theme of courage and perseverance in an international context. This study fills that gap by analyzing Shakira’s “Try Everything” using Saussure’s semiotic framework (current study). It aims to explain how linguistic signs and their relationships construct the meaning of courage and how these signs convey moral messages of persistence and optimism (current study).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the semiotic elements in Shakira’s “Try Everything” and interpret how they convey moral and motivational messages related to perseverance and courage. The focus lies on identifying the signifiers and signifieds that form symbolic meanings within the lyrics. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by expanding the application of Saussurean semiotics in the study of popular music and practically by providing educators with insights on how song lyrics can be used as media for character education and language learning. By connecting linguistic signs to character-building values, this study aims to bridge cultural literacy and moral education in contemporary learning contexts.

Several previous studies have explored song lyrics using semiotic analysis with different focuses. One study examined moral messages of separation in Idgita’s “Berakhir di Aku” using Roland Barthes’ theory (Rejeki, 2025). Another explored motivational meanings in Ariel Noah’s “Walau Habis Terang” through Ferdinand de Saussure’s model (Rusadi & Rohamniah, 2024). Social class representation was discussed in Iwan Fals’ songs using Barthes’ semiotics (Suparman, 2024), while values

of self-reflection were revealed in Tulus' "Diri" through Charles Sanders Peirce's approach (Ahirudin et al., 2025). However, few studies focus on the theme of courage and perseverance in an international context. This study fills that gap by analyzing Shakira's "Try Everything" through Saussure's semiotic approach. This research aims to explain how linguistic signs and their relationships construct the meaning of courage in the song and to describe how these signs convey moral messages of persistence and optimism within Saussure's semiotic framework.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the semiotic elements in Shakira's "Try Everything" and interpret how they convey moral and motivational messages related to perseverance and courage. The focus lies on identifying the signifiers and signifieds that form symbolic meanings within the lyrics. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by expanding the application of Saussurean semiotics in the study of popular music and practically by providing educators with insights on how song lyrics can be used as media for character education and language learning. By connecting linguistic signs to character-building values, this study aims to bridge cultural literacy and moral education in contemporary learning contexts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a semiotic approach based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs to explore the meanings of courage in Shakira's song "*Try Everything*." Qualitative research, as explained by Creswell (2014), is a method used to explore and understand how individuals or groups give meaning to certain human or social experiences (Saefudin et al., 2023). In this context, the study aims to interpret how the lyrics and visuals express courage, persistence, and optimism. The main data come from the song's lyrics and official music video, which were analyzed to identify linguistic and visual signs that represent those values. Data collection involved close reading, listening, and observation, followed by identifying significant words and phrases. Each sign was then analyzed using Saussure's concept of the signifier (sound or image) and the signified (meaning) to reveal how the song constructs its message. The analysis focuses on how language and visuals interact to build the spirit of resilience and self-belief that "*Try Everything*" conveys to its audience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the meaning of signs in the lyrics of Shakira's song "Try Everything" using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. The research data consisted of the song's lyric text, which was analyzed qualitatively through three main stages: data reduction, categorization, and theme determination. The data reduction stage involved selecting words or phrases with symbolic value and potential meaning.

Next, the categorization process grouped signs that shared similar meanings to form the main themes. The final stage was theme determination through interpreting the relationship between the signifier and the signified to reveal the connotative meanings contained in the lyrics.

The analysis results show that the song’s meanings are formed through a system of signs that represent the values of struggle, perseverance, and courage in facing failure. Based on the analysis of the relationship between signifiers and signifieds, several key signs were identified that build the structure of the song’s meaning as follows:

Table 1. Relationship of Signs and Meanings

| Signifier | Signified | Connotative Meaning / Message |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| “I messed up tonight, I lost another fight” | Mistake and failure | Illustrates that failure is a natural part of the learning process |
| “I always get up now to see what’s next” | Getting back up | Represents persistence and the spirit of never giving up |
| “Birds don’t just fly, they fall down and get up” | A bird falling and then flying again | Symbolizes learning, success requires going through failure |
| “I wanna try everything, even though I could fail” | Courage to try | Represents optimism and bravery in facing risks |
| “Look how far you’ve come” | Journey and achievement | Reflects self-awareness of the effort and progress already made |
| “Those new mistakes” | New mistakes | Symbolizes continuous learning, not being afraid of making errors |

Based on the table above, the meanings that emerge can be categorized into three main themes: failure as a learning process, persistence to rise again, and courage to take risks. The first theme appears in the line “I messed up tonight, I lost another fight,” which shows acknowledgment of mistakes and failure. In the Saussurean semiotic context, this sign is not interpreted negatively but represents a learning process that fosters self-awareness.

