



An Analysis of Polysemy in the Song Lyrics ‘Shape of You’ by Ed Sheeran: A Lexical Semantics Study

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Abstract

This study investigates polysemy in Ed Sheeran’s “Shape of You” using a non-empirical qualitative design grounded in lexical semantics. The research aims to identify polysemous lexical items, examine their contextual meanings, and analyze their semantic functions in shaping lyrical interpretation. Data were obtained from the official song lyrics and analyzed through descriptive textual analysis involving lexical identification, contextual classification, and semantic interpretation. The findings reveal that numerous lexical items such as “shape,” “heart,” “fall,” and “touch” exhibit systematic meaning extensions between literal and metaphorical domains. Context plays a crucial role in determining meaning selection, allowing lexical ambiguity to function as a controlled interpretive mechanism. The study further shows that polysemy contributes to aesthetic structuring, emotional intensification, and communicative efficiency within the lyrics. These functions demonstrate that lexical meaning in song discourse is dynamically constructed rather than fixed. Overall, polysemy operates as a central semantic strategy that enhances both interpretive depth and artistic expression in contemporary popular music.

Keywords: Polysemy, Lexical Semantics, Song Lyrics, Contextual Meaning, Semantic Analysis.



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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of linguistic inquiry, semantic analysis has experienced a significant paradigm shift driven by the increasing interest in multimodal and culturally embedded discourse, particularly as language is examined not only as a structural system but also as a dynamic repository of social meaning, affective expression, and creative cognition within global popular culture. Within this evolving scholarly trajectory, song lyrics have emerged as a salient object of analysis in lexical semantics due to their hybrid nature, in which linguistic economy intersects with aesthetic density, allowing single lexical items to encode layered meanings that are continuously reconstituted through listener interpretation and contextual activation (Luli et al., 2025). In parallel, recent developments in cognitive and lexical semantics emphasize that polysemy is not merely a linguistic anomaly but a fundamental organizing principle of meaning extension, particularly evident in artistic discourse where metaphorical and pragmatic constraints shape interpretive variability, thereby positioning contemporary music lyrics as a productive site for examining semantic flexibility in real communicative practice (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022).

Empirical studies focusing on Ed Sheeran’s lyrical corpus have consistently demonstrated that semantic multiplicity operates as a central mechanism in constructing thematic depth and emotional resonance, as shown in analyses of polysemy across the album “Divide,” where lexical items are found to carry overlapping conceptual domains that reinforce narrative coherence while simultaneously expanding interpretive scope (Luli et al., 2025). Complementing this, investigations into semantic relations within the “Equals” album further highlight that lexical networks in Sheeran’s songwriting are systematically organized through sense relations such as synonymy and polysemy, which collectively enhance thematic cohesion and pragmatic richness in lyrical communication (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022). Additional studies examining idiomatic expressions in his lyrics reveal that figurative language functions as a stabilizing force for emotional intensity, where non-literal constructions facilitate deeper engagement with affective meaning structures (Van Thao, 2021), while syntactic and stylistic analyses of songs such as “Perfect” illustrate that grammatical arrangement and stylistic foregrounding contribute to the interpretive elasticity of lyrical meaning (Wildhani et al., 2025). Parallel research on morphology and semantic layering further indicates that even at the smallest linguistic units, meaning

construction is distributed across bound and free morphemes that collectively shape interpretive outcomes in musical discourse (Chayo & Sholah, 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature addressing semantic phenomena in Ed Sheeran's lyrics, a critical reading of existing studies reveals a fragmented analytical focus that privileges either macro-level semantic relations, idiomaticity, or structural linguistic features, while underexploring the systematic operation of polysemy as an independent yet context-sensitive semantic mechanism within specific songs. Studies such as those examining general semantic patterns or sense relations tend to treat polysemy as an auxiliary feature rather than a central analytical category, thereby limiting theoretical precision in distinguishing how individual lexical items dynamically shift meanings across contextual frames (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022; Trisnantasari & Umalekhoa, 2017). Furthermore, even studies explicitly addressing polysemy often remain descriptive in nature, lacking deeper theoretical integration with contextual pragmatics and lexical semantics frameworks, which results in an incomplete account of how meaning instability is systematically structured in lyrical discourse (Luli et al., 2025). This fragmentation produces an epistemic gap in understanding how polysemy functions not merely as lexical variation but as a structured semantic strategy embedded in artistic language use.

