Lexical Ambiguity in the Lyrics of the Cigarettes After Sex Album: A Semantic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze lexical ambiguity in the song lyrics by *Cigarettes After Sex*. The main focus of this study is to identify the types of words that having lexical ambiguity and explore the meanings of the words contained in these words in the context of the album with a semantic approach. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to examine the lexical ambiguity of the lyrics in depth. The results show that the lyrics frequently use lexical ambiguity with multiple meanings, including nouns, adjectives, and verbs. This ambiguity not only enriches the meaning of the lyrics by adding the meaning of the lyrics but also creates a subjective and personal listening experience for the listener. Ambiguous words are often used to describe feelings of love, longing, sadness, and emotional complexity in human relationships. This study concludes that lexical ambiguity plays an important role in creating emotional depth and allowing listeners to find diverse meanings according to their own experiences and emotional contexts. This ambiguity also increases the complexity of the lyrics, making it an effective poetic tool in conveying nuances of emotion and multi-layered meanings.

Keywords: *Lexical Ambiguity; Semantics; Song Lyrics.*

INTRODUCTION

Music is often a medium for expressing emotions that are rich in meaning; in it, song lyrics play an important role in conveying messages and emotions. However, in the process of interpreting lyrics, the phenomenon of ambiguity often arises, especially lexical ambiguity, which is a condition where a word or phrase has more than one possible meaning Nkansah & Gyasi, (2021). This ambiguity can enrich the understanding of a song, providing a deeper layer of meaning, but can also cause confusion or different interpretations among listeners. *Cigarettes After Sex* is an alternative rock/pop band known for its melancholic musical style and lyrics full of ambience. This band is one example whose lyrics often contain lexical ambiguity. Their albums, especially the first one, are filled with lyrics that can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the perspective of the listener. This makes their lyrics an interesting object of study in semantic studies, especially in understanding how lexical ambiguity plays a role in the formation of meaning and emotional resonance in music Kumala & Marchella, (2023). By analyzing the various possible meanings contained in

the lyrics, it is hoped that this ambiguity contributes to the experience of listening to music and understanding the themes carried by this band Sari & Anindita, (2020).

Through a semantic approach, this study will explore how lexical ambiguity can create complex and deep layers of meaning, which in turn can enrich the aesthetic and emotional experiences of listeners. In addition, this study also seeks to identify patterns of ambiguity that may be characteristic of the lyrical style of *Cigarettes After Sex*, so that it can contribute to broader linguistic and musicological studies Fairuz & Madarina, (2021). In communication, misunderstandings can sometimes be caused by inappropriate language use, or even poor word choices, and often lead to misunderstandings, feuds and quarrels. Therefore, before using language to communicate, humans must understand the limitations and obstacles that exist Purba (2020). Language acquisition is the process by which a child learns a second, third, or foreign language over time through environmental learning. Humans learn their first language by listening to their parents when they are born. Society must be able to distinguish between the use of language by children, adults, and the elderly as mature beings. The most important communication tool is language. Due to the fact that language becomes more complex as we age, the study of language is also known as linguistics. Linguistics is a field of study, the study of language that studies how humans communicate Rahmi Julia et al., (2023).

Linguistics helps us learn to improve human communication to translate thoughts, meanings and expressions to better understand how humans communicate. Linguistics has several discussions such as phonetics & phonology (speech sounds), morphology (words and their parts), syntax (sentence formation) and semantics (word meaning). Phonology studies more complex and abstract sounds and patterns, while phonetics studies speech sounds and how people perceive them. Phonetics is the study of how sounds are perceived, articulated, and physically manifested as sound waves Hamka, (2016). Dialects are viewed by phonetics as something independent and consider all sounds. The study of the skeleton and structure of living things is known as morphology, and refers to the formation and evolution of the final form. Morphology in phonetics refers to the mental model that underlies the organization of words or the branch of phonetics that deals with words, their internal structure, and their form Aronoff & Fudeman, (2022).

