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# When / becomes we:

## how prototypically 'pop' are a band's lyrics after one breakup and two reunions?

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### Abstract

This study investigates how the two Take That reunions are reflected in their song lyrics and how this marks a noticeable step away from discourse styles traditionally associated with pop song lyrics. Previous studies have shown pop song lyrics to exhibit a set of prototypical features such as high frequencies of the words *you*, *I*, and *love*, which has often led to the conclusion that pop lyrics are usually perceived as highly clichéd and based on a limited set of stereotypical metaphors. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis, this article will show that while Take That's lyrics of the early years are very much in line with this description, they have since undergone some substantial changes with regard to their 'prototypicality' as pop lyrics. In line with the band's own new self-description as a group rather than five individuals, it will be shown that from the first reunion onwards, new participants have been introduced into the discourse (*we*, *they*), which are otherwise rare in pop lyrics. This change comes with a variety of new attributes, roles and metaphors, which have moved their lyrics away from prototypical pop music discourse. This study also aims to stress the potential of a linguistic, specifically a corpus-linguistic, approach to the genre of pop song lyrics. It will be argued that such an approach can reveal important developments in the overall structure of a text collection that can hint at substantial changes in the underlying discourse that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

**Keywords:** (corpus-)linguistics; metaphor; personal pronoun; song lyrics; stylistics

### Introduction

There have been surprisingly few systematic attempts to describe pop music lyrics as a specific text type, even though they are such an all-present genre of language in

our everyday lives. According to Kreyer and Mukherjee, 'Given this "communicative impact factor", it seems remarkable that the genre of pop song lyrics does not figure very prominently in the linguistic sciences, let alone corpus linguistics' (2007: 31).

This lack of research may be due to the heterogeneity of the genre itself. Certain subtypes of pop music have been studied more extensively, often because they are connected to a particular era, particular milieus or particular topics, notably blues (Monge 2001; Evans 2001; Springer 2001; van Rijn 2001), country and bluegrass (Jaret and Boles 1992; Tilton 2005; van Sickle 2005), and hip hop and rap (Clay 2008; Krohn and Suazo 1995). Few studies have dealt with pop lyrics more generally as a genre, and those that do have largely focused on a limited set of topics as represented in the discourse, particular Afro-American identity (e.g. Lamb 2001) and the representation of gender roles (Hyden and McCandless 1983; Clay 2008). There are a number of studies focusing on the use of pop lyrics in language teaching (Weinberger 2008; Lüke 2008; Murphey 1990, 1992).

Methodologically, the large majority of these studies works with theoretical approaches from the fields of cultural studies or narrative theory (cf. Nicholls 2007). Notable exceptions are the studies by Tim Murphey, who focuses on the use of pop song lyrics in the teaching of English as a foreign language based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of pop lyrics, thereby providing a thorough survey of the linguistic factors that mark pop lyrics as a text type (Murphey 1989, 1990, 1992). Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007) go an important step further, using a similar methodology, but contrasting pop lyrics against other genres of language, notably general spoken and written English. Thus they are able to single out factors that mark pop lyrics as a specific text type. The results from these two studies will be used as a reference point in the present study: the prototypical features of pop song lyrics as a genre, their 'linguistic markers', as found in previous studies, will be outlined and then compared to the lyrics of Take That songs, focusing on the presence and development of these prototypical features.

## **Previous research and methodology**

### **A corpus-linguistic approach to pop song lyrics**

Pop lyrics use, of course, the same linguistic means as other genres of language, but it has been shown that specific text types often display a specific distribution of these general means ('style markers'; cf. Enkvist 1973; Esser 1993; and along similar lines Bronckart *et al.* 1985). Quantitative analyses of compiled text corpora enable us to single out features that seem to be relatively frequent or infrequent in one text type compared to others, including clusters, strings, and prototypical multi-word constructions.

The two major comprehensive, corpus-based and quantitative approaches to pop lyrics are Murphey (1990) and Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007). Murphey's (1990) study is based on data compiled in 1987, using a random selection of the lyrics of the top fifty English songs from the *Music & Media* European Hot Singles chart (Murphey 1990: 21). The resulting corpus consists of 13,161 words. Kreyer's and Mukherjee's (2007) analysis is based on a pilot corpus of pop song lyrics, the Giessen-Bonn Corpus of Popular Music (GBoP), which consists of the lyrics of 27 of the top 30 albums from the US album charts of 2003, and includes 442 songs and approximately 176,000 words. Importantly, they compare the resulting data to the British component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB), which consists of 600,000 words of spoken and 400,000 of written English, including various subgenres (e.g. private conversations and broadcast interviews for spoken texts; newspaper reports and personal letters for written texts). Based on GBoP, pop lyrics generally seem to share more features with spoken rather than written language, albeit with some exceptions.

The analyses based on these two corpora single out a range of lexical and grammatical elements that 'show a conspicuous distribution' (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 44) in pop lyrics. The most important characteristics of pop lyrics that emerge as represented in GBoP as well as in Murphey (1990) are the following:

- an extremely high number of the personal pronouns *you* and *I*, including their various morphological variants (*me, my, your* etc.) (Murphey 1990: 36 and 62–63; Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 44)
- *love* as the most frequent content word, both as a verb and a noun in roughly equal proportions (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 46ff.; Murphey 1990: 47ff.). *Love* as a verb occurs predominantly with subject *I* and object *you*, resulting in the prototypical, probably stereotypical, string associated with pop lyrics *I love you*
- *heart* as another highly frequent content word and one of the most important metaphors of pop lyrics, in addition to the main metaphor *love* (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 50)
- frequent use of the present tense (Murphey 1990: 62).

