

Regret in Henry Moodie's Drunk Text: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Theresia Trisila Dewi

pb221210034@upbatam.ac.id

Zia Hisni Mubarak

zia.hisni@puterabatam.ac.id

Universitas Putera Batam

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the representation of the emotion regret in the lyrics of Henry Moodie's song *Drunk Text* using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research examines eight selected lyric excerpts to highlight the dimensions of text, discourse practice, and social practice. The textual analysis focuses on how lexical choices, modality, pronouns, metaphors, and syntactic structures construct nuances of regret. The findings reveal eight recurring linguistic markers such as "nearly," "forget it," "wish," and "afraid" which emphasize doubt, missed opportunities, and limited courage in communication. At the discourse practice level, the lyrics are produced as conscious linguistic constructions, distributed through digital platforms, and consumed by young audiences as reflections of their emotional experiences. At the social practice level, the lyrics illustrate the fragile communication culture of the digital generation, the ideology of fearful interpersonal relationships, and the role of pop music as a medium for articulating collective emotions.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Lexical Choices; Regret; Henry Moodie; Song Lyrics

INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics, though often perceived as simple artistic expressions, function as cultural texts that convey emotions, values, and social realities through lexical choices and linguistic structures (Fatoni & Santosa, 2020). They operate as discursive practices that connect individual feelings with collective identities, making them legitimate objects of linguistic and discourse analysis (Barradas and Sakka, 2020). Through carefully chosen words, songwriters articulate emotions such as love, loss, longing, and regret, which audiences reinterpret within broader cultural contexts. Music therefore serves not only as entertainment but also as a cultural practice that reflects and shapes emotional dynamics.

Henry Moodie's *Drunk Text* exemplifies this function by portraying regret through lexical elements that highlight doubt, restrained honesty, and missed opportunities. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework comprising text, discourse practice, and social practice provides a comprehensive lens to examine

how regret is linguistically constructed and socially contextualized (Fairclough, 2020). While CDA has been widely applied to political speeches and media texts, its application to contemporary pop music remains limited. In particular, regret as an emotional theme has been underexplored, despite its relevance among younger generations in the digital era.

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing Henry Moodie's Drunk Text through Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. It aims to explore how lexical choices in the song represent expressions of regret, how the lyrics function within processes of production, distribution, and consumption as discourse, and how they reflect broader social practices among digital audiences. In line with these objectives, the study focuses on examining the representation of regret through specific lexical patterns in the lyrics, investigating how the song is produced and received as a form of discourse, and analyzing how its content mirrors the cultural ideologies and communication habits of the digital generation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that explores how language interacts with power and ideology within texts and communication practices. Fairclough (2020) conceptualizes language as a social practice that can be examined through three dimensions. The text dimension focuses on linguistic features such as word choice and syntactic structures, while the discourse practice dimension examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. The social practice dimension connects language to broader cultural and ideological structures, showing how discourse reflects and shapes society. Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that language is not merely a passive reflection of reality but an active force that constructs and reproduces social relations.

Other scholars expand this perspective. Wodak (2020) emphasizes CDA as an interdisciplinary approach that connects language to historical and political contexts, highlighting its role in addressing social problems and uncovering injustice. Her *Discourse-Historical Approach* demonstrates how texts are embedded in broader temporal and social frameworks. Meanwhile, Van Dijk (Al-Azzawi, 2022) introduces a socio-cognitive model, arguing that discourse is shaped not only by linguistic structures but also by shared knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies. His approach highlights how language can maintain or challenge power relations by influencing both thought and social practice. In essence, CDA provides tools to critically examine how texts function within systems of power, inequality, and ideology.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough's (2020) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is considered highly influential because it combines linguistic study with critical social theory. He emphasizes that texts should not be seen merely as neutral reflections of reality, but as active constructions that influence and reshape social relations. Through this perspective, language becomes a tool that both maintains and challenges existing structures of power. His three-dimensional framework text, discourse practice, and social practice provides a systematic way to link detailed linguistic choices with broader social contexts. In this way, CDA enables researchers to uncover how everyday language contributes to the reproduction or transformation of social and ideological structures.

