



Something in the Way

A Quantitative and Qualitative Study of Nirvana's Three Studio Albums from a Stylistic and Linguistic Perspective

Nicolai Dahl Andersen

Aalborg University

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Supervisor: Marie Møller Jensen

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore Nirvana's use of linguistic and stylistic elements in their songwriting to gain an understanding of how they construe meaning, and the type of life experiences they portray. This is done through both a quantitative analysis focusing on a corpus analysis of Nirvana's three studio albums, and a qualitative analysis of three different songs, one from each studio album, looking at in-text uses of conceptual metaphors. The findings of these analyses show several different linguistic patterns in Nirvana's lyrics, however, non are substantial enough to warrant any generalisable conclusions. Instead, these results are discussed and interpreted, and it is revealed that Nirvana's use of language functions as a chronicling of Kurt Cobain's mental journey into musical stardom, and his decline into depression and drug abusive, ultimately culminating with him committing suicide. This is in the sense, that each album shows a different thematic attitude, as well as different use of linguistic and stylistic elements, in a way that corresponds with the journey that Nirvana went through during their rising popularity.

Table of Contents

Overview of Tables:.....	4
1: Introduction	6
2: Theory section	8
2.1: Systemic Functional Linguistics	8
2.2: Transitivity and processes	9
2.2.1: Material process	10
2.2.2: Mental process	10
2.2.3: Relational process	11
2.2.4: Behavioural process	13
2.2.5: Verbal process	13
2.2.6: Existential process	14
2.2.7: Circumstances	14
2.2.8: Transitivity in previous studies	15
2.3: Conceptual Metaphor Theory	16
2.3.1: Structural Metaphors	17
2.3.2: Orientational Metaphors	17
2.3.3: Ontological Metaphors	18
2.3.4: Entity metaphors	18
2.3.5: Substance metaphors	19
3: Methodology	19
3.1: The Works	19
3.2: Software/tools:	21
3.3: Extracting and readying data for analysis	22
3.4: Extracting and processing qualitative data	24
4: Analysis	25
4.1: Quantitative analysis	25
4.1.1: Bleach Corpus Analysis:	26
4.1.2: Nevermind Corpus Analysis	35
4.1.3: In Utero Corpus	43
4.2: Qualitative Analysis	48
4.2.1: Conceptual Metaphors in About a Girl	49
4.2.2: Conceptual Metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit	53
4.2.3: Conceptual Metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box	56

5: Discussion	62
5.1: Discussion of Patterns in Corpus Analysis	63
5.1.1: Pronoun use in Nivana’s music	63
5.1.2: Noun use in Nirvana’s music	65
5.1.3: Verb use in Nivana’s Music	66
5.2: Discussion of Conceptual Metaphor Use in Nirvana’s Music	68
5.2.1: About a Girl	68
5.2.2: Smells Like Teen Spirit	70
5.2.3: Heart-Shaped Box	72
5.3: General Interpretation of Patterns	74
6: Conclusion	79
7: Reference List	82

Overview of Tables

Table 1: Examples of participants in material processes.....	10
Table 2: Examples of the different mental processes.....	11
Table 3: The six categories of relational clauses with examples	12
Table 4: Examples of different relational processes.....	12
Table 5: Example of a behavioural process.....	13
Table 6: Examples of different verbal processes.....	14
Table 7: Example of an existential process.....	14
Table 8: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the Bleach corpus.....	27
Table 9: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the Bleach corpus.....	29
Table 10: Dispersion of “am” search terms in the Bleach corpus.....	30
Table 11: In-text uses of “am” in the Bleach corpus.....	31
Table 12: Dispersion of “do” search terms in the Bleach corpus.....	32
Table 13: Behavioural process example from the Bleach corpus.....	34
Table 14: Material process example from the Bleach corpus.....	34
Table 15: Dispersion of “I” search term in the Nevermind corpus.....	36
Table 16: Pronouns, their frequencies, and rank in the top 50 list of the Nevermind corpus.....	36
Table 17: Dispersion of “not” search terms in the Nevermind corpus.....	37
Table 18: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the Nevermind corpus.....	38
Table 19: Dispersion of top three noun uses in the Nevermind corpus.....	39
Table 20: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the Nevermind corpus.....	40
Table 21: Dispersion of the top five verb search terms in the Nevermind corpus.....	41
Table 22: Mental process example from the Nevermind corpus.....	42
Table 23: Behavioural process example from the Nevermind corpus.....	43
Table 24: Pronouns, their number of uses, and rank in the top 50 list of the In Utero corpus.....	44
Table 25: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the In Utero corpus.....	45
Table 26: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the In Utero corpus.....	46
Table 27: Dispersion of the search terms for “have” and “think” in the Nevermind corpus.....	47
Table 28: Intensive relational process example from the In Utero corpus.....	48
Table 29: Possessive relational process example from the In Utero corpus.....	48
Table 30: Combined frequency for the top five nouns lists of all three corpora.....	65
Table 31: Top five verbs in a combined Nirvana corpus (excluding “to be” forms).....	67

Table 32: Conceptual metaphors in About a Girl.....	68
Table 33: Conceptual metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit.....	71
Table 34: Conceptual metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box.....	73

1: Introduction

Throughout human history there have been many different forms of entertainment and personal expression. These change from culture to culture and develop over time. Some change and adapt to newer times, some remain unchanged as cultural traditions, and newer forms emerge as human culture evolves and becomes more digital. However, few of such things have been as prevalent in all human cultures as music. Music has been present throughout history in the forms of war-drums, social entertainment, motivational anthems for labourers, etc. In more recent times, as the world has become more globalised and individualistic, music has cemented its place in western culture as highly influential presence. This is in the sense that music has become much more than just entertainment: it is divided by genres and people take great joy in identifying themselves with specific types of music. In this way, music can be said to have an intense societal and individualistic influence, as it can be directly linked to several social phenomena and trends. For example, with the popularity of rock music where musical artists like The Beatles and Elvis Presley had a massive influence on youth and popular culture at the time. Many such instances, in varying degrees of severity and popularity, can be seen throughout later years of musical history. For each case, it seems that either one or a few artists are connected to and functions as the catalyst for such societal influence, and as such, it is tempting to ascribe these waves of cultural and social musical significance to the people at the centre of it. However, while these people undoubtedly share a charismatic and appealing character trait, it is through their music they manage to connect with a large body of people.

One more recent times examples of such a phenomenon, is the rise of Grunge music in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Here one band stands out among the crowd: Nirvana. (Britannica, n.d.). Throughout their rather short career, Nirvana managed to amass a large following of people identifying with their music, and as an attest to their influence, they have later been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Nirvana's musical career ended abruptly in 1994 when lead singer and songwriter Kurt Cobain was found dead after having committed suicide (*Nirvana*, 2014). Following this, their music has remained popular, with shirts sporting their iconic *Nevermind* smiley still being worn by many people today (Siegel, 2023).

Because of the popularity and social influence Nirvana had, it is interesting to look at which factors played into this success. Here many speculations and theories can be made linking to societal influence and the band functioning as a brand to which people can identify themselves with. However, no apparent studies have looked at the linguistic factors that played into Nirvana's

songwriting. As such, this paper seeks to shed light on the following problem formulation: How is language used in Nirvana's three studio albums in terms of word use and stylistic choices? and what does this reveal about the personal workings of the band and in particular Kurt Cobain?

Working with the questions stated in this problem formulation, the purpose of this paper is to explore Nirvana's use of linguistic and stylistic elements to gain an understanding of how they construe meaning, as well as the type of life experiences they portray.

To answer these questions two different methodological approaches are used: First, a quantitative approach utilising corpus stylistics to gain insight into statistical patterns of word frequencies throughout the three albums; and second, a qualitative approach focusing on textual examples of linguistic elements. The use of corpora in an analysis is justified by it presenting more general patterns of language use in Nirvana's lyrics, as well as allowing for the analysis of a larger body of text. The qualitative section allows for a more in-depth and specific analysis, contributing depth to the more general results of a corpus analysis. Additionally, two different theoretical frameworks are utilised to create a basis of stylistic points that can be applied in an analysis to identify potential patterns of language use: Halliday's (2013) Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on his description transitivity processes; and Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The implementation of transitivity processes contributes a clear linguistic and grammatical framework when looking at specific textual examples, while conceptual metaphor theory grants a stylistic approach of looking at the use of figurative language – a type of language which is commonly known for being frequent in musical lyrics.

Having introduced the purpose, as well as the methodological and theoretical considerations, the structure of the paper is as follows: First, the theoretical frameworks of Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on transitivity processes, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory are accounted for; then a methodological section follows, containing an overview of the selected data, the software used for corpus analysis, and the extraction and processing of both the quantitative and qualitative data; this is followed by a two part analysis, the first part presenting a quantitative analysis and the second part presenting a qualitative analysis; these are then followed by a discussion that aims at tying together the results of both parts of the analysis and interpreting the implications and meanings hereof; lastly, the paper is wrapped up in a conclusion going through the results, points, and interpretations.

2: Theory section

The following section is an account of the theoretical frameworks utilised throughout the paper. The first part goes over Halliday's (2013) Systemic Functional Linguistics focusing on transitivity processes and the second part focuses on Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

2.1: Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a social semiotic theory of language which views language from a perspective of systems of meaning. This means that language is viewed as a functional tool that speakers use in social contexts. SFL looks at how systems of meaning are organised, how they interplay with and shape human social systems, and their relation to other social systems. In other words, as a linguistic approach, SFL is functionally focused and views function as meaning in social context (Bowcher, Fontaine & Schöntha, 2019, p. 1). The SFL theory was devised by the British linguist M. A. K. Halliday who drew upon the linguistic theories of his teacher John Rupert Firth. Halliday's theory adopted and built upon Firth's idea of systems, which were seen as possibilities that are secondary to linguistic structures. Halliday took this notion of possibilities and developed a theory that foreground choices instead of structures. In Halliday's linguistic view, any act of communication involves possibilities and choices, and SFL maps out these possibilities into network systems of meaning. Hence the systemic part of the theory's name (Steiner, 2018). The functional aspect of SFL is realised by different semiotic areas, or what Halliday calls metafunctions. He explains that there are three basic functions of language: (1) to construe or make sense of human experience, (2) to act out our social relationships, and (3) to facilitate the construction of text and discourse. In order, these basic functions constitute the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 30-31). Central for the purpose of this project is the ideational metafunction. It deals with the fact that language serves a representative function of construing human experiences. By giving different things different names, languages categorise the many different linguistic elements. These elements are then organized into complex grammatical patterns with countless possibilities of representing, construing, and expressing the various areas of human experiences. As Halliday himself explains "language provides a theory of human experience, and certain of the resources of the lexicogrammar of every language are dedicated to that function" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 30). This is the essence of the ideational metafunction and it is this function of language that this

paper focuses on: Specifically, how language construes and represents human experience in regards to the musical lyrics of Nirvana. As explained, Halliday based his theory on a notion of language consisting of systems. Each of the three metafunctions have their own systems which are used to make sense of and organise the linguistic choices of the function. The Ideational metafunction is represented by the system of transitivity. Which will be the system used for analysis later on in the paper.

2.2: Transitivity and processes

As the system realising the ideational metafunction of language, transitivity is concerned with how human experience is construed through language (Webster, 2019, p. 38). In Hallidayan terms, human experience can be understood as a flow of events which is linguistically structured in the grammar of the clause. These structures or figures are centred on a process that unfolds over time and also includes the participants directly involved with such a process. Furthermore, there might be some circumstances involved in these structures, such as space, cause, time, manner, etc. (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2013, p. 213). It is this structural configuration of a process, its participants and its circumstances that is referred to as the transitivity system of a clause. Additionally, the transitivity system can be understood as a way to use language as a meaning-making tool which emphasises choice when construing experience (Neale, 2002). In this sense, through use of transitivity systems, the grammar of a language does not merely annotate experience, it interprets it and theorises about it through human understanding (Webster, 2019, p. 39): Hence, Halliday's use of the term 'construe' (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2013, p. 213).

When using transitivity systems to construe experiences, we are centrally concerned with the different ways in which we use language to describe events flowing over time. There are a vast number of different ways to describe these, however, we can group them into a manageable number of distinct types: these are the six different process types (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, p. 100). These are grouped into three main types and three subsidiary types. The three main process types are material, mental and relational processes, and the three subsidiary types are behavioural, verbal, and existential processes. Each of these have their own small set of participants and these will be included in the following sections elaborating on the different processes.

2.2.1: Material process

The first of the three main process types is material processes. In simple terms, these are processes describing the action of doing or executing a usually physical and tangible action (Harbi et al., 2019, 46). From a cognitive view, humans gain the awareness to distinguish between an inner and outer experience at an early age: three to four months. These outer experiences are what is going on in the world around us or the different actions and events we partake in. It can also be the things that happen around us and the people making them happen (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2013, p. 214). Thereby, the material process type is categorised by construing either the experience of an action or event. You can easily identify a material process by applying the question ‘What did x do?’ to a clause (Harbi et al., 2019, 47).

There are several different participants that can be involved in material processes. However, the two most essential participants are the Actor, who performs the process, and the Goal, which is the object affected by the process (Harbi et al., 2019, 47). Apart from the Actor and Goal, there are also two less common participants that appear in some material processes: the Beneficiary and the Range. In a clause with a Goal, the Beneficiary is the one that benefits from the process. The Range refers to and specifies the scope of the process (Martin, Matthiesen & Painter, 1997, p. 103). A practical example of the different participants in material processes is shown in Table 1.

Actor:	Material process:	Goal:	Beneficiary:	Range:
He	constructed	the treehouse	for his children	
They	climbed			the mountain

Table 1: Examples of participants in material processes:

2.2.2: Mental process

The second main process type is mental processes. When humans gain the ability to distinguish between inner and outer experience, the inner experiences consist mainly of mental processes. These are the experiences related to consciousness and includes such things as emotions, imagination, and perception (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2013, p. 214). These conscious processes of thinking, feeling and sensing are commonly divided into four different types of mental processes: emotive, cognitive, perceptive and desiderative processes. Emotive mental processes construe the experience of feeling. Likewise, cognitive processes construe the experience of thinking and

perceptive processes construe the experience of sensing (Afifah, 2021, p. 42). Additionally, desiderative processes construe one's conscious desire for something (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 256). As is the case for every type of transitivity process, mental processes have their own set of relevant participants. The first of two possible participants is the Senser. This is the participant carrying out the conscious mental process. As such, the Senser must either be a human, which is capable of consciousness, or human-like, like a fictional humanoid abstraction (Webster, 2019, p. 39). The second possible participant is the Phenomenon, which is being sensed by the Senser (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, p. 105-106). An example of the different mental processes and associated participants is shown in Table 2.

Type of mental process:	Senser:	Mental process:	Phenomenon:
<i>Emotive</i>	She	likes	ice cream
<i>Cognitive</i>	She	remembers	the answer
<i>Perceptive</i>	She	saw	a dog
<i>Desiderative</i>	She	wants	a classic wedding cake

Table 2: Examples of the different mental processes

2.2.3: Relational process

The last of the three main transitivity processes is the relational process. Simply put, relational processes construe the experience of a relation between two participants in the transitivity system (Harbi et al., 2019, p. 47). This is in the sense that the relevant participants are characterised by a relational process of *being* something, by being identified as *having* some ability, or by becoming something (Nieto Álvaro, 2013, p. 11-12). As explained by Halliday & Matthiessen (2013), relational clauses serve the purpose of either characterising or identifying and can be divided six different categories. First off, there are three main types of relational processes: intensive, possessive, and circumstantial. Intensive processes construe that a participant is something (x is y), possessive processes construe that a participant has something (x has y), and circumstantial processes construe that something is at somewhere/or sometime (x is at y). Each of these relational types come in two different modes, either attributive (y is an attribute of x) or identifying (y is the identity of x). An overview of these categories can be seen in Table 3.

	Attributive: y is an attribute of x	Identifying: y is the identity of x
Intensive: x is y	She is clever	Mike is the store manager
Possessive: x has y	He has a dog	The dog is Johanne's
Circumstantial: x is at y	The wedding is on a weekend	Today is the 1st

Table 3: The six categories of relational clauses with examples (based on table 5-12 in Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Apart from the different categories of relational processes, the two modes, attributive and identifying, have their own set of related participants. Attributive clauses always have two participants: the Carrier and the Attribute. In an Identifying relational clause, there are also two specific participants: the Token and the Value. The Token is defined as being the more specific entity or participant in the clause, while the Value refers to the more generalisable participant (Berry, 2019, p. 102-103). An example of the different relational clauses and the associated participants is shown in Table 4.

	Carrier:	Relational process (possessive):	Attribute:
Attributive Relational clause:	James	has	a blue car
	Token:	Relational process (intensive):	Value:
Identifying Relational clause:	James	is	a teacher

Table 4: Examples of different relational processes

2.2.4: Behavioural process

Of the subsidiary process types, behavioural processes construe the experience of physiological and psychological behaviour, or in other words, they characterise the outer representation of inner workings and reflections (Harbi et al., 2019, p. 47). In this sense, the behavioural process type lies on the boundary between material and mental processes (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2013, p. 301). Unlike most other transitivity processes, behavioural clauses have a single main participant: the Behaver. The Behaver is very similar to the Senser in Mental clauses but the main difference lies in the participant doing something instead of sensing something (Afifah, 2021, p. 43). In most behavioural processes, there is only the one participant, however, on occasion a second participant is present which closely resembles the scope/Range in Material clauses (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, p. 127). However, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) explain that the behavioural process and this scope are so closely interrelated that this second participant is referred to as the Behaviour. An example of a Behavioural process and the relevant participants is shown in Table 5.

Behaver:	Behavioural process:	Behaviour:
She	expelled	a big sigh

Table 5: Example of a behavioural process

2.2.5: Verbal process

Verbal processes construe the experience of the act of speech. It is the linguistic representation of saying something to someone (Harbi et al., 2019, p. 47). Verbal processes accommodate an additional four unique participants: namely, the Sayer, the Receiver, the Verbiage, and the Target (Harbi et al., 2019, p. 47). The Sayer is the participant uttering a saying, the Receiver refers to the participant to whom the saying is directed, the Verbiage corresponds to the uttered phrase, and the Target only occurs in a subtype of Verbal processes where the Sayer specifically targets another participant with its saying (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 306-307). Examples of verbal processes and the relevant participants is shown in Table 6.

Sayer:	Verbal process:	Receiver:	Verbiage:
James	told	Sophie	that he was sad
Sayer:	Verbal process:	Target:	Verbiage:
Sophie	praised	James	for his honesty

Table 6: Examples of different verbal processes

2.2.6: Existential process

The last subsidiary process type is the existential process, which is very specific in its construing of experiences. This process represents any clause which refers to a state of being, existing, or happening and utilizes the verb ‘be’ or synonyms hereof, like exist (Harbi et al., 2019, p. 47). Typical of an existential clause is that it is led by the adverbial ‘there’, which serves no representational function in the clause despite being the grammatical subject, i.e., it is not a participant. Instead, it serves as an indicator of the existential feature of the clause. The actual functional participant of an existential clause is the singular Existent, which is simply the thing or person that is indicated as existing (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 308-309). Frequently, an existential clause will include a circumstantial element denoting a time or place (Afifah, 2021, p. 44). An example of existential processes and the relevant participants is shown in Table 7.

