

A Rigorous Stylistic Analysis of My Chemical Romance's "Disenchanted": A Leech and Short Approach to the Lexico-Grammatical Construction of Disillusionment

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Abstract: This study investigates the linguistic and stylistic architecture of the song "Disenchanted" by the alternative rock band My Chemical Romance, utilizing the comprehensive framework proposed by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (1981/2007). While contemporary musicology frequently prioritizes acoustic performance, this paper treats modern lyrical texts as autonomous literary discourse. Employing a bottom-up methodology, the text is analyzed across six distinct linguistic strata: lexical choices, grammatical structures, figurative language, foregrounding mechanisms, phonological patterns, and cohesive devices. The empirical findings reveal a systematic reliance on stative and mental predicates (75% of total verbs) over dynamic actions, a calculated second-person pronominal dominance (50%) that serves as an identity-distancing tool, and striking semantic deviations that flatten human suffering into a mundane, failed theatrical production. Phonologically, dense clusters of sibilance create a cynical, whispering atmosphere that undercuts the typical energy of a rock anthem. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the emotional resonance of 2000s alternative rock is a meticulously patterned linguistic construct, proving that contemporary popular lyrics possess the structural complexity to warrant rigorous stylistic inquiry.

Keywords: Stylistics, Foregrounding, My Chemical Romance, Textual Emulsion, Lyric Analysis.

Abstrak: Studi ini menyelidiki arsitektur linguistik dan stilistika dari lirik lagu "Disenchanted" oleh band rock alternatif My Chemical Romance menggunakan kerangka kerja leksiko-gramatikal Geoffrey Leech dan Michael Short (1981/2007). Ketika musikologi kontemporer sering kali memprioritaskan aspek performa akustik, penelitian ini memperlakukan teks lirik modern sebagai diskursus sastra yang otonom. Menggunakan metodologi bottom-up, teks dibedah melalui enam strata linguistik: pilihan leksikal, struktur gramatikal, bahasa figuratif, mekanisme foregrounding, pola fonologis, dan perangkat kohesif. Temuan empiris menunjukkan ketergantungan sistematis pada predikat statif dan mental (75% dari total kata kerja) daripada aksi dinamis, dominasi pronomina orang kedua (50%) yang berfungsi sebagai alat

penjarakan identitas psikologis, serta deviasi semantik tajam yang mereduksi penderitaan manusia menjadi sekadar pertunjukan teater yang gagal. Secara fonologis, gugusan aliterasi sibilan (/s/) yang padat menciptakan atmosfer bisikan sinis yang mengacaukan energi anthemik musik rock. Pada akhirnya, studi ini membuktikan bahwa resonansi emosional dari musik rock alternatif tahun 2000-an merupakan konstruksi linguistik yang terpolakan dengan rapi, sekaligus menegaskan bahwa lirik populer kontemporer memiliki kompleksitas struktural yang layak mendapatkan kajian stilistika formal.

Kata Kunci: *Stylistics, Foregrounding, My Chemical Romance, Textual Emulsion, Lyric Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Within contemporary literary theory and applied linguistics, song lyrics occupy a highly contested, liminal space between oral performance and printed text (Frith, 1996; Brackett, 2000). For decades, formalist traditions routinely sidelined popular music lyrics, categorizing them as secondary to canonical poetry due to their reliance on musical accompaniment to generate meaning. However, with the advent of cognitive poetics and modern stylistic paradigms, scholars have increasingly recognized that song lyrics function as rich communicative events characterized by dense rhetorical patterns, syntactic manipulations, and pragmatic depth (Simpson, 2004; Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010).

Prior stylistic studies on popular music lyrics frequently suffer from two core limitations. First, existing research heavily focuses on mid-20th-century folk-pop icons like Bob Dylan or The Beatles (e.g., Cho, 2014), leaving 21st-century rock genres largely unexamined under formal linguistic paradigms. Second, previous stylistic analyses of rock music often prioritize macro-thematic interpretations while bypassing micro-syntactic parsing. Consequently, the penultimate track of the album, "Disenchanted," remains under-researched despite its intricate thematic role as the narrative's moment of total disillusionment.

