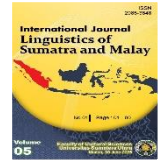




International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)

Journal homepage: <https://talenta.usu.ac.id/ism>



Denotative and Connotative Meaning Relations in the Selection of Canine Lexicon in the Spy x Family Anime Series

Muhammad Yusuf ^{1*} & Muhammad Kiki Wardana²

^{1,2}Faculty of Language & Communication, Universitas Harapan Medan, Medan.

*Corresponding Author: muhammadyusuf@unhar.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received 3 April 2026 Revised 26 May 2026 Accepted 25 June 2026 Available online 30 June 2026 ISSN: 2986-3848 How to cite: Yusuf, M., & Wardana, M.K. (2026). Denotative and connotative meaning relations in the selection of canine lexicon in the spy x family anime series. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 5(1), 37-47.	This study investigates the denotative and connotative meaning relations of canine terminology in the anime Spy x Family Season 2 Episode 1 ("Mission 13: Project Apple") using Geoffrey Leech's lexical semantics framework. Grounded in a descriptive qualitative method, textual data from spoken dialogues and monologues were gathered using observation and note-taking techniques. The analysis identifies seven distinct Japanese canine lexicons: <i>Inu</i>, <i>Wan-chan</i>, <i>Inu-san</i>, <i>Banken</i>, <i>Bakudan-ken</i>, <i>Dougu</i>, and <i>Wan-kou</i>. The findings reveal that while denotative meanings anchor literal reference, connotative layers span a wide evaluative spectrum reflecting speaker ideology. Affectionate and personified diction (<i>Wan-chan</i>, <i>Inu-san</i>) elevates the animal to an equal domestic companion, utilitarian terms (<i>Banken</i>) reflect pragmatic operational valuation, and derogatory expressions (<i>Bakudan-ken</i>, <i>Dougu</i>) result in extreme de-animation and objectification within terrorist discourse. This research concludes that lexical selection in fictional narratives acts as a crucial moral marker, establishing an ideological dividing line between humanistic empathy and utilitarian extremism. Keywords: Canine lexicon, Connotative meaning, Denotative meaning, Lexical semantics, Spy x Family.
 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International. http://doi.org/10.32734/ijlsm.v5i1.26532	

1. Introduction

Language in human communication is never a mere structural arrangement of arbitrary symbols; rather, it functions as a profound reflection of human cognitive frameworks, social attitudes, and ideological stances. The selection of vocabulary, or diction, by a speaker serves as a potent linguistic mechanism not only to designate conceptual labels but also to construct meaning, exert power relations, and project the speaker's emotional and moral alignment toward a specific referent (Aritonang et al., 2026; Bouderbane, 2024; Suardana et al., 2026). Every lexical choice carries an inherent axiological evaluation that differentiates how individuals or social groups perceive and interact with the same objective reality (Dinara Rustembaevna, 2026; Karamatdinovna, 2026; Nasar, 2024). Consequently, investigating vocabulary selection allows linguists to uncover the underlying psychological states and ideological motivations that govern human discourse across varied social contexts (Chapman et al., 2022; Sumardiyanto et al., 2025).

To comprehend how such ideological and evaluative layers are embedded within language, lexical semantics provides an essential theoretical framework by positing the word as the fundamental unit of meaning analysis (Mustofakulova, 2026; Palmer, 1981; Pateda, 2010). Central to lexical semantics is the dichotomy between denotative and connotative meanings, a conceptual distinction extensively systematized by Geoffrey Leech (Leech, 1974, 1981) and widely applied in contemporary linguistic studies (Makhado & Raphalalani,

2026; Sari & Hosniyeh, 2026; Wang & Sun, 2021; Yenni Adelina Sinaga & Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik, 2026). Denotative meaning serves as the referential core and structural anchor of an expression, providing literal clarity, explicit communication, and dictionary-based definitions of a lexical item (Abqori Fadilla et al., 2026; Fauzi & Susiawati, 2026; Sri Utami Rizki et al., 2026). In contrast, connotative meaning transcends literal boundaries to encompass the additional emotional significations, cultural depth, psychological attitudes, and associative nuances that a word evokes within a specific discourse (Boimau et al., 2026; Dari et al., 2026).

The dynamic interaction between denotative foundations and connotative layers forms a unified interpretive system where speakers negotiate communicative values, symbolic complexity, and evaluative expressiveness (Belosevic, 2026; Nishida et al., 2026). This linguistic negotiation is particularly pronounced in the domain of animal-related terminology, or *zoonyms*, which frequently fulfill complex semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic functions in human communication (Oinotkinova, 2023; Rayyan et al., 2024). In various cultural and narrative contexts, animal vocabulary undergoes metaphorical and evaluative shifts, carrying either positive, meliorative associations—such as anthropomorphism, warmth, and loyalty—or severe negative, pejorative connotations, such as dehumanization, cruelty, inferiority, and utilitarian exploitation (Kayed et al., 2023; Mvanyashe, 2024; Oinotkinova, 2023). Therefore, analyzing how a specific *zoonym* is deployed reveals the underlying emotional tone, potency, and moral stance of the interlocutors toward the living world (Humbert-Droz, 2024; Motoki et al., 2022).

