

LEXICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF 'DECEMBER' SONG LYRICS BY NECK DEEP SEMANTIC

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti makna leksikal dan konteks dalam lirik lagu "December" oleh Neck Deep, dengan fokus pada bagaimana bahasa menyampaikan pengalaman emosional dari patah hati, kehilangan, dan kerinduan. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis kata-kata dan frasa yang dipilih dari lagu, menerapkan teori makna leksikal Cruse (2011) dan makna kontekstual Saeed (2015). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa lirik menggunakan bahasa literal dan simbolis untuk menggambarkan kegundahan emosional, dengan kata-kata seperti "patah hati," "dingin," dan "Desember" beralih dari definisi kamus mereka ke interpretasi yang lebih dalam dan kaya konteks. Studi ini menyoroti bagaimana analisis semantik dapat mengungkap tema emosional dan psikologis yang berlapis dalam lirik lagu, yang menunjukkan perannya sebagai medium untuk ekspresi pribadi dan kolektif. Hasilnya berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang bagaimana bahasa dalam musik mengartikulasikan pengalaman manusia universal, terutama di kalangan audiens muda yang menavigasi lanskap emosional yang kompleks.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Semantik, Lirik Lagu, Makna Leksikal, Makna Kontekstual, Ekspresi Emosional.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the lexical and contextual meanings in the lyrics of the song "December" by Neck Deep, focusing on how language conveys emotional experiences of heartbreak, loss, and longing. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes selected words and phrases from the song, applying Cruse's (2011) theory of lexical meaning and Saeed's (2015) for contextual meaning. The findings reveal that the lyrics employ literal and symbolic language to depict emotional turmoil, with words like "heartbreak," "cold," and "December" shifting from their dictionary definitions to deeper, contextually rich interpretations. The study highlights how semantic analysis can uncover the layered emotional and psychological themes in song lyrics, demonstrating their role as a medium for personal and collective expression. The results contribute to a broader understanding of how language in music articulates universal human experiences, particularly among young audiences navigating complex emotional landscapes.

Keywords: Semantic Analysis, Song Lyrics, Lexical Meaning, Contextual Meaning, Emotional Expression

INTRODUCTION

Music has long stood as a vital and expressive element of human culture. Beyond mere entertainment, it functions as an emotional outlet, a form of social commentary, and a mirror to the complex inner lives of individuals and communities. Throughout history, people have turned to music not only for enjoyment but also as a way to articulate feelings that might otherwise remain unspoken. Central to this expressive power is the use of language particularly through song lyrics which serve as a bridge between artistic intention and audience interpretation.

Song lyrics are more than rhythmic phrases or poetic lines accompanied by melody; they are linguistic artifacts that encapsulate deep emotional states, cultural norms, and even ideological perspectives. Every line written by a songwriter carries intentional or subconscious meaning, shaped by personal experience, cultural

background, and socio-emotional context. According to Afanti (2022), lyrics represent a songwriter's emotional outpouring, functioning as a communicative bridge between artist and listener. Similarly, Kurniawan and Sari (2024) argue that lyrics contain rich content that makes them a fertile ground for semantic analysis. This idea is echoed by Zulaikah et al. (2024), who categorize song lyrics as a hybrid literary form combining poetic elements with storytelling and reflective discourse.

Despite their cultural ubiquity, song lyrics are often underanalyzed from a linguistic point of view. While musical composition tends to receive more technical or artistic attention, the semantic layers within lyrics especially how meaning is constructed and interpreted remain a relatively underexplored area, particularly in non-literary linguistic studies. Yet, understanding these meanings can offer deep insights into not only the language of emotion, but also the socio-cultural anxieties, values, and aspirations embedded in popular music.

Semantics, as the linguistic study of meaning, provides valuable tools to analyze such texts. It allows researchers to unpack the meanings of words, as well as how those meanings shift depending on context. Cruse (2011) defines lexical semantics as the study of meaning at the word level, exploring how individual lexical items carry and interact with meaning. In contrast, Saeed (2015) extends this framework by emphasizing the role of meaning in context how the same word can yield different interpretations depending on its situational use.

