

Exploring Lexical and Contextual Meaning in Olivia Rodrigo's Song Lyrics in Sour Album

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore the lexical and contextual meanings in Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics from her album Sour. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study analyzed how Olivia Rodrigo's word choice and context convey deep emotions and messages through literal and contextual meanings. The results of this study revealed how simple yet emotionally charged language is used to describe complex feelings and experiences. Songs such as Brutal, Jealousy, Jealousy, Traitor, and Hope Ur Ok feature themes of love, self-doubt, jealousy, social criticism, and personal growth. Song lyrics are seen as a language-based art form that not only relies on the beauty of words but is also loaded with emotional and social meaning. By analyzing word choice and context, this research also highlighted the way Olivia Rodrigo makes music a valuable tool for language learning and cultural analysis, enriching the understanding of emotional and linguistic expression in music. The research concluded that the lyrics in Sour analyzed through Literal and Contextual depict the narrative of modern life by using simple but powerful language, creating a deep emotional resonance with the listener.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important aspects of human life. As a communication tool, language allows individuals to convey thoughts, emotions and, information in a variety of ways. In linguistic studies, analyzing meaning is important to understand how words are chosen and assembled to create a particular message. One of the most interesting areas of linguistic study is the study of meaning, particularly lexical meaning and contextual meaning (Apriyanto, 2022).

Lexical meaning refers to the basic meaning of a word as listed in a dictionary, without considering the context in which it is used. For example, the word love in English lexically means love or affection. However, in certain contexts, the word can have a more complex meaning, depending on the situation, the relationship between speakers, or the emotions involved. This is where the study of contextual meaning comes in, which looks at how the meaning of a word or phrase is influenced by the situation and environment in which it is used (Hendra et al., 2022).

Song lyrics, as a form of language-based artwork, are a rich medium for meaning analysis. Lyrics not only rely on the beauty of words, but also convey deep emotions, stories and, messages. By using certain words, a songwriter can create a strong image and influence the emotions of the listener. Therefore, analyzing the meaning of song lyrics is one way to understand more deeply what the songwriter wants to convey (Yulia Syahfitri, 2021).

Olivia Rodrigo's album *Sour* has become a phenomenon in the world of modern music. Released in 2021, the album was not only a commercial success, but also gained critical acclaim for its emotional and authentic lyrics. Each song in the album reflects Olivia Rodrigo's personal experiences, such as stories of heartbreak, disappointment, and the struggle to find oneself. These themes are packaged in powerful and meaningful lyrics, making it interesting to analyze from a linguistic point of view.

This research aims to explore the lexical and contextual meanings in Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics on the album *Sour*. By analyzing the word choice and context in the lyrics, this research seeks to reveal how messages and emotions are conveyed through language. This approach not only looks at the literal meaning of words but also how to form a broader meaning in the context of the experiences and emotions expressed by the singer. The song *drivers' license* in this album has lyrics that reflect a sense of loss and disappointment. Lexically, the lyrics use simple words such as car, street, and home. However, in the context of the story being told, these words have a deeper meaning, describing an emotional journey and memories of the past (Apriyanto, 2022). Analyzing the lexical and contextual meanings allows us to understand how these lyrics convey the singer's personal experiences to the listener.

Besides *drivers' license*, other songs in *Sour*'s album such as *Brutal*, *Jealousy Jealousy*, *traitor*, and *Hope Ur Ok* also have lyrics that are rich in meaning. Each song reflects different feelings, ranging from anger, and, confusion to nostalgia (Alfiani & Hakim, 2024). The lexical meanings in these lyrics provide the basic foundation, while contextual meanings expand the interpretation by considering emotional and situational connections.

This research is also relevant in an educational context, particularly in English language learning. Song lyrics are often used as a medium to teach vocabulary, grammar and, text comprehension. By exploring lexical and contextual meanings in song lyrics, not only the meaning of words, but also how to use them in various situations to create complex meanings (Fitria & Dewi, 2022). In addition, this research was expected to contribute to the study of linguistics in general, particularly in understanding how meaning is created in musical texts. Music, as a universal art form, has the potential to convey messages that transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. By understanding the meaning of song lyrics, we can better appreciate how music becomes an effective and emotional means of communication.

Thus, this research focused on exploring the lexical and contextual meanings in the lyrics of Olivia Rodrigo's songs in the album *Sour*. Through linguistic analysis, this research aims to explore how word choice and context create deep meaning while providing new insights into how song lyrics can be a rich and meaningful medium of communication.