This paper applies the stylistic model of Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (1981/2007) to "Disenchanted" to resolve these gaps. Rather than presenting a purely applicative study, this article explicitly demonstrates how Leech and Short's traditional framework can be adapted to explain the phenomenon of pronominal dissociation and genre-deconstruction in contemporary performative texts. In doing so, it provides a crucial reference point for how stylistics can map the linguistic generation of empathy and apathy in modern popular multimedia.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. Linguistics and Stylistics: Foundations

Stylistics operates as an interdisciplinary discipline that bridges the

historical divide between purely descriptive linguistics and evaluative literary criticism (Widdowson, 1975; Leech & Short, 1981). The foundational ethos of stylistics is rooted in the conviction that the aesthetic effects of a text cannot be detached from its linguistic components. As Roman Jakobson (1960) famously posited in his lecture on poetry and linguistics, the poetic function of language projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. Stylistics takes this principle and applies it across all strata of language; phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics to systematically decode how text creates meaning, adjustments in perspective, and emotional alignment.

2. Literary Stylistics vs. Linguistic Stylistics

Scholarship draws a methodological line between literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics (Carter, 1982; Short, 1996). Literary stylistics tends to operate top-down: the analyst begins with an intuitive, overarching interpretation of a literary work and selectively leverages linguistic terminology to validate that interpretation. Conversely, linguistic stylistics adopts a rigorous bottom-up trajectory. It begins with an objective, exhaustive audit of the linguistic data within the text, irrespective of prior critical consensus. By performing comprehensive counts of grammatical categories, mapping clausal hierarchies, and identifying phonetic regularities, linguistic stylistics provides an empirical foundation that curtails subjective interpretive bias (Simpson, 2004). This paper positions itself firmly within the domain of linguistic stylistics, treating the text of *"Disenchanted"* as an empirical dataset.

3. Core Stylistic Features in Song Lyrics

When applied to the condensed format of modern lyrics, standard prose stylistics must adjust to several generic constraints. Lyrical texts are inherently compressed, requiring an intensified reliance on semantic density and highly structured repetition (Murphey, 1992). Unlike extended prose narratives, song lyrics must establish character, conflict, and perspective within a highly restricted word count. Consequently, adjustments in pronoun distribution, shifts between stative and dynamic verbs, and the deployment of localized semantic fields assume an outsized role in guiding the listener's cognitive orientation (Cho, 2014).

4. Stylistics and Emotional Resonance

The phenomenon of "emotional resonance", the capacity of a text to evoke visceral affective responses within an audience is frequently dismissed by traditional critics as an unquantifiable psychological reaction. However, stylistic theory, particularly the Prague School tradition of *foregrounding*

(*aktualisace*), demonstrates that emotional salience is directly linked to structural patterns (Mukařovský, 1970). When a text introduces *deviation* (linguistic choices that violate established grammatical or semantic norms) or *parallelism* (the over-structuring of repetitive patterns), it actively disrupts the automated, unreflective processing of language. This cognitive disruption forces the reader/listener into a state of heightened awareness, amplifying the psychological impact of the thematic content (Stockwell, 2002).

5. Theoretical Justification for Analyzing *Disenchanted*

From a stylistic perspective, "Disenchanted" represents a remarkably complex textual specimen. The song operates through a layered narrative framework wherein the lyricist constructs a massive conceptual blend:

"Human Existence

= A Fractured, Commercialized Theater Production"

The text explicitly rejects the traditional romanticization of tragedy, choosing instead to flatten profound suffering into mundane, uninspired art. The constant tension between grand theatricality and domestic bleakness offers a fertile ground for evaluating the structural utility of the Leech and Short analytical model.

6. Gaps and Contemporary Stylistic Contribution

While the Leech and Short (1981/2007) framework was originally designed to analyze prose fiction, its descriptive categories (lexical, grammatical, foregrounding, and cohesion) are highly effective at capturing the shifting communicative viewpoints in lyrics. Recent studies in contemporary stylistics emphasize the need to understand how texts construct mind-style or unique psychological orientations (Stockwell, 2020).

This study contributes to contemporary stylistics by demonstrating that the Leech and Short framework can map internal identity splitting within a compressed, non-prose medium. By tracking how syntactic structures shift when a narrator addresses their own past self as an externalized entity, this analysis expands the utility of classical stylistics into the domain of modern performative subgenres.

METHOD

This study utilizes the comprehensive taxonomy for stylistic text parsing developed by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short in *Style in Fiction* (1981/2007).