The persistence of these conceptual and methodological limitations generates an urgent need to reposition polysemy as a central analytic lens in song lyric interpretation, particularly because popular music constitutes one of the most widely consumed forms of linguistic input in contemporary global culture, thereby shaping public semantic intuition and interpretive habits at scale. In this regard, failure to systematically analyze polysemy risks oversimplifying the cognitive and communicative complexity inherent in lyrical meaning-making, especially in works that rely heavily on lexical ambiguity to construct emotional and relational narratives. From a practical standpoint, a more refined understanding of polysemy also contributes to pedagogical approaches in applied linguistics, particularly in enhancing learners' interpretive competence in non-literal language comprehension, which remains a persistent challenge in second language acquisition contexts where contextual inference is underdeveloped. This situation underscores the necessity of adopting a more rigorous semantic framework capable of capturing the fluid interplay between lexical meaning and contextual embedding in musical discourse.

Within this scholarly landscape, the present research positions itself by shifting analytical emphasis from broad semantic categorization toward a focused lexical-semantic investigation of polysemy in a single, globally recognized song, namely "Shape of You" by Ed Sheeran, in order to isolate and systematically examine how individual lexical items operate across multiple meaning layers within a tightly bounded textual environment. Unlike prior studies that distribute analytical attention across albums or linguistic categories, this study concentrates on intra-textual semantic dynamics, thereby enabling a more granular understanding of how contextual cues govern meaning selection and interpretation at the lexical level. This positioning allows the research to contribute to ongoing debates in lexical semantics by foregrounding polysemy not as a secondary feature of stylistic language use but as a primary mechanism of meaning construction that operates through systematic contextual modulation within popular music discourse.

This study ultimately aims to provide a theoretically grounded and methodologically consistent analysis of polysemy in "Shape of You," contributing to lexical semantics by demonstrating how single lexical units generate multiple, context-dependent interpretations that collectively construct layered emotional and conceptual meanings within song lyrics, while also offering a refined analytical model that may be extended to broader studies of semantic ambiguity in contemporary musical texts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a non-empirical qualitative design, specifically a descriptive textual analysis within the framework of lexical semantics, since the data are not generated through human participants but derived exclusively from pre-existing linguistic artifacts in the form of song lyrics. The primary data source is the official lyrics of Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You," selected as a representative contemporary pop text characterized by dense lexical variability and frequent semantic shifts. The selection of this text is based on purposive criteria, namely (i) high linguistic accessibility combined with semantic ambiguity, (ii) documented presence in prior linguistic studies as a rich site for semantic inquiry, and (iii) observable instances of lexical items potentially exhibiting polysemous behavior within contextual usage. The analytical framework is grounded in lexical semantics theory, particularly the conceptualization of polysemy as context-dependent meaning extension, allowing the researcher to

identify lexical units whose meanings shift systematically across different lyrical environments while maintaining conceptual relatedness.

The analytical procedure is conducted through a structured qualitative content analysis, beginning with repeated close reading of the lyrics to establish initial semantic familiarity, followed by systematic identification and extraction of lexical items suspected of exhibiting polysemy. Each identified item is then classified based on its core meaning and contextualized meaning variants, drawing upon semantic contrastive interpretation to distinguish literal, figurative, and context-induced senses. To ensure analytical rigor, interpretive consistency is maintained through iterative cross-checking against established lexical semantics frameworks, thereby enhancing confirmability and reducing subjective bias in meaning attribution. The credibility of interpretation is further strengthened through theoretical triangulation, in which identified semantic patterns are continuously compared with established linguistic accounts of polysemy and meaning extension. The entire analytical process is conducted with strict textual fidelity, ensuring that all interpretations remain anchored in the linguistic context of the lyrics without introducing extratextual assumptions beyond the scope of lexical-semantic evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Identification and Distribution of Polysemous Items in “Shape of You”

The lexical configuration of Ed Sheeran’s “*Shape of You*” demonstrates a dense concentration of semantically flexible units that function as carriers of context-dependent meaning within the framework of lexical semantics. The analysis indicates that polysemy is not randomly distributed but systematically embedded in lexical choices that construct both thematic coherence and pragmatic ambiguity. Prior semantic investigations of Ed Sheeran’s lyrical corpus have similarly emphasized that lexical items in his songs frequently operate across multiple semantic domains, reinforcing interpretive openness (Trisnantasari & Umalekhoa, 2017). In this study, such lexical behavior is interpreted as a structured semantic strategy rather than stylistic ornamentation.

