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An Analysis of Emotional and Religious Meaning in Classical German Schläger Songs

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of emotional meaning and implicit religious meaning in the lyrics of classic German Schlager songs. The research is motivated by the view that song lyrics not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium to convey emotional experiences, spiritual reflections, and human life values. The objects of the study consist of five classic German Schlager songs, namely Über den Wolken by Reinhard Mey, Griechischer Wein by Udo Jürgens, Junge, komm bald wieder by Freddy Quinn, Mama by Heintje, and Der letzte Walzer by Peter Alexander. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach. The research data are excerpts from song lyrics that contain emotional and religious elements. The analysis was carried out using James A. Russell's valence–arousal theory (1980) to identify types of emotions and Charles Glock Glock and Rodney Stark Stark's theory of religiosity (1965) to analyze the dimensions of religiosity represented in the song lyrics. The results of this study indicate that classic German Schlager songs represent various human emotions, such as hope, longing, nostalgia, loneliness, sadness, happiness, fear, affection, relief, and grief. These emotions are represented through simple symbols related to everyday life, such as home, mother, letters, dance, and freedom. Furthermore, this study found that the religious meanings in the songs are not explicitly represented through formal religious symbols, but rather through spiritual

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reflection, family affection, hope, the search for the meaning of life, and interpersonal relationships. The most dominant dimensions of religiosity were experiential and consequential, as most of the lyrics describe inner experiences, self-reflection, and compassionate behavior towards others. This study concludes that classic German Schlager songs function not only as entertainment but also as a medium for emotional expression and spiritual reflection. Through song lyrics, human emotional experiences are deeply represented and closely related to life values and religiosity.

Keywords: emotional meaning, religiosity, classic German Schlager, valence–arousal, song lyric analysis

INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics, as linguistic texts, function not only as a medium for entertainment but also as a means of conveying emotional experiences, life reflections, and spiritual values through poetic and symbolic language. In studies of textual linguistics and discourse analysis, meaning in song lyrics is constructed through lexical choices, metaphors, affective evaluations, and the relationships between linguistic elements that shape the listener's emotional experience (Halliday and Hasan, 2021; Bednarek, 2022). Therefore, song lyrics can be understood as a form of artistic communication that represents human experiences, both personal and social. From a semantic perspective, meaning is a key element in understanding the message contained in a text. Chaer (2013) explains that semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of language, both lexical and contextual. Furthermore, Leech (1981) states that meaning is not only conceptual but also encompasses affective meaning related to the speaker's emotions, attitudes, and feelings. This demonstrates that the language in song lyrics has the ability to build emotional engagement through the use of specific words, symbols, and metaphors.

Emotions are psychological responses that arise from specific experiences, situations, or interactions experienced by an individual. Emotions relate to a person's feelings, mood, and reactions to a situation. In psychology and linguistics, emotions are understood as a form of inner expression that can be represented through language, symbols, and specific behaviors. Ekman (1992) explains that humans possess several basic, universal emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust. Furthermore, Plutchik (1980) developed the concept of a wheel of emotions, which demonstrates the existence of derived emotions such as longing, nostalgia, loneliness, hope, grief, and affection. Russell (1980) also explains that emotions can be analyzed based on the dimensions of valence and arousal to determine the positive or negative tendencies

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and emotional intensity that emerge within a text.

The emotional meanings in song lyrics often relate to universal human experiences such as love, loss, longing, hope, and loneliness. Pavlenko's (2021) research shows that the use of affective words like Herz, Sehnsucht, and Traum in German lyrics can construct a representation of collective emotions that are easily internalized by listeners. Furthermore, Foolen (2022) explains that emotional evaluations in artistic texts not only reflect the speaker's feelings but also shape the audience's emotional attitudes toward existential themes such as love, loss, and hope. Thus, song lyrics can be a medium for representing complex human emotional experiences. Beyond emotional meaning, song lyrics can also contain implicit religious or spiritual meaning. Religiosity is a person's spiritual attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to religious values and the search for meaning in life. Glock and Stark (1965) explain that religiosity consists of five dimensions: ideological, ritualistic, intellectual, experiential, and consequential. In literary works and song lyrics, religiosity is not always represented through direct religious symbols, but can emerge through themes of hope, surrender, compassion, reflection on life, and human relationships with others.