The arrangement of words and phrases in a sentence determines its syntactic changes even a single word can change the sentence meaning of the statement. In addition, each language has its own patterns and conventions, which can be changed or modified to produce more lyrical lines. Semantics comes last. The study of semantics examines how words related to ambiguity in language are understood Gani, (2019), semantics is a field of linguistics that studies signs or symbols that are related to meaning, relationships between meanings, and relationships between words and concepts or meanings of words.

The songs on the first *Cigarettes After Sex* album released in 2012, act as a bridge to an emotional landscape; this is very important to their famous persona. The purposes of this are to investigate one particular aspect of the band's artistic skills,

particularly the use of deliberate semantic ambiguity in their lyrical compositions. This study attempts to uncover the layers of meaning woven into the fabric of their songs by concentrating on the semantic intricacies of their debut album, especially how purposeful ambiguity enhances the overall aesthetic and interpretive experience Wahab et al., (2022).

The reason the researcher chose this title, apart from the lyrics in the song *Cigarettes After Sex*, is because the words of one of the songs on the album, which has a dark and profound message, caught the researcher's interest. This problem was identified by the realization that although the emotional impact of *Cigarettes After Sex's* music is well known, little is known about their deliberate choice of language and how it affects interpretation.

To fill this gap, this study explores the intentional insertion of semantic ambiguity in an attempt to learn more about the intricacies that influence listeners' aesthetic and emotional experiences. After looking at how ambiguous words are used, the authors raise the following issues:

1. What are the types of lexical ambiguity words found in song lyrics?
2. What is the meaning of lexical ambiguity words in this album?

Understanding semantics is essential to understanding language and communication. It explores the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences and how language conveys information. Semantics is applied to lyrics in music, where musicians use a variety of language techniques to express feelings, experiences, and ideas. This chapter attempts to investigate the semantic components found in the *Cigarettes After Sex* album, with an emphasis on the ambiguity present in the semantics of the songs and the contextual circumstances that influence how these musical expressions are understood.

Semantics

As a branch of linguistics, this science studies the meaning of words and how language expresses them. As stated by Griffiths, (2006) Semantics is the study of the meaning of words and the meaning of sentences, abstracted from the context of use, is a descriptive subject. As previously state that semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning, studying semantics also teaches us about the relationship between words and their meanings. In addition, the use of semantics to identify problems with understanding words or connotations is often quite useful. The rationale is that each individual can interpret the same set of words or sentences in different ways (Sha'ri et al., 2020). When applying semantic analysis to a language, it is important to remember that each language is different and is often influenced by the culture and environment of its speakers. Thus, the semantic analysis of the language is limited to that language and cannot be used to analyze other languages Shestakova, (2022).

Lexical Ambiguity

The ability of ambiguity to allow for multiple interpretations and subtle meanings within a work of art adds an interesting element of complexity to semantics. The lyrics

on the band's album are intended to elicit multiple emotional reactions and encourage listeners to participate in their own interpretations. This section will examine some of the types of ambiguity found in the album's lyrics and examine the band's intentional use of language to convey a sense of diversity and openness Clarke & Keller, (2015).

When a term has two or more alternative meanings, it is said to be lexically ambiguous. Lexical ambiguity occurs mostly in two forms: homonymy and polysemy. Both can be confusing in writing or speech even though they are very different. When a word has multiple definitions, each definition is related to the other, this is called polysemy. The variations that exist can lead to miscommunication. A word that has different meanings but is pronounced or spelled the same way is called a homonym. In situations like this, context is very important. Lexical ambiguity is the result of homophones appearing in the same place in a speech. Sometimes, lexical ambiguity is used to create beautiful puns and sentences Locatell, (2017). Most words are ambiguous: one form of the word can refer to more than one different concept. For example, a form of the word "bark" can refer to the sound a dog makes, or to the outer layer of a tree. This form of ambiguity is often referred to as 'lexical ambiguity'. Some researchers prefer the term 'semantic ambiguity' because it makes it clear that it is the meaning of the word that is ambiguous and not its form or grammar (Vitello & Rodd, 2015). In general, the terms are largely interchangeable. This chapter uses the term 'lexical ambiguity' because of its broader use.

