



## **CONTEXTUAL MEANING OF HAPPIER AND DRIVERS LICENSE SONG LYRICS BY OLIVIA RODRIGO: SEMANTICS STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research is aimed to investigate the types of contextual meaning as one of Semantics study. The research entitled Contextual Meaning of Happier and Driver's License Song Lyrics by Olivia Rodrigo. The theory applied is proposed by Pateda (2001) while the research method used the descriptive qualitative. The data were taken from two song lyrics by Olivia Rodrigo which is titled Happier and Drivers License. In addition, the data were collected, classified and analyzed. The data found are 25 data of contextual meaning which comprises into 11 data from Happier and 14 data from Drivers License. The result shows that there are 10 data of Individual context, 6 data of Situational context, 6 data of Purpose context, 12 data of Mood/Affective context, 8 data Time context, 6 data Place context, 7 data of Object/Topic context, and 9 data of Linguistics context. Thus, the most dominant contextual meaning in Happier and Drivers License lyrics is Mood/Affective with 18.8%.

**Keywords:** Contextual Meaning, Semantics, Song Lyrics, Context

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a tool of communication, language has a significance role for people when they interact with other people in their social life. According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate (2003) cited in Brown (2007) Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings. Chomsky (2006) stated that language serves as a reflection of the mind. Besides that, Foss (2021) described that through language, people communicate effectively. Good communication depends on how clear the message is, which is often shaped by words choices. Communication is the process of sending information, ideas, feelings, or intentions between a sender and a receiver often using language (Mortensen, 2017). Therefore, language is a crucial means of communication for people. The people conduct their communication by using language. The study of language is known as linguistics which one of its branches is a semantics study.



According to Saeed (2016) Semantics is the part of linguistics that studies meaning in language. Furthermore, Agustiani (2015) cited in Rabi'ah & Anggraeni (2023) said that semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of language units such as words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourses. The understanding of meaning is important since it is to avoid misunderstanding between people when they conduct the communication. People will have a clear message and understand the meaning of the message. Istianari (2014) as cited in Rabi'ah & Anggraeni (2023) people always found the meaning which has ambiguity, so that people need more comprehension about meaning. In addition, sometimes misunderstandings occurred because of the differences in the messages conveyed so that the meaning of the language expressed by the speaker is not in accordance with the response of the listener (Nurfithri, 2022). The messages conveyed is vary. Message in the form of song lyrics can raise ambiguity. This is in line with Chotimah & Sabiq (2021) stated that the language used in the song sometimes contains figurative language. It is unique and full of hidden meanings and erroneous interpreting can lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore Diaz (2010) cited in Chotimah & Sabiq described that meaning also varies from context to context. It can create some difficulties and ambiguity for the addressee. Thus, context has a crucial role in meaning.

Chaer (1990) stated that the three categories of semantics are lexical, grammatical and contextual. According to Verhaar (1978) cited in Widyani et al (2022) cited in Sitinjak et al (2023) contextual meaning is connected to the usage of figurative language or can be seen as a branch of semantics research that examines the meaning of utterances in relation to their situational context. The study of contextual meaning has been conducted by many researchers. The writer took three previous research related to contextual study. First, Suciati (2021) discussed An Analysis of Lexical and Contextual Meaning on Sport News on Jawa Post News Paper (Linguistics Study). Next, Sitinjak et al (2023) described The Lexical and Contextual Meaning in Fajar Sadboy's Quotes. Finally, Rabi'ah & Anggraeni (2023) analyzed Semantics Analysis of Contextual Meaning in Part of your World's Song Lyrics. Therefore, the research of contextual meaning is significance and it can be applied in many literary works. One of the literary works is song lyrics. According to Hidayat (2014) cited in Chotimah and Sabiq (2021) Song is a kind of literary work created to express someone's feeling or situation around the people. Song lyrics by Olivia Rodrigo is very popular of the emotional directness which portray relatable experiences such as heartbreak and jealousy. These song lyrics can be interpreted based on contextual meaning. Thus, this research is aimed to investigate the types of contextual meaning of Happier and Drivers License Song Lyrics by Olivia Rodrigo.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Semantics**

Semantics is a core branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language. Lyons (1977) characterizes semantics as the systematic description of what linguistic expressions mean and how such meanings are represented and related within a language. Further Lyons (1977) stated that semantics is the research of meaning as encoded in linguistic expressions and of the principles by which more complex meanings are constructed from simpler ones. In addition, according to Portner (2006) cited in Nugroho (2022) semantics is concerned with how grammatical operations create complex meanings out of simpler ones; it concentrates on the literal meanings of words, phrases, and sentences. As cited in Sitinjak et al (2023), Tarigan (1985) demonstrates how semantics in limited sense can be understood as examining the connection between a symbol and the object to which it is applied. Aminuddin (2003) defined semantics as the study of meaning.