The precise distributions and details of these findings will be discussed in the respective sections below, when used as a reference point for the development of Take That's song lyrics. In addition, various other features have been found, which will, however, not be regarded in this article due to reasons of space and relevance. Among these are

- a low average word length, even lower than in spoken English (as represented in ICE-GB) (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 44)
- a comparatively low type-token ratio (Murphey 1990: 34ff.), which means that pop lyrics, not surprisingly, appear to be more repetitive than other text types (notably written texts in Murphey's 1990 study). Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007: 45), however, find a higher type-token ratio in GBoP than in spoken ICE-GB, which would mean that pop lyrics are rather less repetitive than spoken language in general and which would make pop lyrics still more similar to written language as a text type in this aspect
- in comparison to spoken English in general, the very infrequent use of discourse markers such as *you know*, which is attributed to the 'written-ness' of pop lyrics in contrast to spontaneous spoken language (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 46)
- the use of deviant spellings (e.g. 'He was a sc8ter boi' in Avril Lavigne's song of the same name) (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 40)
- the comparatively frequent use of non-declaratives, i.e. questions, exclamations and imperatives (Murphey 1990: 62–63)
- the infrequent occurrence of conditional modal verbs (*would, should, could, might*); non-conditional modals (*can, will, going to*), on the other hand, show an average distribution (Murphey 1990: 662–63).

The song lyrics of Take That will be analysed in a similar way in the following sections. By means of a Take That corpus compiled as a database for the present study, the above-listed features and their developments will be investigated, in order to find out whether the band's lyrics have changed in the past 15 years with regard to their 'pop' characteristics.

## Methodology

The present study is based on a text corpus of Take That song lyrics that follows the design of GBoP, in order for the results to be comparable:

- The texts are either taken from the CD booklets or from song lyrics archives on the World Wide Web.
- If lyrics are taken from online resources, they are accepted only if at least two different archives provide identical results.
- The texts are formatted as .txt files in order to be used with the *Word-Smith Tools* text retrieval and analysis software.
- Repeated material, notably choruses, are left in for the quantitative analysis, but considered only once in the qualitative analysis.

In addition to these criteria, the lyrics of cover songs are left out, e.g. those of 'Everything Changes' and 'Relight my Fire'.

Since the leading research question of this study is whether or not there are changes in the chronological development of the band's lyrics, the resulting Take That corpus is divided into three subcorpora as representative of the three phases identifiable in the band's history:

- TT-I, representing the original band line-up in the early years, containing the lyrics of the albums *Take That and Party*, *Everything Changes* and *Never Forget*.
- TT-II, representing the years following the first reunion as a four-piece band, containing the lyrics of the albums *Beautiful World* and *The Circus*.
- TT-III, representing the recent five-piece band after the second reunion with Robbie Williams, containing the lyrics of the albums *Progress* and *Progressed*.

In the following section, the Take That corpus is analysed quantitatively for word frequencies in general and the frequencies of personal pronouns in particular, since these two aspects have been claimed to show characteristic distributions in pop song lyrics.

## The quantitative perspective: word frequencies

### The development of word frequencies in Take That's lyrics compared to GBoP

As described above, pop lyrics display a specific patterning of word frequencies, which distinguishes them from other text types, such as general spoken or written English. TT-I matches this pattern almost exactly, as Table 1 shows.

The list of the 20 most frequent words in TT-I is not only very similar to the one in GBoP; it also displays the key patterns to a greater extent: the proportion of the personal pronouns *I* and *you* (including *I'm*, *me*, *my*, and *your*) is higher and amounts to 15.4%, as opposed to 12.82% in GBoP. In addition, *love* as the most frequent content word also figures much more prominently as the fifth most frequent word, as opposed to the twentieth rank that it occupies in GBoP. Thus, it can be concluded that Take That's music lyrics in their early years are very much typical pop lyrics, with a high occurrence of the personal pronouns and the content word *love*, but also with regard to the other items on the list. Notably absent from TT-I is the personal pronoun *we*, which makes it into the top 23 words in GBoP, albeit only as the 22nd most frequent word.

Table 1: GBoP and TT-I word frequencies compared (keywords referred to in this study are in bold print)

N	GBoP			N	TT-I		
	Word	Freq.	%		Word	Freq.	%
1	<b>YOU</b>	6818	3.87	1	<b>YOU</b>	356	5.47
2	<b>I</b>	6662	3.78	2	<b>I</b>	324	4.98
3	THE	5607	3.18	3	THE	185	2.84
4	TO	3912	2.22	4	TO	151	2.32
5	AND	3863	2.19	5	<b>LOVE</b>	140	2.15
6	<b>ME</b>	3745	2.12	6	<b>ME</b>	118	1.81
7	A	3542	2.01	7	<b>MY</b>	104	1.60
8	IT	2514	1.43	8	AND	103	1.58
9	<b>MY</b>	2214	1.26	9	BE	93	1.43
10	IN	2002	1.14	10	A	89	1.37
11	THAT	1806	1.02	11	OF	77	1.18
12	<b>YOUR</b>	1592	0.90	12	SO	74	1.14
13	<b>I'M</b>	1568	0.89	13	IT	72	1.11
14	ON	1502	0.85	14	IN	68	1.05
15	OF	1439	0.82	15	THAT	66	1.01
16	ALL	1304	0.74	16	ON	52	0.80
17	FOR	1212	0.69	17	<b>YOUR</b>	52	0.80
18	SO	1206	0.68	18	FOR	50	0.77
19	BE	1196	0.68	19	<b>I'M</b>	48	0.74
20	<b>LOVE</b>	1142	0.65	20	IS	48	0.74

The absence of *we* in TT-I is one of the two most important features that are about to change as we progress to the next phase in the band's lyrics, TT-II, which covers the years after the first reunion as a four-piece.

Table 2 compares these two phases and shows that *we* is not only introduced into the list of the most frequent words in TT-II, but that it also figures very prominently from the start.