At the textual level, CDA examines how word choice, syntax, and cohesion convey meaning and ideology. At the discourse practice level, it considers how texts are created, circulated, and interpreted within communication systems. Finally, at the social practice level, CDA situates texts within broader cultural and ideological contexts, showing how language contributes to the reproduction or transformation of power relations. Fairclough emphasizes that language has a dual function: it is both a medium of communication and an ideological tool. This makes CDA a powerful method for analyzing political speeches, media texts, and even song lyrics, as it reveals the hidden ideologies and social dynamics embedded in everyday discourse (Fairclough, 2020).

Previous Studies

A study by Cahya & Sukendro (2022) emphasized music's function as a means of emotional communication by analyzing the semiotics of Hindia's "Rumah ke Rumah" lyrics. Islami & Abrian (2023) used Norman Fairclough's framework to examine the phenomenon of Generation Z loneliness in the song "Penjaga Hati," demonstrating how the language in the lyrics reflects specific social conditions. Saraswati's (2020) study also applied critical discourse analysis to the lyrics of Eminem's "Mockingbird," focusing on the representation of personal experience and social critique through word choice. Furthermore, Az-Zahra & Perangin-angin's (2025) study highlighted the role of parents in Feast's "Nina" lyrics, demonstrating how musical texts can function as ideological vehicles in shaping family perceptions. Ramos (2024) expanded the scope of CDA by examining intercultural communication through the perspectives of multiculturalism and interracialism, emphasizing that discourse shapes not only individual identity but also relations between groups.

Waruwu, Budiarta, & Muliana (2022) examined the meaning and message of Iwan Fals' album "Wakil Rakyat," emphasizing the function of lyrics as a medium for social criticism of the government and societal conditions. Overall, this research demonstrates that CDA, particularly Fairclough's approach, is effective in uncovering the representation of emotion, ideology, and social criticism in musical

texts. However, most previous studies have focused more on themes of love, loneliness, family roles, social criticism, and multiculturalism, while the specific aspect of "representing regret through lexical choice" has not been widely explored. This research fills the gap in the rarely addressed focus on the emotion of "regret" in CDA studies of song lyrics, thus opening new opportunities for linguistic and ideological exploration. By presenting an in-depth analysis of how the diction in the lyrics of "Henry Moodie's Drunk Text" represents regret, while enriching the CDA literature with a more specific and contextual emotional perspective.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical design, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through words rather than numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fairclough's CDA framework serves as the foundation, enabling the exploration of how regret is constructed through lexical choices in Henry Moodie's *Drunk Text*. The sample consists of eight purposively selected lyric excerpts that explicitly or implicitly represent regret. These excerpts were chosen because they contain linguistic markers such as modality, pronouns, metaphors, and syntactic structures that highlight emotional meaning. By focusing on these segments, the study ensures methodological transparency and analytical depth.

Instruments and Procedures

The researcher serves as the primary instrument, conducting reflective interpretations of Henry Moodie's *Drunk Text* by collecting data from verified sources such as Spotify and official lyric providers, in line with the qualitative principle that the researcher is central to data collection and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Using purposive sampling, eight lyric excerpts were selected because they explicitly foreground the emotion of regret through repeated lexical choices like "wish," "afraid," and "nearly." Unlike many contemporary pop songs that focus on love, heartbreak, or identity, Moodie's lyrics emphasize hesitation, missed opportunities, and suppressed honesty, making regret the central emotional construct. The song's distribution through digital platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok ensures accessibility and relevance, particularly among younger audiences who engage with music as a medium of emotional articulation. Therefore, *Drunk Text* offers a unique combination of linguistic richness and cultural resonance, making it an ideal case study for examining how regret is represented in popular music discourse.

