

# THE GRAMMAR OF DISSENT

## Green Day's evolving critique of American society

STEFANIA M. MACI, SILVIA BERTULEZZI<sup>1</sup>  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BERGAMO

**Abstract** – This research explores the intersection of music, language, and social critique through a linguistic analysis of the American punk rock band Green Day. While music and lyrics are powerful tools for expressing cultural and political ideologies, the punk rock genre is particularly notable for its historically anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian themes. As one of the most commercially successful punk bands, Green Day has brought this tradition of dissent to a mainstream audience, crafting lyrics that capture the anxieties and frustrations of American society. This paper utilises Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as methodological frameworks to examine the evolution of Green Day's social commentary throughout their discography. By analysing the thematic focus, rhetorical strategies, and linguistic choices in their lyrics—from their early work in the late 20th century to their more recent releases—this study traces how the band's critique of American society has shifted and adapted over time. The analysis aims to reveal how a popular music artist can both reflect and shape broader socio-political discourses, offering insights into the dynamic relationship between popular culture, language, and ideology.

**Keywords:** corpus linguistics; critical discourse analysis; social critique; punk rock; Green Day.

## 1. Introduction

Music and language are fundamentally interconnected in human cognition and social practice (Kegerreis 2019; Rieb 2018). Both operate as structured semiotic systems capable of expressing emotion, narrating experience, and shaping perceptions of the world (Ulfha *et al.* 2023). Song lyrics, in particular, are a rich form of discourse and intentional linguistic constructs that participate in the production and circulation of ideologies, social critique, and cultural identity (Fathoni *et al.* 2023; Susanti 2016; Visser 2023). Consequently, the analysis of lyrics is of great interest to the field of applied

<sup>1</sup> This paper was conceived and written jointly by the two authors. The individual contributions are identified as follows: Stefania M. Maci wrote Sections 1 (Introduction), 2 (Literature review), 4.1 (CL Analysis) and 5 (Conclusions). Silvia Bertulezzi wrote Section 3 (Methodology), under the supervision of Stefania M. Maci; Section 4.2 (Sentiment analysis) was conceived by Silvia Bertulezzi and jointly written by both authors.

linguistics, as it illuminates how language functions in cultural artifacts that are both widely consumed and emotionally resonant (Flowerdew, Richardson 2017).

A musical genre that offers fertile ground for this type of inquiry is punk rock. Since its emergence in the mid-1970s, punk has functioned as an oppositional cultural force, expressing dissatisfaction with dominant political and economic systems (Adamson 2018; Ambrosch 2018). Its lyrical content often foregrounds anti-establishment themes, articulating anger, alienation, and a rejection of social conformity through an abrasive, direct style (Anttonen 2017; Tupot 2024). As observed by Regev (2007), the embeddedness of punk within national and global cultural politics renders it a significant site for understanding the interplay between popular music and ideology.

Among contemporary punk bands, Green Day has played a particularly influential role in translating punk's rebellious ethos to a mass audience. Green Day is an American rock band formed in Rodeo, California, in 1987, by Billie Joe Armstrong and Mike Dirnt. Their album *Dookie*, which is credited with reviving punk music, brought them widespread recognition in the mid-1990s. The group is well-known for its upbeat live performances and socially orientated songs. While maintaining a commercially accessible sound, the band has consistently used lyrics to critique American political life, corporate power, war, and generational malaise (Chen 2023; Greer *et al.* 2025). Their discography, spanning over three decades, offers a rich corpus for examining the evolution of musical dissent in the context of shifting sociopolitical landscapes.

One of the most effective approaches to studying punk rock lyrics is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially when coupled with Corpus Linguistics (CL). This integrated methodology enables researchers to systematically examine linguistic patterns in large bodies of text while critically interpreting how these patterns relate to structures of power, ideology, and resistance (Alconada 2022; Bonsu 2025). Unlike purely structural analyses, CDA situates linguistic choices within broader sociopolitical contexts, attending to how meaning is produced, legitimized, or contested through language (Shea *et al.* 2024; Wilcox 2022).

This research will conduct a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of Green Day's criticism of American society to see the extent to which, if any, it has changed over time, using the 2004 album *American Idiot* as a pivotal reference point. Rather than surveying the entire discography evenly, the analysis is structured to explore the band's lyrical content before and after *American Idiot*, treating the album as a cultural and political watershed. Through this comparative approach, the research seeks to illuminate how the band's discursive strategies evolved in response to transformations in U.S. society, especially in the context of post-9/11 politics, the Iraq War, and the

increasing commodification of punk sensibilities. By situating *American Idiot* within a broader timeline of Green Day's work, this paper offers a nuanced understanding of how punk rock music both reflects and reshapes public discourse.

Accordingly, this study is structured as follows: after the present *Introduction* and the *Literature Review* in Section 2, the methodological framework is outlined in Section 3. The analysis and interpretation of the data are presented in Section 4, while the main findings and their implications are discussed in the *Conclusions* (Section 5).

## 2. Literature Review

Research across disciplines has explored the cognitive, cultural, and communicative parallels between language and music. As early as the 1960s, scholars examined how music creates meaning through patterns of social expectations (Meyer 1961). Lomax (1978) argued that musical form reflects broader cultural and cognitive structures, suggesting a deep-rooted connection between expressive systems and the societies that produce them. Building on this foundation, Patel and Patel (2010) argue that both the language and music domains share hierarchical, temporal, and syntactic structures, making them equally potent in expressing ideology and identity. Not only is popular music a 'semiotic resource' through which language, sound, and visuals interact to construct social meaning (Machin, van Leeuwen 2016), but also its musical structures and lyrics co-construct meaning, especially within genres that foreground cultural resistance such as punk, hip hop, or protest folk (Machin 2010; Tagg 2012). Within this paradigm, song lyrics become tools for encoding ideologies and challenging dominant discourses. This process is especially evident in genres like punk, where the sonic texture and lyric linguistic style do not merely reflect who we are (Hall and du Gay 1996) but rather serve as powerful tools for expressing marginality, dissent, and subcultural belonging. In this way, musical texts function not just as vehicles of artistic expression but as ideological sites where identities are claimed, contested, and mediated, through specific textual and performative strategies, including lexical choices, narrative stance, and intertextual reference (Moore 2002).

From its inception, punk rock has been analysed as a discursive rebellion against hegemonic structures but also as a semiotic disturbance, where language, fashion, and music coalesced into symbolic resistance (Hebdige 1979), whose linguistic performance constructs authenticity and political stance (Bennett 2001; Tupot 2024). Within punk, the raw, direct language often found in lyrics works to authenticate the speaker's position and to challenge dominant social narratives. Punk lyrics are specifically a

performative dissent genre, which highlights how linguistic defiance becomes a marker of subcultural legitimacy (Ambrosch 2018).

