

# GRAMMATICAL DEVIATIONS IN POPULAR ENGLISH SONG LYRICS: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PINK FLOYD'S "ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL, PART 2"

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the occurrence and function of grammatical deviations in popular music, focusing specifically on the iconic song "Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2" by Pink Floyd. While standard English language teaching (ELT) emphasizes prescriptive grammar, song lyrics often utilize non-standard structures for artistic and communicative purposes. The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the occurrence of negative concord and other grammatical deviations present in the lyrics, compare them with Standard British English (SBE), and analyze their stylistic functions. Using a qualitative descriptive method and content analysis approach, the researcher collected and categorized data from the song's textual lyrics. The findings reveal a prominent use of negative concord (double negation), such as the line "We don't need no education." Discussion of the results suggests that these deviations are not unintentional errors but are examples of poetic license used to signal rebellion, emphasize defiance against authority, and maintain musical rhythm. The study concludes that authentic materials containing non-standard grammar can be valuable pedagogical tools in ELT to help students distinguish between formal and informal registers.*

**Keywords:** Grammatical deviation, Pink Floyd, Song lyrics, Sociolinguistics, Double negation, Poetic license.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT), the definition of "grammatical correctness" is increasingly viewed through the lens of sociolinguistic variation rather than rigid adherence to a single standard. For decades, the pedagogical focus was dominated by Prescriptive Grammar, a framework that dictates linguistic rules for formal and professional discourse.

However, as Sadiqzade (2024) posits, the modern "harmonious path" to language mastery involves a deep engagement with Descriptive Grammar, which examines how speakers use English in artistic, emotional, and informal contexts.

One of the most potent vehicles for exposure to descriptive language is popular music. As an "authentic material," music serves as a linguistic bridge between the academic classroom and real-world communication. However, a recurring phenomenon in popular music is the presence of Grammatical Deviations—intentional breaks in standard syntax used to prioritize rhythm, rhyme, or emotional resonance. Recent research by Afifuddin et al. (2025) suggests that such linguistic creativity in music is not a sign of poor proficiency, but rather a sophisticated tool used to bypass syntactic constraints for cultural expression.

A landmark case of this phenomenon is Pink Floyd's 1979 anthem, *"Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2."* The song's core refrain, *"We don't need no education,"* violates Standard British English (SBE) through Double Negation. While prescriptive frameworks traditionally label this an "error," Ramadhania (2022) argues that in pop lyrics, such structures are utilized as Negative Concord to intensify a sentiment of refusal. Understanding these deviations is vital for students to develop Critical Language Awareness, allowing them to navigate the gap between "textbook English" and the expressive variations found in global media.

Despite the widespread use of songs in ELT, there remains a pedagogical tension regarding the "errors" found in lyrics. Many students struggle to reconcile strict classroom rules with the non-standard forms they encounter in iconic cultural artifacts. Furthermore, while previous studies have analyzed the thematic elements of rock music, there is a lack of up-to-date research focusing on the specific syntactic function of double negatives as a sociolinguistic tool. If these deviations are not analyzed academically, learners may fail to understand the difference between formal register and "Poetic License," leading to inappropriate language use in academic settings.

The research questions for this study are structured to provide a comprehensive linguistic and sociolinguistic investigation into the lyrics of *"Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2."* First, the study seeks to identify and categorize the grammatical deviations appearing in the lyrics, particularly those related to

syntax and negative concord. Following this identification, the research aims to analyze how these specific deviations structurally contrast with the prescriptive rules of Standard British English (SBE), providing a technical comparison between the "poetic" Usage and formal grammatical expectations. Finally, the study explores the sociolinguistic motivations behind the prominent use of double negation, specifically examining how this linguistic choice functions as a tool for expressing institutional rebellion and social identity within the song's thematic framework of educational critique. The objective of this research is to categorize the grammatical deviations in the selected song and analyze their stylistic purpose. By doing so, the study aims to prove that these "errors" are strategic linguistic choices designed to convey social resistance. This study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it expands the body of research on language variation in music as discussed by Purba et al. (2026). Practically, it follows the efficacy models of Annuri et al. (2025), providing teachers with a framework for using music to enhance students' listening comprehension and grammatical "noticing" skills. By deconstructing a famous "error," educators can transform a rock song into a sophisticated lesson on linguistic register and identity.

Song lyrics have long attracted the attention of linguists because they frequently employ non-standard linguistic forms for artistic and communicative purposes. One of the most common forms of grammatical deviation found in popular music is negative concord, also known as double negation. Unlike Standard British English (SBE), which generally prohibits multiple negative markers within a single clause, many songwriters intentionally use negative concord to strengthen emphasis, construct identity, and convey emotional intensity.

