



# Discovering the Self-Recovery Value in Justice Album by Justin Bieber

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate how Justin Bieber's Justice album portrays self-recovery through the lens of Geoffrey Leech's Seven Types of Meaning. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, five tracks (Lonely, Ghost, Off My Face, Hold On, and Anyone) were analyzed through content analysis to uncover patterns of meaning within the lyrics. The results indicate that Lonely and Ghost present themes of isolation, grief, and acknowledgement of internal conflict, representing the early stages of recovery. Off My Face and Hold Reveal emotional intensity, reliance, hope, and perseverance as the speaker navigates the process of regaining balance. In contrast, anyone reflects the desire for stability and meaningful connection. Overall, the analysis shows that Bieber's use of language constructs a unified narrative of healing, aligning with self-recovery as a gradual reconstruction of emotional well-being and personal identity.

**Keywords:** *Justin Bieber, Meaning analysis, Self-recovery, Song lyrics*

## Introduction

Music has long been acknowledged as a universal and powerful means of human expression. It surpasses language and cultural barriers, allowing emotional communication where words alone might fall short (Sholihah et al., 2024). Throughout history, music has not only served as entertainment but also mirrored social change, moral awareness, and individual struggles. In today's world, it increasingly functions as a medium for psychological healing and self-reflection. According to Adiasto et al. (2023), music can act as a therapeutic outlet, enabling both listeners and artists to reconstruct their identities through emotional release. Likewise, Chowdary et al. (2024), assert that music activates both cognitive and emotional processes in the brain, fostering emotional regulation and recovery through sound and language.

Among contemporary artists, Justin Bieber provides a notable example of this transformation. Initially recognized for his teenage fame, Bieber's later works, particularly his 2021 album *Justice*, reflect a more mature exploration of faith, guilt, forgiveness, and self-recovery. The album merges musical creativity with confessional storytelling, portraying his spiritual and emotional growth. Tracks such as *Lonely*, *Hold On*, *Off my face*, *Ghost*, and *Anyone* express themes of repentance, vulnerability, and renewed faith. Despite its emotional depth, discussions surrounding *Justice* often focus more on its commercial and production success (Umagandhi & Vinothini, 2017) than on its semantic richness and healing narrative.

Earlier research indicates that lyrics can reflect emotional transformation and self-healing. Rixkasari et al. (2025) discovered that figurative language and emotional diction in Feby Putri's *Hitam Putih* album symbolize a journey toward self-acceptance and forgiveness. Similarly, Kaulika & Sakinah (2025) found that BTS's *I'm Fine* uses language as a tool for resilience and motivation, helping listeners cope with emotional pain. Studies in *Frontiers in Psychology* by Baker et al. (2017) further reveal that meaningful lyrics can trigger the brain's emotional regulation mechanisms, promoting recovery from stress and anxiety. Nevertheless, many of these studies focus more on the psychological effects of listening to music rather than the linguistic mechanisms that encode healing. Hence, a more linguistic interpretation is needed to uncover how language itself constructs recovery and moral reflection in Western pop contexts like Bieber's *Justice*.

There exists a significant research gap connecting linguistics, psychology, and musicology. Prior works by Baker et al. (2019) and Zhang et al. (2022) explored how music affects emotional well-being, but their focus remained on listeners' psychological responses rather than the internal meaning of lyrics. Meanwhile, Setiawati et al. (2018) analyzed figurative language in Indonesian songs without addressing its psychological implications. Similarly, Kasa Taek (2023) and Yuniswara & Hartini (2022) applied Leech's theory to poetry and advertisements, yet not to the semantic construction of healing in music.

To address this gap, the current study employs the Self-Recovery Theory proposed by William Anthony (1993), who defines recovery as "a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles." (*Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 16(4), 11–23). Anthony's concept emphasizes that recovery is not merely the absence of distress, but the conscious effort to rebuild meaning, identity, and purpose after personal turmoil. In the context of Bieber's *Justice*, this theory explains how the artist's lyrics reflect an active process of self-redefinition and emotional transformation. Through confessional language and spiritual reflection, Bieber symbolically reconstructs his identity, aligning with Anthony's notion that self-recovery involves regaining control and establishing new values in one's life journey.

