

The Role of Lyrics in a Listener's Experience of Preferred Music

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the role of lyrics in a listener's experience of preferred music. A thematic analysis was conducted on 10 semi-structured interviews regarding participants' listening experience of two songs: one of general preference and another preferred song with a happy-sad juxtaposition (happy music with sad lyrics). Main themes derived were: 1) The role of lyrics in a listener's experience 2) Factors influencing the role of lyrics in the listening experience 3) The listening experience of the happy-sad juxtaposition. Results indicate a nuanced relationship between lyrics and music in forming a listener's everyday experience of their preferred music and qualitative evidence for an integration effect of emotionally incongruent lyrics and music. Further research is required to deepen the proposed understanding of the role of lyrics in music listening.

Keywords: Music Preference; Listening Experience; Role of Lyrics in Music; Thematic Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and music are known to complement each other, most often combined in the universal art form of song. This relationship perhaps enhances the artistic experience of music listening. As lyricist Yip Harburg said, "Words make you think a thought, music makes you feel a feeling, but a song makes you feel a thought" (Alonso, 2012). Despite most music genres today containing lyrics, the impact lyrics have on the listening experience of music remains under-researched (Barradas & Sakka, 2022). This study aimed to understand how lyrics influence a listener's experience of their preferred music, particularly in the context of everyday music consumption.

Music and speech elicit emotions using similar acoustic cues (Juslin & Laukka, 2003). Ilie & Thompson (2006) compared the affective consequences of manipulating these cues in speech and music, revealing a general mechanism connecting acoustic attributes to affective connotations, regardless of the medium. Although speech and music employ similar acoustic parameters to convey emotions, some differences in the influence of these cues were observed. Most notably, pitch height had opposite effects on conveying emotions in speech and music. High-pitch speech was rated as more pleasant than low-pitch, while low-pitch music was rated as more pleasant than high-pitch music. This difference might be explained by the aspects of each medium that listeners usually attend to. A listener's attention on cues for the salient aesthetic properties of music versus their attention on cues for the verbal and prosodic elements in speech might elicit different emotions in their listening experience of similar cues in the two mediums. Lyrics, having both musical and linguistic elements, may hence provide a unique listening experience from the interaction of these differences.

Lyrics have the potential to impact a listener's emotional experience to a piece of music. Ali and Peynircioğlu (2006) found that lyrics enhanced the emotion conveyed by sad or angry music but detracted from the emotion evoked by happy or calm music. When conflicting emotions between lyrics and melody were presented, emotions congruent with the melodies received higher ratings than emotions congruent with the lyrics. They concluded that melodies played a larger role in eliciting emotions than lyrics. However, emotion ratings might not reliably capture the full extent of a listener's emotional experience and perception of the music. A more nuanced understanding of the role of lyrics in music and the impact of incongruent emotions conveyed by lyrics requires further investigation through a more qualitative exploration of this relationship on the listening experience.

Brattico et al. (2011) conducted an fMRI study to examine the effect of lyrics in happy and sad music using participants' self-selected music as stimuli. Participants provided familiar music to ensure ecological validity. Music preference was offset as they were instructed to provide both their favourite and disliked pieces of music. The study found that sad music with lyrics activated a wider range of brain activity in regions associated with language and emotion processing. Happy music without lyrics elicited stronger activations in brain regions linked to perceiving and recognising basic emotions. These findings indicated that lyrics play a significant role in defining the experience of sadness in the listening experience while instrumental music had a stronger influence on the experience of happiness. The role of lyrics in a listener's experience of music might thus

depend heavily on the emotion conveyed by the music. Furthermore, the findings may be limited to lyrics with a congruent emotion to the music they accompany. If the effect of lyrics on the listening experience might vary depending on the emotion of the accompanying music, how would this effect translate when lyrics are incongruent to their accompanying music is listened to?

To answer this, Mori and Iwanaga (2014) investigated the effect of sad lyrics with happy music on participants' emotional perceptions and feelings. The study used two foreign songs with this juxtaposition. When the translation of lyrics was presented with the songs, participants' perceived sadness which generated pleasant feelings. They proposed that sad lyrics in happy music might encourage prolactin release, causing the feeling of pleasurable sadness. Happy music with sad lyrics also induced aesthetic emotions, increasing a listener's aesthetic appreciation of the music. Mori and Iwanaga (2014) described this as an integration effect, in which the emotion perceived by one component is affected by the simultaneous presence of the other. Through this effect, emotionally incongruent lyrics may evoke a more complex listening experience. In combination with Brattico et al.'s (2011) findings, it can be concluded that while lyrics might not play a large role in the listening experience of happy music when they are happy, sad lyrics might play a different and more significant role in interacting with happy music to elicit a more complex listening experience. This is therefore evidence for a more nuanced role that lyrics could play in the everyday listening experience, which requires further exploration.

