



A lexico-semantic analysis of Philippine indie song lyrics written in English

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Abstract

The power of music to entertain and to affect people psychologically makes it a significant part of human society and a ripe field for empirical investigations. Researches about music's psychological and physiological effects on people as well as music's pedagogical value in language teaching and learning have shown interesting results. However, there still remains a dearth of empirical studies that look into the purported meanings of songs unearthed through linguistic lenses. This study, therefore, examines the intersection of music and linguistics by conducting a lexico-semantic analysis of 30 indie songs written in English by three Filipino indie musicians. One key finding is that indie songs are not usually unclear contrary to the popular belief that they generally tend to be nebulous and require deliberate disambiguation.

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1. Introduction

Music plays a significant part in man's daily life undoubtedly because of its appeal to the ears. In the modern times, music is also considered a widespread form of media, and it is believed to be universal. Even those who hardly listen to music are exposed to it through radio and television programs as well as advertisements that employ catchy melodies to promote different products and services. Music is essentially everywhere and is considered a significant part of human society.

There have been studies on the psycho-physiological dimension of music (cf. Blood & Zatorre, 2001; Brattico, Brattico & Jacobsen, 2009). Music is likewise believed to have varying effects on a person's mental state (cf. Evans & Schubert, 2006; Gabrielsson, 2002). It was also found that listening to music causes certain changes in people's mental state depending on the music genre one listens to (cf. Juslin, 2011). A study by Ruud (2013), however, contested the existence of "therapeutic music" which, allegedly, has the potency to improve the listeners' health. Instead, Ruud claims that music's effect on

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mental health depends on the kinds of music the listeners have previously listened to, the memories associated with the music, and the context in which the music is perceived.

As far as the pedagogical value of music is concerned, a study by Degé and Schwarzer (2011) found that a music program enhances the students' awareness of phonology, rhyming, and segmenting. Another study by Gordon et al. (2011) discovered that stressed syllables aligned with strong musical beats add vigour to songs and that song lyrics aligned with the rhythm of the music are easier to memorize. Lastly, a study by Tegge (2015) concluded that the repetitive quality of songs as well as the use of high-frequency words has the potential to improve the linguistic competence of entry-level learners of the language.

While there have been several studies done on the psychological effects of music and its application to the classroom setting, there seems to be only a handful of papers that focus on the semantic analysis of song lyrics. Researches done by Nettle (1958) Powers (1980), Murphey and Alber (1985), Thompson and Russo (2004), and McGrath (2011) focused on different dimensions of music. Nettle (1958) proposed the use of linguistic structures in analyzing music, believing that these structures are easily applicable in musicology. Nettle posited that with the use of linguistic patterns in analyzing songs, determining the genre or the musical style of songs becomes much easier. However, Nettle's proposal hardly focused on the analysis of meanings in the lyrics and was more concentrated on the musical aspect of songs. In Powers' (1980) discussion of musical semantics, it was highlighted that music could induce emotions in people, which could otherwise be induced verbally, and that many cultures associate certain elements of music with people, events, or objects. Murphey and Alber (1985) presented a theorized pop song register that promotes second language acquisition among infants. They found that pop songs use simple and monosyllabic vocabulary, which helped infants learn languages faster. Further, studies conducted by Murphey in 1989 and 1992 showed that pop songs are repetitive and similar to a conversation executed at about half the speed of a regular conversation. Murphey (1992, p. 771) also revealed that pop songs contain "vague references" that allow listeners to relate the lyrics of the songs to their personal experiences. Murphey argued that these qualities of pop songs make them potentially effective learning materials in a classroom setting. Murphey also analyzed the lyrics of the top 50 songs from the September 12, 1987 edition of *Music & Media's* Hot 100 Chart and found that pop songs make use of pronouns that seem to refer to a character unmentioned throughout the song. He referred to such cases as "unspecified pronoun referents" that occasionally make the song lyrics ambiguous in meaning. Thompson and Russo's (2004) study delved into the semiotics and deeper meanings found in song lyrics as well as how the lyrics change in meaning when combined with melodies. Their study involved folk and folk-rock music during the 1960s as their corpus. These songs are said to have influenced protest movements during the period yet are relatively simplistic in the lyrical sense. Lastly, McGrath's (2011) work focused solely on the lyrics of songs made by the popular band *The Beatles* and how they use lyrics that appeal to the working class.

1.1. Indie music and the choice of indie songs

Indie (short for "independent") music is estimated to have begun sometime during the 1950s. The exact period when indie music began is difficult to pinpoint, but it started with the independent publication of music by relatively unpopular musicians. The concept of indie as a genre in itself developed only in the 1980s and the 1990s when more musicians started to self-publish. In essence, the publication of music outside the influence of major record labels has become the identifying trait of indie music.

The independent publication of music does have its downsides – independent record labels have little influence over mass media resulting to the lack of popularity of indie music. In contrast, major record

labels have control over the popularity of music because of their widespread media influence – the famous “King of Pop” Michael Jackson was himself signed to the Sony record label, which both spread his music and increased his popularity even long after his death.

For indie artists who have to publish music independently, it becomes more difficult as they hardly have the same amount of influence over the different media platforms. Some songs are more popular than others because of the strong influence of major record labels. The popularity of pop (short for “popular”) music is illustrative of this. Pop music has more appeal compared to other music genres that have a smaller following. Pop artists are most often assigned to major record labels, which significantly and easily increases their fame. This disparity in the popularity between pop and indie songs becomes apparent especially because the two genres seem to communicate and tackle entirely different messages and themes. As how Kruse (1993) puts it, indie music is often created to go against mainstream culture and popular music. It thus follows that the lyrics of pop and indie music are highly dissimilar, divergent, and oftentimes, contrasting.

One of the notable aspects of music is its ability to communicate and evoke emotions, as intuited by Scherer and Zentner (2001). It has been intimated, however, that in the case of indie songs, the meanings implied in the lyrics are vague and open to several interpretations, especially when compared to the lyrics of pop songs, which are said to be more straightforward and believed to convey simpler and easily deducible meanings.