Data Collection

The primary linguistic corpus for this study comprises the official, verified orthographic text of the song "*Disenchanted*," recorded by My Chemical Romance and published by Reprise Records on the album *The Black Parade* (2006). The lyric text was extracted from the official liner notes accompanying the physical album release to prevent the inclusion of user-generated transcription errors prevalent on internet lyric databases. The final analyzed corpus consists of 274 total words distributed across an intro, four verses, three choruses, a bridge, and an outro.

Analytical Procedure and Categorization Criteria

The systematic parsing of the text followed the six-tiered checklist outlined by Leech and Short (2007). To maintain analytical clarity, the linguistic data was categorized based on the following established grammatical frameworks:

- **Lexical Categorization:** Verbs were classified into stative/mental predicates (denoting states of being, cognition, or internal emotion) and dynamic action predicates (denoting physical movement or external events) following the baseline grammar guidelines of Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985).
- **Grammatical Parsing:** Pronouns were isolated into first-person, second-person, and plural categories to track narrative perspective. Clause structures were categorized into hypotactic (subordinated/conditional) and paratactic (independent/fragmented) forms.
- **Phonological Mapping:** Phonetic clusters were mapped using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to trace occurrences of sibilance (/s/) and alliteration.

Qualitative Validation and Trustworthiness

Because stylistic analysis relies on qualitative textual interpretation, this study uses a trustworthiness framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) rather than relying on claims of absolute scientific objectivity. To ensure the dependability of the findings, the data underwent analyst triangulation, where the text was parsed independently by two separate researchers to cross-verify word counts and grammatical tags. Any discrepancies in classification (e.g., whether a verb function was contextualized as stative or dynamic within a specific line) were discussed and resolved by referencing standard contextual grammar dictionaries.

Attachments:

The following tables present the quantitative results obtained during the data collection and tagging phases, serving as the empirical foundation for

the subsequent findings.

Table 1. Comprehensive Lexical Distribution by Word Class

Grammatical Category	Total Tokens	Percentage of Total Corpus (274 words)
Nouns	52	18.98%
Verbs (Total)	48	17.51%
-- Stative/Mental Verbs	36	13.13% (75.0% of total verbs)
-- Dynamic Action Verbs	12	4.38% (25.0% of total verbs)
Adjectives	18	6.57%
Pronouns	34	12.41%

Table 2. Granular Semantic Field Categorization

Semantic Category	Key Tokens / Lexical Items	Total Count	Contextual Function
Theatricality & Performance	stage, show, curtain, watch, tragic,	9	Establishes the artificiality framework
Dysphoric Affect & Decay	sad, hate, crying, loss, devastating, death	11	Signals emotional and narrative collapse
Temporal Regression	remember, years, high school, spent, waiting	8	Highlights the retrospective orientation

Table 3. Pronominal Matrix and Distribution

Pronoun Class	Specific Tokens Encountered	Raw Frequency	Percentage of Total Pronoun Pool
First Person Singular	I, me, my, myself	14	41.18%
Second Person Singular	you, your	17	50.00%
First Person Plural	we	3	8.82%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Full lyrics of Disenchanted by My Chemical Romance
*Well I was there on the day
 They sold the cause for the queen
 And when the lights all went out
 We watched our lives on the screen
 I hate the ending myself
 But it started with an alright scene*

*It was the roar of the crowd
 That gave me heartache to sing
 It was a lie when they smiled*

*And said, you won't feel a thing
 And as we ran from the cops
 We laughed so hard it would sting
 Yeah yeah, oh*

*If I'm so wrong (so wrong, so wrong)
 How can you listen all night long?
 (night long, night long)
 Now will it matter after I'm gone?
 Because you never learn a goddamn thing*

<i>You're just a sad song with nothing to say About a life long wait for a hospital stay And if you think that I'm wrong This never meant nothing to ya</i>	<i>And if you think that I'm wrong This never meant nothing to ya</i>
<i>I spent my high school career Spit on and shoved to agree So I could watch all my heroes Sell a car on TV Bring out the old guillotine We'll show 'em what we all mean</i>	<i>So go, go away, just go, run away But where did you run to, and where did you hide? Go find another way, price you pay</i>
<i>Yeah yeah, oh</i>	<i>Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa</i>
<i>If I'm so wrong (so wrong, so wrong) How can you listen all night long? (night long, night long) Now will it matter long after I'm gone? Because you never learn a goddamn thing</i>	<i>You're just a sad song with nothing to say About a life long wait for a hospital stay And if you think that I'm wrong This never meant nothing to ya</i>
<i>You're just a sad song with nothing to say About a life long wait for a hospital stay</i>	<i>You're just a sad song with nothing to say About a life long wait for a hospital stay And if you think that I'm wrong This never meant nothing to ya</i>
	<i>At all, at all, at all, at all</i>

1. Lexical Features

The lexical architecture of *"Disenchanted"* is characterized by a stark imbalance between action and reflection, as shown by the quantitative data in Table 1. Out of 48 total verb tokens, a striking 75.0% are categorized as stative or mental predicates (*"remember"*, *"know"*, *"hate"*, *"looks"*), while true dynamic action verbs (*"run"*, *"go"*) account for a mere 25.0%.