Homophones

Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word has multiple meanings, and homographs are a prime example of this. Homographs are words that share the same spelling but have different meanings and, in some cases, different pronunciations. This can create ambiguity in written language, as the meaning of the homograph is not immediately clear without context. For instance, the word "lead" can refer to either the verb meaning "to guide" or the noun referring to the metal, while "tear" could mean a drop from the eye or the act of ripping something. Without additional context, it can be difficult to determine which meaning is intended Jaffré, (2006).

In speech, pronunciation often helps distinguish homographs, but in writing, readers rely on the context in which the word appears. For example, the word "bow" could mean a weapon used for archery, or it could refer to bending forward in respect. The surrounding words and the overall sentence structure provide clues that help clarify the intended meaning. Homographs demonstrate how language can be complex and sometimes ambiguous, requiring careful interpretation based on the situation or context Amelyana et al., (2022).

Homonyms

A homonym is two or more words that have different meanings but are pronounced or spelled the same. Homonyms are of two types: homophones and homographs. Words that are pronounced the same but spelled differently are called homophones. Words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently are called homographs Wilson & Marantz, (2022). Lexical ambiguity has received much

attention in theoretical linguistics; theoretical linguistics argues that lexical ambiguity is not always present. Two types have historically been identified. Polysemy, in which a single lexical item has several different but related meanings, such as "mouth," which can mean both "body organ" and "cave entrance," and homonymy, in which a lexical item inadvertently carries two (or more) different and unrelated meanings Cruse et al., (2005).

In Apresjan (1974) theoretical linguistics, most discussions of lexical ambiguity focus on polysemy, which is further divided into two categories. The motivation behind the first type of polysemy is metaphor. It is assumed that there is a parallel between the meanings of a word in metaphorical polysemy. Metaphorical polysemy has a literal primary meaning and a figurative secondary meaning. For example, the vague term "eye" has two meanings: the literal basic meaning referring to "body organ" and the metaphorical secondary connotation referring to "the eye of a needle". Metaphor-driven polysemy seems to be very uncontrolled. There are some examples where there is quite a significant similarity between the primary meaning and its derived meaning, but there are also examples where the similarity is not clear Qizi, (2023). Another type of polysemy is initiated by metonymy. In metonymy, the relationship that is assumed to exist between the meanings of words is proximity or relatedness; which is metonymic-motivated polysemy with the general understanding of polysemy, particularly the ability of a word to have several different but related meanings Vicente, (2018). In metonymic polysemy, the basic meaning and the secondary meaning are literal. For example, the ambiguous word *"chicken"* has a literal base meaning referring to *"the animal"* and a literal secondary meaning of *"the flesh of that animal."*

METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative. The data collection process for qualitative research involves the use of written materials such as manuscripts, documents, and other formal records Zaimardiansyah, (2019). By searching the internet, the author finds and collects certain facts, which they then analyze. The author of this work carries out a certain process. The author selects lyrics after determining the appropriate theme. The author then examines the Cigarettes After Sex notes. To strengthen the analysis, the author also prepares theories. After listening to the lyrics of the *Cigarettes After Sex* album many times, the author analyzes the lyrics and notes the sentences. The author then learns about the types and meanings of the lyrics. And after that the author finds ambiguity in the lyrics. In this section, the author finds the results of the problem formulation. The object of this research is the words of lexical ambiguity and their meanings contained in the *Cigarettes After Sex* album. The right definition of the object of research is combining research topics with data sources. There will be four songs in this album that will be analyzed. The first step in this research involves collecting the lyrics of all songs from the album. This will be done by sourcing the lyrics from official album booklets, the band's website, or reputable lyrics databases to ensure accuracy. Additionally, the lyrics will be analyzed in conjunction

with the music itself. This involves listening to each track while reading the lyrics, allowing for an understanding of how musical elements like tone, rhythm, and emphasis might influence the interpretation of ambiguous language.

