

Analysis of Word Formation in ‘Made You Look’ Song Lyrics by Meghan Trainor

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ABSTRACT

This study examines word formation trends in contemporary popular music through an analysis of Meghan Trainor’s song “Made You Look.” The aim is to explore how linguistic creativity in pop lyrics contributes to emotional expression and social interaction. Utilizing a qualitative approach, specifically discourse analysis, the research investigates how word formation processes shape cultural identity and audience engagement. The study relies on theories from Levitin (2006), Lieber (2009), and Yule (2010) to understand the cognitive, morphological, and structural aspects of language in music. Findings indicate that the lyrics of “Made You Look” incorporate various word formation processes, particularly clipping (3), coinage (1), derivation (1), compounding (4), and conversion (2). Examples such as “*nothin*” (clipping), “*Gucci*” (coinage), and “*’bout*” (clipping) reflect the informal, conversational tone characteristic of pop music. These linguistic choices enhance relatability, reinforce cultural identity, and contribute to the song’s rhythmic appeal. Additionally, the study highlights how Trainor’s use of word formation aligns with sociolinguistic trends in informal speech, particularly within African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The study concludes that word formation in pop lyrics is not merely stylistic but also serves as a strategic linguistic tool for self-expression, audience connection, and cultural representation. This research contributes to the broader understanding of language evolution in media and popular culture.

Keywords: Word Formation; Lyrics; Linguistic Creativity

INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics provide a fertile ground for linguistic analysis due to their inherent creativity (Bokiev, 2018). The constraints and conventions of songwriting often lead to innovative uses of language, making song lyrics a valuable resource for understanding how language evolves and adapts. Songwriters often manipulate language to fit the rhythm, rhyme, and emotional tone of their music, resulting in novel word formations and unconventional grammatical structures. This deliberate manipulation of language makes song lyrics a rich source of data for linguistic research.

Analysing song lyrics offers insights into the ways artists manipulate language to achieve specific stylistic and expressive goals (Bokiev, 2018). Artists may employ a range of techniques, including metaphor, simile, and wordplay, to convey complex ideas or emotions in a concise and memorable manner. By examining these techniques, we can gain a deeper understanding of how language is used to create meaning and evoke responses in listeners. The use of language in song lyrics is often deliberate and strategic, aimed at creating a particular effect or conveying a specific message.

Examining Meghan Trainor's "Made You Look" can reveal contemporary trends in word formation within popular music. Contemporary artists frequently experiment with language, and analyzing their work provides insights into current linguistic innovations. By focusing on a specific song, it becomes possible to identify and analyze the various word formation processes at play, thereby illustrating broader trends in language use within a specific cultural context. This analysis can also shed light on the ways in which popular music reflects and influences broader linguistic trends in society.

Levitin (2006), a neurologist, explores the deep connection between music, human emotions, and memory. He explains that our brains are wired to recognize patterns and respond to rhythm, melody, and harmony, which is why music can evoke strong emotions and memories. According to him, "Music is not just something we enjoy; it is deeply embedded in the structure of our brains." This highlights how music's ability to communicate emotions is rooted in human cognition and social behavior.

In pop music, language functions as more than just a tool for interaction—it helps create a strong emotional connection between the singer and the audience. One way this happens is through morphology, the study of word formation. Lieber (2009) explains that morphology plays a role in forming new words, a process known as lexeme formation, which allows language to evolve. Yule (2010) also identifies ten word formation processes that shape English vocabulary, including clipping, derivation, and blending, which often appear in pop song lyrics to create a relatable and expressive tone.

This study explores how word formation contributes to emotional expression and social interaction in pop song lyrics. By analyzing 'Made You Look' by Meghan Trainor, this research highlights how word formation processes, that are limited to clipping, derivation, and compounding enhance the song's authenticity, making it more impactful and relatable to modern listeners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of word formation in song lyrics aligns with findings from previous studies on word formation in various linguistic contexts.

Panggabean, F.O., et.al (2023) in their “Analysis of Word Formation Process in Online Advertisements” aimed at finding the types of word-formation processes from the official shampoo advertising websites and YouTube during 2020. From the analysis conducted, the researcher found 9 out of 12 existing word ordering processes including compounding, borrowing, initialization, clipping, back-formation, inflection, derivation, and clitization. Among all, the words found within the scope are words formed through the process of compounding, derivation, and borrowing. Their research revealed that these textbooks primarily incorporate source culture, followed by target and international cultures. The study concludes that the integration of cultural aspects into language materials supports contextual learning and enhances students' sociocultural awareness, reflecting the importance of cultural representation in educational resources.