Such complex negotiations of lexical meaning are vividly materialized within literary and cinematic discourses, where characterization and thematic progression rely heavily on distinctive vocabulary and artistic expression (Sumardiyanto et al., 2025; Xolmamatova, 2026). A compelling contemporary phenomenon where this semantic complexity occurs is the animated series *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1, titled "Mission 13: Project Apple." This episode establishes a dramatic narrative collision between two antithetical worlds: the warm, domestic sphere of an ordinary family seeking to adopt a household pet, and the ruthless, clandestine underworld of military espionage, political assassination, and terrorism. Within this unique narrative architecture, a single physical referent—a dog (specifically the great Pyrenees character later named Bond, alongside other experimental canines)—exists simultaneously as a beloved family companion and a biologically engineered weapon manufactured for state destruction.

The lexical representation of the canine entity in this episode provides an extraordinary semantic battleground, making it a highly significant subject for linguistic inquiry. Across the transcription, different characters refer to the exact same canine referent using vastly divergent Japanese vocabulary, ranging from affectionate, humanizing terms to cold, utilitarian, and completely de-animating labels. This extreme semantic distance illustrates how connotative meaning is not static, but is dynamically constructed by the speaker's ideological background, psychological state, and communicative purpose (Ababneh, Al-Azzam, & Al-Amar, 2023; Abdelkarim & Alhaj, 2023). While empathetic characters attribute intimacy and personification to the animal, utilitarian actors and political extremists reduce the living creature to an inanimate tool or a disposable weapon of terror, demonstrating how lexical choices expose latent emotional and ideological divides between disparate groups (Alekseev et al., 2021; Barbara et al., 2024; Dahnilyah, 2020).

Despite the rich semantic potential embedded in anime dialogue, specific lexical semantic analyses focusing on *zoonymic* diction and ideological representation in contemporary Japanese popular culture remain relatively scarce. To address this empirical gap and investigate the phenomena of meaning construction, the present study formulates three primary research questions. First, what are the lexical variations in the Japanese language utilized to refer to the "dog" entity within the transcription of *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1? Second, how do the denotative and connotative meaning relations of each identified lexicon operate within their specific situational contexts of utterance? Third, in what ways do these contrasting connotative meanings represent and construct the psychological characterization and ideological positioning of the speakers?

In direct alignment with these inquiries, this research establishes three comprehensive academic objectives that guide the analytical trajectory of the study. Primarily, it aims to systematically identify, categorize, and classify the varied canine lexicons deployed by the characters throughout the episode's transcription. Furthermore, it seeks to rigorously analyze the relational dynamics between the denotative core and the evaluative connotative layers of these terms using the theoretical framework of lexical semantics as articulated by Leech and contemporary semanticists. Ultimately, this study strives to uncover the profound correlations between semantic diction and character psychology, demonstrating that the selection of animal vocabulary in narrative media serves as a vital linguistic mechanism for reflecting empathy, power relations, and ideological conflict.

2. Research Method

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the lexical phenomena and meaning constructions within the selected discourse, this study employs a descriptive qualitative research design (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Gapur et al., 2024; Gapur & Pujiono, 2018). A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for semantic investigations because it focuses on the depth, richness, and complexity of human language rather than numerical measurements or statistical quantifications (Gapur & Mulyadi, 2018; Pujiono & Gapur, 2019). By utilizing a descriptive methodology, this research aims to systematically observe, analyze, and describe the linguistic realities and underlying semantic nuances exactly as they naturally occur within the communicative interactions of the characters. This methodological framework allows the researcher to delve deeply into the layered meanings embedded in vocabulary selection, providing a holistic explanation of how linguistic signs operate within specific socio-cultural and situational contexts without reducing the linguistic data to mathematical variables or complex statistical formulas.

The primary data source utilized in this investigation is the complete textual transcription of the spoken dialogues and internal monologues from the animated series *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1, formally titled "Mission 13: Project Apple" (source: <https://youtu.be/Zh0c7HhTiwY?si=FGQMZ3SLzIX-dZct>) This specific episode was strategically chosen as the investigative corpus because its narrative architecture centers heavily around the encounter with military experimental animals and a domestic quest to adopt a household pet. The transcription captures the verbal exchanges of a diverse cast of characters—including clandestine spies, professional assassins, telepathic children, ordinary civilians, and extremist terrorists—thereby providing a rich and heterogeneous linguistic environment where words are dynamically negotiated across contrasting psychological states and ideological alignments.

Within this defined primary source, the specific data of the research comprise all Japanese linguistic units—manifested in the form of individual words (lexemes), phrases, or clauses—that explicitly or implicitly refer to the subject of the "dog" or canine entities. These linguistic units represent the core focus of the semantic analysis and include a wide spectrum of vocabulary ranging from general and affectionate terms to functional and derogatory labels. Examples of the collected data points include expressions such as the neutral noun *inu* (dog), the diminutive and endearing *wan-chan* (doggy/puppy), the utilitarian *banken* (guard dog), the destructive compound *bakudan-ken* (bomb dog), and the completely de-animating object noun *dougu* (tool or instrument). Each instance of these canine referents serves as a tangible unit of analysis for evaluating how lexical diction shifts according to the speaker's perspective.