	Existential process:	Existent:	Circumstance: place
There	is	a house	in New Orleans

Table 7: Example of an existential process

2.2.7: Circumstances

Having covered the six different types of transitivity process outlined by Systemic Functional Grammar and their associated participants, the issue of circumstantial elements remains to be explained. These often appear as adverbials in the clause and can be situated at several different locations in the clausal structure without impacting the functional meaning of the overall structure. Furthermore, they can freely be used in all types of transitivity processes, unlike participants which are process-specific.

2.2.8: Transitivity in previous studies

The use of Transitivity systems as an analytical tool has become widely used in discourse-oriented studies. By applying Halliday's notion of Transitivity processes to linguistic patterns in a number of different text genres and discourse situations, researchers have been able to examine and understand the specific meanings encoded in the language of these linguistic situations. An extensive use of Transitivity analysis has been used in the study of language in different types of media eg., news articles (Bello, 2014; Seo, 2013; and Collins et al., 2017), political speeches and debates (Ahmad et al., 2022; Kashif et al., 2022; and Xiang, 2022), and court cases (Bartley, 2018; and Liu, 2021). Apart from analysing social institutions like politics and the news, Transitivity analysis has also been applied to the study of poetry and music with an increasing momentum and interest.

In 2014, Afrianto & Seomantri applied a descriptive method in order to examine the transitivity processes used in three of William Shakespeare's sonnets. They found that the data set of these three sonnets consisted of only four of six process types: Material, Mental, Relational, and Existential. The Material processes occurred at the highest frequency followed by Mental, Relational, and Existential. Afrianto & Seomantri (2014) concluded their study by drawing the assumptions that the identified process types corresponded with the intended ideas and experiences Shakespeare wanted to portray.

In 2016, Zahoor & Janjua used Halliday's transitivity framework to examine the song "I am Malala", which is a westernised tributive song dedicated to the young Pakistani women's rights advocate Malala Yousafzai. Where Afrianto & Seomantri (2014) used a mainly quantitative method looking at the frequency of use of the different process types in Shakespeare's sonnets, Zahoor & Janjua (2016) applied a qualitative methodology in their use of transitivity systems. They decided to focus on character construction within the text and as such examined the different clauses of the song in terms of their processes and appertaining participants. In this way, they gained a deeper understanding of how the main subject in the song 'Malala' was grammatically portrayed in terms of functions and experiential representation. They used these results as a basis of textual interpretation wherefrom they carried a discussion of the intended meanings of the song.

Apart from looking at character construction in songs dedicated to an individual, transitivity analysis has also been applied to classic rock music: which resembles the intended use of the theoretical framework in this project. In 2019, Harbi et al. examined ten popular songs from The Beatles' discography to understand how the band used language in their song writing to construe their experiences of the world. This study mainly focused on the different types of processes used in

the clauses of the song lyrics by categorising the songs and using a quantitative method to create statistical results of the use of these processes. By creating these generalised sets of statistics, Harbi et al. (2019) could then interpret these results and look at how The Beatles used the different process types in the songs and what effects such uses have. Furthermore, at a more abstract level, this allowed them to interpret the meanings construed in the songs as representations of The Beatles experiences of the world.

Lastly, Transitivity analysis has also been used in the study of contemporary popular music. Ani Afifah (2021) used the framework in study that analyses the songs from Lewis Capaldi's album *Divinely Uninspired to a Hellish Extent*. Like the other Transitivity studies, Afifah (2021) also applied a quantitative approach to the analysis of the process types in the songs. However, the researcher divided the analysis into two parts: a quantitative part and a descriptive qualitative part. In the second part, Afifah (2021) described how Lewis Capaldi's songs used the different types of processes and interpreted the meanings the singer wanted to construe.

2.3: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

As described in the introductory section of this paper, the later analytical part will be divided into two parts: one major section focusing on quantitative data and results, and a smaller qualitative section going more in depth with in-text examples of linguistic elements and uses. This latter qualitative part will be based on the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

When looking at music lyrics, it is interesting to look at the way language is used to create and relay meaning. A lot of songwriters make use of figurative language like hyperboles, similes, symbolism, etc. However, a common use of figurative language is that of metaphors. In the academic literature surrounding metaphor use, a large portion of studies focus on its use in songs (Jati, 2020; Johansson, 2016; Manalu et al., 2021; Sumolang, 2021). For each of these studies, it is a commonality to draw upon Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

When using the term 'metaphor', it refers to the linguistic device of comparing two separate things to one another in order to exemplify and clarify the intended meaning of the created phrase. In music, this is often done by an artist comparing themselves or their feelings to other objects (Jati, 2020). Like in Nirvana's lyrics for the song Milk It, "I am my own parasite", where the lyricist compares oneself to a parasite to illustrate his own self-destructive nature.

The term of conceptual metaphor is not as simple as just comparing two different things to each other. Instead, it is important to understand that metaphors are not only used practically in

conversation and writing but are also a subconscious part of our thinking and the ways that we go through life. In this sense, metaphors are directly correlated to what goes on in our minds and are influenced by our life experiences and the activities we partake in (Johansson, 2016). To understand what is meant by the term conceptual metaphor, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) point out that the concepts of mind we as human beings possess are based on the experiences we have in our everyday lives and that these are how we make sense of the world. They explain that these concepts of mind are systematically structured in terms of metaphors. This means that one concept is understood primarily in terms of our experiences of another concept: This is what is to be understood as conceptual metaphors. To distinguish between all the possible conceptual metaphors, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) establish three main types of metaphors: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors.

2.3.1: Structural Metaphors

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the term structural metaphor covers the types of metaphors where a concept is expressed and grasped according to another already defined and heavily structured concept. This is in the sense that we can use metaphors to structure more abstract concepts (p. 61). An example of how structural metaphors are used is seen in the conceptual metaphor *Love is war*, which can be expressed as follows: “He won her hand in marriage”, “She pursued him *relentlessly*”, and “He has to *fend them off*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 49, emphasis in original). Here the abstract concept of love is defined in terms of the well-established and structured concept of war. Where something like showing romantic interest towards somebody is compared to a relentless pursuit of war, in order to highlight the extreme nature of the romantic advances.

2.3.2: Orientational Metaphors

In terms of orientational metaphors, these are not structured in the same way as structured metaphors. This is in the sense that they do not relate to a well defined concept to create the metaphorical comparison. Instead, orientational metaphors are to be understood as metaphors where the interplaying concepts are spatially related to one another: hence the term orientational metaphor. This spatial relation can be expressed in the following terms: up or down; in or out; back or front; on or off; deep or shallow; and so forth (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14) Examples of orientational metaphors is how emotions are often described in terms of spatial direction: “You are in *high*

spirits!”, “I am feeling *up*”, “I *fell* into a depression” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.15, emphasis in original). Here it is clear that the spatial indicators are not meant in a literal sense, as in a person actually falling down. Instead these concepts of spatial relation are used to identify, in this case, the concepts of life and sickness: up relaying a positive look on life and down indicating a negative view on sickness.

2.3.3: Ontological Metaphors

The third type of metaphors presented by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) is ontological metaphors. These are used to conceptualise more abstract concepts like emotions, ideas, or activities in terms of something much more concrete and graspable like an object, a person, an animal, a substance, etc. For example, a metaphor like “you have a heart of stone” does not refer to an actual stone heart, but instead correlates someone lacking empathy for others with something as concrete as a stone. Because of the vastness of different concrete concepts that can be classified under ontological metaphors, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) distinguish between two subtypes: entity metaphors and substance metaphors.

2.3.4: Entity metaphors

Entity metaphors classify when an object, concept, activity, etc. is viewed as its own entity to quantify and identify certain aspects of it. An example of an entity metaphor is “*Inflation is lowering* our standard of living” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 26, emphasis in original). Here the concept of inflation is viewed as its own entity capable of influencing people’s lives. Thus, giving inflation a role as an entity makes it possible to refer to it as being the direct causation of people’s lowered standard of living.

Furthermore, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) mention a specific type of entity metaphor called personification. This is perhaps the most obvious of all ontological metaphors as it takes a physical object and specifies it as being a person. By using personification, it is possible to comprehend and convey a long list of experiences with objects or other non-human entities in relation to actual human activities, emotions, characteristics, and motivations. Some examples of this are “*Life has cheated* me” and “*Cancer finally caught up with him*” (p. 33, emphasis in original).

2.3.5: Substance metaphors

The second subtype of ontological metaphors is substance metaphors. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) explain that these attribute a concept with the capabilities of a substance. For example, the activity in “How did Jerry *get out of* washing the windows?” (p. 31, emphasis in original) is viewed as a substance. This is in the way that the activity of avoiding to wash the windows is viewed as something one can *get out of*, like a body of water. A notable type of substance metaphor is container metaphors. These are used in cases where a concept or person can be clarified in terms of a capability of holding/having something inside of it. A few examples of container metaphors are as follows: “There is a lot of land *in* Kansas” (p. 30, emphasis in original) and “Life is *Empty* for him” (p. 51, emphasis in original). In both examples, the container metaphor is used to grant a concept the capability of containing something else.

3: Methodology

The following section will serve as an outline of the quantitative and qualitative methodological considerations employed in the analytical parts of this paper. Furthermore, the section includes an in-depth introduction and description of the relevant data set used in the paper along with the software used to aid the corpus-driven parts of the analysis.

The methodological focus in this paper is that of both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The analysis is structured into two main parts that serve as a funnel whose purpose is to create analytical depth. This is done by first using a quantitative method in the form of corpus analysis to make general analytical statements about the data set. This in turn allows for further exploration of the empirical patterns that emerge from these. Those patterns then facilitate a more in-depth analysis by applying a qualitative method to more specific in-text examples. In this way, the analysis follows this funnel structure creating depth by first looking at the general empirical data and results, and then moving towards specific in-text examples and points of analytical interest. The following methodology section is structured as follows: first, an account of the works that make up the data set; second, an explanation of the software and tools used for the quantitative analysis; and third, a detailed description of the extraction and processing of the relevant data.

3.1: The Works

The following section presents an overview of the different texts that constitute the data set of this paper. The first part of the section covers the selection process of these texts as well as the

criteria for choosing the websites to extract the texts from. The second part will present a brief account of each of the chosen texts and the contexts surrounding them.

As explained in the introduction, this paper aims to explore the lyrical aspects of Nirvana's music from a linguistic angle. As such, the works that constitute the data set for this paper are the lyrics of Nirvana's three studio albums. This choice of data might seem obvious, but one must understand a few things about the band and their music to fully recognise the more complex nature of this choice.

Nirvana's musical legacy ended in 1994 when lead singer Kurt Cobain committed suicide (Nirvana, 2014). As such, there has been no new releases from the band since. This in turn limits the available texts to the songs written prior to Cobain's passing. Aside from the three studio albums Nirvana had released, there are a plethora of demo-tracks, b-sides, concept-tapes, etc. that have been released in different box sets over the years. These songs and lyrics complicate the selection process of choosing the most relevant data, leading to two different possibilities: [1] either every single piece of Nirvana's lyricism is included in the data set or [2] only the official studio releases are included. In the end, the latter possibility was chosen with the justification that all these non-studio album lyrics were largely unfinished or discarded music. Thus, only the music which Nirvana finished and intentionally released is used as relevant data.

There being only three released albums which match these criteria of data selection, one must note that the corpus which is created from this is highly specialised. This means that any claims and conclusion made regarding the statistical and corpus-related results from the analysis must be viewed through a critical and non-generalisable lens. Being a paper that only focuses on the lyrics of a single band, this circumstance is inevitable and to be expected as no single musical artist has a discography large enough to warrant generalisable analytical conclusions that can be applied to larger areas of researchable. In other words, any conclusions about Nirvana's use of language cannot be representatively used to explain the prevalent linguistic elements of other artists or any general cultural waves from their time.

Apart from the choice of only using Nirvana's studio albums as the corpus, another important factor must be considered when selecting the specific data: the website from which to extract the lyrics. With the vast and ever-expanding nature of the internet, it is not hard to find websites that offer song lyrics – especially of popular artists – which is also the case for Nirvana's music. As such, another element of complexity becomes present when selecting the specific website from which to extract the lyrics. To achieve the highest level of reliability, a few criteria are created to

choose this specific website: [1] All of the lyrics for all of Nirvana’s music must be extractable from the same website – this excludes extracting lyrics from more than one site; [2] The website must offer versions of the songs that contain only the lyrics. As such, no chords, tablature, or notes may be included as this would interfere with the corpus software’s ability to distinguish between tokens; [3] The lyrics offered by the website must be largely identical when cross-referencing with lyrics offered by other websites. This is to ensure that the lyrics are correct and considered to be official versions.

When applying these criteria, the choice of website landed on NirvanaClub.com, which is a fan driven page whose purpose is to house information on every aspect of the band. As such, the webpage has its own section dedicated to Nirvana lyrics, including a section-introduction that outlines their sources. This includes official lyrics from box-sets, transcriptions, album liner notes, and lyric sheets from the Kurt Cobain *Journals* book (“Lyrics”).

3.2: Software/tools:

In contemporary linguistic and stylistic studies that use different corpora to gain insight into different areas of interest, the use of corpus-specific computer software is essential. This is because computer software offers systematic, comprehensible, and substantial overviews of corpora that would be near impossible to create by hand. Furthermore, computer programs can offer several different functions that aid in the analysis of a corpus. Stubbs (2014) explains that a computer can uncover two things in texts: “the frequency of linguistic units (words, phrases and lexicogrammatical structures) and their distribution (within an individual text or across a corpus)” (p. 53). Furthermore, software can often present these two things in a convenient format which makes analysis and interpretation more manageable.

In the case of this paper, the corpus analysis is conducted by using the computer software AntConc which was created by Laurence Anthony, professor and director of the Center for English Language Education in Science and Engineering at Waseda University (Anthony, 2023). AntConc is a software specifically created for the purpose of aiding in corpus-based research (Anthony, 2023). This makes the software ideal for the purpose of this paper as it is both free to use and offers the necessary tools for the outlined analytical purposes.

As of 2023, AntConc offers 9 different tools or functions that can aid in a process of corpus analysis: The KWIC (Key-Word-In-Context) tool, the Plot tool, the File tool, the Cluster tool, the N-Gram tool, the Collocate tool, the Word List tool, the Keyword List tool, and the Wordcloud tool

(Anthony, 2023). Many of these tools could serve a relevant purpose in this paper, but ultimately the used tools are limited to the Word List tool, the Plot tool, and the KWIC tool. Shortly, the functions of these tools are as follows: the Word List tool counts all the words used in a corpus and structures them within a list. This allows one to view the frequency of which each word appears within the corpus; the Plot tool shows concordance search results in a barcode format that represents the length of a corpus. Thus, it allows one to clearly view the placement of the search result within the corpus or text; and the KWIC tool shows a search result in a concordance format which allows one to see how different words and phrases are used in the corpus (Anthony, 2023). The implementation of each of these tools will be explained as they become relevant throughout the paper, therefore, each of the functions will not be expanded upon further in this section.

3.3: Extracting and readying data for analysis

Having accounted for the different works or albums that make up the corpus of this paper, it is also essential to explain the exact thoughts and decisions that went into the extraction and processing of this data. In other words, the following section explains how the albums' lyrics were processed and readied for the software and for corpus analysis. It will also briefly cover how the data is used for both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the analysis.

Having established the specific webpage from which to extract Nirvana's lyrics, a few steps must be taken to ready this data for the corpus-software and analysis. The first step is to simply extract the lyrics and format them into a Microsoft Word-document: a step that is easily achieved by copying and pasting the lyrics from the website. In the case of this paper, each studio album has its own document, which means that all the songs included in the corpus are distributed amongst three different files. This is to allow the AntConc software to process the albums individually which opens the possibility of comparing possible analytical results. Furthermore, the AntConc software allows one to view several files at once as a singular corpus (Anthony, 2023), which thereby facilitates the overview of four different specialised corpora: one for each studio album (*Bleach*, *Nevermind*, and *In Utero*) and one unified corpus.

By first placing the corpora in Word-documents, it gives a manageable overview of the texts that makes it easier to create the necessary edits, so the software does not process any pointless symbols. The following part will go through the edits made to the extracted lyrics to ready them for the AntConc software. As the corpora consists of musical lyrics, there are a lot of symbols indicating pauses, repetitions, etc. which must be considered. A common indication of repetition is

the use of ‘x’ followed by the number of repetitions, eg. ‘x3’ or ‘x8’. In the corpora all such indications of repetitions have been typed out individually, since the AntConc software cannot recognise the meaning of ‘x’ and sees it as its own token. Furthermore, several times throughout the corpora ‘—’, ‘-’, and ‘...’ are used to indicate pauses in the songs. These symbols have been omitted since they would also be considered their own tokens by AntConc. Other points of omission include optional lyrics, which are indicated by [] and any editorial comments on the lyrics, like a section that is whispered, who the original author is, and where the lyrics were originally found. Another conscious omission is the choice to exclude all song titles from the corpora. This decision was made due to not all titles necessarily being thematically related to their respective songs. As such, the words and phrases uttered in the titles should arguably not be included when considering the lyrics.

Having edited and omitted unnecessary symbols from the three corpora, they are now ready to be loaded in the AntConc software. However, before this is possible the Word-documents must be converted to TXT.files: an easy process. On Microsoft-driven systems, simply open the notepad application from the computers search bar, then insert the piece of text you want converted, and save the new file in the application: the file is now saved in TXT-format. In the case of this paper, a separate TXT.file is created for each corpus. By converting the corpora into this format, they can now be opened in AntConc.

Utilising the Word List tool, a new set of necessary edits are revealed that will make the analysis easier and the results of the software’s processing less incomprehensible. This is in the sense that some grammatical choices in the lyrics, like genitives and contractions, are considered as their own word-tokens instead of being counted as a part of the actual word they represent. As such, the following lists all the changes made to the software-generated results.

In terms of genitive confusions, the software cannot distinguish between the genitive ‘-s’ and the contracted ‘s’ in ‘It’s (it is)’. Therefore, the KWIC tool is used to identify all the instances of contracted ‘s’, they are then added to the word-token ‘is’ and subtracted them from the genitive ‘-s’ word-token. Following this edit of genitives, a longer list of contractions is also in need of being changed. However, as these fall under the same category of changes, the explanation of each will be brief, followed by a general explanation: First, all ‘-t’ contractions are added to the ‘not’ word-token; all ‘-m’ contractions are added to the ‘am’ word-token; all ‘-ll’ contractions are added to the ‘will’ word-token; all ‘-ve’ contractions are added to the ‘have’ word-token; all ‘-re’ contractions are added to the ‘are’ word-token; all ‘wouldn’ word-tokens are added to the ‘would’ word-token;

all 'don' word-tokens are added to the 'do' word-token; all 'won' word-tokens are added to the 'will' word-token; all 'isn' word-tokens are added to the 'is' word-token; all 'ain' word-tokens are added to either the 'am' or 'is' word-token.

