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Understanding the Meaning of English Idiomatic Expressions in Song Lyrics

**A Survey Regarding Swedish University Students' Understanding of Idiomatic
Expressions in English Song Lyrics.**

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ABSTRACT

The general field of interest for this study is the Swedish public's level of awareness of non-literal and figurative language, such as idioms and metaphors, in English. The English language can be considered to be evolving into Sweden's second language, since it is present in so much more than school, for example, on television, computers and radio. This study aims to gain an insight into the degree of understanding of common idiomatic expressions in popular English song lyrics by native Swedish speakers. University students were chosen as the sample group and twelve of them were asked to explain their understanding of selected English idioms which occur in songs with which they were likely to recognize. The results have then been analyzed and it was possible to establish the degrees of understanding, misunderstanding and failure to understand. Firstly, the participants have explained the expression out of context, and secondly they were asked to explain it in the context of the song. This was to see whether the expressions appear to have been easier to understand out of context or in context. Earlier research show difficulties in defining the term *idiom*, and in this survey the term *idiomatic expression* has been used and defined as a way of speaking or writing that does not make any literal sense, even though the expressions are used all the time and people familiar with the language generally recognize them and understand their meaning. Earlier research has facilitated the analysis by the use of terms, theories and definitions on various ways of understanding metaphors, metonymy and idioms, and how these might, or might not, differ between Swedish and English. The results of this survey show that most of the expressions appear to have been easier to explain and understand when seen and heard in the context of the song. Although, some expressions appear to have been very alien to the participants, which has resulted in misunderstandings and failure to understand both in and out of context of the song lyrics in question.

Key words: Idiomatic expressions, idioms, metaphors, negative transfer, positive transfer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose and Questions.....	1
1.2 Disposition.....	2
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	3
2.1 Metaphors	3
2.2 Idioms	4
2.3 Second Language Learning	7
2.4 Relevance Theory	9
2.5 Linguistics in Music	10
3. METHODOLOGY	11
3.1 A Qualitative Research Method	11
3.2 The Survey in This Essay	12
3.2.1 Sample.....	12
3.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis	13
3.2.3 Criticism of the Sources and Methods	13
4. THE SURVEY – UNDERSTANDING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS.....	14
4.1 Analysis of the Understanding of English Idiomatic Expressions	14
4.1.1 Downward Spiral.....	15
4.1.2 Make out Like	16
4.1.3 Get Along	17
4.1.4 Screw Someone Over	18
4.1.5 Go Viral.....	19
4.1.6 Up One’s Sleeve.....	20
4.1.7 Hung Up on Somebody	21
4.1.8 On the Edge of the Seat.....	22
4.1.9 The Upside	23
4.1.10 Cut Someone Off.....	24
4.1.11 Read into Every Word.....	25
4.1.12 Get One’s Head Together.....	25
4.1.13 Bite the Dust.....	26
5. DISCUSSION	28
5.1 Summary of the Analysis	28

5.2	Relevance Theory in This Survey	31
6.	CONCLUSIONS.....	32
7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
7.1	Literature	35
7.2	Dictionary	35
7.3	Webpages.....	36
8.	APPENDICES	37

1. INTRODUCTION

In Sweden, English is a language present in so much more than just schools, and it can be said to evolve into this country's second language. English can be seen and heard on television, in movies, and in music, and it is a language much used in today's world of computers. Swedish students are therefore exposed to English in so many ways, and in this essay my field of interest is the Swedish public's level of awareness of non-literal and figurative language in English. I believe music has a way of speaking to many people, and this has made me curious about how English idiomatic expressions often used in song lyrics are understood by native Swedish speakers. Therefore, I have chosen to undertake this study, in which I will inquire into some popular songs with English idiomatic expressions in them.

1.1 Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how common English idiomatic expressions in song lyrics are understood by university students with Swedish as their native language. By conducting this survey, I hope to contribute to earlier research on how English idiomatic expressions are understood by people with English as their second language.