To systematically gather and organize the data from the corpus, the study applies an observational and note-taking technique, widely recognized in qualitative linguistic methodology as the listening and note-taking technique (Sudaryanto, 2015). This data collection process involved a rigorous, repeated close-reading and attentive observation of the entire Japanese transcription alongside the audiovisual execution of the episode to ensure contextual accuracy. During this observational phase, every utterance containing a canine referent was carefully identified, extracted, and documented into structured data cards. Crucially, the recording process did not isolate the lexical items from their communicative environment; rather, each extracted datum was cataloged alongside its detailed situational context, including the identity of the speaker, the intended addressee, the emotional tone of the utterance, and the specific narrative circumstance in which the speech event took place.

Following the comprehensive compilation of the data cards, the research proceeded to the data analysis stage, which was executed through a systematic, multi-step analytical procedure. The first step involved data reduction and classification, wherein the collected canine lexicons were filtered for relevance and subsequently categorized based on their structural linguistic forms and morphological patterns. Once organized, the data underwent a rigorous componential meaning analysis to disentangle their layered significations. To determine the denotative meanings—the basic, literal, and referential definitions of the terms—authoritative Japanese lexicographical resources and kanji dictionaries were consulted as objective structural anchors. Subsequently, to uncover the connotative meanings—the additional emotional, evaluative, and associative overtones—the lexical items were analyzed contextually by examining the speaker's tone, communicative intention, and immediate situational surroundings.

The final stage of the analytical process consisted of contextual interpretation and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014), wherein the empirical linguistic findings were synthesized with the broader narrative and thematic framework of the anime. In this phase, the established denotative and connotative meanings were not treated as isolated linguistic facts; instead, they were deeply interpreted to reveal how semantic diction correlates with characterization and ideological stances. By linking the semantic output back to the narrative context of *Spy x Family*, the analysis demonstrated how specific lexical choices reflect the stark moral boundary between humanizing empathy and utilitarian objectification. This comprehensive interpretive

synthesis ultimately allowed for the formulation of scientifically grounded conclusions regarding the function of lexical semantics in constructing character identity and thematic depth within media discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

The empirical investigation into the transcription of *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1 ("Mission 13: Project Apple") reveals a striking semantic diversity in how a single physical entity—the dog—is linguistically represented across different conversational contexts. The analysis demonstrates that the selection of canine vocabulary is far from arbitrary; rather, it functions as a sensitive linguistic barometer that measures the psychological distance, emotional empathy, and ideological alignment between the interlocutors and the living referent. Throughout the episode, a total of seven distinct lexicons referring to canine entities were identified, encompassing a wide semantic spectrum that ranges from highly affectionate and personified expressions to utilitarian classifications and completely dehumanizing, inanimate labels. This sharp divergence in lexical diction serves as a primary narrative mechanism, highlighting the profound moral clash between the domestic warmth of family life and the cold, instrumental calculation of military espionage and political terrorism.

3.1 Classification of Lexical Data Findings

To establish a comprehensive foundation for the semantic analysis, the collected linguistic data were first compiled, reduced, and categorized based on their distinct morphological forms and situational occurrences. The identification process yielded seven primary lexical variations in the Japanese language that serve as referents for the canine subjects within the narrative. These lexicons do not merely function as interchangeable synonyms; rather, they reflect distinct communicative intentions and social hierarchies dictated by the specific context of the utterance. A general overview of these empirical findings, categorized by their Japanese kanji and romaji representations, their respective speakers, and their immediate situational contexts of speech, is systematically presented in Table 1 below.

Tabel 1. Classification of Lexical Data Findings

No	Lexicon (Kanji/Romaji)	Speaker(s)	Context of Speech Situation
1	犬 (<i>Inu</i>)	Loid, Anya, Keith, etc.	General, neutral usage across various everyday and narrative situations.
2	ワンちゃん (<i>Wan-chan</i>)	Yor, Pet Shop Owner	Used when discussing friendly, cute, or desirable domestic pets.
3	犬さん (<i>Inu-san</i>)	Anya	Used when Anya directly addresses or respectfully speaks about Bond.
4	番犬 (<i>Banken</i>)	Loid (Monologue)	Loid's internal evaluation while inspecting dogs at a military pet shop.
5	爆弾犬 (<i>Bakudan-ken</i>)	Keith, WISE Agent	Used during strategic discussions regarding the assassination plot.
6	道具 (<i>Dougu</i>)	Keith	Used when Bond barks and Keith restrains his subordinate from hitting him.
7	ワン公 (<i>Wan-kou</i>)	Terrorist (Otoko 2)	Used authoritatively when ordering the caged dogs to remain quiet at the hideout.

As illustrated in Table 1, the distribution of these seven lexicons correlates directly with the dramatic tension of the episode, bifurcating into distinct semantic domains based on the identity of the speaker. The generic noun *inu* (犬) functions as the baseline denotative standard, utilized universally by both protagonists and antagonists when referring to the animal in an objective, unmarked manner. However, once the speakers begin to project their personal attitudes and ideological motivations onto the animals, the vocabulary bifurcates significantly. The domestic sphere, primarily represented by Yor, Anya, and civilian pet shop personnel, heavily employs diminutive and honorific modifications such as *wan-chan* (ワンちゃん) and *inu-san* (犬さん). These selections occur precisely in communicative situations characterized by excitement, empathy, and the desire to nurture an emotional bond with a household companion.