The study of meaning in linguistics is one of the broad and growing areas of research. Meaning, as one of the main aspects of language, is often discussed through two main perspectives, namely lexical meaning and contextual meaning. Lexical meaning refers to the literal meanings of words, as listed in the dictionary, while contextual meaning looks at the meanings formed from the specific situations or conditions in which the words are used. In the context of song lyrics, these two types of meaning often interact to create more complex and emotional messages.

According to Leech as cited in Alexander (2018), meaning in linguistics can be divided into several categories, including conceptual, contextual, and emotive meanings. Conceptual meaning refers to the basic meaning of the word, while contextual meaning relies on the word's relationship to the environment or situation in which it is used. Leech's study is an important foundation for understanding how words in song lyrics can have different meanings depending on the context (Enesi & Strati, 2019). The study of Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics, especially in the album *Sour*, has attracted the attention of researchers because of the uniqueness and emotional honesty displayed in the lyrics. An analysis of a song like *Brutal* shows that Olivia Rodrigo uses simple but meaningful language, creating a strong emotional connection with the listener (Putri et al., 2023).

In addition, studies on the relationship between pop music and linguistics show that this genre of music often uses colloquial language to connect with listeners. a previous study conducted by (Limbong, n.d.) revealed that the use of simple vocabulary in pop song lyrics allows listeners to more

easily understand and identify with the message conveyed. In the album *Sour*, Olivia Rodrigo uses a similar approach, but with additional emotional elements that make her lyrics more authentic and profound.

Song lyric analysis can also be a tool for understanding social and cultural dynamics. For example, a previous study conducted by Frith (2019) shows that song lyrics often reflect the cultural values and collective experiences of a society. In the case of the album *Sour*, the lyrics reflect the feelings and experiences of the younger generation growing up in the digital age, where interpersonal relationships are often complicated and influenced by social media.

From the various studies that have been conducted, it appears that the analysis of lexical and contextual meanings in song lyrics is an important area to study. Song lyrics offer unique insights into the use of language in artistic and emotional communication. As such, this research will continue the tradition of linguistic studies by exploring how lexical and contextual meanings are reflected in Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics on the album *Sour*, as well as how these lyrics create powerful and relevant messages for listeners.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the lexical and contextual meanings in Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics from her *Sour* album. The qualitative method is chosen to allow an in-depth analysis of the language and meanings within the song lyrics, focusing on how individual words and phrase function both in isolation and within the context of the songs' narratives. The research involves two key phases: lexical analysis and contextual analysis. These phases are carried out systematically to ensure that both the literal and interpretive dimensions of meaning are thoroughly examined.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of several songs in Olivia Rodrigo's *Sour* album:

1) Brutal

This song is a satire of our dissatisfaction with the life we have and the problems that follow along with the frustration of teenagers because their sweet dreams must become nightmares. In addition, Olivia Rodrigo also expresses the pressure on teenagers who have to fulfil society's expectations of having the perfect teenage experience and being productive at a young age (Darla, 2024).

This song also depicts the feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and lack of social support toward the dreams that the younger generation wants. Olivia Rodrigo also reveals how difficult it is to go through adolescence.

Table 1. Brutal Lexical Meaning

Lyrics	Lexical meaning
"Messy"	Disorganized or chaotic
"Insecure"	Feeling uncertain or unconfident
"Exploited"	Being unfairly used or taken advantage of for someone else's gain.
"Teenage Dream"	An idealized or hopeful vision of teenage life.
"Ego crush"	A significant blow to one's self-esteem or confidence.
"Broken Heart"	Emotional devastation caused by a deep loss or disappointment.

Table 2. Brutal Contextual Meaning

Lyrics	Contextual Meaning
<i>"I'm so insecure, I think that I'll die before I drink"</i>	Reflects extreme emotional pressure and a lack of confidence, making life feel overwhelming even before reaching common social milestones like the drinking age.
<i>"And they'd all be so disappointed, 'cause, who am I, if not exploited?"</i>	Critiques societal expectations that make individuals feel their worth are defined by how they can be used or exploited by others.
<i>"Where's my fucking teenage dream?"</i>	Expresses frustration at the reality of teenage life not living up to the societal or cultural idealization of it as a carefree and exciting time.
<i>"All I did was try my best, this the kind of thanks I get?"</i>	Conveys disillusionment over the lack of appreciation or recognition for one's efforts, highlighting feelings of inadequacy despite hard work.
<i>"Ego crush is so severe, God, it's brutal out here"</i>	Reflects the harshness of social realities that can severely damage one's self-esteem, particularly during the vulnerable teenage years.
<i>"I feel like no one wants me, and I hate the way I'm perceived"</i>	Highlights feelings of social alienation and dissatisfaction with how others view them, amplifying anxiety and a sense of worthlessness.
<i>"And I hate every song I write"</i>	Reflects the struggles of perfectionism and dissatisfaction with one's creative work, even after putting in significant effort.