English song lyrics are often full of idiomatic expressions enabling the listener to understand the message the artist is trying to convey. Whether it is a song about a broken heart or a joyous reunion, political opinions or matters of war and peace, idioms and metaphors help people to gain understanding of the messages the singer is trying to convey. By searching for idiomatic expressions in some popular and famous song lyrics, I aim to establish the extent to which Swedish university students with English as their second language can understand the meanings of some English idiomatic expressions in isolation, and in the context of a song.

In this essay, I have approached my material with two main questions:

- How are the chosen English idiomatic expressions understood by Swedish university students when shown to them out of context?
- How does the understanding of the idiomatic expression change, if it changes at all, when it is shown in the context of the lyrics and heard together with the music?

I have chosen three songs; *Gotye ft. Kimbra – Somebody that I used to know*, *Train – Drive by*, and *Queen – Another one bites the dust*, and have found a total of thirteen idiomatic expressions in them. These I will show to the students at Halmstad University and try to see if

they can understand the idiomatic expressions. In the first part of my survey, I will ask the students to explain the meaning of the expression in isolation. In the second part, I will play the song to the students while they are shown the lyrics in which the expressions are marked to see if their understanding of it might change when it is seen and heard in context.

1.2 Disposition

In the next chapter, there follows a literature review, where earlier research on *idioms*, *fixed expressions* and *metaphors* has been discussed, and some different aspects regarding the terms are presented and contrasted. The differences between learning a native language and a second language are also raised, especially matters concerning transfer from the first language, L1, to the second language, L2, which can be both positive and negative for the learner. This study also briefly discusses other semantic elements in popular rock lyrics aside from idioms, and mentions how context is generated through pragmatic implicature.

In Chapter 3, the methodology of this study is presented. A qualitative research method has been used, but there is also a short introduction of what a quantitative research method is and the differences between the two. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the understanding of the thirteen idiomatic expressions used in this study. It is disposed so as to deal with one question, i.e., one expression, at the time, and then the underlying theories and terms presented in Chapter 2 are compared and contrasted with the findings. In Chapter 5, the analysis is summarised so as to present an easier overview of the material, and the terms and theories in Chapter 2 have facilitated the analysis. The different expressions and how they were understood are compared with one another to show how some expressions seem to have been understood more easily than others, and a discussion follows why this appears to be so. Chapter 6 contains the conclusions and results of this study and presents other ways to use this data in further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980; p. 3) describe how metaphors are commonly associated with poetic and rhetorical words or speech; metaphor is a device of extraordinary language rather than just ordinary language. According to the authors, this is why many people think that they use language perfectly well without applying metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson claim the contrary:

/.../ that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; p. 3)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980; pp. 56-57) claim that most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured. This means that most concepts are, in part, understood in terms of other concepts. Furthermore, the authors discuss whether or not there are any concepts that can be understood without metaphors, i.e. which can be understood directly. The simple spatial concepts, such as *up-down*, *front-back*, *near-far*, etc. are the prime candidates for a direct understanding. The structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our interaction with the physical environment around us, and the authors argue that abstract concepts which derive in this way are concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way. Thus, these spatial concepts are not understood simply in their own terms, but surface from the collection of constantly performed motor functions considering that we emanate from an erect position relative to the gravitational field surrounding us. Therefore, a distinction can be made between experiences that are more *physical*, for example standing up, and experiences that are more *cultural*, such as holiday celebrations. The authors stress that physical experience is in no way more basic than, for example, emotional, cultural or mental experiences, but they say that we tend to conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical. This shows that it is possible to have equally basic kinds of experiences while their conceptualisations need not be equally basic (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; pp. 59-60).

Glucksberg (2001; p. 3) discusses the difficulty of defining *metaphor*. The term is used in many different, but still related, senses. It is also used within and between its different senses in themselves, which make definitions of the term vary in a range of theoretical agendas and assumptions. The word *metaphor* originates from the Greek word *metapherein* the meaning of which is roughly translated as *to transfer* or *to bear* [ibid; p. 3].