Conversely, the terminology deployed within the clandestine underworld of espionage and terrorism reveals an entirely different pattern of lexical selection, characterized by functional modification and semantic

reduction. In situations involving strategic planning or tactical execution, characters such as Loid, the WISE agents, and the extremist leader Keith replace the neutral or affectionate terms with compound nouns and objectifying labels. Expressions like *banken* (番犬 - guard dog) and *bakudan-ken* (爆弾犬 - bomb dog) emerge in contexts where the animals are evaluated strictly by their utility, whether for operational security or destructive warfare. Most notably, the lexical classification reaches its most extreme divergence in the speech of the antagonists, where derogatory suffixes (*wan-kou* / ワン公) and absolute inanimate substitutions (*dougu* / 道具 - tool) are used to assert dominance and suppress any acknowledgment of the animals' biological sentience. This systematic classification provides the empirical groundwork necessary for analyzing the deeper denotative and connotative layers of meaning in the subsequent sections.

3.2 Discussion: Denotative and Connotative Analysis

To understand how lexical selection reflects the underlying ideological and psychological stances of the characters, the identified canine terms must be analyzed beyond their surface-level referential definitions. In accordance with Geoffrey Leech's (1974, 1981) semantic framework, each lexicon possesses a denotative core that anchors its literal meaning within the language system, accompanied by layered connotative significations that convey emotional, evaluative, and associative nuances (Boimau et al., 2026; Yenni Adelina Sinaga & Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik, 2026). Within the narrative of *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1, these connotative layers bifurcate sharply into distinct semantic domains. The following analytical discussion categorizes the empirical findings based on their evaluative direction, beginning with expressions characterized by positive, meliorative overtones that serve to humanize and nurture the canine referent within the domestic sphere.

3.2.1 Affectionate and Personified Diction (Positive Connotation)

In linguistic and cultural practice, animal vocabulary is frequently modified to express affective meaning, projecting the speaker's emotional warmth, empathy, and social attachment toward the non-human subject (Dari et al., 2026; Rayyan et al., 2024). Within the domestic interactions of the Forger family and civilian characters, the canine referent is consistently softened through affectionate morphological attachments. This semantic strategy serves to construct an inviting, safe, and familial atmosphere, transforming the animal from a biological organism into a cherished social companion.

The primary manifestation of this affectionate diction is observed in the use of the lexicon *ワンちゃん* (**Wan-chan**), which is predominantly employed by maternal figures such as Yor Briar and civilian animal caretakers like the pet shop owner. To illustrate the semantic operation of this term within discourse, one of Yor's utterances from the transcription is analyzed below:

(1)

ワンちゃんの好きなもの あげましょう。

Wan-chan no sukinamono agemashou.

"Let's give the doggy something it likes."

From a structural and denotative perspective, the lexical item *wan-chan* is a compound construction derived from *wan-wan*—the Japanese onomatopoeic representation of a dog's barking sound—combined with the diminutive and intimate suffix *-chan* (ちゃん). Literally, it designates a domestic canine in a linguistic register typically reserved for young children or endearing subjects. Connotatively, this lexical selection carries profound emotional overtones of warmth, cuteness, innocence, and vulnerability. By replacing the standard noun *inu* (dog) with *wan-chan*, Yor and the pet shop personnel actively evoke an associative framework where the animal is perceived as a harmless, affectionate entity that requires human care, nurturing, and protection. As observed by Dari, Rahman, and Nazar (2026), such affective meanings reflect the speaker's psychological desire to establish emotional intimacy and maternal protection. In the context of the episode, Yor's diction reinforces her genuine commitment to constructing a loving domestic life for Anya, completely distancing the family's future pet from the harsh realities of violence or utility.

A distinct yet equally significant meliorative shift occurs through the linguistic selection of *犬さん* (**Inu-san**), a form exclusively utilized by the child protagonist, Anya Forger. Rather than adopting the childish diminutive *-chan*, Anya modifies the generic noun with a formal honorific suffix, as demonstrated in her initial attempt to interact with the canine concept:

(2)

犬さん ピーナツ食べる？

*Inu-san pīnatsu taberu?**"Mr. Dog, would you like to eat some peanuts?"*

Denotatively, *Inu-san* combines the base noun *inu* (犬 / dog) with the standard Japanese honorific suffix *-san* (さん), translating literally as "Mr. Dog" or "Sir Dog." In standard Japanese linguistic etiquette, attaching *-san* to an animal is an uncommon morphological choice that signals anthropomorphism. Connotatively, this diction operates as a powerful mechanism of personification and social equalization. While adult characters view pets through the lens of ownership or caretaking, Anya elevates the canine's status from a subordinate animal to a respected "partner" and an equal conversational subject (Oinotkinova, 2023). This connotative elevation is deeply tied to the narrative context: possessing telepathic abilities, Anya is capable of reading Bond's internal thoughts and predicting the future through his mind. Consequently, her linguistic choice reflects her cognitive awareness that the animal possesses subjective agency, intellect, and emotions identical to those of humans. This finding aligns with Makhado and Raphaelalani (2026), who emphasize that connotative meanings introduce metaphorical and cultural depth that transcends literal interpretation. In Anya's worldview, *Inu-san* is not a piece of property or a subordinate creature, but a sentient comrade deserving of equal respect, partnership, and shared treats.

