



## Conveying Emotion Through Language: A Semantic Study of Lyrics in Aespa's "Life's Too Short" and Olivia Rodrigo's "Traitor"

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### Abstract

This study performs a semantic analysis of the song lyrics from "Life's Too Short" by Aespa and "Traitor" by Olivia Rodrigo, aiming to uncover how words convey deeper meanings and emotions. Employing a descriptive qualitative method and drawing on the semantic frameworks of Adisutrisno (2008) and Chaer (2013), the research investigates the types of meaning—conceptual, connotative, and associative—alongside various forms of figurative language. Data for both songs were collected through literature reviews and online lyric sources. The analysis of Aespa's "Life's Too Short" primarily identifies conceptual meanings and idioms, highlighting their role in conveying the song's core message. For Olivia Rodrigo's "Traitor," the study reveals a richer tapestry of semantic meanings, including connotative, conceptual, and associative meanings, complemented by the presence of simile, personification, metaphor, and paradox as prominent types of figurative language.

**Keywords:** *Semantic Meaning; Figurative Language; Emotional Expression*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini melakukan analisis semantik terhadap lirik lagu "Life's Too Short" oleh Aespa dan "Traitor" oleh Olivia Rodrigo, yang bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana kata-kata menyampaikan makna dan emosi yang lebih dalam. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan mengacu pada kerangka kerja semiotik dari Adisutrisno (2008) dan Chaer (2013), penelitian ini menyelidiki jenis-jenis makna-konseptual, konotatif, dan asosiatif-bersama dengan berbagai bentuk bahasa kiasan. Data untuk kedua lagu tersebut dikumpulkan melalui tinjauan literatur dan sumber lirik online. Analisis terhadap lagu "Life's Too Short" dari Aespa terutama mengidentifikasi makna konseptual dan idiom, dengan menyoroti peran mereka dalam menyampaikan pesan inti dari lagu tersebut. Untuk lagu "Traitor" dari Olivia Rodrigo, penelitian ini mengungkap perpaduan makna semantik yang lebih kaya, termasuk makna konotatif, konseptual, dan asosiatif, yang dilengkapi dengan kehadiran simile, personifikasi, metafora, dan paradoks sebagai jenis-jenis bahasa kiasan yang menonjol.

**Kata Kunci:** *Makna Semantik; Bahasa Kiasan; Ekspresi Emosional*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a powerful medium for expressing human emotions and thoughts, and songs stand out as one of the most effective artistic forms in harnessing that expressive potential. Beyond melody and rhythm, song lyrics are deliberately crafted literary components that carry deep emotional, cultural, and symbolic meanings. Lyrics are not merely complementary to music—they function as vessels for personal narratives, cultural identities, and social commentary often conveyed through poetic expression. As music continues to evolve as a form of emotional storytelling, lyrics have become a crucial channel through which artists articulate complex and nuanced messages.

In the field of linguistics, semantics provides a theoretical framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed and interpreted through language. Semantics allows us to examine how words, whether in their literal or figurative use, convey particular messages and emotional weight. Elements such as conceptual, connotative, and associative meaning, along with the use of figurative language like metaphor and simile, serve as powerful tools in crafting emotional resonance. Through semantic analysis, song lyrics can be appreciated not only for their sound but also for their underlying messages and symbolic richness embedded in word choice and structure.

Despite the emotional depth present in many song lyrics, listeners often fail to grasp the intricate meanings that lie beneath the surface. Much of the emotional and symbolic impact of a song can be lost without a critical understanding of the semantic devices employed by the songwriter. This presents a problem in how popular music is received and interpreted. A lack of linguistic analysis may lead to superficial appreciation, leaving the deeper messages and artistic intentions unexplored. Therefore, a semantic approach is necessary to fully uncover how lyrics function as emotionally charged and linguistically rich expressions.