In discourse linguistics studies, religiosity is understood as a discursive construct that can emerge in secular texts through transcendental metaphors, expressions of hope, and the search for meaning in life (Zwingmann, 2025). Zwingmann's (2025) research shows that expressions such as "Glaub an mich," "irgendwo da oben," and "es wird gut" in German popular songs represent forms of personal spirituality without direct reference to specific religious institutions. Furthermore, Thiesen (2024) explains that themes of hope, anticipation, and faith in the future in German popular music often represent secular spirituality integrated with human emotional experience. This suggests that religiosity in song lyrics can be both symbolic and emotional. In general, songs are a form of multimodal communication that combines language, music, and emotion to convey specific messages to listeners. The function of songs is not limited to entertainment but also includes expressive, reflective, and social functions, such as constructing cultural identity and mediating collective emotional experiences (Busse, 2001). Over time, songs have emerged in various genres, such as pop, rock, folk, and Schlager, each with distinct linguistic characteristics and social functions.

The Schlager genre, particularly within the Jew musical tradition, Schlager is known as a popular genre that emphasizes simplicity of language, clarity of message, and emotional connection with listeners. Schlager lyrics generally address themes of love, nostalgia, loyalty, family, hope, and happiness, conveyed through everyday language and simple sentence

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structures. This simplicity allows for a more intense and inclusive emotional meaning to be conveyed to various levels of society. Therefore, Schlager is a relevant object of study to examine how emotional and religious meanings are effectively constructed through simple yet highly affective lyrics.

This study uses five classic German Schlager songs as its subjects: "Über den Wolken" by Reinhard Mey, "Griechischer Wein" by Udo Jürgens, "Junge, komm bald wieder" by Freddy Quinn, "Mama" by Heintje, and "Der letzte Walzer" by Peter Alexander. These five songs were chosen because they represent emotional themes such as longing, nostalgia, loss, family affection, hope, and reflections on life, all related to an implicit dimension of religiosity. Although extensive research on popular music has been conducted, studies examining the construction of emotional and religious meaning in classic German Schlager lyrics remain relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on musical, historical, and popular culture aspects, while linguistic analysis of the representation of emotion and religiosity has received little attention. This situation indicates a research gap in understanding how language in Schlager lyrics simultaneously mediates emotion and spirituality.

Based on the background outlined above, this study focuses on two main research questions. First, this study aims to examine how emotional meaning is represented in classic German Schlager lyrics, specifically in describing the expression of feelings, inner experiences, and the emotional values they convey. Second, this study aims to analyze how religious meaning is implicitly represented in classic German Schlager lyrics, particularly through symbols, metaphors, and implied messages reflecting spiritual values and religiosity. Thus, these two research questions serve as the primary foundation for understanding the emotional and religious dimensions contained in classic German Schlager music.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the emotional and religious meanings in the lyrics of classic German Schlager songs. A qualitative approach was used because this study focuses on the in-depth and contextual interpretation of the meanings contained in the song lyrics (Moleong, 2018). The research data consisted of the lyrics of Reinhard Mey's "Über den Wolken," Udo Jürgens' "Griechischer Wein," Freddy Quinn's "Junge, komm bald wieder," Heintje's "Mama," and Peter Alexander's "Der letzte Walzer." These five songs were selected because they represent emotional themes such as longing, nostalgia, hope, familial affection, and loss, which are related to implicit dimensions of religiosity.

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Data collection techniques were conducted through literature review and documentation from various online sources, such as music archives, lyric books, and digital music platforms. The data were then analyzed using textual linguistics and discourse analysis to identify linguistic elements with emotional and religious content, such as affective lexical choices, metaphors, symbols, and evaluative expressions. The data analysis technique was carried out through several stages, namely reading the entire song lyrics, identifying the forms of emotion and dimensions of religiosity that emerged, classifying the data based on the emotional theories of Ekman (1992), Plutchik (1980), Russell (1980), and the religiosity theory of Glock and Stark (1965), then interpreting the relationship between emotional meaning and religiosity in the lyrics of classic German Schlager songs.

DISCUSSION

Über den Wolken – Reinhard Mey (1974)

Lyric Excerpt	Types of Emotion Dimensions	Valence–Arousal	Dimensions of Religiosity	Interpretation of Religiosity
„Über den Wolken muss die Freiheit wohl grenzenlos sein“	Hope	Positive–High	Experiential	Freedom is interpreted as spiritual reflection and the search for the meaning of life.
„Alle Ängste, alle Sorgen blieben darunter verborgen“	Relief	Positive–Moderate	Consequential	Releasing fear indicates a desire for inner peace.
„Ich wär gern mitgeflogen“	Longing	Negative–Moderate	Experiential	A longing for freedom and detachment from the world.