To implement these changes to the generated word list, a few steps must be followed. Since it is not possible to manually change the listed results directly in the software, a first step is to plot these results into a format that allows such changes: here an obvious format is a Word document. The software-generated results are easily copied into this format and from there ready to be updated according to the aforementioned changes. As such, these changes are manually implemented to the extracted word list and for each change the frequency and rank on the word list is also updated. This results in the finalised versions of the word lists which are found as (Appendix 1, 2, and 3)

3.4: Extracting and processing qualitative data

A large part of the analysis in this paper is of a quantitative nature and relies on the software-processed corpora and the patterns that can be found within these. However, to create a more layered analysis and to reach more substantial conclusions, a section of the analysis will also be dedicated to analysing qualitative data. This qualitative section of the analysis will be conducted by drawing on Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

To ensure a certain degree of replicability in the analysis, it is essential to briefly cover the extraction process of the specific qualitative data that will be analysed. Since the corpus analysis looks at all the lyrics from all three studio albums, it seems obvious to also examine all instances of conceptual metaphors throughout the three albums. However, as is usually the case with a qualitative approach, such analytical sequences would become quite substantial and detailed, likely extending beyond the scopes of this paper. As such, the number of conceptual metaphors examined must be significantly decreased while still maintaining a sense of relevance. To ensure this sense of relevance, a couple of criteria are created: First, there must be included data from each of the three studio albums; and second, the omission of most lyrics must be justifiable and consistent throughout each album.

To meet these criteria and to follow the scopes of this paper, the decision of examining one song lyric from each of the albums is made. This fulfils the criteria of using data from each album, however, consistency and justification remains. In terms of consistency, it is not enough to just pick any random song from each album. Instead, they must be picked for the same reason, and in this case the chosen reason is popularity. There are many ways to gauge the popularity of a song such as

surveys, official billboard charts, sales, etc. but for the purpose of this paper, popularity will be measured in terms of number of all-time streams. To view the number of streams of a song, you need to use a music streaming platform that shares this statistic. An obvious choice is Spotify, which is a popular digital music service that grants access to millions of songs (*About us*). By using Spotify, one can view the number of all-time streams on a song. While this number does not represent streams across all possible music streaming services, it does give a relatively clear suggestion and picture of different bands most popular songs. Here it is essential to point out that Spotify did not exist at the time of Nirvana's rise to fame, as such it cannot gauge the popularity of their songs back then. However, by cross referencing the most streamed Nirvana song with a Billboard list detailing Nirvana's most popular songs in the 1990s (Billboard, 2014), this pitfall can be avoided. By using this measure of popularity, the second criterion of consistency among the chosen lyrics is fulfilled. However, the justification of picking song lyrics based on popularity remains. In short, by looking at the most popular songs from each album, one can argue that you are looking at the songs that resonate the most with the listeners. Thereby, all criteria of choosing song lyrics are met.

Following this criteria-based process of picking the qualitative data, this paper ends up with the lyrics of three different Nirvana songs: from the *Bleach* album, the song "About A Girl" is chosen; from the *Nevermind* album, the song "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is chosen; and from the *In Utero* album, the song "Heart-Shaped Box" is chosen.

4: Analysis

The following analysis will be divided into two main parts: one focusing on the quantitative data stemming from the processed corpora of Nirvana lyrics and the other focusing on the more qualitative and text-specific use of conceptual metaphors in three of the songs.

4.1: Quantitative analysis

The following quantitative section will examine each of Nirvana's studio album corpora in chronological order in terms of the most frequently used word-tokens. First, a general look at interesting patterns in the top 50 word-tokens, followed by a more specific look at the top five nouns and verbs. Furthermore, the verb section for each corpus will also include a smaller section analysing transitivity processes in some textual examples. The top 50 word lists, which are edited according to the criteria stated in the methodology section, can be found in Appendix A (*Bleach* Word List); Appendix B (*Nevermind* Word List); and Appendix C (*In Utero* Word List). The choice of only looking at the top 50 word-tokens is justified by all three corpora being highly

specialised. This is in the way that the number of available word-tokens in each is much smaller than in a lot of other corpus-studies. Thus, when looking at the word list for each Nirvana corpus, the frequency of use of word-tokens past the top 50 is so limited that any conclusions and observations made from these would arguably be unsubstantiated.

4.1.1: *Bleach* Corpus Analysis:

The following section will follow the structure explained above to examine the *Bleach* corpus.

4.1.1.1: Top 50 Word-Tokens in the *Bleach* Corpus:

Looking at the top 50 word-tokens in the *Bleach* Corpus, a few interesting patterns are immediately apparent. Apart from the uses of nouns and verbs – which will be covered later – we see a significant presence of pronouns in the list. The number one most frequently used word-token is the first person singular personal pronoun “I”. It makes up 117 uses out of 2480 word-token entries which amounts to 4.7%. While 4.7% does not seem like a noteworthy frequency, the “I” word-token is only one among a total of 386 word-tokens in the entire corpus.

The substantial presence of the personal pronoun “I” is far from the only interesting pronoun present in the corpus. As the third most frequent word-token, the pronoun “you” is used 104. The specific use of the pronoun is not apparent in the corpus, and therefore it is not clear if “you” is used as either a subject, object, in the second person singular, or in the plural tense. If classification of these different uses could be identified by the AntConc software, the frequencies of each use would likely be much lower and show a clearer image of the actual most frequent use of the pronoun. Despite this imprecision, the frequency of the pronoun is still high and makes up 4.19% of all uses of word-tokens in the corpus, which compared to the frequency of “I”, highlights the weighty presence of the “you” pronoun. Furthermore, with a combined number of 221 uses between the pronouns “I” and “you”, making up a combined frequency of 8.89%, a pattern seems to form in the top 50 list of the *Bleach* corpus: pronoun use is high in Nirvana’s first studio album.

Looking through the top 50 list of the *Bleach* corpus, a total of six different pronouns are identified: I, you, it, me, they, and he - in order of highest to lowest frequency. One must keep in mind that other pronouns are present in the corpus, however, their frequency of use are not high enough to be included in the top 50 word list. Occupying 6 of the top 50 word-tokens, pronouns make up 12 % of the list. Combining their total number of frequencies – “I” used 117 times, “you” 104 times, “it” 42 times, “me” 28 times, “they” 25 times, and “he” 11 times – the total number of pronoun word-tokens in the top 50 list amounts to 327: This corresponds to 13.18% of the entire

corpus. This prevalence of pronouns will be commented on later in the paper, but for now it is essential to add that this is not a surprising result when comparing it with a larger corpus.

Apart from pronouns, another interesting word-token at the top of the word list is the use of the adverb “not”. In terms of frequency, this is the second most frequent word-token and has a total of 110 uses in the corpus, amounting to 4.4%. As established with the pronouns “I” and “you”, this statistical presence is noteworthy and revealing about the linguistic nature of Nirvana’s lyrics in their first studio album. Once again, because of the limitation of the basis AntConc-software, the specific uses of the adverb cannot be accurately accounted for without doing a close reading of the lyrics. However, because of the interesting statistical size of the frequency of “not”, one can draw the conclusion that in some cases Nirvana uses the adverb in relation to verbs, modal verbs, phrases, and other words to imbue a negative meaning, which would fit well with the rebellious image the band is attributed to.

4.1.1.2: Top Five Nouns in the Bleach Corpus:

Having looked generally at the top 50 word-tokens of the *Bleach* corpus, the following two sections will take a more specific look at the top five nouns and verbs in the corpus. To go more in-depth, these sections will look both at the frequencies of the word-tokens but also look at the in-text applications to understand more specifically how these are used.

<i>Rank and Word-Token</i>	<i>Frequency out of 2480</i>
1. girl	Frequency = 2.09% N = 52
2. Daddy	Frequency = 1.04% N = 26
3. alcohol	Frequency = 0.84% N = 21
4. Nirvana	Frequency = 0.56% N = 14
5. eyes	Frequency = 0.52% N = 13

Table 8: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the *Bleach* corpus

Looking at Table 8, we see that the most used noun in the corpus is “girl” with 52 uses. This corresponds to a frequency of 2.09%. Compared to the second most used noun, “girl” has a frequency that is almost double the size. As such, the noun is worthy of note in a statistical sense, and looking closer at the word it is interesting that single most used noun in the album is the female gendered “girl”. To understand how “girl” is used in-text, the KWIC and File tool are helpful as they allow you to look at how a search word is used in the corpus. Using these tools, it immediately becomes apparent that the uses of “girl” are predominantly present in a single song: “Negative Creep”. This means that the female gendered focus, that one could suppose is present throughout the entire album by looking purely at the statistical data, is much more limited, and by using the AntConc-software the specific use of the noun becomes even less significant. This is in the sense that “girl” is used in the sentence “Daddy’s little girl ain’t a girl no more” (Nirvana, 1989). This phrase is repeated a total of 26 times throughout the song, thereby, showcasing the incompleteness of the noun’s frequency of use.

The second most used noun “Daddy” is used 26 times throughout the corpus, amounting to 1.04%, and its frequency originates from the same conditions as “girl”: being repeated in the same phrase of “Negative Creep”. Although these two nouns are only repeated in a singular phrase and song, they still make up the most frequent nouns in the corpus and are therefore still worthy of a brief look as to how they are used. In short, the phrase “Daddy’s little girl ain’t a girl no more” has “girl” as a subject being premodified by the possessive noun “Daddy’s” and the adjective “little”. The verb is realised by the negative “ain’t” followed by the subject complement “a girl” and adverbial “no more”. Looking at the functions of these sentence constituents, it is clear that the female gendered “girl” is shown as being possessed or belonging to the male “Daddy”. “Daddy” being a word that either denotes a father figure or in modern times has gained a sexual connotation. In either case, the “Daddy” is portrayed as being in a position of power over the “girl”. However, the verb reveals that the “girl” is not a girl anymore, which in a literal sense can indicate that the “girl” has grown up and become an adult. Thereby, the “Daddy’s” daughter is no longer a child that he must take care of. However, like with the noun “Daddy”, the phrase “ain’t a girl no more” can also carry a sexual connotation referring to the “girl” becoming sexually active and thereby “losing her innocence”. As such, the entire phrase can be understood in a sexually connotated way as either a daughter becoming sexually active, or the narrator himself being the “Daddy” telling us that him and the “girl” are engaging in intercourse. Looking at the context of the song, this sexual

interpretation seem highly likely as the song is filled with lines like “I’m a negative creep and I’m stoned” and “This is out of our range and its crude”.

Continuing with the remaining three nouns of the top five list, we have “alcohol” with 21 uses (0.84%), “Nirvana” with 14 uses (0.56%), and “eyes” with 13 uses (0.52%). The amount of uses for each of these seems insignificant and as is the case with both “girl” and “Daddy”, the frequency that landed these remaining nouns in top five can be ascribed to them being repeated in their respective songs. Because of this, their specific in-text uses are not interesting enough to warrant a closer examination. This lack of statistical interest is easily explained by the fact of the *Bleach* corpus being highly specialised. Furthermore, because of the limited size of the corpus, there being repetitions of words in the songs will lead to higher frequencies for specific words. This point will be kept in mind as we continue the analysis of the *Bleach* corpus, but also throughout analyses of the *Nevermind* and *In Utero* corpus.

4.1.1.3: Top Five Verbs in the Bleach Corpus:

In the top five noun list of the *Bleach* corpus, it was clear that the use of nouns was slightly limited compared to the use of pronouns. Where the two most used pronouns had a frequency of 117 and 104 respectively, the two most used nouns only had a frequency of 52 and 26. As such, the use of nouns are mostly present in the *Bleach* lyrics as repetitions of the same phrases. Looking at the top five verbs in the *Bleach* corpus, we see that their uses are slightly more frequent and therefore more likely to be interesting in terms of linguistic patterns.

<i>Rank and Word-Token</i>	<i>Frequency out of 2480</i>
1. am	Frequency = 3.06% N = 76
2. is	Frequency = 2.17% N= 54
3. do	Frequency = 2.17% N = 54
4. have	Frequency = 1.08% N = 27
5. would	Frequency = 1.04% N = 26

Table 9: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the *Bleach* corpus

Before examining the top five verbs of the *Bleach* corpus, it must be noted that for a large number of these verb-uses their in-text context is followed by the negative adverb “not” or the contracted form “n’t”. However, these have been separated in the corpus as to not confuse the AntConc-software. As such, the statistical observations of these verbs do not necessarily reflect how the verb is used in terms of negation. The process of separating “not” from the verbs in the corpus is explained further in the methodology section.

Looking at the top five verbs in Table 9, the most used verb is “am” which is the present simple form of the verb “be”. “am” has 76 uses throughout the corpus, which corresponds to 3.06%. Compared to the frequency of the top five nouns, this frequency of 3.06% is statistically more noteworthy. Therefore, it is interesting to look closer at how the verb is used in-text to understand how Nirvana uses language in their first studio album.

Using the the Plot, KWIC and File tool in the AntConc-software to identify in-text uses, three different search terms are looked at: “am”, “ain”, and “m”. This is done to identify all the different in-text variations of the verb that have been combined in the word list provided in Appendix A. By searching for each of these terms in the Plot tool, we gain a sense of the dispersion of the verb throughout the album:

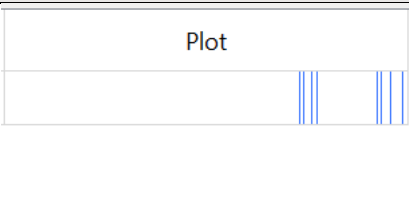

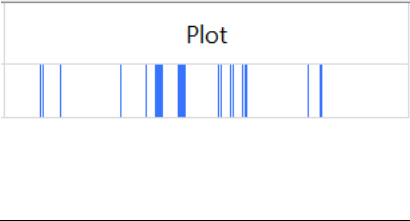
Plotting overview:	Search terms:
	Dispersion of the search term “am”
	Dispersion of the search term “ain”
	Dispersion of the search term “m”

Table 10: Dispersion of “am” search terms in the *Bleach* corpus.

Looking at Table 10, it is clear that the use of “am” is seen fairly consistently throughout the entirety of the album. However, there is a close collection of uses of the verb around the middle. This is easily explained by the use of repetitions, once again in the song “Negative Creep”. Here the phrases “I’m a negative creep” and Daddy’s little girl *ain’t* a girl no more” (Nirvana, 1989, emphasis added) are repeated several times creating this cluster of uses in the Plot tool and increasing the total number of frequencies for the verb.

Aside from these heavily repeated instances, there is still a somewhat even dispersal of the verb throughout the corpus, and the location of these uses can be identified using both the KWIC and File tool. As “am” is a linking verb used in the first person singular to connect the pronoun “I” to a subject complement, if not used as an auxiliary verb, it is used to create a descriptive sentence or phrase, characterising the narrator or lyricist. Examples of the in-text uses throughout the corpus are as shown in Table 11, where auxiliary uses are identified using bold text:

Uses of “am” in the <i>Bleach</i> Corpus:	Song Title:
I’m ashamed; I’m really scared	Floyd the Barber
I’m standing in your line	About a Girl
Just <i>ain’t</i> the way it seems	Love Buzz
When I’m feeling tired; And that is why I’m here with you	Paper Cuts
I’m a negative creep; I’m stoned; Daddy’s little girl <i>ain’t</i> a girl no more	Negative Creep
I’m not lazy; I’m not older; I’m not worth it	Scoff
I’m new; I’m you; I am not proud	Mr. Moustache
Sure you are, but what am I?	Big Cheese
Somebody said that they're not much like I am	Downer

Table 11: In-text uses of “am” in the *Bleach* corpus.

Looking at these examples, most of them are used in a way that describes the subject, and this reveals a tendency from the lyricists of viewing himself or the subject in a highly negative light. Referring to himself as “ashamed”, a “creep”, “scared”, “not worth it”, etc. Since this negative self-talk is present and dispersed somewhat evenly throughout the album, one can argue that the writer

of these lyrics – Kurt Cobain – has a pessimistic outlook on life. That is if this negative presence is not just a theme picked for the album.

The second and third most used verbs in the corpus, are shared by two word-tokens with an equal amount of uses. These are the verbs “is” and “do” who are both used 54 times throughout the *Bleach* corpus. This means that that they each make up 2.17% of the word-token total frequencies. Like the verb “am”, the second most frequent verb “is” is a form of the verb “to be”. This means that the at the statistical highest frequencies of verb uses in the *Bleach* corpus, we find two different forms of the same verb. Combined they make up a total of 5.23% of all uses of word-tokens in the corpus. The word form “is” has an equal function to the form “am”, with the only difference being that the latter refers to the subject/object in the first person singular and “is” refers to the third person singular. In both uses of the verb, they are mostly used to characterise the subject or object with a negative connotation: fx. “My whole existence *is* for your amusement”, “Black *is* black”, “Won't you believe it, It's just my luck” (Nirvana, 1989, emphasis added). This heavy prevalence of verbs facilitating a subject complement is an interesting point to note, as it is a phenomenon that is present and highly used throughout the entirety of the album. It reveals a theme in Nirvana’s first album of focusing mainly on characterising the lyricist or characters related hereto with a negative and pessimistic outlook, rather than focusing on storytelling and narrative songwriting. It is interesting to look at the remaining two studio albums to see if a similar trend is present in them, or if there has been an evolution in Nirvana’s linguistic choices. This point will be looked at further in chapter 5.3.

The third most used verb – or a shared second – is present simple verb “do”. Using the AntConc Plot tool, we distinguish between two search terms for “do” that have been combined in the word list of Appendix A: “do” and “don”.

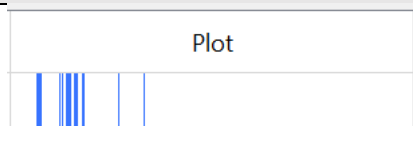
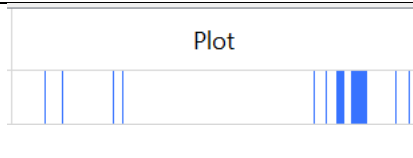
Plotting overview:	Search terms:
	Dispersion of the search term “do”
	Dispersion of the search term “don”

Table 12: Dispersion of “do” search terms in the *Bleach* corpus.