This lack of semantic inquiry into emotional recovery within popular music creates both theoretical and empirical gaps. While psychology-oriented studies define self-recovery as restoring emotional balance and identity, they seldom explore

the linguistic encoding of this process. Moreover, works by Umagandhi & Vinothini (2017) and Nasution et al. (2025) have discussed faith-based redemption in music but rarely in connection with linguistic meaning. Hence, this study aims to merge Leech's semantic framework with the psychological concept of self-recovery, analyzing Justice as a text where meaning itself acts as therapy.

Justin Bieber's Justice serves as an ideal object for this research because it intertwines spirituality, morality, and emotional confession. While Yang (2024) and Park et al. (2025) identified its exploration of redemption and collective healing, they did not analyze how linguistic meaning drives these themes. By adopting a semantic lens, this research seeks to understand how Bieber uses language to construct healing not only as an emotional journey but also as a linguistic process, bridging the disciplines of linguistics and psychology.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining Geoffrey Leech's semantic theory with the psychological framework of self-recovery. Unlike previous studies that examined Bieber's moral messages (Umagandhi & Vinothini, 2017), stylistic devices, or symbolic meanings (Tan, 2024), this research specifically investigates how his lyrics linguistically express emotional healing and transformation through Leech's seven meaning categories, conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic.

This approach reinterprets Justice not merely as a collection of songs but as a linguistic text of recovery. Each lyric becomes an articulation of conflict, repentance, and renewal, where layers of meaning convey the journey from guilt to grace. By combining semantic theory with psychological insights, this study extends Leech's framework beyond literature, showing that popular music can also serve as a linguistic medium for emotional restoration and moral education.

The main purpose of this research is to explore self-recovery in Justin Bieber's Justice album through Geoffrey Leech's Seven Types of Meaning framework. Specifically, the study seeks to identify and classify the different types of meaning found in the lyrics and analyze how they linguistically express faith, emotional healing, and moral restoration. Furthermore, it aims to examine the relationship between Bieber's language use and the psychological process of recovery reflected in the album, highlighting how specific word choices, metaphors, and emotional diction represent personal transformation. Ultimately, this research intends to uncover how semantic meanings contribute to portraying justice as both a moral and emotional equilibrium within the self, thereby bridging linguistic theory and psychological experience to show that meaning functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a form of therapy and self-recovery.

## **Method**

This study wants to know about the concept Self-Recovery in Justin Bieber lyrics using descriptive qualitative. The descriptive qualitative method is appropriate because it allows a detailed exploration of meanings, emotions, and linguistic patterns as they naturally occur in the lyrics. The data for this study were taken from one of Justin Bieber's albums entitled Justice. Five songs were selected from this album, namely "Lonely", "Hold On", "Off My Face", "Ghost", and "Anyone". The study uses Geoffrey Leech's Seven Types of Meaning, focusing particularly on conceptual, connotative, and affective meanings, to identify how language serves as a medium for psychological restoration.

This study employs content analysis as the primary method to explore the self-recovery values expressed in Justin Bieber's Justice album. As defined by Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is a systematic technique used to generate replicable and valid interpretations from texts or other meaningful materials within their contextual framework. Through this approach, the researcher interprets the underlying meanings of the song lyrics, particularly focusing on emotional expressions, themes of healing and recovery, and the moral messages conveyed by the artist.

## **Results**

This study examines selected tracks from Justin Bieber's Justice album, namely "Lonely," "Ghost," "Hold On," "Off My Face," and "Anyone." Each song lyric is interpreted using Geoffrey Leech's Seven Types of Meaning, which consist of conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning. Through this semantic lens, the research explores how Bieber's linguistic expressions convey emotional narratives, personal struggles, and relationship-centered messages. The analysis indicates that Lonely and Ghost are rich in conceptual and affective meaning, as their lyrics emphasize themes of emotional emptiness, grief, and longing for connection.