Ramadhania (2022) investigated the use of double negatives in fifteen English songs and found that negative concord appears frequently as a stylistic device rather than as a grammatical error. The study argues that songwriters deliberately employ double negatives to reinforce meanings and create stronger emotional expressions. However, the research mainly focused on identifying occurrences of double negatives and did not examine their ideological or sociolinguistic functions within a specific musical genre.

Research on linguistic creativity in music has also demonstrated that non-standard language forms often serve communicative and cultural purposes. Afifuddin et al. (2025) analyzed linguistic creativity in regional popular songs and concluded that deviations from standard language norms function as strategic tools for expressing cultural identity and artistic freedom. Nevertheless, the study focused primarily on code-switching phenomena and did not specifically discuss grammatical deviations such as negative concord.

Similarly, Purba et al. (2026) examined language variation in contemporary song lyrics and reported that linguistic deviations often reflect social identity and group membership. Their findings support the sociolinguistic perspective that language variation in music is meaningful rather than accidental. Despite this contribution, the study did not provide a detailed comparison between non-standard forms and Standard British English structures.

From a stylistic perspective, Crystal (2018) argues that artistic texts frequently manipulate grammatical conventions through poetic license. Such deviations enable authors and songwriters to achieve specific aesthetic effects, including rhythm, emphasis, and emotional impact. In rock music, grammatical deviations are often associated with expressions of rebellion, resistance, and opposition to social authority. Consequently, the study of grammatical deviations in rock lyrics offers valuable insights into the relationship between language, identity, and ideology.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of linguistic deviation and language variation in song lyrics. Ramadhania (2022) investigated the use of double negatives in English song lyrics and found that negative concord functions as a stylistic device rather than a grammatical error. However, the study did not examine the ideological meanings of negative concord or its role within the context of rock music. Afifuddin et al. (2025) focused on linguistic creativity in music and concluded that non-standard language serves important cultural and artistic purposes, although their study did not specifically address grammatical deviation or negative concord. Likewise, Purba et al. (2026) examined language variation in song lyrics and reported that linguistic variation reflects social identity and group membership. Nevertheless, their research did not provide a detailed comparison

between non-standard forms and Standard British English (SBE). Building upon these studies, the present research investigates negative concord in Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2* by combining grammatical analysis, comparison with SBE structures, and examination of its stylistic and sociolinguistic functions. Therefore, this study addresses the gaps identified in previous research and provides a more comprehensive understanding of grammatical deviation in classic rock music.

Although previous studies have investigated grammatical deviations, language variation, and linguistic creativity in song lyrics, limited research has specifically examined negative concord in classic rock music from a stylistic and sociolinguistic perspective. Existing studies generally focus on identifying linguistic deviations or discussing language variation in broader contexts without analyzing how negative concord functions as a linguistic strategy for expressing resistance and anti-authoritarian attitudes.

Furthermore, previous research rarely compares the non-standard grammatical forms found in song lyrics directly with Standard British English structures. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how negative concord operates simultaneously as a grammatical deviation, a stylistic resource, and a sociolinguistic marker of rebellion in rock music.

Therefore, this study focuses on the use of negative concord in Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2*. Specifically, it investigates the linguistic characteristics of negative concord, compares the identified forms with Standard British English, and explores their stylistic function in expressing resistance toward institutional authority. By doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of research on grammatical deviation in song lyrics while providing a more focused analysis of negative concord within the context of classic rock music.

Grammar is traditionally bifurcated into two competing ideologies: the prescriptive and the descriptive. Prescriptive grammar serves as a normative framework, establishing rigid "rules" for "correct" linguistic behavior, typically mandated in academic and professional spheres to ensure standardization. Conversely, Sadiqzade (2024) argues that a "harmonious path" to linguistic mastery

requires a shift toward Descriptive Grammar, which prioritizes observing how native speakers naturally use language across varying social contexts.

As noted by Crystal (2018), grammar is a "living system," not a static set of edicts. In the context of popular music, descriptive grammar almost always takes precedence. Artists utilize colloquialisms and non-standard syntax to achieve "authenticity," allowing them to bridge the gap between high-art performance and the relatable, everyday experiences of their audience. The deviation from standard syntactic norms in music is rarely a result of poor proficiency; rather, it is a deliberate exercise of Poetic License. This concept grants artists the freedom to manipulate language—altering pronunciation, syntax, or morphology—to preserve aesthetic elements like rhyme, meter, and emotional "hooks." Afifuddin et al. (2025) expand on this by asserting that linguistic creativity in music is a strategic tool for expressing cultural rebellion. By breaking syntactic constraints, songwriters can articulate specific moods or social stances that would be diluted by formal language. In Pink Floyd's work, poetic license is used to bypass the listener's logical "grammar filter," speaking directly to the audience's subconscious emotional response.

