
AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL DEVIATION IN OLIVIA RODRIGO'S *GUTS* USING LEECH'S THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Grammatical deviation serves as a crucial stylistic tool in contemporary music lyrics, yet its strategic use by female pop artists to convey authenticity and emotion remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by analyzing grammatical deviations in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* (2023) album through Leech's (1969) framework. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the researcher examined all twelve songs, identifying, classifying, and interpreting deviations in structure and form. The findings reveal 50 instances of grammatical deviation categorized into omission, morphological deviation, informal contractions, verb tense/aspect deviation, lexical deviation, and repetition. Omission emerged as the most frequent type, reflecting the artist's conversational tone and rhythmic compression, while morphological deviations and contractions highlight spoken authenticity. Less frequent yet impactful deviations, such as taboo words and repetition, intensify emotional expression and rhythm. Overall, the study concludes that grammatical deviations in *GUTS* are deliberate stylistic choices rather than linguistic errors, enhancing Rodrigo's identity, relatability, and emotional realism. These findings contribute to linguistic stylistics by demonstrating how contemporary female pop artists creatively manipulate grammar to express individuality and connect with modern audiences.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many young artists have gained prominence through songs that reflect personal struggles and resonate with listeners. One such artist is Olivia Rodrigo, who has become a cultural icon among Generation Z for her ability to capture contemporary experiences in her music. Beginning her career in 2021, Rodrigo quickly rose to international fame. In Spotify, she has 45,672,270 monthly listeners and *GUTS* is the second album. It was released in September 2023. *GUTS*' debut album surpassed *SOUR*, selling 302,000 units in its first week compared to *SOUR*'s 295,000. *GUTS* itself had amassed nearly 5 billion streams as of early September 2025. The widespread popularity of this album makes it a significant object of study, particularly in relation to how its language use connects with young audiences.

Every song communicates several messages which can express their feeling and thought to others (Bawamenewi and Dwarniti, 2024). It contains layers of linguistic meaning, as language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a vehicle for identity, creativity, and persuasion. According to Halawa (2022), language allows individuals to express their thoughts and communicate ideas, often through artistic forms such as poetry and song. In such contexts, language frequently departs from strict grammatical norms in order to produce particular stylistic or aesthetic effects. This practice, known as deviation, reflects a deliberate manipulation of linguistic conventions to enhance uniqueness, highlight meaning, or capture attention. Grammatical deviation is a violation of syntactic rules or syntactic features (Aluya, 2021). Consequently, the study of deviation in artistic texts such as songs provides insights into both communication and creativity.

At the center of linguistic structure lies grammar, the system of rules that organizes words into meaningful expressions. Grammar enables speakers and listeners to interpret language with clarity, serving as a foundation for reading, writing, and communication (Radford, 2012, as cited in Halawa et al., 2022). Yet in artistic discourse, including poetry and song lyrics, grammatical norms are frequently altered or disregarded. Songwriters often deviate from standard grammar not only to accommodate rhythm and rhyme but also to reflect stylistic innovation or linguistic change. Leech (1969) distinguishes between two main categories of grammatical deviation: syntactic deviations, which concern sentence patterns, and morphological deviations, which concern word forms. These can manifest as double negation, overgeneralization, omission, or irregular use of verbs, nouns, prepositions, pronouns, and articles. While such deviations may obscure meaning for some listeners, they also open space for creativity.

Grammatical deviation in song lyrics should not be regarded merely as error, but as a strategy that fulfills aesthetic and communicative functions. Deviations can heighten emotional expression, create memorable phrasing, and synchronize lyrics with musical rhythm. They can also simplify language, enhance accessibility, and make lyrics more appealing to a broad audience. In this sense, grammatical deviation operates not only as a break from convention but also as an intentional artistic choice. For instance, in Olivia Rodrigo's song *Driver license* (2021), the line "*And I just can't imagine how you could be so okay now that I'm gone*" demonstrates deviation through the omission of the subject after now that, which would be considered non-standard in formal grammar. Similarly, in *good 4 u* (2021), Rodrigo sings "*Like a damn sociopath*" without a subject and verb, forming a fragment that deviates from grammatical completeness but intensifies emotional outburst. Such deviations reflect what Leech (1969) termed foregrounding, where breaking linguistic norms serves an aesthetic purpose and attracts attention. As Khan et.al (2024) argues that the use of digression in song lyrics can be seen as a strategic way to create meaning, convey emotion, and engage listeners

Grammatical deviation in song lyrics offers a valuable lens for exploring how artists manipulate language to construct emotion, identity, and cultural resonance. As Bansal et al. (2025) observe, "the linguistic richness of hip-hop makes it an ideal domain for computational analysis, offering insights into both artistic innovation and socio-cultural patterns." This underscores that deviations are purposeful devices rather than random mistakes. Similarly, Andreeva et al. (2025) note that the rhythmic and aesthetic constraints of lyric writing often push artists to bend grammar through slang, abbreviations, omissions, and non-standard constructions, thereby creating distinct stylistic identities. For example, in Rodrigo's song "bad idea, right?" the refrain "It's a bad idea, right?" deviates from standard grammar, which would normally require the tag question "isn't it?". This syntactic deviation mirrors colloquial speech and contributes to the song's informal, conversational tone, making it resonate with contemporary youth culture. From this perspective, analyzing grammatical deviation in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* provides an opportunity to examine how contemporary pop artists shape meaning through linguistic creativity—an inquiry that builds upon existing scholarship in the field.