Cruse (2011) defines lexical semantics as the study of word meaning within the lexicon, focusing on the structured relationships among words such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and collocation. It investigates how words convey meaning in isolation and how their meanings are interrelated through networks of semantic fields. Cruse emphasizes that understanding lexical meaning involves more than just knowing dictionary definitions—it requires analyzing sense relations, componential meaning, and the nuanced differences between near-synonyms. In lyrical texts, lexical semantics enables researchers to unpack the fundamental meaning of key terms that construct the emotional foundation of the narrative.

In contrast, Saeed (2015) expands the analysis by situating meaning within its context of use. Contextual semantics focuses on how words shift or extend in meaning depending on the situation, speaker intention, cultural knowledge, and audience interpretation. This includes phenomena such as deixis, implicature, presupposition, and metaphor, all of which are vital in lyrical expression. Saeed argues that the same lexical item can convey radically different meanings depending on its environment. This perspective is essential in analyzing song lyrics, where figurative language, tone, and emotional cues often modify or even subvert literal word meanings. By combining both lexical and contextual approaches, this study explores how language operates at multiple levels to express heartbreak, emotional displacement, and psychological depth.

The present study focuses on the song "December" by the British pop-punk band Neck Deep, which has gained recognition for its emotionally resonant lyrics and themes. The song narrates the emotional turbulence of a failed relationship, depicting experiences of heartbreak, regret, disorientation, and unresolved emotional wounds. These themes are not isolated incidents but resonate strongly with the lived experiences of many young people today, particularly in an era marked by emotional volatility, digital alienation, and shifting relationship norms. The choice of this particular song is deliberate not only because of its lyrical richness, but also due to its cultural relevance within the genre of emo and pop-punk music, which often serves as a vehicle for articulating personal pain and generational dissatisfaction.

This study investigates how lexical and contextual meanings shape the emotional narrative of the song's lyrics. By applying semantic theories from Cruse (2011), and Saeed (2015), the research seeks to dissect how individual word choices contribute to the larger emotional narrative, and how those meanings are influenced by the broader context of use. This approach not only facilitates a richer interpretation of the song's linguistic content but also sheds light on how language functions as a medium for emotional expression in contemporary music.

This research specifically explores heartbreak tinged words (such as heartbreak, pain, grieving) in the lyrics of 'December', by mapping the differences between lexical meaning (dictionary definition) and contextual meaning (emotive value in breakup narratives). The findings are expected to reveal distinctive linguistic patterns used in pop-punk music to encode traumatic experiences. This study aims to analyze the lexical and contextual meanings in the lyrics of 'December' by Neck Deep, focusing on how these meanings convey emotional experiences of heartbreak and loss

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the lexical and contextual meanings in the lyrics of the song "December" by Neck Deep. The descriptive method allows for an in-depth examination of the text without manipulating or altering the original data. The focus is on identifying semantic features embedded within the lyrics and interpreting their functions in conveying emotional states.

The primary data for this study consists of the official lyrics of "December" by Neck Deep, retrieved from verified digital platforms. The lyrics were analyzed by identifying keywords related to emotional pain, loss, and longing, then categorizing them based on lexical and contextual meanings

The research procedure consisted of several steps: selecting the song for its thematic and emotional richness, transcribing the lyrics, identifying lexical and contextual meanings, interpreting the findings using linguistic theories, and drawing conclusions about the semantic implications of the lyrics. This methodical approach assures that the analysis is systematic, theory-driven, and applicable to the study of meaning in language.