An interesting observation from the plotting of these search terms is that they seem to be placed at each end of the album: “do” being used primarily in the first half of the album and “don” being used in the second half. The verb “do” is usually applied in a sentence to introduce an action, behaviour, activity, etc. that the subject or object is engaged in. In terms of the difference between the two search terms, the only significant difference is that “don” has an in-text context of being used as a contraction with the negative adverb “not”. Thus, “don” is used in a context where the subject or object is not doing the action described. Therefore, it is an interesting observation that the two uses of the verb are divided in each end of the album. This indicates a pattern of Nirvana leading the album with describing the subjects as actively engaging in actions and behaviours to then actively depicting or encouraging them to not engage. However, a worthy point to note is the indication of search term clusters in the Plot tool, which means that there is a heavy presence of repetition at these parts of the corpus. For the “do” search term, a noteworthy repetition of the phrase “You could *do* anything” (Nirvana, 1989, emphasis added) is present in the beginning of the album in the song Blew. In the second part of the corpus, the phrase “*Don't* have nothing for you” (Nirvana, 1989, emphasis added) from the song “Sifting” makes up the significant indication of repetition visible in the Plot tool. These repetition clusters make the division of the two search terms less interesting as it means there is not an as big presence of different uses of “do” and “don” in the corpus. Instead, the repetitions once again showcase a point of critique in terms of using a specialised set of corpora, since most of the linguistic patterns in these are not significant enough to make generalisable statements on, because of their limited sizes.

The fourth and fifth most used verbs in the *Bleach* corpus are “have” and “would”. They have an almost equal number of frequencies of uses, “have” being used 27 times and “would” being used 26 times. Respectively, these amount to 1.08% and 1.04% of the corpus word-token frequencies. As is the case with some of the top five nouns, a lot of the uses of “have” and “would” are caused by repetitions of the words. Paired with their arguably low number of frequencies, this makes their uses in the corpus significantly less interesting as they do not actually occupy a substantial amount of Nirvana’s verb-uses. As such, these will not be examined further in this section.

4.1.1.4: Transitivity Processes in the Bleach Album:

Throughout the previous section on the top five verbs in the *Bleach* corpus, several in-text examples were used to showcase how the verbs were used. The following section will look at 2 of

these sentence or phrase examples and explore them in closer detail following Halliday’s (2013) description of transitivity processes. The selection process is based on the top five verb uses, picking an in-text example from the two most used verbs: taking care to not select different forms of the same verb, like “am” and “is”. Ultimately, this examination of transitivity processes is carried out to get a better grasp at how the different linguistic elements used in Nirvana’s music are applied to construe different experiences.

The first in-text example is based on the most used verb in the corpus “am”. As such, the phrase “I’m standing in your line” (Nirvana, 1989) from the song “About a Girl” is chosen:

Behaver:	Behavioural process:	Circumstance:
I	‘m (am) standing	in your line

Table 13: Behavioural process example from the *Bleach* corpus.

As is displayed in Table 13, this an example of a behavioural process type. Here the subject “I” functions as the Behaver performing as specific behaviour. The Behavioural process is then realised by the verb group “am standing”, and finally defined in terms of the Circumstance “in your line”. In this way, the most used verb “am” is used in a verb group with “standing” to facilitate the construing of a behavioural process. In the words of Harbi et al (2019), “am” is used to characterise the outer representation of inner workings and reflections.

The second example of a transitivity process is based on the third most used verb “do” – the second most used verb is a form of “to be” like “am”. As such, the phrase “you could do anything” from the song “Blew” is chosen:

Actor:	Material process:	Goal:
You	could do	anything

Table 14: Material process example from the *Bleach* corpus.

As is shown in Table 14, this is an example of a material process. The subject of the clause “you” functions as the Actor of the Material process. In turn, the Material process is then realised by the verb group “could do”, and finally the Goal of the process is realised by “anything”. In this way, the third most used verb in the *Bleach* corpus “do” is used in a verb group with “could” to describe the tangible action of the subject “you” being able to do the Goal “anything”.

Looking at these two examples of transitivity processes in the *Bleach* corpus, they each represent one of the most used verbs in the entire album. As such, it is interesting how these verbs are implemented in the text. In both cases, they are part of a verb group which means that at least in the cases of these examples, the verbs do not stand alone in the text. Furthermore, it is interesting that they occupy two different transitivity types, one of which belongs to the subsidiary transitivity types: the behavioural process. Having only applied Halliday's transitivity theory to a fraction of all the processes in the corpus, it is difficult to draw any generalisable conclusions from these uses. However, they can contribute a slight insight into the textual uses of some of the major linguistic patterns presented in the corpus, and this can be used as support and valuable points later in the project when the results from quantitative and qualitative sections are tied together.

4.1.2: *Nevermind* Corpus Analysis

The following section covers the corpus of Nirvana's second studio album, following the established structure from the analysis of the *Bleach* corpus, it starts off identifying general linguistic patterns in the top 50 word list and then looks closer at the top five most frequent nouns and verbs in the corpus.

4.1.2.1: Top 50 Word-Tokens in the *Nevermind* Corpus

For comparison later on, it makes sense to look at how some of the same linguistic elements prevalent in the *Bleach* corpus are used in the *Nevermind* corpus. As such, the first part of the *Nevermind* top 50 word list will look at pronoun frequency and the use of the negative adverb "not".

Looking at pronoun use, these play a significant role in Nirvana's songwriting on the *Nevermind* album. Using AntConc's word list tool (see Appendix B), the most frequent word-token is revealed to be the first-person singular pronoun "I" with 267 total uses throughout the corpus. With a total of 3060 word-token uses in the corpus, the use of "I" makes up 8.7% of the corpus. Compared to the second most used word-token, which has 125 uses, "I" is used more than double the number of times. Thus, the use of this pronoun is worthy of note as it suggests a linguistic focus on the the lyricist's experiences in the Album. This is furtherly supported when looking at how the pronoun is plotted throughout the corpus:


Plotting overview:	Search terms:
	Dispersion of the search term “I”

Table 15: Dispersion of “I” search term in the *Nevermind* corpus.

Table 15 reveals that the use “I” is evenly distributed throughout the entirety of the album. Thereby, showcasing a statistical indication of a first-person singular focus in Nirvana’s lyrics. In this sense, an argument can be made that their second album focuses more on the writer’s experiences and opinions rather than on telling a narrative lyrical story. This is thereby a clear sign of the heavy prevalence of pronoun use in the corpus.

While “I” accounts for the most frequent word-token and pronoun in the top 50 list, there are several other pronouns present within the list:

Pronoun:	Frequency of use:	Rank on top 50 list:
I	267	1
you	70	6
it	54	11
she	31	18
me	27	21
he	24	25
myself	15	39
some	15	39
something	14	44

Table 16: Pronouns, their frequencies, and rank in the top 50 list of the *Nevermind* corpus.

In total, there are 9 different pronouns present in the top 50 word-tokens of the *Nevermind* corpus. As is clear from Table 16, their individual frequencies of use vary greatly, spanning from 267 uses to a modest 14 uses. Combined the frequency of all pronouns in the top 50 amounts to total of 517 uses, or 16.89% of the entire corpus. This means that at least 1/6th of the corpus consists entirely of pronoun uses – half of these being the pronoun “I” – which shows a statistical focus on

personal experiences and interpersonal relationships in the album. This is furtherly shown by the second most used pronoun being “you”. Thus, clearly showing an intentional focus on describing the lyricist’s “I” and its relationship to the second person singular/plural “you”.

Furthermore, it is interesting that both the female and male gendered pronouns “she” and “he” are prominent on the top 50 list. “She” is used a total of 31 times which amounts to around 1% of all word-tokens, and “he” is used 24 times, which accounts for 0.78%. From a general viewpoint, these statistics are not particularly fascinating, however, what is interesting is that these pronouns are both present within the top 50 – even within the top 25 – word-tokens of the corpus. Thus, despite their arguably limited number of uses, which can be explained by the specialised nature of the corpora, they are still prominent within the linguistic word-usage of the lyrics. This is in the sense, that their prevalence indicates that Nirvana consciously chose to describe the experiences of both a third person singular “he” and “she”.

Apart from the frequently used pronoun “I”, there is a clear trend of a limited frequency amount for the remaining pronouns, which decreases heavily for each of them. Because of this statistical fact, it is once again important to note that this corpus, like all the corpora in this paper, is highly specialised, which will lead to statistical conclusions that are only vaguely supported and bordering to speculation. This is caused by the limited amount of usable text from Nirvana’s discography, but is an inevitability when the focus is on the linguistic usage of only a singular band and not on several bands, an entire genre of music, a larger discography, etc.

Other than pronoun-use, the top 50 list also shows an interesting presence of the word-token “not”. It is the second most used word in the album and has a total number of uses of 125, which accounts for around 4% of the corpus. The noteworthy presence of the adverb warrants a mention as it directly indicates that the album has a general theme of using negation in terms of verb uses.



Plotting overview:	Search terms:
 <p>Plot</p>	Dispersion of the search term “not”
 <p>Plot</p>	Dispersion of the search term “t”

Table 17: Dispersion of “not” search terms in the *Nevermind* corpus.

Using the plot tool to look at the relevant search terms for “not”, Table 17 reveals that the trend of negation is evenly dispersed throughout the corpus. This point will be furtherly considered in the coming section on the top five verbs, as the “not” adverb is commonly used in conjunction with a verb to imbue a negative meaning.

4.1.2.2: Top Five Nouns in the *Nevermind* Corpus

Rank and Word-Token	Frequency out of 3060
1. way	Frequency = 1.5% N = 46
2. gun	Frequency = 0.49% N = 15
3. memoria	Frequency = 0.45% N = 14
4. mind	Frequency = 0.13% N = 4
5. love	Frequency = 0.06% N = 2

Table 18: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the *Nevermind* corpus

Before examining the top five nouns presented in Table 18, there are a couple of extraction points that need clarification. This is in the sense, that the nouns “way”, “mind”, and “love” can function as more than one word type. To identify the noun uses of each of these words, AntConc’s KWIC tool is utilised to view the in-text context and thereby manually categorise the correct number of frequencies of these as nouns. For the word “way”, it can either function as a noun or an adverb and using the KWIC tool, it is revealed that all instances of “way” in the corpus function as a noun. The word “mind” can function as both a noun and a verb, and here it is revealed that only 4 out of 14 total uses of the word function as a noun. “love” can also function as both a noun and a verb and it only has two out of 13 total uses as a noun.

Looking at Table 18, it is apparent that the *Nevermind* corpus has a limited presence of different nouns and uses hereof. This lack of nouns is further showcased by fact that not all the top five nouns are found within the top 50 word list: “love” being the fifth noun on the list, is the 54th word-token in the corpus. In total, the top five nouns only account for 81 word-token uses out of

3060 in the entire corpus. This corresponds to 2.6% of all word-token frequencies. Compared to pronoun uses like “I” which is used 267 times this frequency is small. Thereby, giving an understanding of the infrequent use of nouns in the album. The lack of nouns is furtherly established when looking at how the individual nouns within the top five list are dispersed in the *Nevermind* lyrics. AntConc’s Plot tool is used to view this dispersion, however, only the top three nouns are shown, as the fourth and fifth most used nouns can both function as multiple word classes, which the AntConc software cannot distinguish between.

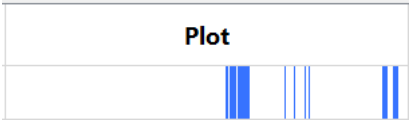
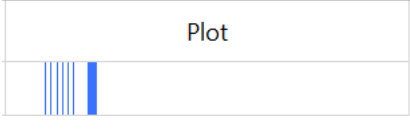
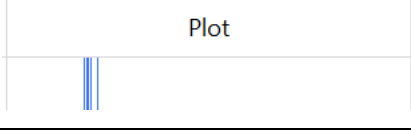
Plotting overview	Rank and Noun
 <p>Plot</p>	1. way
 <p>Plot</p>	2. gun
 <p>Plot</p>	3. memoria

Table 19: Dispersion of top three noun uses in the *Nevermind* corpus.

Table 19 clearly displays that the top 3 nouns are mostly used in clusters. This means that most of the noun uses are caused by repetitions within the lyrics. The most used noun “way”, being used 46 times, has two main clusters of repetition visible in the Plot tool. Using the File tool, it is apparent that these repetition clusters stem from two different songs: “Territorial Pissing” and “Something in the Way”. In total, these two songs account for 42 out of 46 total uses of “way” in the corpus. Being repetitions, the uses of “way” in the songs are the same in all instances, meaning that the number of different uses for the noun are significantly less unique. In the case of the nouns “gun” and “memoria” – “memoria” being an artistic twist on “memory” – all their in-text uses also consist of repetitions, as is apparent from the clusters displayed by the Plot tool.

These findings all showcase the lack of noun-use in the *Nevermind* corpus, which might seem like an uninteresting find. However, one can argue that a lack of nouns is in fact a fascinating result, as it implies a linguistic choice of non-specific subject/object reference from the lyricist. This choice can be either conscious or unconscious in terms of there being a case of intentional omission

of nouns. In either case, the lyrical focus has been on more general descriptors of interpersonal relations, like pronouns.

4.1.2.3: Top Five Verbs in the *Nevermind* Corpus:

Rank and Word-Token	Frequency out of 3060
1. do	Frequency = 2.74% N = 84
2. am	Frequency = 2.05% N = 63
3. have	Frequency = 1.89% N = 58
4. is	Frequency = 1.66% N = 51
5. said	Frequency = 0.84% N = 26

Table 20: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the *Nevermind* corpus

Looking at Table 20 showing the top five verbs in the *Nevermind* corpus, we see a distinct difference in average number of word-token uses compared to the top five nouns. This is in the sense that the frequency of noun uses is low overall, and the most used noun has a frequency that is three times higher than the second most used. Thereby, the amount of different noun uses varies greatly. This is not the case for the frequencies of verb uses, as these – at least in the top four – are somewhat evenly distributed. Furthermore, what is shown is a relatively high average frequency of verb uses in the top five, considering the limited size of the corpus. This is also clear when looking at the verbs' placement on the top 50 word list in Appendix B. Here the top four verbs are all within the 12 most used word-tokens of the corpus, whereas the fifth most used verb “said” is ranked as the 22nd most used word-token.

Observing the specific verbs in the top five list, the most used verb in the corpus is the present simple “do”. It has a total of 84 uses which amounts to a frequency of 2.74%. In the entire corpus, “do” is the fourth most frequent word-token which attests to its prevalence in the lyrics.

In brief the remaining four verbs are as follows: The second most used verb is “am” with 63 uses accounting for a frequency of 2.05%; The third most used verb is “have” with 58 uses which

amounts to a frequency of 1.89%; The fourth most used verb is “is” with 51 uses accounting for a frequency of 1.66%; and the fifth most used verb, which has a slightly lower frequency, is “said” with a total of 26 uses which corresponds to a frequency of 0.84%. Interestingly, the top five list consists of two different forms of the verb “to be”: These are “am” and “is”. The application of these verb forms in the lyrics is to either classify the subject/object in the first or third person with a complement or serve as an auxiliary verb. As such, these verbs largely have the same function which means that in term of verb function, “to be” makes up the largest frequency presence in the corpus.

Apart from the verbs’ frequencies of use, it is also interesting to look at how the different verbs are dispersed throughout the corpus. This is done by using AntConc’s Plot tool to look at the specific search terms and viewing the resulting plotting hereof. In terms of search terms, these are chosen following the distinctions between different word-tokens of the same word as described in chapter 3.3 of the methodology section: e.g. “am” has the search terms “am”, “m”, and “ain”.

Furthermore, only the search terms that yielded any results will be included:

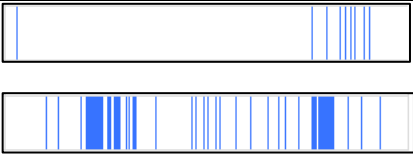
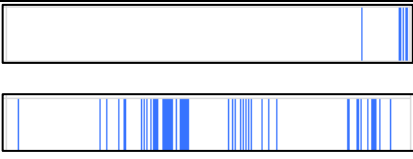
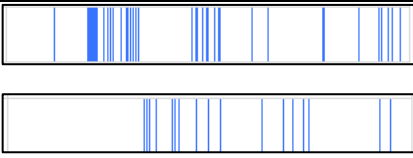
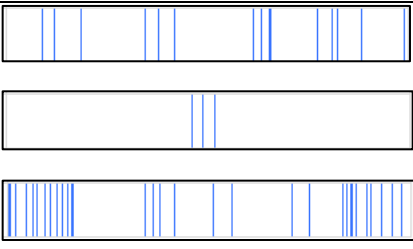

Plotting overview	Rank and Verb Search Term(s)
 ”do” ”don”	1. “Do”, “don”
 ”am” ”m”	2. “am”, “m”
 ”have” ”ve”	3. “have”, “ve”
 ”is” ”isn” ”s”	4. “is”, “isn”, “s”
 ”said”	5. “said”

Table 21: Dispersion of the top five verb search terms in the *Nevermind* corpus.

Looking at Table 21, there is an even dispersion of usage throughout the corpus for all of the top five verbs – except “said”. For search terms like “don”, a clear presence of clusters can be seen, which indicates a lot of repetitions in the song lyrics. To a lesser extent, such repetition clusters can also be observed in the search terms “m” and “have”. Despite these indications of repetition, there is still a clear and even dispersion of uses for each of the verbs, which once again attests to their prevalence within the corpus. Another interesting point to note is that among the search terms for the top five verbs, there is a trend of contractions being more prevalent than full verb forms. This can be seen for “don” – the contraction of “do not” – which has a total word-token count of 75, compared to “do” with only 9 total uses. It is also the case for “m” – the contraction of “I am” – which has a word-token count of 63, compared to “am” with only 7 uses. This trend of contraction can be caused by several things: One possibility is that Nirvana intentionally uses informal language as it fits their genre of music and overall theme as a band. Another possibility is that the lyrics were transcribed by a person who chose to use contractions instead of the full verb forms. However, this point quickly becomes unsubstantial when comparing the transcribed lyrics to the actual studio recordings: e.g. in the song “Lithium” Kurt Cobain is clearly heard singing the lines “*I’m* not gonna crack”, “*I’m* so happy”, “*I’m* so ugly”, etc. (Nirvana, 1991, emphasis added). Furthermore, as is mentioned in chapter 3.1. of the methodology, most of the lyrics were gathered from official sources like albums, box-sets, and Kurt Cobain’s notes. Thus, indicating that the informal language use is a conscious stylistic choice made by Nirvana.

4.1.2.4: Transitivity Processes in the *Nevermind* Corpus

The following section will look at two examples of transitivity processes in the *Nevermind* corpus. These are based on the two most used verbs from the corpus as described above: “do” and “am”. The first example is therefore based on the most used verb “do” and is extracted from the song “Drain you”: “I don’t care what you think” (Nirvana, 1991).

Senser:	Mental Process: (Cognitive)	Phenomenon:
I	don’t care	what you think

Table 22: Mental process example from the *Nevermind* corpus.