To ensure ecological validity of this exploration, one must consider how music is selected and listened to in the everyday music listening context. Naturally, people would listen to music of their own preference. However, previous studies did not utilise their participants' preference. Furthermore, music preference has been shown to influence a listener's aesthetic experience through activating the default mode network, a neural circuit involved in emotional experiences and aesthetic contemplation (Reybrouck et al., 2018; Satpute & Lindquist, 2019). It is evident that the listening experience would be significantly affected by whether stimuli presented were preferred by participants. The role of lyrics in a listener's experience of their preferred music compared to unfamiliar or disliked music might be vastly different. Therefore, it would be impossible to fully capture an ecologically valid description of the everyday listening experience without accounting for preference.

This study aimed to comprehensively and ecologically determine the role of lyrics in a listener's experience of their preferred music. This was achieved through a qualitative exploration of this experience, including the experience of preferred music with emotionally incongruent lyrics, namely sad lyrics with happy music. This juxtaposition was chosen to further explore the integration effect found by Mori & Iwanaga (2014).

2. METHOD

Design. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted to determine the role of lyrics in participants' listening experience of preferred music and when lyrics are emotionally incongruent to its music. This happy-sad juxtaposition explored, is defined by Mori and Iwanaga (2014) as music with a fast tempo and major key accompanied by sad lyrics. A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted on semi-structured interviews.

Participants. 10 undergraduates (7 females, 3 males; age range: 20-24 years) were recruited from Durham University through convenience sampling, irrespective of their musical background. For two participants, data from the second part of the study were excluded from the analysis as the happy-sad juxtaposition was found not to be present. This was determined with the researcher's discretion of whether the right type of juxtaposition was perceived by the participants during the interview.

Materials and Apparatus. Participants' preferred music was played via Spotify on either the researcher's or the participant's personal device. Interviews were recorded using the voice recording app on a smartphone. A list of interview questions served as a guide for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). The interview guide consisted of two parts, prompting participants to describe their listening experience and music preferences. The questions in both parts were mostly identical, except for question 8, which served as a general question regarding participants' music preferences and opinions. The rest of the questions were identical in order to avoid leading participants to differing conclusions or statements between the two interview parts. This ensured that any differences in participants' descriptions of their experiences were from the listening experiences themselves and not due to other variables. Additional questions were asked based on the participants' responses such as, "Do you consider yourself more of a 'music person' or a 'lyrics person'?". This question was frequently used to gain insight into participants' backgrounds and how this influenced their listening experience.

Procedure. Participants were asked to choose two preferred songs: one representing their general preference and another with a perceived happy-sad juxtaposition. Both songs had to contain lyrics and be of their preference. A

“preferred song” was defined to participants as a song that they enjoy, like and would choose to listen to outside of the study’s context and as part of their everyday listening habits. The happy-sad juxtaposition was defined to participants as any song which they perceive has happy-sounding music with sad-sounding lyrics. It was important to explore both types of preferred music to understand any potential differences between the role of lyrics in each listening experience.

Participants were informed that they were not obligated to provide a second song if they could not find a preferred song with the desired juxtaposition. This would indicate the prevalence of this incongruence in preferred music. The titles of both songs were noted to ensure the presence of the happy-sad juxtaposition in the second song (see Appendix B for list).

The first song (general preference) was played aloud, and participants were interviewed about their listening experience. The question, “What are your general opinions on the role of lyrics in music?” was asked at the end of this interview to avoid priming their answers with the subsequent discussion on juxtaposition.

Next, the second song (with happy-sad juxtaposition) was played aloud, and participants were asked to describe their listening experience of this specific piece. Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked more general questions about their background and music preference.

The specific order of listening to each song right before being interviewed was determined to ensure participants provided accurate descriptions of their listening experience, aiming to minimise reliance on memory and encourage them to focus on each song. The order and frequency of the questions varied based on participants’ responses and additional questions were asked at the researcher’s discretion. On average, the interviews took approximately 20 minutes per participant.