These frameworks are central to the analysis of the punk band Green Day's lyrical and discursive evolution, before and after their successful album *American Idiot*. Green Day remains a focal point in debates on authenticity vs. commodification in punk, given that the band has evolved from subcultural rage into mainstream critique by utilising strategic and accessible linguistic structures to broaden political messages without abandoning punk's core ethos (Ensminger 2011). By combining narrative with intertextual references to war, media, and surveillance, Green Day recontextualizes punk tropes (e.g., marginalization, institutional distrust) within a post-9/11 political landscape (Quail 2021) and constructs a mass-mediated dissent that maintains updated cultural and social relevance (De Loera 2024).

The identification of political and societal messages in punk rock lyrics can be realised through a CDA- and CL-based analysis. While CDA provides the theoretical foundation (Fairclough 1995, 2014), Corpus Linguistics (CL) offers replicable tools, detecting patterns of lexical and grammatical usage across datasets. Baker (2023) claims that corpus tools allow for a bottom-up discovery of ideology through quantitative analysis, an approach increasingly used in song lyric research (Motschenbacher 2016; Muhammad *et al.* 2022). In addition, Partington *et al.* (2013) further explain how corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) can uncover evaluative clusters (e.g., words of anger, dissent, or satire) that carry ideological weight in music. In punk and protest genres, these tools help trace how resistance is linguistically framed over time. Together, CDA and CL not only expose how Green Day crafts dissent through language but also demonstrate the band's role in shaping and sustaining a linguistically mediated politics of resistance in popular culture.

### 3. Methodology

To investigate changes in Green Day's lyrical discourse over time, we selected some of their albums and compiled three distinct corpora reflecting the pre-, during-, and post-*American Idiot* periods. *American Idiot* (2004) is central to Green Day's career and delineates a *before* and an *after* because not only does it mark a critical and commercial turning point for the band, but also signals a deepening of the band's engagement with political discourse and social critique.

The albums selected for the pre- and post-*American Idiot* periods have been based on commercial relevance, as measured by aggregated streaming

and sales data from Kwordb.net,<sup>2</sup> a centralized platform for music chart statistics. Accordingly, three corpora have been constructed to reflect three distinct phases of the band's artistic and political trajectory: the *Pre-American Idiot* (PrAI) corpus, the *American Idiot* (AI) corpus, and the *Post-American Idiot* (PoAI) corpus.

The PrAI corpus includes two of Green Day's most influential early albums: *Dookie* (1994) and *Nimrod* (1997). The album *Dookie* (1994) consists of 14 songs<sup>3</sup> and is widely regarded as Green Day's mainstream breakthrough, characterized by themes of disaffection, alienation, and suburban boredom, delivered through concise, emotionally raw lyrics. The album *Nimrod* (1997) comprises 18 songs<sup>4</sup> and exhibits a broader stylistic and thematic range than its predecessor, incorporating elements of experimentation while retaining Green Day's trademark irreverence and cynicism. Together, the PrAI corpus spans a total of 32 songs (1,031 types; 6,521 tokens), offering a linguistic snapshot of the band's formative years.

At the centre of this study lies *American Idiot* (2004), which serves as the critical turning point in the band's sociopolitical discourse. This concept album, often described as a punk rock opera, contains 9 songs<sup>5</sup> (807 types; 3,973 tokens). This album is explicitly political, offering a sustained critique of American consumerism, media culture, and foreign policy in the early 2000s. Its centrality in the corpus reflects both its thematic density and its pivotal role in shaping the band's subsequent ideological orientation.

The PoAI corpus encompasses Green Day's later work following the political and stylistic turning point marked by *American Idiot*. This corpus includes two albums: *21st Century Breakdown* (2009) and *Revolution Radio* (2016). *21st Century Breakdown* contributes with 18 songs,<sup>6</sup> and builds upon the rock-opera structure introduced in *American Idiot*, presenting a wide-

<sup>2</sup> Kwordb.net is a website that aggregates and tracks music data, providing charts for various platforms like iTunes, Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube (available at [Kwordb.net](http://Kwordb.net))

<sup>3</sup> The songs of the album *Dookie* are *Burnout*; *Having a Blast*; *Chump*; *Longview*; *Welcome to Paradise*; *Pulling Teeth*; *Basket Case*; *She*; *Sassafras Roots*; *When I Come Around*; *Coming Clean*; *Eminius Sleepus*; *In the End*; *F.O.D.*

<sup>4</sup> The songs included in *Nimrod* are *Nice Guys Finish Last*; *Hitchin' a Ride*; *The Grouch*; *Redundant*; *Scattered*; *All the Time*; *Worry Rock*; *Platypus (I Hate You)*; *Uptight*; *Last Ride In*; *Jinx*; *Haushinka*; *Walking Alone*; *Reject*; *Take Back*; *King for a Day*; *Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)*; *Prosthetic Head*; *All By Myself* (hidden track).

<sup>5</sup> The songs included in *American Idiot* are: *American Idiot*; *Jesus of Suburbia*; *Holiday*; *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*; *Are We the Waiting*; *St. Jimmy*; *Give Me Novacaine*; *She's a Rebel*; *Extraordinary Girl*; *Letterbomb*; *Wake Me Up When September Ends*; *Homecoming*; *Whatsername*.

<sup>6</sup> The album includes the following songs: *Song of the Century*; *21st Century Breakdown*; *Know Your Enemy*; *¡Viva la Gloria!*; *Before the Lobotomy*; *Christian's Inferno*; *Last Night on Earth*; *East Jesus Nowhere*; *Peacemaker*; *Last of the American Girls*; *Murder City*; *¿Viva la Gloria? (Little Girl)*; *Restless Heart Syndrome*; *Horseshoes and Handgrenades*; *The Static Age*; *21 Guns*; *American Eulogy (A. Mass Hysteria, B. Modern World)*; *See the Light*.

ranging critique of contemporary American life through its narrative arc and varied personas. *Revolution Radio* contains 12 songs<sup>7</sup> and offers a grounded and urgent reflection on violence, media saturation, and social anxiety in 21st-century America. Together, these two albums provide a comprehensive view of the band's continued engagement with themes of personal identity, political frustration, and cultural resistance in the aftermath of their mainstream reinvention. Overall, the corpus consists of 30 songs (1,333 types, 7,798 tokens). A breakdown of the three corpora can be seen in Table 1:

| Corpus                            | Types | Tokens | TTR  |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|------|
| Pre <i>American Idiot</i> (PrAI)  | 1,031 | 6,521  | 0.16 |
| <i>American Idiot</i> (AI)        | 807   | 3,973  | 0.20 |
| Post <i>American Idiot</i> (PoAI) | 1,333 | 7,798  | 0.17 |

Table 1  
Corpora breakdown.

All the lyrics forming our three corpora were sourced from publicly available online platforms, initially copied from Google results and then verified through physical CD booklets, where available, and Genius.com,<sup>8</sup> a curated and community-annotated lyrics database.

