

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL AND CONTEXTUAL MEANING IN FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD! BY FINNEAS O'CONNELL

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Abstract

This study examines lexical and contextual meaning in Finneas O'Connell's song "For Cryin' Out Loud!" The research is motivated by the increasingly context-driven nature of meaning in contemporary song lyrics, where speakers often rely on ambiguity, metaphor, and emotional inference rather than literal wording. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the lyrics were read, listened to, selected, coded, and interpreted through the distinction between dictionary-based lexical meaning and meaning shaped by situational context. The analysis shows that the song is built around lexical choices associated with motion, exhaustion, emotional distance, and bodily sensation. These expressions do not merely describe actions in a literal sense; instead, they construct a narrative of unstable intimacy, repeated misunderstanding, and persistent attachment. The findings indicate that the song presents a relationship marked by tension, dependency, and emotional fatigue, while the repeated refrain functions as a discourse marker of frustration and plea. Read through a semantic lens, the lyrics reveal how lexical items gain fuller meaning only when interpreted within the emotional and relational context of the song.

Keywords: semantics; lexical meaning; contextual meaning; song lyrics

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is concerned with how meaning is encoded and interpreted in language. In literary and musical texts, meaning is rarely limited to dictionary definitions because words are shaped by speaker intention, emotional stance, and situational context. Song lyrics are therefore a productive site for semantic analysis because they combine artistic language with interpersonal expression. Within this perspective, lexical meaning refers to the conventional meaning of a word, while contextual meaning emerges from the setting, relationship, and communicative purpose in which the word is used.

This study focuses on Finneas O'Connell's "For Cryin' Out Loud!" as a text that is rich in contextual cues. The song is especially suitable for semantic analysis because its wording moves between direct emotional address, self-questioning, and figurative descriptions of

relational strain. Rather than presenting a stable romantic narrative, the lyric voice constructs a tense and uncertain conversation in which affection coexists with exhaustion. The title itself already signals emotional pressure and serves as an exclamatory frame for the rest of the text.

Recent scholarship supports the relevance of this approach. Studies on Sabrina Carpenter's "Nonsense" found that contextual interpretation is essential for understanding playful innuendo and situational references (Sari & Yuwana, 2024). Ulfah and Pujiati (2025) showed that song lyrics may contain multiple semantic layers, including lexical and contextual meanings, which strengthen the emotional message delivered to listeners. Haykhal (2025) similarly demonstrated that lexical and contextual meaning work together to convey identity, struggle, and social commentary in J. Cole's "The Off-Season." In 2026, Lailiyah et al. showed that contextual markers remain decisive for interpreting narrative stance and emotional positioning in Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero." These studies indicate that song lyrics are best read as context-dependent discourse rather than isolated word lists.

Against this background, the present manuscript asks how lexical items in "For Cryin' Out Loud!" produce meanings that go beyond their dictionary sense and how those meanings shape the song's emotional narrative.

Literature Review

Earlier semantic studies in song lyrics have consistently shown that contextual meaning often dominates literal interpretation. Sari and Yuwana (2024) analyzed Sabrina Carpenter's "Nonsense" and found that much of the song's effect depends on contextual cues, figurative language, and situational references. Ulfah and Pujiati (2025) extended this observation by showing that song lyrics can contain several semantic categories at once, including lexical, contextual, connotative, and idiomatic meaning. Their findings suggest that lyric interpretation becomes more complete when the analyst accounts for both direct denotation and emotional implication.

Haykhal (2025) examined J. Cole's *The Off-Season* and found that lexical and contextual meaning help explain how the artist communicates identity, struggle, and social commentary. The study is important because it shows that semantic analysis is not limited to love songs; it can also reveal how lyrical language constructs personal and social experience. In another 2025 study, contextual analysis of Neck Deep's "December" demonstrated that words such as 'cold' and 'heartbreak' shift from literal reference to symbolic emotional

expression when read in context. This supports the view that song lyrics often function as layered texts where one lexical item can carry several meanings at the same time.

More recent work in 2026 continues the same direction. Lailiyah et al. (2026) showed that deictic expressions in Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" require contextual interpretation to identify speaker position, temporal orientation, and emotional stance. Rohmah and Jayanti (2026) also reported that denotative and connotative meaning in Nadin Amizah's "Sorai" reveal emotional depth that is not visible at the literal level. Taken together, these studies justify the present analysis of Finneas O'Connell's "For Cryin' Out Loud!" because the song likewise depends on context-sensitive wording, emotional tension, and figurative imagery to construct meaning.