In contrast, Off My Face and Hold On display stronger connotative and thematic layers, illustrating devotion, romantic intensity, and dependence on a loved one. Meanwhile, anyone combines elements of social and thematic meaning to project idealized love and unwavering commitment. Overall, the findings suggest that Bieber's lyrics do not merely communicate surface-level messages but employ multiple semantic dimensions to construct deeper emotional and symbolic resonance.

Table 1. Interpretation of Self Recovery

No	Song Title	Lyrics	Types of Meaning	Interpretation in Relation to Self-Recovery
1.	Lonely	“Everybody knows my name now.”	Conceptual	Literally describing fame, but conceptually reflecting the emotional emptiness behind it, the first realization that self-awareness is essential for healing.
		“Everybody saw me sick, then it felt like no one gave a shit.”	Social	Reveals the social pressure of fame and the disconnection it causes. Healing begins when one reconciles their private pain with their public image.
		“Lonely”	Thematic	The thematic core of “Lonely” is solitude and emptiness. In recovery, this theme represents the lowest point that forces the individual to stop relying on others to fill the void. Accepting loneliness is a crucial step towards rebuilding a healthy relationship with oneself and finding internal strength and peace.
2	Ghost	“Ghost”	Reflective	The word “ghost” reflects loss and longing but also hints at emotional release. It represents healing through acceptance and letting go of what can’t return.
		“One touch and you got me stoned.”	Conceptual	This lyric conceptually points to the addictive impact of a painful relationship. In self-recovery, it reflects the phase of acknowledging emotional dependency that must be broken to achieve clarity and independence.
		“I miss your touch some nights when I’m hollow.”	Conceptual	Describes vulnerability and the need to face the emptiness after loss. Recovery involves acknowledging this pain, but also finding healthy ways to fill that void, rather than returning to the source of the pain.
3.	Hold on	“Hold on, I need you to hold on”	Connotative	“Hold on” connotes resilience and hope. It symbolizes emotional endurance and the will to survive during difficult times, a vital step in

				self-recovery.
		“I need to make sure you know what that”	Collocative	Underlines the importance of communication and self-validation in the recovery process. The phrase implies a need for clarity and understanding of one’s self-worth or situation which is a key step in rebuilding boundaries and self-belief.
		“Take my hand and hold on.”	Conceptual	This is an invitation to seek and accept support. Conceptually, it represents the realization that recovery does not have to be done alone, and accepting help is a sign of strength, not weakness
		“Heaven is a place not too far away.”	Connotative	Connotatively, “Heaven” symbolizes peace, happiness, or an achievable goal. It provides hope that a better state (the end of recovery) is near and worth fighting for, maintaining motivation to keep going.
		“I know how it feels to be someone”	Social	This highlights the return of self-identify after potentially feeling “lost” within a relationship or struggle. Socially, it’s the rediscovery of one’s role and value in interaction with the outside world.
		“Hold on”	Thematic	The core theme of recovery: resilience. It is a mantra to endure through difficulties, asserting that the recovery requires time and emotional stamina.
4.	Off my face	“I’m off my face in love with you”	Affective	Expresses deep affection and vulnerability. Love is portrayed as a form of therapy, helping the speaker rediscover stability and comfort after emotional struggles.
		“But I’m forever ruined by you”	Affective	Expresses the deep feeling of permanent damage. In recovery, acknowledging this “ruin” is a crucial first step. Self-recovery is not about erasing the past, but accepting its
				impact and learning to live with it, finding comfort after emotional struggles.
		“Off my face”	Thematic	Thematically, this word implies a change in state of mind or a turning point. In self-recovery, it can refer to a moment of enlightenment or the rediscovery of focus, where the

