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Social Aspect in Avenged Sevenfold ‘So Far Away’ Song: A Critical Discourse Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Discourse study is an interdisciplinary field that combines linguistics, psychology, poetics, and social sciences, focusing on systematic theory and various contexts. Social cognition is defined as a system of mental structures shared by members of a group, culture, or organization. This research aims to analyze the social aspects of the Avenged Sevenfold song “So Far Away” from a Critical Discourse perspective. It follows a descriptive qualitative design, generating data that describe the ‘who, what, and where of events or experiences’ from a subjective perspective. The analysis begins with an examination of each word in the lyrics, followed by an analysis of the entire song and its social aspects. Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the song reflects Synyster Gates’ feelings after the passing of his best friend, The Rev. Since they had been close friends since childhood, The Rev’s death was deeply painful for Synyster Gates.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse, Social Aspect, Song*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse is the study of language in various forms, including words, clauses, phrases, sentences, and even discourse itself. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) goes beyond analyzing words, phrases, clauses, and sentences; it also examines elements outside the discourse itself. CDA has become a common approach for analyzing both written and spoken texts, encompassing critical linguistics, critical semiotics, and socio-political studies investigated through language, discourse, and communication (Bulan & Kasman, 2018).

Discourse studies is an interdisciplinary field that combines linguistics, psychology, poetics, and social sciences, focusing on systematic theory and various contexts. It has evolved from shared problems and interests as an extension of these disciplines. Discourse studies are related to fundamental similarities in discourse, objects, and language forms within communicative contexts (Anwar, 2020). CDA serves as a tool for analyzing both linguistic and social aspects (Ulinuha, 2013). As a branch of discourse analysis, CDA provides a particular perspective (Wisudawati & Setyani, 2018) and is essential for understanding the textual and societal practices of news discourse presented by the media. CDA also examines spoken and written language as a form of social practice (Muhassin, 2021).

Discourse analysis (DA) emerged from an awareness of communication problems that extend beyond sentence structure and speech functions. It involves analyzing coherent message structures and applies rules from various linguistic branches, such as semantics and syntax (Sahmeni & Afifah, 2019).

Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted through text and speech in social and political contexts. With this approach, critical discourse analysts take an explicit stance to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. One example of discourse that can be analyzed through both text and social aspects is song lyrics. A song is a short musical composition that combines words and music. Many songwriters use their craft to express emotions, introduce new ideas, or motivate listeners to be more productive. Song lyrics can be analyzed through three aspects: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure.

Based on this framework, researchers have conducted a critical discourse analysis of the social aspects in Avenged Sevenfold's song *So Far Away*. This song is a tribute to The Rev, a band member who passed away. The study aims to explain the social aspects and the author's background behind the lyrics of "So Far Away", which evoke deep emotions, often bringing listeners to tears.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis Based on Van Dijk

The first dimension examined in Van Dijk's CDA model is text structure, which consists of three analytical units: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. First, macrostructure refers to the general meaning of a text, which can be observed by examining the topics or themes displayed in news discourse. Second, superstructure signifies discourse structures as well-structured text components, such as introduction, content, and conclusion. Third, microstructure includes elements that can be observed in smaller parts of the text, such as semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical elements (Muhassin, 2021).

According to Van Dijk, discourse analysis is insufficient if it only focuses on the text itself, as the text has a practical production process that must also be examined. Readers need to understand how a text is produced in order to grasp its knowledge background. For example, if a text discriminates against women, it is necessary to analyze why the text was produced in that way and why it portrays women as a minority.

Van Dijk establishes a connection between macro elements, such as social structure, and micro elements, referred to as social cognition. Social cognition has two meanings: it describes the process through which journalists produce texts and reflects the social values within a society for a wider audience. Social values influence journalists' knowledge and the way they produce texts. Van Dijk also examines how social structures, dominance, and power dynamics shape discourse. Additionally, he analyzes how journalists' cognition and awareness influence certain texts. In his model, discourse is seen through three dimensions: text, social cognition, and social analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis by Norman Fairclough

According to Fairclough, discourse plays a role in the construction of social identity, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning (Prasetyawati, 2021). Fairclough aims to build a model of discourse analysis that contributes to social and cultural analysis, combining textual analysis—typically confined to a limited space—with a broader societal context. His primary focus is on how language users convey certain ideological values (Tambunan, 2018).