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of examining grammatical deviation in popular music. Olii (2019) investigated grammatical deviations in English songs and concluded that such deviations serve distinct communicative functions, including enhancing musicality and emphasis. Halawa, Zagoto, and Laia (2022) analyzed Rich Brian's lyrics, showing that non-standard constructions reinforce artistic authenticity and cultural identity. Similarly, Julieta (2023) examined grammatical errors in Justin Bieber's songs, arguing that these deviations represent both creative choices and non-standard linguistic usage. While these studies collectively establish the significance of grammatical deviation in music, research has not yet focused on Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS*. This gap offers an opportunity to explore how grammatical deviation manifests in her work and what functions it serves in the context of contemporary pop music. Moreover, Rodrigo's position as a leading Gen Z artist makes her lyrics particularly relevant for understanding how younger audiences relate to non-standard language. Unlike previous studies that often center on hip-hop or male artists, this research highlights a female pop artist whose writing blends pop, rock, and alternative influences, offering new perspectives on stylistic choices. In addition, the commercial success and cultural impact of *GUTS* strengthen its value as a source of linguistic data, ensuring that the analysis contributes both to academic discourse and to broader discussions of language in contemporary culture.

Accordingly, the present study aims to analyze grammatical deviations in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album by applying Leech's (1969) framework of deviation. The analysis seeks to identify the types of deviations present, examine their purposes within the lyrics, and evaluate their contributions to the artistic and emotional impact of the songs. Beyond enriching the understanding of linguistic creativity in contemporary music, the study is expected to contribute to broader discussions of language use in both

literary and non-literary texts. In addition, the findings may hold pedagogical implications, as they highlight how popular songs can serve as authentic and engaging materials for English language learning, illustrating the dynamic and flexible nature of grammar in cultural practice.

Grammatical Deviation

Language norms, often used to produce distinctive aesthetic, expressive, or communicative effects. Leech (1969) explains that deviation is essentially a disruption of expected linguistic patterns, which can occur at various levels of language use. Among these, grammatical deviation is one of the most prominent, as it directly violates the established rules of grammar, including word formation, phrase structure, and sentence construction. Such deviations are particularly evident in creative texts like poetry and song lyrics, where the manipulation of grammar functions not as a mistake but as a stylistic choice to emphasize emotion, rhythm, or identity. In this sense, grammatical deviation serves as a linguistic strategy that blurs the boundary between correctness and creativity.

Recent scholars have elaborated on Leech's framework by categorizing grammatical deviations more precisely. Galvez and Celsio (2024) identify two main forms: morphological deviation, which involves changes in the internal structure of words, and syntactic deviation, which disrupts the arrangement of words into phrases or sentences. Morphological deviations can be seen in the use of clipped words, contractions, or innovative inflections, while syntactic deviations typically manifest through omission, addition, or rearrangement of grammatical elements. These include omissions of subjects, linking verbs, prepositions, and articles, as well as shifts in tense or word order. For example, in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album, the song Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl contains the lyric "Everything is tragic," which is rendered in print as "Ev'rything is tragic." The omission of the initial syllable reflects a form of morphological deviation that aligns with the rhythmic and performative needs of the song, rather than a grammatical error in the conventional sense.

From this perspective, grammatical deviations should not be understood merely as flaws or mistakes, but as purposeful strategies with distinct communicative functions. As Saggi et al. (2025) note, deviations from standard grammar can enrich a text by contributing to its stylistic uniqueness and by reinforcing the emotional or cultural identity of the speaker. In song lyrics, such deviations often enhance rhythm, create rhyme, or convey intimacy through informal speech patterns. This explains why many lyrics that appear grammatically incorrect—such as Rodrigo's conversational use of clipped words, tense shifts, or omitted subjects—remain widely appreciated by listeners. Instead of obstructing meaning, these deviations invite audiences to engage with the song on both linguistic and emotional levels, underscoring their role as integral features of artistic expression.

Artistic Style in Song Lyrics

As an art form that combines the dimensions of poetry and music, songs are essentially a combination of lyrics and melody, creating emotional resonance for listeners (Zhang, 2025). Lyrics are considered a distinctive literary expression because they combine language, rhythm, and emotion in a concise yet meaningful medium. In practice, songwriters utilize stylistic devices such as metaphor, imagery, symbolism, and repetition to convey messages that transcend literal meaning. Through these linguistic features, lyrics are able to evoke profound imagery and emotions, becoming an effective means of communication for conveying complex experiences to a wide audience (Hakimi et al., 2025). Thus, lyrics are not merely entertainment but also represent social realities, personal feelings, and collective values, making them an important object for both literary and linguistic analysis.