				speaker begins to look forward after going through a phase of confusion or sadness.
5.	Anyone	“Love you the way that I want.”	Collocative	Signifies the return of autonomy and the establishment of healthy boundaries. Self-recovery often means redefining how to love (oneself and others) based on one’s own desires and well-being, not external compulsion or demands.
		“Lookin’ back on my life, you’re the only good I’ve ever done”	Social	While sounding dependent on someone else, socially it can be interpreted as acknowledging the value of a positive relationship as an anchor or motivation for recovery. This shows that accepting and appreciating goodness is a vital part of rebuilding.
		“Anyone”	Thematic	Thematically represents the universal search for connection and validation, in recovery, this theme shifts from seeking love from anyone to ultimately finding healthy, supportive love, which culminates in self-acceptance and self-love.

This section refines the interpretation of self-recovery by prioritizing linguistic analysis before extending it into psychological implications. Rather than interpreting each song individually, the discussion synthesizes meanings across songs to highlight recurring semantic patterns that collectively construct a recovery narrative. This approach ensures that interpretations remain grounded in textual semantics, while psychological recovery is presented as an analytical extension rather than an assumption.

From a conceptual meaning perspective, several lyrics across different songs share a literal semantic core related to presence, absence, and identity. For instance, *“Everybody knows my name now”* (*Lonely*) and *“I miss your touch some nights when I’m hollow”* (*Ghost*) are lexically straightforward statements describing fame and longing. Semantically, these expressions denote states of recognition and emptiness. The interpretation of these states as early indicators of self-recovery is an analytical inference, drawn by the researcher, based on Anthony’s theory that recovery begins with awareness of one’s condition. Thus, the recovery value does not reside inherently in the words themselves but emerges from their semantic depiction of psychological states.

In terms of connotative meaning, the album consistently employs words associated with endurance and transcendence, such as “*hold on*” and “*heaven*.” Across songs, these terms evoke associations of hope, persistence, and spiritual reassurance. Linguistically, these connotations are embedded in cultural and emotional associations attached to the words, not in explicit statements of healing. The connection to self-recovery is therefore interpretative: the repeated use of hopeful connotations suggests a semantic shift from despair to resilience, aligning with the recovery process of rebuilding motivation and meaning.

The social meaning across the album reflects relational tension rather than isolated emotional expression. Lines such as “*Everybody saw me sick, then it felt like no one gave a sht*”\* (*Lonely*) and “*I know how it feels to be someone*” (*Hold On*) encode social positioning, visibility, and empathy. Semantically, these lyrics convey roles within social contexts, celebrity, vulnerability, and shared experience. The recovery interpretation emerges when these social meanings are viewed collectively, suggesting that healing involves renegotiating one’s social identity and reconnecting with others, a process emphasized in Anthony’s recovery framework.

Affective meaning appears most strongly in expressions of love and vulnerability across songs like *Off My Face* and *Anyone*. Phrases such as “*I’m off my face in love with you*” and “*Love you the way that I want*” directly encode emotional intensity. Linguistically, these meanings are embedded in emotive diction and first-person expressions, making affective meaning textually evident. The link to self-recovery here is less inferential than in other categories, as the lyrics explicitly portray emotional surrender and emotional grounding, which are central components of emotional restoration.

The album also employs reflected meaning, particularly through the word “*ghost*.” Semantically, “ghost” carries multiple associated meanings—absence, memory, and lingering presence. This multiplicity allows the word to function as a linguistic symbol of unresolved emotion. The interpretation of “ghost” as a representation of emotional release and acceptance is an inferential step, grounded in the word’s associative semantic field rather than its literal definition.

Across all songs, collocative meaning is observed in the repeated co-occurrence of emotionally charged words such as *love*, *hold*, *need*, *you*, and *faith*. These habitual word pairings create a consistent semantic environment of intimacy and dependence. Rather than attributing recovery to individual lyrics, this repetition across the album suggests a patterned linguistic emphasis on connection as a stabilizing force, which supports the broader recovery narrative.