To prepare the data for sentiment analysis, three separate `.txt` files were compiled and manually reviewed to ensure transcription accuracy. Following this quality check, the texts underwent a standard pre-processing phase using the *spaCy*<sup>9</sup> natural language processing library in Python.<sup>10</sup> Pre-processing involved several standard steps aimed at minimising orthographic variation and optimising the data for computational analysis. For this reason, all texts were converted to lowercase to ensure case-insensitive comparisons, punctuation was removed to reduce noise,<sup>11</sup> and the texts were tokenised.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The songs of the album *Revolution Radio* are: *Somewhere Now*; *Bang Bang*; *Revolution Radio*; *Say Goodbye*; *Outlaws*; *Bouncing Off the Wall*; *Still Breathing*; *Youngblood*; *Too Dumb to Die*; *Troubled Times*; *Forever Now*; *Ordinary World*.

<sup>8</sup> Genius.com is the world's biggest music encyclopaedia with a community of more than two million contributors where to discuss and deconstruct all aspects in music (available at: [genius.com](https://genius.com)).

<sup>9</sup> *SpaCy* is an open-source library for advanced natural language processing in Python, designed specifically for efficiency and industrial-level NLP tasks (available at: <https://spacy.io>).

<sup>10</sup> Python is an open source high-level programming language with dynamic semantics (available at <https://www.python.org/>).

<sup>11</sup> Noise is unstructured, meaningless data produced in the batch process of data collection that is responsible for errors in the linguistic analysis (Wang *et al.* 1995; Wright 2024).

<sup>12</sup> In Natural Language Processing, tokenization is the process of breaking down text into smaller units called tokens, making it easier for computers to process (<https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/tokenization>).

Function words<sup>13</sup> were retained due to their relevance in the lyrical and rhetorical structure—particularly personal pronouns and auxiliary verbs, which are often semantically loaded in musical texts and contribute significantly to the expressive and evaluative dimensions of lyrics (Sufah 2024). These procedures are widely adopted in corpus-based sentiment analysis, as they help standardise input data and improve the robustness of subsequent lexical and semantic evaluations.

We uploaded the corpora into CorpusSense<sup>14</sup> to identify recurring lexical patterns; for this purpose, we generated word frequency lists for each corpus and focused on the top 20 most frequent words. While raw frequency alone does not guarantee semantic salience or discourse significance (Stubbs 2001), it served as an initial heuristic for identifying potentially dominant themes. Building on this, we extracted keywords and key terms<sup>15</sup> and compared the results across the three corpora to capture corpus-specific lexico-semantic features, shedding light on what distinguishes one Green Day's phase from the others in terms of discourse construction and thematic emphasis. Keywords were further examined through concordance analysis to explore their function in immediate context (co-text) and broader socio-discursive context. This step facilitated a CDA-informed reading, assessing how the lyrics construct meaning and critique. This approach enabled us to identify both specific patterns common to all three corpora and, if present, diachronic shifts in style specific to each corpus, offering a richer and more nuanced account of lexical salience and thematic evolution over time.

As the wordlist thus created raised the awareness of the extremely frequent recurrence of negative forms, particularly modal and auxiliary negation such as *don't*, *can't*, and *not*, we decided to carry out a more targeted investigation into the emotional and attitudinal tone of the lyrics through sentiment analysis. Conducted using *R*,<sup>16</sup> sentiment analysis allowed

<sup>13</sup> Function words are words that have no independent meaning. They are used to establish relations between the different parts of speech in sentences (cf. Freeborn 1995).

<sup>14</sup> CorpusSense is an open access software used for corpus query and analysis designed for the exploration of large language datasets through a combination of statistical and linguistic techniques using Python (Moreno-Ortiz 2024b). The range of functionalities offered by CorpusSense facilitates both quantitative and qualitative textual analysis, including the generation of frequency lists, keyword extraction, collocations, colligations and semantic analysis (available at: <https://corpus-sense.uma.es/>).

<sup>15</sup> As aptly claimed by Moreno-Ortiz (2024a), the notion of *keywords* as unusually frequent words statistically computed against a reference corpus (cf. Baker 2023) creates some problems given that keyword extraction depends on the type of the reference corpus selected by the researcher. For this reason, Corpus Sense adopts an advanced topic model, such as BERTtopic, which is “capable of automatically distilling the relevant themes of a corpus, rank them by relevance, and list the keywords associated with each topic” (Moreno-Ortiz 2024a, p. 183).

<sup>16</sup> *R* is an open access software environment for statistical computing, well-suited for text mining and natural language processing (available at: <https://www.r-project.org/>).

us to move beyond surface lexical patterns and assess the evaluative polarity embedded in the lyrics across albums. In this way, sentiment analysis served as a triangulation method to capture affective trends and shifts that would not have emerged from structural frequency-based techniques alone.

Each corpus was segmented into units of four lines, approximating the average stanza length in song lyrics, to allow for manageable and contextually coherent sentiment units. Sentiment scores were computed using multiple tools to allow for comparative interpretation and methodological triangulation. First, the *Afinn lexicon* (Rinker 2021),<sup>17</sup> which assigns polarity scores on a scale from -5 (strongly negative) to +5 (strongly positive), was employed to capture sentiment strength in a straightforward and computationally efficient manner. This was complemented with the *sentimentr* package<sup>18</sup> (Rinker 2021), which calculates sentiment at the sentence level and integrates contextual valence modification (e.g., negation, intensifiers, adversative structures). This allowed for a more nuanced assessment of evaluative tone, particularly in lyrics where affective expression is shaped by subtle grammatical cues.

The combination of a basic polarity model and a more context-sensitive metric provided a basis for evaluating not just the emotional direction but also the complexity and intensity of sentiment across albums. This layered methodological approach, integrating frequency-based, sentiment-based, and discourse-analytic techniques, offers a multi-dimensional perspective on how Green Day's lyrics evolve over time. The use of computational tools such as *spaCy*, *CorpusSense* and *R* enables large-scale data processing, while qualitative interpretation anchors these findings in broader ideological and stylistic developments. In doing so, the analysis captures both macro-level patterns and micro-level textual strategies in the band's shifting critique of American society.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1. CL Analysis

#### 4.1.1. The PrAI corpus

The list of keyword expressions of the PrAI corpus and extracted with *CorpusSense* can be seen in the cloud form in Figure 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Afinn lexicon* is a sentiment analysis resource developed by Nielsen (2011) that assigns numerical valence scores to individual words to indicate their emotional orientation.

<sup>18</sup> The *sentimentr* package is a library for R designed to perform sentiment analysis with greater sensitivity to linguistic context than simple polarity dictionaries.





*September* can symbolically be read as referring to the social context of the time. *American Idiot* was composed during the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack, which resulted in the *war on terror*, spanning into multiple wars, including the Iraq War (2003-2011). The term, therefore, metonymically functions as trauma as well as temporal transition, as indicated by the use of the temporal deixis (“summer has passed”) and natural imagery (“rain”), which seems to encode melancholy:

(3) Here comes the rain again  
 Falling from the stars  
 Drenched in my pain again  
 Becoming who we are  
 As my memory rests  
 But never forgets what I lost  
 Wake me up when September ends

It seems, therefore a mourning elegy encapsulating the emotional landscape of the 9/11 aftermath in an introspective counterpoint, as clearly revealed in the band's official video of the song (Green Day 2009).