As displayed in Table 22, the phrase is an example of a Mental process type. The subject “I” functions as Senser, while the verb group “don’t care” makes up the Mental process. Remaining is the phrase “what you think” which realises the Phenomenon in the Mental process. As such, the most used verb in the *Nevermind* corpus “do” is used in a verb group with “not care” to make up the Mental process. As is also made clear in Table 22, the verb group realises the type of mental process called Cognitive. This is in the sense that the entire transitivity structure depicts the inner workings of the Senser “I” on a cognitive level rather than on an Emotive, Perceptive, or Desiderative level.

The second textual example is based on the line “I’m not gonna crack” from the song “Lithium”. This is an example of how the second most used verb “am” is used in terms of transitivity structures:

Behaver:	Behavioural Process:	Circumstance	Behaviour:
I	‘m (am)	not	gonna crack

Table 23: Behavioural process example from the *Nevermind* corpus.

In Table 23, it is clear that the sentence functions as a Behavioural process type. As such, the subject “I” functions as the Behaver. That is, the person carrying out a type of behaviour. The Behavioural process is then realised by the verb “am”, which leads to the Behaviour that is being carried out “gonna crack”. Lastly, the Circumstance “not” defines that the Behaviour is not taking place. As such, the Behavioural process is negative, since it describes not doing a particular thing. In this example of a transitivity process, the verb is not used as part of a verb group and instead stands alone as the Behavioural process.

As was the case in section 4.1.1.4., these results cannot be used to draw generalisable conclusions and interpretations of the linguistic use in the corpus, but it will be drawn upon in the discussion when tying the quantitative and qualitative sections together.

4.1.3: *In Utero* Corpus

The following section is the last part of the quantitative analysis and focuses on Nirvana’s last studio album *In Utero*. Like the previous two overarching sections, it follows a structure of first looking at general patterns in the top 50 word list, followed by looking at the top five nouns and verbs, with the inclusion of a few in-text transitivity examples.

4.1.3.1: Top 50 Word-Tokens in the *In Utero* Corpus

Pronoun	Number of Uses	Rank on Top 50 List
I	150	1
me	51	7
we	28	13
you	26	17
it	12	40

Table 24: Pronouns, their number of uses, and rank in the top 50 list of the *In Utero* corpus.

In Table 24, all the pronouns present in the top 50 word list (see Appendix C) are shown along with their number of uses and overall rank. Interestingly, only five different pronouns are used enough throughout the corpus to warrant a place in the top 50: these are, in order of most uses, “I”, “me”, “we”, “you”, and “it”. There only being five different pronouns in the list is interesting since pronouns often occupy a large part of language use – a point that will be expanded later. As such, the limited number of different pronouns speaks to the intentionality and specificity of reference in the lyrics. This is in the sense that the pronouns are mostly focused on referencing the narrative lyricist “I” and “me”, the second person “you”, or the interpersonal relationship between the subject and a secondary entity “we”. Thus, the focus of pronoun-use in the album is on relaying the experiences of the relationship between the lyricist and a secondary person.

The majority of pronoun-uses in the corpus are occupied by the first-person singular “I” with a total of 150 uses and a frequency of 7.03%. The second most used pronoun is the first-person objective “me” with a total of 51 uses throughout the corpus. This amounts to a frequency of 2.39%. Comparing these, the number of uses of “I” is triple the size of “me”, which is a considerable difference when considering that these are the two most used tokens in the given word type category. Furthermore, seeing as the pronoun “I” is the single most frequent word-token in the entire corpus, out of all word-tokens, there is a clear indication that the primary focus of the album’s lyrics are on the lyricist’s own experience, since the first-person singular is so prevalent.

Apart from the frequently used first-person singular pronouns, the third most used is the first-person plural “we” with 28 uses, amounting to a frequency of 1.31%. This is once again almost half the number of uses of the pronoun ranking above it. The fourth most used pronoun is “you” with 26 uses or a frequency of 1.22%. Thus, the third and fourth most frequent pronouns are nearly used the

same amount throughout the corpus. The fifth most used pronoun is “it” with only 12 uses and a frequency of 0.56%. This is once again half the number of uses as the pronoun ranking above it. These large jumps in frequencies between the different pronouns attest to the lack of different pronoun uses in the album, which indicates that it is mostly centred around first-person singular experiences.

4.1.3.2: Top Five Nouns in the *In Utero* Corpus

Rank and Word-Token	Frequency out of 2131
1. Heart	Frequency = 0.98% N = 21
2. Servants	Frequency = 0.75% N = 16
3. Advice	Frequency = 0.65% N = 14
4. Sun	Frequency = 0.51% N = 11
5. Complaint	Frequency = 0.42% N = 9

Table 25: Top five most frequent noun word-tokens in the *In Utero* corpus

Looking at Table 25, the frequencies displayed for each of the top five nouns are all relatively low. The most used noun “Heart” only has a total of 21 uses, whereas the fifth most used noun has 9. Respectively, these correspond to frequencies of 0.98% and 0.42%. Compared to word-tokens occupied by other word classes, these frequencies are not high enough to draw any general conclusions or to recognise any linguistic patterns that are used throughout the entire corpus. However, despite this lack of generalisation, there is still some interesting points that can be drawn from these observations of noun use. This is in the sense that the low frequencies of these nouns suggests that each of the top five nouns only appear in one or two songs, an mostly as repetitions. This is confirmed by using AntConc’s File tool to identify the in-text uses of each noun: The noun “Heart” is used in *Heart-Shaped Box* and *Tourette’s*; “Servants” is used in *Serve the Servants*; “Advice” is used in *Heart-Shaped Box*; “Sun” is used in *Dumb and All Apologies*; and “Complaint” is used in *Heart-Shaped Box*. Here it is also interesting to note that the song *Heart-Shaped Box*

contains three out of the top five most used nouns, which suggest that this song is unique in terms of its use of nouns compared to all other songs in the corpus. Note that *Heart-Shaped Box* will be looked at further in a later section.

4.1.3.3: Top Five Verbs in the *In Utero* Corpus

Rank and Word-Token	Frequency out of 2131
1. is	Frequency = 3% N = 64
2. am	Frequency = 2.86% N = 61
3. have	Frequency = 1.36% N = 29
4. are	Frequency = 1.26% N = 27
5. think	Frequency = 1.22% N = 26

Table 26: Top five most frequent verb word-tokens in the *In Utero* corpus

In Table 26, the top five verbs of the *In Utero* corpus are shown, and looking at these specific verbs and their respective number of uses, a couple of interesting patterns emerge. First, it is worthy to note the gap in frequency size between the top two verbs and the remaining three. This is in the sense that the top two verbs are used more than twice as much as the remaining verbs. The most used verb is “is” with 64 uses and a frequency of 3%, and the second most used verb is “am” with 61 uses and a frequency of 2.86%. The three remaining verbs are, in order of largest to smallest frequency, “have” with 29 uses, “are” with 27 uses, and “think” with 26 uses. Respectively, these account for the frequencies of 1.36%, 1.26%, and 1.22%. Comparing the top two verbs with the remaining three of the top five list, there is a substantial difference in their number of uses.

Looking at these two most used verbs, it becomes apparent that they are both a form of the verb “to be”: “is” being the third-person singular form and “am” being the first-person singular form. Furthermore, the fourth most used verb, in the *In Utero* corpus, “are” is also a form of the verb “to be”: it is used in the second-person singular along with the first-, second-, and third-person plural.

This means that the verb “to be” occupies three fifths or 60% of the top five verbs in the *In Utero* corpus.

The two remaining verbs of the top five list, “have” and “think”, both have relatively small frequencies, which could indicate that most of their uses stem from repetition. This can be determined more clearly by looking at how they are dispersed throughout the corpus. This is once again achieved by using AntConc’s Plot tool:

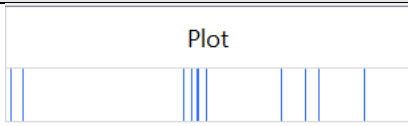
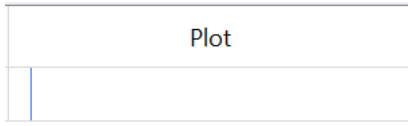

Plotting overview:	Verb Search Term(s)
 <p>Plot</p> <p>”have”</p>	“have” and “haven”
 <p>Plot</p> <p>”haven”</p>	
 <p>Plot</p>	“think”

Table 27: Dispersion of the search terms for “have” and “think” in the *Nevermind* corpus.

Looking at Table 27, the dispersion of both “have” and “think” is interesting since the plotting of these indicate that their in-text uses are not entirely caused by repetition. This is in the sense that their plotting not only consists of word-token clusters. This is especially the case for “have”, which is clearly seen spread over three to four different songs without excessive clusters. However, “think” is not as spread out and most of its uses are caused by repetition. This is clear because a large portion of its plotting consists of a cluster of repetition in a single song. The rest of the dispersion of “think” appears to be characterised by repetitions in a much lesser extent.

4.1.3.4: Transitivity Processes in the *In Utero* Corpus

The following section goes through two in-text examples of transitivity processes in the *In Utero* corpus. These are based on the two most used verbs, not being different forms of the same verb, from the corpus, as described in the previous section: “is” and “have”. The first example is based on the most used verb “is” and consists of the phrase “That legendary divorce is such a bore” (Nirvana, 1993) from the song “Serve the Servants”:

Carrier:	Relational Process: (Intensive)	Attribute:
That legendary divorce	is	such a bore

Table 28: Intensive relational process example from the *In Utero* corpus.

As displayed in Table 28, this example is a case of an Intensive Relational process of the Attributive subtype. As such, the subject noun group “That legendary divorce” functions as the Carrier in the process. The Relational process is realised by the verb “is”, and finally the Attribute related to the Carrier is “such a bore”. The classification as an Intensive Relational process simply means that the Carrier is equated with the Attribute: x is y , or Carrier *is* Attribute.

The second example of transitivity processes in the *In Utero* corpus is based on the third most used verb “have”. Here the line “I have very bad posture” (Nirvana, 1993) from the song “Pennyroyal Tea” is chosen:

Carrier:	Relational Process: (Intensive)	Attribute:
I	have	very bad posture

Table 29: Possessive relational process example from the *In Utero* corpus.

As displayed in Table 29, this is an example of a Possessive Relational Process of the Attributive subtype. The subject “I” functions as the Carrier of the Attribute “very bad posture”. Here the verb “have” functions as the Relational process, and this is also classified as an Intensive process because the Carrier is equated with the Attribute. Using the verb “have” could however, suggest that this is a case of a Possessive rather than Intensive Relational clause, but since the subject is not able to physically possess the concept of bad posture, it only makes sense that this is a case of an Intensive process: Subject = “very bad posture”.

Like in the previous transitivity section, these results are not generalisable. However, they will be implemented in the discussion later in the paper.

4.2: Qualitative Analysis

The following sections will function as a qualitative analysis of Nirvana’s lyrics. As previously explained in chapter 3.4., three different songs from the three studio albums are chosen as the data for the following analysis: About a Girl, Smells Like Teen Spirit, and Heart-Shaped

Box. All three songs are included in Appendix D. These songs will be examined according to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2.3: conceptual metaphor theory. This theory will be employed by first identifying the lines in which the different metaphors are used in the songs. This is done by going through the songs in Appendix D and picking out the lines containing a metaphor: in the following sections, these lines will be italicised as a header for each analysis of a metaphor. After identifying all the lines containing a metaphor, the type of metaphor is identified and analysed in terms of how it is used, and which function it serves. This is done by establishing the target and source domains of each conceptual metaphor while considering the different types of metaphors presented by Lakoff & Johnson (1980): structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors.

4.2.1: Conceptual Metaphors in About a Girl

The following section covers all instances of conceptual metaphor use in About a Girl from Nirvana's first studio album *Bleach*.

I need an easy friend

In terms of Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) three metaphor types, the metaphor in this line is of the structural type. This is in the sense that an abstract concept is expressed in terms of a more defined and structured concept. In this case, the target domain is friendship or social relationship and the source domain used to express this abstract concept is that of a game. As such, the structural metaphor in play is something like: *Social relations are a game*. The target domain is expressed in the line by "I need an ... friend" where the wish for a social relationship is expressed. The type of friendship is then defined by the adjective "easy", which arguably falls under the conceptual source domain of *game*, where some games are hard, and some are easy. In this case, the subject wishes to attain a friendship without too much trouble, and as such, "easy" is used to express this wish.

I do with an ear to lend

In this line there are two metaphors in play simultaneously. These are both of the structural type. The first metaphor is the use of "ear" to refer to the act of listening. In this case, the target domain is *listening* which is expressed through the source domain of *ear*. As such, the first conceptual metaphor can be described as: *Listening is an ear*. In this sense, the body parts used to listen, ears, are used figuratively to carry and express the meaning of the concept of listening.

The second structural metaphor refers to the use of the word “lend”. Here the target domain is the body part ear, or, as just established, the act of listening. The source domain used to exemplify this concept is that of currency. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *The act of listening is a currency*. This is in the sense that the lyricist refers to someone listening as “lending an ear” thereby indicating that the ear or the act of listening is a currency which can be lent someone else. In this way, the well-established concept of currencies and lending is used to express that someone is willing to listen to someone else.

I don't think you fit this shoe

The conceptual metaphor used in this line is also structural. The specific part of the line that expresses the conceptual metaphor is “you fit this shoe”, which is arguably a reference to the classic fairytale Cinderella in which a girl loses a glass slipper at a ball, and a love-smitten prince goes around looking for the girl that fits the slipper. In the case of “About a Girl”, the phrase refers back to the two previous lines where the lyricist explains what he is looking for: “an easy friend”, “with an ear to lend” (Nirvana, 1989). As such, when he sings “I don’t think you fit this shoe”, the intended meaning is to tell a secondary “you”, that he or she does not live up to what he is looking for. The conceptual metaphor in this case has the target domain of identity or personal characteristics, which are expressed through the source domain articles of clothing – with the special cultural reference of Cinderella being heavily influencing. In this way the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Personal identity or characteristics are articles of clothing*. In simple terms, some pieces of clothing fit, and others do not, so when looking for specific character traits in another person, this conceptual metaphor exemplifies these wants in a clear way.

I do won't you have a clue

This is another case of a structural metaphor. The metaphorical part of the line consists of “have a clue” where the target domain knowledge is expressed through the source domain of an investigation. The conceptual metaphor can thereby be expressed as: *Knowledge or understanding is an investigation*. This is in the sense that the lyricist expresses a wish for the recipient to understand his request or wants. This is expressed through the conceptual domain of an investigation where one can gather clues and information to draw a conclusion. Thus, when expressing “won’t you have a clue”, the lyricist expresses a desire for the other person to finally understand his wants.

I'll take advantage while / You hang me out to dry

This section focuses on two lines which are grammatically connected by the adverbial “while”, and both contain a conceptual metaphor. The line “You hang me out to dry”, is an example of another type of figurative language: an idiom. As explained by Csábi (2002) in a study on polysemous words, idioms, and conceptual metaphors in cognitive linguistics, idioms are also a part of the human conceptual system and some – not all – are even metaphorical as well (p. 252). This is the case for this idiom, where the idiomatic meaning refers to being put or putting somebody in a difficult situation. This is expressed by a conceptual metaphor with the abstract target domain being interpersonal struggles or hardships which are expressed through the source domain of drying wet clothing: *Interpersonal struggles are wet clothing in need of drying*. This makes sense in the way that when one hangs out wet clothing to dry it is put aside to dry on its own over a longer duration of time. Applying this concept to the more abstract concept of interpersonal struggles, it explains that when one is put in a difficult situation by someone else, it is like one is being left to solve this problem all alone: you are hung outside to dry.

Having established the meaning of this idiom, the first line in the header can be examined: “I’ll take advantage while”. The metaphorical concept in this line is expressed by using “advantage”. The target domain is referred to by the adverbial “while” and consists of the abstract concept of interpersonal struggles. This is the metaphorically expressed through the source domain of a game. As such the conceptual metaphor can be expressed as follows: *Interpersonal struggles are a game*. This is in the sense that in a game one can take “advantage” of an opponent’s mistakes or choices. In this way, the lyricist explains that while the recipient of the song is putting him in a difficult situation, he is taking “advantage” of the situation.

I'm standing in your line

The conceptual metaphor in this line is twofold. This is in the sense that there is both structural and an entity metaphor in play. The structural metaphor is expressed by “standing in your line” where the target domain is interpersonal relations and the source domain through which this is expressed is queues or lines. As such, the conceptual metaphor is described as follows: *Interpersonal relations are queues*. In this way, “standing in your line” refers to the lyricist choosing to side with and supporting the recipient, as if standing in a queue and committing to what is at the end of the line.

The second conceptual metaphor, the entity metaphor, is secondary to the above-mentioned structural metaphor. It has the same target domain, interpersonal relations, however, the source domain is containers. As such, the conceptual entity metaphor can be described as: *Interpersonal relations are containers*. This is in the sense that the interpersonal relations are described as a line and the lyricist describes himself as standing *in* that line. Thereby, the line is a container which one can enter and exit with clear defining “walls” or borders. Since this line/container is an interpersonal relation then there are clear borders defining this relationship.

I do hope you have the time

In this line there are two structural metaphors present. The first is introduced in the line “I do hope” using the verb “hope”. Here the target domain is the concept of wanting something and it is expressed through the source domain of religion. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be explained as: *Wants are religion*. This is in the sense that the lyricist has a want of the recipient making time for him, which is expressed through the religious connotation of hoping. The second structural metaphor is expressed in the line “you have the time” where the lyricist expresses his want for being prioritised by the recipient. The target domain in this metaphor is priorities and it is realised by the source domain of time. As such, the conceptual metaphor is as follows: *Priorities are time*. This is in the sense that by prioritising being with someone you commit to allotting a certain amount of time to spend with them. In this way, the metaphor simply explains the more abstract concept of a priority in terms of the more concrete concept of time: the time spent on the priority.

I do pick a number too

This line consists of a single structural metaphor. Its target domain is once again interpersonal relations, however, there are two possible interpretations of the source domain from which the intended meaning is drawn. Both have an influence on the meaning of the line, and one interpretation is arguably more fitting than the other. Despite this, both will be covered as to cover any interpretive confusions. The first source domain is that of a gambling game. Here the line “pick a number” is interpreted in terms of gambling games like the roulette wheel or a lottery where one picks a number in hopes of winning a prize. Following this source domain, the conceptual metaphor can be described as: *Interpersonal relations are a gambling game*. In this way, the lyricist describes himself as picking a number in hopes of winning a prize, and looking at the in-text context, this

refers to the two previous line “I’m standing in your line/ I do hope you have the time”. Here the lyricist hopes that the recipient will prioritise him, and thus the prize referred to in the line in question is this prioritisation of an interpersonal relationship.

The second interpretation, and arguably the more fitting choice, is that the source domain is once again occupied by the concept of a queue or a line. This is in the sense that in some queues, one must draw a number which indicates one’s placement in the queue. In this interpretation, the conceptual metaphor would be described as follows: *Interpersonal relations are queues*. In this way, the lyricist stands in the recipient’s line and has drawn a number for the queue as well. This highlights the lyricist’s desire to engage in the concerned relationship.