3. RESULTS

A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted on descriptions of participants’ experiences of two preferred songs: of general preference and happy-sad juxtaposition. Referencing Braun and Clarke (2006), the following decisions were made. The analysis took an inductive approach; codes and themes were formulated based on the data without any pre-existing theoretical framework or coding frame. When initial codes were formed, the observation was made that some participants’ general preference songs also had a happy-sad juxtaposition, indicating that this experience was part of their overall music preference. There were further overlaps found between participants’ responses for both parts of the interview. To account for these overlaps, the codes from both the general preference and happy-sad juxtaposition songs were collated and the analysis was conducted across this entire data set. Therefore, themes do not correspond with specific questions and the themes elucidated by the three affinity diagrams presented below include data from both parts of the participants’ interviews. The reflexive method used in the analysis meant that frequency of codes was not analysed as frequency is not relevant in determining a theme’s significance to one’s research aims.

Three overarching themes were derived from this analysis. The affinity diagrams for these themes are presented below with relevant sub-themes and their relationships.

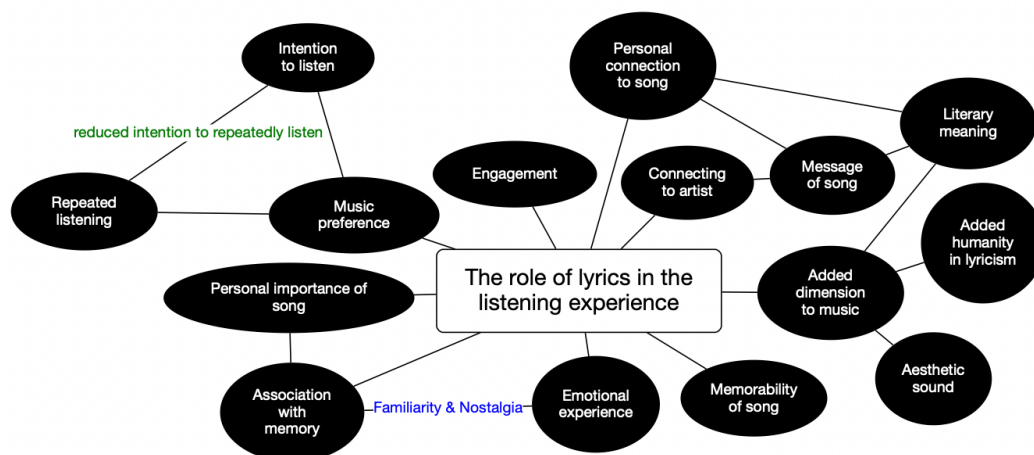


Figure 1. Sub-themes for The Role of Lyrics in the Listening Experience of Preferred Music

The first theme defines the role of lyrics in the listener's experience of preferred music. In essence, the sub-themes found demonstrate how lyrics affect a listener's experience of their preferred music.

Memorability of song. Lyrics make a song more memorable; “when you want to google a song most of the time, you’ll be like, ‘you know that song that had that one line’ (ID07)”.

Emotional experience. Lyrics influence the emotional experience of one's preferred music, associated with “Association with memory” through the experience of “Familiarity and Nostalgia”; “a combination of lyrics and memories so lyrics because of the words it says- so it invokes certain feelings and makes you think (ID10)”.

Association with memory. Lyrics are associated with one's memories influences the experience of preferred music. This association invokes feelings of “Familiarity and Nostalgia” and is tied to “Emotional experience” through this; “takes me back to those days... I listened to it so much growing up so it's sort of nostalgic (ID07)”.

Personal importance of song. Lyrics affect how important a preferred song is to listeners, also associated with “Association with memory” and “Emotional experience”; “without the lyrics the beat itself wouldn't invoke those emotions and wouldn't lead to the song being as memorable or playing as big of a role in like, my playlist or my life (ID07)”.

Music preference. Lyrics contribute to music preference through affecting one's “intention to listen” and engagement in “repeated listening”; “if the lyrics wasn't there, I wouldn't listen to it (ID04)” and “to keep me wanting to listen to a song (ID03)”.

Engagement. Lyrics keep a listener engaged during their listening experience; “it's kind of keeping me engaged... at least you've got some variation within the lyrics when you're listening (ID03)”.