There are various developments starting in this phase that will prove to be crucial in the development of the band's lyrics. First, we can see a decline in percentage of almost all the personal pronouns, most importantly in the first person singular: *I* drops two ranks to fourth position and, more importantly, loses one third of its percentage in the corpus. *My* loses a quarter of its percentage, while *me* remains relatively stable. The second person pronouns (*you* and *your*) maintain their frequencies, despite a small loss. Overall, these two groups of pronouns drop to 11.47%, as opposed to 15.4% in TT-I and even slightly below their proportion in GBoP (12.82%). Secondly, as already mentioned, *we* is introduced as a participant,

which was notably absent in the list of most frequent words in TT-I. The quantitative and qualitative development of this pronoun (including its other forms *us*, *our(s)* and *ourselves*) will be discussed in detail below. Thirdly, *love*, which is the most frequent content word in GBoP and in TT-I, is absent in the TT-II subcorpus. A 'newcomer' in the list of most frequent words in TT-II is *just* (and also *can*, which is 22nd in the word frequency list). These two are very much connected with the construction of *we* as a concept in the band's lyrics. This aspect will be discussed in the next section.

Table 2: TT-I and TT-II word frequencies compared

N	TT-I			N	TT-II		
	Word	Freq.	%		Word	Freq.	%
1	<b>YOU</b>	356	5.47	1	<b>YOU</b>	307	4.25
2	<b>I</b>	324	4.98	2	THE	283	3.92
3	THE	185	2.84	3	TO	250	3.46
4	TO	151	2.32	4	<b>I</b>	216	2.99
5	<b>LOVE</b>	140	2.15	5	A	178	2.47
6	<b>ME</b>	118	1.81	6	<b>ME</b>	147	2.04
7	<b>MY</b>	104	1.60	7	AND	134	1.86
8	AND	103	1.58	8	<b>WE</b>	128	1.77
9	BE	93	1.43	9	ALL	121	1.68
10	A	89	1.37	10	IT	94	1.30
11	OF	77	1.18	11	THAT	91	1.26
12	SO	74	1.14	12	<b>MY</b>	90	1.25
13	IT	72	1.11	13	FOR	85	1.18
14	IN	68	1.05	14	IT'S	85	1.18
15	THAT	66	1.01	15	IN	82	1.14
16	ON	52	0.80	16	ON	80	1.11
17	<b>YOUR</b>	52	0.80	17	<b>YOUR</b>	68	0.94
18	FOR	50	0.77	18	SO	65	0.90
19	<b>I'M</b>	48	0.74	19	IS	64	0.89
20	IS	48	0.74	20	JUST	62	0.86

The introduction and prominence of *we* in TT-II is continued and increased in TT-III, as Table 3 shows.

Generally, the trends started in TT-II are continued and reinforced in TT-III: *we* gains more importance and even overtakes *I*. The *I* and *you* group of pronouns lose further ground: their total percentage is now 6.99%, about half of the proportion in GBoP and even less than half of the one in TT-I, continuing the downward trend started in TT-II.

Table 3: TT-II and TT-III word frequencies compared

TT-II				TT-III			
N	Word	Freq.	%	N	Word	Freq.	%
1	<b>YOU</b>	307	4.25	1	THE	272	4.85
2	THE	283	3.92	2	<b>YOU</b>	161	2.87
3	TO	250	3.46	3	TO	129	2.30
4	<b>I</b>	216	2.99	4	<b>WE</b>	127	2.27
5	A	178	2.47	5	<b>I</b>	124	2.21
6	<b>ME</b>	147	2.04	6	AND	113	2.02
7	AND	134	1.86	7	ALL	91	1.62
8	<b>WE</b>	128	1.77	8	A	85	1.52
9	ALL	121	1.68	9	IT	75	1.34
10	IT	94	1.30	10	WHAT	73	1.30
11	THAT	91	1.26	11	OF	65	1.16
12	<b>MY</b>	90	1.25	12	WHEN	60	1.07
13	FOR	85	1.18	13	<b>ME</b>	57	1.02
14	IT'S	85	1.18	14	<b>LOVE</b>	56	1.00
15	IN	82	1.14	15	WAS	52	0.93
16	ON	80	1.11	16	<b>YOUR</b>	50	0.89
17	<b>YOUR</b>	68	0.94	17	SO	48	0.86
18	SO	65	0.90	18	IN	47	0.84
19	IS	64	0.89	19	FOR	45	0.80
20	JUST	62	0.86	20	THAT	45	0.80

In contrast to TT-II, however, *love* is reintroduced into the list of most frequent words, and to a rather significant extent. A qualitative analysis of this metaphor, which is so important in pop lyrics in general, will show, however, that the concept undergoes a drastic change with regard to the way it is constructed as a metaphor.

There are other significant changes in TT-III that not only mark it as distinct from the band's previous lyrics, but also move it further away from prototypical pop lyrics in general. For instance, the interrogative words *what* and *when* make it into the frequency list, suggesting that open questions rather than statements are important in the band's discourse. This aspect is linked to both the construction of *we* and the use of the key metaphor *love*, as the qualitative analysis in the section, 'The metaphor *love*', below, will show.

To sum up, a purely quantitative analysis of *Take That's* lyrics by means of word frequency lists shows the following three developments: first, the personal pronouns *I* and *you* (including their object and possessive forms) decline continuously through the three phases, although they started out as even more frequent in TT-I



than in GBoP. Secondly, TT-II introduces *we* into the band's discourse. Thirdly, TT-III introduces question words into the discourse, and generally moves the band's lyrics further away from what we can consider 'prototypical' pop lyrics based on the word frequencies in GBoP.

These conclusions can be confirmed when we have a closer look at the quantitative development of all personal pronouns across the three subcorpora. Figure 1 shows the development of the five pronouns groups, including all forms, i.e. 'I' includes *I*, *me*, *my*, *mine*, and *myself*, and the other pronouns include their various forms respectively. It becomes evident that *I* and *you* consistently decline, whereas *we* and *they* increase in frequency per thousand words. The third person singular pronouns *he* and *she* remain relatively stable. It also shows that both the decrease of the prototypical pronouns *I* and *you*, and the rise of *we*, all started in TT-II, whereas it is only the more frequent use of *they* that starts in TT-III, the second reunion. A notion of *we* thus seems to have loomed much earlier than the 'proper' (i.e. complete) second reunion, but a concept of the agents 'outside' ('they') seems to have started only in the third phase.