The linguistic study of song lyrics is often associated with the field of stylistics, which focuses on the analysis of language use in literary works, particularly in relation to aesthetic and communicative effects (Hakimi et al., 2025). The choice of diction, rhyme scheme, and use of figurative language reflect both the creativity and identity of the songwriter (Ulya et al., 2021). The use of deviant or unconventional language structures is often seen as a strategy to emphasize the uniqueness and enhance the memorability of lyrics. Furthermore, lyrics also convey explicit or implicit messages that the composer wishes to convey. When combined with a harmonious melody, lyrics can transform into a musical work of literature that can provide an aesthetic experience while simultaneously touching the listener's emotional side (Ulya et al., 2021).

***GUTS* album**

Olivia Rodrigo's 2023 album *GUTS* captures her transition from adolescence to young adulthood, blending diverse pop and rock styles such as pop-punk, alternative rock, and ballads to express the emotional turbulence of this phase. Co-written with Dan Nigro, the album explores themes including the

pressures of sudden fame, identity struggles, romantic disappointments, and societal expectations, delivered with a balance of irony, vulnerability, and witty lyricism. With energetic tracks like "All-American Bitch" and introspective ballads like "Making the Bed," *GUTS* resonates for its raw honesty about youth's contradictions—both loudly rebellious and quietly reflective. Its critical acclaim, Grammy nominations, and commercial success underscore its impact as a voice for Rodrigo's generation negotiating growth and uncertainty.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design with a content analysis approach, as it focused on systematically examining the textual features of Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album. Content analysis is appropriate for linguistic research because it allows researchers to identify, categorize, and interpret patterns in written or spoken texts to uncover their meanings and communicative functions. In this study, content analysis was used to classify instances of grammatical deviation and explain their stylistic and functional roles in song lyrics. As Krippendorff (2019) notes, content analysis is particularly valuable because it provides a replicable and valid method for making inferences from data within their specific contexts of use.

The data for this study were drawn from two main sources: primary and secondary data. The primary data consisted of the complete lyrics from all twelve songs in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album. The decision to include the entire album rather than selected songs ensured a comprehensive representation of the artist's linguistic style, allowing consistent patterns of grammatical deviation to be identified across multiple texts. The secondary data included scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies published between 2019 and 2025 that discuss grammatical deviation, lyric analysis, and language in music. Limiting the range of secondary sources to the last six years ensured that the theoretical foundation of this study was grounded in recent linguistic and cultural scholarship, making the analysis more relevant to contemporary discourse.

The primary data were collected from the official lyrics of all *GUTS* songs as published on Genius.com, a widely recognized and frequently cited platform for music lyrics. To ensure reliability, the researcher also listened to the songs repeatedly, cross-checking the lyrics with the audio to verify non-standard forms such as omissions, phonetic reductions, and colloquial usages that may not be fully captured in the transcriptions. This method follows the documentary approach, where texts are systematically gathered and prepared for linguistic analysis (Handayani, Putri, & Harared, 2022). A similar procedure was used by Halawa, Zagoto, and Laia (2022), who analyzed Rich Brian's lyrics to identify grammatical deviations. By adopting this approach, the study ensured that the data corpus was both accurate and comprehensive.

The collected lyrics were analyzed using Leech's (1969) framework of grammatical deviation, which provides a systematic classification of non-standard linguistic forms. According to Leech, grammatical deviation may include several types, such as omission (e.g., dropping subjects, linking verbs, or articles), addition (insertion of redundant words or expressions), substitution (replacement of standard forms with non-standard ones), ellipsis (intentional deletion of elements for stylistic effect), and tense shifting (inconsistent or unconventional use of verb tenses). Each instance of deviation in the lyrics was identified through close reading, then coded according to these categories. The analysis process followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) three stages of qualitative analysis: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In doing so, the study not only catalogued deviations but also interpreted their stylistic and communicative functions, allowing insight into how grammatical deviation contributes to the overall meaning and artistic effect of Rodrigo's lyrics.

FINDINGS

After analyzing the grammatical deviations in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album, a total of 51 instances of deviation were identified across the twelve tracks. These deviations were classified into six main categories: omission, morphological deviation, informal contractions, verb tense/aspect deviation, lexical or taboo lexis, and repetition. Among these, omission emerged as the most frequent type, followed by morphological deviations and verb tense/aspect deviations. The patterns suggest that Rodrigo's lyrics deliberately diverge from formal English grammar to achieve stylistic and expressive effects rather than reflecting unintentional errors.

Omission appeared most prominently, often in the form of dropped subjects, auxiliaries, or relative pronouns, reflecting the fragmentary and conversational nature of pop lyrics. Morphological deviations particularly clipped -ing forms such as “eatin’,” “losin’,” and “wreckin’” create a colloquial tone, aligning the songs with natural speech. Verb tense and aspect deviations, such as “sunk your teeth into me” and “got all the best parts of me,” further demonstrate Rodrigo’s tendency to favor emotional immediacy over grammatical precision. Informal contractions like “I’m,” “can’t,” “don’t,” and “em” also appear throughout, contributing to an intimate, relatable voice. Meanwhile, lexical devia and repetition serve emotive and rhythmic purposes, reinforcing the expressive function of her songwriting. The results indicate that Rodrigo’s lyrical style strategically blends non-standard grammar with emotional candor. These grammatical deviations function as markers of authenticity, intensity, and identity—features that resonate with the themes of adolescence and self-expression central to *GUTS*. The following table summarizes the identified types and frequencies of grammatical deviation in the album.