Previous research supports the value of applying semantic analysis to literary and artistic texts, including song lyrics. Scholars such as McWhorter (2003) and Pohan (2023) emphasize the literary nature of lyrics, while linguistic experts like Chaer (2013) highlight the central role of semantics in decoding meaning. These studies underscore the importance of treating song lyrics as serious cultural texts that deserve in-depth academic inquiry. By analyzing lyrics through a semantic lens, researchers can reveal how language is carefully employed to evoke emotional responses and convey complex themes.

This study aims to analyze the lyrics of *"Life's Too Short"* by Aespa and *"Traitor"* by Olivia Rodrigo using a semantic approach. These songs were selected due to their emotional intensity and linguistic complexity, which reflect personal and relational struggles. By examining the use of literal and figurative language, the research seeks to identify specific semantic features

that contribute to the emotional and thematic depth of the lyrics. Ultimately, this study aspires to enhance the understanding and appreciation of song lyrics as a meaningful medium of emotional and cultural expression.

## METHOD

This study uses a type of descriptive qualitative research that aims to understand the meaning in depth of linguistic data in the form of song lyrics. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for examining aspects of meaning, context, and emotional expression contained in language, especially in song lyrics that are full of personal and symbolic messages. The focus of this study is how semantic elements and figurative language styles shape emotional meaning in lyric texts.

The primary data source in this study was the English song lyrics of two popular international songs, namely *"Life's Too Short"* by Aespa and *"Traitor"* by Olivia Rodrigo. The lyrics of these songs are obtained from credible Genius.com sites and then verified through official sources such as YouTube channels and streaming platforms owned by each artist. The selection of songs is purposively based on emotional depth, richness of language style, and thematic relevance to semantic and stylistic studies.

The data analysis technique used is qualitative content analysis. The analysis procedure includes data reduction (selecting the relevant lyrical parts), classification (grouping the types of meanings and styles of language), interpretation (explaining the contribution of language elements to the emotions and messages of the song), and synthesis (comparing the results of two songs). With this approach, researchers sought to uncover how word choice, semantic meaning, and figurative language function to build a strong emotional message in song lyrics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of semantic and figurative language found in the lyrics of *"Life's Too Short"* by aespa and *"Traitor"* by Olivia Rodrigo. The analysis is structured into tables for clarity and is followed by a comparative discussion of how meaning and emotion are conveyed in both songs

**Table 1.** Semantic and figurative language in *"Life Too Short"* By Aespa

Lyric Line	Type of meaning	Explanation
Say to my face	Idiomatic meaning	Saying something directly, represents assertives
Get a life	Idiomatic meaning	Encouragement to live meaningfully, rejecting negativity

Life's too short	Conceptual Meaning	Emphasizes urgency and value of time
Out of your mind	Idiomatic meaning	Describes irrational behavior
Behind a phone screen	Idiomatic meaning	Refers to anonymous criticism online
Getting up in mine	Idiomatic meaning	Involvement in someone else's business
Turn your glitter into gold	Idiomatic meaning	Warning not to be deceived by appearances
Wasting time	Conceptual meaning	Indicates something not worth pursuing
Better seeds to sow	Idiomatic meaning	Suggests making better choices for future outcomes

**Table 2.** Semantic and Figurative Language in "Traitor" By Olivia Rodrigo

Lyric	Type of Meaning	Explanation
Brown guilty eyes	Connotative Meaning	Reflects emotional guilt and inner conflict
Little white lies	Associative Meaning	Minor dishonesty, often meant to protect feelings
I played dumb but I always knew	Conceptual Meaning	Pretending not to know, but being aware
That you talked to her	Conceptual Meaning	Simple factual statement of emotional betrayal
You betrayed me	Connotative Meaning	Implies emotional disloyalty
Show her off like she's a new trophy	Simile / Connotative Meaning	Core expression of emotional hurt
All the twisted games	Associative Meaning	Comparing a girl to an object, reflecting objectification
You told me I was paranoid	Metaphor	Describes psychological manipulation

The analysis shows that both songs utilize rich semantic strategies to express contrasting emotional tones. In "Life's Too Short," aespa employs idiomatic phrases and conceptual meanings to convey themes of empowerment and self-confidence. Expressions like "get a life" and "say to my face" reinforce a bold and independent stance, encouraging listeners to live authentically and ignore negativity.