The most striking deviation in this study is the use of Double Negation, or Negative Concord. From a prescriptive standpoint, Swan (2016) clarifies that in Standard British English (SBE), two negatives logically cancel each other out, theoretically creating a positive statement. However, in sociolinguistic reality, double negatives are deeply rooted in working-class British dialects and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Ramadhania (2022) categorizes this structure as a pervasive "grammatical crime" in popular music, but notes its effectiveness in establishing a "street-level" or rebellious identity. Building on the theoretical contributions of Purba et al. (2026) regarding language variation, it can be argued that double negation acts as a sociolinguistic "shibboleth"—a marker of solidarity among those who exist outside the formal, educated elite. In *"Another Brick in the Wall,"* the double negative is not a mistake; it is a linguistic weapon against institutional authority.

The pedagogical significance of using non-standard lyrics is supported by the intersection of music and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. Music

acts as a powerful catalyst for lowering what Krashen termed the "Affective Filter," creating a low-stress environment conducive to learning. Sadiqzade (2024) demonstrates through recent efficacy studies that English songs significantly enhance listening comprehension by providing high-impact, authentic input. When students encounter a grammatical deviation in a catchy song, it triggers a "noticing" moment. According to the Noticing Hypothesis (Leow, Ronald, 2019), conscious awareness of the gap between a song's "error" and the textbook's "rule" is the primary driver of acquisition. This awareness allows learners to develop a nuanced understanding of Linguistic Register, teaching them that "correctness" is often determined by context—a crucial skill for achieving native-like fluency in a globalized world.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. This approach provides an objective, systematic, and in-depth description of the linguistic phenomena in Pink Floyd's *"Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2."* As a qualitative study, it focuses on the quality and context of the words and syntactic structures rather than numerical generalizations.

In this qualitative content analysis, the "respondent" or subject of study is the textual data itself. The primary data source is the full lyrics transcript of the 1979 song *"Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2,"* written by Roger Waters. To ensure the highest degree of reliability, the lyrics were cross-referenced against the original album liner notes (*The Wall*) and verified digital archives, including the official Pink Floyd discography and the Oxford Lyrics database.

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. To maintain objectivity, the researcher used several secondary analytical instruments, including the Standard British English (SBE) Framework. Specifically, the grammatical standards outlined in Swan's (2016) *Practical English Usage* were used as the benchmark for identifying deviations. Observation Checklist: A structured table used to categorize linguistic features (e.g., syntax, morphology, and negation). Sociolinguistic Theory: The theoretical frameworks of Hashim &

Zamsari (2025) and Afifuddin et al. (2025) were used to interpret the functions of the identified deviations.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the identified grammatical deviations were rechecked using Swan's (2016) framework of Standard British English. The researcher also compared the identified forms with findings reported in previous studies on negative concord and grammatical deviation in song lyrics. This triangulation process was conducted to ensure consistency between the interpretation of the data and existing linguistic theories.

The study was conducted through a systematic documentation procedure consisting of the following steps: Selection, choosing the specific song based on its historical and linguistic relevance to the theme of educational rebellion. Transcription: Converting the auditory data into a clear textual format for close reading. Data Reduction: Scanning the lyrics to isolate specific phrases and sentences that do not align with prescriptive SBE rules. Classification: Grouping the identified "errors" into linguistic categories, with a primary focus on double negation and ellipsis. Comparative Mapping: Aligning the deviant forms alongside their grammatically correct counterparts to visualize the structural contrast.

The data was analyzed using the Interactive Model of Analysis, which involves three concurrent flows of activity: Data Display; Organizing the findings into a comparative table to show the gap between the song's "poetic" language and standard grammar. Data Interpretation: Analyzing the deviations through the lens of Poetic License and Negative Concord, this step connects the linguistic data to the sociolinguistic motivations of rebellion and student identity. Conclusion Drawing and Verification; Synthesizing the findings to answer the research questions, ensuring that the interpretations are grounded in the newest literature (e.g., Sadiqzade, 2024) and the pedagogical implications for ELT as suggested by Khalil et al. (2024).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The most significant grammatical deviation identified in the lyrics is negative concord. In Standard British English, the expressions “We don't need no education” and “We don't need no thought control” would normally be rendered as

“We don't need any education” and “We don't need any thought control.” From a prescriptive grammatical perspective, the original lyrics violate standard rules governing negative constructions. However, from a descriptive linguistic perspective, such forms represent negative concord, a phenomenon commonly found in various non-standard English dialects.