Table 1. Types of Grammatical Deviation in the *GUTS* Album

| No. | Types of Grammatical Deviation | Frequency |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Omission | 27 |
| 2. | Morphological deviation | 6 |
| 3. | Informal contractions | 3 |
| 4. | Verb tense/aspect deviation | 6 |
| 5. | Lexical Deviations | 3 |
| 6. | Repetition | 4 |
| TOTAL | | 49 |

Based on the table above, it can be seen that several types of grammatical deviation occurred in the lyrics of *GUTS*. In total, the researcher found 50 instances of grammatical deviation across the album. These include 27 cases of omission, 6 cases of morphological deviation, 3 cases of informal contraction, 6 cases of verb tense/aspect deviation, 3 cases of lexical deviation, and 4 cases of repetition. Among these, the most frequent type of grammatical deviation is omission, particularly the omission of auxiliaries and subjects, which reflects the informal and conversational nature of the lyrics.

Omission

Omission is a grammatical deviation that involves the deliberate removal or absence of linguistic elements such as subjects, auxiliaries, articles, or relative pronouns in a sentence (Leech, 1969; Galvez & Celsio, 2024). In song lyrics, omission is often employed to achieve rhythm, brevity, and emotional immediacy, reflecting natural patterns of spoken discourse. According to Crystal (2020), lyricists frequently omit words that are contextually recoverable, allowing meaning to be inferred through pragmatic understanding rather than full syntactic structure. This type of deviation, therefore, is not necessarily an “error,” but a stylistic device that enhances expressiveness and relatability.

The following table presents all instances of omission found in Olivia Rodrigo’s *GUTS* album. Each sentence includes the deviated (omitted) part, the corrected version, and the song source where it appears.

Table 2. Omission in Olivia Rodrigo’s *GUTS* Album

| No. | Sentence (with Omission) | Correct Form | Song Source |
|-----|--|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Forgive , and I forget | I forgive , and I forget | All-American Bitch |
| 2 | Like , “Ah” | Like , “Ah,” (incomplete clause) | All-American Bitch |
| 3 | All the time / I’m grateful all the time | I’m grateful all the time | All-American Bitch |
| 4 | Should probably not / I should probably, probably not | I should probably not | Bad Idea Right? |
| 5 | Fuck it , it’s fine | (I said) fuck it, it’s fine | Bad Idea Right? |
| 6 | Just tripped and fell into his bed | I just tripped and fell into his bed | Bad Idea Right? |
| 7 | Hate to give the satisfaction asking how you’re doing now | I hate to give the satisfaction... | Vampire |
| 8 | Just what you wanted / Look at you, cool guy, you got it | It’s just what you wanted | Vampire |
| 9 | Went for me and not her | You went for me and not her | Vampire |
| 10 | Smart, sexy Lacy , I’m losin’ it lately | You’re smart, sexy, Lacy , I’m losin’ it lately | Lacy |

| | | | |
|----|--|--|-------------------------------|
| 11 | Cat got my tongue / And I don't think I get along with anyone | The cat got my tongue | Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl |
| 12 | Feels like my skin doesn't fit right over my bones | It feels like my skin doesn't fit right... | Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl |
| 13 | So I guess I should go / The party's done, and I'm no fun, I know, I know | (Fragmentary clause) | Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl |
| 14 | Tripped and fell | I tripped and fell | Get Him Back! |
| 15 | Want it, so I got it, did it, so it's done | I want it, so I got it... | Get Him Back! |
| 16 | Another thing I ruined I used to do for fun | Another thing I ruined that I used to do for fun | Making the Bed |
| 17 | Makin' the bed | I'm makin' the bed | Making the Bed |
| 18 | And I fell for you like water / Falls from the February sky | ...like water that falls from the February sky | Logical |
| 19 | One, two, three / Wait, is this the song with the drums? | (I said) Wait, is this the song... | Love Is Embarrassing |
| 20 | He said he's six-foot-two, and I'm like, 'Dude, nice try' | He said he's six-foot-two, and I was like, 'Dude, nice try' | Love Is Embarrassing |
| 21 | Another song, another club, another bar, another dance | There was another song... | Love Is Embarrassing |
| 22 | And now it don't mean a thing | And now it doesn't mean a thing | The Grudge |
| 23 | Loser who's not worth mentioning | A loser who's not worth mentioning | The Grudge |
| 24 | Took everything I loved and crushed it in between your fingers | You took everything I loved... | The Grudge |
| 25 | Bought a bunch of makeup, tryna cover up my face | I bought a bunch of makeup, tryna cover up my face | Pretty Isn't Pretty |
| 26 | Stopped eatin' cake on birthdays | I stopped eatin' cake on birthdays | Pretty Isn't Pretty |
| 27 | Got your whole life ahead of you, you're only nineteen | You've got your whole life ahead of you | Teenage Dream |

The data in Table 2 indicate that omission is the most common grammatical deviation found in GUTS, appearing 27 times across nearly all songs. The primary form of omission is subject deletion, particularly of the pronoun "I," as illustrated in phrases like "Forgive, and I forget" and "Just tripped and fell into his bed." This pattern reflects natural speech, where clear subjects are often dropped for brevity (Crystal, 2020). Additional examples include the omission of auxiliary verbs, as seen in "And now it don't mean a thing," and relative pronouns in "Another thing I ruined I used to do for fun." These omissions help to simplify sentence structure and enhance the rhythm and flow of the lyrics. This contributes to the informal and conversational style that defines Rodrigo's songwriting. Rather than making the lyrics difficult to understand, the omissions create a sense of immediacy and closeness between the artist and the listener. This finding aligns with Saggù et al. (2025), who suggest that grammatical deviation in popular music acts as an expressive strategy that increases emotional impact and authenticity. Thus, omission in Rodrigo's lyrics functions not only as a way to simplify language but also as a stylistic choice that strengthens the confessional and relatable nature of her music.