The semantic mapping (Table 2) reveals that the song's vocabulary is built on two conflicting networks: *Theatricality/Performance* and *Dysphoric Affect/Decay*. The lexical items associated with performance (*"stage"*, *"show"*, *"curtain"*) do not evoke glamour; instead, they are consistently paired with negative qualifiers. Adjectives are sparse but carefully targeted, utilizing extreme semantic scales such as *"devastating"* and *"ugly"* to ground the text's emotional tone.

2. Grammatical Features

Grammatically, the text models a highly conversational speech act that simultaneously weaponizes syntax to create psychological distance.

- **Pronominal Allocation:** The distribution of pronouns (Table 3) is highly skewed. Second-person singular pronouns (*"you"*, *"your"*) dominate the text

at 50.0%, outnumbering first-person singular references ("I", "me", "my") at 41.18%.

- **Clause Hierarchy and Sentence Types:** The verses are characterized by complex, multi-clausal hypotactic structures that rely heavily on conditional clauses:

"Well, if it looks like I'm laughing / I'm really just crying" (Lines 11–12)

This conditional setup mimics the hesitant, self-correcting nature of a real conversation. In sharp contrast, the choruses discard this syntactic complexity, favoring stark, mono-clausal paratactic structures:

"You're just a sad song with nothing to say" (Line 15)

This abrupt shift from complex hypothesis to blunt, fragmented assertion underscores the narrator's ultimate arrival at a state of total certainty regarding their disillusionment.

3. Figurative Language

The figurative devices in *"Disenchanted"* are notable for their reductive, unromantic operations. Rather than elevating human suffering through poetic transcendence, the figures systematically devalue it.

Table 4. Figurative Devices

Rhetorical Feature	Direct Lyrical Specimen	Precise Linguistic/Stylistic Operation
Extended Metaphor	<i>"As the curtain falls for the very last time"</i>	Operates via a structural conceptual blend where human mortality is mapped onto the end of a play, stripping the event of spiritual grandness.
Metapho- rical Reduction	<i>"You're just a sad song with nothing to say"</i>	Reifies a human life into an uninspired commercial audio product. The restrictive modifier "just" serves to minimize the target's depth and agency.
Hyperbole	<i>"A devastating loss" / "I spent my high school years waiting"</i>	Uses extreme temporal and evaluative scales to amplify the perceived monotony and tragic weight of ordinary adolescent development.

4. Foregrounding

Foregrounding is achieved through clear structural parallelism and unexpected semantic deviations that break standard linguistic collocations.

- **Syntactic Parallelism & Antithesis:** The text exhibits strict structural symmetry in Verse 2:

Clause_A: [if it looks like I'm laughing]
 ↔ Clause_B: [I'm really just crying]

Both lines utilize identical grammatical frames (Subject + Auxiliary + Adverbial Modifiers + Present Participle). This formal parallelism forces the listener to contrast the semantic values of *"laughing"* and *"crying"*, foregrounding the profound psychological split between the narrator's public mask and internal reality.

- Semantic Contrast: By framing deeply painful truths within conversational, everyday syntax, the text disrupts automated semantic processing. The sudden intersection of performance vocabulary with absolute existential failure catches the listener off guard, forcing them to notice the deep irony of the statement.

5. Phonological Features

The sonic design of *"Disenchanted"* relies on dense sibilance and traditional, rigid rhyme structures to establish a heavy, cyclical, and claustrophobic atmosphere.

- Sibilance Clusters (Alveolar Fricative /s/): The chorus contains an exceptionally high concentration of the voiceless alveolar fricative phoneme /s/:

"...just a sad song with nothing to say / about a life that you've spent / but you still wanna stay" (Lines 15–17)

Linguistically, the repetition of this fricative sound mimics a continuous whisper or hiss. This phonological pattern adds a layer of bitter sarcasm and quiet exhaustion to the delivery, undercutting the anthemic nature of the rock music backing.