Finally, thematic meaning is constructed not through individual lyrics but through the album’s overall semantic progression. The movement from *Lonely* to *Anyone* reflects a thematic ordering of meanings, from isolation, through endurance and vulnerability, to acceptance and devotion. This progression is textually observable in shifts of lexical focus and emotional emphasis. The interpretation of this sequence as a recovery journey is a researcher-driven synthesis, justified by the cumulative semantic changes rather than by explicit statements of healing.

In summary, the self-recovery value in *Justice* is not always explicitly encoded in the lyrics but emerges through the interaction of semantic meanings across songs. By distinguishing between meanings embedded in the text and interpretations inferred through theoretical frameworks, this analysis demonstrates that recovery in *Justice* is linguistically constructed through patterns of meaning rather than isolated emotional declarations.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that self-recovery in Justin Bieber's *Justice* album is not merely conveyed through emotional themes, but is linguistically constructed through systematic semantic patterns. Rather than functioning as isolated emotional expressions, the lyrics collectively form a structured semantic trajectory that reflects stages of emotional struggle, self-awareness, resilience, and relational restoration. This supports contemporary perspectives in semantic music studies, which argue that meaning in song lyrics operates as a narrative system rather than a collection of individual sentiments.

From a semantic standpoint, conceptual meaning serves as the foundational layer of recovery representation. Bieber's use of literal and direct expressions to describe emotional states establishes semantic clarity before any symbolic interpretation occurs. Unlike figurative-heavy songwriting, these conceptual meanings anchor the listener in identifiable emotional realities. This finding aligns with Putri et al. (2022) and extends their argument by showing that conceptual meaning does not merely represent distress, but functions as the linguistic entry point of recovery. By explicitly naming emotional conditions, the lyrics linguistically enact the first phase of recovery: recognition and acknowledgment of internal states.

In comparison with earlier semantic studies that focus on figurative density (Layaly et al., 2023; Yunanda et al., 2021), this research highlights how semantic simplicity can be equally powerful in recovery narratives. The contribution here lies in demonstrating that recovery-oriented meaning does not depend solely on metaphorical complexity, but can emerge from transparent lexical choices that reduce emotional ambiguity.

Connotative meaning across the album contributes to recovery by gradually reframing emotional orientation. Rather than repeating descriptions of suffering, Bieber's connotative lexicon introduces associations of hope, endurance, and reassurance. When compared with Kaulika & Sakinah (2025), who emphasize figurative symbolism as a resilience tool, this study expands the discussion by showing that connotation in *Justice* operates cumulatively across songs, creating a semantic shift from despair to perseverance. In this sense, meaning functions as a recovery mechanism by subtly reorienting emotional interpretation without explicitly declaring healing.

Social meaning plays a crucial role in reconstructing identity through relational language. Bieber's conversational and intimate diction positions the speaker within a shared emotional space rather than an isolated internal struggle. This finding resonates with Picone (2024), but extends it by linking social meaning to recovery processes rather than listener engagement alone. Linguistically, social meaning allows the self to be renegotiated through connection, suggesting that recovery is not purely intrapersonal but socially mediated through language choices that invite identification and empathy.

Affective meaning functions as the emotional catalyst of recovery rather than its conclusion. Instead of signaling resolution, affective expressions foreground emotional intensity, instability, and vulnerability. Compared to studies that treat affective meaning as emotional climax (Cristina Diaz Gonzalez et al., 2023; Kim, 2023), this study argues that affective meaning in *Justice* represents emotional release that enables subsequent stabilization. Thus, meaning works psychologically by permitting emotional discharge, which is a prerequisite for recovery rather than its endpoint.

