

An Analysis of Ambiguity of One Direction's Song Lyrics in The *Midnight Memories* Album

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Article Info

Article history:

Submitted Jan 13, 2024

Revised Jan 30, 2024

Accepted Feb 20, 2024

Published Feb 29, 2024

Keywords:

*Ambiguity,
Lexical,
Grammatical,
Song Lyrics.*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to discuss the types of ambiguity found and the meanings conveyed through ambiguity in the song lyrics of One Direction's *Midnight Memories* album. To identify ambiguity types, the researcher employed Stephen Ullmann's theory, and to determine the meaning of ambiguity, Abdul Chaer's theory was utilized. This study adopted a qualitative descriptive analysis approach. The data for this research was derived from the lyrics of all songs included in One Direction's *Midnight Memories* album. Documentation was used for data collection, and data reduction, display, and conclusion techniques were applied for analysis. The findings indicate that lexical ambiguity predominates in the lyrics of One Direction's *Midnight Memories* album. Furthermore, contextual meaning, particularly involving figures of speech, is most suitable for interpreting the ambiguous meanings in the album's lyrics.

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<https://doi.org/10.30631/ellture.v6i1.79>

Introduction

Language is fundamental to human life, serving as a primary tool for expressing opinions, ideas, and information. Humans strategically select words to achieve communication goals, with spoken language, symbols, and intonation carrying intentional meanings. Linguistics, the study of language structure and use, encompasses branches like Pragmatics, Phonology, Semantics, Morphology, Sociolinguistics, and Psycholinguistics. This research focuses on Semantics.

Semantics explores the meaning of language, including its formation, division, and change. However, communication challenges arise due to ambiguous language, where words or sentences hold multiple interpretations, causing misunderstandings. As Simatupang & Rahmanita (2022:18654) note, ambiguity refers to ideas or situations with multiple meanings.

Stephen Ullmann (1964) categorizes ambiguity into phonetic, lexical, and grammatical types. Phonetic ambiguity stems from sound similarities, while lexical ambiguity arises from words with multiple meanings (Crystal, 2008:23). Grammatical ambiguity, also known as structural ambiguity, involves multiple grammatical interpretations (Crystal, 2008:458).

The dimension of meaning in semantics investigates how lexemes convey meaning, encompassing reference, denotation, connotation, sense relations, lexical and grammatical meaning, morphemes, homonymy, polysemy, lexical ambiguity, and sentence meaning (Kreidler, 2002:41-56). Abdul Chaer further divides meanings into lexical, grammatical, contextual, referential, non-referential, denotative, connotative, conceptual, associative, word, term, idiom, and proverb.

Ambiguity is prevalent in literary works, including songs. Popular groups like One Direction, known for their catchy melodies, often employ lyrics with implicit meanings. The group's *Midnight Memories* album, released in 2013, achieved significant commercial success. This research aims to identify ambiguity types using Ullmann's theory and describe the meanings of ambiguity depicted in One Direction's *Midnight Memories* album lyrics based on Abdul Chaer's theory

Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to comprehensively understand the ambiguity present in song lyrics. As Siyoto & Sodik (2015:27) explain, qualitative research prioritizes in-depth understanding over generalization. A descriptive analysis approach, as outlined by Siyoto & Sodik (2015:11), is used to meticulously describe and interpret the meaning of words, phrases, or sentences. The aim is to characterize phenomena without explaining their causes or effects.

A literature review was conducted to gather relevant information. The research focused on One Direction's *Midnight Memories* album, identifying and analyzing ambiguous lyrics. Data was collected through documentation, specifically by accessing and analyzing song lyrics on Musixmatch. The process involved accessing the website, listening to songs on Spotify while reading lyrics, identifying ambiguous lyrics, and numbering them for analysis. Data analysis followed a three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

Finding and Discussion

According to Stephen Ullman classify ambiguity in three types of ambiguity, there are ambiguity phonetic, ambiguity lexical, and ambiguity grammatical. From three of types ambiguity, the researcher found 2 types of ambiguity in One Direction's song lyrics in the *Midnight Memories* album. Phonetic ambiguity cannot be analyzed, because song lyrics are literary works consisting of spoken and written, that's why researcher cannot analyze phonetic ambiguity because there are written lyrics that make the listener know what the singer is actually saying.

a. Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity is the type of ambiguity that occurs when a word in sentence has more than one meaning.