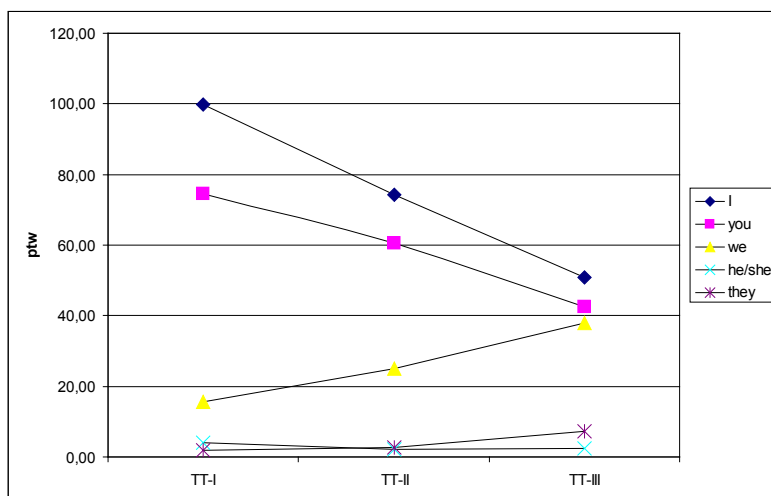


Figure 1: Quantitative development of personal pronouns (per thousand words)

These observations are in accordance with how the band have described their own self-image since the first reunion. Their identity as a 'we' rather than just four or five individuals becomes apparent in many interviews after the first reunion as a four-piece. Linking this identity to the role of outside forces as an influence is an aspect that seems to become more significant after the second reunion with Robbie Williams, in which shifting responsibilities to protagonists outside the

band seems to have been an important step in dealing with problems and conflicts that had occurred before and after their first breakup in the 1990s.

Since the development of *we* and *they* as new protagonists in the band's lyrics (and their story as a whole) turns out to be one of the major changes in the analysis of the band's song texts as a text type, the following section will deal with these two innovations and their development in more detail.

## **The qualitative development of personal pronouns: who are *we* and *they*?**

### **The development of *we***

*We* in TT-I. *We* is a comparatively infrequent participant in the discourse in TT-I, as shown in the previous section. In this phase, it usually refers to the *you* and *I* combined, the classic protagonists of pop lyrics, and it is primarily positively connotated and usually associated with love.

1. It feels so nice to be with you / Us two, we feel like a glove
2. I need you so bad / And when we talk can you understand my feelings
3. Everything changes but you / We're a thousand miles apart / And I still miss you
4. Looking back we're the only couple still together

Often, *we* refers to something in the future and appears in a context of hope and stability (contextual keywords are underlined):

5. And we're still so young and we hope for more
6. Surely we must be in sight of the dream we long to live
7. Hand in hand under this rainbow we can always stay the same
8. Everything changes around us / (Baby don't U cry) / We will be the same as before
9. And we'll be together, this time is forever / We'll be fighting and forever we will be / So complete in our love / We will never be uncovered again

This construction of the future is usually very optimistic, even if sometimes phrased in open or neutral terms:

10. Maybe we'll make it together tonight
11. I don't wanna let go / So maybe we can change the way we feel / For love
12. The chances are you'll be there too some day / We'll never know, let's hope

*We* in the past is also usually positive and refers to good aspects of a relationship that still goes on or that is in the process of being restarted:

13. Hope they can look back and smile just like we have done
14. Let's take a walk and reminisce about / The feelings we used to feel
15. We were strong and survived the storm
16. Can the ecstasy we found here / Be re-claimed as yours and mine
17. We need to hold on to all the times we spoke of love

Interestingly, negative contexts never appear for the future *we* in this subcorpus, but when they do, *we* is associated with vulnerability, missed chances and loss within a relationship.

18. Why's life never easy or do we make it hard for ourselves
19. For love, and talk the way we used to talk / Till we both know what we've lost
20. We sit and talk all night, still you never seem to lose your height
21. Did the love we had between us / Miss the road to paradise

The only contexts in which *we* does not seem to refer primarily to a relationship occur in the song 'Never Forget':

22. We've come so far and we've reached so high / And we've looked each day and night in the eye

It has to be kept in mind, though, that all occurrences of *we* are theoretically ambiguous as to their referents. After the first reunion, however, the *we* that explicitly refers to someone else than *you and I* becomes much more frequent.

*We in TT-II.* *We* is introduced as a quantitatively significant agent in TT-II, so this phase deserves some more thorough analysis, since the construction of *we* is as a protagonist.

*We* is more or less equally referred to in the past and in the present, with about an eighth of occurrences (12.5%) referring to the future (see Table 4).

Table 4: The use of tenses with personal pronoun *we*

Time/tense	Frequency	%
Future	8	12.50
Past	26	46.88
Present	26	40.63

The construction of *we* differs drastically between past and present. The present *we* is primarily constructed in a negative context of uncertainty, whereas the past is primarily depicted as positive, even though it is often combined with a sense of retrospective re-evaluation.

The negative connotations of the present *we* can be observed in the verbs it collocates with: *fall (down), grieve, run out of time, divide, have separate lives, die, are so complicated, make it so frustrating*. A sense of uncertainty becomes apparent in the highly frequent collocation with *if (only)*: *if we try, if we only learn to listen, if we only start believing, if our arms were reaching out, if our words could only bridge the doubt*.