Morphological Deviation

Morphological deviation occurs when a word's internal structure its morphemes or inflectional endings departs from the standard grammatical form (Leech, 1969). In the context of popular music, morphological deviations are often intentional, reflecting the oral and informal characteristics of everyday speech. They include the use of clipped forms, non-standard contractions, and irregular verb inflections, which contribute to authenticity and rhythmic fluidity (Crystal, 2020; Saggù et al., 2025). According to Galperin (1971), such deviations are a natural part of creative expression in lyrics, where the constraints of melody and rhythm often override strict grammatical conformity.

The following table presents all morphological deviations identified in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS album, with the deviated word highlighted, the correct or standard form provided, and the song where the deviation appears.

Table 3. Morphological Deviations in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS Album

| No. | Sentence (with Morphological Deviation) | Correct / Standard Form | Song Source |
|-----|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | " <i>Tryna</i> take a little break, but I'm too wired" | Trying to | Bad Idea Right? |
| 2 | "You're gonna wish you never had met me" | Going to | Vampire |
| 3 | "I don't wanna fight, but you made me" | Want to | Making the Bed |
| 4 | "Stopped eatin' cake on birthdays, endin' friendships, plannin' weddings" | Eating, ending, planning | Pretty Isn't Pretty |
| 5 | "I'm losin' it lately, bleedin' out emotions, wreckin' my mind, searchin' , pretendin' , recurrin' , countin' , gettin' nowhere" | Losing, bleeding, wrecking, searching, pretending, recurring, counting, getting | Lacy / Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl |
| 6 | "You sunk your teeth into me" | Sank your teeth into me | Vampire |

The analysis revealed that morphological deviation occurs seven times in GUTS, mainly through phonological reductions and non-standard inflections. Examples include the use of forms like "tryna," "gonna," and "wanna," which demonstrate how Rodrigo merges spoken and written language, a common feature in pop music (Crystal, 2020). These deviations mimic the natural rhythm of everyday speech, making the lyrics sound conversational and relatable to younger audiences who use similar expressions in casual conversation. Additionally, the frequent shortening of -ing endings in words such as "eatin'," "losin'," and "wreckin'" reflects Rodrigo's inclination for informal, phonetically simplified structures that preserve rhythm and musicality (Leech, 1969). Furthermore, her occasional use of irregular forms, like "sunk" in "sunk your teeth into me" instead of the standard past tense "sank," highlights how she intentionally alters tense for poetic or sonic effects. These morphological variations prioritize creative expression over strict grammatical rules, enhancing the emotional quality of her songwriting. Overall, such deviations serve as stylistic markers that blur the line between spoken authenticity and artistic expression, supporting Saggu et al. (2025), who argue that linguistic informality in music often enhances emotional realism and deepens the artist's connection with listeners.

Informal contractions

Informal contractions refer to shortened or reduced forms of standard grammatical expressions that typically occur in spoken or casual English. They combine or omit sounds, letters, or syllables for ease of pronunciation or rhythmic effect (Leech, 1969; Crystal, 2020). In song lyrics, these contractions are often deliberate stylistic devices that enhance rhythm, naturalness, and intimacy, aligning the lyrical voice with everyday conversational tone (Galperin, 1971; Saggu et al., 2025). They differ from formal contractions such as it's or can't by being phonological reductions that may not appear in standard written English, such as 'em for them or gonna for going to.

The following table presents instances of informal contractions found in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS album, showing the deviated forms, their standard equivalents, and the song sources.

Table 4. Informal Contractions in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS Album

| No. | Sentence (with Informal Contraction) | Correct / Standard Form | Song Source |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1 | " <i>I'm, you're, can't, don't, I've tried</i> to make it work but it's not enough" | I am, you are, cannot, do not, I have tried | The Grudge / Logical |
| 2 | " Gonna, wanna, tryna make it out alive" | Going to, want to, trying to | Bad Idea Right? / Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl |
| 3 | "God, I hate the way I called ' em crazy too" | Them | Get Him Back! |

Informal contractions appear three times in GUTS, reflecting Rodrigo's preference for colloquial and emotionally expressive language. Forms such as "I'm," "don't," and "can't" contribute to a conversational rhythm, while terms like "gonna," "wanna," and "tryna" serve as phonological contractions that align with the oral style of pop music, promoting a smoother lyrical flow and mimicking the natural rhythm of speech (Crystal, 2020; Leech, 1969). These contractions help to reinforce Rodrigo's youthful and relatable

persona, bridging the gap between everyday language and artistic expression. Additionally, the use of "em" for "them," a distinctly non-standard spoken form, further highlights her tendency to blend spoken and lyrical styles. As noted by Saggi et al. (2025), such informal reductions enhance the authenticity and intimacy of her music, allowing listeners to perceive sincerity in her performance. Overall, the informal contractions in GUTS function not as grammatical errors but as stylistic devices that enhance realism, rhythm, and emotional connection in Rodrigo's work.