This research focuses on the analysis of words in the lyrics of December that meet the criteria: (1) retrieving the full lyrics from official sources, (2) containing lexical meaning related to heartbreak (heartbreak, pain, grieving) based on the dictionary (Cruse, 2011), (3) having the potential for contextual meaning shifts that strengthen the emotional theme (cold as alienation, December as loneliness) according to Saeed's theory (2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Semantic Analysis by Part of Speech

This section divides the words into three parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and examines how each contributes to the emotional and thematic depth of the songs. By distinguishing between dictionary-based meanings and those influenced by situational context, this study demonstrates how seemingly simple phrases can convey complex emotions related to heartbreak, as shown in the table data below:

Nouns.

no	data	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning
1	Heartbreak	heartbreak is a deep emotional distress caused by the end of a romantic relationship.	heartbreak represents an experiencer's emotional suffering after a relationship ends, expressed ideationally in the text.
2	Mid December	mid-December is a literal temporal expression referring to the middle of December.	mid-December symbolizes the emotional setting of loss and loneliness.
3	Confessions	confessions as honest admissions of wrongdoing or guilt.	confessions as thematic realizations of regret and interpersonal engagement.
4	Pain	pain refers to physical or emotional suffering.	pain as a mental process experienced subjectively.
5	Ballroom floor	ballroom floor as a space for formal dancing, usually luxurious.	Ballroom floor as a symbolic representation of desired but unattainable social ideals.
6	Chicago	City name in the United States.	as symbol of escape, dreams, or foreign places that one wishes to reach.
7	December	December is the final month of the year.	December symbolizes emotional finality, loneliness, and reflective tone.

Data1 Heartbreak

Lexically, heartbreak denotes intense emotional pain due to a failed romantic relationship. Contextually, it represents a deeper psychological wound carried by the narrator, functioning as the emotional core of the song. It is the embodiment of the “experiencer” in semantic roles, directly linked to loss and personal trauma.

Data2 Mid December

Literally, mid-December refers to a time frame. However, in the song, it evokes the cold, barren feeling of the winter season—a metaphor for emotional isolation and loneliness. Its temporal placement coincides with the end of something, reinforcing the finality of the breakup.

Data3 Confessions

The word confessions lexically means admissions of guilt or wrongdoing. In context, it reflects attempts at emotional honesty or reconciliation. It signals internal regret and vulnerability, making it semantically rich with interpersonal tension.

Data4 Pain

Pain is a general term for physical or emotional suffering. The song uses it not only to indicate emotional suffering but also as a symbolic process of internal decay. It functions as a mental state that dominates the narrator’s experience.

Data5 Ballroom floor

Denotatively, this refers to a location for formal dancing. In the song, it symbolizes a scene of lost grandeur—a space where love once existed but is now associated with abandonment and emotional collapse.

Data6 Chicago

As a place name, Chicago simply identifies a geographic location. Semantically, however, it is recontextualized as a distant escape or fantasy destination. It reflects the narrator's longing for detachment, symbolizing emotional exile or unreachable goals.

Data7 December

The final month of the year, December typically signifies closure. Contextually, it becomes a metaphor for the emotional coldness and emptiness that follows the end of a relationship, embodying seasonal depression and reflective sadness.

Verbs.

no	data	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning
1	Passed out	passed out means to become unconscious.	in this context has meaning emotional exhaustion, especially as an experiencer role.
2	Grieving	grieving as the process of mourning a significant loss.	grieving as an ideational process that conveys trauma and sadness from the experiencer.
3	Getting lost	getting lost means to lose one's direction.	as symbolic of emotional disorientation and identity loss.
4	Die	die as the cessation of life.	die metaphorically to express despair and loss of emotional vitality.
5	Hope	Hope has meaning desire for a positive future outcome.	irony/sarcasm; false hope, hope can be ironic or modal in context.

Data1 Passed out

Lexically, passed out means losing consciousness. In the song, it signals a state of emotional exhaustion where the weight of grief becomes physically overwhelming. It marks the narrator's collapse, both literally and metaphorically.

Data2 Grieving

Grieving means mourning a loss. Here, it frames the lyrics within the context of bereavement not just of a person, but of love and shared memories. It presents an ongoing process rather than a resolved emotion.

Data3 Getting lost

While typically meaning disorientation in space, getting lost is used symbolically to represent losing a sense of self or direction after the breakup. It suggests a struggle with identity and direction in life post-relationship.

Data4 Die

Literally meaning the cessation of life, die is metaphorically used to portray extreme despair or the death of feelings. It highlights the totality of the narrator's emotional breakdown, indicating that something vital within has ended.