Very often this is accompanied with a sense of passiveness:

23. It's only love that pulls us through

Positive contexts for *we* are the ones that refer to humankind as a whole or unambiguously to the band members as a group, rather than the *we* that refers to the classic pop song protagonists *you* and *I*. In these cases, *we* collocates with positive verbs such as *look to the sky, breathe air, lay down, believe, belong, realize that the crowd is listening, start rehearsing every scene*. In these contexts, there is a high frequency of *we all* (stressing the referent of *we* as the new topic, humankind as a whole).

Along the same line, the future *we* is similarly positive as in TT-1, but with a more noticeable stress on positive potential rather than certainty, reinforced by the frequent collocation with modal verbs, notably *can* and *could*:

24. we can light up the sky

25. we can make a start

26. we can play a part

27. we can ride on a star

28. we can rule the world

29. we can work it out

30. Today this could be the greatest day of our lives ... / Tonight this could be the greatest night of our lives / Let's make a new start, the future is ours tonight

There is only one negative future case of *we*, interestingly about the chance/opportunity of these things to happen.

31. Will we lose this chance again?

In contrast to the notions of uncertainty and defeat associated with the present, and the notion of open potential associated with the future, *we* in the past is con-

structed as predominantly positive. *We* occurs very frequently in the past, and often collocates with *used to*:

- 32. Where are the stars?/The one that we used to call ours
- 33. We used to laugh till we fell down
- 34. We used to walk Mancunian Way
- 35. We used to think we were the bomb

Negative or at least neutral constructions of the past *we* usually involve something positive that only appears negative in retrospective, often with a connotation of 'ignorance is bliss':

- 36. All the things we had and never understood
- 37. All the talks we had never did no good

Thus, it emerges that even though *we* as an agent is introduced in this phase of the band's history, its construction is very much based on the past, which is constructed as something overwhelmingly positive, with some negative aspects appearing only in retrospective. The identity of the present *we* is largely constructed in terms of defeat, uncertainty and, at best, potential, rather than in terms of some clearly defined status or character. The uncertainty that is implied by this stress on potential rather than existing identity becomes even clearer in TT-III.

*We in TT-III: between omnipotence and doom.* In TT-III the association of *we* with uncertainty and positive potential in the future is most explicit, but also most extreme as to the potential outcomes. It usually revolves around the concept of power. The future *we* either faces a future of powerlessness:

- 38. So don't start thinking we can start again
- 39. But the truth is more than we'll ever comprehend
- 40. We'll get a five minute warning for divine intervention
- 41. We'll get nothing done under electric sun
- 42. We'll be bionic and beyond the circuits of our minds

Or it faces a future of fulfilling its positive potential and exerting power:

- 43. We'll be practising our politics / Defending all our policies
- 44. I'm feeling happy now I'm feeling immortal / We'll live forever now
- 45. They'll run so hard we'll tear the ground away
- 46. We will meet you where the lights are / The defenders of the faith we  
are

The present likewise revolves around the issue of power, but in contrast to the future, the majority of cases paint a negative picture of insecurity:

- 47. But we don't know where we're from
- 48. We're not wise at all. It's getting harder
- 49. We're not sure where the fallout blows
- 50. So answer me, where do we go from here?

This notion of insecurity is reinforced by a sense of running out of time and living in a crucial moment without much time to do anything that will give things a positive turn:

- 51. It's just a fraction of time / Until we move into reverse / Can feel the pressure
- 52. There's no time for us, no time for us until we're out of time
- 53. My greatest fear is / we're just wasting tears / wasting several years
- 54. Do you understand / We don't have too much time here
- 55. And time it travels far too fast / We're not too far we're down here

With regard to who or what is responsible for this difficult situation, some cases involve negative forces from outside ('they', see below), but it is mostly *we* that is constructed as the dark and destructive force itself:

- 56. We are the virus that we talk about
- 57. We're all, we're all guilty now
- 58. And we burn the bridges we're crossing over / Just to see the firelight
- 59. Here we come now on a dark star

The positive side of this potential occurs only infrequently and involves notions of being powerful and having one's faith in one's own hands:

- 60. We're all free to fight

With regard to the past *we*, the aspect of powerlessness and passiveness, which emerges in TT-II and is strongly connected to the emergence of *they* as an outside force, becomes the primary aspect in TT-III:

- 61. We were the foolish fearless
- 62. Never knowing the cost of what we paid / Letting someone else be strong
- 63. We did what we were told in our lives
- 64. We were drawn to whoever could keep us together

Positive contexts occur, but infrequently, and they echo the notions expressed in TT-II: a *we* living in a dream world, full of awe, 'between the stars':

- 65. When we were young / When everything was what it seemed ... When  
we adored the fabulous
- 66. We became the parade on the streets that we once cleaned
- 67. And every day was how we dreamed
- 68. Back then we were like cavemen / But we met the moon and the stars

It is noticeable from these examples and from the texts as a whole that the possibility of interpreting *we* as referring to the members of the band or to humankind as a whole, in addition to the classic pop lyrics interpretation of *you and I*, becomes more and more likely in TT-II and even more so in TT-III. The exact nature of its identity, however, remains obscure and ambivalent throughout the two phases in which it represents an important protagonist in the band's lyrics. In TT-II it is largely constructed on the basis of the past, while the present and future identity is characterized only in terms of its potential and possibilities rather than in terms of existing features or any definable status. In TT-III, in which *we* plays an even bigger role, the glorious past is partially redefined as a phase of powerlessness and passiveness, whereas the present and future *we* is constructed as an active and powerful force, which is, however, ambiguous as to its exact nature: *we* is either the positive force that will save the world, or the negative force that will destroy everything around it. These observations shed an interesting light on the band's self-image after the second reunion: after what had happened in the past, one might detect correspondingly ambivalent feelings as to the outcome of this project: that the band might become extremely successful once again, or that things might go horribly wrong. Either way, given that this new identity as *we* seems to be very important in the band's self-image, its precise status and characteristics are left surprisingly undefined or at least highly ambiguous.

Since the construction of *we*, however ambiguous it may be, comes with the introduction of *they* as a new protagonist, the next subsection will look at this innovation (which it is with regard both to Take That's lyrics in particular and to pop music lyrics as a text type in general) in more detail.