Data Analysis

The lyrics of Henry Moodie's *Drunk Text* were obtained from verified sources, with the official version accessed through Spotify under Columbia Records, cross-

checked with Genius Lyrics, and further confirmed by ANTARA News to ensure authenticity. These sources guarantee that the lyric excerpts analyzed are reliable and suitable for application within Fairclough's CDA framework. Data analysis followed Fairclough's (2020) three-dimensional CDA model, beginning with textual examination of lexical choices, modality, pronouns, metaphors, and syntactic structures that represent regret. At the discourse practice level, the study considered how the lyrics were produced, disseminated, and consumed, while at the social practice level, it explored how regret reflects cultural norms, generational ideologies, and interpersonal communication in the digital era. The analysis was conducted iteratively through close reading, thematic coding, and critical interpretation, consistent with qualitative research principles (Saldaña, 2021), thereby ensuring validity and providing a comprehensive picture of how regret is linguistically and socially represented in popular music discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis

In this textual analysis, the entire lyrics of Henry Moodie's song "Drunk Text" are the object of study to see how the emotion of regret is represented through language. However, the data presentation does not show the entire lyrics in their entirety, but only the parts relevant to the research focus. The selected segments are lines containing linguistic markers in the form of lexical choices, modalities, pronouns, metaphors, and syntactic structures that clearly indicate the expression of regret. The following is a display of data sorted from verse to outro, marked with data numbers and analyzed critically.

"5th of November / When I walked you home / That's when I nearly said it / But then said, 'Forget it' and froze"
(Data 01)

The verse *"5th of November / When I walked you home / That's when I nearly said it / But then said, 'Forget it' and froze"* illustrates regret through several recurring linguistic features that appear across the song. Lexical choices such as *nearly*, *forget it*, and *wish* consistently mark missed opportunities and unfulfilled desires. Modal expressions (*nearly*, *probably*, *would*, *wasn't*) reinforce hesitation and uncertainty, showing how fear prevents honest communication. Pronouns (*I* vs. *you*) highlight the imbalance between self-introspection and emotional distance, situating regret within relational failure. Metaphors like *froze*, *deleted the message*, and *drunk text at midnight* symbolize paralysis, loss of courage, and missed chances. Finally, syntactic structures short clauses, parallelism (*I wish...*), and conditional forms (*If I tell you the truth*) intensify the emotional tension and underscore the dilemma of suppressed honesty.

"Do you remember? / You probably don't / 'Cause the sparks in the sky / Took a hold of your eyes while we spoke"

(Data 02)

The verse “*Do you remember? / You probably don’t / ‘Cause the sparks in the sky / Took a hold of your eyes while we spoke*” illustrates regret through recurring linguistic markers found across the song. Lexical choices like *remember* and *don’t* convey uncertainty about shared experiences, while the epistemic modality *probably* reinforces hesitation and doubt. The metaphor *sparks in the sky* symbolizes distraction, showing how meaningful moments lose significance when attention is diverted. Pronoun use (*you*) highlights emotional distance and imbalance in the relationship, while rhetorical questioning underscores the speaker’s inner conflict rather than seeking an actual response. Together, these features uncertain diction, modality, metaphorical imagery, and relational pronouns construct regret as a product of failed communication and missed emotional connection.

“*Yesterday, drank way too much / And stayed up too late / Started to write what I
wanna say / Deleted the message / But I still remember it said*”

(Data 03)

The pre-chorus “*Yesterday, drank way too much... Deleted the message*” illustrates regret through recurring linguistic features that appear across the song. Lexical choices such as *deleted* and *wanna say* highlight suppressed desire and missed opportunities, while modality signals hesitation and lack of courage. The dominance of the pronoun *I* reflects self-introspection and personal accountability for communication failure. Metaphorical expressions like *deleted the message* symbolize emotional loss and avoidance, extending beyond literal action to represent fear of honesty. Structurally, the chronological narrative emphasizes the process of hesitation, showing how doubt and fear culminate in regret.

