

ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS IN SABRINA CARPENTER'S SONG LYRICS 'NONSENSE': A SEMANTIC STUDY

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Abstract

This study analyzes the contextual meaning in the lyrics of the song “Nonsense” by Sabrina Carpenter. The findings reveal that the lyrics convey meanings both directly and indirectly, with several expressions relying heavily on context for accurate interpretation. Through semantic analysis, the study demonstrates how figurative language, playful innuendos, and situational references in the song reflect the songwriter’s intent and emotional nuance. The results highlight the significance of context in interpreting song lyrics and contribute to a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in contemporary pop music.

Keywords: *semantics, lexical meaning, contextual meaning, song lyrics, Sabrina Carpenter, qualitative analysis*

Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool used by humans to communicate with one another. Through language, individuals can express emotions, share ideas, and build relationships. As Ugoala (2022) points out, language is vital for maintaining good relations between individuals, groups, and nations (p. 171). Similarly, Finegan (2008) highlights that language functions as a conduit for human thought (p. 6). Effective communication, therefore, depends heavily on the ability of speakers and listeners to understand each other. When language is understood clearly, messages can be conveyed effectively, reducing the risk of misinterpretation (Ashr & Yuwana, 2023).

Communication can occur either orally or in written form. Oral communication includes direct conversations, speeches, and interviews (Yuwana, 2023), while written communication encompasses letters, emails, and printed texts. Regardless of the form, meaning is the core of any communicative act. As Chaer (2003) notes, understanding meaning is essential to avoid miscommunication and to ensure the message is received as intended.

In linguistics, the study of meaning is addressed in the field of semantics. Semantics explores how meaning is constructed and interpreted through language (Hao, 2018). It distinguishes between literal and non-literal meanings, the latter often including metaphors and other figurative uses of language (Lariba, Oroh, & Andries, 2024, p. 230). Semantics also examines how words relate to each other in context, enabling sentences

to convey coherent meanings regardless of whether the language used is direct or figurative (Sucihati & Theresia Budi, 2020).

A key area within semantic study is contextual meaning, which focuses on how meaning is shaped by situational and linguistic context. As Requezo in Wardani (2019, p. 1) explains, contextual meaning involves examining the surrounding context to interpret utterances that may not be fully understood in isolation.

One medium where contextual meaning—especially metaphorical meaning—frequently appears is in song lyrics. Songs are powerful artistic expressions that can convey layered emotional and conceptual content (Talohanas & Yuwana, 2022). As part of popular culture, songs are easily accessible and widely consumed, making them an ideal source for analyzing how language functions to express meaning. Song lyrics often use figurative language and metaphors to evoke emotions or describe complex experiences. This figurative use of language adds richness and depth to the lyrics but also poses interpretive challenges, making semantic analysis particularly valuable (Yudanti & Yuwana, 2024).

This study focuses on the song “Nonsense” by Sabrina Carpenter, an American singer and songwriter known for her creative wordplay and expressive lyrics. The lyrics in “Nonsense” contain both lexical and contextual meanings, with metaphorical expressions that invite interpretation beyond the literal level.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the popularity and emotional appeal of song lyrics, the meanings embedded in them—especially those conveyed metaphorically—are often overlooked or misinterpreted. This raises the question; How are lexical and contextual meanings, including metaphorical expressions, constructed and interpreted in the lyrics of “Nonsense” by Sabrina Carpenter?

Research Objectives

There are three research objectives, they are; 1) To identify and categorize lexical meanings in the lyrics of “Nonsense”, 2) To analyze the contextual meanings within the same lyrics, and 3) To explore the significance of metaphorical language in conveying emotional and conceptual messages in the song.

Scientific Contribution

This study contributes to the field of semantics by providing a detailed analysis of how lexical and contextual meanings function within a popular song. By focusing on metaphor as a central feature of contextual meaning, the research highlights how figurative language can enrich communication and influence interpretation. This work is also relevant for educators and learners of English as a foreign language, as it offers practical insights into how everyday media, such as songs, can serve as effective tools for semantic analysis and language learning.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a semantic analysis approach, focusing particularly on contextual and metaphorical meanings found in song lyrics. Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for exploring and interpreting linguistic phenomena in depth, especially those constrained by context, as explained by Robert K.