### **The introduction of *they***

*They* is hardly present as a protagonist in TT-I and TT-II, and only in the latter is it constructed as an agent that can possibly intrude into the pop lyrics world of *me and you*. Accordingly, in TT-I, *they* when referring to people is constructed as someone 'outside', who is just 'there' and has no relation to *me and you*:

- 69. Hope they can look back and smile just like we have done
- 70. What can I do? I tell you baby they [the others] don't mean a thing

If *they* are put in a negative light in this phase, it is usually in the context of ignorance:

- 71. If only they all knew

Among the low number of occurrences of *they* in this phase, a significant number of cases refers to inanimate referents, and thus not to actual agents in the first place:

- 72. Just understand that things are not as they seem
- 73. Your promises have never been anything you made them seem

This is still true for TT-II, in which *they* does not increase in frequency yet. About half of the occurrences refer to inanimate objects:

- 74. Tell me your secrets, I'll keep them safe
- 75. All of the miles of words we've spoken, all of the lines that got away /  
Didn't we take the time to say them all?

In others, *they* refers to human beings that can hardly, however, count as agents. *They* are usually people who try to employ a negative force on *us* (the *us* that can now refer to either *you and me*, the band, or humankind as whole), but who do not succeed and thus prove to be ineffective:

- 76. They tried to stop her / She just got stronger
- 77. They gave us the keys to the city but they don't fit anything

In TT-III, *they* gains more distinct features as a protagonist. *They* most frequently refers to a destructive force, either in the form of an active, usually animate, present danger or in the form of a past danger that has been neutralized:

- 78. We were holding back the flood / They said we'd never dance again
- 79. We're not too far we're down here / Before they take it from our hands
- 80. They say nothing / Deny everything / And make counteraccusations
- 81. But if I've done my job / They won't wanna mess with you
- 82. There was more of them than us / Now they'll never dance again

*They* also refers to the 'unknowing' masses, yet infrequently:



- 83. The monkeys learnt to build machines / They think they'll get to heaven through the universe
- 84. At Fulham Broadway station I see them every day all day / Download a little meditation

Only infrequently, *they* refers to someone or something neutral, inanimate or passive:

- 85. And they checked my pulse and it gave them hope
- 86. And all the animals in the park / Are waiting for their dinner to come
- 87. The pretty things / So collectable / Why not collect them all

The innovation of *they* as a relatively uncommon protagonist in pop lyrics is thus closely linked to the construction and development of *we*. In TT-I *they* are not part of reality as represented in the lyrics since this reality is largely defined by *we* (usually meaning *you and I*), and the same goes for TT-II, even though the more ambivalent construction of *we* would permit the existence of outside forces, but constructs the more complex nature of *we* largely on the basis of conflicting forces inside this narrow dimension rather than involving other participants. Only in TT-III does *they* represent a participant of reality that is linked to the complex nature of *we* and contributes an overwhelmingly negative, usually powerful and threatening force, which is closely linked to the construction of *we* in the past. This confirms the conclusion of the previous section that the redefinition of agents and their roles occurring in the band's lyrics since their first reunion focuses to a large extent on the past and the analysis of the band's story, which is the aspect largely responsible for the increasing differences we can observe between the band's lyrics and pop lyrics in general.

This retrospective analysis of their own past is, however, not the only factor responsible for the changes to traditional pop lyrics introduced since the first reunion of the band. The next section will show that another set of changes, those involving the two main metaphors of pop lyrics *love* and *heart*, is based on different underlying developments that do not so much involve changing frequencies but a changing use of these two prototypical stylistic markers of pop lyrics.

## **The key pop metaphors *heart* and *love***

Identifiable metaphors have been shown to be very important in pop lyrics: Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007) demonstrate that the uses of the key role metaphors *love* and *heart* occur within an extremely limited range of constructions and collocations and 'represent excessively used clichés (and are thus easily accessible to even the most casual listener' (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 51). Both *love* and *heart*

occur in all three phases of *Take That* lyrics, but they undergo significant changes in use and construction from TT-II onwards.

### **Heart as a metaphor**

The prototypical uses of *heart* in pop lyrics, as described in Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007: 50) are the following (with prototypical collocations underlined): A *heart* is

- a vulnerable entity: 'you broke my mother's heart'
- an entity that can be possessed by others: 'the thief who stole my heart'
- a human being: 'my heart smiles'
- a location/vessel: 'nobody, nowhere holds the key to your heart'
- a block of ice/piece of rock: 'and melt your cold cold heart'.

In TT-I, *heart* is used in a very limited subset of these available metaphors. It is either a vulnerable entity:

88. Another crack in my heart
89. However you break my heart / Somebody else will break yours too
90. Even though I have broken your heart / Will you still love me?

Or it is a location/vessel:

91. You will always have a place in my heart
92. It won't be long now till your heart is open wide

In TT-II, the range of metaphors is extended, but stays within the one found in pop lyrics in general. It includes the two constructions found in TT-I, i.e. a *heart* is a vulnerable entity in (93) or a vessel in (94)-(96):

93. If love is truth then let it break my heart
94. This is the life we've been given / So open your heart and start loving
95. You'll always be a part of me / And in my heart you'll always be
96. Oh sweet misery / Fill my heart up and pour it all over me

In addition to these, a *heart* can be possessed by others:

97. [A beautiful day] A beautiful way to lose your heart
98. Keeping your heart in my pocket / Hope to God that I don't drop it

And, finally, a *heart* is constructed as having characteristics of a human being:

99. If there's something in your heart that tells you to stop
100. My heart is numb, has no feeling

In TT-III, the construction of the *heart* metaphor changes completely. Of the prototypical uses, only the 'heart as a human being' is used:

- 101. Why don't you teach your heart to feel
- 102. Don't start thinking with your heart again
- 103. Just listen to your heart /Not the voices in your head

These examples overlap with a category of the construction of the *heart* metaphor that covers all other cases, in which a *heart* does not comply with any of the traditional metaphors. It is constructed as a positive force, usually contrasted with the head, as in (103), and collocates with positively connoted adjectives:

- 104. You're in a room with a rock star / Only I play the good parts of a kind heart
- 105. Unload my love like a looter / I need some gas and a kick start for a good heart

This construction of *heart* as a positive force contrasts with the prototypical negative construction of 'a heart is a block of ice/piece of rock' (see above).