According to Chaer (1990) semantics comprises into lexical meaning, grammatical meaning and contextual meaning. Furthermore, Zulfahita et al (2019) cited in Sitinjak et al (2023) said that the types of meaning are separated into lexical and contextual meaning. Chaer (2012) cited in Sucihati (2021) stated that lexical meaning can be interpreted in accordance with the referent or in accordance with the results of observation of the sensory or meaning that is real in everyday life. However, this research will focus on contextual meaning which will be discussed below.

### **Contextual Meaning**

#### **Definition of Contextual Meaning**

Contextual meaning is the meaning that corresponds to the context of the word that appears as an additional meaning in addition to the actual meaning of the impression caused by a particular situation (Nawaristika, 2012 cited in Sucihati, 2021). Furthermore, Verhaar (1978 cited in Widayani et al 2022 cited in Sitinjak 2023) stated that contextual meaning is connected to the usage of figurative language or can be seen as a branch of semantics research that examines the meaning of utterances in relation to their situational context. In addition, according to Siswanto (2016) contextual meaning refers to the meaning an expression acquires in actual use, as shaped by the circumstances of its production and interpretation. Pateda



(2001) cited in Siswanto (2016) defines contextual (situational) meaning as arising from the relationship between an utterance and its context—who is involved, for what purpose, and under what conditions. Further Pateda described that contextual meaning emerges from aligning linguistic form with the particulars of a speech event. Interpretation depends on: who is speaking to whom and in what roles; what the current situation is (e.g., solemn, noisy, secure); with what illocutionary goal (requesting, expecting); in what mood (anger, joy, fear); at what time (morning, night, during rest); in what place (school, market, theater); with what object or topic in focus; and with what linguistic constraints (punctuation, diction, intonation, stress, and co-text). Lyons (1981) states that interpretation depends on participant roles, shared background, and the situational frame, and to meaning-in-use as described in introductory treatments that emphasize the role of deictic anchoring, co-text, and world knowledge in resolving interpretation (Yule, 2022; Saeed, 2016).

#### Types of Contextual Meaning

According to Pateda (2001, cited in Siswanto, 2016) the types of contextual meaning are as follows:

1. Individual Context (Speaker/Hearer)

This type covers personal attributes of the participants—gender, age, social and economic background, education level, and position—that shape diction and style so that messages are understandable to the interlocutor. Individual context forced speakers to find words that the meaning [is] understood ... in accordance with gender, age, social background, [and] economic educational background. Therefore, individual context is about who is speaking to whom and what roles or traits they have (ex or new partner, age, friends, self-view). These details affect word choice, tone, and how the line is understood.

Example: (1) It is difficult to expect an understanding about democracy for someone who is educated Elementary School.

2. Situational Context

This refers to the physical and social conditions of the event—security, noise, solemnity—which restrict what counts as appropriate to say. Situational context is about the physical and social situation around the utterance. It asks: what is happening, in what kind of place, and under what conditions? In breakup songs, situational context often shows a “post-breakup” scene, a new dating scene, or a drive through a familiar area. These settings shape what feels appropriate to say and how the lines are understood.

Example: (2) In a context of mourning, the material warns against utterances that could offend: people should not say “This man who passed away has a



debt of some money. The gravity of the situation filters permissible expressions.

3. Purpose Context (Communicative Goal)

This captures the illocutionary intent—asking, requesting, expecting, refusing—which determines the form of the utterance. Thus, purpose context is about what the speaker wants to do with the line: ask, request, admit, wish, refuse, or set a limit. In breakup songs, purpose context often shows up as polite questions, wishes with limits, confessions, or challenges. Seeing the goal behind each line helps explain why the wording is soft, direct, or confrontational.

Example: (3) Give me some bread.

The purpose strongly shapes lexical choice and directness.