3.2.2 Utilitarian and Functional Diction (Neutral/Calculative Connotation)

While affective diction seeks to humanize and nurture the subject within domestic environments, lexical selection within professional and tactical domains frequently shifts toward functional classification. In such communicative contexts, interlocutors prioritize the instrumental value of an entity over emotional attachment or empathy. This phenomenon is clearly observable in the speech of Loid Forger when operating under his clandestine identity as the professional spy "Twilight." Driven by pragmatic necessity and operational security, Loid evaluates potential household pets not through the lens of companionship, but through a calculative framework of utility and tactical efficiency.

This functional valuation is linguistically encoded in the use of the lexicon 番犬 (*Banken*), which emerges during Loid's internal monologue while inspecting highly trained canines at an organization-affiliated pet shop:

(3)

どうせ 飼うなら保安上頼りになる番犬をと思ったが...

*Douse kaunara hoan jou tayorininaru banken o to omottaga...**"If we are going to keep one anyway, I thought a reliable guard dog would be best for security purposes, but..."*

From a denotative standpoint, *banken* is a compound noun formed by the kanji 番 (*ban* - watch/duty) and 犬 (*ken* / *inu* - dog), defined strictly by authoritative dictionaries as a "guard dog" or "watchdog." Connotatively, this term is devoid of affective warmth, conveying instead an emotionally neutral, utilitarian, and highly calculative meaning centered on security, vigilance, and practical function. In his internal discourse, Loid strips away the romanticized domestic image of a family pet (*wan-chan*) and replaces it with a pragmatic assessment of operational utility. The canine is perceived as a functional asset designed to maintain perimeter defense and safeguard the Forger family's false identity from external threats. This empirical finding resonates with Nasar (2024) and Sumardiyanto et al. (2025), who observe that individuals within specialized professions often assign evaluative connotative meanings based on technical function and spatial optimization rather than layperson sentimentality. Loid's lexical choice demonstrates how a spy's cognitive schema naturally categorizes living organisms according to their tactical contribution to mission success.

3.2.3 Dehumanizing and Objectifying Diction (Negative/Pejorative Connotation)

At the furthest opposite end of the semantic spectrum lies vocabulary characterized by severe pejorative connotations and linguistic objectification. When language is deployed within extremist political movements or militaristic environments, words are frequently manipulated to justify violence, enforce dominance, and remove ethical boundaries (Bouderbane, 2024; Suardana, Kaka, & Isu, 2026). In the transcription of *Spy x*

Family Season 2 Episode 1, the terrorist leader Keith and his subordinates systematically employ derogatory and destructive modifications when referring to the experimental animals of Project Apple, effectively reducing living creatures to disposable instruments of warfare.

The first step in this linguistic degradation is manifested through the lexical compound 爆弾犬 (**Bakudan-ken**) and the pejorative slang ワン公 (**Wan-kou**). To illustrate how these terms operate to assert hostility and superiority within terrorist discourse, an utterance from one of Keith's subordinates (Otoko 2) at their clandestine hideout is analyzed below:

(4)

いい子にしてろよ ワン公ども。

Ii ko ni shi tero yo wan kou-domo.

"Be good little boys and stay quiet, you mutts."

Denotatively, *bakudan-ken* combines the words for "bomb" (*bakudan*) and "dog" (*ken*), literally designating a canine equipped with explosives. Meanwhile, *wan-kou* attaches the pejorative or condescending suffix *-kou* (公) to the onomatopoeic bark *wan*, which translates literally as "dog-brute" or "mutt," amplified further by the pluralizing suffix of inferiority, *-domo* (ども). Connotatively, these lexical choices carry intense emotional overtones of hostility, violence, inferiority, and complete contempt. As Kayed, Bani Essa, and Alkayid (2023) highlight in their cross-linguistic analysis of canine terminology, dog-related expressions are frequently exploited in negative contexts to signify cultural inferiority and subordination. By categorizing the animals as *bakudan-ken*, the terrorists conceptualize them not as biological organisms, but as destructive delivery systems whose sole existence is defined by their capacity to explode and cause death. Similarly, the use of *wan-kou* establishes a rigid hierarchy of power, reinforcing the animals' subjugated status under human tyranny.

However, the most extreme and theoretically significant empirical finding in this study occurs when the lexical representation undergoes total semantic de-animation (the complete stripping away of biological sentience). This extreme shift is captured in Keith's authoritative command when the telepathic dog, Bond, barks at an intruder and a subordinate attempt to physically assault the animal:

(5)

やめろ。道具を 傷つけるな。

Yamero. Dougu o kizutsukeru na.

"Stop it. Do not damage the tool."

Denotatively, the lexical item 道具 (**Dougu**) refers exclusively to an inanimate "tool," "instrument," or "implement" utilized for manual or mechanical work. It possesses zero biological or zoological features in its literal dictionary definition. Connotatively, Keith's substitution of the noun *inu* (dog) with *dougu* represents an absolute objectification and dehumanization of the canine subject. In this utterance, the animal is completely stripped of its status as a living, breathing creature capable of feeling pain, and is linguistically re-classified as a lifeless piece of property (*inanimate object*). Keith does not instruct his subordinate to avoid "hurting" or "wounding" an animal; rather, he warns him against "damaging" (*kizutsukeru*) a valuable tactical and economic asset.