Personal connection to song. Lyrics influence one's personal connection to music through “Literary meaning” (meaning derived from lyrics) and “Message of song” (how lyrics translate the message of a song into words); “(describing what the song means) it's quite a sad like, depressing way of looking at things and I feel like I've been there before, that's why the lyrics are really easy to connect to (ID02)”.

Connection to artist. Lyrics facilitate one's connection to a song's artist, through understanding the “message of song” through its “literary meaning”; “lyrics help with conveying that message to the listener (ID09)”.

Added dimension to music. Lyrics add to one's experience of preferred music by providing “literary meaning”, “added humanity” (the social, linguistic element of lyricism) and “aesthetic sound” (sound of lyrics as a musical element); “if you just had music, it would be one thing (ID06)” and “with a singer you add of course an entire different layer (ID09)”.

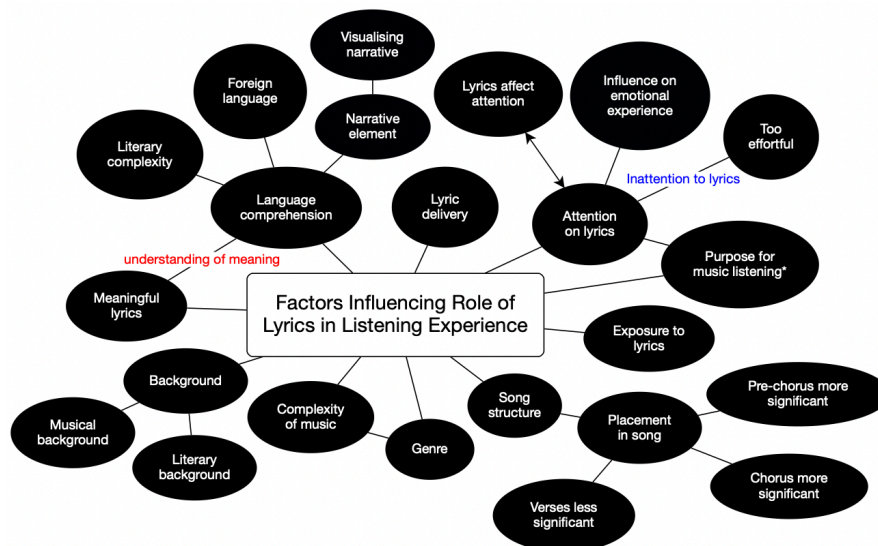


Figure 2. Sub-themes for Factors Influencing the Role of Lyrics in the Listener's Experience of Preferred Music

Note. * The sub-theme “Purpose for music listening” is further broken down in Figure 2.1.

This theme involves the factors identified that influence the role lyrics play in a listener's experience of their preferred music. These factors are often interconnected in their influence on the perception of lyrics in a listening experience.

Lyric delivery. The way lyrics are sung in a piece of music affects their role in a listener's experience; "they're more forcefully delivered in the chorus, so I notice them more (ID06)".

Background. This represents how the background of listeners influence the role of lyrics on their experience of preferred music. This is broken down into "literary background" and "musical background", which elucidates that listeners' love for literature or level of musicianship affects their attention to lyrics in a song; "I've always sort of preferred reading kind of instead of listening to music so I think lyrics speak to me more than the melody (ID06)" and "I grew up with playing a lot of classical music and like that type of music doesn't require lyrics for you to resonate to emotionally and I think playing that from a young age meant that I had to be in tune with the music more and I think as a result of that I can appreciate music for what it is without the lyrics and I appreciate the notes for it and I appreciate how different harmonies can come together whether it's like a dissonance or it's a harmonic and I think that in doing that I don't necessarily have to relate to the lyrics (ID05)".

Complexity of music. The complexity of accompanying music affects the role of lyrics on the listening experience. Simpler music requires lyrics to complete a listening experience while more complex pieces of music do not; "the instrumental of the song is unique enough that I would probably still enjoy it a lot (without lyrics) (ID08)".

Genre. The role of lyrics differs for various genres of music. This is associated with of each genre's music; "a lot of jazz music can be played without a lyricist... with jazz there's a lot you can do with just the instruments you have... in pop, you can't really have that (ID09)".