Metaphor must not be confused with metonymy, although some linguists regard metonyms as variants of metaphors. Metonymy occurs when one entity is used to refer to another, and metaphor and metonymy are, therefore, different kinds of processes. Whereas metaphors are used to consider one thing in terms of another, and the primary function of which is to facilitate understanding, metonymy has a referential function which allows one entity to stand for another, but also helps contribute towards understanding. Like metaphors, metonymic concepts help structure language, actions, thoughts and attitudes, and these concepts are usually grounded in human experience. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; pp. 36, 39). Metonymy allows language users to understand the literal absurdity in, for example; *The White House has announced...*, *giving someone a hand*, *answering the door* etc. since a building literally cannot announce something, one does not give one's hand to another for help and a door actually does not verbally ask something which someone will then answer (Yule, 2010; p. 121).

2.2 Idioms

The meaning of the term *idiom* is difficult to explain. Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk and Schreuder (1995; p. 3) describe the term *complex unit* as perhaps a more accurate definition. The authors agree that, in the complex units that idioms form, that is, the syntactic expressions that they are, they demonstrate lexical co-occurrence limitations that cannot be explained in terms of regular syntactic or semantic restrictions governed by a set of rules.

The fact that *kick the bucket* means 'die' does not follow from any underlying principle or from our knowledge of the world. The fact that we have to say *spill the beans* and not *spill the peas* does not follow from any grammatical rule but simply has to be learned /.../(Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk & Schreuder, 1995; p. 3)

One common definition of idiom is that it is a component, or a series of components, for which the semantic understanding is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed (Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk & Schreuder, 1995; p. 5). In other words, an idiom is a construction of words or phrases that mean something different from what the words are literally saying. Earlier research agrees that idioms have a semantic meaning that would differ from what would be created if the regular rules of semantic interpretation were to be applied (Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk & Schreuder, 1995; p. 6).

However, researchers are not in agreement about whether the expressions that form part of the idiom still would have an individual meaning or not, and also whether there is a relation

between the meaning of the full idiom and the meaning of the different parts. Nicolas argues that only an idiom as a whole has any meaning, that is, none of the separate parts of an idiom are of any significance unless put together. In the same book, Schenk writes that the idiom can refer only as a whole unit and that the different parts themselves cannot refer. Therefore, it is not possible that there can be any relation between the parts and the whole (Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk & Schreuder, 1995; p. 6).

Glucksberg (2001; pp. 68-69) also tries to explain the difficulty of defining idioms. What separates idioms from fixed expressions is the absence of any relation between the semantic meaning and the idiomatic meaning.

Examples such as *kick the bucket* have led to the deceptively simple view that idioms are simply memorized expressions, nothing more than long words, and so require no further analysis or explanation (see Swinney & Cutler, 1979). To learn an idiom, simply memorize its stipulated meaning and that's that. /---/ But idioms are not just long words. They consist of phrases and, more important, behave as do phrases, albeit with certain constraints. (Glucksberg, 2001; pp. 68-69)

Some idioms can be syntactically flexible, for example, they can be used in both active and passive forms. As an example, Glucksberg (2001; p. 69), shows the active and passive forms used in *Who let the cat out of the bag? It was let out by old George, of course*. Idioms have parts that can be referred to anaphorically by a pronoun while some can be modified internally. In the same example as above, a constituent of the idiom, in this case *the cat*, can be referred to by the pronoun *it*. Examples of internally modified idioms are *he kicked the proverbial bucket*, or *he didn't spill a single bean* [ibid; p. 69]. If idioms were to be just long words, the syntactic flexibility would not be possible.