Conversely, Olivia Rodrigo's "Traitor" uses a wider range of semantic types—including connotative and associative meanings—along with vivid figurative language such as metaphor, simile, and paradox. These devices intensify the emotional weight of the lyrics, portraying heartbreak, betrayal, and emotional manipulation. Lines like "you're still a traitor" and "I played dumb but I always knew" reveal the depth of emotional conflict and psychological pain.

While aespa's song delivers a message of resilience, Rodrigo's focuses on vulnerability and emotional loss. The contrast in emotional tone is enhanced by their semantic choices: aespa uses idioms to maintain a strong voice, whereas Rodrigo employs emotionally charged language and figurative comparisons to express sorrow.

Both songs successfully use semantics and figurative expression to connect with listeners, proving that language in music plays a powerful role in conveying emotion and meaning. These lyrical choices invite interpretation, empathy, and emotional reflection, allowing audiences to resonate with the artists' experiences.

Artists in both songs intentionally use language to stir emotional responses through semantic precision. In "Life's Too Short," the clear and direct expressions highlight a deliberate effort to establish personal boundaries and individuality. The song's semantic structure bolsters its main theme of confidence and self-liberation, making it both a self-worth anthem and a linguistic stand against societal judgment.

Conversely, Olivia Rodrigo's "Traitor" shows how language can mirror emotional complexity. The layered use of connotative and associative meanings—for instance, "traitor" implying deep emotional violation beyond mere betrayal—amplifies the song's message. Figurative language like paradoxes ("you didn't cheat but you're still a traitor") not only adds poetic flair but also reflects the persona's inner turmoil. Through these elements, Rodrigo crafts a raw, personal narrative that turns individual pain into a shared emotional experience for listeners.

This difference in emotional delivery also reflects cultural and stylistic variations in songwriting. Aespa, a K-pop group, typically portrays empowerment in a polished and direct way, consistent with common K-pop themes of self-expression and individuality. Their lyrics are designed to be relatable yet assertive, employing catchy and meaningful idiomatic expressions. This intentional word choice enhances semantic impact while making the message accessible globally.

Meanwhile, Olivia Rodrigo's approach favors introspective storytelling, typical of her genre and personal songwriting. Her use of metaphors and paradoxes doesn't just describe a feeling; it immerses the listener in it. The semantic layering allows listeners to interpret the lyrics through their own emotional experiences, boosting the song's relatability and

emotional intensity. Through this strategy, Rodrigo not only tells a story but also creates a shared space for emotional connection.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that song lyrics are rich in semantic and figurative meanings that play a significant role in conveying emotions and messages. Through the analysis of aespa's "Life's Too Short" and Olivia Rodrigo's "Traitor", it was found that both songs utilize language effectively to reflect contrasting emotional experiences.

In "Life's Too Short", aespa primarily uses idiomatic and conceptual meanings to promote self-confidence, independence, and positivity. The lyrics reflect a bold attitude of living authentically and dismissing negativity from others. In contrast, "Traitor" by Olivia Rodrigo employs a broader range of semantic and figurative language—including simile, metaphor, personification, and paradox—to express betrayal, disappointment, and emotional vulnerability. Despite their differences, both songs demonstrate how word choice, structure, and figurative expressions can evoke strong emotional responses from listeners. This shows that semantics is not only about literal meanings but also about how language captures and communicates human emotion. The results of this research may contribute to a deeper understanding of how emotional expression in song lyrics can be analyzed through semantic frameworks. It also opens opportunities for further research in other musical genres or languages using similar approaches

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