The identification process reveals that nouns and verbs dominate the polysemous structure of the lyrics, particularly those related to bodily perception and emotional experience. These lexical items exhibit a pattern of meaning expansion from literal physical reference to metaphorical emotional representation. A structured categorization of these findings is presented in Table 1, which maps lexical items to their semantic variability.

Table 1. Distribution of Polysemous Lexical Items in “Shape of You”

Lexical Item	Core Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Semantic Type
shape	physical form	physical attraction	literal–figurative
body	human anatomy	romantic objectification	literal–metaphorical
heart	organ	emotional center	literal–emotive
love	affection	relational bonding	general–contextual

The table illustrates that lexical ambiguity is structurally concentrated in body-related and emotion-related vocabulary, indicating thematic alignment between lexical choice and lyrical subject matter. Such concentration reflects a deliberate semantic pattern in which meaning extension operates through bodily metaphors, a phenomenon also observed in broader Ed Sheeran song analyses (Kemal & Damayanti, 2021). The lexical clustering observed in Table 1 suggests that polysemy functions as an organizing principle rather than incidental linguistic variation.

Further examination shows that verbs such as “fall,” “pull,” and “touch” also exhibit systematic semantic bifurcation between physical action and emotional implication. This duality reinforces the cognitive linguistic principle that embodied experience structures abstract meaning representation. A second distributional overview is provided in Table 2 to highlight verbal polysemy within the dataset.

Table 2. Verbal Polysemy and Contextual Extension

Verb	Literal Sense	Extended Sense	Function in Lyrics
fall	physical descent	emotional surrender	romantic initiation
pull	physical dragging	attraction force	emotional pull
touch	physical contact	intimacy	emotional closeness

The data in Table 2 demonstrates that verbal items serve as dynamic semantic bridges between physical action schemas and emotional conceptualization. This aligns with findings in corpus-based lyrical studies which emphasize the role of embodied cognition in song discourse (Kendong et al., 2023). The lexical structure therefore confirms that meaning production in the lyrics is heavily reliant on conceptual metaphor mechanisms embedded in polysemy.

A comparative semantic reading suggests that polysemous verbs in the dataset function as experiential anchors that allow listeners to transition between literal and affective interpretations. This transition is not arbitrary but guided by contextual cues embedded within the lyrical progression. Research on figurative language in Ed Sheeran's works similarly notes that semantic layering is a core feature of his lyrical construction (Yansyah et al., 2022). The present analysis extends this observation by specifying lexical categories where such layering is most pronounced.

The distribution of polysemous nouns and verbs reveals an underlying semantic symmetry in which physicality and emotionality are continuously mapped onto each other. This mapping reflects a consistent lexical-semantic strategy that supports narrative cohesion across the song structure. A synthesized mapping of this relationship is presented in Table 3 to clarify cross-category alignment.

Table 3. Cross-Category Semantic Mapping

Physical Domain	Emotional Domain	Interpretive Outcome
body	desire	romantic objectification
heart	affection	emotional depth
touch	intimacy	relational closeness

The table indicates that lexical items do not operate independently but function within a network of semantic correspondences. Such relational structuring is consistent with sense relation theory in lexical semantics, where meaning emerges from inter-lexical associations (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022). This reinforces the argument that polysemy in the dataset is relational rather than isolated.

Contextual dependency emerges as a central determinant in lexical interpretation, particularly in distinguishing literal from metaphorical meaning. The same lexical item may shift meaning depending on co-textual and situational embedding within the lyric sequence. Studies on contextual meaning in song discourse similarly emphasize this dependency as fundamental to interpretation (Mamun et al., 2024). The present findings confirm that polysemy cannot be resolved without contextual anchoring.

The repetition of semantically flexible lexical items across the lyrics indicates intentional reinforcement of interpretive multiplicity. This repetition functions as a discourse-level mechanism for sustaining ambiguity while maintaining thematic clarity. Prior research on Ed Sheeran's semantic style supports the view that repetition and variation jointly construct lyrical meaning (Gafur et al., 2021). In this dataset, repetition amplifies rather than reduces semantic complexity.

The overall lexical distribution suggests that polysemy is strategically concentrated in emotionally salient lexical fields rather than evenly distributed across the lexicon. This concentration enhances listener engagement by increasing interpretive participation. Studies on background knowledge in song discourse suggest that such structures activate listener cognition during interpretation (Biktagirova & Samarkina, 2023). Consequently, lexical design in the song operates as a cognitive engagement mechanism.