Yin (2017), who states that this method is appropriate for studying a specific phenomenon within a particular time and space. This approach is used to explore how lexical and contextual meanings, especially metaphors, are constructed in the song "Nonsense" by Sabrina Carpenter.

Data Source

The primary data source for this research is the official lyrics of the song "Nonsense" by Sabrina Carpenter, released in 2022. The lyrics were retrieved from the verified lyrics database on Genius.com, which serves as a publicly accessible and widely cited online source for song lyrics. The selection of this song was based on its rich linguistic features, particularly its use of metaphorical and playful language.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a documentation technique. As described by Bogdan and Biklen in Creswell (2018), documentation involves collecting text-based data that are already available in written form and not influenced by the researcher. The researcher downloaded the lyrics from the online source, followed by a close reading to identify words, phrases, or sentences that potentially contain metaphorical and contextual meaning. The data are limited to the official lyrics of the song and do not include interpretations or annotations made by listeners or fans.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis process involved several systematic stages; 1) Observation: A detailed reading of the lyrics to identify elements with potential semantic significance, 2) Identification: Marking segments of the text (words, phrases, clauses) that appear to convey metaphorical or contextual meaning, 3) Categorization: Metaphorical expressions were identified and categorized using the Metaphor Identification Procedure of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (MIPVU), a standardized method for identifying metaphor-related words in discourse. This procedure involves examining whether a word has a more basic meaning in other contexts and whether the meaning in the current context differs yet can be understood in comparison to the basic one, 4) Interpretation: Analyzing the contextual meanings and metaphorical expressions in relation to the communicative intent of the lyrics and their broader cultural or emotional implications, 5) Description: The findings are presented in a descriptive manner, highlighting the lexical choices, figurative expressions, and the role of context in meaning construction.

Result and Discussion

Result

Data 1

Think I only want one number in my phone
I might change your contact to "don't leave me alone"
You said you like my eyes and you like to make 'em roll
Treat me like a queen, now you got me feelin' thrown, oh

Lexical Meaning

Secara leksikal, lirik ini menunjukkan keinginan eksklusivitas dan ketertarikan terhadap seseorang. Frasa "only want one number in my phone" berarti hanya ingin berkomunikasi dengan satu orang, menunjukkan fokus emosional.

Contextual Meaning

Dalam konteks lagu yang bernuansa flirty dan playful, frasa "change your contact to 'don't leave me alone'" menyampaikan rasa ketergantungan emosional yang berlebihan namun dibalut dengan nada humor. Ungkapan ini juga mencerminkan perasaan terpesona yang berlebihan terhadap pasangan.

Data 2

But I can't help myself
When you get close to me
Baby, my tongue goes numb
Sounds like bleh, blah, blee
I don't want no one else
Baby, I'm in too deep
Here's a lil' song I wrote
It's about you and me

Lexical Meaning

Kata-kata seperti "tongue goes numb" dan "bleh, blah, blee" secara harfiah menyiratkan kehilangan kemampuan berbicara atau gugup karena perasaan cinta yang kuat.

Contextual Meaning

Secara kontekstual, bagian ini menggambarkan efek emosional dari ketertarikan cinta yang intens. Ketidakmampuan berbicara secara jelas mencerminkan keadaan jatuh cinta yang membuat seseorang kehilangan kontrol terhadap ekspresi verbalnya.

Data 3

I'll be honest
Lookin' at you got me thinkin' nonsense
Cartwheels in my stomach when you walk in
And when you got your arms around me
Ooh, it feels so good I had to jump the octave
I think I got an ex but I forgot him
And I can't find my chill, I must have lost it
I don't even know I'm talkin' nonsense
I'm talkin', I'm talkin'

Lexical Meaning

Ungkapan "cartwheels in my stomach" dan "I can't find my chill" secara leksikal adalah bentuk idiom yang menggambarkan kegugupan dan perasaan gembira secara berlebihan.