Song structure. The way lyrics are structured within a piece of music affects the role it plays on one's experience of preferred music. This includes how often lyrics are repeated, the number of words in a lyric, and their placement in a song; "there's fewer words in the chorus... I think that it makes it more striking in comparison to the verses when the lyrics blend in more (ID06)".

Exposure to lyrics. Increased exposure to lyrics can enhance or dampen the effect of lyrics in one's experience; "the more I listen to it, the more I look into the lyrics- not look into it but the more I hear it (ID07)" and "because I know this song so well, I play it all over, I don't listen to the lyrics anymore (ID01)".

Language comprehension. The understanding of the language used in lyrics affects their role in a listener's experience, associated with "Meaningful lyrics" as listeners' understanding of the lyrics contribute to what they perceive to be meaningful. In "foreign language", the listening experience depends on the parts of the lyrics that are understood; "it's like half-Korean half-English... the part that caught my attention was the English part (ID08)" and if listeners use translations to further understand them, "I look at translations (ID02)". "Literary complexity" exemplifies how some listeners engage in the literary analysis of lyrics to find a deeper meaning within them; "the metaphor of sugar (ID01)" while others prefer lyrics that are less complex and easier to follow. "Narrative element" signifies the story-telling element in lyrics, leading to "visualising narrative" in which listeners describe how this story "plays out like a scene in your head (ID10)".

Meaningful lyrics. How meaningful the lyrics are perceived to be is important in their impact on one's experience of preferred music. If meaning is not perceived, lyrics matter less; "the lyrics are really random, I actually don't even remember the lyrics... like (song title)? what are you talking about... there's not actually like anything that I can really latch onto (ID02)".

Attention on lyrics. The amount of attention placed on lyrics in a song can alter their role in one's experience of preferred music. This attention affects the emotions evoked by lyrics in a listening experience ("influence on emotional experience") and is affected by the "purpose for music listening". This sub-theme has a bidirectional relationship with "lyrics affect attention" as some lyrics attract a listener's attention, while attention placed on lyrics facilitates more attention to them in future listens; "I notice the lyrics more I feel, now I know the meaning behind them (ID03)". Conversely, inattention to lyrics stems from the act being deemed "too effortful"; "focusing on the lyrics is too much mental work (ID09)".

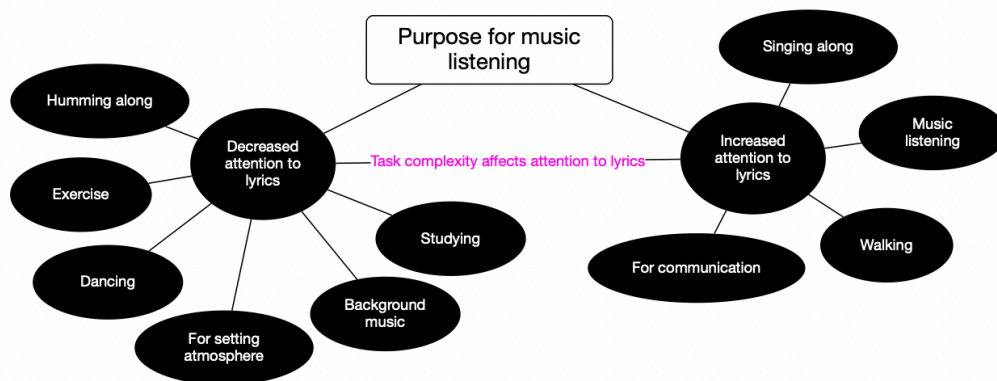


Figure 2.1. Sub-themes for Purpose for Music Listening

Purpose for music listening. Figure 2.1 demonstrates how the role of lyrics depends on why music is being played in the everyday context. This purpose determines how much attention is placed on the music and lyrics while listening. “Task complexity affects attention to lyrics” represents the trend that more complex tasks are associated with a decreased attention to lyrics; “It depends how focused I am on the music so if I’m doing tasks while listening to it or if I’m just lying in bed and just listening to the music (ID03)”.