“*I wish I was who you drunk texted at midnight / Wish I was the reason you stay
up till 3...*”

(Data 04)

The chorus “*I wish I was who you drunk texted at midnight / Wish I was the reason you stay up till 3...*” exemplifies regret through recurring linguistic strategies found throughout the song. The repeated use of *wish* highlights unfulfilled desires and hypothetical longing, a pattern that intensifies the emotional weight of regret. Pronouns *I* and *you* consistently mark relational imbalance, situating regret within failed communication and emotional distance. Metaphorical imagery such as *drunk text at midnight* symbolizes impulsive connection that never materialized, reinforcing the theme of missed opportunities. Syntactically, parallelism through repetition of *I wish...* underscores entrapment in unrealized desires, a structure echoed across other sections of the lyrics.

“Wish I wasn’t scared to be honest and open / Instead of just hoping / You’d feel what I’m feeling inside”

(Data 05)

The chorus line *“Wish I wasn’t scared to be honest and open / Instead of just hoping / You’d feel what I’m feeling inside”* reflects regret through linguistic strategies that recur throughout the song. Lexical choices like *scared* and *hoping* highlight fear and hesitation, while the hypothetical modality *wasn’t* underscores unrealized desires. Pronoun use (*I* vs. *you*) reinforces relational imbalance, situating regret in failed communication. Metaphorical phrasing such as *feel what I’m feeling inside* conveys emotional alienation and the longing for mutual understanding. Structurally, the contrastive clause *instead of* emphasizes wrong choices, echoing the broader theme of suppressed honesty and missed opportunities.

“Destroy myself to keep a friend / Hiding away 'cause I was afraid you'd say no”

(Data 06)

The bridge *“Destroy myself to keep a friend / Hiding away 'cause I was afraid you'd say no”* reflects regret through linguistic strategies that recur across the song. Lexical choices such as *afraid* emphasize fear as the root of hesitation, while the modal *would* signals hypothetical rejection and deepens uncertainty. Pronoun use (*I* vs. *you*) continues to highlight relational imbalance and emotional distance. Metaphorical phrasing like *destroy myself* conveys emotional sacrifice and suppressed honesty, reinforcing the theme of regret. Structurally, the cause-and-effect clause *'cause I was afraid* underscores fear as the underlying reason for communication failure, a pattern consistent throughout the lyrics.

“If I tell you the truth / What will I lose? I don’t know”

(Data 07)

The bridge line *“If I tell you the truth / What will I lose? I don’t know”* conveys regret through linguistic strategies that recur across the song. Lexical choices like *truth* and *lose* highlight the emotional dilemma of honesty versus risk, while the epistemic modality *will* underscores uncertainty about possible consequences. Pronoun use (*I* vs. *you*) continues to emphasize self-introspection alongside relational tension. Metaphorical use of *lose* symbolizes the potential loss of closeness, reinforcing the theme of regret. Structurally, the combination of conditional clauses, rhetorical questions, and declarative statements intensifies the inner conflict, echoing the broader pattern of hesitation and suppressed honesty found throughout the lyrics.

“I wish I had sent you that drunk text at midnight / I was just scared it would ruin our friendship / But I really meant it / I wonder how you would reply”

(Data 08)

The outro “*I wish I had sent you that drunk text at midnight / I was just scared it would ruin our friendship / But I really meant it / I wonder how you would reply*” represents the most explicit form of regret in the song. Lexical choices like *wish I had sent* highlight missed actions and unfulfilled desires, while modal expressions such as *would ruin* and *I wonder* emphasize hypothetical outcomes and uncertainty. The dominance of the pronoun *I* reinforces self-introspection and personal accountability, while *you* signals emotional distance. Metaphorical imagery like *drunk text at midnight* symbolizes impulsive communication that never occurred, deepening the sense of lost opportunity. Structurally, the cause-and-effect clause *scared it would ruin* underscores fear as the central obstacle to honest expression, echoing the broader pattern of hesitation and suppressed courage found throughout the lyrics.