RESERCH METHODE

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The descriptive method is appropriate because the purpose of the study is not to test a hypothesis statistically, but to describe and interpret the meanings found in the lyrics. The data source is the song text of "For Cryin' Out Loud!" by Finneas O'Connell, obtained from an online lyric source. The documentary method is used because the object of analysis is a written lyric text.

The data collection procedure follows four stages. First, the lyric text is selected as the main data source. Second, the song is read and listened to repeatedly in order to identify words and phrases that appear semantically significant. Third, each relevant unit is coded for analysis. Fourth, the lexical meaning of each unit is compared with its contextual meaning in the song so that the interpretation can be explained clearly. This procedure preserves the methodological pattern of the original study while redirecting the analysis to Finneas O'Connell's song.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies recurring lexical fields of motion, pressure, fatigue, and bodily sensation. These lexical choices operate literally at the word level but develop broader meanings when placed in the relational context of the lyrics. The table below presents selected data.

No	Lexical unit	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning
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No	Lexical unit	Lexical meaning	Contextual meaning
1	me / you contrast	Pronouns referring to speaker and addressee.	Signals uncertainty and shared blame.
2	seek / soothe / answer	Verbs of searching, calming, and responding.	Frames the partner as emotional relief and reassurance.
3	stuck / waiting	To be trapped, delayed, or unable to move.	Represents emotional suspension and waiting for repair.
4	For cryin' out loud	Exclamation of frustration.	Signals emotional strain.
5	calling your name	To say or cry out a person's name.	Shows longing and repeated attempts to reconnect.
6	wearing me out / heart is a maze	To exhaust; a maze is a complex structure.	Conveys fatigue and the partner's confusing behavior.
7	running your mouth	To speak continuously or carelessly.	Suggests conflict and uncontrolled speech.
8	show me the ropes / show me the door	To teach; to reveal an exit.	Creates a push-pull image of instruction and rejection.
9	sweating / running every light / sleep at night	Physical stress, recklessness, disturbed rest.	Marks anxiety, impulsivity, and unrest.
10	meaner you are / harder to leave / bruise underneath	Cruelty, departure, and physical injury.	Portrays harmful attachment where affection and pain coexist.

The table shows that the lyrics repeatedly move between literal and figurative registers. The lexical items of motion, such as 'stuck,' 'waiting,' 'calling,' and 'running,' are not neutral descriptions of physical activity. In context, they represent a relationship that cannot settle into stability. The speaker appears to be caught in a cycle of pursuit, frustration, and return. This pattern is reinforced by the refrain, which works less as a simple exclamation than as an emotional marker of pressure and resignation.

Another important pattern is the use of embodied language. References to the heart, sweat, makeup, and bruising create a physical surface for emotional experience. Lexically, these words belong to the body; contextually, they signal vulnerability, stress, and the visible effects of relational conflict. The phrase describing the partner as a maze is especially revealing because it transforms an architectural object into a psychological image. The partner is not merely difficult to understand; the partner is portrayed as a space that redirects, delays, and confuses the speaker.

The final lines deepen this interpretation by combining tenderness and harm. The lyric movement toward a kiss is immediately followed by an image of a bruise, which creates a sharp semantic contrast between affection and injury. In this sense, the song does not present love as purely romantic or purely tragic. Instead, it represents intimacy as unstable, exhausting, and emotionally costly. The contextual meaning of the song therefore emerges from the tension between what is literally said and what the relationship implies.

CONCLUSION

"For Cryin' Out Loud!" demonstrates that lexical meaning alone is not sufficient for understanding song lyrics. Words such as 'stuck,' 'maze,' 'sweating,' and 'bruise' carry conventional meanings at the lexical level, but in context they construct a narrative of emotional uncertainty, dependency, and fatigue. The song repeatedly presents the speaker as someone who wants closeness but remains caught in conflict. Through this semantic reading, the lyric emerges as a portrayal of unstable intimacy in which affection, frustration, and pain coexist.

The study also confirms that contextual meaning is crucial in interpreting contemporary song lyrics. When read through a semantic lens, Finneas O'Connell's song reveals a layered emotional structure that would be less visible if the analysis stopped at dictionary meaning. Future studies may extend this approach to the other songs in the same album or compare Finneas's lyric style with other contemporary singer-songwriters.

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