Contextual Meaning

Secara kontekstual, bagian ini mencerminkan kondisi emosi yang tidak stabil karena jatuh cinta. Lirik menunjukkan bagaimana cinta bisa mengacaukan pikiran dan membuat seseorang bicara "nonsense," atau hal-hal yang tidak terkontrol namun penuh makna emosional.

Data 4

I'm talkin' all around clock
I'm talkin' hope nobody knocks
I'm talkin' opposite of soft
I'm talkin' wild, wild thoughts
You gotta keep up with me
I got some young energy
I caught the L-O-V-E
How do you do this to me?

Lexical Meaning

Secara literal, frasa seperti “all around clock” berarti aktivitas yang intens dan konstan, sedangkan “opposite of soft” menggambarkan sesuatu yang berani dan eksplisit.

Contextual Meaning

Dalam konteks lagu ini, bagian ini mengindikasikan energi dan gairah cinta yang intens serta hampir tak terkendali. Lirik mencerminkan gairah muda yang penuh semangat dan dorongan emosional, diungkapkan melalui bahasa slang dan metaforis.

Discussion

Data 1

In the first line of this data, the sentence ‘think I only want one number in my phone’ shows that the songwriter thinks that he only has one phone number in his mobile phone, which, in this context, the word ‘number’ refers to ‘phone number’. Literally, ‘number’ can be interpreted as a number or a sequence of numbers, but in the context of mobile phones, ‘number’ almost always refers to the phone number used to contact someone. So contextually, in this song, the writer wants to express her desire to focus on just one special person in her life. The word ‘number’ shown in this sentence becomes a symbol that the person referred to by the writer is an important person in his life.

In the second line of this data, the sentence ‘I might change your contact to “don't leave me alone”’ shows that the writer wants to consider renaming the contact number of the person he is referring to to ‘don't leave me alone’. The word ‘contact’ literally means contact information. Thus, in this sentence, the writer is indicating that she has a fear of losing the person she is referring to, as well as showing that she has an emotional dependence on that person. It also shows the writer's level of dependence on this person and suggests to the listener that this person is very important in her life.

In the third line of this data, the sentence ‘You said you like my eyes and you like to make 'em roll’’. Literally, in this sentence, ‘eyes’ means eyes. In the context of this sentence, the writer shows that the person he is referring to compliments him about his eyes. This shows that the person referred to as ‘you’ in this sentence shows admiration for the physical features possessed by the writer. And the phrase ‘make'em roll’ in this sentence usually often refers to an action or behavior that causes the speaker's eyes to roll, usually in response to something pleasant, surprising, or impressive. So, in the context of this song lyric, making someone's eyes roll could mean making them blush, be mesmerized, or impressed by the actions or words of a second person. This could refer to a joke, a tease, or a sweet act that makes the speaker feel mesmerized or even a little embarrassed.

In line four of this data 'Treat me like a queen, now you got me feelin' thrown, oh". In the sentence 'Treat me like a queen,' the word queen in this sentence means queen, which, if connected to the context of this sentence, literally means treating someone very well, respectfully, and attentively, like a queen. Then, in the sentence 'Feelin' thrown,' this can literally be interpreted as a feeling of confusion, surprise, or uncertainty. In this context, the feeling of being 'thrown' indicates that the writer feels overwhelmed or surprised by the special treatment given by the person he is referring to, or can be said to be his partner in the context of this song. This could mean that such great attention and affection are something new or unexpected for the writer, so she feels a little unsure or confused about how to react. So it can be said that in the context of this song, this sentence shows the speaker's feelings of being impressed and perhaps a little confused by how kind and caring his partner is.