Best Song Ever lyrics

Datum 1 : And we danced all night to the best song ever
 We knew every **line**, now I can't remember.
 How it goes, but I know that I won't forget her
 'Cause we danced all night to the best song ever

Lexical ambiguity is found in the line "We knew every line, now i can't remember." The word **Line** in the lyrics above is classified as lexical ambiguity, where single word has multiple meaning, according to Ullman's theory lexical ambiguity is when a word has more than one meaning and make different interpretations of readers and listeners. The meanings word **Line** it could be **verse of song lyrics** or it could be **boundary**. The lexical meaning of Line based on Oxford dictionary is long thin mark.

The meaning of **verse of song** is based on the context of the previous lyrics which mention the best song ever in the line "And we dance all night to the best song ever, we

know every line, now I can't remember". By using this meaning, the meaning of the lyrics interpreted as "we know every verse in the song, now I can't remember". Based on Oxford dictionary **boundary** means a real or imagined line that marks the limits or edges of something and separates it from other things or places, then the lyrics will be interpreted as "we know every boundary, now I can't remember". Based on context the lyrics the meaning verse of song is more suitable as meaning of ambiguity depicted in best song ever song lyrics.

Datum 2 : Said her name was Georgia Rose
 And her daddy was a dentist,
 said i had a **dirty** mouth,
 but she kissed me like she meant it.

The word dirty in this sentence above is lexical ambiguity because word of dirty has more than one meaning that makes the listener and reader confused because has different interpretations of the lyrics, the word dirty it could be not clean or it could be obscene.

The meaning of not clean is based on the context of the previous lyrics that mentioned dentist in verse of lyrics "her daddy was a dentist." By using the meaning not clean, the lyrics can be interpreted as "her daddy was a dentist, said i had an unclean mouth, she kissed me like she meant it", and not clean is suitable as meaning depicted in this ambiguity lyrics.

The meaning of obscene can be interpreted as a figure of speech, based on oxford dictionary obscene means connected with sex in a way that most people find offensive, by using this meaning the lyrics will interpreted as which if using this meaning, "her daddy was a dentist, said i had an obscene mouth, she kissed me like she meant it."

Midnight Memories lyrics

Datum 1 : Five **foot** something with the skinny jeans
 Don't look back, baby, follow me
 I don't know where I'm going,
 but I'm finding my way

The lyrics above contain lexical ambiguity, in line "Five foot something with the skinny jeans." The word foot in this lyrics is a type of lexical ambiguity because the word foot make confusion for readers and listeners. The word foot it could be step or it could be leg-a person or an animal stands.

Step is meaning based on context lyrics and leg-a person or an animal stand is lexical meaning, By using the meaning step, the lyrics can be interpreted as "Five step something with the skinny jeans". That's mean the act of lifting your foot and putting it down in order to move or walk to somewhere, and step is more suitable as meaning of ambiguity depicted in this song lyrics. Meanwhile by using the meaning leg-a person or an animal stand of which is the lexical meaning of "support for humans and animals to stand up" then the lyrics will be "Five foot-leg something with the skinny jeans", that's mean that there are five legs.

Datum 2 : Straight off the plane to a **new** hotel.
 Just touched down, you could never tell
 Big house party with a crowded kitchen
 People talk shh, but we don't listen

The lyrics above contain lexical ambiguity, in line "Straight off the plane to a new hotel." The word new in this lyrics is a type of lexical ambiguity because the word new that followed by the word hotel make confused for readers and listeners.