This profound semantic shift directly exemplifies what Leech (1981) and Alhaj (2026) describe as the power of connotative manipulation to serve ideological ends. In alignment with Oinotkinova (2023) and Mvanyashe (2024), who note that zoonymic discourse can reflect severe societal cruelty and systemic subjugation, Keith's diction reveals the ultimate endpoint of utilitarian extremism. By linguistically transforming a sentient animal into a mere "tool," the terrorist leader constructs a psychological reality where ethical considerations are eradicated, rendering the sacrifice of living beings entirely acceptable within the pursuit of political warfare.

3.3 Meaning Relations and Character Ideology

The empirical findings from the transcription of *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1 demonstrate that lexical choices extend far beyond mere referential designation; they function as a structural mapping of human consciousness and social attitudes. When analyzed through the framework of lexical semantics, the varied canine vocabulary converges into distinct semantic fields that establish the moral and ideological boundaries of the narrative. As theoretical literature asserts, language serves as an active medium for constructing

ideology, projecting power relations, and revealing the speaker's ethical alignment toward the objective world (Aritonang et al., 2026; Bouderbane, 2024; Suardana, Kaka, & Isu, 2026). In this episode, the semantic field of the canine referent acts as a linguistic dividing line between humanism and extreme utilitarianism, distinguishing the moral trajectories of the protagonist group (the Forger family) from those of the antagonist faction (Keith and his terrorist network).

The protagonist group exhibits a dynamic, evolutionary semantic trajectory that mirrors their growing empathy and commitment to humanistic values. Initially operating from a cold, professional perspective, Loid Forger relies on the neutral-utilitarian lexicon 番犬 (*Banken* - **guard dog**), assessing the animal strictly through the calculative lens of operational security (Nasar, 2024; Sumardiyanto et al., 2025). But, as the narrative progresses and the family interacts with the living creature, their diction undergoes a profound meliorative shift toward positive-affective terminology. Through Yor's adoption of ワンちゃん (*Wan-chan* - **doggy**) and Anya's personified 犬さん (*Inu-san* - **Mr. Dog**), the Forger family actively reconstructs the animal's identity from a utilitarian security asset into an equal, sentient member of the domestic sphere (Dari, Rahman, & Nazar, 2026; Makhado & Raphalalani, 2026). This linguistic progression illustrates how affective connotative meanings foster emotional resonance and moral connection, effectively using language to build a nurturing family unit amidst a backdrop of global tension.

In stark contrast, the antagonist group maintains a rigid, highly destructive semantic field that reflects the cruelty of war and extreme utilitarian exploitation. Throughout the episode, Keith and his extremist subordinates consistently reject any affective or humanizing vocabulary, anchoring their speech exclusively in pejorative modifications and absolute objectification (Kayed, Bani Essa, & Alkayid, 2023; Mvanyashe, 2024). Rather than recognizing the biological sentience of the animals, they linguistically trap them within the categories of 爆弾犬 (*Bakudan-ken* - **bomb dog**) and derogatory slurs like ワン公 (*Wan-kou* - **mutt**). To illustrate how this ideological stance is definitively codified in the narrative's climax, Keith's ideological declaration regarding the operational purpose of the animals is analyzed below:

(6)

爆弾犬を使ったこの計画が 成功すれば東西の なれ合いは間違いなく終わる。

Bakudan inu o tsukatta kono keikaku ga seikou sureba touzai no nareai wa machigainaku owaru.

"If this plan using bomb dogs succeeds, the collusion between East and West will undoubtedly end."

In this pivotal utterance, the grammatical and semantic structure of Keith's speech exposes his ideological worldview. Denotatively, the phrase 爆弾犬を使った (*Bakudan inu o tsukatta* - **using bomb dogs**) positions the canine entity not as the subject of an action, but as the direct grammatical object of the verb *tsukau* (を使う - to use/to manipulate). Connotatively, this combination of the weaponized lexicon *bakudan-ken* with an instrumental verb stripped of empathy reinforces a worldview where living beings possess zero intrinsic value. In alignment with Leech (1981) and Alhaj (2026), who emphasize that connotative meanings project ideological doctrine and speaker intent, Keith's diction reveals an extremist ideology where life is entirely commodified for political violence. By consistently deploying terminology that de-animates the canine subject into a mere tool (道具 / *Dougu*), the terrorists construct a linguistic reality that justifies mass destruction and ethical detachment (Oinotkinova, 2023).

Ultimately, the relational dynamics between denotative and connotative meanings across these two opposing groups prove that lexical selection in fictional discourse is a powerful narrative tool. The choice of a single word—whether *Inu-san*, *Banken*, or *Dougu*—encapsulates the fundamental thematic conflict of *Spy x Family*: the struggle between preserving life through humanistic connection and destroying it through instrumental objectification.