Data 2

In the first line of this data 'But I can't help myself. In this sentence, the word help is literally interpreted as help. In the context of this song, this whole sentence wants to show that the writer feels like he can't control himself or his feelings. In the context of this song, it shows that the writer is so influenced by his feelings of love that he cannot act or respond in the usual or expected way. So overall, this sentence could indicate that although there may be reasons for the writer to not show their feelings too much or to remain calm, they still feel unable to control their emotions. Ultimately, this could indicate that the love and attraction they feel for the other person is very strong and dominates their behaviour and feelings.

In the second line of this data 'When you get close to me. In this sentence, the phrase 'get close to me' can literally be interpreted as approaching the writer physically or emotionally, which indicates that there is both physical and emotional closeness between the speaker and the person. In this context, too, this sentence not only shows an indication of physical closeness but also shows the involvement of emotional aspects, where such closeness deepens the relationship and interaction between the two individuals. Thus, overall, the phrase 'When you get close to me' can be described as the moments when a loved one gets close and how it affects the writer deeply. Ultimately, this closeness gives the writer a strong emotional reaction and makes them feel feelings that may be difficult to control.

In the third line of this data, 'Baby, my tongue goes numb'. In this sentence, the phrase 'my tongue goes numb' can literally be interpreted as my tongue becomes numb or loses sensation. In the context of this song, it shows that the writer has a feeling of nervousness, fascination, or loss for words when being close to a loved one. This is a strong emotional reaction that causes the writer to find it difficult to speak or express their feelings clearly. So overall, the line 'Baby, my tongue goes numb' describes moments when the writer feels so nervous or mesmerized by the presence of a loved one that it is difficult to speak clearly. This shows how deep and intense the feelings of love and attraction he has for the person he is referring to in the context of this song.

In line four of the song, 'Sounds like bleh, blah, blee'. In this sentence, the phrase 'sounds like' is used to describe how something sounds or how something is interpreted through hearing. In this context, the writer wants to describe how his voice sounds when speaking. Then in the phrase "Bleh, blah, blee' here does not have a literal meaning, because this is onomatopoeia, which in the context of this song is used to describe sounds that are unclear or chaotic. The use of these words creates an image of a sound

that makes no sense or is incomprehensible. So overall, in the context of this song, the line 'Sounds like bleh, blah, blee' shows that feeling nervous or mesmerized makes the speaker lose the ability to speak clearly, and the words become unclear and garbled.

In line seven of the song, 'Here's a lil' song', the phrase 'a lil' song' literally consists of the word "Lil", which stands for 'little', meaning small or simple, and 'Song', meaning song. In this context, 'a lil' song' can indicate that the song may be short, simple, or light. So overall, it can be interpreted that the sentence 'Here's a lil' song' shows that the speaker has created a simple song for a loved one as a sign to express his/her feelings.

Data 3

In the third line of this data, 'Cartwheels in my stomach when you walk in'. In this sentence, the word 'cartwheels' is literally an acrobatic movement in which a person spins like a wheel on hands and feet. In the context of this song, the phrase 'cartwheels in my stomach' is more of a figurative expression that describes an intense feeling of nervousness, excitement, or palpitations. So overall, 'Cartwheels in my stomach when you walk in' here seems to want to show a picture of the very strong and turbulent feelings experienced by the writer when a loved one is present. This then shows how intense and deep the feelings of love or attraction felt by the writer can affect her physical condition.

In the fifth line of this data 'Ooh, it feels so good, I had to jump the octave. In this sentence, the phrase 'Jump the octave' itself, in a musical term, means to raise the tone of voice one octave higher, which means that the writer is trying to show a significant change in his tone of voice, usually to express more intense emotions. So overall, 'Ooh, it feels so good I had to jump the octave' here wants to show a picture of a very intense happiness or pleasure felt by the writer when being with a loved one. This feeling is so strong that it triggers a real physical reaction, namely the desire to raise the pitch of the voice as an expression of the happiness he feels.