To sum up, the prototypical pop metaphor *heart* undergoes a significant development in the three phases of the band's lyrics. Whereas TT-I uses *heart* in a restricted set of typical uses, TT-II extends this set but stays within the submetaphors available and recognisable as 'prototypically pop'. It is in TT-III that this range of submetaphors is entirely left aside and *heart* is used in completely new contexts. The conclusion here is that the band continues to use a recognisable pop metaphor, but changes its underlying metaphorical structure. The next subsection will show that a similar development occurs with the second and most frequent pop metaphor, *love*.

### The metaphor *love*

*The use of love as a noun.* *Love* can be used both as a noun and as a verb, and occurs in roughly equal proportions in GBoP. *Love* as a noun is a leitmotif that can govern lexical choices throughout a whole text. Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007) find that a large majority of pop lyrics revolve around the main metaphor LOVE IS AN UNPLEASANT THING (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 52), involving submetaphors such as

- love is something that hurts your body or soul
- love is a sword or a fire that burns you
- love is an opponent in a fight
- love is a lie, a fickle thing or a cloud.

As a metaphorical superstructure, LOVE IS AN UNPLEASANT THING thus triggers the use of collocations that are in line with this main metaphor: for instance, if the submetaphor LOVE IS SOMETHING THAT HURTS governs a text, the occurrence of verbs such as *to hurt*, *to wound*, *to mar*, *to scar* can be predicted (see also Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 53).

In line with the prototypical uses found in GBoP, the noun *love* is primarily constructed as an unpleasant thing in TT-I, frequently in the collocation with the verb *to hurt*:

- 106. Tell me why you wanna hurt me / Is this the way that love has got to be
- 107. your games are hurting me / So why did I ever fall in love with you

Love as an unpleasant thing is also often evoked by the frequent occurrence of verbs that denote the possibility of loss, or the necessity of efforts for love to be saved:

- 108. What's the point in love when you have to give it up
- 109. Love ain't here anymore / It's gone away, to a town called yesterday
- 110. I can make it, I know I can / I can save this love forever
- 111. Now girl don't go and throw our love away
- 112. That every time I reach for love / It always runs away

In some instances, *love* is put in a context of (self-)deception, evoking the submetaphor LOVE IS A LIE/CLOUD/FICKLE THING. In most of these cases *love* collocates with the pretext *I thought*:

- 113. I always thought this love was so strong / So alone, so lost in the dark
- 114. I thought that I saw love in your eyes / But all the promises you made were not to be
- 115. I thought I found love with somebody else's girl

In far fewer cases, *love* is a pleasant thing, and only very rarely is it constructed as something stable:

- 116. Looking back we're the only couple still together / Even then I knew this love would be forever

In these occurrences, it collocates with positive adjectives and nouns, such as *sweet* and *heaven*, as well as words denoting security and certainty (in contrast to the examples above, in which loss and deception governed the context):

117. On the wings of love I found heaven, sweet heaven baby  
 118. Sure so sure that it's sweet love I found  
 119. And when I find a place for me to keep my sweet love / Then I will leave  
 it there forever more

In other positive contexts, *love* is constructed as a lifesaver, or anchor (cf. 'wings' in (117)):

120. Hangin' onto your love  
 121. then you rescued me baby

As mentioned above, *love* rarely occurs as a metaphor in TT-II. The noticeable change in its constructions, however, is that positive connotations predominate in this phase, and *love* is often associated with stability, evoking the 'anchor' metaphor that was also present in TT-I:

122. Love will stand and never break  
 123. It's only love that pulls us through  
 124. I am breathing, believing / The love is always there

*Love* as an unpleasant thing is rarer, but does still occur:

125. Just have a little patience / I'm still hurting from a love I lost  
 126. Ain't no sense in love  
 127. Love is never easy unless it's in a movie

A new element in the use of this metaphor, however, involves questions as to the real character of *love* in the first place, in which cases *love* is constructed as something ambiguous or undefined, an aspect that was never raised in the earlier data:

128. Give me your love mixed up with sin  
 129. So many truths, too many lies / Making love can be so crazy  
 130. I'd write a long love song with no meaning and hope nobody would hear

This issue is explicitly addressed in 'What is love?', a whole song dedicated to the very question of defining love in the first place, with a variety of metaphors that do not belong to any of the prototypical ones associated with *love* in general pop lyrics: *Love is a truth, a fear, a rose for my valentine, only words, a game, a pain, a cure, science, faith, a reason to fall to your knees and die*. This clearly marks the redefinition of *love* as distinct from the submetaphors available in pop lyrics, which is continued in TT-III albeit without the ambivalence and uncertainty associated with it in TT-II.

In TT-III, *love* is primarily constructed as something stable, something that a person possesses and gives freely to others. The risk of loss, that was omnipresent in TT-I and still occurred in TT-II, is largely absent in this phase:

131. Shouting love at the world
132. I wish that beggars were choosers / Unload my love like a looter
133. My friends, my dear, my love, my God

In only one instance, the ambiguity that played such an important part in the construction of the *love* metaphor in TT-II is evoked:

134. All of that distance, 'cause I fell in love with the enemy

In conclusion, *love* as a prototypical pop metaphor undergoes a similar development as *heart*: it is still used to a similar extent in all three phases, but the underlying metaphorical structure changes radically from the original 'love is an unpleasant thing' via 'love is an ambiguous thing' to 'love is a pleasant thing', to the extent that the uses associated with pop lyrics in general are eventually entirely absent. In contrast to *heart*, however, this change starts in TT-II and is then continued in TT-III. This strategy of continuing to use a recognisable pop metaphor but changing its metaphorical structure can also be observed in the construction of *love* as a verb.

