

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the motivation driving this research project. It includes the background of the study, research questions, objectives, significance, scope and limitations, as well as definitions of key terms. These elements are essential to structure and frame the introductory chapter of this research.

1.1 Background of the Study

Music has been recognized as a powerful cultural and communication medium, significantly influencing listeners' emotional experiences and personality development, beyond mere entertainment. Song lyrics are used to convey narratives and meanings that individuals interpret through the lens of their personal experiences and self-concepts. According to a recent comprehensive review, the psychological effects of song lyrics predictively influence listeners' mood regulation, behaviour, and emotional states, suggesting that lyrical narratives serve as meaningful stimuli that interact with personal cognitive frameworks (Liébana & Ibiás, 2025). Popular music lyrics contribute to identity formation, particularly among young people who frequently engage with music as a form of social expression, meaning that lyrics function as cultural texts through which listeners explore and negotiate self-concepts, emotions, and interpersonal relationships (González, 2021). This communication process transforms lyrics into a shared evaluation arena, where the artist's expression of reality allows listeners to actively participate in constructing identity meaning and emotional resilience.

Global studies suggest that lyrics serve as emotional catalysts, enabling listeners to develop meanings that resonate with their context. A psycholinguistic study conducted by Mawaddah & Djauhari (2025) demonstrated that word choice and sentence structure in lyrics significantly impact listeners' emotional resonance. It influences how individuals recall personal memories and form affective associations with songs. These findings highlight the fact that listeners are interpreters of lyrical content rather than passive recipients (Aini et al., 2025). In

addition, studies on music reception indicate that listeners actively decipher lyrics using their social frameworks and personal experiences. The meaning of lyrics often differs between individuals and cultural groups. In Indonesia and other similarly globalized environments, local research reveals that popular music lyrics serve as a source of emotional and cultural meaning for young people. These lyrics enable listeners to understand topics such as love, loss, empowerment, and social belonging through their own sociocultural lenses.

Research on Indonesian popular culture emphasizes how lyrics play a role in the formation of emotional narratives and social identities among members of Generation Z, and how these narratives are interpreted based on the listener's lived experiences rather than the literal meaning of the song itself (Ramadhana & Heriyati, 2025). Followers are able to articulate and validate their own lived experiences through the act of listening, which becomes a form of identity formation. Lyrical descriptions of an artist's struggles serve as a mirror for followers to use in this process.

Despite extensive research on how lyrics reflect societal trends and emotional themes, there is still a significant gap in empirical research that captures how listeners perceive the "personalities" and "lived experiences" presented through lyrics, particularly across languages. While many studies examine lyric content or emotional responses in laboratory settings, few use robust linguistic frameworks like Appraisal Theory to directly measure audience perceptions of personality and thematic evaluations embedded in lyrics (Fiqri et al., 2023). Furthermore, existing qualitative approaches to lyric analysis tend to focus on textual features (e.g., sentiment or lexical trends) rather than how listeners perceive personality constructions in lyrics, leaving room for research that combines linguistic evaluation and reception theory (Rosebaugh & Shamir, 2022). Addressing this gap is essential for moving beyond textual assumptions and toward a more scientific understanding of how 'mental struggle' is processed and confirmed by a worldwide audience.

Previous research shows that Appraisal Theory within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics has been widely applied to

analyze evaluative meaning in song lyrics, particularly in expressing emotions and attitudes represented through language choices. Research by (Oryza & Mendrofa, 2024) analyzed Taylor Swift's EP *Midnights* with an emphasis on the graduation system in Appraisal Theory and found that the intensity of linguistic evaluation in lyrics contributes significantly to the formation of emotional depth and personal experiences experienced by listeners. These findings indicate that song lyrics not only convey textual messages but also create evaluative meanings that can be interpreted subjectively by listeners. However, the study remained focused on analyzing the lyrics and did not involve listener perception as a primary data source.

In line with this, other research in the fields of music and linguistics shows that the emotional meaning and identity formed through song lyrics are often mediated by the social experiences and backgrounds of the audience, so that interpretations are not singular (Fiqri et al., 2024). Therefore, although previous studies have shown that Appraisal Theory, particularly the Judgment category, is effective in revealing evaluative meaning in song lyrics, there is still a lack of research on how that meaning is perceived and interpreted by multilingual audiences. This study is based on a research gap that integrates Appraisal Theory, with an audience reception approach to analyze how fans interpret Eaj's personality and life experiences through song lyrics.

The relevance of this study is further underscored by Eaj's own career trajectory, which provides essential context for understanding the personality and life experiences represented in the EP. Eaj, whose real name is Park Jae-hyung, debuted in 2015 as the lead guitarist and vocalist of the South Korean pop rock band *Day6* under JYP Entertainment, having gained early recognition after competing in the first season of *K-pop Star* in 2012. Throughout his six years with the group, Park experienced significant mental health struggles; in an interview, he revealed that he had a panic attack and was diagnosed with panic disorder in April 2020, a period during which he became increasingly open with fans about his condition. On December 31, 2021, Park announced he would be leaving *Day6* and ending his exclusive contract with JYP Entertainment due to personal reasons, a departure that he had initially

framed as a hiatus rather than a permanent exit. Following this transition, Park pursued a solo career under the stage name Eaj, releasing his solo debut single "Car Crash" in April 2022 and continuing to build an independent artistic identity outside the K-pop industry.