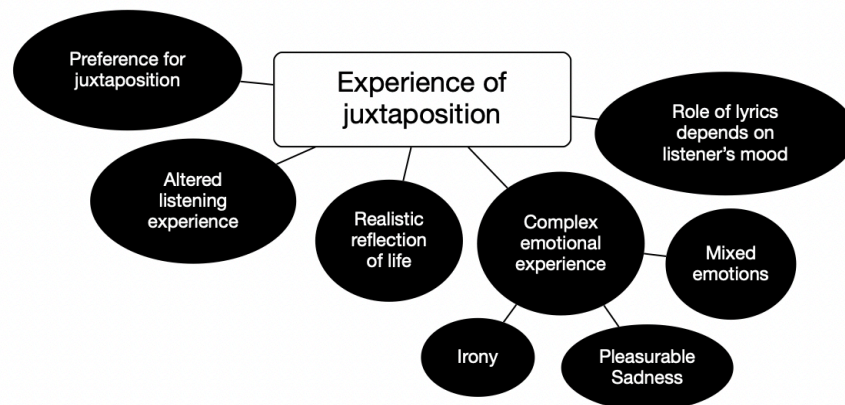


Figure 3. Sub-themes for The Experience of Happy-Sad Juxtaposition

The last theme defines the listener’s experience of the happy-sad juxtaposition in their preferred music. The sub-themes demonstrate how this juxtaposition impacts a listener’s experience and music preference and the role of lyrics on this experience.

Altered listening experience. After perceiving the juxtaposition (which often occurs only when intentionally attending to the lyrics), the listening experience of a song is altered; “I hear it in a slightly different way that’s hard to describe but I think certainly deeper and there’s more dimensions there (ID06)”.

Realistic reflection of life. The juxtaposition experienced is perceived as one that realistically reflects the nuanced nature of our experiences in life; “I feel like, that’s just life! There are moments when you’re happy and there are moments when you’re sad and you carry on and it’s just the vibes that happy-sad songs give. Like, you’re going through it, the song carries on and you’re following the beat, but the lyrics are sad but it’s just what it is, and it carries on and life is just a mixture of bittersweet moments (ID02)”.

Complex emotional experience. The juxtaposition elicits a complex and nuanced emotional experience in listeners. Some described are pleasurable sadness; “it’s like making me celebrate those sad experiences, which is why it’s bittersweet (ID08)”, irony; “Ironically, I feel like I want to dance... which is a bit ironic because as I said the lyrics are actually quite depressing (ID05)”, and mixed emotions; “it’s a mixture of happiness, sadness, nostalgia, relief, it’s quite a rollercoaster of emotions (ID07)”.

Preference for juxtaposition. A preference was found for music with this happy-sad juxtaposition; “I actually have a playlist of happy-sad songs (ID02)”.

Role of lyrics depends on listener’s mood. Lyrics affect one’s experience of the juxtaposition. Attention to the meaning of lyrics is necessary to perceive the juxtaposition and this attention depends on what listeners prefer to

perceive in their listening experience; “if you’re actively listening to the lyrics then it’s sad but you can also kind of just listen to the music and not... So, I think it definitely changes the tone of the song, the lyrics (ID03)”.

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of lyrics in a listener’s experience of their preferred music, with a specific focus on the experience of the effect of emotionally incongruent lyrics and music. Previous research had oversimplified the role of lyrics in a listening experience, perhaps a symptom of their quantitative nature. Ali and Peynircioğlu (2006) undermined this role by comparing the emotional impact of lyrics with music, using emotionally incongruent lyrics and melody to conclude that melody was more significant in the emotional experience of music. The present findings dispute this conclusion by providing a more nuanced understanding of how lyrics impact a listener’s experience of their preferred music, both generally and within emotionally incongruent lyrics and music.

The first theme “the role of lyrics in the listening experience” narrates the various roles lyrics have in the listener’s experience of preferred music, in directly impacting one’s emotional experience (“emotional experience”) and preference for the piece of music (“music preference”), and in adding another dimension to the listening experience of the music itself (“added dimension to music”). The second theme “factors influencing role of lyrics in listening experience” represents the multitude of factors identified that influences the role of lyrics in the listening experience, some involving the music itself (“complexity of music”). Together, these themes set forth that lyrics and music share a complex and interactive relationship which uniquely shapes each listener’s experience of their preferred music.

Within the first theme “the role of lyrics in the listening experience”, the sub-theme “association with memory” illustrates how lyrics affected a listener’s experience through their memory of previous listening experiences. Barradas and Sakka (2022) found that lyrics increased the brain activation of episodic memory across two cultures. This study’s findings further this association with the resulting emotional experiences of “familiarity and nostalgia” in the experience of preferred music, and how this affects the personal importance of a song to listeners (“personal importance of song”). This elucidates the intimate quality of the relationship between listeners and their preferred music, and how lyrics play a role in establishing this relationship.