Rahmi Auli (2020) in his “An Analysis of Word Formation in English Translation of Holy Qur’an by Maulawi Sher ‘Ali,” investigated word formation in Surah Al-Qalam. The data in this thesis were taken from the English Translation of Holy Qur’an by Maulawi Sher ‘Ali. This research used the word formation theory proposed by O’Grady and Alchilbald (2016) to find out the types of word formation in Surah Al-Qalam. The research methodology that was used is descriptive qualitative method since the collected data is in the form of sentences. The study found 125 data of word formation in the English Translation of Holy Qur’an’s Surah Al Qalam. Specifically, there were 39 derivation process, 34 inflection process, 27 suppletion process, 9 reduplication process, 6 compounding process, 5 conversion process, 3 backformation process, and 2 internal change process. Derivation is the most dominant process that is found in Surah Al-Qalam. There was 39 data from the total 125 of the data.

Luthfiyati et al. (2010) in their “The Analysis of Word Formation Processes in The Jakarta Post Website” examined identifying the most common type of derivation words that is used in the headline of ten education articles in ‘Jakarta Post Website’ in October 2015 until April 2016. The result shows that the most common of derivation words that is used in headline ten article educations in ‘Jakarta Post Website’ in October 2015 until April 2016 is noun derivations.

By integrating insights from these studies, this literature review underscores the significance of word formation perspectives in language education and media discourse. These elements play a crucial role in shaping comprehension, knowledge transmission, and cultural engagement in Indonesian academic and journalistic contexts.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically using discourse analysis to examine the lyrics of Meghan Trainor's song “Made You Look.” The

focus is on how word formation in the lyrics functions as a tool for social interaction and emotional expression. This approach is grounded in Fairclough's view of language as a social practice embedded in cultural and ideological structures. The sample for this research is the complete set of lyrics from the song "Made You Look," selected for its contemporary relevance and rich linguistic features.

Instruments and Procedures

Data collection is carried out through close reading and textual analysis of the song lyrics. The analysis emphasizes word formation processes as outlined by Yule (2010), including clipping, coinage, derivation, compounding, and conversion. In addition, the study incorporates Lieber's (2004) framework on lexeme formation to identify how the creation of new words and expressions contributes to the emotional depth of the lyrics. Levitin's (2006) research on music and emotion further informs the understanding of how lyrics and rhythm interact to evoke strong emotional responses. A rubric is used as an analytical tool to assess specific linguistic features such as word formation types, informal language, and emotional resonance within the lyrics.

Data Analysis

The data are analysed using a rubric-based framework that allows for systematic interpretation of linguistic creativity and emotional engagement in the lyrics. The rubric includes criteria for identifying and categorizing word formation processes, measuring the use of informal or expressive language, and evaluating the emotional and social impact of the lyrics. This structured approach ensures objectivity while capturing the dynamic relationship between language, emotion, and cultural identity in pop music. The analysis aims to reveal how the linguistic choices in "Made You Look" serve as a medium for self-expression and social connection among listeners.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The lyrics of Meghan Trainor's "Made You Look" showcase fascinating word formation processes, which are integral to understanding the song's emotional and social impact. In the study, the words analyzed were grouped based on the meaning of the word formation process and found 12 categories of meaning consisting of clipping, derivation, and compounding. In the lyrics there is a word-formation process that involves certain endings to emphasize meaning or style, in accordance with the cheerful and confident feel of the song.

This word-formation process is frequently used in songs to generate an intriguing rhythm while making it easier for listeners to recall the lyrics. By analyzing the meaning, we can see how Meghan Trainor conveys a message of empowerment through creative wordplay, in which some words convey a sense of self-affirmation and confidence, while others are used for dramatic effect or entertainment. This

shows that the language in pop songs is not just fun to listen to, but also reflects a strategic use of linguistics.

Types of Word Formation Processes

Clipping

It is a part of the word is omitted while retaining its meaning.

In the first verse, the contraction of pronoun "...*nothin'*..." in the third line of the lyrics *But even with nothin' on*, is a clipped form of '*nothing*,' in which the final "g" is omitted, it is common in informal, conversational English. This phonological simplification reflects a casual tone and is characteristic of certain dialects, including African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This phonological feature, often referred to as "**g-dropping**," is commonly observed in informal speech. Sociolinguistically, *nothin'* is associated with casual, nonstandard speech, frequently used in lower social strata or informal contexts.

In the second verse, the contraction "...*gon*..." in the third line "*Ooh, tell me what you, what you, what you gon' do, ooh*" is a clipping of "*going to*," functions as a future marker, indicating intention or action, typical in AAVE and informal English. This feature is phonologically driven, aiding rhythm in musical contexts. This process aligns with AAVE's phonological tendency to simplify syllable structures, including consonant cluster reduction. Sociolinguistically, its use reflects identity and solidarity within the AAVE-speaking community, varying by age, setting, and formality. Stylistically, *gon'* is more common in informal speech and conversational contexts but is rarely used in formal writing.