In addition, to analyze the data, the focus is on describing instances of lexical ambiguity at both the word and phrase levels. Word-level ambiguity includes cases where a word has multiple meanings (polysemy) or where homonyms create potential for different interpretations. For each ambiguous word identified, a description will be provided of how different meanings could be relevant within the specific lyrical context. Phrase-level ambiguity involves identifying phrases that could be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the listener's perspective or the surrounding lyrics. Each phrase will be described in terms of its potential meanings and how these contribute to the broader themes and emotional tone of the song.

Furthermore, the analysis will also take into account the contextual elements surrounding the ambiguous words and phrases. This includes examining how the ambiguity interacts with the themes of the album, the narrative structure of the songs, and the emotional resonance they aim to evoke. The study will also explore how these ambiguities might enhance the listener's engagement with the music by allowing for multiple layers of interpretation. Moreover, the descriptive study synthesizes the findings to offer insights into how lexical ambiguity in the album's lyrics contributes to its artistic and emotional depth. The study will highlight the significance of ambiguity in creating a rich, multifaceted listening experience and suggest directions for further research in the area of semantics in music lyrics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, there are three data analyzed with a semantic approach, especially with the lexical ambiguity measurement tool. All of them are taken from the lyrics of the song Cigarette After Sex to provide data boundaries so that they have the same uniformity and typical diction.

Data 1
"*Whispered something in your ears..*"
(Cigarette After Sex - Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby)
The lyrics of the song *Whispered Something in Your Ear* represent a calm yet mysterious vibes. Most of it is reflected through the choice of words and phrases in the lyrics. In this song, there are several words and phrases that have the potential for lexical ambiguity, which can lead to various interpretations depending on the listener's perspective.

The word "Whispered"
The word "whispered" can cause ambiguity because the act of whispering can have various connotations. This word can refer to the act of conveying a secret message or speaking softly for a certain reason (for example, to create an intimate atmosphere or express anxiety). In the context of the lyrics of this song, "whispered"

can be interpreted as the act of conveying something important but secret, emphasizing the aspect of intimacy or secrecy between two individuals.

The phrase "Something in Your Ear"

This phrase is lexically ambiguous because "something" is a non-specific pronoun, which can refer to various things. The phrase "in your ear" can refer to the physical process of whispering or it can also be interpreted metaphorically, such as infiltrating an idea or thought into someone's mind. Without further explanation, this phrase can be interpreted literally as whispering into the ear, or figuratively as conveying something personal and important that is only meant for the intended recipient.

The lexical ambiguity in the lyrics of "*Whispered Something in Your Ear*" adds depth and complexity to the experience of listening to the song. The choice of words that are intentionally left open to interpretation allows the listener to connect with the song on a personal level, as the resulting meaning can vary depending on the individual's perspective. This ambiguity also creates a mysterious and intimate atmosphere that is in line with the theme and tone of the song.

Data 2
"Made you smile and looked away .."
(Cigarette After Sex - Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby)

The lyrics of the song *"Made you smile and looked away"* imply emotional dynamics that seem gentle but complex. In this phrase, there are several elements that have lexical ambiguity, which allows for various interpretations based on the context and experience of the listener.

The phrase "Made You Smile"

The phrase "*made you smile*" lexically has ambiguity that lies in the word "*made*". This word can mean causing or triggering an emotional response in the form of a smile, but without further clarification, it is unclear whether this smile is produced by a deliberate action, something spontaneous, or even something that may not be realized by the subject. The context of this phrase can reflect a situation where someone does something that is intentionally intended to make someone else smile, but it is not explained whether this action is positive, negative, or simply neutral.

The word "You"

As in many song lyrics, the word "*you*" is often ambiguous because it is not specific. "*You*" can refer to the listener of the song, a specific person, or perhaps an anonymous figure who is the object of the singer's attention. This allows the listener to personally interpret who is meant. The ambiguity of the identity of "*you*" allows these lyrics to resonate with many listeners, as they can associate the phrase with someone important in their lives, whether it be a friend, a lover, or even themselves.