Fairclough proposes four steps of critical discourse analysis. First, focus on a social wrong in its semiotic aspects. Second, identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong. Third, consider whether the social order requires the social wrong. Fourth, identify possible ways to overcome these obstacles (Sudarna and Yulina, 2021).

Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse model consists of micro, mezzo, and macro elements. The micro element analyzes the text itself, examining cohesion, coherence, grammar, transparency, theme, modality, and lexical

structures. The mezzo element, also known as discourse practice, focuses on the production, distribution, and use of text. The macro element, or sociocultural practice, explores the social context that influences the creation of a text, including situational, institutional, and social levels. This three-dimensional model emphasizes discourse as a form of social practice, where text is the product of broader practices, including its production, distribution, and consumption. Both textual and discourse practice dimensions are shaped by social practice, while discourse and language as social practices are determined by social structures (Wang, 2021).

Based on Fairclough and Van Dijk's theories of critical discourse analysis, this research adopts Van Dijk's CDA framework to analyze textual elements, author psychology, and social aspects in the song *So Far Away*. The study connects these aspects into a comprehensive analysis, focusing on the author's psychological background to understand the influences behind the songwriting. Specifically, this research explores how a member of Avenged Sevenfold expressed personal emotions through the song's lyrics.

Social Aspects in Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA studies should investigate both linguistic text and the social characteristics surrounding it, as these contribute to social power (Irawan and Adnan, 2018). Fairclough states that critical discourse analysis consists of three dimensions: text, discourse practice, and sociological aspects. The text dimension includes grammatical structures, syntax, and all elements within the text. Discourse practice involves the construction of the text, while the sociological aspect examines how the community interacts with the discourse by providing opinions, comments, and reactions. Sociocultural practice refers to external contexts related to society, culture, and politics that influence the presence of a text (Saraswati and Sartini, 2017).

Social cognition is defined as the mental structures and systems shared by members of a group, culture, or organization. This system consists of attitudes, ideologies, values, norms, and knowledge that shape discourse and social practices (Wardani, 2020). In sociocultural analysis, textual evidence enhances the understanding of a discourse, making the analysis both linguistic and intertextual. While textual analysis provides insight into what is explicitly stated, sociocultural analysis reveals what is implied or missing from a text. Understanding implicit meanings is crucial, as they often provide a gateway to the ideological aspects of discourse (Mandarani, 2021).

The Definition of Music

Nowadays, music serves as a common form of entertainment. People listen to music anytime and anywhere for various reasons: to alleviate boredom while waiting for a bus, to enhance concentration while studying, to boost motivation

during workouts, or to relax before sleep. It is undeniable that music has a significant impact on people's lives. Even educators incorporate music into teaching to create an engaging learning experience.

The word "music" originates from the Greek word *mousike*, which was derived from the name of a deity associated with the arts and sciences. Music primarily conveys feelings and sounds, making it a medium for emotional expression. It harmonizes various musical instruments and song lyrics in a way that evokes specific effects on listeners (Wibowo, 2019). Lyrics, an essential part of music, often resemble literature, particularly poetry (Ekaningrum, 2015). Many songwriters use lyrics to express personal thoughts, emotions, and opinions. Some songs serve as tributes to individuals who have passed away, such as "So Far Away", which expresses the grief of losing a close friend.

Previous Research

Izzet (2020) found that metaphorical elements in BTS songs encourage listeners to stay motivated and pursue their dreams. This suggests that songs with meaningful lyrics can influence listeners' emotions and actions. Typically, such songs feature powerful messages and upbeat music that instill energy and enthusiasm.

Similarly, Risdianto (2016) examined the repetition of the phrase "We Will Not Go Down" in a song, concluding that it was designed to influence audiences—both supporters and opponents—by reinforcing the idea that Palestinian people will not surrender. Another study by Wibowo (2019) analyzed the lyrics of Ebiet G. Ade's *For Us to Ponder*, concluding that the song contains ten of the eighteen character values outlined in the 2013 curriculum, making it a valuable resource for character education.