The second theme, persistence to rise again, is reflected in the lines “I always get up now to see what’s next” and “Birds don’t just fly, they fall down and get up.” These quotes indicate emotional resilience and mental strength to keep going. The sign “get up” has the signified of determination and persistence, which connotatively conveys the message that success can only be achieved by those who continue to try.

The third theme is courage to take risks, as seen in the lyric “I wanna try everything, even though I could fail.” The phrase “try everything” symbolizes the bravery to experiment and face failure as part of the process toward maturity. Additionally, the line “Those new mistakes” shows acceptance of errors as part of personal growth. The relationship among these three themes creates a coherent

structure of meaning: failure provides a foundation for rising again, and rising again builds the courage to try new things.

Overall, the results show that the lyrics of “Try Everything” not only deliver motivational messages but also contain a consistent and interconnected meaning structure, illustrating a continuous learning process in human life.

The analysis of the song lyrics “Try Everything” shows that the words and phrases used create a system of meaning that reflects perseverance, courage in facing failure, and the value of learning from mistakes. Using Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic approach, the relationship between the signifier and the signified produces strong connotative messages about resilience and optimism in life.

In general, phrases like “I messed up tonight, I lost another fight” represent human experiences when facing failure. The signified meaning here is an acknowledgment of mistakes and personal imperfection, which connotatively suggests that failure is a natural part of struggle. Meanwhile, the line “I always get up now to see what’s next” expresses determination and the willingness to rise again, reinforcing the theme of resilience central to the song.

The expression “Birds don’t just fly, they fall down and get up” conveys the idea of learning through experience. In semiotic terms, this line represents a natural process that occurs not only to birds but also to humans, who must experience setbacks in order to grow. The relationship between the signifier and the signified shows that success does not come without mistakes. Additionally, the line “I wanna try everything, even though I could fail” carries the signified of courage to try new things despite risks, which connotatively reflects optimism and determination to keep moving forward.

The lyric “Look how far you’ve come” emphasizes self-reflection on personal effort. This phrase shows awareness of the long journey a person has undertaken to reach a certain point in life. Meanwhile, in the line “Those new mistakes,” the word “mistakes” no longer carries a negative meaning but is instead symbolized as an opportunity to learn something new. This shows that each mistake is positioned as a way to grow, rather than as an obstacle.

Linking these findings to Saussure’s theory, the song’s meaning emerges through a system of signs that is arbitrary but socially and emotionally agreed upon. The relationship between signifier and signified is not only denotative but also connotative, building moral and emotional values for listeners. The song conveys a universal message that learning, courage to try, and acceptance of failure are essential foundations in human character development.

This analysis aligns with previous research that examines songs as tools for promoting positive character values. “Try Everything” demonstrates that popular music can deliver educational and motivational messages. The main difference lies in

the cultural and linguistic context used by Shakira, which emphasizes global and inclusive values. Theoretically, these findings support Saussure's view that language, including song lyrics, is not just a communication tool but a system of signs shaping social and emotional realities (Cevania & Merrita, 2023).

From a synthesis of the meanings, it can be concluded that the entire song lyric consistently delivers the message that failure is part of the journey toward success, and the courage to try is true strength. Practically, these meanings have positive implications in education, as they encourage learners to develop resilience, self-confidence, and a continuous spirit of learning.

Overall, the song lyrics not only entertain but also educate, showing that music can be a medium for emotional growth, moral reflection, and the development of perseverance. By using clear signifiers to convey deep connotations, the lyrics motivate listeners to face challenges, learn from mistakes, and maintain optimism even in difficult situations. Through this, "Try Everything" demonstrates that resilience and determination are skills that can be nurtured through experience, reflection, and a willingness to embrace failure as a natural part of life.