In line seven of the data, 'And I can't find my chill, I must have lost it'. In this sentence, the phrase 'Can't find my chill' is a slang phrase that means someone cannot stay calm or relaxed. Where the word 'Chill' contained in this sentence can be interpreted as calmness or a relaxed attitude. So contextually, this shows that the writer is feeling a sense of not being able to maintain calmness or control. This shows that something, in this case, the feelings that the writer has towards his loved one, has made him lose the ability to stay calm or control himself.

Data 4

In the first line of this data, "I'm talkin' all around the clock". In this sentence, the phrase 'all around the clock' literally means all the time, which describes something that goes on continuously without stopping. So overall, 'I'm talkin' all around clock' can be described as depicting how a strong feeling of love or attraction towards someone makes the writer constantly think about that person without stopping. This ultimately shows and emphasizes how intense and deep the feelings are, and shows that this love is so strong that it dominates the writer's thoughts and emotions all the time.

In the second line of this data, 'I'm talkin' hope nobody knocks. In this sentence, the phrase 'Hope nobody knocks' means hoping that no one interrupts or interrupts. In the context of this song, the writer wants to show his hope that no one can disturb or interrupt the moment or thoughts about his loved ones. So that the overall context of the sentence 'I'm talkin' hope nobody knocks' here shows the writer's desire to maintain moments of togetherness with his loved ones without outside interference. This

illustrates the importance of the moment in their relationship and shows that the speaker wants to savor their togetherness and the depth of their feelings without interruption from the other party.

In the third line of this data, 'I'm talkin' opposite of soft'. In this sentence, the phrase 'Opposite of soft' means the opposite of soft, which can be interpreted as hard or strong. Here, the writer wants the author to describe something that is not soft or weak, but has strength or a great intensity. So in this sentence, 'I'm talkin' hope nobody knocks' here shows the speaker's desire to be able to maintain moments of togetherness with his loved ones without outside interference. In this case, it shows a picture of how important the moment is in their relationship and shows that the speaker wants to enjoy their togetherness and the depth of their feelings without interference from other parties. In line four of this data, 'I'm talkin' wild, wild thoughts'. In this sentence, the phrase 'wild thoughts' means wild, uncontrollable, or unpredictable thoughts. Here, the writer wants to show that his thoughts or feelings at this moment are full of passion, excitement, or a wild and unpredictable impulsiveness. So overall, the contextual meaning of the sentence 'I'm talkin' wild, wild thoughts' here illustrates that the writer is currently experiencing passionate thoughts or feelings, wild thoughts, or impulsivity. This shows that the writer is feeling the freedom to express herself in an uncontrollable or unexpected way, perhaps in the context of strong feelings of love or passion.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research that has been conducted by researchers, in analyzing the semantic meaning of the song entitled "Nonsense" by Sabrina Carpenter, focusing on the contextual meaning contained in the lyrics of the song. Here, the author concludes that the analysis that has been carried out reveals some important insights regarding how language is used in songs to convey complex emotions and messages. The lexical meaning contained in the song is often straightforward, and there is also often harmony with the general use of the sentence, or it can be said that the lexical meaning contained in this song is simple and easy to understand, which can make the lyrics easy to relate to each other. For example, the phrase "Cartwheels in my stomach" in the lyrics of this song clearly illustrates to the listener that the author or singer in this song has feelings of excitement and nervousness, which is a common experience in a romantic context.

Furthermore, at a deeper level, the contextual meaning contained in the lyrics of this song also often adds layers of interpretation to reflect the complex emotions and experiences experienced by the singer or writer in this song. For example, the phrase "jump the octave" contained in the lyrics of this song, was found to be used to express an intense emotional reaction which shows how the use of musical terms can be used to express deep feelings, especially the feelings experienced by the writer or singer in the lyrics of this song. In essence, the overall semantic analysis of these song lyrics illustrates how important context is in interpreting a song lyric. By knowing or examining the literal and figurative language used in a song, one can provide a more complete or comprehensive understanding of the message and emotional expression that a songwriter wants to convey. This research also contributes to the field of semantics by illustrating how everyday language and contextual clues can create a variety of meanings in music that can be interpreted.

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