The phrase "Looked Away"

The phrase "*looked away*" also has ambiguity. Lexically, it can be interpreted as the physical act of looking away. However, the phrase can also be interpreted metaphorically, for example indicating reluctance, embarrassment, or even denial of a feeling. The context of "*looked away*" in these lyrics can reflect a range of emotional responses, from awkwardness, a desire to hide feelings, to a sign of uncertainty or doubt. For example, perhaps someone feels uncomfortable with the smile they caused and therefore looks away. The lexical ambiguity in the lyrics of "*Made you smile and looked away*" allows the listener to ponder the various possible meanings behind the action being expressed. These simple yet ambiguous words could refer to a brief moment of happiness followed by doubt or awkwardness, or even describe a deeper and more complex dynamic in an interpersonal relationship. This ambiguity adds an interpretive layer that makes these lyrics rich in emotional nuance and open to multiple interpretations based on the listener's personal experiences.

Data 3
"Baby, I'm a firefighter.."
(Cigarette After Sex - Fire Fighter)

Lexical ambiguity is often used to add depth and richness to a song's meaning. In the case of "*Baby, I'm a Firefighter*," the ambiguity in words like "*baby*" and "*fire*" creates different layers of meaning. The song may not be about a literal firefighter, but rather about someone who plays the role of savior in an emotional relationship, trying to "put out the fire" of conflict or sadness. Analysis of lexical ambiguity in the lyrics of the song "Baby, I'm a Firefighter" can be done using a descriptive approach to identify words or phrases that have more than one meaning (*ambiguity*) and how that ambiguity affects the overall interpretation of the lyrics.

The Word "Baby"

In its literal meaning, the word "baby" can literally refer to a baby or a small child. While in metaphorical meaning, in the context of the song, "*baby*" is often used as a term of endearment for a lover. The ambiguity arises because this word can mean either a baby or a loved one, depending on the listener's interpretation.

The Word "Firefighter"

In literal meaning, the word *"firefighter"* literally means a firefighter. In addition, in metaphorical meaning in the context of the song, "*firefighter*" may be used metaphorically to describe someone who tries to save or protect others from emotional harm or conflict. Ambiguity arises when the listener tries to determine whether the term should be taken literally or figuratively.

The Word "Fire"

In literal meaning, the word refers to an actual fire, something that burns. Furthermore, in metaphorical meaning, the word *"Fire"* can refer to something that burns inside a person, such as passion, love, or even anger. Ambiguity occurs because "*fire*" can be taken literally or as a symbol of strong feelings.

The lexical ambiguity in the lyrics of "Baby, I'm a Firefighter" adds a dimension of multiple interpretations, allowing the listener to understand the song in a unique and personal way. This ambiguity enriches the listening experience by opening up a variety of possible meanings that can be explored based on the context and emotions felt by the listener.

CONCLUSION

This study examines lexical ambiguity in the lyrics of the band *Cigarettes After Sex* by focusing on two main questions, particularly what types of lexical ambiguous words are found in the lyrics of the song and the meaning of the lexical ambiguous words in the context of the album. The results of the analysis show that the lyrics in the *Cigarettes After Sex* album often utilize lexical ambiguity through the use of words that have more than one meaning, both in literal and metaphorical contexts. These ambiguous words are often nouns, adjectives, and verbs, which can be interpreted differently depending on the context and emotional experience of the listener. For example, the word "*fire*" can mean physical fire, but also symbolizes passion or intense feelings. In this album, lexical ambiguity not only enriches the meaning of the lyrics but also creates a deep and personal listening experience. The meanings of these words are multi-layered, allowing listeners to discover different meanings each time they listen to the song, depending on their emotional context at the time. Overall, this study reveals that the lexical ambiguity in *Cigarettes After Sex*'s lyrics serves as an effective poetic device, creating depth and strong emotional resonance. This ambiguity not only adds complexity to the lyrics, but also encourages listeners to engage more deeply with the music and find meaning that resonates with their own experiences.

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Zaimardiansyah, et al. (2019:21) "qualitative research is a research procedure by collecting data in the form of words and data obtained through manuscripts, documents, and other official documents"