DISCUSSION

Reinhard Mey's song "Über den Wolken" (Over the World) embodies emotional meaning

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through the emotions of hope, relief, and longing. Based on Russell's (1980) valence-arousal theory, the emotion of hope in the lyrics "Über den Wolken muss die Freiheit wohl grenzenlos sein" demonstrates positive valence and high arousal because it depicts human hope for freedom and a peaceful life. Freedom in this song is interpreted not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

Furthermore, the lyrics "Alle Ängste, alle Sorgen blieben darunter verborgen" convey the emotion of relief, representing the human desire to escape from the fear and pressures of everyday life. Researchers argue that this song illustrates the modern human need for inner peace and emotional space to reflect on their lives. This aligns with Frankl's (1985) view that humans always strive to find meaning in life through personal experience and self-reflection.

The religious meaning in this song is implicitly represented through spiritual reflections on freedom and the search for meaning in life. Based on Glock and Stark's (1965) theory of religiosity, this experience includes the experiential dimension because it is related to human inner experience and self-reflection.

Griechischer Wein – Udo Jürgens (1974)

Lyric Excerpt	Types of Emotion Dimensions	Valence–Arousal	Dimensions of Religiosity	Interpretation of Religiosity
„Griechischer Wein ist so wie das Blut der Erde“	Longing	Negative –Moderate	Experiential	Grapes become a symbol of identity and emotional attachment to one's homeland.
„Dass ich immer träume von daheim“	Nostalgia	Negative–Low	Consequential	Home is interpreted as a source of emotional and spiritual serenity.
„In dieser Stadt werd' ich immer nur ein Fremder sein“	Loneliness	Negative–High	Experiential	Social isolation gives rise to reflections on the meaning of home and identity.

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DISCUSSION

The song "Griechischer Wein" represents the emotions of nostalgia, longing, and loneliness associated with experiences of social alienation and longing for home. The lyrics, "Dass ich immer träume von daheim," demonstrate nostalgia for one's hometown as a source of emotional comfort and self-identity. Based on Russell's (1980) theory, nostalgia is an emotion with negative valence and low arousal because it is associated with past memories and feelings of loss. According to Wildschut et al. (2006), nostalgia is a complex emotion that often arises when individuals long for past experiences that hold deep emotional value. Meanwhile, the lyrics, "In dieser Stadt werd' ich immer nur ein Fremder sein," convey loneliness resulting from social alienation.

Researchers argue that this song not only addresses the immigrant experience but also illustrates the human need for acceptance within one's social environment. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain that humans have a basic need to feel accepted and to have social connections with their surroundings. The religious meaning in this song is implicitly represented through the search for the meaning of life, self-identity, and human relationships with the social environment. Based on Glock and Stark's (1965) theory, this experience includes an experiential dimension because it relates to human inner reflection on their existence.

Junge, komm bald wieder – Freddy Quinn (1963)

Lyric Excerpt	Types of Emotion Dimensions	Valence–Arousal	Dimensions of Religiosity	Interpretation of Religiosity
„Junge, komm bald wieder“	Longing	Negative–Moderate	Konsekuensial	A mother's longing demonstrates the value of family affection.
„Ich mach mir Sorgen um dich“	Fear	Negative–Low	Experiential	Emotional anxiety represents family concern.
„In jedem Hafen kam ein Brief an Bord“	Affection	Negative–Low	Consequential	The letter becomes a symbol of love and emotional protection.

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DISCUSSION

The song "Young, komm bald wieder" represents emotional relationships within a family through longing, fear, and affection. The lyrics "Young, komm bald wieder" convey a mother's longing for her child far away at sea. Furthermore, the lyrics "Ich mach mir Sorgen um dich" convey a mother's anxiety for her child's safety. Researchers argue that this anxiety represents a strong form of affection and emotional care within family relationships. According to Bowlby (1988), emotional relationships within a family are formed through attachment, or emotional bonds, that provide a sense of security for individuals. This is reinforced by the lyrics "In jedem Hafen kam ein Brief an Bord," which use letters as a symbol of love and emotional communication. The religious meaning of this song is represented through the values of affection, care, and concern for family. Based on the theory of Glock and Stark (1965), these actions fall within the consequential dimension because they are manifested through compassionate behavior toward others.