Within the second theme “factors influencing role of lyrics in listening experience”, the sub-theme “purpose for music listening” elucidates how lyrics could impact a listener’s experience of their preferred music depending on the purpose for music listening. Within this, the sub-theme “task complexity affects attention to lyrics” connects “decreased attention to lyrics” and “increased attention to lyrics” together to demonstrate that the complexity of the purpose for music listening might determine the role of lyrics in a listening experience through resulting degrees of attention placed on listening. For example, the sub-theme “studying” under “decreased attention to lyrics” describes how lyrics typically do not play a significant role in one’s listening experience and would often be ignored. This might possibly be due to the task complexity of “studying” being high, thus more attention is placed on the task instead of on music listening. Bonnell et al. (2001) found that participants divided their attention between music and lyrics when listening to operatic songs, suggesting that music and lyrics are processed by independent systems. In line with this, Shih et al. (2012) observed that playing background music with lyrics as compared to music without lyrics had more significantly lowered participants’ attention and concentration levels at work. This reduction in attention might be attributed to the challenge of processing lyrics while engaging in an activity which utilises the same cognitive system. These findings clarify the more diminished role found in this study for lyrics in the listening experience of background music, especially during tasks with higher complexity which require the same cognitive resources used by lyrical processing such as “studying”. In the same light, when played in the background of tasks which do not share the same cognitive mechanisms as lyrical processing such as “walking”, more attention is placed on the lyrics (“increased attention to lyrics”) and lyrics thus would play a bigger role in one’s listening experience. It is notable that only the role of lyrics is affected in the listening experience, while the experience of the music itself does not seem to be affected by the individual’s “purpose for music listening”. This dissociation supports Bonnell et al.’s (2001) findings that music and lyrics are processed by independent systems. Therefore, the cognitive system for musical processing is mostly unaffected by an individual’s “purpose for music listening”.

The sub-theme “song structure” depicts how the role of lyrics in a listening experience is dependent on how the song is structured. This includes repetitive, striking lyrics usually in the chorus playing a larger role, while wordier lyrics usually in the verses are less noticed in one’s listening experience. Nunes et al. (2015) conducted three studies that demonstrated how repetitive lyrics, through distinct and repeated exposure, leads to a greater processing fluency in listeners. Through an analysis of data from the Billboard’s Hot 100 singles chart from

1858-2012, they also discovered that having more repetitive lyrics significantly drives a song's market success by increasing the likelihood of a song debuting in the top 40 and decreasing the time it would take it to reach #1. These findings support what was found in this study, that the structure of lyrics in a song plays a role in shaping one's listening experience, influencing listeners' intention to listen to a song and repeated listening behaviours, ultimately shaping their music preference. Future research is needed to dissect the mechanisms within this role to further understand how and to what extent this can impact a listener. This could prove useful in establishing lyrical placement and song structure as potential factors in the research area of lyrical messaging.

The third theme "experience of juxtaposition" describes the same integration effect in sad lyrics with happy music found by Mori & Iwanaga (2014) through evoking a "complex emotional experience" in participants such as the feeling of "pleasurable sadness", which was also found by Mori & Iwanaga (2014). This implies that the role of lyrics and music is equal as both interact to elicit an emotional experience that is distinct from the ones evoked separately. Emotionally incongruent lyrics and music might thus be associated with a more complex and aesthetic listening experience through this integration effect.

Several limitations exist in this study. Firstly, there was no standardised procedure when the songs were played aloud to participants. Some participants chose to read the lyrics while listening, while others made conversation over the music playing. While this was done intentionally by the interviewer to achieve the most naturalistic and comfortable environment for participants possible, this variance in the attention placed on listening to the songs might have affected the results of the study. This is especially so considering the finding of the sub-theme "purpose for music listening", which highlights how varied the role of lyrics can be in the listening experience based on how participants use, interact with, and attend to the music. This factor should be controlled for in future studies.

A naturalistic approach to this listening process was taken to maintain ecological validity. However, the study's listening context did not fully simulate the everyday listening scenario, which itself varies tremendously. Hence, the findings are not completely ecologically valid. Future studies aiming to replicate this should seek to improve on the listening context to be more representative of a typical everyday listening context for it to achieve a greater ecological validity.