The findings in this sub-section establish that polysemous lexical items in "Shape of You" are systematically distributed, contextually activated, and semantically interrelated. The observed structure

supports the theoretical claim that lexical semantics in popular music operates through patterned ambiguity rather than random variation. Comparative studies of contemporary song lyrics similarly highlight that polysemy constitutes a stable feature of modern lyrical construction (Luli et al., 2025). This provides a foundational basis for deeper contextual and interpretive analysis in subsequent sections.

Contextual Mechanisms of Meaning Extension in Polysemous Lexical Items

The contextual activation of polysemous lexical items in “*Shape of You*” demonstrates that meaning is not statically encoded within words but dynamically constructed through co-textual relations that govern interpretive selection at the discourse level. The analysis indicates that lexical ambiguity operates as a controlled semantic resource in which contextual cues systematically disambiguate competing meanings without eliminating interpretive plurality. Previous semantic studies on Ed Sheeran’s lyrical productions similarly emphasize that contextual embedding plays a decisive role in regulating lexical interpretation across different song structures (Kemal & Damayanti, 2021). Within this framework, polysemy is understood as a context-sensitive mechanism that sustains both semantic flexibility and communicative coherence.

The interaction between lexical items and surrounding linguistic environments reveals a patterned mechanism in which surrounding verbs, nouns, and thematic sequences constrain the activation of specific meanings. This process reflects the principle that lexical meaning is distributed across linguistic units rather than localized in isolated words. A synthesized representation of contextual activation patterns is presented in Table 4, which illustrates how specific lexical items shift meaning depending on lyrical environment.

Table 4. Contextual Activation of Polysemous Meanings

Lexical Item	Literal Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Triggering Context
shape	physical form	attraction appeal	romantic description
burn	combustion	intense emotion	emotional escalation
club	social venue	meeting space	narrative setting
mind	cognition	desire/focus	interpersonal interaction

The table demonstrates that semantic selection is governed by contextual triggers that reposition lexical items within affective and experiential domains. This finding aligns with contextual semantics theory, which posits that meaning emerges through interaction between lexical potential and situational constraints (Mamun et al., 2024). In the dataset, contextual cues consistently shift interpretation from concrete to abstract domains, particularly in emotionally charged segments of the lyrics.

Further analysis reveals that metaphorical extension is a dominant mechanism through which polysemy is realized in the song, particularly in lexical items associated with physical sensation and emotional intensity. These extensions are not arbitrary but follow cognitively grounded mappings between bodily experience and affective states. Research on figurative language in contemporary lyrics confirms that such metaphorical structuring is a recurring linguistic strategy in popular music discourse (Yansyah et al., 2022). The present findings refine this claim by demonstrating that metaphorical activation is systematically conditioned by immediate lexical context.

The verb “burn,” for instance, illustrates a clear shift from literal combustion to emotional intensity, where contextual positioning within romantic narrative frames triggers semantic reinterpretation. This transformation reflects embodied cognition principles in which sensory experience structures abstract meaning representation. Similar patterns have been observed in semantic analyses of Ed Sheeran’s broader lyrical repertoire, where emotional intensity is frequently encoded through physical metaphors (Trisnantasari & Umalekhoa, 2017). The current analysis extends this observation by identifying contextual conditions that regulate such semantic transitions.

Contextual dependency also operates at the discourse level, where sequential progression of lyrics constructs cumulative meaning that redefines earlier lexical interpretations. This indicates that polysemy is not resolved at the word level but negotiated across larger textual units. Studies on sense

relations in song lyrics similarly highlight that lexical interpretation is shaped by inter-sentential relations rather than isolated lexical analysis (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022). In this study, discourse sequencing is identified as a key determinant in stabilizing interpretive variability.

The interaction between lexical ambiguity and thematic structure further suggests that polysemous meanings contribute to narrative coherence rather than disrupting it. This is achieved through controlled ambiguity, where multiple meanings coexist without causing interpretive breakdown. Corpus-based lyrical analyses of contemporary music similarly argue that ambiguity enhances narrative depth by allowing multiple interpretive pathways (Kendong et al., 2023). The findings here support this view while specifying that coherence is maintained through consistent contextual signaling.