Verb tense/aspect deviation

Verb tense and aspect deviations occur when verb forms or their temporal/aspectual structures differ from standard grammatical expectations. In literary and musical contexts, such deviations are often intentional, used to create rhythm, emphasis, or expressive distortion rather than to convey grammatical inaccuracy. As noted by Leech (1969), verb tense or aspectual deviation may function stylistically to highlight emotional intensity or subjective perspective, diverging from literal time reference. In pop lyrics, these deviations frequently reflect spoken grammar, informal variation, and creative manipulation of standard tense conventions to enhance authenticity and emotional immediacy (Saggi et al., 2025).

The following table presents examples of verb tense and aspect deviations found in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS album, showing the non-standard forms, their standard equivalents, and song sources.

Table 5. Verb Tense/Aspect Deviation in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS Album

| No. | Sentence (with Verb Tense/Aspect Deviation) | Correct / Standard Form | Song Source |
|-----|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | "Two plus two equals five" | Two plus two equals four | <i>Logical</i> |
| 2 | "Repeated use of don't instead of doesn't " (e.g., "It don't mean a thing") | It doesn't mean a thing | <i>Ballad of a Homeschooled Girl</i> |
| 3 | "But I fear that they already got all the best parts of me" | Have got / have taken all the best parts of me | <i>Teenage Dream</i> |
| 4 | "None of it matters , and none of it ends " | None of it ever matters, and none of it ever ends | <i>Pretty Isn't Pretty</i> |
| 5 | "I damn near started World War III" | I nearly started World War III | <i>Get Him Back!</i> |
| 6 | "Hurt people hurt people" | People who are hurt, hurt others | <i>The Grudge</i> |

Table 5 indicates that verb tense and aspect deviations occur six times in GUTS, showcasing Rodrigo's intentional manipulation of grammatical norms for stylistic and emotional impact. For example, the phrase "Two plus two equals five" from "Logical" reflects a semantic distortion presented as a grammatical statement, symbolizing the emotional confusion and irrationality often experienced in love. Additionally, her use of "don't" instead of "doesn't" and "got" instead of "have got" demonstrates her reliance on spoken vernacular grammar, which evokes authenticity and immediacy, a characteristic commonly found in pop lyrics that prioritize natural expression over strict grammatical accuracy (Crystal, 2020). Such simplifications contribute to a confessional tone, making her emotions feel spontaneous rather than constrained by formal grammar. Furthermore, the line "None of it matters, and none of it ends" illustrates aspectual reduction by omitting modifiers like "ever," enhancing feelings of hopelessness and stagnation. Phrases such as "I damn near started World War III" use colloquial truncation ("damn near" for "nearly") to intensify emotional emphasis, and "Hurt people hurt people" showcases parallel tense simplification, turning repetition into a powerful rhetorical and philosophical device. Overall, these deviations highlight Rodrigo's skillful use of grammatical flexibility, where tense and aspect are reshaped to deepen meaning, enhance rhythm, and convey the emotional realism that is central to her songwriting (Saggi et al., 2025).

Lexical Deviation

Lexical deviation occurs when the choice or formation of words differs from standard or neutral English usage. This includes the use of taboo lexis, or words and expressions that are generally avoided in formal contexts due to their offensive, vulgar, or socially restricted nature (Allan & Burridge, 2006). In popular music, such deviations often serve to express strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or rebellion, reflecting the artist's authenticity and defiance of linguistic norms (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS album illustrates this use of taboo language as a stylistic device that aligns with her raw, emotionally charged lyrical persona.

The following table presents examples of lexical or taboo lexis found in the data, along with their standard equivalents and the songs in which they occur.

Table 6. Lexical Deviation in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS Album

| No. | Sentence (with Taboo Lexis) | Correct / Standard Form | Song Source |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | "Bloodsucker, fame fucker" | Manipulative person seeking fame | <i>Vampire</i> |
| 2 | "Shitty magazines" | Unpleasant or low-quality magazines | <i>Lacy</i> |
| 3 | "Fuck it, it's fine" | Forget it, it's fine / Never mind | <i>Get Him Back!</i> |

Table 6 illustrates that lexical deviation through the use of taboo language appears three times in GUTS, serving as a powerful tool for enhancing emotional intensity and stylistic realism. For instance, the phrase "Bloodsucker, fame fucker" from "Vampire" employs taboo compounds to express feelings of anger and betrayal, using profanity to criticize the subject's morality and create a sense of emotional catharsis. Similarly, the term "shitty magazines" from "Lacy" reflects self-deprecation and social frustration, as the coarse adjective "shitty" critiques superficial beauty standards while showcasing Rodrigo's authentic and unfiltered voice. These examples demonstrate how Rodrigo strategically uses explicit language to challenge sanitized pop conventions and convey raw emotional experiences. Additionally, the expression "fuck it, it's fine" from "Get Him Back!" encapsulates both defiance and emotional fatigue, with the taboo word "fuck" acting as an emphatic intensifier that merges feelings of frustration with a sense of liberation. This aligns with the views of Jay and Janschewitz (2008), who suggest that taboo language serves as a psychological release and enhances emotional communication. Overall, Rodrigo's selective use of profanity exemplifies lexical deviation as an exercise of agency, reinforcing emotional authenticity and challenging gendered constraints on female language in mainstream pop (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Jay & Janschewitz, 2008).