1.2. Research objectives

The ambiguous quality of music was established in a 1989 study conducted by Murphey in his lexical analysis of the lyrics of the chart topper songs found in the 12 September 1987 edition of *Music & Media*. Murphey found that 86% of the songs contain pronouns that refer to unspecified characters and added that another 12% of the songs use pronouns that refer to no one or nothing at all. Stated in another way, the pronouns in 98% of the analyzed songs seem to refer to people or objects not identified within the songs.

The vagueness in song lyrics remains evident in the music published today. Thus, the aim of this research is to analyze the lyrical content of indie songs written in English by selected Filipino indie artists of different subgenres and to deduce the meanings as well as the themes of these songs through a lexico-semantic analysis. Specifically, the paper aims to:

1. determine the meanings, ideas, or actions the selected Filipino indie songs convey to the listeners;
2. construe the themes of the selected indie songs based on the semantic meanings derived from the lyrics; and
3. identify the semantic techniques used by the artists to purposively make their music (un) ambiguous in meaning.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The Lexical Semantic Analysis framework used by Schneider in his 2014 dissertation entitled *Lexical Semantic Analysis in Natural Language Text* was used as the benchmark in the analysis of the song lyrics. The framework makes use of multiple-word expression identification and supersense classifications. Multiple-word expressions (MWE’s) are defined as lexemes made from multiple words but are treated as single units. Often, the meanings of MWE’s are highly different from the meanings of the individual words that constitute them, which makes the identification of such MWE’s a critical part of semantic analysis. On the other hand, supersense classification categorizes words and/or MWEs into

predetermined general categories called supersenses. Supersenses are a set of general categories for all the verbs and nouns in a given language. According to Schneider, there are 25 supersense categories for nouns, and 15 for verbs. These categories are as follows:

Noun supersense categories

1. *Object* – includes natural objects and non-living features found in nature, e.g., ocean, planet, rock
2. *Artifact* – includes man-made structures and objects, e.g., tire, restaurant, wristwatch
3. *Location* – includes geopolitical entities and other nouns pertaining to locations, e.g., Mandaluyong City, Auckland
4. *Person* – includes humans or personified beings that refer to single individuals, e.g., aliens, Zeus, beekeeper
5. *Group* – includes groups of people, institutions or groups of objects, e.g., congregation, Church of Christ, royalty
6. *Substance* – includes materials and substances, e.g., cardboard, steel, molecules
7. *Possession* – includes entities involved in ownership or payment, e.g., gift, loan, car rental
8. *Time* – includes time periods, amounts of time and units for temporal measurement, e.g., 20 minutes, leap year, curfew
9. *Relation* – includes relations between entities and quantities as well as ordinal numbers, e.g., 1:24 scale, reverse, 1:1 ratio
10. *Quantity* – includes quantities and units of measurement as well as cardinal numbers and fractions, e.g., 14 inches, 2 liters, teaspoon
11. *Feeling* – includes all subjective emotions, e.g., dread, glee, indifference
12. *Motive* – includes abstract external forces that cause someone to perform an action, e.g., incentive, reason, bonus
13. *Communication* – includes words that involve the encoding and transmitting of information, e.g., remark, movie, TV program
14. *Cognition* – includes the aspects of the mind; thoughts, beliefs and fields of study as well as social and philosophical movements, e.g., multiculturalism, biology, communism
15. *State* – includes states of affairs, diseases, and symptoms, e.g., tuberculosis, nausea, respite
16. *Attribute* – includes characteristics of objects or people that can be judged, e.g., matte, elegance, vintage
17. *Act* – includes things that people do or cause to happen, as well as learned professions, e.g., engineering, doctor, tampering
18. *Event* – includes things that happen at a given place and time, e.g., bomb blast, car accident, low tide
19. *Process* – includes the phenomena of gradual changes through several states, e.g., evolution, adaptation, oscillation
20. *Phenomenon* – includes physical forces and occurrences, e.g., lightning, storm, headwind
21. *Shape* – includes all two and three-dimensional shapes, e.g., hexahedron, groove, indentation
22. *Food* – includes all consumable objects, particularly food and drink, e.g., Camembert cheese, soda, teriyaki
23. *Body* – includes all body parts, e.g., tubercle, pinky finger, wings

24. *Plant* – includes plants or fungi, e.g., truffle, Eustoma, iris

25. *Animal* – includes non-human, non-plant life, e.g., feline, passerine bird, egret

Verb supersense categories

1. *Body* – includes all bodily functions and care for the body, e.g., wear, sleep, ache

2. *Change* – includes modifications and alterations; size and temperature change, e.g., grow, heat, modify

3. *Cognition* – includes mental processes, e.g., conclude, deduce, analyze

4. *Communication* – includes verbal communication and non-verbal gesturing intended to send a message, e.g., tell, request, command

5. *Competition* – includes athletic activities, sports and fighting, e.g., attack, parry, hunt

6. *Consumption* – includes the consumption of food and drink, e.g., eat, ingest, smoke

7. *Contact* – includes all physical contact, e.g., touch, strike, catch

8. *Creation* – includes words that involve the creation of something, e.g., play, paint, perform

9. *Emotion* – includes all feelings, e.g., despise, prefer, disgust

10. *Motion* – includes all physical movements, e.g., walk, rotate, convulse

11. *Perception* – includes perception of phenomena by the senses, e.g., see, listen, taste

12. *Possession* – includes the acquisition or loss of something, e.g., provide, purchase, rob

13. *Social* – includes social activities and events, e.g., meet, celebrate, adjourn

14. *Stative* – includes being and having certain qualities, e.g., span, equal, surpass

15. *Weather* – includes all weather phenomena, e.g., rain, snow, hail

It should be noted that a single word may qualify under multiple supersenses depending on the context of the song or the specific line in the lyrics where the word is used, which essentially means that a particular word can be interpreted in several ways. The word *heart*, for example, can be classified under *Cognition*, (the source of feelings and intuitions) under *Body*, (the internal blood-pumping organ) or under *Attribute* (the courage to perform an action). This is a key consideration in the analysis as such cases wherein a single word can be classified under several supersenses may make the lyrics ambiguous. If a noun or a verb does not seem to qualify under any particular supersense, is too generic to further break down, (e.g. *somebody* and *something*) or has no context provided such that it is impossible to qualify under one supersense, it is categorized under a unique category named *Tops/Other*. This categorization of lexemes under supersenses was also used in order to simplify the process of semantic analysis as well as to more clearly dictate the context(s) in which the words are being used.