I do keep a date with you

In this line, there are two conceptual metaphors in play: one entity and structural metaphor. The entity metaphor refers to the use of the verb “keep”. Here the more abstract concept of time is viewed as the target domain. The source domain is the more general and concrete concept of an object. This conceptual metaphor is described as follows: *Time is an object*. In this way, using the word “keep” objectifies – in the words literal sense – the abstract size of time and a date into an object that one can keep.

The structural metaphor in the line is expressed by the use of “dates”. Here the lyricist refers to the event of being together with the recipient by stating the date at which the planned interaction is set to take place. In this case, the target domain consists of an event while the source domain is realised by a date. As such the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Events are dates*. Thereby, the concept of an event can be conceptualised by referring to the actual date of the event.

4.2.2: Conceptual Metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit

The following section covers all instances of conceptual metaphor use in Smells Like Teen Spirit from Nirvana’s second studio album *Nevermind*.

Bring your friends

The metaphor in this line is structural and refers to the ability to bring someone. The target domain is people, and it is realised by the source domain of things or objects. The conceptual metaphor can therefore be described as follows: *People are objects*. This is in the sense that “friends” or people are viewed as an object that one has physical control over and can “bring”

places. The intended meaning of the metaphor is simply to conceptualise the act of inviting friends to come along in a graspable way. This is easily done by reducing the autonomous nature of people to an object that is capable of making its own decisions.

She's over bored

This line is an example of an orientational metaphor. Here the spatial relation of being above or over something is used to express that something is more than a given quantity. The target domain is therefore quantity, and the source domain is over, leading to the description of the conceptual metaphor: *Large quantities are over*. This is in the sense that the lyricist expresses that the lyrical target is in a mental condition that is more than bored. Therefore, the spatial relation of “over” is used to conceptualise this concept of being more than something else.

Oh no, I know a dirty word

The conceptual metaphor in this line is of the structural type. It is presented in the line by the adjective “dirty”. The target domain is the notion of something being bad or wrong and it is realised by the source domain of filthy or unclean. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Bad is unclean*. This is in the sense that the lyricist uses the concrete and defined concept of cleanliness to conceptualise the more abstract notion of something being bad. As such, something as defined as a “word” is described as being dirty to highlight the negative connotation of it.

With the lights out, it's less dangerous

This line contains two separate conceptual metaphors. The first is an orientational metaphor and it is presented by the phrase “the lights out”. Here the target domain is the status of something not being connected and it is realised by the source domain and spatial relation of something being outside. As such, the first conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Off is out*. In this way, the lyricist describes the state of lights being turned off as instead being outside. The orientational nature of this metaphor means that it is not structured in the same way as structured metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Instead, it is used as a simple way to exemplify other concepts, much like up is often used to refer to something positive and down is used when something is negative.

The second conceptual metaphor is structural and is presented by the words “less dangerous”. Here the target domain is the degree of risk and it is realised by source domain of an amount. Thereby, the conceptual metaphor is best described as: *Degree of risk is an amount*. This is in the

way that the degree of danger is defined in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’, as when referring to a specific amount. Thereby, instead of defining the more abstract size of the present danger, the more defined concept of an amount is used to conceptualise the degree.

I feel stupid and contagious

This line contains a structural metaphor and is represented by the use of the verb “feel” to describe the adjectives “stupid” and “contagious”. In this sense, the target domain for the metaphor is personal characteristics and illnesses, and this is conceptualised by the source domain of emotions. As such, the conceptual metaphor is defined as: *Characteristics and illnesses are emotions*. This is in the sense that both the characteristic of stupidity and the physical condition of being contagious as concepts in their own right are not part of a human’s emotional capacity. However, these are described according to the concept of emotion to portray a sense of self-awareness and to conceptualise these human statuses in a way that is more relatable to the listener. In clearer terms, being stupid and contagious are not necessarily things people are mentally aware of. Instead, people can more easily relate to the general human experience of feeling emotions. Thereby, this structural metaphor manages to make these conditions in the lyrics more relatable.

And for this gift I feel blessed

The conceptual metaphor in this line refers to the use of the verb “feel” to describe the adjective. Much like the previous line, this is a case of conceptualising a more abstract status or condition by means of emotions. In this way, the target domain is the concept of luck or holiness, and it is realised by the source domain emotions. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Luck or holiness is emotions*. This is much in the same way as the statuses of stupidity and contagion in the previously examined line are made relatable by means of the concept of feelings and emotions. Here the status of being blessed, which can be interpreted as both referring to luck or holiness is made more relatable and graspable by conceptualising it through the structural metaphor of emotions.

Our little group has always been/ And always will until the end

These lines present an interesting example of a more complex structural metaphor. This is in the case that the metaphorical element of the line does not refer to a single word use or two, but instead the entirety of the two lines. The target domain for this metaphor is life and it is realised by

the source domain of a journey. In this way, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Life is a journey*. In this sense, this intricate concept of the life experience of finding a friend group, spending time together, and committing to maintaining this social circle of relations is conceptualised by the simpler concept of a journey: A journey that has a beginning, middle, and an end. As such, when the lyricist expresses that “Our little group has always been/ And always will until the end” (Nirvana, 1991), he does not disclose all the complicated details that make up the story of this friend group. Instead, he uses the metaphorical concept of journey to neatly conceptualise this life experience: “has always been” describes the beginning and middle of the journey, and “always will until the end” describes the middle and end.

And I forget just why I taste

This last conceptual metaphor in *Smells Like Teen Spirit* is also of the structural type. It is represented in the line by the use of the verb “forget”. Here the target domain is less obvious, but it is occupied by the concept of negativity, pessimism, or depression. This is then realised by the source domain of memories or recollection. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Depression is lacking recollection*. This is in the sense that the lyricist uses the concept of forgetting to illustrate a depressive or negative mental state, which is made clear by the following line in the song where he explains his reason for tasting: “Oh yeah, I guess it makes me smile” (Nirvana, 1991). The underlying connotation of these lines combined is that the lyricist is in a depressed mental state and that things which previously brought joy now no longer bring forth the same emotions. Thereby, using the concept of lacking recollection, this more abstract concept of a depressive state is explained in terms that are more concrete, structured, defined.

4.2.3: Conceptual Metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box

The following section covers the use of conceptual metaphors in the song *Heart-Shaped Box* from Nirvana’s third studio album *In Utero*. Unlike the two previous songs, *About a Girl* and *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, the conceptual metaphors in this song are much more complex and context specific. This is in the sense that the lyrics are coated in figurative language about Kurt Cobain’s private life and relationship with Courtney Love. As such, the conceptual metaphors covered in this section will in some cases be supplemented with news articles and other sources to support the conclusions that are reached.

She eyes me like a Pisces when I am weak

This first line of the song presents an interesting and intricate structural metaphor. In fact, there are more than one conceptual metaphor in play in the line, however, the entirety of the line has a single overarching metaphor which is the focus of this section. This metaphor has a target domain of love and is realised by the source domain hunt. In this way, the overarching conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Love is a hunt*. This interpretation is based on the line referencing Kurt Cobain's relationship to his wife of the time of the song's release, Courtney Love. Thus, the "She" in the lyrics refers to Courtney, who is given the characteristic abilities of an animal predator that "eyes" its prey and attacks when it is "weak". In this way, Kurt demonstrates the power dynamic of their relationship by portraying Courtney as the dominant partner and him as the weaker of the two. Furthermore, the line carries an undertone of Courtney utilising Kurt's weak moments to employ this power over him: this in turn portrays their relationship as being unhealthy.

Another point worthy of note in the line is the use of the star sign Pisces to describe the way Courtney "eyes" him. This is interesting because Courtney Love is born under the star sign of Cancer. However, Kurt Cobain is in fact born under the Pisces star sign (MacGuire, 2018). Thus, this part of the line can be interpreted as Courtney showing some behaviour towards Kurt, that reminds him a lot about his own before: it is the behaviour of a Pisces. The interpretation of the overarching conceptual metaphor being *Love is a hunt* is based on the classic metaphor of portraying romantic pursuits as a war: e.g., *Fighting* for someone's hand in marriage. However, here the conceptual domain is more focused on hunting specific terms like eyeing. Having established the connotations of the lyrics referring to unhealthy aspects of Kurt and Courtney's relationship, it is also possible to interpret the conceptual metaphor as follows: *Unhealthy love is a hunt*.

I've been locked inside your Heart-Shaped box for weeks

In this line, Kurt uses an ontological metaphor to simplify the abstract concept of love, more specifically his relationship with Courtney. Therefore, the target domain is love and it is realised by the much more concrete concept of a container. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be simply described as: *Love is a container*. This is in the way that Kurt uses the words "locked inside" and "Heart-Shaped box" to conceptualise love as a container that you can physically be inside. However, as is apparent from the context of the song, there is a heavy negative connotation

connected to Kurt and Courtney's romantic relationship, and this interpretation can also be carried into this line. In this way, the ontological container can be more specifically tied to that of a prison cell. This makes sense in the way that Kurt uses the verb "locked" to describe his relation to the "Heart-Shaped box" or prison. Following this interpretation, the target domain shifts to that of unhealthy love and is then realised by the source domain of a prison cell. Thereby, the conceptual metaphor might more accurately be described as: *Unhealthy love is a prison cell*.

I've been drawn into your magnet tar pit trap

This line moves away from the immediate theme of unhealthy love and focuses on a much more personal struggle: drug abuse. The line has two simultaneous and overlapping structural metaphors. The first of which has the target domain of drug addiction and the source domain of magnetism. This conceptual metaphor is thereby fittingly described as: *Drug addiction is a magnet*. This is in the sense that Kurt uses words like "magnet" and "been drawn" to simplify his addictive relationship with the "tar pit trap". The complicated nature of addiction is difficult to grasp for a lot of people, but the draw of a magnet is a concept that is much more defined and easily understood.

The claim of drug addiction being the focus of this line might not seem directly evident. However, this becomes clear in the second conceptual metaphor. Here the focus is on Kurt's use of the phrase "tar pit trap". The target domain is drugs, and it is realised by the source domain of a trap. Thereby, this conceptual metaphor is described as follows: *Drugs are a trap*. The claim that the target domain is supported by Kurt use of "tar", which one can argue is a reference to black tar heroin. This makes sense because Kurt had been battling an addiction with black tar heroin for some time up till his suicide in April 1994. The substance was even found in his blood after his autopsy, and at a point during his battle with addiction he even wrote a letter which he never sent to his fans chronicling his relationship to the drug (Cieysinski, 2019). The conceptual metaphor of a "tar pit trap" thereby, conceptualises the addictive nature of drugs through the concrete imaging of a pit trap: Something that catches you and is hard to escape. Additionally, it is worth to note that the line leads with the words "I've been drawn into *your*" (Nirvana, 1993, emphasis added).

Contextually, this can be interpreted as Kurt ascribing his battle with addiction to Courtney, blaming her at some level for leading or "drawing" him into the heroin pit trap like a magnet. This makes sense with the overall thematization of the song following the unhealthy aspects of their relationship.

I wish I could eat your cancer when you turn back

This line consists of two different conceptual metaphors: one of these are structural and the other is an entity metaphor. The first metaphor appearing in the line is the entity metaphor, which is expressed using the verb “eat” to describe “cancer”. The target domain is cancer or disease, and it is realised by the source domain of an object or even a consumable like food. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Cancer is an object*. This is in the sense that the abstract and complex concept of a serious disease like cancer is made more graspable by making it a concrete entity or object. This is achieved by giving it the ability to be eaten, thus, making it much more tangible to grasp.

The second metaphor in the line is more subtle and it relates to the entirety of the phrase “I wish I could eat your cancer” (Nirvana, 1993). The target domain in this case is once again love, and it is realised by the source domain sacrifice. As such, it can be described as follows: *Love is a sacrifice*. This is in the sense that Kurt expresses a wish to rid the recipient of the line of the disease by going so far as to consume the cancer himself. Since one cannot eat a disease like this, the intention is arguably to illustrate the sacrificial act of carrying someone else’s burdens in the name of love: in this case, Kurt himself getting the cancer instead of the other.

Through the context of the previous lyrics and Kurt’s personal relationship with Courtney Love, an additional meaning is given to this line. This is in the sense that the song leads with mentioning the star sign Pisces, which Kurt is born under. Interestingly, apart from being a disease, Cancer is also the star sign which Courtney Love is born under (MacGuire, 2018). Thereby, the line “I wish I could eat your cancer” (Nirvana, 1993) might not refer to the literal disease, but is instead a subtle reference to Courtney. As such, it is possible to interpret the line as Kurt expressing a wish to stand up to Courtney or maybe even change the parts of her that he blames for the negative and unhealthy status of their relationship. In this way, the overarching conceptual metaphor changes from *Love is a sacrifice* to instead focus on this expression or wish for change in an unhealthy situation. Thereby, the target domain shifts to change of unhealthy relationship patterns and is realised by hope or wishes. The conceptual metaphor will therefore be as follows: *Change in unhealthy relationship patterns is a wish*.

Forever in debt to your priceless advice

The conceptual metaphor in this line, unlike some of the previous metaphors, is much simpler. It is also of the structural type and has a target domain advice which is realised by the

source domain of money. In this way, the conceptual metaphor can be described as: *Advice is money*. This is in the way that Kurt uses the words “debt” and “priceless” to conceptualise the notion of an advice. By doing this, he ascribes “advice” a monetary connotation, referring to it as something that carries value. In this sense, Kurt expresses that the advice that he has been given is so valuable that he can never repay the “debt” of it.

Meat-eating orchids forgive no one just yet

This line includes an entity metaphor with two possible interpretations. In the first interpretation, the target domain is plants, and it is realised by the source domain of an entity. As such, the conceptual metaphor can be described as follows: *Plants are entities*. This is in the sense that the plant orchid is given the property of being a meat-eater and the capability of forgiveness. In the case of forgiveness, there can even be talk of a personification where the plant is given human abilities.

In either case, orchids are given a much more active role and influence than the passive nature of a plant. This makes sense in terms of the second interpretation of the line where orchids are a clever nod to drugs. This is to be understood by knowing that poppy seed can be used to create heroin (*Opium Poppy*, n.d.), to which Kurt was addicted. Although poppy flowers are not an orchid, the plant analogy is still prevalent. With this knowledge, the target domain then becomes drugs, and the conceptual metaphor can be described as: *Drugs are an entity*. Thereby, the addictive nature of drugs is given the ability of being unforgiving. Furthermore, the use of the meat-eating property is clever both in the sense that some plants – like the Venus fly trap – are carnivorous, but also in the sense that heavy drug abuse can negatively impact one’s health to the point of developing skin abscesses (*Opium Poppy*, n.d.). In this way, drugs can then be directly attributed the “meat-eating” capability. It is in this sense that the concept of drugs is made into an active entity in the metaphor and in the line.

Cut myself on angel's hair and baby's breath

The conceptual metaphor in this line is quite interesting as it comes across as quite evident on the surface but has additional meanings when diving a bit further into the symbolism at play. The metaphor is seemingly structural but turns out to be ontological because of this underlying meaning. Nevertheless, the source domain in this line stems from the use of “cut” to describe the attributes of “angel’s hair and baby’s breath” (Nirvana, 1993) and can be defined as a knife. The target domain,

however, relies on the interpretation of Kurt's use of "angel's hair and baby's breath" (Nirvana, 1993). With an explanation pending, the target domain can be interpreted as unhealthy love, leading to the conceptual metaphor being described as: *Unhappy love is a knife*.

The interpretation of unhealthy love relies on several factors. First of which is the thematic context of the rest of the song, which centres around this topic. The second is on the specific word choice of "angel's hair and baby's breath" (Nirvana, 1993). The words are interesting because on the surface they are merely the names of two different plants or flowers. However, what makes these interesting is that both – baby's breath more than angel's hair – are traditionally used for bridal bouquets and floral arrangements at weddings (Nowack, 2021). Thereby, Kurt does not directly refer to the plants themselves but to the symbolic meaning of a wedding: in this case, Kurt and Courtney's wedding. By using the verb "cut" to describe this symbolism, he conceptualises the feeling going into a relationship or marriage in a happy state and then ending up getting emotionally hurt through the more concrete concept of cutting oneself on a knife. In this way, he also takes some responsibility by acknowledging that he himself made the conscious decision of entering this situation, only to end up hurt.

Another way of interpreting the use of the plants, is to view the use of angel's hair to symbolise Courtney and baby's breath to symbolise their daughter Frances Bean Cobain. In this scenario, Kurt then refers to the situation of being with Courtney and having a child together as a regretful decision that has ended up hurting him. In both cases, the conceptual metaphor centres around unhappy love and conceptualises this as a knife that can potentially cut oneself.

Broken hymen of your highness I'm left back

This line contains another structural metaphor and is much more obvious than the previous line. Here the target domain is that of sexual relations and it is realised by the source domain of power relations. As such, the conceptual metaphor is described as follows: *Sexual relations are power relations*. This makes sense in the way that the phrase "Broken hymen" is a direct reference to sexual intercourse: in human anatomy, the hymen is a piece of skin in the opening of the vagina, which is most often seen in women who have never had intercourse (OALD, n.d.). Then when Kurt relates this hymen to "your highness" – Courtney Love – he places himself in lower position in hierarchy of power. In this way, Courtney is above him and he is "left back" to serve her. Thereby, one can view the line as a metaphor for how Courtney might have used sexual intercourse to hold a power over Kurt in their relationship.

Throw down your umbilical noose so I can climb right back

This last line containing conceptual metaphors is also interesting at multiple layers. The first metaphor to note in this line, is the use of “Throw down” and “so I can climb right back” (Nirvana, 1993), which is arguably a reference to a previous line in the song where Kurt mentions himself being stuck in a tar pit trap. Here he requests that something is thrown down in the pit to help him escape. Thereby, the conceptual metaphor used previously in the song *Drugs are a trap* is indirectly present in the line by way of reference. Having established the pit trap symbolism in the line, the interesting mention of an “umbilical noose” (Nirvana, 1993) is left to be addressed.

In terms of tools for escaping a pit, this umbilical noose is used to figuratively symbolise a rope. However, the combination of the adjective umbilical and the noun noose raises a few interpretive questions. This is in the sense that “umbilical” is a reference to the umbilical cord that connects a baby to its mother during pregnancy, and a noose refers to the circle tied with a knot at the end of a rope, which is used to hang people as a form of execution. In this way, the two words belong to two completely different conceptual domains, as “umbilical” is connected to birth and life, while “noose” is connected to death and execution. By using the word “umbilical” as the descriptive adjective, the noun arguably functions as the target domain of this conceptual metaphor. As such, it can be described as follows: *Death/execution is life/birth*.