Idioms can vary in their predictability. Some idioms can be identified immediately after the first word has been said or seen, for example, *yummy, yummy, yummy*, while others cannot be recognized until a key word helps identify the phrase as an idiom. In, for example, *hit the nail on the head*, the idiom cannot be recognized with any certainty until the word *head* appears. It is possible that the phrase might be intended literally up until the point when the key word *head* occurs (Glucksberg, 2001; pp. 70-71). Therefore, the recognition of an idiom does not seem to work as recognition of words does. When a word is recognized, the entire group of possible words are activated at once, and are continuously narrowed down as more information is added. When understanding or recognizing an idiom, the process does not take

place gradually over time. There is no evidence of any idiomatic meanings being activated until the key words in the construction are actually encountered, which implies that idioms are not just long words. Idioms behave like phrases or configurations of words, and temporary interpretations are not made until there is enough evidence to support a likely interpretation. In this respect, idioms are recognized segment-by-segment rather than word-by-word (Glucksberg, 2001; pp. 71-72).

Palmer (1981; p. 80) argues that, semantically, an idiom is like a single word, although it does not function as such. Many idioms contain a verb and a noun and, even though the verb may be in the past tense, the number of the noun cannot be changed. One can say *spill the beans/spilled the beans* or *kick the bucket/kicked the bucket*, but not *spill the bean* or *kick the buckets*. The noun can be plural as in *red herrings* but the adjective cannot be comparative, that is one cannot say *redder herring*. Idioms also have many syntactic restrictions and some idioms have passives while others do not. One could say *the law was laid down*, or *the beans have been spilled*, and these passives would be accepted, while *the bucket was kicked* would not work [ibid; p. 80]. Since the restrictions vary from idiom to idiom, it is difficult to apply any general rule, bearing in mind that some idioms are more frozen in their forms than others.

To decide what is, and what is not, an idiom is very difficult, but one can say that it is often a matter of degree. One could argue that idioms could be defined in terms of that they have no equivalent in other languages, that is, they cannot be directly translated into another language. However, this will not work since an idiom in English might not have, for example, a French equivalence, it could still be possible for a direct translation of that idiom in Welsh. Word formation issues also help render difficulties for solving the problems of idioms (Palmer, 1981; pp. 81). English is a language where multiword idiomatic expressions are commonly *calqued*¹ in other languages, especially in Celtic languages such as Cornish or Welsh. Mills (<http://www.academia.edu/>, 2000)² illustrates this in an example where the English word *daybreak* has been calqued into Cornish; *dydh-tardh*. The calque is following the English syntax and not the Cornish syntax, which normally would be like *tardh-an-jydh*. Mills also stresses [ibid.] that not all words that are calqued from English in this way follow the English syntax, and that English is not the only language from which words can be calqued or

¹ *Calque* is a type of borrowing in language, where there is a direct translation of a word's elements into the language that borrows it (Yule, 2010; pp. 54-55).

² http://kent.academia.edu/JonMills/Papers/9363/Linguistic_Relativity_and_Linguistic_Determinism_Idiom_in_20th_Century_Cornish (accessed 2012-04-21)

borrowed. In word formation, there is also a possibility that new and more complex lexemes can be formed from simpler ones, where compounds and derivatives can be more or less idiomatic. All these have a degree of idiomaticity but, as stated before, there can be no clear definition of what is, or what is not, an idiom (Palmer, 1981; pp. 81-82).

Gustawsson (2006; pp. 11-12) describes how the terms *idiomatic* and *idiomaticity* are often used together with idioms and fixed expressions³ as a help to describe these. She writes that *idiomaticity* and *idiomatic* are often used as if they actually meant *figuratively* and/or *native like* and that they sometimes are used in this narrow sense although, as seen above, they are indeed very difficult to define. Gustawsson avoids the terms *idiomatic* and *idiomaticity*, but uses the Oxford English Dictionary's (OED) definition of idiom:

A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., peculiar to language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one. (Gustawsson, 2006; p. 12)

According to previous definitions, Gustawsson (2006; p. 12) claims that idioms are a string of two or more words whose individual meaning does not add to the meaning of the sum of the parts, and which behaves and functions as a lexical unit.