2. Method

2.1. Corpus of the study

The corpus of the study included a total of 30 Filipino indie songs written in English taken from three different indie musicians, each representing a subgenre of indie music: Reese Lansangan (*indie pop*), December Avenue, (*indie rock*) and Clara Benin (*indie folk*). The musicians were selected based on the subgenres of their music as well as their degree of popularity. Each artist was picked to represent a particular subgenre of indie music, and all three artists are famous in the indie music scene with a relatively large fanbase. Ten songs from each band/musician were chosen to form a total of 30 songs.

Only sample illustrative extracts are presented in the succeeding sections. The lyrics of the songs analyzed were taken from the online websites of the artists, if available. Otherwise, the lyrics were taken from public access websites such as *www.azlyrics.com*, *www.genius.com* and *www.metrolyrics.com* and cross-referenced with other websites for accuracy. When necessary, transcriptions of the song lyrics were made by listening to the actual songs that have been uploaded online.

2.2. Lexico-semantic analysis procedure

The analysis was performed by taking extracts from each of the songs included in the corpus and by applying the Lexical Semantic Analysis framework by Schneider. This process involved the breaking down of the corpus into single units of words or MWE's, classifying the nouns and verbs under predetermined supersenses, and analyzing the individual meanings of these units. To assist in determining the semantic meanings and supersense categorization, the free software program *WordNet* was used. The software is available for free and can be downloaded from the Princeton University official website at <https://wordnet.princeton.edu/>. *WordNet* is an application from Princeton University that provides a word-search function which determines all the possible semantic meanings of a word, including all of the word's possible supersenses depending on the context of the verse or line where the word is used. It also determines the word's lexical relations, such as synonyms, metonyms and homonyms. This software made it easy to determine all possible meanings of words and phrases in the corpus and opened up possible alternative meanings and contexts in which the songs may be viewed.

Table 1. Sample lexical semantic analysis of "Angels" by Augustana

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>Would I <u>fight</u> with an <u>angel</u>? <i>(v.) social/competition (n.) person</i></p> <p>Would I <u>leave</u> here with you? <i>(v.) motion/cognition</i></p>	<p>The initial lines make use of alliteration – the repetition of the same initial word in every line. Additionally, the verbs “<i>fight</i>” and “<i>leave</i>” possibly qualify under two different supersenses, indicating two possible meanings.</p>

The sample analysis shown in Table 1 illustrates the process of the lexico-semantic analysis. The first column includes the extracts of lyrics taken from the corpus, which are in bold font. The nouns and verbs in the lyrics are underlined, and the multi-word expressions are both underlined and italicized. Directly below each of the underlined verbs, nouns, and MWEs are the supersense(s) they have been classified under. The supersense classification dictates the meaning(s) of the lexeme and is the main interest of the study, as lexemes that qualify under two or more supersenses may hold a variety of meanings and change the possible interpretations to the line, the verse, or the entirety of the song. The second column includes brief comments on the individual lines or lexemes deemed relevant in the analysis. These comments may remark about the use of figures of speech in the lyrics, which may or may not contribute to the ambiguity of the song's meaning, a summary of particular lines in the lyrics that may help determine the theme of the song, or the existence of several possible meanings of a particular lexeme in the extract, which may make the song open to a variety of interpretations.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the titles of the songs written by Reese Lansangan as well as their general themes.

Table 2. Deduced themes of Reese Lansangan's songs

Song Title	Theme
A Song About Space	Science
Autopilot	Love
Bleed	Lost love
Creeper	Stalking
Exploration No. 5	Friendship
Go Online	Love
Grammar Nazi	Grammar
Home	Love
Slick	Admiration
St. Petersburg	Loneliness

The songs written by Reese Lansangan show variety in theme. Some interesting themes include *Science*, *Stalking* and *Grammar*, which are both unusual and uncommon themes not only in pop songs but in music as a whole. This might be due to Lansangan's desire to write her songs about unique topics that are rarely the topics of ordinary conversations.

Table 3. Deduced themes of December Avenue's songs

Song Title	Theme
Back to Love	Love
Breathe Again	Love
City Lights	Loneliness
Dive	Lost love
Ears and Rhymes	Love
Fallin'	Love
Forever	Love
I'll Be Watching You	Reconciliation
Sleep Tonight	Love
Time to Go	Love

The songs written by December Avenue do not show much variety in theme, especially in comparison with the music of the other musicians included in the study. A majority of December Avenue's songs cover themes on romantic love or one of its subcategories such as *Reconciliation* and *Lost love*.

Table 4. Deduced themes of Clara Benin's songs

Song Title	Theme
Be My Thrill	Love
Closure	Unreciprocated love
Coming	Religion
December	Life
Dust	Life
Easy	Love
Kingdom Come	Religion

Riverchild	Misery
Smile	Admiration
Wine	Confusing love

While not showing as much variety in theme as that of Reese Lansangan’s songs, the songs of Clara Benin still include some themes unique to her, such as *Life* and *Religion*. While songs about life and religious songs are somewhat commonplace, Benin was also the only artist in the study who wrote songs that bore these two themes.