With this understanding of the metaphorical workings of the line, it can be interpreted as Kurt establishing that he is trapped in a pattern of drug addiction (the tar pit trap), and he request Courtney to help him escape it and become reborn (the umbilical cord). However, because of the unhealthy nature of their relationship and it being the reason for him ending up with a drug addiction, he knows that this rebirth is also an execution, since the patterns are doomed to repeat themselves. With this interpretation, an overarching and more subtle conceptual metaphor is arguably present within the context of the line: the ontological metaphor of *Unhealthy love is a trap*. This is in the sense that the theme of unhealthy love is imbued in most of song and this line is a realisation that Kurt is deeply dependent on this love to live, but it is also the thing that is ultimately killing him.

5: Discussion

The following discussion is aimed at tying the results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses together. This will be done by first comparing the three different corpus analysis sections’

results while interpreting and discussing the implications and patterns herein. Then, the results of qualitative section of conceptual metaphor use will be discussed and interpreted. Following these, any overlying and generalisable patterns are discussed, tying together the two analytical approaches to comment on the societal or personal implications of Nirvana's linguistic use in their three studio albums. Ultimately, this discussion is designed and pointed towards answering the problem formulation stated in the beginning of the paper: How is language used in Nirvana's three studio albums in terms of word use and stylistic choices? and what does this reveal about the personal workings of the band and in particular Kurt Cobain?

5.1: Discussion of Patterns in Corpus Analysis

The following section will look at how the results from each of the three corpus analysis sections compare to each other. For the sake structure, the section will follow a similar structure starting with a look at pronoun-use, nouns, and verbs. For each of these, the observations made from each corpus will be compared to each other alongside a look at a fourth collected-works corpus containing all three albums.

5.1.1: Pronoun use in Nirvana's music

An obvious place to start off is to compare the use of pronouns throughout the three corpora. Here we see a few similarities, but also some differences in terms of the most used pronouns. Unsurprisingly, the most used pronoun – and in general the most used word-token – throughout all three corpora is the first person singular “I”: In the *Bleach* corpus, it is used a total of 117 times; in the *Nevermind* corpus, 267 times; and in the *In Utero* corpus, 150 times. In terms of the respective frequencies of “I” in each corpus, *Bleach* has a frequency of 4.7%, *Nevermind* has frequency of 8.7%, and *In Utero* has a frequency of 7.03%. Being the single most used word-token in each of the three corpora, these relatively high frequencies are to be expected. Relating to this, by using the online resource COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), the prevalence of the “I” pronoun in the English language is clearly highlighted. In a corpus of more than one billion words, “I” ranks as the eighth most used word. As such, it is not surprising that this word-token is highly prevalent in all three Nirvana corpora. Despite this fact of expectance, it should still be noted that there is clear difference in the size of each corpus' frequency of “I”. This is in the sense that the last two Nirvana studio albums – *Nevermind* and *In Utero* – are much closer to each other frequency-wise, than *Bleach* is to either of them. This could suggest that the latter two albums focus more on

the lyricist's own experiences than *Bleach* does. However, this point is only speculation and remains unsubstantiated without diving closer into the actual texts in the corpora.

In general, and as is to be expected, several pronouns are prevalent within each of the corpora, and therefore, the three albums share a lot of the same patterns when it comes to their uses. However, there is also some interesting outliers among these which deserve a closer look. For example, the commonly used pronoun “you” is present in all three top 50 lists. However, its frequency and amount of uses becomes an outlier when comparing the three corpora. In both *Bleach* and *Nevermind*, “you” is the second most used pronoun: respectively, its frequencies are 4.19% in *Bleach* and 2.28% in *Nevermind*. In Nirvana's last studio album *In Utero*, “you” is the fourth most used pronoun with a frequency of 1.22%. Statistically, the differences between these three frequencies are seemingly not worthy of note. However, the fact that in two of the albums “you” is the second most used pronoun, while it is only the fourth in the last album stands out. Furthermore, another interesting outlier here is that in the *Bleach* corpus, “you” has a frequency almost as high as the single most used word-token “I” – “I” has 4.7% and “you” has 4.19%. This means that in the *Bleach* corpus, “you” is much closer to being the most used token as compared to “you” in the *Nevermind* and *In Utero* corpus.

Another interesting outlier in pronoun use is that there seems to be a shift in the use of gendered pronouns throughout the three albums. In the *Bleach* corpus, only the male pronoun “he” with a frequency of 0.44% appears within the top 50 list, while the female “she” with a frequency of 0.28% occupies the 80th rank on the word list. In the *Nevermind* corpus, both “she” and “he” appear within the top 25 word-tokens: “she” with a frequency of 1% and “he” with a frequency of 0.78%. Lastly, in the *In Utero* corpus, neither “he” or “she” appear within the top 50 word-tokens. In fact, their uses are so limited that they are nearly non-existent within the album: “she” has five uses and “he” has two. Thus, Nirvana's third studio album becomes an outlier in terms of its use of gendered pronouns, as its uses are almost absent. The *Nevermind* corpus has the highest number of uses for each of the two gendered pronouns, and while the *Bleach* corpus also uses both of them, it has a slightly bigger presence of the male gendered “he”.

A final outlier in terms of pronoun use, is that there is a clear difference in the number of different prevalent pronouns used throughout the corpora. This is in the sense that both the *Bleach* and *In Utero* corpus only have five to six pronouns present in their top 50 word-tokens list, while the *Nevermind* corpus includes nine different pronouns. This means that nearly 20% of *Nevermind*'s top 50 list consists of different pronouns. Of interest, the pronouns “myself”, “some”, and

“something” are used in *Nevermind*, which is not the case for either of the other two corpora’s top 50 list.

5.1.2: Noun use in Nirvana’s music

As is clear from looking at noun use throughout the three Nirvana albums, their uses are fairly limited and often they are characterised by a lot of repetitions which influences the size of their frequencies. Looking at the different nouns presented in the top five lists for each corpus (as shown in Table 1, 9, and 14), a comparison reveals that none of the nouns reoccur within multiple albums. As such, there are no repeats of noun specific thematization when it comes to the lyrics from different albums being about the same subjects. There not being any such repetitions makes it difficult to observe any similarities or differences between the corpora’s top five nouns. Instead, the only apparent pattern that can be drawn from comparing the three top five noun lists, is that of different amounts of frequencies of noun use for each album. This is in the sense that one can look at the combined frequency of all five nouns from each list, and then compare these to see if there is any decline or increase in the overall percentage of noun uses from one album to another:

Corpus (and total word-token uses)	Combined Frequency of Top Five Nouns
<i>Bleach</i> (2480)	N = 126 Frequency = 5.08%
<i>Nevermind</i> (3060)	N = 81 Frequency = 2.64%
<i>In Utero</i> (2131)	N = 71 Frequency = 3.33%

Table 30: Combined frequency for the top five nouns lists of all three corpora

Looking at the frequencies presented in Table 30, there is some differences between the noun use from each corpus that is worthy of note. While the frequencies are not immensely different in terms of size, it is clear that the *Bleach* corpus has a larger frequency of noun use than both *Nevermind* and *In Utero*. If one was to look only at the number of uses for each of the top five lists – 126, 81, and 71, respectively – it would seem like there is a decline in the use of nouns, getting lower for each album. However, calculating the frequencies it is then clear that this pattern of

exponential decline is not accurate, as there is in fact an increase in frequency of top five noun uses from the *Nevermind* album to the *In Utero* album.

Overall, the conclusion for noun use throughout all three corpora is that their scope of use is very limited. Most of the higher noun frequencies are caused by repetitions of a single phrase in a single song, thereby not indicating any overarching linguistic themes expressed through nouns across the albums.

5.1.3: Verb use in Nirvana's Music

The following section is going to compare the previously examined top five verb uses of all three corpora. Looking at both the commonalities and outliers in their applications.

First off, there are a couple of commonalities to note when looking at the specific verbs present in all three lists. As is apparent from all three previous verb sections, some form of the verb “to be” is present and prevalent in all corpora. In the *Bleach* corpus, the two forms “am” and “is” are prevalent and make up the top two most used verbs with the frequencies of 3.06% and 2.17%, respectively.

In the *Nevermind* corpus, the two same forms are prevalent, however, they do not occupy the top two frequencies for verb uses. Instead, “am” with a frequency of 2.05% is ranked as the second most frequent verb, and “is” with a frequency of 1.66% is the fourth most frequent verb.

Lastly, in the *In Utero* corpus, there are three forms of “to be” present in the top five list. The most used verb in the corpus is the “to be” form “is” with a frequency of 3%, and the second most used verb is “am” with a frequency 2.86%. Thus, the third form of “to be” remains and is realised by the verb “are”, which is the fourth most used verb in the corpus with a frequency of 1.26%. As such, it is clear that the verb “to be” makes up a majority of verb uses throughout all three Nirvana albums. Which indicates a nature of subject/object description in the lyrics. This is in the sense that these forms of “to be” are used to introduce a characteristic of the subject/object in focus. For example, with phrases like “he is x”, “I am y”, or “you are z”.

One could make the case that including all the different forms of “to be” in the word lists as separate verbs saturates the top five verb lists. Thus, it is difficult to establish any other interesting patterns of verb use in the corpora. To attempt to rectify this shortcoming, the following table shows the top five verbs of all three corpora combined with the omission of any forms of the verb “to be”:

Rank and Word-Token	Frequency out of 7671
1. do	N = 154 Frequency = 2%
2. have	N = 115 Frequency = 1.49%
3. can	N = 41 Frequency = 0.53%
4. said	N = 39 Frequency = 0.5%
5. know	N = 36 Frequency = 0.46%

Table 31: Top five verbs in a combined Nirvana corpus (excluding “to be” forms)

What is observed from Table 31 is that without “to be” verbs, “do” and “have” are the most prevalent verbs. The three remaining verbs “can”, “said”, and “know” all have frequency that are around 0.5% or under. Thus, there uses are fairly limited within the three corpora and it becomes difficult to draw any substantial conclusions on the linguistic patterns they might suggest. As such, the two verbs “do” and “have” remain as the more substantial verbs in terms of frequencies.

Looking at the three corpora individually, the verb “have” is prevalent within all three top five lists, while “do” is only present within the top five of *Bleach* and *Nevermind*. As such, “have” is a commonality of occurrence when comparing the corpora, as it is prevalent in all of them. In the collected corpus of all three studio albums, “have” has a frequency of 1.49%. However, individually, “have” has a frequency of 1.08% in the *Bleach* corpus; 1.89% in the *Nevermind* corpus; and 1.36% in the *In Utero* corpus. While these frequencies are similar, there is still a shown pattern of “have” being slightly more frequent in the *Nevermind* corpus than in the other two. Although, looking at the rankings of “have” within all three corpora, it is either situated as the third or fourth most used verb. Thus, indicating that despite the slight difference in frequency, “have” is more or less equally prevalent in all three corpora.

The other prevalent verb in the collected corpus, “do”, reveals an outlier in terms of its presence within the three individual corpora. This is in the sense that “do” only appears within the top five lists of the *Bleach* and *Nevermind* corpora, and not in the *In Utero* top five verbs list. In the collected corpus, “do” is the most frequent verb with a frequency of 2% – when omitting all forms

of “to be”. Interestingly, in the *Bleach* corpus, “do” has a frequency of 2.17% and is ranked the third most used verbs after “am” and “is”. This means that when omitting “to be” forms, “do” also becomes the most frequent verb in *Bleach*. Furthermore, in the *Nevermind* corpus, the frequency of 2.74% for “do” is high enough to make it the most used verb even when including all forms of “to be”. Curiously, with its prevalence in both *Bleach* and *Nevermind*, “do” is not present in the *In Utero* corpus’ top five list, which could suggest that Nirvana’s first two studio albums have a bigger linguistic focus on portraying actions. However, one must keep in mind that “do” is not the only actionable verb in the English language, and therefore, it would require a more detailed look at all actionable verb uses within all three corpora to substantially conclude such a claim.

5.2: Discussion of Conceptual Metaphor Use in Nirvana’s Music

In the qualitative section, the application of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to three songs from one of each of Nirvana’s three studio albums made up a textual analysis. This section of the discussion will first go through the results of the qualitative analysis trying to identify any patterns at a more generalisable scale. This is done primarily by looking at the individual results from each song section and then comparing these. In turn, this leads to an interpretation of the results, going over what they indicate.

5.2.1: About a Girl

Following the structure described above, the first part of this section will go through the results from the different song sections that applied conceptual metaphor theory. In Nirvana’s first studio album *Bleach*, the song *About a Girl* was analysed. In total, nine different lines, some of which are repeated throughout the song, were identified as containing conceptual metaphors:

Lines containing conceptual metaphors in <i>About a Girl</i>	Conceptual metaphors in <i>About a Girl</i>
<i>I need an easy friend</i>	<i>Social relations are a game</i>
<i>I do with an ear to lend</i>	<i>Listening is an ear; The act of listening is a currency</i>
<i>I don't think you fit this shoe</i>	<i>Personal identity or characteristics are articles</i>

<i>I do won't you have a clue</i>	<i>of clothing</i>
<i>I'll take advantage while / You hang me out to dry</i>	<i>Knowledge or understanding is an investigation</i>
<i>I'm standing in your line</i>	<i>Interpersonal struggles are wet clothing in need of drying; Interpersonal struggles are a game</i>
<i>I do hope you have the time</i>	<i>Interpersonal relations are queues; Interpersonal relations are containers</i>
<i>I do pick a number too</i>	<i>Wants are religion; Priorities are time</i>
<i>I do keep a date with you</i>	<i>Interpersonal relations are a gambling game; Interpersonal relations are queues</i>
	<i>Time is an object; Events are dates</i>

Table 32: Conceptual metaphors in About a Girl

In Table 32, it is shown how in these nine lines there are 15 different conceptual metaphors in play. Most of these fall under the category of structural metaphors, meaning that they are structured in a way that defines a more abstract concept in terms of a much more concrete and established notion. For example, the conceptual metaphor *Social relations are a game* shows how the abstract and complex concept of social relations are defined and exemplified by comparing them to the more defined and simple concept of a game.

Looking at the conceptual metaphors in “About a Girl” in terms of patterns, most of these involve a comparison of interpersonal or social relations. As this data consists of a singular song, it makes sense that there would be a general theme in lyrics, and based on its presence in the conceptual metaphors, this theme revolves around such relationships. Furthermore, the metaphors that do not directly cover the concepts of such relations are still used in a context that relates to this theme. This is in the sense that a conceptual metaphor like *The act of listening is a currency* also

refers to the relationship between the lyricist and the recipient. Another pattern that can be drawn from the use of conceptual metaphors in the song is that several metaphors use the source domain of a game to exemplify the more abstract target domain.

In terms of interpreting the uses of conceptual metaphors in the song and the patterns of these uses, there is first a clear and obvious textual interpretation that should be expressed: the song is about an interpersonal relationship. This is an obvious take and is fairly evident even in the song title “About a Girl” where this theme of addressing a girl is presented. Moving deeper, the pattern of comparing social relations to a game, might even indicate a subconscious view of these types of relationships being trivialised. This is purely based on linguistic and metaphorical word use and can therefore be hard to prove. However, the pattern of continuously describing relationships as a game, can be viewed as both a simple conceptualisation of the more abstract concept in simple terms, as is the definition of a conceptual metaphor, but it can also be viewed as this more internalised trivialisation of interpersonal relations.

In terms of generalisable patterns, this interpretation of trivialisation of relationships cannot be transferred as an album-wide theme. This is in the sense that the thematization of interpersonal relationships is specific to the song “About a Girl” and since this is the only song that has been analysed from the *Bleach* album, it is not possible to apply this to an understanding of the entire album’s thematic subject. Such a generalisation would require a textual analysis of all songs in *Bleach*. Despite this, it is however possible to infer a more general societal stance from this interpretation. This is in the sense that as of the release of *Bleach* in 1989, Nirvana chose to conceptualise interpersonal relationships through a game-metaphor, which indicates a tendency of this trivialisation and a superficial way of looking at associations with other people. In this way, their focus is not on the individual they are engaging in a social relation with, but on what other people can do for them.

5.2.2: Smells Like Teen Spirit

In the same manner as above, this section will go through the results from the analysis of the song Smells Like Teen Spirit from Nirvana’s second studio album. This song has nine lines containing conceptual metaphors:

Lines containing conceptual metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit	Conceptual Metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit
<i>Bring your friends</i>	<i>People are objects</i>
<i>She's over bored</i>	<i>Large quantities are over</i>
<i>Oh no, I know a dirty word</i>	<i>Bad is unclean</i>
<i>With the lights out, it's less dangerous</i>	<i>Off is out; Degree of risk is an amount</i>
<i>I feel stupid and contagious</i>	<i>Characteristics and illnesses are emotions</i>
<i>And for this gift I feel blessed</i>	<i>Luck or holiness is emotions</i>
<i>Our little group has always been/ And always will until the end</i>	<i>Life is a journey</i>
<i>And I forget just why I taste</i>	<i>Depression is lacking recollection</i>

Table 33: Conceptual metaphors in Smells Like Teen Spirit

In total, these nine lines contain nine different conceptual metaphors, most of which are of the structural type: one of them is an orientational metaphor. In terms of defining or claiming any distinct patterns in the use of metaphors in the song, there are not any immediately prevalent when looking at the display in Table 33. The target domain of each metaphor varies in each case and as such there are no thematical connection to draw between them or to connect to a subject of the song. Trying to define a pattern in the conceptual domains used in the song, it is possible to claim that there is a trend towards negatively laden concepts. This is seen in the use of domains like *bad*, *unclean*, *off*, *out*, *risk*, *illness*, *depression*, *lacking recollection*, and viewing people as *objects*. All of these can be said to share a sense of negative connotation on a more general and societal level. In this way, it is possible to view this song as tendency towards portraying and dwelling on negative subjects for Nirvana. Although this point can of course not be generalised to the entirety of their second album, as it would require further textual analysis to support such a claim, the fact that the

corpus analysis of the *Nevermind* corpus revealed that the negative adverbial “not” made up 4% of all word-token uses would suggest that there is such a tendency present in the album.

Aside from this negative tendency, there is a significant lack of patterns in “Smells Like Teen Spirit”. Therefore, it might seem insignificant to look at and interpret the use of conceptual metaphors in the song. However, the circumstance that the analysis reveals no obvious patterns is an interesting pattern. This is in the sense that it suggests the song does not have any thematic thread that ties the lyrics together, and instead consists mostly of seemingly random utterances. Looking at the lyrics of the song, this interpretation is easy to support, as there in several cases are instances of phrases like “A mulatto/ An albino/ A mosquito/ My libido” and “I found it hard, it's hard to find/ Oh well, whatever, nevermind” (Nirvana, 1991). Such lines do not clearly have any deeper meaning, and more accurately exists as melodious nonsense. Interpreting this choice of composing a song of seemingly random and non-connected lyrics, it is possible to infer a sense of indifference in Nirvana’s songwriting. Considering that their albums are temporally displaced by two years each, it makes sense that the members of the band develop in terms of opinions, views, and mental states. This is especially relevant in the case of Kurt, who wrote most of their lyrics, and arguably went through a great deal of personal growth or change during the band’s popularity: this is in the sense that their sudden rise in popularity led to intense changes in his life which had severe consequences for his mental health, and as is well known, this resulted in an unescapable drug abuse, ultimately culminating with his suicide. Therefore, it is entirely possible that this tendency of indifference in “Smells Like Teen Spirit” is a reflection of Kurt’s outlook on life at the point of writing: it is a seemingly meaningless song created to reflect the meaninglessness of life. This ironic and meaningless theme is also reflected in the origin of the song name, which comes from something as meaningless as a friend writing “Kurt smells like teen spirit” on a wall in sharpie while Kurt was sleeping (*The Story Behind, n.d.*).