Discourse Practice Analysis

As Fairclough (2020) emphasized, language is viewed as a social practice analyzed through three main dimensions: text, discourse practice, and social practice. In the case of Henry Moodie’s *Drunk Text*, discourse practice can be examined through its production, distribution, and consumption.

Production

Henry Moodie, as both songwriter and performer, constructs the lyrics of *Drunk Text* not as spontaneous expressions but as deliberate linguistic choices that convey doubt, fear, and regret. Lexical items such as *nearly, forget it, wish, afraid, and lose* highlight missed opportunities and suppressed emotions. This aligns with Siregar et al. (2025), who argue that song lyrics are linguistic constructions designed to convey emotional depth and social meaning. For instance, the line “*I wish I had sent you that drunk text at midnight*” (Data 08) employs a past hypothetical form, consciously emphasizing regret for actions not taken.

Distribution

The song was distributed through digital platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok, enabling rapid and widespread circulation. Barradas & Sakka (2020) note that song lyrics contain rich lexical relations and semantic structures that construct meaning, making them valuable for critical examination. Digital distribution also strengthens intertextuality, as audiences reinterpret lyrics through covers, remixes, reaction videos, and social media commentary. For example, the lyric “*Deleted the message / But I still remember it said*” (Data 03) resonates strongly with digital-native audiences, particularly younger listeners accustomed to messaging culture, thereby reinforcing the song’s relevance in contemporary communication practices.

Consumption

According to Fatoni & Santosa (2020), songwriters' expressions of love, loss, longing, and regret are reinterpreted by audiences within broader cultural contexts. In *Drunk Text*, the primary audience is the younger generation, who consume the lyrics as reflections of their own emotional struggles. Empirical indicators of this reception can be seen in TikTok trends where users pair the song with personal stories of hesitation or missed opportunities, and in YouTube comments where listeners explicitly identify with Moodie's expressions of fear and regret. Lyrics such as "*Wish I wasn't scared to be honest and open*" (Data 05) resonate with youth experiences of vulnerability in digital communication. Similarly, rhetorical questions like "*Do you remember? / You probably don't*" (Data 02) and metaphors such as "*Cause the sparks in the sky*" (Data 02) invite listeners into the singer's emotional dilemma, fostering identification and solidarity.

Social Practice Analysis

Digital Generations and Culture

The representation of regret in *Drunk Text* reflects the communication practices of the younger generation in the digital era, where instant messages (chat, text, drunk text) are central to emotional expression. Moodie's hesitation in sending messages mirrors the paradox of digital communication: immediacy coexists with doubt. As Hakim (2025) notes, linguistic features such as lexical choice and syntactic structure shape meaning; here, the line "*Started to write what I wanna say / Deleted the message*" (Data 03) embodies the culture of fast-paced yet uncertain communication. The act of deletion functions not only as a literal action but as a linguistic marker of fear and indecision, showing how digital technology structures emotional hesitation and regret.

Ideology and Social Relations

The lyrics foreground the ideology of fragile interpersonal relations, where honesty is constrained by social norms of friendship preservation and fear of rejection. Wodak (2020) emphasize that CDA reveals the interplay between language, power, and ideology; Moodie's diction and modality explicitly reproduce this tension. For example, "*Destroy myself to keep a friend / Hiding away 'cause I was afraid you'd say no*" (Data 06) links the lexical choice *afraid* and the modal *would* to an ideology of self-suppression. The metaphor *destroy myself* intensifies this ideological critique, showing how emotional sacrifice is normalized to maintain social bonds. Thus, language features fear lexicon, hypothetical modality, and metaphors of self-destruction function as ideological tools that both reproduce and critique the norm of withholding honesty to protect relationships. Regret emerges as the emotional consequence of this ideology, where silence is socially safer than truth.