Table 5. Specific themes found in indie songs

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Love	12	40%
Life	2	6.6%
Admiration	2	6.6%
Loneliness	2	6.6%
Lost love	2	6.6%
Religion	2	6.6%
Unreciprocated love	1	3.3%
Confusing love	1	3.3%
Friendship	1	3.3%
Grammar	1	3.3%
Misery	1	3.3%
Reconciliation	1	3.3%
Science	1	3.3%
Stalking	1	3.3%
Total	30	100%

A majority of the songs in the corpus bear the theme of *Love* or one of its subsets, with all of the artists having written at least four songs related to love. The theme of love is especially prevalent in the songs written by December Avenue. This contrasts the observation that indie songs bear unique themes and topics in comparison to pop songs, considering that the most popular contemporary songs are about love as well – an aspect of pop songs as suggested by Madanikia and Bartholomew (2014). The said analysis revealed that 80% of the chart-topping songs from 1971 to 2011 bear the themes of lust and/or love, and 62% of the songs bear the theme of love alone – an interesting finding as it goes against that of Kruse (1993) which states that indie songs are often written in contrast to the mainstream music.

3.1. Lexico-semantic analysis

The following section shows the lexico-semantic analysis performed on selected extracts from the corpus. Three songs from each musician were selected and presented below. The songs were selected to show the dominant characteristics of the music of each artist.

3.1.1. Reese Lansangan

Reese Lansangan is a 26-year-old female artist with a wide body of creative work. Lansangan is also well known for her works in various media: coloured illustration, fashion design, graphic design and writing. Despite the variety of her work, Lansangan claims that her first love is music and remains very famous for her songs. Lansangan personally states that her work aims to convey aspects of humanity by depicting observations, commentaries, collective experiences and fleeting feelings as well as to dissect everyday phenomena and see them under a different light.

Lansangan's music is regarded as indie pop— a variant of indie music described by Frith & Horne (2016) as a subgenre that generally attempts to stray from the styles of mainstream pop music. Dolan (2010) adds that indie pop borrows the “catchiness” aspect that is common in pop music and combines this with a more “stripped-down” and simple-sounding quality. Lansangan's music in particular generally makes use of the acoustic guitar and light percussion as well as voicing.

3.1.1.1. “Autopilot” by Reese Lansangan

Extract 1

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>My <u>mind</u> goes <u>autopilot</u> (n.) cognition (v.) change (n.) cognition When I'm next to you, I don't even <u>know</u> (v.) cognition</p>	<p>“Autopilot” in this sense is a state wherein one acts without awareness of one's actions.</p>
<p>Can't <u>remember</u> words (v.) cognition (n.) communication That <u>come out</u> (v.) change/communication</p>	<p>“Come out” may mean to physically come out, or to make something known to others.</p>
<p>You're <u>tangling me up</u> inside (v.) contact/stative</p>	<p>The MWE “tangle up” could mean to physically tie up or to involve in a certain situation.</p>

The initial lines in Extract 1 reveal the theme of the song as romantic love; specifically, the emotions which one feels when beside a person one holds affection for. The usage of a metaphor is found in the line “My mind goes autopilot” – a reference to the automated piloting feature found in aircraft wherein the on-board computer takes full control of the airplane. Lansangan likens this to the brain relinquishing control over one's actions and giving it over to the “autopilot”, which in the context of the song likely refers to one's feelings or emotions taking control of actions instead of the rational mind. The final lines of the extract make use of two MWEs that qualify under two supersenses: “come out” may be in the *Change* supersense wherein speech comes out of the singer's mouth, or alternatively, it may be in the *Communication* supersense in which case it would mean to make known, to disclose, or to reveal. On the other hand, “tangle up” may either mean to physically tie up or to get involved in something. Considering that the line “You're tangling me up inside” does not make sense with either meaning, this may be regarded a case of ambiguity.

In its entirety, the song *Autopilot* makes use of several figures of speech, particularly metaphor and personification, which sometimes makes the meaning of some lines non-evident and makes multi-word expressions qualify under two different supersenses and project different possible meanings. In several occasions, neither of the possible meanings makes sense in the context of the line, stanza, or the entire song.

3.1.1.2. “Grammar Nazi” by Reese Lansangan

Extract 2

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>My <u>momma</u> told me it's unwise (n.) person (v.) communication To <u>like</u> a <u>boy</u> who's just nice (v.) emotion (n.) person Who couldn't put <u>apostrophe</u>'s (n.) communication On his <u>possessives</u> (n.) communication And don't <u>look</u> at me when I <u>look</u> at you (v.) perception (v.) perception</p>	<p>The singer's mother tells her that it is not a good idea to fancy a boy who makes grammar errors.</p>

<p>Whenever you say “stuffs” (v.) communication (n.) artifact (Stuffs!) (n.) artifact ‘Cause that’s my cue (*retch*) (n.) communication</p>	<p>These lines illustrate how the boy in question pluralizes the word “<i>stuff</i>” by adding an –s. The singer also physically expresses her disgust at wrong grammar.</p>
<p>You see “your” and “you are” (v.) cognition They’re two, (n.) quantity two different things, baby (n.) quantity (n.) Tops (n.) person It’s YOUR problem, YOU’RE confused (n.) cognition But I’mma help you out (v.) social With the words (n.) communication you use, yeah (v.) consumption</p>	<p>“see” in the <i>Cognition</i> supersense means “to realize” instead of “to physically perceive”</p> <p>To “help out” is an example of an MWE that simply means “to be of help in a particular situation.”</p>

In Extract 2, the singer expresses disgust for wrong grammar, gives examples of common grammar mistakes the boy supposedly commits, and gives examples of their correct usage in order to aid the boy in improving his use of the language. Upon the analysis, the satire of the song as well as its theme also becomes evident: the singer’s mother discourages her from fancying a boy who could not use the possessive case properly. The singer herself also retches in disgust upon hearing a simple pluralization error, which is a considerable hyperbole. There is also the use of the multi-word expression “*help out*.” While some MWEs may have meanings that are far from the meanings of their individual lexemes and are thus difficult to interpret immediately, the MWE “*help out*” in itself is rather straightforward and remains relatively easy for the listeners to understand.