A notable observation is that emotional vocabulary exhibits the highest degree of contextual flexibility, particularly in terms such as “love,” “heart,” and “mind,” which shift between cognitive, affective, and relational domains depending on lyrical environment. This flexibility indicates that emotional lexicon functions as a primary site of semantic negotiation in song discourse. Research on background knowledge in music interpretation suggests that such lexical flexibility activates listener inferential processes (Biktagirova & Samarkina, 2023). The present findings reinforce this by demonstrating that emotional lexicon is structurally predisposed to polysemous expansion.

The stability of contextual interpretation is further reinforced through repeated lexical framing, where recurring linguistic patterns guide meaning selection across the song. This repetition reduces interpretive ambiguity without eliminating semantic multiplicity, thereby maintaining aesthetic richness. Prior studies on Ed Sheeran’s stylistic features similarly identify repetition as a mechanism for reinforcing thematic unity (Gafur et al., 2021). In this analysis, repetition functions as a contextual stabilizer that anchors polysemous interpretation.

The results also indicate that contextual cues operate hierarchically, with immediate co-text exerting stronger influence than broader thematic structure in determining lexical meaning. This hierarchical structure suggests that meaning construction is locally governed but globally coherent. Research on semantic interpretation in song discourse supports the view that micro-contexts dominate lexical disambiguation processes (Ilma & Sabat, 2023). The findings here specify that such dominance is particularly evident in emotionally charged lexical environments.

Analysis demonstrates that polysemy in “*Shape of You*” is not merely a lexical phenomenon but a contextually regulated semantic system that integrates metaphorical mapping, discourse sequencing, and cognitive activation. This system ensures that meaning remains both flexible and interpretable within bounded textual constraints. Comparative studies on lexical meaning in song lyrics similarly emphasize that contextual embedding is essential for semantic realization (Faudzan, 2025). The present findings contribute to this understanding by detailing how contextual mechanisms systematically govern polysemous interpretation in contemporary pop lyrics.

Semantic Function of Polysemy in Aesthetic and Communicative Structuring of Lyrics

The semantic function of polysemy in “*Shape of You*” extends beyond lexical variation into a structured aesthetic mechanism that shapes how meaning is both produced and perceived within the lyrical discourse. The analysis indicates that polysemous lexical items operate as dual-functional units that simultaneously support communicative clarity and poetic ambiguity, thereby enabling layered interpretation without compromising thematic coherence. Prior research on semantic structures in Ed Sheeran’s songwriting similarly emphasizes that lexical choices are systematically aligned with expressive and aesthetic objectives rather than purely referential functions (Trisnantasari & Umalekhoa, 2017). Within this interpretive frame, polysemy is positioned as a core linguistic strategy that mediates between denotative meaning and artistic expression.

The aesthetic dimension of polysemy is particularly evident in how lexical ambiguity contributes to rhythmically and semantically dense lyrical constructions that enhance listener engagement. This dual-layered semantic structure allows a single lexical item to function across multiple interpretive domains, thereby increasing the cognitive and emotional involvement of the audience. A structured overview of the aesthetic-functional distribution of polysemous items is presented in Table 5 to illustrate this interaction.

Table 5. Aesthetic and Communicative Functions of Polysemous Lexical Items

Lexical Item	Communicative Role	Aesthetic Role	Functional Outcome
shape	attraction reference	metaphorical framing	thematic anchoring
heart	emotional reference	symbolic depth	affective intensification
touch	relational signaling	intimacy imagery	sensory engagement
fall	narrative progression	emotional transition	experiential framing

The table demonstrates that lexical items are not only semantic carriers but also structural components of aesthetic meaning construction, where communicative and poetic functions operate in parallel. This aligns with discourse-oriented analyses of song lyrics that emphasize the integration of meaning and style in shaping interpretive experience (Wildhani et al., 2025). The findings suggest that polysemy enables lexical economy while simultaneously expanding expressive capacity.

Further analysis reveals that polysemy enhances narrative fluidity by allowing seamless transitions between literal and metaphorical domains, thereby sustaining lyrical continuity. This fluidity is achieved through strategic lexical selection that anticipates multiple interpretive pathways within a single semantic frame. Research on sense relations in Ed Sheeran's albums similarly indicates that lexical flexibility contributes to narrative cohesion across thematic sequences (Kusuma & Simatupang, 2022). In the present study, such flexibility is identified as a structural feature that supports lyrical progression without semantic fragmentation.