The word new it could be new building hotel or it could be hotel never visited. By using the meaning new building hotel, the lyrics can be interpreted as "Straight off the plane to a new building hotel". Meanwhile by using the meaning hotel never visited, then the lyrics will be "Straight off the plane to a new hotel we never visited before". That's mean the they never go in this hotel before.

Both of meanings, either new building hotel and hotel never visited can be used as the meaning of ambiguity word new in this song lyrics.

Does he Know? Lyrics

Datum 1 : Your favorite **band**, and the way that you dance
 But baby, baby
 Does he know you can move it like that?

There is lexical ambiguity found in the line "Your favorite band, and the way that you dance" it is where single word has more than one meaning and considered as

the ambiguous one make the different interpretations of readers and listeners. Word band has multiple meanings it could be group music or it could be thin piece of material/tape.

Group music is meaning based on context lyrics that mention about dance in the verse” and the way that you dance.” By using the meaning music group, the lyrics interpreted as "Your favorite music group, and the way that you dance" and this is more suitable as the meaning of ambiguity of word band in this song lyrics. The meaning tape is meaning based on lexical meaning that’s mean a piece of material, by using this meaning the lyrics interpreted as “Your favorite tape, and the way that you dance.”

Datum 2 : Your **secret** tattoo, the way you change moods
 The songs that you sing when you're all alone

Lexical ambiguity is found again in this song lyrics in the line “Your secret tattoo, the way you change moods” The word secret in this lyrics above is classified as lexical ambiguity, it is where single word has multiple meaning, according to Ullman’s theory lexical ambiguity is when a word has more than one meaning and make different interpretation for readers and listeners.

Secret in this lyrics has multiple meanings, it could be hidden or it could be no one know. By using the meaning hidden, the lyrics have the meaning "Your hidden tattoo, the way you change moods". While using the meaning no one know, the lyrics will be interpreted as "Your tattoo that no one know, the way you change moods", which means a tattoo that he/she didn't tell anyone.

Both of meanings, either hidden and no one know can be used as the meaning of ambiguity of word secret in this song lyrics.

Through The Dark lyrics

Datum 1 : Don’t **burn** out
 Even if you scream and shout
 it'll come back to you
 And I'll be here for you

There is lexical ambiguity found in the line “Don’t burn out “ it is where single word has more than one meaning and considered as the ambiguous one make the

different interpretations of readers and listeners. Word burn has multiple meanings it could be die, give up or it could be destroyed by fire.

Die/give up is a meaning based on contextual meaning and as figure of speech, by using the meaning die/give up the lyrics can be interpreted as "don't give up" and this is more suitable as meaning of the ambiguity word burn in this song lyrics. The word burn has meaning as lexical meaning of destroy by fire, by using the meaning destroy by fire the lyrics interpreted as "don't destroy by fire" which means don't burn/destroy your yourself.

Datum 2 : Oh, I will carry you over fire
 and water for your love
 And I will hold you closer, hope your heart is strong enough
 When the night is coming down on you
 We will find a way through the **dark**

In the same song, there is a kind of ambiguity in the line "We will find a way through the dark". The type of ambiguity found is lexical ambiguity, one word that has more than one meaning. The word dark in this lyric has multiple meanings it could be fear, without hope or it could be no light.

Fear and without hope is meaning based on context lyrics as a figure of speech, and no light (physically in the dark/fuscous) as lexical meaning. By using the meaning fear the lyrics can be interpreted as "We will find a way through the fear" or "We will find a way through the hopeless hard times" while using the meaning no light the lyrics will be "We will find a way through the no light" that's mean they will seek their way out of the dark place into the light Both meanings of fear and without hope can be used as the meaning of ambiguity word dark in this song lyrics.

b. Grammatical Ambiguity

This ambiguity is where a sentence may be interpreted the meaning in more than one way. Grammatical ambiguity is occurs because there are combination and blend of words with other words in a sentence.

Story of My Life lyrics

Datum 1 : **She told me in the** morning she don't
 feel the same about us in her bones.