Music as Cultural Practice

Pop music operates as a cultural arena where private emotions are made public and negotiated collectively. Fairclough (2020) argues that texts construct and challenge social relations; Moodie's lyrics exemplify this by transforming personal regret into a generational symbol. The line "*I wish I was who you drunk texted at midnight*" (Data 04) uses repetition of *wish* and hypothetical modality to articulate unfulfilled desire, but critically, this longing resonates beyond Moodie's personal narrative. It reflects a broader cultural practice where young people delay honesty due to social pressure, embedding regret within collective identity. Pop music thus becomes a site where linguistic features lexical repetition, metaphorical imagery, and modality carry ideological weight, enabling audiences to identify with and contest the norms that shape emotional communication.

Overall, the song's text represents three interconnected dimensions: (1) digital culture shaping hesitant communication, (2) ideology of fragile relationships reproduced through fear lexicon and hypothetical modality, and (3) pop music as a cultural practice that transforms private regret into collective emotion. By linking specific language features directly to ideological structures, the analysis shows that regret in *Drunk Text* is not merely personal but socially constructed, reflecting and critiquing the generational struggle between honesty and relational stability.

Interpretation of the findings from the three layers of CDA indicates that recurring linguistic patterns in the textual analysis layer confirm that regret is constructed through consistent language strategies. This aligns with Fairclough's (2020) view, which emphasizes that texts are not simply reflections of reality but ideological constructions that shape social meaning. At the discourse practice layer, digital distribution reinforces intertextuality because lyrics are reproduced through covers, remixes, and social media content. This condition aligns with Barradas & Sakka (2020), who emphasize that song lyrics possess rich semantic relationships and can be consumed across cultural contexts. Thus, *Drunk Text* demonstrates how language in pop music functions as a medium connecting personal expression with collective cultural consumption.

At the social practice layer, the song's lyrics reveal the ideology of fragile interpersonal relationships. This aligns with Wodak (2020), who assert that CDA functions to unpack the interplay of language, power, and ideology. Moodie presents the dilemma between honesty and the risk of losing relationships, thus reflecting the communication norms of the digital generation. Therefore, *Drunk Text* not only represents regret as an individual experience but also as a social phenomenon rooted in digital communication patterns. This also broadens the scope of CDA to the realm of popular music, as shown in the research of Islami & Abrian (2023) and Saraswati (2020) which highlights emotions in lyrics.

This research makes an important contribution by extending the application of CDA to popular texts such as song lyrics, not just political or media discourse. Practically, this research demonstrates how pop music can function as a medium for understanding the emotional dynamics of the digital generation. From a pedagogical perspective, the results of this study can be used as an example in teaching critical discourse analysis because it is able to connect linguistic aspects such as lexical, syntactic, and metaphor with social practices. Furthermore, this research also opens up opportunities for further studies to compare the representation of other emotions, such as love, loneliness, or anger, in contemporary pop lyrics using the CDA framework.

While this research makes a contribution, it has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the data used focuses only on one song, *Drunk Text*, so generalization to other works is still limited. Second, the research emphasizes lexical and syntactic aspects without delving into musical prosody or vocal performativity as part of the discourse. Third, the analysis of audience consumption is based only on general indicators such as YouTube comments and TikTok trends, so it has not been supported by empirical data in the form of interviews or surveys. Finally, this research focuses on the context of the current digital generation, so the resulting interpretations have the potential to change as communication culture develops in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how Henry Moodie's *Drunk Text* demonstrates that song lyrics are not mere emotional outpourings but deliberate linguistic constructions that articulate regret and hesitation. By situating the text within Fairclough's framework of language as social practice, the research shows how individual experiences are transformed into collective meanings through music. The analysis contributes to discourse studies by illustrating how lexical choices, modality, and metaphor function not only as textual devices but also as reflections of broader cultural and ideological structures.

For linguistics students, this research underscores the importance of examining popular texts as sites where language interacts with digital culture, interpersonal norms, and generational identity. For discourse analysis researchers, it offers a model of integrating textual, discourse practice, and social practice dimensions to reveal how music mediates between private emotion and public ideology. Ultimately, *Drunk Text* exemplifies how pop music operates as a cultural arena where language both reproduces and critiques social relations, providing fertile ground for further exploration of communication, identity, and ideology in contemporary discourse.

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