

Making and Breaking the Rules: Lexical Creativity in the Alternative Music Scene

Abstract

This article delves into the connections between language as a rule-governed system of communication and music as a means to express subcultural ideologies and satisfy collective needs. By resorting to the morphological analysis of a corpus of names of alternative music artists, the article evinces that language is a manipulable code through which users can convey their desire for self-assertion and their rejection of established commercialism and mainstream culture. Language is thus used to break away from the norm, and also from what is foreseeable or even politically correct. In morphological terms, this is reflected in the manipulation of morphological rules, which results in the creative or deviant use of word-formation devices, such as affixation (*Benighted*), conversion (*The Boredoms*), compounding (*The Lovemongers*), or blending (*The Beatscuits*). Moreover, the fragile correspondence between an orthographic word, a phonological word and a lexeme is constantly challenged by the creative use of graphemes and punctuation, word play, or semantically anomalous word combinations (*W00d5b17ch*, *Celibate Rifles*). In conclusion, the study illustrates the users' awareness of the possibilities of the system and their ability to manipulate it in order to meet pragmatic, aesthetic, intellectual and social needs.

Keywords: creativity; deviation; morphology; music; productivity