MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SONG 'BAD GUY' BY BILLIE EILISH

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Abstract

This paper presents a morphological analysis of Billie Eilish's song *"bad guy"*, exploring how word structure and formation contribute to the song's stylistic and thematic identity. The lyrics exhibit a dynamic interplay between standard and nonstandard morphological forms, including contractions, colloquial participle reductions (e.g., *sleepin', creepin'*), and productive affixation (e.g., *bloody, criminal*). Through frequent use of inflectional and derivational morphemes, the song constructs meaning in an economically expressive manner. The analysis identifies instances of morphological creativity, such as the recurring "X type" construction (*tough guy*, *bad type*), which exemplifies ellipsis and noun phrase nominalization. Morphosyntactic minimalism, combined with strategic use of compounding and conversion (e.g., *bad* as a noun), reinforces the persona's defiant tone and emotional detachment. Additionally, interjections like *duh* and the reduplicative compound *tippy toes* provide insight into the pragmatic and stylistic functions of morphology in pop lyricism. The song's lexical choices are not merely stylistic flourishes but serve a rhetorical purpose, enhancing the confrontational stance of the speaker and underscoring themes of autonomy and resistance. These linguistic features coalesce to produce a strikingly modern persona that blurs the boundaries between aggression and vulnerability, performance and authenticity. By grounding its findings in contemporary morphological theory, this analysis highlights how Eilish's lyrics manipulate familiar forms to construct a subversive voice that challenges normative gendered expectations and conventional syntactic patterns. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that *"bad guy"* uses morphology not only as a linguistic tool but as an aesthetic device central to the song's unique narrative style.
Keyword: Morphological, morphemes, creativity, linguistic

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool that invigirates our everyday lives. As defined by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, it is a system of spoken and written expression employed by the people of a particular country. In everyday life, language plays a vital role in helping individuals connect, share information, and interact with one another. It is necessary for humans to connect, communicate, and receive information from others in daily life. The members of a social group employ language as a system of sound symbols and an arbiter character to cooperate, communicate, and identify themselves (Herman, 2018:33). Spoken language is found in songs, speeches, films, and everyday conversations. It is essential to human existence, as social interaction and communication are fundamental aspects of our nature.

The field related to analyzing the process of word formation is morphology. Following Lieber (2021) morphology is the study that focuses on words and word formation. Another definition from Badawi (2019) elaborates that morphology focuses on the internal structure and meaning of words. In conclusion, morphology is a branch of linguistics that examines the internal structure of words and the rules that govern how new words are formed in a language. Morphological analysis is a fundamental component of linguistic study with wide-reaching implications in education, second language acquisition, legal interpretation, and computational linguistics. In educational contexts, morphological awareness has been found to significantly enhance students' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Research by Marlina (2020) demonstrated that explicit instruction in affixes improved vocabulary mastery among junior high school students in Indonesia. Similarly, Anggraini and Setiawan (2021) emphasized that morphological competence supports learners in developing reading, writing, and speaking skills by enabling them to decode complex words. In the field of second language acquisition, morphological knowledge allows learners to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words and form new words more accurately, which facilitates greater language autonomy and proficiency (Pratiwi, 2020). Moreover, in academic writing, especially at the postgraduate level, morphological awareness has been shown to predict vocabulary development and the use of complex grammatical structures, thereby improving writing quality (Triyoko & Sunardi, 2021). Additionally, in the realm of natural language processing (NLP), morphology supports tasks such as stemming, lemmatization, and tokenization, all of which are crucial for building more accurate language models and improving search engines, machine translation, and speech recognition systems (Derczynski, 2017). Thus, the study of morphology is not only central to theoretical linguistics but also instrumental in applied contexts where language is processed, taught, and utilized.

Songs are brief musical compositions with spoken lyrics. Sitorus and Herman (2019:24) assert that one kind of communication that enables people to cooperate is singing. Songs are often seen as a form of communication that uses sound and music to express ideas, emotions, or thoughts. However, when listening to music, people frequently overlook the lyrics. In many cases, the appeal of a song lies more in the performer or the musical quality than in the words themselves. When listeners do try to focus on the lyrics, they may find it difficult to understand them—especially if the lyrics include metaphors or abstract language which proves the importance of analysis of songs.

