



Connotative Meanings In The Novel Ghostgirl: Homecoming

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Abstract

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This study examines the connotative meanings in Tonya Hurley's novel Ghostgirl: Homecoming, emphasizing the role of language in conveying emotional and cultural nuances in literature. The research underscores the growing importance of connotative analysis in understanding literary expression, particularly in a globalized context where cultural differences influence textual interpretation. The primary objectives are to identify the types of connotative meanings—positive, neutral, and negative—and analyze the messages in the novel's narrative. Grounded in Leech's (1981) and Hook's (1989) theories on connotation, this qualitative study employs a semantic analysis of the novel's text. Data collection involves documenting and categorizing connotative expressions, followed by a descriptive presentation of findings. The results reveal a predominance of negative connotations, aligning with the novel's themes of identity, mortality, and self-acceptance. This research enhances readers' appreciation of Hurley's narrative craftsmanship and contributes to broader discussions on semantics in literature, highlighting the dynamic interplay between language, emotion, and societal narratives.

Keywords: *Connotation, Semantics, Novel, Ghostgirl: Homecoming.*

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential part of human interaction, allowing individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas to fulfill both physical and psychological needs. Language serves as the primary tool for conveying messages, and the choice of words significantly influences how meaning is interpreted in social contexts. Often, people employ figurative language to convey messages indirectly, whether for politeness, emotional expression, or to obscure the true intent behind their words.

Figurative language serves multiple purposes, including stimulating imagination, enhancing imagery, intensifying emotions, and concretizing abstract concepts (Perrine, 1969). To fully grasp the depth of meaning in language, semantic analysis is crucial. According to Yule (1996), semantics is the study of word, phrase, and sentence meanings and how they contribute to the overall message of a text. Focusing on connotative meaning—the emotional and associative value beyond literal definitions—helps uncover the deeper implications of an utterance (Leech, 1981). Connotative meaning plays a vital role in shaping interpretations, as it reflects cultural, emotional, and social nuances that influence how language is perceived.

The study of connotative meaning has garnered significant attention in linguistics, literature, and communication studies, highlighting its importance in understanding language beyond its denotative function. The way words evoke emotions, cultural associations, and hidden meanings varies depending on context, making connotation a dynamic aspect of communication.

In contemporary literature, young adult fiction often employs rich figurative language to explore complex themes of identity, belonging, and existential struggles. Novels like Tonya Hurley's *Ghostgirl: Homecoming* use connotative language to resonate with readers navigating similar emotional landscapes. Literary analysis of such works bridges the gap between authorial intent and reader interpretation, particularly when cultural or generational differences might obscure deeper meanings.

Literature and language share a profound connection, with narrative devices serving as a medium for conveying societal commentary and psychological depth. Tonya Hurley, a celebrated author of young adult fiction, is renowned for her stylized prose and metaphoric storytelling. *Ghostgirl: Homecoming*, a sequel in the critically acclaimed series, delves into themes of mortality, self-acceptance, and the liminal space between life and death. Hurley's linguistic craftsmanship is layered with connotative meaning, allowing her to address adolescent struggles, societal expectations, and existential questions with both wit and sorrow.

This study aims to analyze the connotative meanings in Tonya Hurley's *Ghostgirl: Homecoming* and classifying their types, examining how her lexical choices evoke emotional and cultural associations. By dissecting the layers of meaning in the novel's text, this research seeks to enhance readers' understanding of Hurley's artistic expression while contributing to broader discussions on the role of semantics in literature. Ultimately, this exploration will illuminate how contemporary authors like Hurley use language to reflect personal and universal narratives, deepening the connection between literature and human experience.

THEORY

According to Leech connotative meaning is part of semantic. Connotative meaning cannot be separated from denotative meaning or conceptual meaning. Conceptual meaning plays a central role in linguistic communication, forming the core function of language, whereas other forms of meaning (e.g., emotional or associative) are secondary. Leech considers conceptual meaning fundamental because its arrangement parallels the structural and phonological levels of language. Essentially, it pertains to the logical, factual, or referential content of words, how they correspond to real-world entities or ideas. For instance, the word "tree" denotes a perennial plant with an elongated stem, or trunk, supporting branches.

Moreover, the connotative meaning refers to Leech (1981, p. 12) explains that connotative meaning extends past a word's literal definition, encompassing the emotional and cultural significance attached to it. These associations differ across individuals and societies, shaped by personal histories and contextual usage. For example, "mountain" denotatively refers to a large natural elevation of the earth's surface, but connotatively, it may symbolize challenge, majesty, or isolation. Such added dimensions enrich language, allowing speakers to convey deeper implications. Kreidler (1998) similarly views connotative meaning as a subjective dimension of language, the emotional responses a word triggers. While connotations can be personal, shared experiences often lead to collective interpretations, creating widely recognized associations for certain terms.

Additionally, J.N. Hook (1989) categorize connotative meaning into three distinct types: positive, neutral, and negative.