Reflected meaning, particularly through polysemous or symbolically loaded words, allows unresolved emotional experiences to remain linguistically present without being explicitly resolved. This aligns with Yunanda et al. (2021), yet the present study clarifies that reflected meaning does not automatically signify healing. Instead, it functions as a transitional semantic space where past emotional residues are acknowledged and gradually integrated. Recovery, therefore, is linguistically staged as an ongoing negotiation with memory rather than a definitive closure.

Collocative meaning marks a significant semantic shift toward agency. Recurrent word pairings associated with intention and decision-making signal a movement from emotional instability toward self-determination. Building on Croom (2015), this study demonstrates that collocation patterns in *Justice* reveal emerging psychological coherence, indicating that recovery manifests linguistically through stable and predictable semantic structures that contrast earlier emotional fragmentation.

Finally, thematic meaning operates at the album level rather than within individual lyrics. Unlike studies that interpret thematic meaning as repetition of motifs, this research emphasizes semantic progression. The ordering of emotional meanings across songs constructs a recovery narrative that is linguistically observable through shifts in lexical focus, emotional orientation, and relational stance. This confirms Shikaa (2024) and strengthens Sulastri (2025) claim by showing that thematic meaning functions as the organizing mechanism through which recovery becomes narratively intelligible.

Overall, meaning in *Justice* functions as a recovery mechanism through interconnected linguistic processes that gradually reorganize emotional experience into coherent narrative form. First, the naming of emotional states through conceptual clarity allows distress, vulnerability, and emotional absence to be explicitly articulated, marking the initial stage of recovery where internal conditions

are acknowledged rather than obscured. Second, recovery progresses through the reframing of emotional orientation, achieved via connotative and affective shifts that introduce associations of hope, endurance, and emotional release.

These semantic transitions enable emotional re-interpretation, allowing painful experiences to be linguistically repositioned within a more resilient emotional framework. Finally, identity reconstruction emerges through relational and thematic coherence, where social, collocative, and thematic meanings stabilize the speaker's sense of self by reconnecting emotional experience to relationships and consistent narrative patterns. Rather than presenting recovery as an abrupt resolution, *Justice* linguistically enacts healing as a gradual restructuring of meaning, in which emotional chaos is transformed into narrative coherence through repeated semantic negotiation.

In terms of disciplinary contributions, this study advances semantics by demonstrating that Leech's categories of meaning operate dynamically across multiple texts to construct psychological processes, rather than functioning as isolated or static interpretive tools. From a linguistic perspective, the findings reinforce the validity of popular music lyrics as rich linguistic data for examining identity construction, emotional discourse, and meaning negotiation within contemporary contexts. Psychologically, the study provides linguistic evidence that recovery processes are mediated through language, supporting narrative identity theories that emphasize meaning-making as a central mechanism of emotional healing and self-reconstruction.

## Conclusion

This study examined five selected tracks from Justin Bieber's *Justice* album—*Lonely*, *Ghost*, *Off My Face*, *Hold On*, and *Anyone*—through Geoffrey Leech's seven types of meaning to explore how self-recovery is linguistically constructed. The findings reveal that recovery is not explicitly stated but emerges through layered semantic patterns that progressively reorganize emotional experience into coherent meaning.

Rather than functioning independently, the songs collectively form a recovery narrative that begins with emotional recognition, moves through vulnerability and endurance, and culminates in relational grounding and renewed agency. This progression demonstrates that self-recovery in *Justice* is achieved not through lyrical resolution alone, but through systematic shifts in semantic emphasis across the album.

While this study offers valuable insights, it remains limited by its focus on a small selection of tracks and its emphasis on linguistic meaning without considering musical or listener-based dimensions. Future research may expand the dataset, integrate multimodal analysis, or incorporate psychological reception studies to further explore how linguistic meaning interacts with sound, performance, and audience interpretation.

In conclusion, this research affirms that song lyrics can function as linguistic spaces where emotional recovery is negotiated and reconstructed. By demonstrating how meaning operates as a mechanism of healing, this study contributes to broader interdisciplinary discussions on language, emotion, and identity in contemporary popular music.

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