In general, the song’s theme seems to be English grammar, with some elements of humor included, making the song sound quite satirical. A majority of the song consist of common grammar mistakes and their corrections. The analysis of the lyrics agrees with the notion that the themes of indie songs are unlike that of pop songs, as not many pop songs have English grammar as the theme. However, for the most part, the analysis also disagrees with the assumption that indie song lyrics written in English tend to be ambiguous. Even with the cases where certain words could possibly refer to different things or may have several interpretations, the song remains relatively easy to understand and hardly uses any ambiguous words.

3.1.1.3. “Home” by Reese Lansangan

Extract 3

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>My bones are safe (n.) body And my heart can rest (n.) body/cognition (v.) body Knowing it belongs to you (v.) cognition (v.) possession My world is changed (n.) cognition (v.) change And it's cradled by (v.) contact</p>	<p>“bones” is likely a synecdoche – referring to a whole by one of its parts and vice versa. “Heart” may also bear two different meanings based on the context.</p>

The comfort that is you
(n.) feeling (v.) stative

Metaphor is used as comfort is directly likened to the
“you” character.

Extract 3 shows the chorus of *Home*. The singer expresses her affection as well as her feeling of security and safety around the unspecified “you” referent – earlier presumed to be the groom. Figures of speech are once again used by the singer; in particular, synecdoche and metaphor. Synecdoche is shown in the lines “*My bones are safe*” which likely means “*I am safe*” – the bones, parts of the singer’s body – are used to refer to the entirety of the singer. Additionally, the word “*heart*” in the line “*my heart can rest*” may be classified under *Body* – the muscular organ responsible for pumping blood, or *Cognition* – the source of one’s feelings or intuitions. The *Body* supersense means a physical resting of the heart, which implies that a physical feeling of calmness or relaxation is felt by the singer through to the “groom.” Meanwhile, the *Cognition* supersense meaning implies that it is the singer’s feelings that are at rest – a comparatively more psychological calmness. Lastly, the usage of metaphor is found in the last few lines of the extract wherein the singer likens the “groom” to the feeling of comfort in the words “*the comfort that is you.*”

Home bears the theme of romantic love – one of the most common themes of the songs in the corpus. The song includes the use of figures of speech, such as synecdoche and metaphor. The presence of an unspecified “you” referent is also consistent throughout the song. However, as the song is originally written as a wedding song, it is safe to assume that the “you” character refers to the groom in a wedding. An idiom is also used by the singer, which may hinder the understanding of the lyrics by those who are unfamiliar with idioms.

Overall, the songs of Reese Lansangan have an interesting variety of themes, including English grammar and science. However, a number of Lansangan’s songs have romance and love as themes – similar to that of pop songs. For the most part, the lyrics of the songs contained simple and easy-to-understand vocabulary. However, Lansangan also makes extensive use of figures of speech, which, in some occasions, renders the meanings of the lyrics ambiguous and not immediately evident. Certain lexemes with two or three possible supersense classifications, while not excessively present, are also included in the lyrics. While there are cases of these lexemes occasionally opening several possible interpretations for the songs, for the most part, these meanings are related to each other and hardly makes the songs difficult to understand. Lansangan’s music seems easy to interpret and to understand as the songs only make use of simple vocabulary. However, some background knowledge of popular culture as well as figures of speech may be necessary to fully understand the songs. This is an interesting finding as it contrasts with some of the findings of previous studies such as that of Murphey and Alber (1985) which posited that pop songs are generally easy to understand even by infants. However, some of these findings also confirm that of previous studies such as those by Murphey (1989, 1992) which found that pop songs make use of unspecified pronoun referents and vague references that allow the listeners to easily relate themselves to the song.

3.1.2. December Avenue

December Avenue is a Filipino indie rock band formed in 2008 with four members who were schoolmates in college. They formed the band *Sense of Sound* with the intention of writing songs to which people can very much relate. Eventually, the band decided to use the name December Avenue meant to represent a bridge from the past to the future. By posting videos of gigs and performances on *YouTube*, the band gained a relatively large following yet still remains unsigned to any major record labels. The band prefers to publish their music independently. The band believes that their songs are written based on their own experiences, with a strong desire to make them relatable to the listeners. Their subgenre is referred to as “indie rock” – a genre that typically utilizes the guitars and heavy

percussion of mainstream rock music combined with a “do-it-yourself” attitude of writing and publishing music that is a common feature of all indie music.

3.1.2.1. “Breathe Again” by December Avenue

Extract 4

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>Breathe again (v.) <i>body/stative</i> By the <u>love</u> I’ve <u>waited</u> (n.) <i>feeling</i> (v.) <i>stative/cognition</i> like the <u>sunrise</u> (n.) <i>phenomenon</i></p>	<p>“waited” may mean to physically stay in one place or to look forward to a possible event.</p>
<p>When I <u>look into</u> the <u>night</u>, (v.) <i>cognition</i> (n.) <i>state/time</i> I <u>see</u> the <u>day</u> is clear (v.) <i>perception</i> (n.) <i>time</i></p>	<p>The use of antithesis in “night” and “day” is present in these verses of the song.</p>

Extract 4 displays uses of figures of speech, namely simile, personification, and antithesis. The first lines in the extract state: “I’ve waited like the sunrise”, which makes relatively little sense if the use of simile is intended by the songwriters as sunrise does not “wait.” The line may also be considered as personification in which the sunrise stays in a certain location for a time. Secondly, the contrasting use of “night” and “day” in the second verse of the song illustrates an example of antithesis – the use of opposite terms for contrasting effect. Additionally, considering the line: “When I look into the night, I see the day is clear,” the line does not make much sense, as “look into” is an MWE that simply means to examine. This comes to mean that the singer “examines the night” and concurrently deduces from his examination that “the day is clear.”