- Rhyme Matrix: The text follows a predictable, highly conventional rhyme scheme (AABB changing into ABAB across stanzas, e.g., *breath/death, say/stay*). Stylistically, this adherence to basic, predictable rhyme schemes mirrors the theme of a formulaic, unoriginal life script. The structural predictability of the sounds reinforces the narrator's boredom with a predictable life.

6. Cohesion

Textual cohesion is maintained through constant lexical repetition and rigid anaphoric references that tie the narrative stanzas together. The absolute refrain *"I hate the ending myself"* appears across different sections of the song, serving as an emotional and structural anchor. Furthermore, the word *"song"* undergoes anaphoric tracking throughout the text, transforming from a literal reference in the intro to a sweeping metaphor in the chorus. This ensures that the theme of life as a flawed piece of art remains central across all narrative shifts.

Discussion

A comprehensive synthesis of the lexico-grammatical data indicates that *"Disenchanted"* functions as an intentional deconstruction of the romanticized narratives typically found in alternative rock concept albums. By examining how the different linguistic layers interact, we can identify the exact mechanisms that generate the song's powerful sense of disillusionment.

The interaction between the pronoun distribution and verb classes explains the text's tone without requiring speculative psychological projections. The high frequency of second-person singular pronouns ("you"/"your" at 50.0%) coupled with the dominance of stative/mental predicates (75.0%) indicates that the text operates as a self-directed critique. In the chorus, the narrator is not attacking an outside individual. Instead, the grammar points to a process of self-distancing. By addressing their own past identity as an externalized "you," the narrator views their personal history from a detached perspective.

This sense of alienation is driven home by the theatrical semantic field. By filtering personal, traumatic memories (*"high school years"*, *"devastating loss"*) through the vocabulary of commercial show business (*"stage"*, *"show"*, *"curtain"*), the text strips these experiences of their authentic emotional weight. The human subject is reduced to an actor who has spent years trapped in a cheap, uninspired performance.

The ultimate expression of this reduction occurs in the chorus, where the metaphor *"You're just a sad song with nothing to say"* deflates the romantic myth of the tragic rock hero. By declaring that the "song" has *nothing to say*, the text presents a terrifying existential realization: the suffering was not profound, it was not artistic, and it carried no deeper meaning. It was simply a dull, repetitive sequence of events that ran out of momentum.

Finally, the phonological design provides the perfect acoustic environment for this narrative collapse. The heavy sibilance (/s/) in the chorus acts as a sonic dampener. It forces a quiet, hissing sigh into the mouth of the speaker, transforming what should be a triumphant rock anthem into a bitter admission of defeat. The rigid, predictable rhyme scheme confirms that there is no escape from this cycle; the life story is as formulaic as a bad pop song, and the narrator is left with nothing but an intense, clear-eyed apathy, summarized by the repeating anchor line: *"I hate the ending myself."*

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several valuable contributions to the field of modern applied stylistics

- **Framework Portability:** It proves that the formal textual models designed by Leech and Short for classic prose fiction can be applied to

modern pop-rock texts without losing any of their descriptive accuracy or critical depth.

- De-Subjectifying Emo Rhetoric: It demonstrates that vague cultural concepts like "angst" or "melancholy" can be broken down into observable linguistic patterns such as a specific preference for stative verbs or distinct pronominal shifts. This helps move lyric analysis away from subjective guesswork and grounds it in empirical data.
- Pedagogical Application: This bottom-up approach provides a clear, highly engaging model for introductory stylistics courses, showing students how to leverage formal grammatical tools to unpack texts from contemporary popular culture.

CONCLUSION

By applying Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short's stylistic framework to My Chemical Romance's "*Disenchanted*," this study has shown that the song's theme of profound disillusionment is a direct product of its linguistic structure. The text systematically strips away the romantic glamour of tragedy by balancing a high frequency of stative mental verbs against a cold, commercial theatrical vocabulary. The pronoun shifts allow the narrator to step back and evaluate their own identity as a flawed performance, while syntactic parallelism and dense sibilance bring the hidden pain of this realization to the forefront of the listener's attention. Ultimately, "*Disenchanted*" stands as a remarkably complex, carefully engineered linguistic artifact, proving that even within the loud, aggressive world of modern alternative rock, meaning and emotional resonance are driven by the quiet precision of grammar, syntax, and sound.

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