From these studies, it can be concluded that song lyrics have the power to shape perspectives, motivate individuals, and serve as sources of inspiration. However, lyrics should not be analyzed solely based on their words and sentences; researchers must also examine the songwriter's background to uncover the deeper meanings implied in the lyrics. This study analyzes the social aspects of Avenged Sevenfold's *So Far Away*, a song dedicated to the late band member The Rev, to understand how the songwriter (Synyster Gates, The Rev's best friend) expresses his grief through the lyrics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has a descriptive qualitative design which generates data that describe the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective perspective (Doyle et al., 2020). The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened (Nassaji, 2015). Qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture

rather than breaking it down into variables. The goal is a holistic picture and depth of understanding rather than a numeric analysis of data (Ekawati, 2019). This research is analyzed the author psychology and social aspect of the song from Avenged Sevenfold titled "So Far Away" which was the feeling of losing your best friend since he was passed away.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"So Far Away" Lyrics

Never feared for anything

Never shamed but never free

A life to heal the broken heart with all that it could

Lived a life so endlessly

Saw beyond what others see

I tried to heal your broken heart with all that I could

Will you stay?

Will you stay away forever?

How do I live without the ones I love?

Time still turns the pages of the book it's burned

Place and time always on my mind

I have so much to say but you're so far away

Plans of what our futures hold

Foolish lies of growing old

It seems we're so invincible

The truth is so cold

A final song, a last request

A perfect chapter laid to rest

Now and then I try to find

A place in my mind

Where you can stay

You can stay away forever

How do I live without the ones I love?

Time still turns the pages of the book it's burned

Place and time always on my mind

I have so much to say but you're so far away

Sleep tight, I'm not afraid (not afraid)

The ones that we love are here with me

Lay away a place for me (place for me)

'Cause as soon as I'm done I'll be on my way

To live eternally

How do I live without the ones I love?

Time still turns the pages of the book it's burned

Place and time always on my mind

And the light you left remains but it's so hard to stay

When I have so much to say and you're so far away

I love you, you were ready

The pain is strong and urges rise

But I'll see you, when he lets me

Your pain is gone, your hands untied

So far away (so far)

And I need you to know

So far away (so far)

And I need you to, need you to know

Song Analysis

The text remains coherent despite not containing all elements of cohesion. In the lyrics, there is an anaphoric reference in the line "How do I live without the ones I love?" and multiple instances of substitution, such as I, me, you, your, we, and our, which refer to the songwriter and a third person who is the subject of the song. The songwriter also uses he to represent God.

There are several repetitions of words and phrases, such as "Time still turns the pages of the book it's burned", "So far away (so far)", and "And I need you to know", which appear two to three times throughout the lyrics. This repetition emphasizes the songwriter's longing due to the distance between him and the song's subject.

The lyrics also include conjunctive relations indicating results ("so"), contrast ("but"), and time ("now", "then"). However, there is no ellipsis or lexical cohesion, as the lyrics do not contain synonyms, hyponyms, or antonyms. Additionally, there is no comparative cohesion since the lyrics do not make any comparisons.

The lyrics are coherent because the words are meaningfully connected, making it easier for the listener to understand the songwriter's emotions. The song expresses the songwriter's feelings after losing someone important to him.

Author Background

"So Far Away" is a song written by Synyster Gates, the guitarist of Avenged Sevenfold. It was the first song he wrote in his music career. Synyster was born in Huntington Beach, California, USA, on July 7, 1981. He is the son of musician, author, and comedian Brian Haner Jr., who worked with Sam in Sam's band in the 1970s. Syn has a stepmother named Suzy Haner and step-siblings named Johnny Gera and McKenna. He married Michelle DiBenedetto on May 7, 2010, in Mexico, and they have a son, Nicolangelo "Nicci" Saint James Haner, born on May 12, 2017.

Syn began playing guitar at the age of nine and became serious about it at eleven. He studied at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles as part of a guitar music program, focusing on jazz and classical guitar. He joined Avenged Sevenfold in 1999 at the age of 18 as the lead guitarist and backing vocalist. In 2006, he was named "Guitarist of the Year" by Total Guitar magazine and ranked third in Rock Magazine's best musician poll in 2010. In 2016 and 2017, he was voted the best metal guitarist in the world by Total Guitar. In 2018, he ranked 87th in Guitar World's list of the 100 greatest guitarists of all time.