*A rebel*, particularly found in the song *She's a Rebel* and, as a noun, juxtaposed with “saint”, “vigilante”, and “dangerous”, is thematically associated with the idea of opposition defiance and identity:

(4) She sings the revolution  
 The dawning of our lives  
 She brings this liberation  
 That I just can't define  
 Well, nothin' comes to mind

The keyword *suburbia*, seems the leitmotiv in the album *American Idiot*, and constructs the protagonist, Jesus of Suburbia, as the product of cultural emptiness and consumerist monotony as can be seen in the song *Jesus of Suburbia*:

(5) I'm the son of rage and love  
 The Jesus of Suburbia  
 The bible of “none of the above”  
 On a steady diet of  
 Soda pop and Ritalin

In this sense, it seems to metonymically represent the American middle-class experience considered by the band as emotionally sterile, political apathetic and spiritual vacant.



and is consistently associated with images of romantic misfits, emotional fugitives, and nonconformist identities, as can be seen in excerpt (7) taken from *Outlaws*.

(7) First love  
First forgiveness  
We were delinquents  
Freaks of a fading memory

*Outlaws*

Unlike traditional formulations of deviance or rebellion, the term *outlaws* here assumes a nostalgic and almost redemptive quality. Linguistically, the term denotes marginality but is stripped of violent or threatening connotations, instead of evoking intimacy and vulnerability. Its semantic field includes affective states such as longing and loss, positioning the outlaw as a figure of existential resistance rather than ideological confrontation. As such, it seems to propose the band's generational shift who no longer shout in anger (as in *American idiot*) but sing in longing for meaning and connection, as seen in excerpt (8), where the youthful rebellion (*Outlaws, when we were forever young / When we were outlaws / We're outlaws of redemption, baby*):

(8) I've got no supervision  
Nothin' will change my spirit's place to roam  
I'll plead my innocence, I'll plead my innocence  
But that's my best defense when you are young  
Outlaws, when we were forever young  
When we were outlaws  
We're outlaws of redemption, baby  
Hooligans, we destroyed suburbia  
When we were outlaws  
We're outlaws of forever

The final keyword, *troubled times*, appears prominently in the track *Troubled Times* and functions as a temporal and thematic anchoring the band's reflection within a post-truth, post-hope global context:

(9) What good is love and peace on Earth  
When it's exclusive?  
In these troubled times, I feel alone  
Where's the truth in the written word  
If no one reads it?

As a collocation, the phrase is highly conventional and resonates with both media discourse and public rhetoric concerning crisis (as seen in excerpt (9) above or in the line *What part of history we've learned / When it's*

*repeated?*). However, its use in the Green Day corpus acquires a more introspective dimension. Rather than framing political events or collective unrest in concrete terms, *troubled times* is employed to index emotional isolation, uncertainty, and despair:

(10) That good is love and peace on Earth  
When it's exclusive?  
Where's the truth in the written word  
If no one reads it?

A new day dawning  
Comes without warning  
So don't think twice

We live in troubled times (Ah-ah, ah-ah)  
We live in troubled times (Ah-ah, ah-ah)

As can be seen in excerpts (9) and (10), the expression is often embedded within declaratives that reinforce a tone of helplessness or emotional fatigue, serving less as a critique of external conditions and more as a lament.

## 4.2. Sentiment analysis

### 4.2.1. The PreAI corpus

The visualisations below present the sentiment analysis results for the *Pre-American Idiot* corpus, using both the *Afinn* lexicon and the *sentimentr* package (Figure 4). The plot displays sentiment scores calculated with *Afinn*, showing a general skew toward negative values. Two clusters of pronounced negativity are particularly notable. The first, located just before index 200, corresponds to a section of lyrics that articulate disillusionment with societal norms and the loss of youthful ideals, reflecting anger toward a world perceived as corruptive and dehumanising:

(11) Everyone's so full of shit  
Born and raised by hypocrites  
Hearts recycled, but never saved  
From the cradle to the grave  
We are the kids of war and peace  
From Anaheim to the Middle East  
We are the stories and disciples of  
The Jesus of Suburbia

The second and more extreme peak occurs just after index 250 and is attributable to *Platypus (I Hate You)* from *Nimrod*, a song marked by overt aggression and profane, explicitly hateful language, which is reflected in its

sharp negative sentiment score.

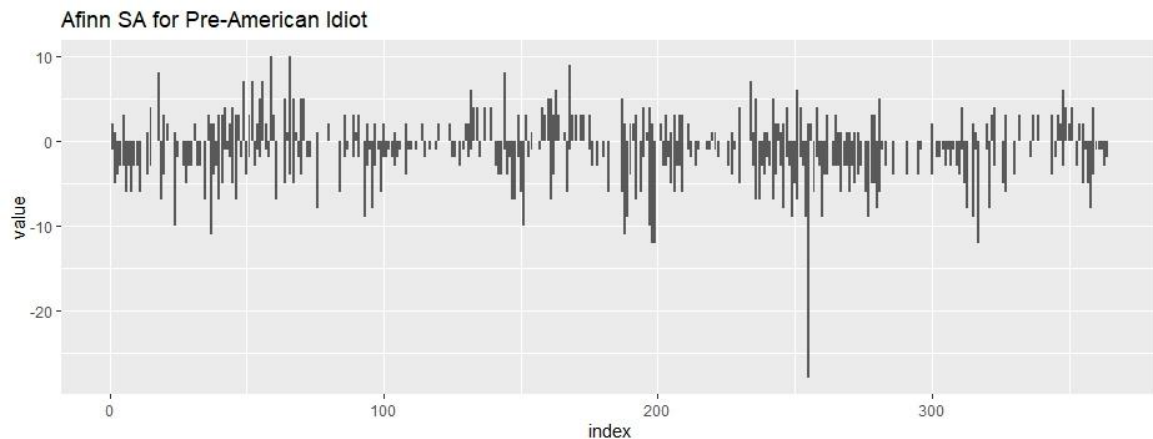


Figure 4

*Afinn* sentiment analysis of the Prai corpus. Negative score -882. Positive score +440.