Overall, the song *Breathe Again* contains a plethora of abstractions, figures of speech, as well as lines and verses that are grammatically correct and uses relatively simple vocabulary yet bears no easily discernible meaning even after the semantic analysis. Some of the lexemes used are also open to various interpretations regardless of the context, which may either make the song easily relatable to a larger audience or further confuse listeners as regards the meaning of the song.

3.1.2.2. “Fallin’” by December Avenue featuring Clara Benin

Extract 5

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
<p>'Cause I’m <u>falling</u> faster like a <u>train</u> of <u>love</u> (v.) <i>change</i> (n.) <i>artifact</i> (n.) <i>feeling</i> <u>Coming right</u> and <u>getting close</u> to you (v.) <i>change</i> (v.) <i>motion</i> And I’m <u>falling</u> faster like the <u>speed of light</u> (v.) <i>change</i> (n.) <i>time</i> <u>Shining</u> bright and <u>chasing</u> over you (v.) <i>perception</i> (v.) <i>motion/social</i></p>	<p>“Falling” may be used in the sense of “falling in love.”</p> <p>The use of MWE’s is seemingly prevalent. Simile is also used twice.</p>
<p>Like a <u>movie scene</u> (n.) <i>communication</i> I’m <u>watching</u> <u>all the time</u> (v.) <i>perception</i> (n.) <i>time</i> Like a <u>child</u> I’m <u>running forward</u> into you (n.) <i>person</i> (v.) <i>motion</i></p>	<p>Additional uses of simile in the second verse of the song – this part is sung by Clara Benin as the song is a duet.</p>

Extract 5 shows the chorus and the second verse of *Fallin’* respectively. The chorus is sung by the male singer of December Avenue and includes several uses of simile as well as multi-word expressions. In the first line, the singer likens his fall to that of a rushing “train of love” which likely refers to the

rate in which the singer has fallen in love with the “you” character. The singer also likens his fall to the speed of light and states that this is the speed in which he is chasing the “you” character. “Chasing” in this sense may be a physical pursuit, which is less likely considering the context of the song or a romantic one which is more likely the intention of the songwriter. Another interesting part of the extract is the MWE “getting close” which means to physically be near something or someone. However, another possible interpretation is to get nearer socially – to become friends or lovers. The term “get close” in the social sense may be a Filipinism, as Filipinos often make use of the term “close” to refer to social and romantic relationships. This is particularly interesting as *WordNet* did not yield any results that depict this meaning, thus the lack of an appropriate supersense classification. The second part of Extract 5 shows more examples of simile prevalent throughout the song. This part is sung by the female Clara Benin as if in response to the parts sung by the male vocalist of December Avenue. It is likely that the previously unspecified “you” character sung by the male vocalist refers to Clara Benin. Her part in the song contains another number of MWEs: “movie scene,” “all the time” and “running forward.” These multi-word expressions are relatively easy to understand and are used as similes. The female singer likens her observance of the male singer in the manner that she watches a scene from a movie. Likewise, she likens her desire to get near him to the manner in which a child runs toward someone.

Fallin’ makes extensive use of simile and anaphora as well as multi-word expressions, which makes the meaning of the song easier to decipher. The song also bears the theme of romantic love. These are interesting findings as they deviate from the notion that indie musicians tend to make their music open to several interpretations and difficult to understand, and that indie music projects dissimilar themes with that of pop songs. The use of the term “get close” – a possible Filipinism, is also found in the lyrics, which might make the meaning of the particular line unclear to non-Filipino listeners. For the most part, the song also makes use of simple vocabulary, and the lexemes are qualified under single supersenses and have singular meanings.

3.1.2.3. “Sleep Tonight” by December Avenue

Extract 6

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
Baby it's alright (n.) person I'll be <u>right by your side</u> (n.) location	“Baby” may refer to either a young child or may be used as a term of endearment for a beloved person.
No need to cry out loud (n.) state (v.) communication/body	“cry” may mean to either shout out or may refer to the physical expression of sadness: shedding tears.
Nothing to cry about (n.) quantity (v.) communication/body	
Baby it's alright (n.) person I'll be <u>just by your side</u> (n.) location	To “keep on one’s sight” means to observe keenly or to watch over someone or something.
I'll <u>keep you on my sight</u> (v.) social	
I'll never <u>leave 'til you sleep</u> <u>tonight</u> (v.) motion (v.) body (n.) time	

Extract 6 shows the chorus of *Sleep Tonight*. It is likely that the “baby” character refers to the singer’s romantic partner and beloved. The song also keeps the theme of love. A further look into the lyrics would imply that the word “cry” is used twice and bears two possible meanings: the *Communication* supersense meaning means to shout out, while the *Body* supersense meaning refers to the bodily function of tears being released by the eyes – an expression of extreme emotions, often sadness. This might be an application of antanaclasis – the repetition of a word or phrase but with each

bearing a different meaning. The idiom “*keep on one’s sight*” is used, which means to watch over someone or something. In the context of the song, this is an expression of love of and protection of the person being watched over. Lastly, alliteration is also used by the constant repetition of “*I’ll*” in the latter part of the chorus – likely done to add emphasis to the singer’s love for the person.

Sleep Tonight in its entirety makes great use of alliteration in order to emphasize the singer’s love for the beloved. Some idioms and multi-word expressions as well as figures of speech are also observable and aid in the understanding of the song.

Overall, the use of figures of speech aids in conveying December Avenue’s desired meaning for the songs instead of making the lyrics more difficult to interpret. The songs also constantly bear the theme of love or its subsets. While there are some cases where the lyrics are open to several possible interpretations such as in the song *Breathe Again*, these are not present in all of their songs. In fact, the majority of December Avenue’s songs make use of simple lyrics with only single meanings or two related meanings and figures of speech that will likely aid rather than hinder the listeners in understanding the meaning of the songs. This might be due to December Avenue’s initial goal of writing songs that are easy to relate to.