4. Mood/Affective Context

Mood concerns the emotional state of speaker or hearer (fear, joy, anger) and manifests in lexical selection and tone. Mood context is about feelings and emotional tone in the lines. It shows how the speaker feels (jealous, sad, angry, hopeful) and how those feelings color the words. In breakup songs, mood often appears through strong adjectives, intensifiers, confessions, and sharp contrasts.

Example of irritation producing harsh language: (3) You. damn it.

Emotional coloring affects both choice of words and how those words are taken up by the hearer.

5. Time Context

Timing—morning, day, night, or sensitive moments like rest time—affects what is appropriate and how it is phrased. Time context is about when the line happens. Time words like last week, today, now, still, and a month ago anchor events on a timeline. Clear time anchors help the reader follow before–after relations and feel how close or distant the events are. In breakup songs, recent time often makes the mood feel fresh and strong.

Example: When visiting someone who is resting, the text suggests mitigated wording such as (4) We will talk again about this issue or (5) You have to go back first. They are reflecting deference conditioned by time.

6. Place Context

Place—school, market, theater—shapes volume, wording, and communicative focus. Place context is about where things happen. Place words like suburbs, street, or shared hangout spaces help set the scene. Clear places make it easier to imagine the action and feel why a line has a certain mood.

Example: (6) at the movies influences the “hardness” (volume) and selection of words. Different settings cue different expectations about how information should be conveyed.

7. Object/Topic Context



This type focuses on the subject matter under discussion, which channels vocabulary toward domain-appropriate terms. Thus, Object/Topic context is about what the line is mainly talking about (the subject or domain). The topic guides word choice and the kind of images used.

Example: If the focus is economics, for example, speakers will select words whose meanings are related to economic concepts. Topic focus narrows the interpretive field.

8. Linguistic Context (Co-text and Language Rules)

Linguistic context includes punctuation and diction in writing, suprasegmental elements (intonation, stress) in speech, and the surrounding co-text that selects the appropriate sense for polysemous words.

The material also highlights how articulation and perception bear on meaning in use: mispronouncing can cause misunderstanding; hearing conditions may distort. Furthermore, a single verb can yield distinct meanings depending on its co-text, as in the following patterns for “take”: follow (e.g., “I don’t take courses ...”), steal (“She took my money ...”), receive (“our company will take ... employees”), take as a son-in-law (“will take the young man as his son-in-law”), and move (“took the book ... and lay it on the table”). Such variation demonstrates that the sentence-level environment and adjacent words determine which sense is activated. In short, linguistics context is about how nearby words (co-text) and common language patterns guide meaning. Collocations, fixed phrases, pronouns, and comparatives help select the intended sense and make the line sound natural.

### Function of Contextual Meaning

According to Pateda (2001, cited in Siswanto, 2016), contextual meaning serves several interrelated functions.

1. It constrains interpretation, guiding hearers toward what is intended by filtering possibilities through participant profiles, situational appropriateness, and topical relevance.
2. It preserves social harmony: norms of formality and politeness regulate directness and lexical choice so that utterances fit the setting.
3. It increases communicative efficiency: shared time, place, and purpose allow economy of expression because much remains understood implicitly.
4. It prevents misunderstanding by aligning linguistic form and delivery with the channel and with co-text that disambiguates polysemy and selects the intended sense.

### Context

Context includes at least: (a) participants and roles (who is speaking to whom, and how third parties figure in the scene: I/you/she/they); (b) time and place (when events occur—now, today, last week—and where they unfold—here/there/your



street); (c) shared background knowledge and presuppositions (assumed promises, familiar locations, mutual acquaintances); (d) communicative purpose or illocution (stating, asking, admitting, wishing, challenging); (e) social stance and register (politeness, formality, distance/closeness, comparison with rivals or peers); and (f) the surrounding lines—the immediately preceding and following lines that supply cohesion, clarify reference, and guide sequencing across a verse or chorus. In addition, According to Gross (2013) cited in Arfiawati (2024) In language and communication, context refers to the different elements and conditions that affect how a statement is received and interpreted.

### **Song**

A song is a piece of music made to be sung; it joins words (the lyrics) with musical elements such as melody, rhythm, tempo, harmony, and the color of the voice to create a strong emotional effect (Frith, 2015). The music can support the words, change the mood, or add a second layer of meaning that the words alone do not carry. The lyrics are the verbal part of the song. They are short, patterned, and made to be heard, not just read, therefore they often use rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and clear sections like verse, pre-chorus, chorus, and bridge.