Positive Connotation

Positive connotation refers to words that evoke favorable associations beyond their literal definitions. Consider the terms "vintage" versus "old." While both describe aged items, "vintage" suggests quality, nostalgia, and timeless value, whereas "old" remains neutral. This

positive framing is particularly valuable in persuasive contexts like advertising, where describing a car as "pre-owned" (positive) rather than "used" (neutral) can significantly influence consumer perception. Such word choices create emotional appeal and build favorable impressions.

Neutral Connotation

Words with impartial connotations carry no strong emotional associations in either direction. They serve as straightforward, factual descriptors. The term "chair," for instance, neutrally denotes a piece of furniture designed for sitting, without suggesting any particular emotion or judgment. Such impartial language proves essential in academic writing, technical documentation, and objective reporting where maintaining neutrality is crucial.

Negative Connotation

Negative connotation occurs when words trigger unpleasant associations beyond their dictionary definitions. The verb "loiter" technically means to stand around without purpose, but carries strong negative implications of laziness or even criminal intent, unlike the more neutral "wait" or positive "linger." Such negatively charged words can create unintended bias, which is why journalists and public speakers often replace them with neutral alternatives. For instance, describing someone as "opinionated" (negative) creates a very different impression than "principled" (positive), though both refer to someone with strong beliefs.

METHOD

This study used qualitative method in which the data used was in the form of text or document. The source of data in this study is taken in the form of novel's narrative by Tonya Hurley, *Ghostgirl: Homecoming*. The data of this research were analyzed based on the theory of Leech (1981) and Hook (1989). The findings descriptively presented according to their denotative and connotative meaning, along with the type of connotation. These were the following procedures used to analyze the data after collecting it:

- 1) Gathering all the words, phrases, and sentences those have identified
- 2) Analyzing both meanings of each selected data, denotatively and connotatively
- 3) Categorizing the connotative meaning type of the selected data into positive, neutral, or negative.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

(1) Types of Connotations in the Novel *Ghostgirl: Homecoming*

a. Positive Connotation

Data 1

It was **home**. Her **home**. Maybe not sweet, but **bittersweet** at least.

The word **home** is related to the place where someone lives, especially as a member of a family or household. That is what the conceptual or denotative meaning of the word **home** is. However, its connotative meaning is way deeper than that. It is strongly tied to individual identity and comfort. That emphasizes ownership and emotional ties with safety, belonging, and nostalgia, not just a physical place. As it relates to good and comforting feelings, it can be concluded that **home** has a positive connotation. In other cultures across the world, this word also has a positive connotation universally, such as in Western and Asian cultures.

Additionally, the other word, **bittersweet**, comes with mixed connotations. The literal meaning of this word is about a blend of pleasure and pain. Furthermore, the word **bittersweet** suggests resigned acceptance, a recognition of both attachment and incompleteness. So, this

word particularly has combined connotations, both positive and negative. Nevertheless, when viewed through the context, the data can be considered to carry a positive connotation because the character here, who described her home, Charlotte, feels her home still has a lingering feeling of belonging and good memory, even though it is not perfect, because she is an orphan. She still considered it precious.

Data 2

She could always count on Scarlet to **spot the dark cloud**.

The phrase **spot the dark cloud** is one of the examples that carries a positive connotation. This phrase is a figurative expression, commonly known as an idiom. Just like other idioms, this phrase connotes something deeper than its literal meaning. The denotative meaning or literal meaning of this phrase is about someone who noticed dark clouds or a looming storm. However, dark clouds here are not the literal clouds. Instead, it's a situation or future event that causes worry, problems, or unhappiness. Therefore, the actual meaning of the phrase **spot the dark cloud** is someone who can see the cracks that might occur or that others might miss. In this context, Charlotte trusted Scarlet because she thinks that Scarlet is astute, vigilant, or observant, and can notice something unpleasant. And Scarlet could make up something to make Charlotte feel better by pointing out the advantages of something she thought displeasing. Thus, it can be considered to have a positive connotation because Charlotte appreciates Scarlet's vigilance and relies on her, showing the trust she has in Scarlet.

b. Neutral Connotation

Data 3

She seemed to be **all business**, except for the flirty smile she flashed in Charlotte's direction.

The denotative meaning of the word **business** refers to work, professionalism, or tasks. Meanwhile, this word carries connotative meaning that refers to competence, focus, authority, and lack of warmth, describing the demeanor. In this context, the phrase **all business** implies that she is serious, efficient, and no-nonsense, but her flirtatious smile demolishes this, creating a contrast. This phrase connotes a deliberate contrast to add depth to her character. Her professionalism is undercut by playfulness, and the description of her smile hints at hidden layers. In cultures valuing warmth, such as in Latin America, **all business** might initially read as cold, but the smile redeems it. While in stricter cultures like Germany, it could just mean focused. The phrase itself does not inherently have a positive or negative connotation, but is observational. As such, this example is considered to have a neutral connotation as it simply describes her demeanor without judgment.