4. Conclusion

This empirical investigation into the lexical semantics of *Spy x Family* Season 2 Episode 1 ("Mission 13: Project Apple") demonstrates that language functions as a profound mirror of human consciousness, psychological states, and ideological stances. The analysis concludes that a single physical referent—the canine entity—is dynamically constructed and interpreted across a diverse semantic spectrum through seven primary lexical variations in the Japanese language: *Inu*, *Wan-chan*, *Inu-san*, *Banken*, *Bakudan-ken*, *Dougu*, and *Wan-kou*. Rather than serving as arbitrary synonyms, these terms reflect deep-seated communicative intentions and ethical orientations that vary significantly according to the speaker and the immediate context of speech.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the relationship between denotative foundations and connotative layers spans an extraordinarily wide evaluative continuum. At one end of the spectrum, affective and humanizing diction dominates the domestic sphere, manifested through the diminutive warmth of ワンちゃん (*Wan-chan*) and the respectful personification of 犬さん (*Inu-san*), which elevate the animal to an equal, sentient companion. In the intermediate domain, calculative and utilitarian diction emerges in professional espionage, where 番犬 (*Banken*) designates the animal purely through its instrumental security function. At the furthest opposite extreme within the clandestine underworld of terrorism, language descends into severe pejorative modification and total de-animation. Through terms like 爆弾犬 (*Bakudan-ken*), ワン公 (*Wan-kou*), and the absolute inanimate substitution 道具 (*Dougu* - tool), living organisms are stripped of their biological sentience and linguistically reduced to disposable instruments of political violence.

In the end, this research proves that lexical semantics within fictional discourse operates as a crucial narrative device and an analytical marker of moral boundaries. The specific vocabulary chosen by a character act as a linguistic dividing line between humanism and extreme utilitarianism, dictating whether a living creature is conceptualized as a beloved "family member" or a mere "tool of war." By mapping how vocabulary shifts alongside character development and thematic tension, this study reaffirms that meaning in language is continuously negotiated to reflect empathy, power dynamics, and the fundamental struggle between preserving life and commodifying it.

References

- Abqori Fadilla, D., Susanto, A., & Sukirno, S. (2026). Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Lyrics of the Song “Pikiran yang Matang” by the Band Perunggu. *Journal of Social Research*, 5(4), 1746–1755. <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v5i4.3113>
- Alekseev, A. V., Yazov, Y. K., Sychev, A. M., Bich, M. G., & Skiba, V. Y. (2021). Analysis of the protest movement of African Americans in the United States through denotative and connotative meanings of Hashtags. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17, 1210–1219. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?partnerID=HzOxMe3b%5C&scp=85104621333%5C&origin=inward>
- Aritonang, F. A., Caniago, Z. S., Anggraeni, B., Irwansyah, R., Tarigan, N. D. P., Sinabang, C. A., Tarigan, F. E., & Soraya, T. R. (2026). Roland Barthes’ Semiotic Analysis of Lemonilo Advertising Posters: The Construction of Denotative, Connotative, and Mythical Meanings. *Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 5(2), 1711–1720. <https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i2.1334>
- Barbara, F., Zsolt, B. I., & Andrea, D. (2024). The connotative meaning of built historic environments: exploring heritage professionals’ and laypeople’s dimensions of meaning. *Magyar Pszichologiai Szemle*, 78(4), 485–512. <https://doi.org/10.1556/0016.2023.00067>
- Belosevic, M. (2026). The influence of linguistic experience and connotative meanings on the perceived creativity of German personal name blends: An experimental study. *Word Structure*, 19(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.3366/word.2026.0259>
- Boimau, P. A. N., Sabat, Y., & Aisyah, S. (2026). The Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Song Lyric of “If Ain’t Got You” By Alicia Keys. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 11(3), 1234–1241. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i3.2812>
- Bouderbane, A. (2024). Connotative Meaning of Political Emotive Expressions in Arab Spring Fake News. *Text and Social Media Analytics for Fake News and Hate Speech Detection*, 199–211. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003409519-11>
- Chapman, R. M., Gardner, M. N., & Lyons, M. (2022). Gender differences in emotional connotative meaning of words measured by Osgood’s semantic differential techniques in young adults. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01126-3>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2025). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Fifth Edit). Sage Publications.
- Dahnilyah. (2020). Connotative and Denotative Meaning of a Poem Entitled: “Membaca Tanda-Tanda” on Environmental Devastation: An Ecocriticism. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1655(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1655/1/012145>
- Dari, W., Rahman, F., & Nazar, M. (2026). An Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Adele’s Song Lyrics “My Little Love”: A Semantic Analysis. *Journal of Linguistics, Culture and Communication*, 4(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.61320/jolcc.v4i1.23-42>
- Dinara Rustembaevna, R. (2026). Nomination and Semantics of Clothing: Denotative and Connotative