2) Jealousy, Jealousy

This song is a satire on our dissatisfaction with ourselves that arises from envy of other people's success. There is a criticism of social media for creating unrealistic standards of beauty and success, making teenagers feel trapped in a cycle of self-comparison (Jeon, 2021). The song focuses on the struggle against envy and self-comparison, there is also an implicit acknowledgment that these problems arise from a lack of self-acceptance.

Table 3 Jealousy, Jealousy Lexical Meaning

Lyrics	Lexical Meaning
<i>"Throw my phone across the room"</i>	Throw: To propel something through the air. Phone: A device used for communication and internet access.
<i>"Paper-white teeth"</i>	Paper-white: Extremely white, resembling the colour of paper. Teeth: Hard, bony structures in the mouth.
<i>"Comparison is killing me slowly"</i>	Comparison: The act of examining similarities and differences. Killing slowly: Gradual emotional or mental harm.
<i>"Jealousy"</i>	A feeling of envy or resentment toward someone else's achievements, possessions, or qualities.
<i>"Vintage clothes"</i>	Vintage: Clothing that is from a previous era, often considered classic or high-quality.
<i>"Pretty boyfriend"</i>	Pretty: Attractive or pleasing in appearance. Boyfriend: A male partner in a romantic relationship.

Table. 4 Jealousy, Jealousy Contextual Meaning.

Lyrics	Contextual Meaning
<i>"I kinda wanna throw my phone across the room"</i>	Reflects frustration with the pressure and insecurities caused by social media, where unrealistic beauty standards dominate.
<i>"All I see are girls too good to be true"</i>	Suggests the idealized and unattainable standards portrayed on social media, making the narrator feel inadequate.
<i>"I know their beauty's not my lack, but it feels like that weight is on my back"</i>	Acknowledges that others' beauty doesn't diminish their worth, yet the societal pressure creates an emotional burden.
<i>"Comparison is killing me slowly"</i>	Highlights the detrimental effects of constantly comparing oneself to others, leading to anxiety and self-esteem issues.
<i>"And I'm happy for them, but then again, I'm not"</i>	Reflects conflicted feelings of envy and guilt, common in a culture of competitive achievement and social comparison.
<i>"All I see is what I should be, happier, prettier"</i>	This shows how social media influences a skewed perception of self-worth, making the narrator feel they are not enough.
<i>"I wanna be you so bad, and I don't even know you"</i>	Emphasizes the irrationality of envy in the social media age, where people admire and desire the lives of strangers based on superficial impressions.

3) Hope Ur Ok

This song is a deeply emotional song in which the singer reflects on the lives of two individuals she knew during her youth. The song expresses empathy and concern for their well-being, even though they have since drifted apart. It touches on themes of friendship, personal struggles, family dynamics, and the hope for healing and happiness for those who went through difficult experiences (O, 2021).

Table. 5 Hope Ur Ok Lexical Meaning

Lyrics	Lexical Meaning
<i>"Tow-head blonde"</i>	Refers to a person with very light blonde hair, often described as white or very pale blonde, like tow (a fiber from flax or hemp).
<i>"Eyes of salt"</i>	Likely a metaphor describing the person's eyes as being emotional, possibly hinting at tears (salty water), conveying sadness or emotional depth.
<i>"Marching band"</i>	A group of musicians who perform while moving, often in parades or school events. It signifies the boy's involvement in school activities.
<i>"Bible"</i>	Refers to the Christian holy text, symbolizing the religious focus of the boy's parents.
<i>"Long sleeves"</i>	This could symbolize hiding something, possibly emotional scars or abuse, especially considering the line about his dad. It may represent a form of protection or concealment.
<i>"Bad deal" and "royal flush"</i>	"Bad deal" : refers to an unfortunate or unfair situation