3.1.3. Clara Benin

Clara Benin is a 23-year-old Filipino singer and songwriter in the indie folk genre. Her first original song “*Closure*” became a surprisingly popular song and slowly led the artist to indie OPM fame. Benin’s voice was also featured in a famous advertisement jingle by a popular fast food restaurant. A year later in 2015, she released her first album *Human Eyes* independently, officially making her an indie artist.

Clara Benin’s subgenre of indie music is called “*indie folk*.” According to Scholes (2000) in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, the term “*folk*” is generally used to refer to the traditions, customs, and superstitions of the uncultured classes. In its most general description, folk music refers to the local songs of a particular culture or people. Another definition by Lloyd (1969) refers to folk music as the music of the lower classes. Rooting from folk music, indie folk took its name from its use of acoustic instruments prominent in folk songs. In the case of Clara Benin, the acoustic guitar is the primary instrument, with the guitar sounding a melody that serves as a backing track for the singer’s voice. There is very little presence of other instrumentation, and for the most part, only the voice of the singer and the acoustic guitar can be heard.

3.1.3.1. “*Dust*” by Clara Benin

Extract 7

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
Look what’s become of us (v.) <i>cognition</i> (v.) <i>stative</i>	The singer expresses her realizations in life and implies some degree of misery.
Aren’t we all just made of dust (v.) <i>creation</i> (n.) <i>substance</i>	
Don’t we all just wanna go home (v.) <i>emotion</i> (v.) <i>motion</i>	Another case of anaphora is found in the repetition of “ <i>Don’t we just...</i> ”
Don’t we all just wanna belong (v.) <i>emotion</i> (v.) <i>stative</i>	

Extract 7 shows the lines of *Dust*’s chorus. The singer expresses some of her morose realizations in life and makes a religious reference in the line “*Aren’t we all just made of dust*” – a phrase that is likely taken from the Bible verse, Genesis 3:19. In its entirety, the song *Dust* makes extensive use of figures of speech particularly those that employ contrast as well as some references to religion. While there are

several cases where figures of speech are used, and even with the song being open to an alternative and more religious interpretation, the main theme of the song remains easy to understand.

3.1.3.2. "Kingdom Come" by Clara Benin

Extract 8

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
Eternity's no myth, (n.) <i>time/state</i> (n.) <i>communication</i> It's a gift for us (n.) <i>possession</i> So open up your eyes (v.) <i>contact</i> (n.) <i>body/cognition</i> You were made (v.) <i>stative</i> (v.) <i>creation</i>	The singer tells of how eternity is a gift for everyone - that it is a reality. "open up your eyes" may be meant literally or figuratively.
For more than this I won't let anything (v.) <i>social</i> (n.) <i>Tops/other</i> Go to waste (v.) <i>change</i> (n.) <i>substance</i> Let your kingdom (v.) <i>social</i> (n.) <i>state/location/group</i> come (v.) <i>motion</i> I won't let anything (v.) <i>social</i> (n.) <i>Tops/other</i> get in the way (v.) <i>social</i> Let your kingdom (v.) <i>social</i> (n.) <i>state/location/group</i> come (v.) <i>motion</i>	The singer tells the listener that he/she has a greater purpose in life. The singer expresses her determination to "Let [your] kingdom come" – likely a religious reference. Anaphora is used in these final verses as shown in the repetition of the phrases "I won't let anything" and "Let your kingdom come."

Extract 8 displays several religious references in the song *Kingdom Come*. The first part of the extract has the singer telling the listener that "Eternity's no myth, it's a gift for us" and afterward asks the listener to "open up [your] eyes." The Bible verse John 3:16 tells the readers of Jesus' sacrifice for humanity so that humanity can have eternal life, which might be what the song is referencing. Furthermore, the only way to gain eternal life according to the Bible is to believe and have faith in God – which may be an alternate meaning of the phrase "open up your eyes." In the second part of the extract are the final verses of the song, which again displays anaphora. The point of interest in this extract is the line "Let your kingdom come" which is repeated twice. Aside from being the title of the song, the words "kingdom come" are best known as words from the Lord's Prayer, famously known as the prayer Jesus Christ taught his disciples. The words, when taken together, can also be a noun that may refer to the end of time or to the afterlife. This implies that the singer is awaiting the end of the world with the hope of gaining the eternal life that was promised to those faithful to God. *Dust* is visibly a song about life and religion because of the several references the singer makes to the Bible. These references open up various possible interpretations of the lyrics in some cases where there are up to three possible meanings of a lexeme. Notably, fewer figures of speech are used in comparison to the previous songs.

3.1.3.3. "Smile" by Clara Benin

Extract 9

Lyrics and Supersense Categorizations	Explanation
I didn't know any better (v.) <i>cognition</i> I was four years old	The first verse of the song depicts the singer as a child learning how to pray.

<p>(v.) <i>stative</i> (n.) <i>quantity</i> (n.) <i>time</i> Just <u>learning</u> how to <u>pray</u> (v.) <i>cognition</i> (v.) <i>communication</i></p>	
<p>I didn't <u>know</u> any better (v.) <i>cognition</i> I <u>was</u> <u>fifteen</u> <u>years</u> old (v.) <i>stative</i> (n.) <i>quantity</i> (n.) <i>time</i> I've <u>forgotten</u> how to <u>pray</u> (v.) <i>cognition</i> (v.) <i>communication</i></p>	<p>The second verse depicts the singer, now a fifteen-year-old, saying that she has forgotten how to pray.</p>
<p>I still don't <u>know</u> any better (v.) <i>cognition</i> As I should by <u>now</u> (n.) <i>time</i> I'm still <u>learning</u> how to <u>pray</u> (v.) <i>cognition</i> (v.) <i>communication</i> But you <u>were</u> always there (v.) <i>stative</i> You <u>watch</u> me <u>fall</u> (v.) <i>social/perception</i> (v.) <i>motion/social</i> You <u>watch</u> me <u>break</u> (v.) <i>social/perception</i> (v.) <i>emotion</i> You always <u>stay</u></p>	<p>The final verses depict the singer at present who is still in the progress of learning how to pray.</p> <p>An unspecified “you” character is mentioned – the character supposedly stayed with the singer through difficult times in her life.</p>