5.2.3: Heart-Shaped Box

In Nirvana’s third studio album, the song “Heart-Shaped Box” was picked as the data for a qualitative analysis using conceptual metaphor theory. This song also has nine lines containing conceptual metaphors:

Lines containing conceptual metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box	Conceptual Metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box
<i>She eyes me like a Pisces when I am weak</i>	<i>Love is a hunt; Unhealthy love is a hunt</i>
<i>I've been locked inside your Heart-Shaped box for weeks</i>	<i>Love is a container; Unhealthy love is a prison cell</i>
<i>I've been drawn into your magnet tar pit trap</i>	<i>Drug addiction is a magnet; Drugs are a trap</i>
<i>I wish I could eat your cancer when you turn back</i>	<i>Cancer is an object; Love is a sacrifice;</i>
<i>Forever in debt to your priceless advice</i>	<i>Change in unhealthy relationship patterns is a wish</i>
<i>Meat-eating orchids forgive no one just yet</i>	<i>Advice is money</i>
<i>Cut myself on angel's hair and baby's breath</i>	<i>Plants are entities; Drugs are an entity</i>
<i>Broken hymen of your highness I'm left back</i>	<i>Unhappy love is a knife</i>
<i>Throw down your umbilical noose so I can climb right back</i>	<i>Sexual relations are power relations</i>
<i>Throw down your umbilical noose so I can climb right back</i>	<i>Drugs are a trap; Death/execution is life/birth; Unhealthy love is a trap</i>

Table 34: Conceptual metaphors in Heart-Shaped Box

In the nine lines displayed in Table 34, 17 different conceptual metaphors are used. Pattern-wise there are some clear thematical uses of metaphors. This is especially the case for conceptual domains concerning drugs, love, and relationships: in particularly unhealthy love and relationships. This is in the sense that 12 out of the 17 metaphors directly refer to these conceptual domains. Furthermore, the remaining five metaphors also relate to these themes of love and drugs in some ways, for example the source domain of *plants* which is a symbolic and figurative way of

referencing drugs. As such, there is a clear and prominent presence of a thematic pattern in the song. Additionally, a linguistic pattern worthy of note stems from the relatively high number of conceptual metaphors compared to the number of lines they in which they are used: 17 metaphors compared to nine lines. This reveals that the song has a high rate of metaphorical language and speaks to the reflective nature of songwriting process connected to Heart-Shaped Box.

Interpreting these metaphorical uses, it is not possible to make any album-wide thematic generalisations like in the last two songs. However, inferring from the metaphors in “Heart-Shaped Box”, there is a tendency of using much more descriptive, metaphorical, and reflective language. This suggests that Kurt, being the songwriter, is in a mental state with a much higher reflective level at the point in time of the *In Utero* album’s creation and release. This is in the sense that he thinks about his life, his relationship with his wife, the struggles herein, and his addictive tendencies.

While this reflective indication might suggest a positive trend in outlook, opinions, and views on life, the thematic aspects of these reflections are highly negative. Thereby, the positive aspect of reflecting on life might seem like an improvement for Kurt Cobain on personal level but this is overshadowed by the fact that these reflections centre around hopelessness, unhealthy and unescapable relationship patterns, and addiction.

5.3: General Interpretation of Patterns

The following section looks at the patterns and interpretations hereof in the previous sections on conceptual metaphor use in “About a Girl”, “Smells Like Teen Spirit”, and “Heart-Shaped Box”, comparing these to establish and discuss developments in Nirvana’s songwriting and implications of these linguistic patterns.

To start of this section, there are clear differences in the ways conceptual metaphors are utilised in the three songs. Looking at these differences through a temporal perspective, it is possible to infer a developmental pattern both in Nirvana’s songwriting and in Kurt Cobain’s personal growth. This is in the sense that the *Bleach* album, in which About a Girl is situated, was released in 1989; the *Nevermind* album, containing Smells Like Teen Spirit, was released in 1991; and the *In Utero* album, containing Heart-Shaped Box, was released in 1993. As such, each of the three songs and albums are displaced by a period of two years. Therefore, it is possible to look at the differences in linguistic uses from each of the albums as an indicator of several types of developments for Nirvana through the years.

At the textual and song specific level, the patterns in conceptual metaphor use shows how Nirvana in their first studio album, or at least in *About a Girl*, focuses on interpersonal relationships and on conveying personal experiences. These are however portrayed in a superficial and trivial manner, which suggests an immature outlook on life and the roles of other people. This is in the sense that the description of the interpersonal relationship concerned in the song is viewed from a perspective of how another person can serve the subject/lyricist: it focuses on what he needs from someone and not on what he can do for someone else. Inherently, there is nothing wrong with portraying the experiences of the lyricist, or Kurt, but the singular focus suggests a pattern of social immaturity: which fits with the rebellious and uncaring brand Nirvana had as a band (*Nirvana*, 2014).

In their second studio album, or at least in the song “Smells Like Teen Spirit”, Nirvana’s songwriting goes from trivialising immaturity, to negative indifference. This is in the sense that “Smells Like Teen Spirit” does not have a concrete theme or any deeper meaning. Instead, it is a collection of primarily negatively laden words and phrases with no inherent connection to each other. As Kurt explains in an interview, the song is an attempt at writing the ultimate pop-song (*The Story Behind*, n.d.). This attest to the ironic nature of the song, and from this one can infer quite a bit about the band and Kurt’s development from their first album. Paired with their rapid rise in popularity connected to the release of *Nevermind* (*Nirvana*, 2014), one can imagine how Kurt and Nirvana had to adapt to a new way of life which might not match with their previous trivialising and immature image. Keeping a sense of rebellion in their band’s image, the shift to irony and indifference, in a way mocking the music industry, shows a clear development in outlooks for Kurt and the rest of the band. It is also possible to interpret this change as the catalyst for the more depressing and negative aspects, which were prevalent towards the final period of Nirvana’s history.

These aspects are visible when looking at their final studio album *In Utero*, or at least in the song “Heart-Shaped Box”. Here the linguistic and metaphorical use is much more detailed and intentional, revealing a higher level of self-reflection in Kurt’s songwriting. However, the themes covered in this reflective writing are inherently negative and hopeless, describing his unhealthy relationship, the struggles herein, his regrets, addiction, etc. In this sense, the evolution or development in terms of writing and personal growth is heavily suggestive of more consideration of the band or Kurt’s lived experiences. This is in the sense that Nirvana’s music is no longer a portrayal or demonstration of a rebellious, uncaring, and indifferent outlook on life. Instead, the

thoughtfulness and complex metaphorical linguistic uses in the lyrics shows a growth in emotional and social maturity. However, this reflective growth is still imbued in a theme of depression and hopefulness. From the lyrics of *Heart-Shaped Box*, this hopeless theme is portrayed in a highly individualistic light, only focusing on Kurt's life experiences, and as such it is difficult to comment on whether this temporal development for Nirvana's musical expressions only reflects Kurt or if it also can be applied to the rest of the band's personal growth. In either case, Kurt's development from immature rebel to indifferent superstar, to hopeless depression is clearly visible in the linguistic uses and textual elements of Nirvana's lyrics throughout the years. Furthermore, this decline and pattern of negative development is undoubtedly and regretfully supported by Kurt's suicide in 1994 (Cieysinski, 2019).

Tying in the compared data from the quantitative analysis. There are some linguistic tendencies that furtherly support this developmental conclusion. First off, the undeniable prevalence of pronoun use in the corpora must be addressed. Here it is especially in the use of the first-person singular "I" that a pattern can be connected. As established previously, the difference in frequency of "I" from album to album in a chronological order is as follows: 4.7% to 8.7%, to 7.03%. Previously, it was suggested that this development indicated a shift in focus from album to album, where *Bleach* did not focus on the lyricist's experience as a subject "I", and *Nevermind* and *In Utero* did to larger extent. However, it would require a more textual analysis to confirm whether such a pattern could be confirmed.

Having conducted and discussed the qualitative analysis, these quantitative results can then be tied into the conclusions and considerations to furtherly support or create other perspectives. As such, the use "I" can be compared to the developmental pattern established in Nirvana and Kurt's songwriting throughout the albums. The qualitative pattern of a trivialising and immature *Bleach* album ultimately resulting in a reflective and introspective *In Utero* album, fits quite well with the pronoun use of "I" not being particularly prevalent in the first album, but being more so in the last. In this sense, *Bleach* being more rebellious and focusing on how other people can serve the subject of the lyrics corresponds with a relatively low presence of the "I" pronoun, while *In Utero* being a reflective example of Kurt's self-growth and emotional distress corresponds with a much higher frequency of use for "I". Interestingly, the *Nevermind* album seems to be an outlier in this regard, as the use of "I" is has the largest frequency of all three albums. Following the interpretation above, this would indicate that *Nevermind* is the most introspective and self-reflective album of the three. However, the discussion of conceptual metaphor uses in *Nevermind's* *Smells Like Teen Spirit*

established that a pattern of indifference and irony was prevalent. Thereby, this does not correspond with the high frequency of “I” used throughout the album. This can be interpreted in several ways, one of which is that *Smells Like Teen Spirit* is an outlier in the album, and that the rest of the songs from *Nevermind* follow an entirely different thematic pattern. This would require further analysis to confirm or deny, and as such it only remains as speculation in this paper. However, it might also suggest that the use of “I” is not only prevalent in an introspective sense in Nirvana’s lyrics. By this, the *In Utero* album might focus heavily on the reflective aspects of Kurt’s songwriting, but *Nevermind* also focuses heavily on conveying the subject’s experiences, while not necessarily doing so on a reflective level. Instead, it is entirely possible to still portray the lyricist’s experiences, while adhering to the indifferent thematization established by *Smells Like Teen Spirit*.

The “you” pronoun also supports these patterns of correspondence between the quantitative and qualitative results. This is in the sense that the frequency of “you” chronologically are as follows: 4.19% to 2.28%, to 1.22%. These declining frequencies make sense in terms of the development in songwriting and the use of “I”, as the first studio album can be inferred as having a focus on how interpersonal relations can benefit the subject. This corresponds well with being the album with the highest frequency of “you”. *Nevermind* and *In Utero* becoming more focused on the experiences of the lyricist or Kurt also corresponds with these having a declining pattern in terms of frequency of “you”.

In terms of noun use displayed in the corpus analyses, there is also some patterns which support or makes sense in terms of the interpreted development of Kurt’s songwriting and emotional wellbeing. For example, this is shown in the combined frequencies of top five nouns in the three corpora: *Bleach*’s nouns having a frequency of 5.08%, *Nevermind*’s of 2.64%, and *In Utero*’s of 3.33%. The relatively low amount of noun uses is interesting, and this pattern of the first album having the highest frequency to the second having the lowest and the third having a slight increase makes some sense when compared to the interpretation of metaphor uses. The pattern corresponds with *Bleach* being coherent thematically, at least in “About a Girl”, and having a high frequency of noun uses to support the metaphorical uses. *Nevermind* being the lowest in terms of noun frequency corresponds with the indifferent and ironic linguistic and lyrical pattern, as this does not require any significant number of nouns to maintain.

In Utero, however, relies heavily on metaphorical and symbolic language – at least in the case of “Heart-Shaped Box”. This would correspond well with a relatively high frequency of noun use, and it is therefore interesting to consider why this is not the case. One possibility is that Heart-

Shaped Box is an outlier in terms of the metaphorical and reflective linguistic elements used in the song. As such, the rest of *In Utero* could easily be much less prevalent in terms of the pattern established and discussed previously. However, this would once again require further analysis to confirm or deny, and therefore must remain as speculation in this paper. Another possibility is that the top five lists are not accurate indicators of noun frequency throughout the entirety of the album. This is in the sense that a low frequency for a singular noun can amount to a large frequency when combining all nouns if the corpus consists of many different nouns. In this way, the statistical results from the top five noun use might not be accurate enough to draw generalisable conclusions and interpretations.

Finally, looking at the patterns displayed in the verb section of the quantitative part of the analysis, here there is a heavy presence of different forms of “to be”: in each top five list there is either two or three forms of “to be” present. These are mainly used as subject or object complements in the lyrics. In terms of the developmental patterns established above, it is interesting to look at chronological prevalence of “to be” forms in the albums. As such, from a temporal perspective, the frequencies are as follows: in *Bleach* there is a combined frequency of 5.23% in the top five list; this becomes 3.71% in *Nevermind*; and 7.12% in *In Utero*. Comparing this to the interpretation of Nirvana’s lyrical evolution, it corresponds quite well, as *Bleach* has a certain level of descriptive qualities. Then moving to *Nevermind* where the frequency drops slightly, the thematic presence of indifference and irony also corresponds to lower level of complimentary descriptive language use. Finally, *In Utero* being the culmination of reflective and introspective language centred around Kurt’s negative outlook on his romantic relationship at the time also corresponds well with a rise in complimentary language use, as is connected to the “to be” verb forms.

This pattern is even further supported when drawing on the analyses of the transitivity patterns related to the verb uses in the quantitative section. In the *Bleach* corpus, two different types of processes were examined: one Behavioural and one Material process. The Behavioural process was related to a verb use of the “to be” form. This suggests that at least some of the “to be” uses in the corpus centre around Behavioural process, and in turn on construing experiences related to carrying out certain behaviours. The second transitivity type relates to the verb “do”, and being a Material process, it displays how “do” is used to describe and introduce tangible actions. Moving on to the *Nevermind* corpus, here one Mental and one Behavioural process was examined. The Mental process refers to the use of the verb “do” and displays how the verb is used to construe

experiences of a cognitive nature. The Behavioural process refers to the verb “am” and displays how the verb in this context is used to portray the act of carrying out a behaviour. Lastly, in the *In Utero* corpus two Intensive Relational process were examined. Respectively, they refer to the verbs “is” and “have” and show how these are used to Attribute certain characteristics to the subject of the clause or phrase. Relating this to the developmental pattern established through the temporal aspect of Nirvana’s songwriting evolution, one could argue that the use of Behavioural and Material processes in the *Bleach* corpus fits with the somewhat descriptive aspects of the interpersonal focus in the album. Moving to the indifferent theme in *Nevermind*, there seems to be some disparity between this and the implementation of Mental processes. This is in the sense that these processes are used to construe experiences on the cognitive level, and this does not correspond with an uncaring and indifferent general thematization.

Lastly, the two Intensive Relational processes in the *In Utero* corpus correspond rather well with the reflective and introspective nature present in the album. As such, the transitivity patterns examined previously furtherly support the developmental interpretation of Nirvana or Kurt’s evolution. However, the limited number of transitivity patterns examined should be kept in mind, as this limitation leads to vague conclusions from which to support other interpretations. As such, this point would benefit from expanding the transitivity sections and looking at a larger body processes throughout all three albums.

6: Conclusion

As stated in the introductory chapter of this paper, Nirvana was a popular band in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This popularity and the influence it accrued the band is an interesting phenomenon to explore, and many factors might contribute to its existence. This paper has taken a linguistic and stylistic approach to exploring Nirvana’s lyrical expression, in an attempt at gaining valuable insights into the patterns of language they used in their music. This was done following the problem formulation stated in the beginning: How is language used in Nirvana’s three studio albums in terms of word use and stylistic choices? and what does this reveal about the personal workings of the band and in particular Kurt Cobain?

To answer this, both a quantitative and qualitative analysis was carried out using both Halliday’s (2013) notion of transitivity processes and Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory to contribute a linguistic and stylistic framework of looking at Nirvana’s lyrics. The quantitative section functioned largely as a corpus analysis of each of Nirvana’s three studio

albums. The results from this yielded no large generalisable patterns, which can be attributed to the fact that the corpora sizes were relatively small. However, despite the lacking generalisability, the corpus analysis still showed how pronouns were among the most used words in all three corpora, that noun use was very limited, and that there was a prevalence of “to be” forms in the top five verb list for each corpus.

The quantitative analysis was supported with some in-text examples and here the theoretical framework of transitivity processes was applied to gain a deeper understanding of how the most frequent verbs were used. The results hereof were also not substantial enough to draw general conclusions, however, they were later used to support claims made in the discussion.

The qualitative analysis functioned as a textual analysis of three different songs, one from each studio album, applying the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The results of this were then processed in the discussion, which lead to the interpretation of Nirvana’s lyrics being a showcasing of personal growth and decline, developing over time from one album to another. This is in the sense, that Nirvana’s use of language in their first studio album shows an informal and trivialising tendency, while remaining somewhat descriptive and facilitating of the points they were trying to make. For example, in the song “About a Girl” the linguistic use focuses on the subject’s experiences and needs, by highlighting what he desires from other people. In their second studio album however, the lyrical expression is much more juvenile and indifferent, not using descriptive language to convey a narrative structure, like in the song “Smells Like Teen Spirit” where most of the song consists of incoherent phrases and utterances. This shift from the first album to the second is interpreted as a symptom of Kurt Cobain’s personal development and approach to the band’s rising popularity. In this sense, the first album signifies Nirvana’s baseline outlook on and construing of life and meaning, and then *Nevermind* is a portrayal of the rebellious and indifferent outlook Kurt had related to their rising stardom and commercialisation. Then the last studio album, takes a completely different linguistic turn, being much more precise and descriptive in its portrayal of lived experiences. This is especially seen in the song “Heart-Shaped Box” where Kurt heavily emphasises figurative language to describe his unhealthy relationship to both drugs and his wife Courtney Love. This development is therefore interpreted as a declining mental state for Kurt, showing a high level of reflective language use, but highlighting the experience of hopelessness. As such, the linguistic and stylistic uses in Nirvana’s three studio albums can be viewed as a chronicling of Kurt’s mental journey into musical stardom, and his decline into depression and drug abusive, ultimately culminating with him committing suicide.

With the purpose of the paper being to explore Nirvana's use of linguistic and stylistic elements to gain an understanding of how they construe meaning, and the type of life experiences they portray, this conclusion manages to answer all these points. Having established how language is used in Nirvana's music, it is recommended that further research delves into a societal perspective and looks at the cultural zeitgeist in the early 1990s, to try and connect Nirvana's linguistic and stylistic uses to the societal factors that might have influenced their rise in popularity.

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