	“Royal flush” : is a winning hand in cards, representing the hope that despite a bad start, the boy might have overcome his struggles and found success.
<i>“Middle school friend”</i>	Refers to someone the singer knew during their middle school years, a time in childhood when people experience significant personal and social changes.
<i>“Raised her brothers on her own”</i>	This phrase indicates that the middle school friend took on significant responsibility at a young age, likely due to family difficulties.
<i>“Unlearn all of their hatred”</i>	Refers to the process of rejecting or overcoming the negative beliefs or prejudices taught by others (likely her parents).
<i>“Address the letters, to the holes in my butterfly wings”</i>	This metaphor likely expresses the idea of sending messages to parts of the self or experiences that feel broken or incomplete. “Butterfly wings” could represent fragility or vulnerability.
<i>“Nothing’s forever”</i>	A simple phrase conveying the idea that all things change or end eventually.
<i>“Ironed out”</i>	Refers to smoothing or resolving something, in this case, the "clouds" or difficulties.
<i>“Monsters creep into your house”</i>	Likely a metaphor for internal fears, struggles, or external problems that invade one’s life.
<i>“Every door is hard to close”</i>	This could symbolize difficulties in moving on or letting go of the past.
<i>“Created with the courage to unlearn all of their hatred”</i>	A powerful line expressing admiration for the strength and bravery of the individuals who managed to overcome prejudice or toxic teachings.

Table. 6 Hope Ur Ok Contextual Meaning

Lyrics	Contextual Meaning
<i>“A tow-head blonde, with eyes of salt”</i>	She remembers a boy they knew when they were younger, someone who faced challenges at home. The boy’s “eyes of salt” could symbolize sadness, pain, or emotional depth.
<i>“He wore long sleeves ‘cause of his dad”</i>	Suggests that he might have been physically or emotionally abused by his father.
<i>“My middle school friend grew up alone. She raised her brothers on her own”</i>	Thinking about a female friend they had in middle school, who grew up in a similarly difficult environment. This friend took on a parental role, raising her younger brothers while dealing with disapproval from her parents about her romantic choices. She was eager to escape this environment, symbolized by her desire to go to college.
<i>“Address the letters, to the holes in my butterfly wings”</i>	This is metaphorical. Butterflies are often symbols of transformation and beauty, and the “holes” in the wings likely represent the scars or emotional pain she has experienced in their life. She sends these “letters” to the



	past, to the people they care about, with unresolved emotions or wounds.
<i>"God, I hope that you're happier today"</i>	Reflects a heartfelt wish for their well-being, showing the narrator's care for them even from a distance.

4) Traitor

This song is portraying the raw feelings of betrayal, sadness, and confusion when someone you loved moves on to someone else, all while still grappling with the past. The song resonates with anyone who has experienced heartbreak due to dishonesty or emotional disloyalty, while also capturing the complexity of love and loss. It also touches on themes of self-reflection and personal growth as the narrator comes to terms with the betrayal (Cindy et al., 2024).

Tabel. 7 Traitor Lexical Meaning

Lyrics	Lexical Meaning
<i>"Brown guilty eyes and little white lies"</i>	<p>"Brown": Refers to the colour of the eyes</p> <p>"Guilty": Describes someone who feels responsible for something wrong</p> <p>"Little white lies": Refer to small, harmless or insignificant lies often used to protect someone or avoid confrontation.</p>
<i>"I played dumb, but I always knew"</i>	Means pretending not to understand or know something.
<i>"You talked to her, maybe did even worse"</i>	<p>"Talked to her": Refers to communication with another person</p> <p>"Did even worse": Suggests actions that went beyond simple conversation implying a deeper emotional or physical betrayal.</p>
<i>"Ain't it funny how you ran to her, the second that we called it quits?"</i>	<p>"Ran to her": Means immediately going to her for comfort or companionship</p> <p>"Called it quits": Means ending a relationship.</p>
<i>"You betrayed me"</i>	Refers to the act of being deceived or hurt by someone who was supposed to be loyal.
<i>"Loved you at your worst, but that didn't matter"</i>	Refers to the person's flaws or most difficult moments.
<i>"It took you two weeks to go off and date her"</i>	<p>"Two weeks": Is a short period of time</p> <p>"Date her": Refers to entering into a romantic relationship.</p>
<i>"Now you bring her around just to shut me down"</i>	<p>"Bring her around": Means introducing the new partner to the narrator or to the same social circle</p> <p>"Shut me down": Means trying to silence or invalidate the narrator's feelings.</p>
<i>"Show her off like she's a new trophy"</i>	Refers to an object of pride or a prize, often symbolizing someone who is valued or flaunted.
<i>"I wish that you had thought this through before I went and fell in love with you"</i>	<p>"Thought this through": Means considering the consequences of actions beforehand</p> <p>"Fell in love": Means to emotionally invest in someone.</p>