Data5 Hope

Hope traditionally conveys a desire for a positive outcome. In this context, it is tinged with irony, possibly referencing false hope or naïve optimism. It showcases the dissonance between expectation and reality.

Adjectives.

no	data	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning
1	Cold	cold as a low temperature, opposite of warm.	'cold' as a metaphor for emotional numbness and isolation, often interpersonal in nature.
2	Perfect house	House that Ideal or flawless.	symbolizes a fantasy of perfection that contrasts with the speaker's reality.
3	Rose red	A shade of red.	Symbolizes unattainable beauty or idealized love.

Data1 Cold

Cold denotes low temperature, but metaphorically in this song, it implies a lack of emotional warmth. It encapsulates feelings of detachment, rejection, and the end of intimacy between the speaker and their partner.

Data2 Perfect house

Literally referring to an ideal residence, perfect house becomes a symbol of the unattainable dream. It stands for the illusion of domestic happiness that the narrator once desired but could never achieve.

Data3 Rose red

This is a color term, but symbolically, it connotes romantic passion and beauty. Within the song's emotional landscape, it is used to represent a lost ideal love that was once vibrant but is now unreachable or corrupted.

2. Thematic Grouping of Words Based on the Song Theme

The table that ensues shows the classification of lexical items based on thematic importance, as well as their contextual meanings within the song. The study discovered three themes: emotional pain, loss and longing, unattainable ideals, and regret. These topics are not only conveyed by the lexical meanings of the words, but they are also disclosed more thoroughly through contextual meanings influenced by the surrounding scenario and emotional environment in the lyrics.

theme	word
Emotional Pain	Heartbreak, grieving, pain, die, cold, hope
loss and longing	December, mid December, passed out, getting lost, Chicago, confessions
unattainable ideals	Ballroom floor, perfect house, rose red

Emotional Pain

The theme of emotional pain is reflected through lexemes such as heartbreak, grieving, pain, die, cold, and hope, which form a semantic network of internal suffering and despair. Lexically, these words denote distress or loss, but their contextual application in the song deepens their emotional resonance. For example, "cold" transcends its literal temperature-based definition to symbolize emotional detachment and relational numbness. According to Saeed (2015), such a contextual shift aligns with how language constructs ideational meaning based on experiential roles. The narrator, as the experiencer, expresses overwhelming feelings of rejection and emptiness. Meanwhile, the term "hope" is framed ironically, suggesting disillusionment rather than optimism. This irony highlights how language can subvert expectations, reinforcing the psychological fragmentation that follows a painful breakup. These expressions serve

not only as indicators of sadness but as linguistic manifestations of unresolved trauma, thus reinforcing the cathartic function of the lyrics.

Loss and Longing

The lexical items under the theme loss and longing such as December, mid-December, passed out, getting lost, Chicago, and confessions represent both spatial and temporal disorientation. Lexically, words like “getting lost” and “Chicago” may appear neutral or even geographical. However, in context, they symbolize the narrator’s emotional exile and yearning for resolution. The mention of “Chicago” is not merely a city reference; it becomes an emblem of escape, a metaphor for psychological or emotional distance. Similarly, “mid-December” invokes seasonal imagery to reflect loneliness and emotional coldness. This aligns with Eggins’ (2004) functional-semantic perspective, in which language functions as a vehicle for negotiating meaning within social and psychological contexts. The frequent use of spatial metaphors and confessional tones constructs a narrative of unfulfilled longing, reinforcing the song’s portrayal of a fractured self in search of closure.

Unattainable Ideals

Lexical choices such as ballroom floor, perfect house, and rose red reflect the theme of unattainable ideals, emphasizing the disparity between reality and fantasy in romantic relationships. Lexically, these terms evoke beauty, elegance, and perfection. Contextually, however, they serve as ironic contrasts to the speaker’s emotional devastation. The “ballroom floor,” typically associated with celebration and romance, is recontextualized as a distant, unreachable space—a metaphor for a dream-like love that is no longer attainable. “Perfect house” symbolizes the societal ideal of domestic bliss, which the narrator sees as shattered or inaccessible. Meanwhile, “rose red,” a traditionally romantic color, becomes a symbol of longing for something beautiful that is forever out of reach. These symbolic reinterpretations resonate with Cruse’s (2011) view of connotative meaning, where words acquire emotional and cultural weight beyond their denotation. Collectively, these expressions expose the emotional gap between the narrator’s expectations and reality, illustrating how language encodes disappointment and idealization simultaneously.