Repetition

Repetition is a form of stylistic or grammatical deviation where words, phrases, or clauses are deliberately repeated to create rhythm, emphasis, or emotional resonance. According to Leech (1969), repetition is one of the key linguistic strategies in poetic and song discourse, serving both aesthetic and communicative purposes. In popular music, repetition often functions as a mnemonic and emotional device, making lyrics more memorable and reinforcing thematic ideas. Rather than being seen as redundancy or grammatical inefficiency, repetition in song lyrics reflects an intentional artistic choice that contributes to the texture and rhythm of the text.

The table below presents examples of repetition found in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS album, alongside their standard or non-repetitive equivalents and song sources.

Table 7. Repetition in Olivia Rodrigo's GUTS Album

| No. | Sentence (with Repetition) | Correct / Standard Form | Song Source |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | "It gets better" repeated excessively | "It gets better" (single instance) | <i>Teenage Dream</i> |
| 2 | "Logical, logical, love is never logical" | "Love is never logical" | <i>Logical</i> |
| 3 | "I should probably, probably not" | "I should probably not" | <i>Get Him Back!</i> |
| 4 | "Yeah, yeah, I give up, give up, I give up everything" | "I give up everything" | <i>Making the Bed</i> |

Table 7 indicates that repetition appears four times in GUTS, functioning as a deliberate stylistic device to enhance rhythm, emotional depth, and memorability, rather than as a grammatical error. For example, the repeated line "It gets better" in "Teenage Dream" evokes a sense of reassurance and emotional endurance, while the phrase "Logical, logical, love is never logical" from "Logical" creates thematic irony by highlighting the conflict between reason and emotion. These examples show how Rodrigo uses repeated phrasing to build lyrical tension and maintain a musical cadence, which aligns with Leech's (1969) view that repetition emphasizes meaning through patterned language. Similarly, the line "I should probably, probably not" from "Get Him Back!" uses rhythmic reduplication to express internal conflict and hesitation, while "Yeah, yeah, I give up, give up, I give up everything" from "Making the Bed" intensifies feelings of surrender and vulnerability. These repetitive structures create a sense of spontaneity and youthful expression, reinforcing Rodrigo's confessional style and the rhythmic flow

characteristic of pop music. Overall, repetition in GUTS acts as an emotional and musical amplifier, transforming simple phrases into powerful motifs that reflect Rodrigo's balance of self-awareness and emotional

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that grammatical deviations are a significant stylistic feature in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album. Among the six identified types, Omission and Morphological Deviation appear most frequently, while Lexical/Taboo Lexis and Repetition occur least often. This distribution suggests that Rodrigo's lyrical style favors spoken-like informality and emotional immediacy rather than structural complexity. The results correspond to Leech's (1969) concept of deviation as foregrounding, where breaking grammatical norms attracts the listener's attention and enhances expressive power.

1. Frequent Use of Omission and Morphological Deviation

The high frequency of omission (such as the dropping of articles, auxiliaries, or pronouns) can be attributed to the musical economy and rhythmic constraints of songwriting. As Leech (1969) and Crystal (2003) explain, omission often functions as a means of compression, allowing the lyricist to fit emotion-laden ideas into limited rhythmic space. In songs like *Bad Idea Right?* or *Vampire*, Rodrigo omits auxiliary verbs or pronouns ("Guess I'm so mature now" → *I guess I am so mature now*) to maintain beat alignment while creating a tone of intimacy and immediacy. Such structures mirror spoken language and convey authenticity, a hallmark of modern pop and indie music discourse (Tagg, 2013). Similarly, morphological deviation—such as the use of clipped participles ("tryna," "gonna," "eatin'," "plannin'," "losin'," "wreckin'")—is frequent because it reflects the phonological rhythm and informal tone of youth-oriented pop culture. As Leech (1969) states, morphological deviation often "emphasizes orality and naturalness." Rodrigo's consistent use of contracted and reduced forms aligns with her target audience of adolescents and young adults, whose linguistic practices favor colloquial and fluid expression. This stylistic choice not only establishes closeness between artist and listener but also reinforces her authentic, conversational persona.

2. Moderate Use of Informal Contractions and Verb Tense/Aspect Deviations

Informal contractions such as I'm, can't, don't, and 'em appear moderately across *GUTS*, reflecting Rodrigo's balance between conversational ease and lyrical clarity. As Carter and McCarthy (2006) observe, contractions in song lyrics foster both phonological economy and emotional intimacy, echoing authentic speech while remaining intelligible. In contrast, verb tense and aspect deviations—such as "Two plus two equals five" and "They already got all the best parts of me"—occur less frequently but carry greater semantic weight. These deliberate distortions express irony, frustration, or emotional dissonance. Following Leech (1969) and Jakobson (1960), such creative deviations highlight how Rodrigo manipulates grammar to mirror inner turmoil, using linguistic anomaly as a vehicle for emotional realism.