### **Sentence**

According to Akmajian et al. (2017), sentences are built by syntactic rules, and their structure and word choice work together to create meaning. In song lyrics, short lines or even phrases can function like sentences if they carry a complete idea. Their meaning is also shaped by the nearby lines (co-text) that come before and after. In this study, a lyric line or a short phrase that expresses a full idea is treated as a sentence-level unit for analysis. Further, Yule (2022) stated that a sentence is the basic grammatical unit of a language. It is a group of words that expresses a complete thought, usually with a subject and a predicate. Sentences are used for different functions, such as making statements, asking questions, giving commands or requests, and showing strong feelings (exclamations).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research applied descriptive qualitative method. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Obeyd (2021) in Arfiawati (2024) stated that research involves collecting data, analysing data, and making inferences based on the analysis. In addition, according to Ratna cited in Sopa (2015) cited in Rabi'ah & Anggraeni (2023) descriptive analysis method is done by describing the facts then followed by analysis. The qualitative descriptive





research collects the data, classifies the data, organizes the data, makes interpretation the data, and draws a conclusion based on the data analyzed (Rabi'ah & Anggraeni (2023). This research is focused on identifying and understanding of the contextual meaning on song lyrics by Olivia Rodrigo.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Individual context (speaker/hearer)**

#### **Data 1:**

#### **Your friends are mine, you know I know (H-04)**

The lyric above belongs to the contextual meaning of individual context as this type is about who is speaking to whom and what roles or traits they have (ex or new partner, age, friends, self-view). This lyrics showed closeness and shared history after the breakup. The lyric means that the speaker and the ex share the same friends. The roles is clear that an ex talking to an ex-partner about the new partner, while also judging herself.

### **2. Situational context**

#### **Data 2:**

#### **We broke up a month ago (H01)**

The lyric above belongs to contextual meaning of situational context as it is about the physical and social situation around the utterance. In situational context, it asks: what is happening, in what kind of place, and under what conditions. Situational context often shows a post-breakup scene, a new dating scene, or a drive through a familiar area. These settings shape what feels appropriate to say and how the lines are understood. Therefore, this lyric sets a post-breakup situation, recent, and still sensitive.

### **3. Purpose context**

#### **Data 3**

#### **How could you be so okay now that I'm gone? (DL06)**

The lyric above belongs to Purpose context as it is about what the speaker wants to do with the line: ask, request, admit, wish, refuse, or set a limit. The purpose context often shows up as polite questions, wishes with limits, confessions, or challenges. Seeing the goal behind each line helps explain why the wording is soft, direct, or confrontational. In this lyric, the challenges the addressee's state and invites a defense. A challenge; questions the ex's calmly.





The song above shows that feeling and emotional tone lead the meaning in both happier and drivers license. The lyrics that confess, wish, set limits, or challenge carry the main force. In happier, the purpose is often a wish with a limit, and the mood is mixed: kind on the surface, protective underneath. In drivers license, the purpose leans to challenge and confession, and the mood moves from shock to steady sadness. Thus, this Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics states something which all context layers support the songs' messages: loss, comparison, and trying to move on.

After analysing the contextual meaning, the writer presented the frequency of the occurrences of contextual meaning on the lyrics. They are as follows:

Types of Contextual Meaning	Frequency	Percentage
Individual Context	10	15.6
Situational Context	6	9.4
Purpose Context	6	9.4
Mood/Affective Context	12	18.8
Time Context	8	12.5
Place Context	6	9.4
Object/Topic Context	7	10.9
Linguistics Context	9	14
Total	64	

Based on the result of data presented above, it can be concluded that the most dominant contextual meaning in song lyrics Happier and Driver License by Olivia Rodrigo is Mood/Affective Context 18.8%.

## CONCLUSION

The writer found 25 data in song lyrics which is comprised into 11 from happier marked (H) and 14 from drivers license marked (DL). The analysis applied Pateda's eight context types. They are individual (speaker/hearer), situational, purpose, mood/feeling, time, place, object/topic, and linguistic (co-text and language rules). The data in this research were obtained from song lyrics of Happier and Drivers License by Olivia Rodrigo. Therefore, there are 10 data of Individual context, 6 data of Situational context, 6 data of Purpose context, 12 data of Mood/Affective context, 8 data Time context, 6 data Place context, 7 data of Object/Topic context, and 9 data of Linguistics context. Thus, the most dominant contextual meaning in Happier and Drivers License lyrics is Mood/Affective with 18.8%.



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