Extract 9 includes the lines from three separate verses of the song *Smile*. The figure of speech called symploce is used – a combination of anaphora and epistrophe wherein both the beginning and ending of every verse is repeated for emphasis. The extracts seem to be in chronological order and bear references to one’s growth from childhood to adulthood. In the first part of the extract, the singer is a four-year-old learning how to pray, while in the second part, the singer has become a teenager and has forgotten how to pray. The final part of the extract shows the current status of the singer who is seemingly attempting to relearn how to pray. In addition to the symploce from the previous verses, the final verse adds a mention of an unspecified “you” character that supposedly watches over the singer through difficult times – likely another religious reference, with the “you” character being God. Several words that bear different meanings are also present in the verses particularly “fall and “break.” “fall” may mean a physical fall caused by gravity or to suffer defeat or failure. “break” qualifies under only one supersense but may mean either a violent outburst of pent-up emotions or a less violent loss of control of one’s emotions usually by crying.

Overall, the songs of Clara Benin contain a considerable number of religious references, although they may not be immediately evident and that they remain somewhat questionable. The usage of figures of speech is also common as with the music of the other artists included in the study. Clara Benin’s songs also make use of several MWEs and individual lexemes that are open to multiple possible supersense meanings or interpretations, which adds to the ambiguity of the songs at times. Regardless of the prominence of love as a theme, Benin’s songs still bear some amount of variety and are the only songs in the corpus that bear themes related to life and religion.

In general, it was found that each artist has a penchant for certain themes as well as song writing techniques: Reese Lansangan writes with the most general variety in theme and makes use of humor and references to popular culture as well as figures of speech, with some cases of several possible meanings or interpretations of certain lexemes. December Avenue has the least thematic variety, opts to write love songs, which, for the most part, are easy to understand, and tends to use figures of speech to make the songs easier to understand. Lastly, Clara Benin makes extensive use of figures of speech, idioms, religious references that are not immediately evident, and a good number of lexemes that bear several possible meanings, making her music open to the many interpretations and considerably the most ambiguous among the other artists included in the study.

It should be noted that the study analyzed a relatively limited corpus, especially considering the still-increasing number of indie OPM musicians. However, it can be deduced from the study that indie OPM does not entirely go against the mainstream pop music – which in previous studies is said to be a distinguishing quality of indie music as a genre. At least 40% of the indie songs in the corpus bear *Love* as a theme, which further increases to 53.2% if the subsets of *Love* are included, making it the major theme of the songs in the corpus. The inclusion of more indie OPM songs in the corpus would likely bear similar results in the thematic analysis.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study examines the themes and the meanings of indie OPM music through an in-depth analysis of the multi-word expressions and lexemes found in its lyrics. The results of the study imply that indie OPM, while occasionally ambiguous, still remains easy to understand for the most part because of the use of simple vocabulary as well as figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, and anaphora in order to aid rather than hinder the understanding of the lyrics. However, as the lexico-semantic analysis of song lyrics is a field that remains relatively unexplored, there are several limitations of the study, the small size of the corpus being the most notable.

Future researchers may increase the breadth of the corpus by focusing on the entire discography of a single band or musician, including songs covering more music genres, and analyzing songs from other countries. The creation or modification of an existing theoretical framework that is specifically aligned toward the lexico-semantic analysis of songs is also favourable – a considerably difficult task as not many studies have been done to ascertain the meanings of song lyrics.

The study found that the predominant theme of the songs that comprised the corpus, while still bearing a wide variety of topics, is, for the most part, about love. A considerable number of the lexemes in the songs occasionally bear two or three possible meanings, which, when each meaning is applied, opens alternate interpretations. When used in conjunction with other lexemes with several possible meanings, these alternate interpretations have the potential to change the assumed theme of the entire song. Idioms and figures of speech are used by the songwriters or artists, which in some occasions lead to possible alternate meanings. However, idioms and figures of speech are also used in relatively equal number so that the listeners would easily grasp the meaning of the songs rather than to lead them to confusing alternate meanings. While alternate interpretations are evident in some songs, they are not extensively existent contrary to the popular belief that indie music generally tends to be nebulous and requires deliberate disambiguation.

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İngilizce yazılmış Filipin bağımsız şarkı sözlerinin leksiko semantik analizi

Öz

Müziğin insanı eğlendirmek ve psikolojik olarak insanları etkileme gücü, onu insan toplumunun önemli bir parçası haline getirmekte ve deneysel araştırmalar için olgun bir alan haline getirmektedir. Müziğin insanlara yönelik psikolojik ve fizyolojik etkilerinin yanı sıra, dil öğretimi ve öğrenmede müziğin pedagojik değeri hakkında araştırmalar ilginç sonuçlar göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte, yine de, dilsel merceklerle ortaya çıkarılan şarkıların iddia edilen anlamlarına bakan deneysel çalışmaların bir kalanı hala varlığını sürdürmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma üç Filipinli bağımsız müzisyen tarafından İngilizce yazılmış 30 bağımsız şarkının lexico-semantik analizi yaparak, müzik ve dilbilimin kesişimini incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın bir anahtar bulgusu, bağımsız şarkıların genellikle, belirsiz olma eğilimi gösterdikleri ve kasıtlı anlamsızlık gerektiren popüler inanışa aykırı olmadığıdır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Orijinal Filipin Müziği; bağımsız müzik; sözcüksel anlambilim; anlamsal analiz

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