Several studies on morphological analysis have been conducted in the past. The first study, conducted by Aprianti and Parmawati (2020), is titled Derivational And Inflectional Morpheme Analysis On The Song Lyrics Of Lady Gaga "A Star Is Born" Album. This research analyzed the morphology in the lyrics of all the songs of Lady Gaga's album "A Star Is Born" by using a qualitative method. The second study, by Feng (2016), is titled Development of morphological awareness through English songs: A case study which investigated the effects of English songs on morphological development amongst test groups. The third is a study by Kusuma and Mardijono (2013) titled *The Word Formation Processes of Indonesian Slang Words Used in Cosmo Girl! Indonesian Teenage Magazine*, which examined the processes of word formation in Indonesian slang found in the magazine, using Yule's (2006) theory.

ARGOPURO

Billie Eilish is an American singer and songwriter who rose to global fame with her distinctive sound, bold aesthetic, and emotionally resonant lyrics. Born in Los Angeles in 2001, Eilish gained initial attention with her debut single "Ocean Eyes," written and produced by her brother Finneas O'Connell. Her music, which blends elements of pop, indie, and electronic genres, is known for its haunting melodies, minimalist production, and introspective themes. Eilish's debut album, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* (2019), became a massive critical and commercial success, earning her multiple Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year and Best New Artist. What sets Billie Eilish apart is not just her unique voice or genre-defying sound, but the depth and complexity of her lyrics. Her songwriting often explores topics such as mental health, self-image, fame, love, and existential angst. For example, in songs like "everything i wanted" and "idontwannabeyouanymore," Eilish reflects on insecurity, depression, and the pressure of public life with raw honesty. Her use of metaphor, dark imagery, and conversational tone allows listeners to connect deeply with her emotions. Additionally, Eilish frequently challenges conventional pop themes, avoiding clichés in favor of vulnerability and authenticity. In interviews, she has expressed her desire to write lyrics that mean something and make people feel seen. Despite her youth, Eilish has become a voice for a generation that often feels misunderstood or overwhelmed by modern life. Her ability to pair deeply personal lyrics with innovative musical production has made her one of the most influential artists of her time. Through her music, Billie Eilish not only entertains but also opens up conversations about emotions, identity, and mental well-being, leaving a lasting impact on her audience worldwide. Due to Billie Eilish's ingenuity, it is important to provide a morphological analysis of her song to deepen our understanding of how the song's structure contributes to its strength as a good song.

METHOD

Methods are scientific stages to obtain benefits, steps or research objectives. In conducting this research, the researchers used descriptive research. According to Auli (2020) descriptive research is a research that is used to describe something systematically, factually and accurately in research without leaving important points in the research. It can be concluded that descriptive research is appropriate when researchers aim to understand an event, identify the people involved, and determine where it took place. Therefore, using descriptive qualitative research in analyzing the word formation processes in Billie Eilish's song "bad guy" is considered relevant. This approach allows the study to be conducted in a systematic and scientific manner, utilizing data in the form of texts or words, which is essential for addressing the research questions effectively. In this research, the data collection procedures were as follows: (1) the researchers listened to the songs, (2) they read the lyrics while carefully understanding the content and meaning of each song, (3) they identified and underlined words related to the word formation processes found within the lyrics, and (4) they compiled all the underlined words as the data for analysis. After gathering the data, the researchers analyzed it based on the research questions. This analysis was essential for drawing meaningful conclusions. The data analysis procedures included: (1) examining the identified and underlined words related to word formation processes, (2) describing each type of word formation found in the lyrics and interpreting their meanings, and (3) presenting the results based on the research findings. The object of this study was Billie Eilish's song "bad guy". The lyrics for these songs were sourced from the website Genius.com.

The data analysis stage in this research used the theory of communication barriers proposed by Chaney and Martin (2014). The data analysis stage began with an in-depth observation of the identified data. This step was taken to determine the types of communication barriers. Second, the types of barriers are associated with the categories of generations involved, namely Gen Z and Alpha. Then, the causes of the barriers were specifically identified by exploring the established context of the communication. Through these stages, the communication barriers between Gen Z and Alpha in this study are revealed

clearly and in a structured manner. The data analysis stage was also supported by a literature study that examined communication barriers in certain cultural circles. Literature study acts as a description of qualitative research methods (Darmalaksana, 2020).

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Based on the findings, the researchers found that the song "bad guy" by Billie Eilish consists of approximately 257 words in its standard lyrics (excluding repeated interjections like "duh" and introductory hummed sounds).