- Components, Evaluativeness, and Expressiveness. *Science Time*, 4(3/1).
<https://doi.org/10.66345/stj.v4i3/1.5344>
- Fauzi, A., & Susiawati, I. (2026). Denotative and Connotative Meaning in Arabic Texts: Implications for Enhancing Semantic Competence in Arabic Language Education. *INCARE, International Journal of Educational Resources*, 6(5), 606–622. <https://doi.org/10.59689/incare.v6i5.1262>
- Gapur, A., & Mulyadi, M. (2018). Lexical field of ‘saying’ on Japanese lexeme iu.’ *JAPANEDU: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran Bahasa Jepang*, 3(2), 108. <https://doi.org/10.17509/japanedu.v3i2.11442>
- Gapur, A., & Pujiono, M. (2018). Konstruksi interogatif polar dalam Bahasa Jepang. *Ranah: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa*, 7(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.26499/rnh.v7i1.477>
- Gapur, A., Taulia, & Wardana, M. K. (2024). Exploring the linguistic landscape of public elementary schools in Medan: Understanding forms and functions. *International Journal of Cultural and Art Studies*, 8(1), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.32734/ijcas.v8i1.16989>
- Karamatdinovna, U. G. (2026). Semantic Structure of Toponymic Units: Denotative Meaning, Connotation, Evaluation, And Pragmatic Functions. *American Journal of Philological Sciences*, 06(03), 156–159. <https://doi.org/10.37547/ajps/volume06issue03-36>
- Kayed, M. Al, Essa, L. B., & Alkayid, M. (2023). A contrastive study of the connotative meanings of “dog-related” expressions in English and Jordanian proverbs: Implications for translators and language teachers. *Acta Linguistica Petropolitana*, 19(1), 66–101. <https://doi.org/10.30842/alp2306573719166101>
- Leech, G. N. (1974). *Semantics*. Penguin Publishing Group.
- Leech, G. N. (1981). *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Penguin Publishing Group.
- Makhado, A. J., & Raphalalani, M. R. (2026). An analysis of Denotative, Connotative and Collocative Meaning of Tshivenda Proverbs: A Leech’s semantic Theory Perspective. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6697/19466>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mustofakulova, M. (2026). Zamonaviy Tilshunoslikda Konnotativ Ma’Noning Tadqiqi. *Yangi Davr Ilm-Fani: Inson Uchun Innovatsion G’Oya Va Yechimlar*, 2(11), 27–31. <https://doi.org/10.47390/ydif-y2026v2i11/n06>
- Mvanyashe, A. (2024). The connotative meaning of the Xhosa word umlungu before and during the democratic era. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 42(1), 17–20. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2022.2153709>
- Nasar, J. L. (2024). Connotative Meanings of House Styles. *The Meaning and Use of Housing: International Perspectives, Approaches and Their Applications*, 143–167. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003514978-13>
- Nishida, Y., Nishiguchi, M., Kawahara, Y., Matsubara, K., Nishiyama, M., Asakawa, K., Osawa, S., & Wada, Y. (2026). Visual shapes and emojis capture aspects of basic tastes and spiciness via shared connotative meaning. *Food Quality and Preference*, 145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2026.105997>
- Oinotkinova, N. R. (2023). Connotative meanings of zoonyms denoting wild animals in the Altai language. *Eposovedenie*, 2023(4), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.25587/2782-4861-2023-4-76-87>
- Palmer, F. R. (1981). *Semantics* (Second Edi). Cambridge University Press.
- Pateda, M. (2010). *Semantik Leksikal*. Rineka Cipta.
- Pujiono, M., & Gapur, A. (2019). Ekolirik Dalam Lagu Anak Jepang: Tinjauan Dua Douyou. *IZUMI*, 8(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.8.1.9-19>
- Rayyan, M., Abusalim, N., Zidouni, S., & Alghazo, S. (2024). The Connotative Meanings of Animal Names in the Algerian Society. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 16(1), 95–116. <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.16.1.6>
- Sari, M., & Hosniyeh, H. (2026). Makna Denotatif dan Konotatif dalam Lirik Lagu “Tilik Jogja” Karya Citra Scholastika. *JiIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 9(1), 1346–1356. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v9i1.9668>
- Sri Utami Rizki, Riri Kumalasari, & Octavio Sin Trindade. (2026). Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Book of Celoteh R.A. Kartini. *Jurnal Sastra Indonesia*, 15(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jsi.v15i1.45206>
- Suardana, P., Kaka, P., & Isu, E. (2026). The Analysis of Connotative Meaning in Political Speeches of President Donald Trump. *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 9(1), 68–73. <https://doi.org/10.33503/journey.v9i1.3010>
- Sudaryanto. (2015). *Metode dan Aneka Teknik Analisis Bahasa*. Sanata Dharma University Press.

- Sumardiyanto, B., Purbadi, Y. D., Sutanty, P. B. B., Ric, M. I., & Aditya, Y. R. (2025). Architectural semiotics to uncover the denotative and connotative meanings of buildings in Malioboro, Yogyakarta. *ARTEKS : Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur*, 10(3), 647–654. <https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v10i3.4460>
- Wang, J., & Sun, Y. (2021). Different Metaphorical Orientations of Time Succession between Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 36(3), 194–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1910952>
- Xolmamatova, S. (2026). Lexical Units Expressing Connotative Meaning. *THE IMPACT OF ZAHIR AD-DIN MUHAMMAD BABUR'S LEGACY ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF EASTERN STATEHOOD AND CULTURE*, 970–977. <https://doi.org/10.52773/tsuull.conf.2026./umat3040>
- Yenni Adelina Sinaga, & Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik. (2026). An In-Depth Semantic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meaning in the Song Lyrics of 'Let Her Go' by Passenger. *Journal of Social Humanities and Education*, 1(4), 277–285. <https://doi.org/10.65310/02gdnk45>