Data 4

Both girls had taken measure of each other, and after round one they returned to their "**corners**," each with a bit more respect for the other

The example of neutral connotations can be seen in this data with the word **corner**. Corners can refer to an area or angle where two or more sides or edges meet or join. As for a verb, **corner** means to force something, especially living creatures, into a place or situation from which it is hard to escape. Those are the literal meanings or denotative meanings of **corners**. On the other hand, the word **corner** connotes something deeper than that in this context. As in boxing or other sports competitions, "corners" are the physical space where fighters retreat to reassemble. Meanwhile, here it symbolizes a space of emotional or psychological withdrawal, a temporary space to reassess their relationship after a confrontation. Before this statement happens, the characters—Scarlet and Virginia—have a few conversations about how they live their lives with some harsh but true arguments. That was their own way of

getting to know each other. After that, they eventually end up being more respectful of each other and realise that they have more in common than they had expected. The metaphor of “corners” symbolizing their emotional space is only a descriptive mark that portrays the girls as skillful persons rather than enemies, making their increasing respect feel appropriate. The “corners” are not confinement. They are spaces to assess how the relationship will play out. Hence, this example is considered as the type of a neutral connotation because it does not contain strong emotions.

c. Negative Connotation

Data 5

“Do you think some of the girls at work, especially Prue and Pam, I mean, **take you for granted** sometimes?”

The phrase **take you for granted** is an idiom that has the meaning of to fail to appreciate their efforts or presence, assuming they’ll always be available without reciprocating care or acknowledgment. It often implies resentment or hostility. A non-native speaker may misunderstand the idiom. They may think that it means to accept you as unquestioned, and interpret it in a literal way. Contextually, the expression shows that, according to Maddy, Prue and Pam ignored or undervalued Charlotte's contributions and feelings. The hesitant approach “**Do you think...?**” hints that it is a sensitive observation, not just a neutral question. Maddy is likely validating Charlotte’s hidden frustrations. Currently, she feels neglected by her friends due to their hectic jobs and activities. Meanwhile, she had nothing busy to do. Hence, this idiom can be classified as one of the examples of negative connotations because it implies a lack of appreciation or exploitation.

Data 6

“She didn’t **come knocking on your door**,” Maddy said, playing both sides.

The connotation of this example is highly reliant on its context. In which Maddy played dirty on Charlotte and her friends. Pitted them against each other because she felt pressured by the fact that all her wicked deeds had finally been discovered by the others. Based on the context, Maddy expressed that the one who “came and knocking the door” was Scarlet. Implying the one who asked for help is Scarlet by knocking on Charlotte and Maddy’s door.

Besides that, the phrase **come knocking on your door** is also an idiom that generally means something is about to happen or is arriving unexpectedly. However, the specific meaning of the idiom can vary depending on the context. As previously explained, the utilization of this phrase does explain about literally describes someone knocking on the door in a physical way, which is Scarlet. However, it carries a deeper meaning because Maddy uses it to shift the blame onto Scarlet, because the sequence of events they experienced started there. Truthfully, Maddy was the culprit of the rift in Charlotte's friendship because she was the one who instigated and heated up Charlotte so that her relationship with her friends became tense throughout this time. In conclusion, this example remarks negative connotations because of the context it has and its malicious intent.

Through this analysis, we can identify which types of connotations are most prevalent in the *Ghostgirl: Homecoming* novel. Furthermore, there are 56 data that contain connotative meanings, with a breakdown of 13 positive connotations, 13 neutral connotations, and 30 negative connotations. This indicates that the theme of the novel is in line with what type of connotative meaning that is dominantly used. In this case, *Ghostgirl: Homecoming* explores the emotional and psychological journey of its characters, particularly their navigation of life, death, and the spaces in between. Hurley’s use of connotative language, especially the frequent

negative connotations, mirrors the novel's darker undertones, emphasizing themes of isolation, longing, and self-discovery.

CONCLUSION

These conclusions are drawn from the analysis of connotative meaning in Tonya Hurley's novel *Ghostgirl: Homecoming*. The findings reveal that all types of connotations—positive, neutral, and negative—are present in the novel, with negative connotations being the most prevalent, followed by positive and neutral ones. This prevalence aligns with the novel's themes of mortality, identity, and the liminal space between life and death, which are central to the narrative. The frequent use of negative connotations underscores the protagonist's struggles with self-acceptance and existential questions, while positive and neutral connotations provide balance, reflecting moments of hope and introspection. Furthermore, meaning is very wide and can be interpreted differently by each person. Thus, this study is unlimited and can be expanded in various topics. For instance, the thematic meanings or associative meanings are also interesting to be studied and it can provide deeper understanding of other types of meaning. Additionally, comparative studies with other young adult novels or analyses of symbolism could offer richer insights into the interplay between language and theme in contemporary literature.

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