This career transition from a K-pop group member to an independent solo artist is directly reflected in the thematic content of the EP *When the Rain Stopped Following Me*, which frequently touches on themes of regret, betrayal, lost youth, and the search for a renewed sense of self beyond a former public persona. Given that Eaj's departure from Day6 was surrounded by public discussion regarding the circumstances of his exit and his subsequent openness about his mental health journey, listeners' interpretations of the EP are likely to be shaped, at least in part, by their awareness of this biographical background. This makes the EP a particularly rich object of study for examining how fans construct meaning around an artist's personality and lived experience, especially across audiences with varying degrees of familiarity with his career history and cultural background.

Based on this background, this study focuses its data sources on fan perceptions as the main representation of the song lyric interpretation process. This study views lyrics not as a single carrier of meaning, but as a trigger for linguistic evaluation mediated by the listener's life experiences, emotions, and social background. Therefore, the personality, character, and mental struggles depicted in Eaj's lyrics are understood as the result of the interaction between language and audience interpretation. The EP *When the Rain Stopped Following Me* was chosen based on the personal and reflective nature of its lyrics, which allow listeners to connect the song's narrative with their own emotional experiences and personal development.

By placing the listener at the center of the analysis, this study departs from the assumption that the meaning of personality and life experiences in song lyrics is subjective and contextual. Differences in linguistic backgrounds and personal experiences allow fans to construct diverse interpretations of Eaj's persona as presented in the lyrics. Therefore, this study aims to formulate research questions that explore

how fans interpret Eaj's personality, character, and mental struggles through song lyrics, as well as how these patterns of assessment emerge in the perceptions of cross-linguistic audiences. Despite extensive research on song lyrics and emotional meaning, limited studies integrate Appraisal Theory with a cross-linguistic audience reception approach to examine how listeners interpret personality constructions in song lyrics. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by combining evaluative linguistic analysis with qualitative audience perception across linguistic backgrounds.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do fans interpret the personality and life experiences of Eaj as represented in the lyrics of the EP *When the Rain Stopped Following Me*?
2. What evaluative linguistic patterns (e.g., affect, judgment, appreciation) emerge in fans' perceptions of personality and mental struggle in the lyrics?
3. To what extent do interpretations differ across linguistic backgrounds (Indonesian, English, Korean) in fans' reception of the same song lyrics?

1.3 Research Purpose

This study aims to comprehend how fans derive meaning concerning personality, life experiences, and mental challenges from the lyrics of Eaj's songs in the EP *When the Rain Stopped Following Me*, employing a reception framework that prioritizes audience interpretation over textual cues.

1. This study also aims to map patterns using Appraisal Theory as a linguistic lens (affect, judgment, appreciation).
2. Analyzing how fans from different language communities interpret personality constructions in song lyrics.
3. Contributing to theoretical refinement in linguistic reception studies exploring in-depth interpretations.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is significant in several ways:

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

It bridges linguistic evaluation theory with audience reception theory, advancing a model for studying music lyrics as socially interpreted texts, not just as literary artifacts.

1.4.2 Methodological Significance

By using a cross-lingual questionnaire and interpretative analysis of fan perceptions, this study provides an empirical foundation for assessing how interpretations vary across cultural and language groups.

1.4.3 Practical and Cultural Significance

Understanding how fans relate to personality and mental themes in lyrics can inform artists, music scholars, and cultural analysts about the socio-emotional impact of contemporary music beyond commercial success. Additionally, research on music reception contributes to broader discussions in media psychology about the role of lyrics in emotional processing and identity formation. Research on psychological effects of song lyrics shows that musical language can shape listener emotions and cognitive responses, reinforcing the relevance of reception studies in understanding cultural texts.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

1.5.1 Scope

This study focuses on:

- a. Fans of Eaj's EP *When the Rain Stopped Following Me* who speak Indonesian, English, or Korean.
- b. Evaluative linguistic categories from Appraisal Theory (affect, judgment, appreciation) as applied to fan perceptions.

- c. Qualitative data collected through open-ended questionnaires and follow-up interviews across language groups, emphasizing perceptual differences in personality and emotional interpretation.

1.5.2 Limitation

This study is limited by its qualitative nature, which focuses on in-depth exploration of participants' interpretations rather than statistical generalization. The number of participants is relatively small to allow detailed analysis of individual responses. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of Eaj's listeners. Furthermore, as the data are collected through written responses, some participants may not fully articulate their thoughts, which could limit the depth of certain interpretations.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Fans' Interpretation

Fans' interpretation refers to the process through which fans actively construct meaning from song lyrics based on their personal experiences, emotions, linguistic background, and social context. In this study, fans' interpretation focuses on how listeners understand and evaluate the personality, character, and life experiences of Eaj as represented in his song lyrics.

2. Personality

Personality refers to the perceived representation of an individual's characteristic traits, values, emotional dispositions, and self-image attributed to Eaj by listeners through his song lyrics. In this research, personality is understood as a socially and linguistically constructed impression shaped by listeners' evaluative perceptions rather than a fixed, author-intended, or psychometrically measured trait profile.

3. Life Experiences

Life experiences refer to listeners' interpretations of the personal struggles, emotional journeys, and lived realities reflected in the song lyrics. In this study, life experiences include themes such as mental

struggle, vulnerability, resilience, and self-reflection as perceived by fans through their engagement with the lyrics.

4. Song Lyrics

Song lyrics refer to the written verbal component of songs that convey meanings, emotions, and narratives. In this research, song lyrics are treated as linguistic resources that enable evaluative interpretation rather than as texts with a single, objective meaning.

5. Reception

Reception refers to the process by which audiences actively interpret and assign meaning to cultural texts. In this study, reception emphasizes the role of listeners as active meaning-makers who interpret song lyrics based on their linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds.