Despite the general negative sentiment emerging from the *Afinn* analysis, several positive peaks in the positive range (+5 to +10) appear, particularly in the first half and middle section of the plot, notably between indices 50 and 120. However, a closer inspection reveals that these are false positives, as they occur in contexts where positively connoted terms are semantically or pragmatically negated by their co-text. The first instance of this phenomenon appears at index 15-18, corresponding to *Having a Blast*. Here, expressions such as (emphasis added) “I don’t *care*,” “*kiss* yourself goodbye,” and “I’m losing all *happiness*” contain terms such as “care,” “kiss,” and “happiness,” which are typically associated with positive affect. Nevertheless, these terms are clearly embedded in a pessimistic and detached discourse, thereby subverting presumed positivity. A second example appears in *Welcome to Paradise* (indices 52-60). Again, while certain lexical items may trigger positive sentiment analysis, their discursive framing is distinctively sarcastic and critical. The refrain “Some call it slums, some call it *nice* / I want to take you through a wasteland, I like to call my *home* / Welcome to *paradise*” highlights the contrast between superficial positivity (*nice*) and the reality of the urban decay (*slums*, *wasteland*), rendering positive evaluation hollow. A third peak, around indices 64-66, aligns with *Pulling Teeth*. Although positive terms are present (*love*, *takes good care of me*), they follow a sequence of lines depicting an abusive relationship (*Is she ultra-violent? Is she disturbed?*). In this case, the sentiment score fails to account for the darkly sarcastic tone and the disturbing context of abusiveness, yielding to a false positive (emphasis added):

(12) Is she ultra-violent? Is she disturbed?  
I *better* tell her that I *love* her  
Before she does it all over again

Oh *God*, she's killing me!  
 For now, I'll lie around  
 Hell, that's all I can really do  
 She takes *good care* of me  
 Just keep saying my *love* is true

Another positive peak appears at index 144 in the track *Fuck Off And Die*. This peak is triggered by the term *fun*, which in context is not genuinely celebratory. The lyrics *When it's all said and done, it's real and it's been fun / But was it all real fun?* suggest a disenchanted, sarcastic use of “fun” that masks deeper feelings of disillusionment and misanthropy. A similar irony emerges later in the same song (indices 158–175), where the adjective *wonderful* in “*wonderful times*” is likewise to be interpreted sarcastically.

A particularly complex case occurs around indices 161–162, corresponding to the song *Nice Guys Finish Last*. The sentiment spike here is likely driven by the presence of lexical items such as *nice*, *sympathy*, *best*, *happy*, *joke*, and *funny*. However, these terms are embedded in a text that critiques the very values they represent. The song reflects a worldview in which kindness and vulnerability are not rewarded but penalised, and where emotional expression is treated with irony. The positive lexis is immediately undermined by the presence of terms like *worst*, *piss*, *pressure*, *insane*, *outcast*, and by metaphorical representations that evoke degradation and despair—e.g., *Do you feel washed up like piss going down the drain?* or *Don't pat yourself on the back / You might break your spine*. The passage articulates an ironic reflection on failure, alienation, and disaffection (emphasis added):

(13) *Nice* guys finish last  
 You're running out of gas  
 Your *sympathy* will get you left behind  
 Sometimes you're at your *best*  
 When you feel the worst  
 Do you feel washed up like piss going down the drain?  
Pressure cooker, pick my brain and tell me I'm insane  
 I'm so fucking *happy* I could cry  
 Every *joke* can have its truth, but now the *joke's* on you  
 I never knew you were such a *funny* guy  
 Oh, *nice* guys finish last  
 When you are the outcast  
 Don't pat yourself on the back  
 You might break your spine

The plot, generated with *sentimentr* (Figure 5), offers sentence-level sentiment scores and provides a more granular view of attitudinal polarity, with blue dots indicating positivity and red ones indicating negativity. Again, a general leaning toward negative sentiment is observable, with a dense

cluster of red and dark orange points below the zero line. The distribution corroborates the earlier *Afinn*-based findings but enhances interpretability by accounting for valence shifters and contextual nuance. While positive sentiment seems to be present, we have seen that it is a negation of positive sentiment, suggesting that the Green Day's early lyrical phase is characterised by a predominance of negative affective stance, particularly themes of anger, frustration, and alienation.

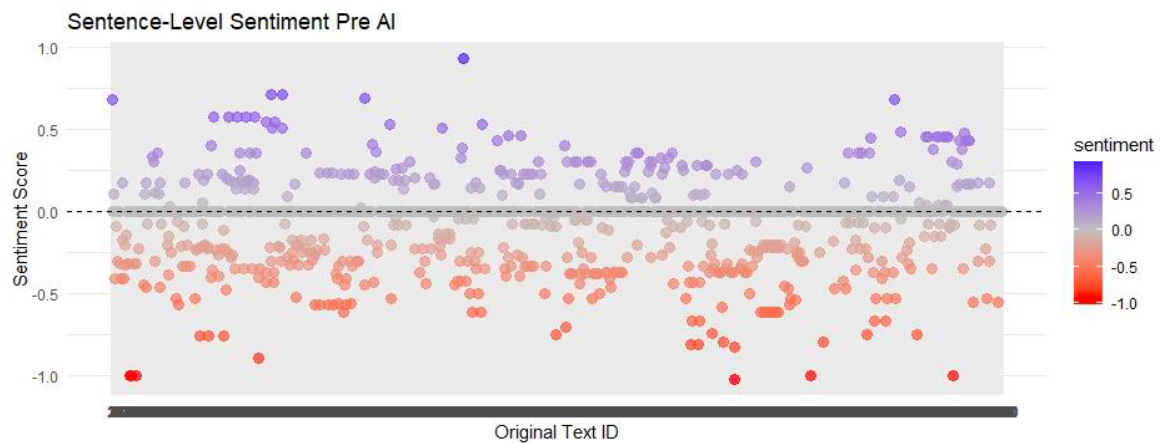


Figure 5  
sentimentr analysis of the PrAI corpus.

#### 4.2.2. The AI Corpus

The sentiment analysis for the *American Idiot* corpus reveals a continued tendency toward negative affect, particularly in the album's opening sections (Figure 6).

As shown in both the *Afinn*-based bar plot and the sentence-level visualisation from the *sentimentr* package (Figure 7 below), dense clusters of negative sentiment are especially prominent in the first third of the album. This aligns with the album's well-documented purpose: a politically charged commentary on early-2000s America, composed in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the Iraq War.

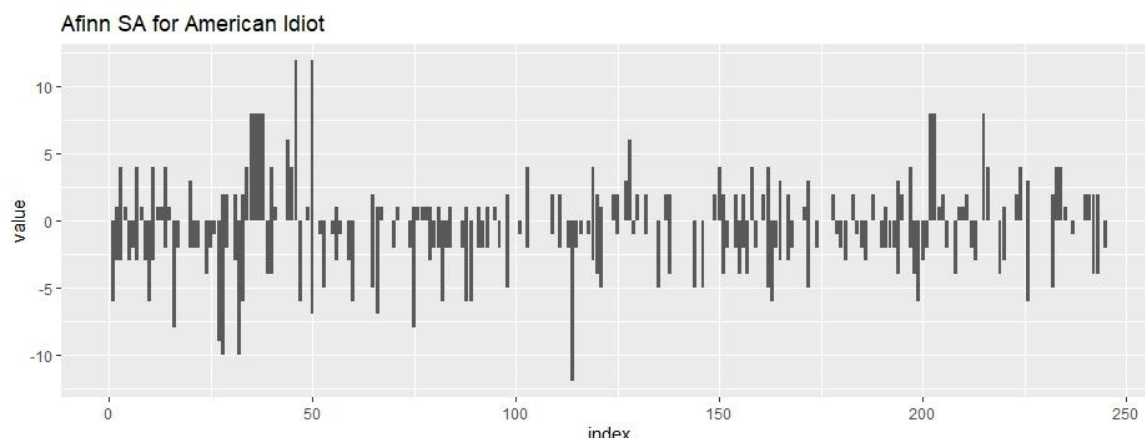


Figure 6.