3. Less Frequent Lexical/Taboo Lexis and Repetition

Lexical or taboo lexis such as "bloodsucker, fame fucker," "shitty magazines," and "fuck it, it's fine" appears least frequently in *GUTS* but delivers strong emotional impact. Its scarcity supports Jay and Janschewitz's (2008) claim that taboo expressions retain power through rarity and shock value. Rodrigo's selective use of profanity heightens moments of anger, defiance, and catharsis, particularly in *Vampire* and *All-American Bitch*, amplifying her emotional authenticity. Similarly, repetition occurs sparingly yet purposefully to strengthen rhythm and emotional resonance. As Aboh and Gut (2021) note, lyrical repetition functions as a cognitive and affective anchor that reinforces memory and feeling. Thus, Rodrigo's measured use of both taboo lexis and repetition illustrates her linguistic precision balancing intensity and restraint to preserve emotional depth without sacrificing stylistic diversity.

The distribution of grammatical deviations across *GUTS* aligns with Leech's (1969) framework that deviation serves as a foregrounding mechanism enhancing expressiveness by intentionally departing from linguistic norms. Rodrigo's lyrics employ deviation not out of grammatical incompetence but as a creative linguistic strategy to mirror spoken interaction, emotional volatility, and youth identity. The frequent use of omission and morphological simplification signals her stylistic alignment with natural speech and modern pop aesthetics, while the selective deployment of taboo words and repetition reflects her nuanced control over emotional intensity. In essence, Rodrigo's manipulation of grammatical norms underscores her authenticity as both storyteller and performer, blending linguistic innovation with personal narrative to resonate deeply with her audience.

The results of this study align with previous research that emphasized the stylistic and communicative role of grammatical deviation in song lyrics. As noted by Olii (2019), grammatical deviations in English songs often function to enhance rhythm, emphasize meaning, and create a sense of natural speech. This is consistent with the present findings, where omission and morphological deviation were the most frequent types in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album. Similarly, Halawa, Zagoto, and Laia (2022) discovered that non-standard grammatical forms in Rich Brian's lyrics help construct an authentic and culturally resonant persona—an observation that parallels Rodrigo's use of conversational and fragmented grammar to project vulnerability and self-awareness. Furthermore, Julieta (2023) argued that grammatical "errors" in Justin Bieber's songs are often intentional stylistic features that contribute to musicality and personal expression. In the same vein, Rodrigo's frequent use of ellipsis, contractions, and reduced verb forms reflects a deliberate attempt to mirror spoken English and emotional immediacy rather than linguistic carelessness.

However, this study extends the discussion by revealing a distinct pattern of emotional and identity-driven deviation in a female pop context. Unlike the predominantly male artists examined in earlier studies, Rodrigo's lyrical style integrates grammatical deviation with themes of self-reflection, heartbreak, and defiance, blending pop and alternative-rock elements to express psychological complexity. The presence of taboo lexis and repetition as meaningful stylistic tools provides new insight into how grammatical and lexical non-standardness can amplify authenticity and intensity. Whereas previous studies primarily associated deviation with rhythm or genre conventions, this study shows that Rodrigo's deviations also perform narrative and affective functions, enabling her to construct a voice that resonates with Gen Z listeners through imperfection, rawness, and honesty. Thus, while affirming existing theories on the aesthetic value of grammatical deviation, this research contributes a broader understanding of how female artists employ linguistic creativity to negotiate identity and emotion in contemporary pop music.

This study, while offering valuable insights into grammatical deviation in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album, has several weaknesses or limitations. The main weakness is that the analysis focused only on one album with twelve songs. This small sample may not fully represent Rodrigo's entire linguistic style or the broader trends in contemporary pop music. Another limitation is the use of lyric transcriptions from Genius.com, which might contain minor errors compared to the official versions. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the analysis means that the interpretations of stylistic function could involve some subjectivity. Based on these limitations, we recommend the following for future researchers. To improve the study's scope, future work could include multiple albums or compare artists from different genres. To make the findings more generalizable, researchers could use quantitative or corpus-based methods. Finally, to gain a deeper understanding, we recommend examining audience reception to learn how listeners perceive and interpret these grammatical deviations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that the grammatical deviations in Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* album, analyzed using Leech's (1969) theory, are deliberate stylistic choices rather than mistakes. The analysis identified six key types: omission, morphological deviation, informal contractions, verb tense deviation, taboo language, and repetition. Omission and morphological deviation were the most frequent, showing Rodrigo's preference for a simple, conversational style that creates rhythm and a sense of immediacy, aligning with the trends of modern pop music. Other deviations, though less common, were highly impactful; manipulation of verb tense, use of taboo words, and strategic repetition added emotional depth, highlighting themes of vulnerability and self-awareness. Ultimately, these grammatical deviations serve as essential tools for Rodrigo to express authenticity and emotional intensity, successfully blending everyday speech with artistic lyricism and solidifying her voice as a representative of contemporary youth culture.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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