The repeated use of negative concord creates a stronger sense of emphasis than the corresponding standard forms. Rather than functioning as logical double negatives, the constructions serve to intensify the speaker's rejection of the concepts being discussed. From a stylistic perspective, the use of negative concord contributes to the song's expression of dissatisfaction and resistance toward institutional authority. The non-standard grammatical form strengthens the emotional force of the lyrics and supports the rebellious tone that characterizes the song. Similar uses of negative concord have been reported by Ramadhania (2022), suggesting that this phenomenon is a common stylistic strategy in popular music.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of linguistic deviation and language variation in song lyrics. Ramadhania (2022) investigated the use of double negatives in English song lyrics and found that negative concord functions as a stylistic device rather than a grammatical error. However, the study did not examine the ideological meanings of negative concord or its role within the context of rock music. Afifuddin et al. (2025) focused on linguistic creativity in music and concluded that non-standard language serves important cultural and artistic purposes, although their study did not specifically address grammatical deviation or negative concord. Likewise, Purba et al. (2026) examined language variation in song lyrics and reported that linguistic variation reflects social identity and group membership. Nevertheless, their research did not provide a detailed comparison between non-standard forms and Standard British English (SBE). Building upon these studies, the present research investigates negative concord in Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2* by combining grammatical analysis, comparison with SBE structures, and examination of its stylistic and sociolinguistic functions. Therefore, this study addresses the gaps identified in previous research and provides a more comprehensive understanding of grammatical deviation in classic rock music.

The findings indicate that negative concord is the most prominent grammatical deviation found in the lyrics. The repeated use of the structure “don't + no” differs from Standard British English, which requires the use of the quantifier “any” following a negative auxiliary. In addition, the lyrics contain examples of ellipsis and informal lexical choices that contribute to the conversational and expressive nature of the song.

The identification of these "errors" serves as the primary evidence of the artist's use of Poetic License. While a prescriptive evaluation would suggest these lines imply a positive (i.e., "We *don't* need education"), the phonological emphasis and rhythmic beat confirm that the second negative is used for reinforcement, not cancellation.

As analyzed through the theoretical framework of Afifuddin et al. (2025), linguistic creativity in rock music is a strategic tool for cultural resistance. The use of non-standard grammar in this song contributes to the expression of dissatisfaction and resistance presented in the lyrics. The choir of school children singing these lines represents a collective expression of dissatisfaction toward aspects of formal education portrayed in the song. By intentionally using non-standard syntax, the lyrics strengthen the impression of resistance toward institutional authority and reinforce the song's critical message. Identity Construction: Following Hashim & Zamsari (2025), language variation is a key marker of social positioning. The double negative is historically associated with working-class or "non-elite" dialects. Using this register in a song about school helps distinguish the perspective of the students from that of institutional authority represented in the lyrics. From a musicological perspective, the double negative "*don't need no*" produces a percussive, hard-hitting dental sound (*d, n, n*) with greater acoustic power than the standard "*don't need any*". This suggests that the deviation functions as a deliberate stylistic choice that contributes to both the aesthetic and communicative impact of the song.

The findings of this study have profound implications for modern English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies. Traditionally, teachers might avoid such songs for fear of reinforcing "bad habits." However, according to the recent efficacy studies by Khalil et al. (2024), high-impact songs like this are essential for

lowering the Affective Filter when students connect emotionally to the music; their cognitive receptivity to complex grammatical concepts increases.

Furthermore, these lyrics provide a clear example of the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990). By presenting students with a line that sounds "cool" but is "grammatically wrong," teachers can facilitate a deeper understanding of Linguistic Register. It allows learners to observe that "correctness" is contextual; while a double negative is a powerful tool for a rock anthem, it remains inappropriate for a formal essay. As Sadiqzade (2024) emphasizes, a "harmonious path" to mastery involves understanding these nuances of language variation.

Ultimately, the study finds that the grammatical deviations in Pink Floyd's lyrics are not the result of linguistic deficiency but represent deliberate stylistic choices that contribute to the communicative purpose of the song. The expression "We don't need no education" functions as a powerful stylistic feature, as it effectively reinforces the emotional tone and thematic message of the song. This suggests that in the hierarchy of language use, communicative intent and emotional truth often supersede prescriptive accuracy in artistic discourse.

The phenomenon identified in this study is consistent with findings reported by Ramadhania (2022), who documented the use of negative concord in several English songs from different genres. This similarity suggests that negative concord is not unique to Pink Floyd's lyrics but represents a broader stylistic tendency within popular music.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the dominant grammatical deviation in Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2* is negative concord, particularly in the expressions "We don't need no education" and "We don't need no thought control." Compared with Standard British English, these constructions deviate from conventional negative structures through the use of multiple negative markers within a single clause. However, the findings indicate that the deviations function as deliberate stylistic devices rather than grammatical errors. The use of negative concord strengthens emphasis, enhances the emotional impact of the lyrics, and contributes to the song's expression of resistance. These findings suggest that song lyrics can serve as valuable authentic materials for helping learners understand the

distinction between standard and non-standard language use in different communicative contexts.

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