*Afinn* sentiment analysis of the AI corpus. Negative score -393. Positive score +275.

The lexical choices, frequently characterised by anger, disillusionment, and social critique, carry an inherently negative valence, reflecting the ideological framing of the album as a punk-inflected dissent.

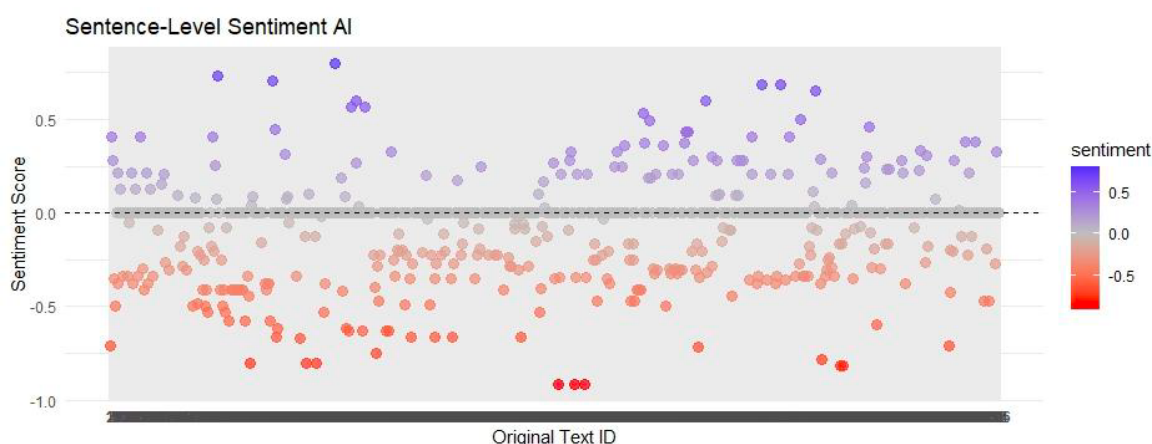


Figure 7

*sentimentr* analysis of the AI corpus.

A notable cluster of positive values appears shortly after the initial negative segments in the *Afinn* plot. However, this apparent positive shift is not confirmed in the *sentimentr* output. Upon closer inspection of the corresponding lyrics, it becomes evident that this is a false positive introduced by the *Afinn* lexicon: the word *care*, typically tagged as positive, appears in negated constructions, as in “don’t care”, which *Afinn* fails to register as negative due to its context-agnostic design. A similar discrepancy can be observed just after the 200-index mark, further reinforcing the need for context-sensitive approaches in affective textual analysis.

The most pronounced dip in sentiment occurs around index 115,

corresponding to the introduction of *St. Jimmy*, a key narrative figure in the album's punk-opera structure. This character's entry is marked by overtly aggressive and nihilistic language, which registers clearly as strongly negative across both sentiment models, highlighting the tonal shift and intensification of emotional volatility at this point in the album.

#### 4.2.3. *The PoAI Corpus*

The sentiment analysis of the *Post-American Idiot* corpus reveals a shift in emotional expression when compared to the earlier lyrical phases of *Dookie*, *Nimrod*, and *American Idiot*.

As observed in both the *Afinn*-based bar plot and the sentence-level output from *sentimentr* (Figures 8 and 9), the overall sentiment appears to gravitate more consistently toward neutrality, with many values clustering around the zero line and fewer instances of extreme polarity.

The most prominent positive peak in the *Afinn* graph (Figure 8), which can also be observed in the *sentimentr* graph (Figure 9), immediately draws attention, but upon closer inspection, it reveals a false positive. The lyrics associated with this spike consist of a transcribed laughter found in *Christian's Inferno*, which the *Afinn* lexicon interprets as strongly positive.

Positioned immediately after the first stanza, the laughter acts as a disturbing emotional shift. Far from expressing amusement, it conveys a manic, deranged tone, that erupts when reality collapses into absurdity. The laughter therefore exemplifies affective dissonance, functioning as a semiotic trace of despair, a maniacal response to a disintegrating world order. Trapped in a "modern Hell," the singer feels violently rejected and overwhelmed. Images like "bitter pill... chased in blood" and "fire in my veins" express inner chaos, suggesting trauma, anger, and existential despair:

(14) I got under the grip between this modern Hell  
 I got the rejection letter in the mail and it was already ripped to shreds  
 Seasons in ruin and this bitter pill is chased in blood  
 There's fire in my veins and it's pouring out like a flood  
 Woah-oh, Christian's inferno  
 Woah-oh, Christian's inferno  
 Woah-oh, Christian's inferno  
 Woah-oh, Christian's inferno  
 Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha  
 Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha

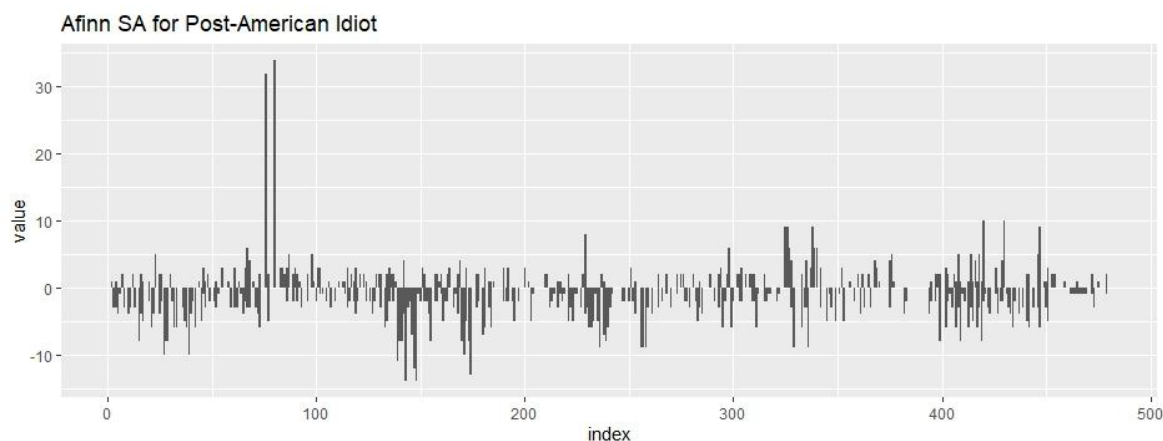


Figure 8

*Afinn* sentiment analysis of the PoAI corpus. Negative score -931. Positive score +502.