The study's sample consisted of 10 Durham University undergraduates, with an age range of only 4 years. Hence, the findings in this study might not be representative of the whole population of music listeners. In order to capture a more accurate representation of the role of lyrics in a listener's experience of preferred music, a bigger sample size with a wider range of demographic characteristics should have been used. Sampling could be done more intentionally to achieve this in the future.

This study sought to understand the role of emotionally incongruent lyrics on the listening experience of preferred music. However, the results found had a lesser than intended focus on this role. This might be because of the broad scope of the study which prevented it from conducting a deeper investigation in each research aim and that the separation of the role of lyrics in the experience of this integration effect is more difficult for participants to articulate in the interviews. Further research is thus needed to investigate this and could also explore the listening experiences of other types of emotionally incongruent lyrics and music. Given Bonnell et al.'s (2001) and Shih et al.'s (2012) studies, future studies should also consider how the dissociation between our attention to and processing of lyrics and music has an impact in shaping the integration effect found in emotionally incongruent music and lyrics. For instance, paying more or less attention to sad lyrics could affect how this effect is presented to listeners.

Future research is needed to unpack the mechanisms behind the various factors found in this study and how they each influence the role of lyrics in music listening. There is a great chance that the themes are more connected with each other than found. For example, the "narrative element" in lyrics could facilitate a greater "language comprehension" and thus a greater connection to a song ("personal connection to song"). Additionally, "Background" represents a possible link between musical or literary knowledge and the role of lyrics in music listening. Therefore, future research should focus on finding these connections to elucidate a more holistic picture than what has currently been found.

In conclusion, the findings of this study challenge previous research which oversimplified the role of lyrics on the experience of music by attempting to quantify it without a focus on ecological validity. By accounting for participants' music preference, a nuanced understanding of how lyrics truly impact the everyday listening experience is provided. The study's proposed understanding of this provides a solid theoretical basis for future studies in this research area. Further research should be conducted to deepen this understanding. Moreover, qualitative evidence of an integration effect between emotionally incongruent music and lyrics highlights the

interactive nature of their relationship, shedding light on how complex emotions are elicited by songs with such incongruence. These findings offer a thorough and nuanced perspective on lyrics in music listening, paving the way for more ecologically valid and accurate representations in future research.

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APPENDIX A

List of interview questions (Part 1):

*For interviewer: note the name and artist of song presented

- 1) Why did this piece of music come to mind/Why do you generally like to listen to this song?
- 2) What part of the music speaks to you the most? Why?
- 3) What emotions did you feel while listening?
- 4) Which parts of the music brought out those emotions for you? Why?
- 5) What did you notice more, the music or the lyrics? Why?
- 6) What's more important to you, the lyrics, or the melody in this piece of music? Why?
- 7) How do you think your listening experience would change if the music did not have lyrics in it?
- 8) What are your general opinions on the role of lyrics in music?
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to add?

List of interview questions (Part 2):

*For interviewer: note the name and artist of song presented

- 1) Why did this piece of music come to mind/Why do you generally like to listen to this song?
- 2) What part of the music speaks to you the most? Why?

- 3) What emotions did you feel while listening?
- 4) Which parts of the music brought out those emotions for you? Why?
- 5) What did you notice more, the music or the lyrics? Why?
- 6) What's more important to you, the lyrics, or the melody in this piece of music? Why?
- 7) How do you think your listening experience would change if the music did not have lyrics in it?
- 8) What other types of music do you prefer to listen to? Why those?
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

Table 1. List of songs for part 1

Song Title	Zucker	Grapejuice	Judas	Dandelions	Little bit of love	The Sign	Maneater	Dive	Love is the way	Burn one
Artist Name	TYM	Harry Styles	Lady Gaga	Ruth b	Tom Grennan	Lizzo	Nelly Furtado	Victoria Monet	Thee sacred souls	RADA

Table 2. List of songs for part 2

Song Title	Sommer*	That's just how it goes	Dying on the inside	Miss you	Where are you now	Daylight	Teeth	What do I call you	Supalonely	Hu Man*
Artist Name	Bonez MC	rolemodel	Nessa Barrett	Oliver Tree	Justin Bieber, Diplo, Skrillex	Harry Styles	5 Seconds of Summer	Taeyeon	BENEE	Greentea peng

*Note. *happy-sad juxtaposition not present*