Tabel. 8 Traitor Contextual Meaning

Lyrics	Contextual Meaning
<i>"Brown guilty eyes and little white lies"</i>	"Brown guilty eyes" : Refer to the person showing signs of guilt, possibly through their eyes or body language. "Little white lies" : Are small lies that are often told to protect oneself or avoid conflict.
<i>"I played dumb, but I always knew"</i>	Means pretending not to notice or understand something. The narrator admits that while she acted like she didn't know, she was aware of what was going on all along.
<i>"That you talked to her, maybe did even worse"</i>	This line refers to the person talking to someone else (the "her") while they were still together. The "maybe did even worse" suggests that there may have been more serious actions involved, like emotional or physical infidelity.
<i>"I kept quiet so I could keep you"</i>	She stayed silent about her suspicions or discomforts to avoid causing conflict and keep the person in her life.
<i>"Ain't it funny how you ran to her, the second that we called it quits?"</i>	"Ran to her" : Means immediately seeking comfort or companionship with someone else once the relationship ended "called it quits" .
<i>"And ain't it funny how you said you were friends? Now it sure as hell don't look like it"</i>	The person claimed to be just "friends" with the other person, but now sees their actions as contradicting that claim.
<i>"You betrayed me"</i>	This is a direct statement of the emotional core of the song feeling deceived or let down by someone who was supposed to be trustworthy.
<i>"And I know that you'll never feel sorry for the way I hurt, yeah"</i>	She resigned to the fact that the person who betrayed her will never apologize or acknowledge the hurt they caused.
<i>"It took you two weeks to go off and date her"</i>	"Two weeks" emphasizes the quick timeline in which the person moved on to a new romantic relationship after the breakup.
<i>"Guess you didn't cheat, but you're still a traitor"</i>	While the person didn't technically cheat, she still feels betrayed because their actions talking to and dating someone else so soon still feel like an emotional betrayal.
<i>"Now you bring her around just to shut me down, show her off like she's a new trophy"</i>	"Bring her around" : Refers to introducing the new partner in the same circles or spaces. "Show her off like she's a new trophy" : Suggests flaunting the new partner in a way that diminishes feelings.
<i>"I know if you were true, there's no damn way that you could fall in love with somebody that quickly"</i>	"True" refers to being honest and genuine in the relationship, how the person could fall in love so quickly with someone else if their feelings for the narrator were real.
<i>"God, I wish that you had thought this through before I went and fell in love with you"</i>	Wishes the person had considered the emotional consequences of their actions before she became emotionally invested in the relationship.
<i>"When she's sleepin' in the bed, we made, don't you dare forget about the way you betrayed me"</i>	"Sleeping in the bed we made" refers to the new partner occupying the same space where the narrator and the person once shared intimacy.

“You gave me your word, but that didn’t matter” **“Gave me your word”** refers to promises or assurances the person made to the narrator, which they broke.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals the intricate interplay between lexical and contextual meanings in Olivia Rodrigo’s song lyrics from the Sour album. Through detailed linguistic analysis, it is evident that Rodrigo employs simple yet emotionally charged language to convey complex feelings and narratives. Lexical meanings provide the foundational understanding of the lyrics, while contextual meanings expand upon this by interpreting the emotions and situations embedded in the songs. Each track analyzed such as Brutal, Jealousy Jealousy, Hope Ur Ok, and Traitor showcases a unique blend of vulnerability, societal critique, and personal reflection. These lyrics resonate with listeners by capturing universal themes of love, self-doubt, envy, and resilience, making them a rich medium for linguistic and emotional exploration. Moreover, this study emphasizes the value of song lyrics as a tool for language learning and cultural analysis, demonstrating how music transcends boundaries to communicate profound human experiences. Future research could further explore the role of song lyrics in different cultural contexts or examine how other artists employ language to connect with their audiences emotionally and intellectually. Through such analyses, we can continue to uncover the power of music as a linguistic and artistic medium.

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