There are also other false positive phenomena. For instance, in *Bang Bang* (index 228), positivity is simply triggered by the preposition “like” which is purely used as a comparative marker. It carries no intrinsic sentiment and does not indicate genuine positivity. Furthermore, at indices 324–339, a cluster of positive sentiment can be observed, matching the song *Say goodbye*, which corresponds to the repeated use of the word “love” in the line *Say goodbye to the ones we love*. While “love” is lexically positive, its semantic orientation is negative, as it refers to mourning and loss, saying farewell to those who have died. In *Troubles Times*, at indices 420 and 429, the false positive peaks are caused by a rhetorical question that criticises social inequality: *What good is love and peace on Earth / When it's exclusive?* Although the terms *love* and *peace* are conventionally positive, their contextual framing is critical and ironic, highlighting the hypocrisy of values that are upheld only for the privileged few. The sentiment here is not celebratory but disillusioned and accusatory. At last, at index 446, corresponding to *Forever Now*, the line that triggers false positive sentiment is *If this is what you call the good life [...] I want a better way to die*. While the phrase *good life* is lexically positive, it is the overall tone that is clearly critical, expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of things.

A significant negative cluster appears between index 125 and 150, corresponding to a segment in *21st Century Breakdown* where the album's protagonist is discursively positioned within a narrative of hopelessness and existential erosion. The dense use of negatively loaded lexical items such as *pathetic*, *desperate*, and *helpless* marks a shift in the ideational content and interpersonal positioning of the speaker: the lyrics construct an individual increasingly alienated from agency and resistant to normative forms of empowerment. The affective stance here is not simply negative but ideologically saturated, foregrounding the singer's misalignment with narratives of self-determination.



Figure 9  
sentimentr analysis of the PoAI corpus.

Toward the end of the corpus, primarily representing the final tracks of *Revolution Radio*, we observe a marked flattening of affect, as sentiment scores stabilise near the neutral line. This shift reconfigures the band's ideological framing, moving from the performative outrage of punk protest to a more subdued and introspective critique of socio-political inertia. The consistent lexical negativity, devoid of evaluative contrast, may thus signal a rhetorical move from resistance to a kind of narrative stasis, where emotional engagement gives way to affective withdrawal. In this light, the lyrical discourse of the post-*American Idiot* period does not abandon social critique but recontextualises it through a discourse of exhaustion, a pattern that aligns with broader post-crisis cultural narratives of disillusionment and systemic stagnation.

## 5. Conclusions

This study combines corpus linguistics and sentiment analysis to examine shifts in Green Day's protest discourse across three phases of their discography, revealing evolving patterns in affective stance and ideological critique.

A close reading of selected keywords across Green Day's discography—drawn from three corpora representing their pre-*American Idiot*, *American Idiot*, and post-*American Idiot* phases—points to a clear transformation in the band's discursive orientation over time. In their early work, expressions like *your time*, *hell*, and *time* reveal personal angst, often articulated through irony or resignation. These terms frequently appear in contexts where frustration is turned inward or directed toward abstract dissatisfaction. There is little in the way of systemic critique; instead, the tone is one of passive alienation, where rebellion is more emotional than

ideological. With *American Idiot*, this changes significantly. Keywords such as *rebel*, *suburbia*, and *September* point to a more direct engagement with sociopolitical realities, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. The band's language becomes more pointed and performative, aligning itself with a broader critique of American culture, media, and war. This discursive stance, however, evolves again in their later albums, as can be seen in the *Post-American Idiot* phase. Terms like *the modern world*, *outlaws*, and *troubled times* suggest a shift away from overt confrontation toward a more reflective and mournful register. Here, the emphasis is less on resistance and more on enduring or narrating decline. Taken together, these shifts suggest that Green Day's protest discourse has moved from youthful alienation to full-throated dissent, and finally toward a more introspective form of cultural critique.

The sentiment analysis across Green Day's three lyrical phases confirms this trajectory in affective-discursive stance. The *Pre-American Idiot* and *American Idiot* corpora are marked by emotional polarity and heightened negativity, reflecting a discourse of rebellion, disillusionment, and ideological confrontation. By contrast, the *Post-American Idiot* era exhibits a flattened affective profile, with fewer sentiment extremes and more neutral tones.

From a CDA perspective, this shift suggests a movement away from overt dissent toward a more introspective and at times resigned or disenchanting affective positioning. Though critique remains present, it is increasingly mediated through sarcasm, narrative fatigue, and subdued emotional registers, indicating a transformation in both the band's expressive strategies and their ideological framing of contemporary social realities.

While the findings highlight significant discursive transformations, they also underscore the limitations of lexicon-based sentiment tools in capturing irony, ambiguity, and figurative language—especially in genres like punk rock—suggesting the need for future research that integrates multimodal analysis, listener reception studies, and more context-sensitive NLP frameworks.

**Bionotes:** Stefania M. Maci (PhD, Lancaster University, UK) is Full Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Bergamo, where she is Coordinator of the MA in *Text Sciences and Culture Enhancement in the Digital Age*, Director of CERLIS (Research Centre on Specialised Languages) and Scientific Coordinator of ReDH (Research Group on Digital Humanities). Her more recent work includes *Translating tourism* (2025 – Routledge, coauthored with Cinzia Spinzi); *Evidentiality in the genre of medical posters* (2022 – Peter Lang); and the co-edited volumes *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse and Disinformation* (2023); *The Routledge Handbook of Scientific Communication* (2022). Silvia Bertulezzi is a student in the MA's programme *Text Sciences and Culture Enhancement in the Digital Age* at the University of Bergamo.