The communicative function of polysemy is also evident in its role in balancing explicitness and ambiguity, ensuring that meaning remains accessible while still open to interpretation. This balance is particularly important in popular music, where accessibility and interpretive richness must coexist to sustain broad audience engagement. Studies on idiomatic and figurative language in song lyrics confirm that controlled ambiguity enhances communicative effectiveness by inviting listener participation in meaning construction (Van Thao, 2021). The current analysis refines this argument by showing that polysemy serves as a primary mechanism for achieving this equilibrium.

Emotional intensification emerges as another key function of polysemy, particularly through lexical items that encode both sensory and affective dimensions. Words such as "heart," "touch," and "fall" simultaneously evoke physical experience and emotional resonance, thereby deepening listener immersion. Research on lexical meaning in song discourse supports the view that emotional engagement is amplified through layered semantic structures (Faudzan, 2025). In this dataset, such layering is systematically embedded in polysemous lexical choices that guide emotional interpretation.

The aesthetic structuring of lyrics is further reinforced through repetition of polysemous lexical items, which creates rhythmic coherence while maintaining semantic variability. This repetition functions as both a mnemonic device and a stylistic reinforcement mechanism, enhancing memorability without reducing interpretive depth. Corpus-based analyses of popular music similarly highlight repetition as a central feature in constructing lyrical identity and coherence (Kendong et al., 2023). The present findings extend this perspective by linking repetition directly to polysemous reinforcement of meaning.

Another significant observation is that polysemy facilitates listener-centered interpretation, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction between textual cues and individual experiential frameworks. This interactive process reflects the role of background knowledge in shaping song interpretation, particularly in emotionally driven discourse (Biktagirova & Samarkina, 2023). The analysis suggests that polysemy increases interpretive agency by allowing multiple valid readings to coexist within the same lexical structure. This contributes to the democratization of meaning in popular lyrical consumption.

The stylistic dimension of polysemy also manifests in its contribution to linguistic economy, where minimal lexical input generates maximal semantic output. This efficiency allows songwriters to compress complex emotional and relational narratives into concise lyrical expressions. Studies on syntactic and stylistic features in Ed Sheeran's work similarly emphasize linguistic compression as a defining characteristic of his songwriting style (Gafur et al., 2021). The current analysis situates polysemy as a key mechanism enabling this compression without loss of interpretive richness.

The results further indicate that polysemy operates as a bridge between linguistic structure and cultural resonance, enabling lyrics to reflect shared experiential frameworks while remaining open-ended. This bridging function enhances the cultural portability of the song, allowing it to resonate across diverse interpretive communities. Research on song discourse and cognitive engagement similarly highlights the role of lexical flexibility in facilitating cross-cultural interpretability (Sugiati et al., 2025). In this context, polysemy becomes a site of cultural mediation embedded within linguistic form.

The overall analysis demonstrates that polysemy in “*Shape of You*” functions simultaneously as a semantic, aesthetic, and communicative system that structures meaning production across multiple levels of interpretation. This multifunctionality underscores the role of lexical ambiguity as a deliberate artistic strategy rather than a byproduct of linguistic variation. Comparative studies in contemporary lyric semantics support this view by identifying polysemy as a defining feature of modern song discourse (Luli et al., 2025). The findings in this section consolidate this understanding by showing how polysemy integrates aesthetic design and communicative efficiency within a unified lyrical framework.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of polysemous lexical items in Ed Sheeran’s “*Shape of You*” demonstrates that lexical meaning is systematically structured through context-dependent semantic extension that operates across identification, contextual activation, and aesthetic-communicative functions. The findings indicate that polysemy is not an incidental linguistic feature but a central organizing principle that governs how lexical items shift between literal and metaphorical domains, particularly in vocabulary related to physicality, emotion, and interpersonal relations. Contextual mechanisms play a decisive role in regulating meaning selection, ensuring that lexical ambiguity contributes to interpretive clarity rather than semantic confusion. Furthermore, the study shows that polysemy enhances both aesthetic richness and communicative efficiency by enabling lexical economy, emotional intensification, and narrative cohesion within lyrical discourse. These functions collectively illustrate that meaning in song lyrics is constructed through an integrated semantic system in which lexical items operate as dynamic carriers of multiple, contextually activated interpretations. The study contributes to lexical semantics by reinforcing the view that polysemy is a structured cognitive-linguistic mechanism embedded in artistic language use.

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