The lyrics to Billie Eilish's *"bad guy"* present a rich field for morphological analysis due to their use of colloquial, compressed, and emotionally expressive language. Billie Eilish's *"bad guy"* stands out not only for its minimalist production and distinctive tone but also for the morphological features embedded in its lyrics. While the song may appear deceptively simple on the surface, a deeper linguistic analysis reveals a rich tapestry of morphological patterns that reflect spoken English, creative word formation, and stylistic playfulness. This analysis explores the morphological categories evident in the song, examining how Eilish's lyrics utilize monomorphemic structures, inflectional and derivational morphology, contractions, compound words, and other morphological devices to shape meaning and tone.

To begin, much of the vocabulary in *"bad guy"* consists of monomorphemic words, meaning they are composed of a single morpheme and cannot be broken down further. Words like *white, red, nose, knees, guy,* and *bad* fall into this category. Their morphological simplicity allows the song to communicate clearly and directly, especially in lines like "White shirt now red, my bloody nose." Despite the visual intensity and emotional charge of the line, the majority of the words used are structurally simple, heightening the stark contrast between form and content. This linguistic economy is a hallmark of the song's minimalist yet impactful lyrical style.

Complementing this simplicity is the use of inflectional morphology, where word forms are modified to express grammatical relationships without changing the core meaning or word class. For instance, in "Creepin' around like no one knows," the verb *knows* includes the third person singular present tense inflection *-s*, marking grammatical agreement. Similarly, *bruises* and *knees* showcase the plural morpheme *-s* or *-es*, which is standard in English pluralization. The use of *wanting* in "I do what I want when I'm wanting to" involves the present participle suffix *-ing*, which signals continuous or habitual action. Although these inflectional forms are common, their placement in a stylized pop context adds rhythmic and functional variation to the lyrics according to Yastanti, U., Lestari, I. D., & Rohati, T. D. (2021).

More stylistically significant is the use of derivational morphology, where affixes are added to roots to create new words or change word classes. The adjective *bloody*, derived from the noun *blood* with the suffix *-y*, provides an excellent example. Here, derivation adds descriptive intensity to the noun, painting a vivid and somewhat violent image. In a similar vein, *criminal* is formed through the addition of the suffix *-al* to the root *crime*, with etymological origins in Latin. Though the suffix *-al* can indicate either an adjective or a noun, in the phrase "Think you're so criminal," it clearly functions as a noun. Another instance is *animal*, where the Latin root *anim-* (meaning life or spirit) combines with *-al* to create a noun that metaphorically describes the speaker's submissive behavior. These examples show how derivational morphology adds thematic richness to the song by enabling precise and evocative word choices. (Br. Singarimbun, D. S., Sembiring, M., & Ambarita, E., 2023).

A hallmark of contemporary colloquial English—especially in pop music—is the use of contractions, and *"bad guy"* employs them extensively. These include common forms like *don't* (do + not), *you're* (you + are), *I'm* (I + am), and *I'll* (I + will). Such contractions serve both a rhythmic and stylistic function, streamlining the flow of lyrics and enhancing the conversational tone. In addition to these standard contractions, the song also features colloquial reductions such as *sleepin', creepin',* and *bein',* where the final /g/ is dropped in writing to mimic informal speech. Though these words retain their grammatical function as participles, the altered spelling reinforces the casual, almost dismissive mood that defines the speaker's persona.

Another prominent feature is the use of compound words and phrases, particularly in the repeated structure involving *"guy"*. Lines like "So you're a tough guy / Like it really rough guy / Just can't get enough guy" demonstrate the productivity of this structure. Each compound noun phrase combines an adjective with the noun *guy* to characterize the subject in exaggerated, ironic terms. This recurring pattern culminates in the verse "I'm that bad type / Make your mama sad type," where the formulaic use of *type* nominalizes preceding clauses or adjectives, effectively turning phrases into character archetypes (Nurwulan, G. R. & Heryono, H. , 2024). This construction, minimalist in syntax, achieves morphological creativity through repetition and ellipsis, skipping auxiliary verbs like *am* or *is* but maintaining coherence.

The word *tippy* in "you're on your tippy toes" illustrates reduplication and diminutive formation. Derived from *tip*, the form *tippy* adds the suffix -*y*, often used to soften or infantilize terms. The phrase *tippy toes* evokes a playful, almost childlike image, yet in the song, it's used to describe someone sneaking or walking carefully. This juxtaposition between morphological playfulness and lyrical irony underscores the layered tone of the song.