CONCLUSION

The semiotic analysis of Shakira's song "Try Everything" using Ferdinand de Saussure's approach shows that the relationship between the signifier and the signified creates connotative meanings about perseverance, courage to try, and learning from mistakes. The song represents values of diligence and optimism through linguistic symbols such as "I messed up tonight" and "I always get up now," which illustrate the human process of facing failure and continuing to improve. Theoretically, these findings support Saussure's view that language functions as a system of signs that shapes social and emotional meaning. Practically, the song can be used in education to promote positive character traits such as resilience, self-confidence, and courage to take risks. This study has limitations because it focuses only on one song and one theoretical approach. Future research is recommended to analyze other songs using different semiotic approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of meaning and values in popular music.

REFERENCES

Abdurrazaq, M. N., & Supriadi, M. (2025). Pesan Moral pada Lagu Diri Karya Tulus: Sebuah Kajian Pustaka Melalui Pendekatan Semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce. *Jurnal Riset Multidisiplin Edukasi*, 2(10), 199-214. <https://doi.org/10.71282/jurmie.v2i10.1017>

- Cevania, D., & Merrita, D. (2023). Signs through Songs: A Semiotic Analysis of Self-Confidence Lyrics. *e-LinguaTera*, 3(1), 201-214. <https://doi.org/10.31253/lt.v3i1.2113>
- Fanani, F. (2013). Semiotika Strukturalisme Saussure. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 5(1), 10-15. <https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v5i1.149>
- Heni, H. S., Handayani, D. S., & Herawati, T. (2022). Analysis of language styles in Fiersa Besari's songs based on hermeneutic study. *Journal of Scientific Research, Education, and Technology (JSRET)*, 1(2), 221-227. <https://doi.org/10.58526/jsret.v1i2.31>
- Kumar, T., Akhter, S., Yunus, M. M., & Shamsy, A. (2022). Use of Music and Songs as Pedagogical Tools in Teaching English as Foreign Language Contexts. *Education Research International*, 2022(1), 3384067. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3384067>
- Mega, R. U., & Tawami, T. (2022). Semiotic analysis on film industry: case study Suspiria movie poster. *International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others*, 5(4), 110-122. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6979222>
- Persada, S. I. P. (2020, January). Semiotic Analysis of Gundala Movie Poster. In *International Conference on Business, Economic, Social Science, and Humanities–Humanities and Social Sciences Track (ICOBEST-HSS 2019)* (pp. 133-135). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200108.029>
- Rahmatika, A. (2021). LANGUAGE STYLE IN SONG WITH DIFFERENT THEMES. *Journal of Language, Literature and Teaching*, 3(3), 25-42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35529/jllte.v3i3.25-42>
- Rejeki, S. S. . (2025). Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Lirik Lagu “Berakhir di Aku” Karya Idgitaf. *J-CEKI : Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, 4(2), 170–182. <https://doi.org/10.56799/jceki.v4i2.7424>
- Rusadi, I., & Rochmaniah, A. (2024). Analisis Semiotik tentang Pesan Motivasi dalam Lirik Lagu "Walau Habis Terang" oleh Ariel Noah. *Jurnal Bahasa Daerah Indonesia*, 1(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.47134/jbdi.v1i1.2653>
- Saefudin, D. P., Mulyadi, M., & Santosa, P. P. P. (2023). The Analysis of Flouting Maxim in the @Pepekomik comic strip. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 4(2), 367–379. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v4i2.764>
- Saefudin, D., Nurani, S., Puadah, A., & Kartono, K. (2025). Deconstructing Messages in Comic Strips on the Instagram Account Komik Grontol: A Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes. *Channing: Journal of English Language Education and Literature*, 10(1), 20-29. <https://doi.org/10.30599/y8g5k595>

- Sara Hatem Jadou, Iman M. M. Muwafaq Al Ghabra, Barthes' Semiotic Theory and Interpretation of Signs, July-September 2021 Vol 11, Issue 3; 470-482 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i03.027>
- Suparman, S. (2024). Analisis Lagu Iwan Fals Menggunakan Analisis Semiotik Roland Barthes. *Jurnal Vokatif: Pendidikan Bahasa, Kebahasaan, Dan Sastra*, 1(1), 21-32. <https://doi.org/10.51574/vokatif.v1i1.1177>
- Xiaoyu, W., Ying, X., Shilin, L., Xiubo, R., Dan, Y., Xinran, Y., ... & Qiu Jian, X. (2023). Phonetics as a means of nationalising art songs: a comparative music-phonetics study based on Zhao Yuanren's New Poetry Collection. *Journal of New Music Research*, 52(2-3), 202-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09298215.2024.2311649>