In the second verse, the contraction of a preposition "...*'bout*..." in the fifth line "*I'm 'bout to turn the heat up, ...*", shortened version of *about*, is typically used in informal spoken settings, particularly in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and pop culture. It signals familiarity, solidarity, and efficiency in communication. The **speaker's intent** is to create intimacy, express cultural identity, or enhance rhythm in speech. Its **cultural impact** reflects creativity within specific communities, reinforcing sociolinguistic norms. Over time, it showcases language evolution, adapting to changing social contexts while maintaining expressiveness and efficiency.

Coinage

It refers to the creation of entirely new words, often for commercial products, which may later become generalized in everyday language.

"**Gucci**" (slang usage), originally a surname (**Guccio Gucci**), "**Gucci**" became a **brand name** for luxury fashion. Over time, the word expanded beyond the brand to mean something "high-quality," "expensive," or "cool." Since the slang meaning

of *Gucci* is no longer just a proper noun but a new, independent word, it aligns with coinage in modern slang evolution. Yule (2010) describes **coinage** as the creation of an entirely new word (e.g., “Kleenex” or “Xerox”). Since “Gucci” has undergone **semantic shift and brand extension**, then **eventually aligns with coinage** in a slang sense.

In the meantime, “**Louis Vuitton**” & “**Versace**” could evolve similarly, but they primarily remain proper nouns and are classified under **eponymy** (a word that is derived from a proper name (often a person or place) rather than **coinage**). Both originate from founders’ surnames (*Louis Vuitton* and *Gianni Versace*). Unlike “Gucci,” these brands have not widely shifted into slang with new meanings.

Derivation

It is a word formation process where affixes (prefixes or suffixes) are added to a base word.

“...*hoodie*...”, a diminutive form derived from “*hooded sweatshirt*,” in the seventh line of “*Cause even with my hoodie on*” in the fourth verse is formed from the noun “*hood*” (which refers to a covering for the head) + the suffix “*-ie*” (a diminutive suffix often used to create informal or affectionate forms of words). The suffix “*-ie*” is commonly used in English to create casual or familiar terms. ‘*hoodie*’ is initially associated with youth culture, casual wear, and urban subcultures, its meaning has shifted beyond a simple garment descriptor to a broader cultural symbol of identity and group affiliation. Culturally, *hoodies* can carry different connotations, sometimes linked with rebellious or nonconformist attitudes depending on context and location.

Compounding

It is the process of joining two or more words to create a new lexical unit.

A noun compound “*double take*” in the second verse, line one in “*I’ll make you double take soon as I walk away*” can be analysed as “*double*” (adjective) means “twice” or “*twofold*” and “*take*” (noun) refers to an act of looking or reacting. Together, “*double take*” forms a noun meaning **a delayed reaction, usually of surprise or confusion** (e.g., “*He did a double take when he saw the price.*”). “*double take*” is a lexicalized compound, meaning it has a fixed, established meaning and it is also a space-separated compound, rather than a closed-form (e.g., *toothpaste*) or hyphenated (e.g., *mother-in-law*) compound.

The noun “...*sunscreen*...” that occurs in the first line of the fifth verse, “...*double up that sunscreen.*” is derived from “*sun*” + “*screen*” → ‘*sun*’ (noun) which refers to the star that provides light and heat. While, ‘*screen*’ (noun) is something that blocks or protects. When combined, “*sunscreen*” refers to a protective lotion or cream that blocks harmful sun rays, therefore it is categorized into **closed**

compounds – words written as a single unit. The meaning of a compound word can easily be understood from its parts. “**sunscreen**” is semantically transparent → The meaning is clear from “sun” (source of UV rays) and “screen” (a protective barrier). In relation to **Word Formation in Modern English (Plag, 2003)**, classifies compound words based on their **head** (the main part that determines meaning). Headedness in “**Sunscreen**”: **Right-headed compound** → The head (*screen*) determines the category and meaning. “Sunscreen” is a type of **screen** rather than a type of sun. In conclusion, the word “**sunscreen**” in “...*double up that sunscreen.*” is formed through compounding, specifically as a closed compound noun.

The phrase “...*morning hair*...” which refers to hair that is messy or unkempt after waking up, appearing in the sixth line of the fourth verse, “*But I’m hotter when my morning hair’s a mess*” is a **compounding noun** → “**morning**” + “**hair.**” ‘**morning**’ (noun/adjective) + ‘**hair**’ (noun) is a new noun phrase with a unique meaning. This aligns with Yule’s definition of **noun-noun compounding**, where two nouns merge to form a new concept. According to Endocentric vs. Exocentric Compounding (Bauer, 1983), compounds can be endocentric (where one word defines the category) or exocentric (where the meaning extends beyond the literal combination): “**morning hair**” as an Endocentric Compound → The **head noun** is “hair,” and “morning” describes the **type** of hair. The meaning is clear from its parts: **hair that appears in the morning** (often messy). This follows the **endocentric pattern**, meaning the compound is still a type of “hair.”