It seems to me that when I die
these words will be written on my stone

This lyric above contain type of grammatical ambiguity. According to Ullman theory grammatical ambiguity cause by the confusion of structure forms or sentence structure. In verse of lyrics “She told me in the morning she don’t feel the same about us in her bones” the phrase of told me in the morning make ambiguous and create different interpretation. The sentence in the morning refer to told me or refer to she don’t feel.

The meaning of the lyrics can be:

- (a) She told me, in the morning she didn't feel the same about us in her bones. Which means, that she don't feel the same about us in her bones in the morning, or
- (b) She told me in the morning, she don't feel the same about us in her bones. Which means, that in the morning she told me about she don't feel about us in her bones.

Strong lyrics

Datum 1 : *My hands, your hands, **tied up like two ship***
 Drifting, weightless
 Waves try to break it
 I'd do anything to save it
 Why is it so hard to save it?

The lyrics above contain of grammatical ambiguity. According to Ullman theory grammatical ambiguity is occurs when phrase, clause or sentence create confused because their structure may be interpreted multiple ways. In verse of lyrics “My hands, your hands, tied up like two ship”. The phrase tied up like two ship make confused for readers and listeners, whether their hands are tied separately and form 2 ship or refer to their hands are tied together

The meaning of the lyrics can be in two forms:

- (a) Their hands tied separately like two ships
- (b) Their hands are tied together like two ships

Right Now lyrics

Datum 1 : *And I know that **we won't be going home,**
for so long.
But I know that I won't be on my own, yeah
I love this feeling*

This lyric above contain of grammatical ambiguity. According to Ullman theory grammatical ambiguity is occurs when phrase, clause or sentence create confused because their structure may be interpreted multiple ways. In verse of lyrics “won’t be going home, for so long.” whether for so long refer to not going home for a long time or it could be not coming home late.

The meaning of the lyrics can be:

- (a) And I know that we will not be going home, for a long time
- (b) And I know that we won't be going home late

Happily lyrics

Datum 1 : *I don't care what people say when we're together
You know I wanna be the one
who holds you when you sleep*

There is grammatical ambiguity in the lyrics above, It is confusing the phrase “what people say when we're together”. This is grammatical ambiguity that make confused for readers and listeners because we're in the lyrics above it could be refer to me and you or refer to me, you, and the people.

Two forms the meaning of the lyrics can be:

- (a) I don't care what people say, when we're together (me and you)
- (b) I don't care, what people say when we're together (me, you, and the people)

Half A Heart lyrics

Datum 1 : *Though I try to get you out of my head*
 The truth is I got lost without you
 And since then, I've been waking up to

This lyric about contain of grammatical ambiguity. According to Ullman theory grammatical ambiguity cause by the confusion of structure forms or sentence structure. In verse of lyrics "Though I try to get you out of my head" make ambiguous and create different interpretation. it can be **Try to get you, out of my head** or it can be **try to, get you out my head.**

Two form of the meaning of the lyrics can be:

- (a) Though I try to get you, out of my head
- (b) Though I try to get you out of my head

Conclusion

There are three types of ambiguity. They are lexical ambiguity, grammatical ambiguity and phonetic ambiguity. In album Midnight Memories by One Direction, the researcher just can analysis lexical ambiguity and grammatical ambiguity. The type of lexical ambiguity is more dominant and the most often appear in the song lyrics than grammatical ambiguity.

The meaning of ambiguity depicted in One Direction's song lyrics in the Midnight Memories album is lexical and contextual meaning, and most of the meaning of ambiguity found in One Direction's song lyrics in the midnight album is using figure of speech with contextual meaning based on the lyrics.

It can be concluded, the ambiguity of words and phrases can be interpreted in various ways, and most of the ambiguity in this song has figure of speech meanings, and several other meanings that make the listeners confused. Listeners still enjoy the song because of the beauty of the melody, or easy listening even though there are many ambiguous meanings. sometimes songwriters and singers make song lyrics that can be interpreted universally based on the understanding of listeners, it is possible that there are some song lyrics whose meanings are only known by the songwriters and singers themselves.

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