*Love as a verb.* When *love* is used as a verb, the two participants involved, i.e. the subject and object of *to love*, are of relevance in a linguistic analysis of this metaphor. As can be seen in Table 5, pop lyrics as represented in GBoP use only part of the possible range of potential constructions of this verb.

Table 5: Absolute and relative frequencies of complementation types of *love* in GBoP and ICE-GB (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 47)

GBoP			ICE-GB		
	Abs. freq.	Rel. freq.		Abs. freq.	Rel. freq.
Subject: <i>I</i>	47	47%	Subject: <i>I</i>	50	47%
Subject: <i>you</i>	19	19%	Subject: <i>you</i>	8	8%
Object: <i>you</i>	37	37%	Object: <i>you</i>	9	8%
(...) I (...) love you	30	30%	(...) I (...) love you	5	5%
Object: <i>me</i>	25	25%	Object: <i>me</i>	2	2%
Object: NP	16	16%	Object: NP	36	34%
<i>Love to</i> VERB	2	2%	<i>Love to</i> VERB	21	20%
I'd/would love to	0	0%	I'd/would love to	14	13%
Love <i>GERUND</i>	0	0%	Love <i>GERUND</i>	3	3%

While *I* is the most frequent subject in both pop lyrics and other text types, other possible subjects and objects display significantly different distributions: *to love* is to a large extent restricted to the participants *I* and *you* in these two positions, with alternatives such as other noun phrases, as well as the constructions *love to*, *would love to (do something)* and *love doing something* being almost completely absent. The highly frequent collocation of subject *I* and object *you* leads to the string that is so often associated with pop songs, *I love you*. '[This] reveals clear and identifiable differences in the complementation potential of the verb LOVE between general language use and pop song lyrics; secondly the string seems to be a central metaphorical vehicle in pop music' (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007: 48).

In TT-I, *to love* predominantly occurs in the prototypical construction *I love you*:

- 135. Everything changes but you / I love you
- 136. And remember I'll always love you / Forever
- 137. We're a thousand miles apart / But I still love you

The only (very slight) variation on this is the reversal of *I* and *you*, as well as one occurrence of a third person object:

- 138. Even though I have broken your heart / Will you still love me?
- 139. Hate it but I love her / Hate it but I want her

*I love you* still occurs in TT-II, but far less frequently and sometimes only metalinguistically as a quotation, as in (142):

- 140. I don't know how you are / Or how you may be / But I know I love you still
- 141. It's all good you know / I still love you so
- 142. I love you was too many words to say

Additionally, there are slight variations on the construction. Firstly, both the verb phrase, as in (143), and the object, as in (144), occur in more complex constructions:

- 143. So come on let me love you / This is the life we've been given
- 144. The one that starves is the one I love

Secondly, there are two instances of an inanimate object:

- 145. I love that song / The one that says how I wish you were here
- 146. I love a merry-go-round / You went your way, I went my way

These changes are continued in TT-III, where *love* as a verb is extremely rare. The only two proper occurrences involve *to love* in a complex-transitive construction in (147), and an inanimate object in (148):

147. You can look back but don't stare / Maybe I can love you out of there

148. Youth don't leave me, hair stay on me, god I love those hips

The phrase *I love you* is avoided altogether. In fact, the only time it occurs, it is paraphrased as 'Eight letters, three words, one meaning' in the song of the same title.

As a result, *love* as a verb exemplifies most clearly the development observed for *love* and *heart* as main metaphors of pop lyrics. In TT-I its use never goes beyond the uses typically associated with pop lyrics above. TT-II reduces these constructions and introduces variations on the metaphors, whereas TT-III does away with the structures available in pop lyrics. The fact that both main pop metaphors are continued after the first and second reunion of the band makes them still recognisable as a pop band, which might be an important factor in the band's success. The change in the underlying metaphorical structure, on the other hand, allows them to move away from the restricted discourse associated with this genre and to introduce new topics, without losing their 'pop' nature.

## **Conclusion: from 'prototypically pop' to 'symbolically pop'?**

The comeback success of *Take That* is so far unprecedented in pop music and has certainly raised questions of how four or five men in their forties can still be a convincing pop band especially (but not only) with regard to their 'boy band' past. This article has shown that there have been significant changes in the band's lyrics that have moved them away from what has been established as prototypical pop lyrics. First, new protagonists represented by the personal pronouns *we* and *they* have been introduced and allow the band to cover topics other than those prevalent in pop lyrics: their own past as a band and the world outside the *you and I* bubble that is typically associated with pop music discourse. Secondly, the two main pop metaphors *love* and *heart* have undergone radical changes in their underlying metaphorical structure. The fact that they still play a significant role in the band's lyrics ensures that Take That are still recognisably 'pop', but again their altered use allows the introduction of new perspectives on these classic topics.

This article has also attempted to show that a linguistic, and specifically a corpus-linguistic, perspective can provide new insights into the analysis of pop lyrics as a text type. A quantitative analysis can give important hints at differences and changes in the overall discourse as represented by a collection of texts, as



has been shown in the analysis of word frequencies and personal pronouns. The complementary qualitative analysis of collocations and metaphors can likewise uncover significant overall changes in discourse structures. These two methodical approaches have shown that Take That in their early years, as represented by the subcorpus TT-I, are clearly prototypically pop both from a quantitative perspective (word frequencies) as well as a qualitative one (use of metaphorical superstructures), whereas TT-II and TT-III display innovations to pop lyrics without abandoning the stylistic markers that define pop lyrics as a genre. If the original *Take That* lyrics of the early years are 'prototypically pop', the newer *Take That* lyrics can thus be described as 'symbolically pop'.

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