Looking into the semantic shift and idiomatic meaning in which some compounds evolve to have meanings beyond their literal words, this compounding noun is defined in “morning hair” has a slight idiomatic meaning because it implies messy, unstyled hair after waking up, rather than just “hair in the morning.” However, it remains mostly compositional, meaning the meaning is still understandable from its parts. In conclusion, the phrase “**morning hair**” in the lyrics is an **endocentric compound noun** formed through **compounding**. It describes a specific type of unkempt hair that appears after waking up, making it slightly idiomatic but still understandable from its components.

The compound verb “...*jaw...drop*...” that appears in second line of the third verse, “*I can guarantee your jaw will drop, drop (oh)*” where two independent words combine to form a new meaning. “**jaw drop**”: “**jaw**” (noun) + “**drop**” (verb) = **Compound verb**. The literal meaning (*a jaw physically dropping downward*) has evolved into an **idiomatic expression** meaning “to be extremely surprised or shocked.” This fits **Yule’s (2010)** definition of compounding, where two words create a new concept beyond their individual meanings. Looking into the idiomatic & metaphorical meaning (semantic shift), in which the semantic shift occurs when a word or phrase changes meaning over time. While originally a literal action, “jaw drop” is now idiomatic, meaning “**to be astonished**” rather than literally dropping the jaw. This aligns with **Traugott & Dasher’s (2001) theory of semantic change**, where physical actions evolve into abstract expressions.

In conclusion, the phrase “*jaw drop*” is a compound verb under Yule’s theory. It has undergone semantic shift, evolving from a literal action to an idiom expressing shock.

Conversion

It is a word formation process where a word changes its grammatical category (such as from a noun to a verb) without altering its form.

“*look*” (**Verb** → **Noun**) used as a **verb**, appears in the fourth line of the first verse “*Bet I made you look.*” Here, “*look*” means “to direct one’s eyes towards something.” “*look*” that occurs in the first line of the first verse “*I could have my Gucci on.*” implies “I have a fashionable **look**.”) Here, it is used as a **noun**, meaning “style” or “appearance.” Examining the **Conversion process**: “*look*” originally functioned as a verb, meaning “to see,” but it has been converted into a noun meaning “appearance” without any morphological changes.

“*bop*” (**Noun** → **Verb**). **Noun usage**: “...*this your bop.*” Here, “*bop*” is a **noun**, meaning “a catchy song or tune.” **Verb usage**: (*Not explicitly in the lyrics, but common in English:*) “*This song bops.*” Here, “*bop*” is used as a **verb**, meaning “to have a good rhythm or be enjoyable to dance to.” Looking into the **Conversion process**: “*bop*” originally existed as a noun, referring to a type of jazz music, but later became a verb in informal usage, meaning “to dance” or “to be catchy.”

In conclusion conversion is a highly productive process in English, often influenced by cultural and social trends (e.g., “*bop*” gaining new meaning in pop music). In the lyrics, “*look*” and “*bop*” clearly demonstrate functional shifts without morphological changes. This process aligns with Yule (2010) in explaining how English words adapt their function dynamically over time.

CONCLUSION

Meghan Trainor’s “Made You Look” is analyzed to show how word formation processes support the song’s expressiveness, cultural resonance, and listener involvement. By looking at the particular language components—clipping, coinage, derivation, compounding, and conversion—the study shows how these procedures make the song more relatable, support its themes of confidence and empowerment, and forge a deep emotional bond with listeners. The use of clipping, such as “*nothin’*,” “*gon’*,” and “*bout*” are used to reflect casual speech patterns, which give the songs a more genuine and conversational tone. This linguistic decision supports the song’s accessibility and wide popularity by conforming to common characteristics of informal English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In a similar vein, derivation and compounding contribute to the song’s lively and infectious quality, which helps to make it memorable and powerful.

Using research by Yule (2010), Lieber (2009), and Levitin (2006), this study additionally places the results in broader language and cultural settings. The way the song's structure, rhythm, and word selections promote social connection and emotional expression is a clear example of the relationship between language and music. Additionally, the results support the importance of morphology in influencing popular culture and public debate by being consistent with earlier studies on word development in media and advertising. The study's conclusion is that word creation in pop music is more than just a stylistic decision; it is essential to both audience participation and cultural expression. Artists such as Meghan Trainor successfully influence the way that modern music conveys meaning, emotions, and identity through the use of inventive linguistic techniques. By looking at how listeners understand and interact with language in pop music or by investigating comparable linguistic patterns in other genres, future research can build on these findings. The dynamic interrelationship between language, music, and society will be further clarified by this continuing investigation.

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