Functional shift, also known as zero derivation, is another subtle but effective morphological strategy used in *"bad guy."* In the phrase "I'm only good at bein' bad," the adjective *bad* functions as a noun, a shift achieved without any morphological alteration. This type of conversion adds flexibility to word usage, and in this case, amplifies the thematic focus on role-playing and identity performance.

The use of interjections, particularly *duh,* introduces pragmatic meaning rather than grammatical content. *Duh* is a non-inflected word that conveys sarcasm or condescension. While morphologically simple, its inclusion is crucial to the overall tone, serving as a cue to the listener about the speaker's ironic detachment.

Lastly, phrasal verbs such as *take control* and *sing along* offer an additional layer of morphological interest. Though composed of a verb and a particle, they function as single semantic units. In "I like it when you take control," the phrase implies emotional or relational dynamics, while *sing along* reflects participatory behavior. These constructions maintain internal syntactic structure while carrying compound meaning, a hallmark of idiomatic English.

Table 1. Morphological categories in the song

Category	Definition	Examples from Lyrics	Notes
Monomorphemic Words	Words made up of a single morpheme	*white, red, nose, knees, guy, bad*	Simple in structure; carry full lexical meaning without affixes
Inflectional Morphology	Modification of a word to express grammatical features	*knows, bruises, knees, puffed, wanting*	Regular plural *-s*, 3rd person *-s*, past tense *-ed*, participle *-ing*
Derivational Morphology	Creating new words by adding prefixes or suffixes	*bloody (blood + -y), criminal (crime + -al), animal*	Alters word class or meaning
Contractions (Morphological Compression)	Combining auxiliary verbs and negatives or pronouns	*don't (do + not), you're (you + are), I'm (I + am), I'll (I + will)*	Common in informal English and in pop lyrics
Colloquial Contractions	Informal spelling or pronunciation in lyrics	*sleepin', creepin', bein'*	Reflects spoken language; drops final *g*
Compound Words	Combining two or more words to form a new meaning	*tippy toes, tough guy, bad type, sad type*	Includes descriptive noun phrases
Functional Shift (Zero Derivation)	Change in word class without changing form	*bad (adj → noun in "bein' bad")*	No visible affix; shift happens through usage
Reduplication/Diminutive Formation	Repetition or modification to create informal or childlike tone	*tippy (from tip + -y)*	Adds playfulness, informal tone
Interjections	Expressive, standalone words	*duh*	Not morphologically complex; adds tone or attitude
Phrasal Verbs	Verb + particle combinations that form a single semantic unit	*sing along, take control*	Morphologically separable but function as one unit

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CONCLUSION

The morphological analysis of Billie Eilish's *"bad guy"* reveals a dynamic interplay between simplicity and stylistic innovation. Billie Eilish's *"bad guy"* demonstrates a rich use of English morphology through its blend of simple structures and inventive linguistic forms. Much of the song's vocabulary consists of monomorphemic words like *red, nose, knees,* and *bad*, which are morphologically simple yet contribute to strong visual and emotional imagery. The lyrics feature standard inflectional morphology, as seen in words like *knows* (3rd person singular *-s*), *bruises* and *knees* (plural *-es*), and *wanting* (*-ing* participle). These inflections are often accompanied by colloquial reductions such as *sleepin', creepin',* and *bein'*, where the dropped *g* mimics casual speech. The song also uses derivational morphology in words like *bloody* (from *blood* + *-y*), *criminal* (from *crime* + *-al*), and *animal* (from *anim-* + *-al*), showing how affixation can create expressive descriptors. Contractions such as *don't, you're,* and *I'm* reflect morphological compression, enhancing the song's conversational tone. Compound constructions like *tough guy, rough guy,* and *bad type* use repetition and modification to characterize personas, with *type* serving as a nominalizing element in lines like "mama sad type." The playful diminutive *tippy* (from *tip* + *-y*) in *tippy toes* adds contrast between childlike imagery and the implied sneakiness. Eilish also uses functional shift, such as turning the adjective *bad* into a noun in "bein' bad," illustrating English's flexibility. Phrasal verbs like *take control* and *sing along* add idiomatic depth, while interjections like *duh* provide pragmatic meaning and underline the song's sarcastic tone. Altogether, the lyrics of *"bad guy"* make creative use of English morphology, balancing structural simplicity with expressive and ironic complexity, contributing to the song's distinct voice and stylized identity.

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