Mama – Heintje

Lyric Excerpt	Types of Emotion Dimensions	Valence–Arousal	Dimensions of Religiosity	Interpretation of Religiosity
„Du sollst doch nicht um deinen Jungen weinen“	Sadness	Negative–Low	Experiential	A mother's grief demonstrates a deep emotional bond.
„Einst wird das Schicksal wieder uns vereinen“	Hope	Positive–Moderate	Experiential	Destiny becomes a symbol of spiritual hope.
„Es betet ja für mich oh Mama dein Herz“	Affection	Positive–Moderate	Consequential	A mother's prayers become a symbol of spiritual protection and unconditional love.

DISCUSSION

Heintje's song "Mama" represents a mother's love through the emotions of sadness, hope, and affection. The lyrics "I feel so sorry for my children" convey a mother's sadness for her child, while the lyrics "I can't believe I'm with a child" convey the hope of being reunited. The song's religious meaning is evident in the lyrics "I bet you for my mother's sake," which use a mother's

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prayer as a symbol of spiritual protection and unconditional love. Researchers observe that the religiosity in this song is not directly expressed through formal religious symbols, but through spiritual values such as prayer, love, and family care. According to Pargament (1997), religiosity can emerge in everyday spiritual experiences, including emotional connections and family support. Based on the theory of Glock and Stark (1965), these experiences include experiential and consequential dimensions because they relate to emotional experiences and acts of affection toward family members.

Der letzte Walzer – Peter Alexander

Lyric Excerpt	Types of Emotion Dimensions	Valence–Arousal	Dimensions of Religiosity	Interpretation of Religiosity
„Der letzte Tanz begann“	Nostalgia	Negative–Low	Experiential	Dance becomes a symbol of emotional memory.
„Die Zeit die dann begann war wunderschön“	Happiness	Positive–Moderate	Experiential	Past happiness becomes a reflection of life.
„Doch dann erlosch die Glut wie sie begann“	Grief	Positive–Moderate	Experiential	Fire becomes a symbol of love slowly fading away.

DISCUSSION

The song "Der Letzte Walzer" represents nostalgia, past happiness, and grief over lost love. The lyrics "Der Letzte Tanz begann" convey nostalgia for past memories, while the lyrics "Die Zeit die dann begann war wunderschön" convey happiness over a past love experience. However, the lyrics "Doch dann erlosch die Glut wie sie begann" convey grief or sadness over the end of a love relationship. Researchers argue that this song demonstrates how humans often retain memories as an important part of their emotional identity. This aligns with the opinion of Sedikides et al. (2008), who stated that nostalgia helps individuals maintain self-identity and meaning in life through past memories. The religious meaning in this song is implicitly represented through reflections on life and the experience of loss. Based on the theory of Glock and Stark (1965), this

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experience falls within the experiential dimension because it relates to emotional reflection on the human life journey.

Based on research data, the song "Über den Wolken" represents the emotions of hope, relief, and longing related to spiritual reflection and the search for the meaning of life. The song "Griechischer Wein" shows the emotions of longing, nostalgia, and loneliness related to social alienation and longing for home. Meanwhile, the songs "Junge, komm bald wieder" and "Mama" represent family affection, emotional anxiety, hope, and a mother's spiritual protection for her child. In addition, the song "Der letzte Walzer" depicts nostalgia, past happiness, and lost love through symbols of emotional memory and reflection on life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the lyrics of classic German Schlager songs implicitly convey various emotional and religious meanings through the use of simple yet highly affective language. The emotional meanings in the songs analyzed include hope, longing, nostalgia, loneliness, sadness, happiness, fear, affection, relief, and grief. These emotions are represented through everyday symbols such as home, mother, letters, dance, and freedom, which can build emotional closeness with listeners.

Furthermore, this study shows that the religious meanings in classic German Schlager songs are not conveyed directly through formal religious symbols, but through spiritual reflection, hope, family affection, the search for the meaning of life, and human relationships with others. Based on Glock and Stark's theory of religiosity, the most dominant dimensions of religiosity are experiential and consequential, as most of the lyrics describe inner experiences, self-reflection, and compassionate behavior toward others.

The song "Über den Wolken" represents freedom and the search for the meaning of life as a form of spiritual reflection. The song "Griechischer Wein" depicts nostalgia, social alienation, and longing for home as emotional components of human identity. The songs "Junge, komm bald wieder" and "Mama" convey a mother's familial affection, care, and emotional protection for her child. Meanwhile, "Der letzte Walzer" represents nostalgia and the loss of love as part of a reflection on the human journey. Thus, this research demonstrates that classic German Schlager songs serve not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a means of representing human emotional and spiritual experiences closely related to life's values.

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