Besides his role in Avenged Sevenfold, Syn was a member of Pinkly Smooth, an experimental metal band formed in 2001 with his best friend, The Rev. The band released an album titled Unfortunate Snort. Syn is known for his

perfectionism in music. He dislikes restringing his guitar, which once even delayed an album release. He has been known to sleep in the studio when struggling to find the right key for his guitar.

Syn is a multi-talented musician, proficient in guitar, violin, and piano. He is also a businessman, running an online guitar school through his YouTube channel and Instagram. His courses cater to beginner, intermediate, and advanced students, and he often shares videos of his students playing guitar on his Instagram. He has students from various countries, all of whom express great satisfaction with his teaching.

Between 2007 and 2009, Syn owned a clothing line business selling hats, t-shirts, beanies, hoodies, and accessories inspired by rock fashion. However, the business closed due to licensing issues, and many fans are still waiting for its return. Syn is also an innovative musician, drawing inspiration from other artists. He has always aspired to be a professional rock guitarist like Slash and studied harmonization from classical guitarist Adam Aparicio. His role model is Django Reinhardt, a renowned European jazz guitarist. He collaborates on melodies for Avenged Sevenfold albums with his father and Matt Shadows, the band's songwriter. Many fans admire his guitar skills, particularly in the Afterlife music video.

Beyond music, Syn is a kind-hearted person. He has a dog named Pinkly that accompanies him on tours. On stage, fans often throw water bottles, hats, or even underwear at him, but he remains focused on playing guitar, showing his professionalism, which has earned him worldwide admiration.

Social Aspect

Synyster Gates wrote "So Far Away" after the band's drummer, Jimmy "The Rev" Sullivan, passed away on December 28, 2009. The song serves as a farewell letter from Syn to Jimmy and was the first Avenged Sevenfold song he wrote both lyrically and instrumentally.

Syn was very close to his best friend, James Owen Sullivan, known as The Rev, the drummer of Avenged Sevenfold. The Rev was highly talented in drumming, ranking 41st among the greatest drummers of all time in 2009 and 9th in the world.

On December 28, 2009, while Avenged Sevenfold was at the peak of their career, devastating news broke: The Rev was found dead at his home at the age of 28. His family, friends, and fans were shocked, as no one expected to lose him so soon. It took about six months for the autopsy results to be released. On June 9, doctors confirmed that his death was caused by poisoning due to the use of mixed psychotropic substances, also known as "cross fading."

This tragedy deeply affected the band members, especially Syn, who considered The Rev his best friend, neighbor, and even a brother. They had spent their childhood together, along with Matt Shadows, the lead vocalist of Avenged

Sevenfold. Rumors spread about the band's disbandment, but Avenged Sevenfold proved otherwise by releasing a new album in 2017 with Mike Portnoy as their drummer.

Years passed without The Rev, but Syn remained extremely depressed. He had lost his best friend, partner in crime, and motivator. He felt lost without The Rev and nearly quit the music industry. However, he remembered a song he had written for his grandfather, who passed away during a vacation. That song had never been released, so he decided to remake it as a tribute to his beloved friend. This is how "So Far Away" came to life. Syn poured his heart into this song—the first and last song he dedicated to The Rev, the most important person in his life after his parents and wife.

Listening to this song reveals the deep sorrow Avenged Sevenfold felt after losing their drummer, sibling, and friend. Fans were shocked when Syn revealed a large "The Rev" tattoo on his chest, symbolizing that The Rev would always be in his heart. The music video for "So Far Away" includes many references to The Rev, such as tattoos, band equipment with his initials, and clips of Avenged Sevenfold before and after his passing. The video is dominated by a somber atmosphere, with every band member displaying deep sadness on their faces.

CONCLUSION

After all the analysis above, it can conclude the song actually is the Syn's feeling after his best friend, the Rev was passed away. The Rev and Syn was become best friend since childhood, it must be hurt for Syn when the Rev left him forever. In the lyric 'How do I live without the ones I love?' emphasized the Syn's frustration when his best friend that he loves left him. In the lyric 'Lay away a place for me (place for me)', Syn wants the Rev for waiting him and prepare place for him, then they can meet again. Syn's love for the Rev cannot be apart even one of them was in another dimension. After the Rev passed away, Syn even made a big tattoo in his chest with "The Rev" as the word, it means the Rev was really having special place in Syn's heart since childhood, now, and forever.

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