Following the tabular analysis, it is evident that the selected lexical items serve as anchors for conveying emotional and psychological experiences related to heartbreak and personal loss. The term “heartbreak”, for example, carries the denotative meaning of emotional pain caused by a failed romantic relationship. In context, it is intensified through experiential meaning (Saeed), emphasizing the narrator’s deep emotional turmoil.

Words such as “cold,” “mid-December,” and “die” are lexically neutral but gain symbolic weight in the context of the song. “Cold” not only denotes low temperature but also evokes emotional numbness and isolation post-breakup. Contextually, it is laced with sarcasm and longing, symbolizing an unattainable dream or an ideal life that the narrator’s former partner might desire. Similarly, “hope” is presented in an ironic light suggesting false optimism or unfulfilled expectations, further highlighting emotional disillusionment.

The line “passed out on the floor” reflects physical and emotional collapse, interpreted in Saeed’s framework as an experiencer role under emotional stress. “Pain,” “grieving,” and “confessions” serve as lexical indicators of emotional distress and introspection. These expressions capture the process of coping with emotional trauma, regret, and unresolved guilt key components in the aftermath of a breakup.

The song also incorporates spatial and geographical imagery, such as “Chicago”

and “sunset on the west coast,” which serve as mental escape routes and symbolize emotional distancing.

Overall, the findings show that the song employs a range of semantic devices metaphor, hyperbole, irony, and symbolism to articulate emotional vulnerability and psychological conflict. The lexical choices are emotionally charged, while the contextual interpretations provide deeper insight into the speaker's mental state and relational dynamics. This combination of literal and symbolic meanings underscores the effectiveness of semantics in decoding the layered messages in song lyrics.

Through this analysis, it becomes clear that “December” is not merely a narrative of heartbreak but a rich linguistic text that captures universal experiences of loss, longing, and emotional recovery. The lyrics function as a conduit for both personal catharsis and collective resonance, particularly among young audiences navigating complex emotional realities.

CONCLUSION

The semantic analysis of Neck Deep’s “December” reveals the depth and complexity of emotional messages embedded in its lyrics. The song constructs a vivid portrayal of heartbreak, longing, and emotional stagnation. Contextual meanings further enhance this depiction, highlighting societal expectations, personal regret, and the psychological aftermath of a breakup.

This study demonstrates how semantic tools can be effectively applied to uncover the layered meanings in song lyrics. It also underscores the potential of music to act as a medium of emotional release, particularly among younger audiences. The song “December” exemplifies how language in music can encapsulate individual pain while simultaneously speaking to collective generational experiences.

The study reveals that words like 'December' and 'cold' shift from literal meanings to symbols of emotional finality and numbness, reflecting the songwriter's use of metaphor to articulate heartbreak.

Beyond its lexical and contextual richness, the song "December" by Neck Deep reveals how everyday language can be repurposed into emotionally powerful expressions through careful semantic crafting. The ability of lyrics to oscillate between literal and metaphorical meanings highlights the dynamic nature of language as both a communicative and expressive tool. This reinforces the importance of semantic analysis not only for academic inquiry but also for understanding how popular culture gives voice to shared human experiences, particularly those involving loss, identity, and emotional vulnerability.

This study also suggests that semantic analysis of song lyrics can be valuable in interdisciplinary contexts, such as language education, music therapy, and cultural studies. For instance, educators can use emotionally resonant lyrics to teach nuanced meaning, figurative language, and socio-emotional literacy in the classroom. Future research may explore comparative semantic patterns across different musical genres or investigate how cultural background influences listener interpretation. Such studies could deepen our understanding of the interplay between language, emotion, and social experience in contemporary media.

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