**Authors' address:** [stefania.maci@unibg.it](mailto:stefania.maci@unibg.it)

## References

- Adamson C. 2018, *Punk Rock Languages*. <https://www.lvguowei.me/post/punk-rock-languages/> (29.07.2025).
- Alconada S.A. 2022, "Statement of Vindication": A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Kathleen Hanna's Lyrics, Unpublished Thesis, University of the Basque Country, Bilbao.
- Ambrosch G. 2018, *The Punk Ideology: The Language of Politics in Punk's Poetry*, in Ambrosch G., *The Poetry of Punk*, Routledge, London.
- Anttonen S. 2017, *A Feel for the Real: Discourses of Authenticity in Popular Music Cultures through Three Case Studies*, Juvenes Print, Suomen Yliopistopaino Oy Tampere.
- Baker P. 2023. *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Bennett A. 2001, *Cultures of Popular Music*, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia.
- Bonsu E.M. 2025, "Trapping My Way up": A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Black Sheriff's Songs, in "Critical Discourse Studies" 22 [1], pp. 19–36.
- CBS Mornings, dir. 2024. *Extended Interview: Green Day*. 25:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVCvgX5sWEc>.
- Chen Y. 2023, *The Rebellion Power of the F-Word in Modern Songs*, Unpublished Thesis, Malmö University, Malmö.
- De Loera C. 2024, *Green Day Tweaks "American Idiot" Lyrics to Include Donald Trump Diss*, in *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2024-01-02/green-day-changes-american-idiot-lyrics-donald-trump-maga-agenda> (29.07.2025).
- Ensminger D.A. 2011, *Visual Vitriol*, University of Mississippi Press, Jackson, Mississippi.
- Fairclough N. 1995, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Routledge, London.
- Fairclough N. 2014, *Critical Language Awareness*, Routledge, London.
- Fathoni M.F., Ibnu A., Suhaeli R.A., Gustin R. and Slamet R.J. 2023, *Critical Discourse Analysis In The Lyrics of A Song Entitled "Polisi Dan Bajingan" By Iwan Fals*, in "Journal of Scientific Research, Education, and Technology (JSRET)" 2 [3], pp. 1112–17.
- Flowerdew J. and Richardson J. (ed.) 2017, *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, Routledge, London.
- Freeborn, D. 1995, *Function Words*, in *A Course Book in English Grammar. Studies in English Language*, Palgrave, London, pp. 66-90.
- Green Day, dir. 2009. *Wake Me Up When September Ends [Official Music Video] - YouTube*. 4k Upgrade. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU9JoFKlaZ0&t=432s>.
- Greer K.M., Cary K.M., Lester J.N. and Jozkowski K.N. 2025, *The Persistence of Sexual Scripts and Compromised Sexual Agency: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Songs "Baby It's Cold Outside" and "Blurred Lines"*, in "Sexuality and Culture" <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-025-10396-3> (29.7.2025).
- Hall S. and du Gay P. (ed.) 1996, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publications, London Thousand Oaks, Calif.
- Hebdige D. 1979, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London.
- Kegerreis A. 2019, *Linguistics and Music*. <https://music.destinymanifestation.com/linguistics-and-music/> (29.07.2025).

- Lomax A. 1978, *Folk Song Style and Culture*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, N.J.
- Machin D. 2010, *Analysing Popular Music: Image, Sound, Text*, SAGE., Los Angeles and London.
- Machin D. and van Leeuwen T. 2016, *Sound, Music and Gender in Mobile Games*, in “Gender and Language” 10 [3], pp. 412–32.
- Meyer L.B. 1961, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Moore A. 2002, *Authenticity as Authentication*, in “Popular Music” 21 [2], pp. 209–23.
- Moreno-Ortiz A. 2024a. *Keywords*, in Moreno-Ortiz A., *Making Sense of Large Social Media Corpora: Keywords, Topics, Sentiment, and Hashtags in the Coronavirus Twitter Corpus*, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, pp. 59–102.
- Moreno-Ortiz A. 2024b, *Making Sense of Large Social Media Corpora: Keywords, Topics, Sentiment, and Hashtags in the Coronavirus Twitter Corpus*, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham
- Motschenbacher H. 2016, *A Corpus Linguistic Study of the Situatedness of English Pop Song Lyrics*, in “Corpora” 11 [1], pp. 1–28.
- Muhammad M.M., Goyak F., Zaini M.F., Abdelkhalek Ibrahim W.M. 2022, *Diachronic Analysis of the Profane Words in English Song Lyrics: A Computational Linguistics Perspective*, in “Malaysian Journal of Music” 11 [1], pp. 14-32.
- Nielsen F.Å. 2011, *A New ANEW: Evaluation of a Word List for Sentiment Analysis in Microblogs*, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1103.2903v1> (29.7.2025).
- Partington A., Duguid A. and Taylor C. 2013, *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- Patel A.D. and Patel A.D. 2010, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York.
- Quail B. 2021, *American Idiots: Charting Protest and Activism in the Alternative Music Scene During George W. Bush’s Presidency*, in “Comparative American Studies An International Journal” 18 [3], pp. 302–21.
- Regev M. 2007, *Ethno-National Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism Made from Within*, in “Cultural Sociology” 1 [3], pp. 317–41.
- Rieb C.A. 2018, *The Impact of Music on Language Acquisition*, in “Honors Capstones” p. 1205, <https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/studentengagement-honorscapstones/1205> (29.7.2025).
- Rinker T. 2021, *Sentimentr: Calculate Text Polarity Sentiment*, <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/sentimentr/index.html> (July 30, 2025).
- Shea N., Reymore L., White C.W., Duinker B., VanHandel L., Zeller M. and Biamonte N. 2024, *Diversity in Music Corpus Studies*, in “Music Theory Online. A Journal of the Society for Music Theory” 30 [1], [https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.24.30.1/mto.24.30.1.shea\\_et\\_al.html](https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.24.30.1/mto.24.30.1.shea_et_al.html) (July 29, 2025).
- Stubbs M. 2001, *Texts, Corpora, and Problems of Interpretation: A Response to Widdowson*, in “Applied Linguistics” 22 [2], pp. 149–72.
- Sufah A. F. J. 2024. *Morphological Analysis of Function and Content Words In The Song Lyric Traitor by Olivia Rodrigo*, in “Proceedings of International Seminar on Translation, Applied Linguistics, Literature, and Cultural Studies” 2 [1], pp. 27–39, <http://publikasi.dinus.ac.id/index.php/struktural/index>.
- Susanti M.P. 2016, *A Critical Discourse Analysis Of The Songs’ Lyric In Gypsy Heart Album By Colbie Caillat*, in “Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra” 3 [1], pp. 37–44. <https://jurnal.stkipgriponorogo.ac.id/index.php/JBS/article/view/66> (29.06.2025).
- Tagg P. 2012, *Music’s Meanings: A Modern Musicology for Non-Musos*, The Mass Media

Music Scholars' Press (MMSP), Larchmont, NY.

- Tupot M.L. 2024, *Is The Language Surrounding Current Punk Culture Signaling A Watering Down Of Dissent? Culture Mapping The Signifying Language Of Present-Day Punk Against Original Punk To See If It Is Still Addressing Societal Issues And Challenging The Status Quo*, Legacy Theses and Dissertations (2009–2024), MSc Unpublished Dissertation, University at Albany, Albany.
- Ulfha S.M., Adawiyah S.L.R. and Anwar S. 2023, *Critical Discourse Analysis of Imagine by John Lennon: An Iconic Song*, in “Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Scientific Studies (IJOMSS)” 1 [2], pp. 29–35.
- Visser B.S. 2023, *Exploring the Lexical Richness of English Song Lyrics Written by Dutch Artists: A Study of Cross-Linguistic Differences in Language Usage*, Unpublished BA Thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen.
- Wang R.Y., Storey V.C. and Firth C.P. 1995, *A Framework for Analysis of Data Quality Research*, in “IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering” 7 [4], pp. 623–40.
- Wilcox C.D. 2022, *Dropkick Murphys vs. Scott Walker: Unpacking Populist Ideological Discourse in Digital Space*, in “Media and Communication” 10 [4], pp. 202–212.
- Wright G. 2024, *What is noisy data? | Definition from TechTarget*, <https://www.techtarget.com/searchbusinessanalytics/definition/noisy-data> (29.7.2025)