2.3 Second Language Learning

Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) describes how the development of a first language is a spontaneous and unconscious process closely related with cognitive maturation. On the other hand, the development of a second language often occurs at an age when cognitive maturity no longer can be considered as an important factor. The author claims that there is general agreement that cross linguistic influence, also called *transfer*, is one of the processes involved in second language development. In other words, when learning a second language, there is a transfer of prior knowledge from the first language, L1, to the second language, L2. There are two major types of transfer; *positive transfer* – when a structure or rule from the L1 is used in a correct or appropriate way in an L2 utterance – and *negative transfer* – when a structure or a rule from the L1 is used in an incorrect or inappropriate way in an L2 utterance (Saville-Troike 2012; p. 19, see also Yule, 2010; p. 191).

³ *Fixed expressions* is used as an umbrella term for prefabricated chunks of language, and includes terms such as *frozen expressions*, *fixed phrases*, *phrasal lexemes*, *phrasemes*, *phraseolexemes*, *phraseological units*, *phraseologisms*, *polylexical expressions* and *set expressions*. The study of fixed expressions is referred to as *phraseology* (Gustawsson, 2006; p. 11).

Positive transfer facilitates L2 learning since a rule or structure used in L1 also works in L2, meaning that a new one does not need to be learned. As an example of positive transfer, Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) uses the word *exterior*, which is a word with the same spelling and meaning in both Spanish and English, although the pronunciation is different. In negative transfer, inapt transfer of L1 pronunciation to L2 is recognized as a *foreign accent* in the speech production of a non-native speaker. According to Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) this is probably the most common and easily recognized aspect of L1 influence, but grammatical interference is also quite common, as in the examples; *Can I assist to your class?*, or *I have been always to class on time*, which are utterances a native English speaker would be unlikely to produce.

One might believe that this process should cause problems with expressions that are intended to be understood literally or fixed expressions that cannot be translated and have no literal meaning, including exclamations and interjections such as *ouch!* or *tra-la-la*, but these expressions need only to be memorized. The problem occurs when there is culture-specific knowledge involved within the meaning of the idiom or expression. As an example, Glucksberg (2001; p. 87) illustrates how the Spanish idiom *no hay Moros en la costa* literally translated into English would be *there are no Moors on the shore*. The idiom makes perfect sense in the Spanish culture where there is a history of conflict with North African people but, in the English culture, the expression would be quite opaque. The corresponding idiom in English would be *the coast is clear*. Many idioms cannot survive a literal translation, while others can be translated quite well. In general, idioms are deeply connected to culture and people involved in a culture change would need to understand the full meaning of idioms since they tap so deeply into the world that goes together with a new language. Metaphors and idioms can be said to mirror both universal and culture-specific ways of thinking (Glucksberg, 2001; pp. 86-89).

Cook (1996; p. 109) and Saville-Troike (2012; p. 88) discuss how it is commonly believed that children have better conditions to learn a second language, than adults do. The explanation of why this is so, is often enshrined in the *critical period hypothesis*, where physical and social factors, as well as cognitive and abstract thinking, interfere with an adult's language learning. Cook (1996; p. 109) argues that there is not much evidence of this, and that age is instead a positive advantage. A study in Scandinavia is presented as an example, where Swedish children improved at learning English during their years in school, and that Finnish-speaking children under the age of eleven, living in Sweden and learning Swedish, did not

progress as well as those children over eleven [ibid; p. 109]. Saville-Troike (2012; p. 88-89) claims that, even though young learners ultimately gain higher levels of L2 proficiency, adults learn faster in early stages of second language learning. Young learners have an advantage in that their brains have the capacity to assume the new functions involved in learning a language, and this ability is lost in the early teens, while adults have a greater learning capacity and a better memory for vocabulary.

2.4 Relevance Theory

Relevance theory is seen as an attempt to work out one of the most essential features of human verbal and non-verbal communication, i.e., the expression and recognition of intentions. Relevance theory is an alternative to the classical code model, where a communicator encodes the intended message into a signal, which is then decoded by the listener with the help of an identical copy of the code. In relevance theory, a communicator provides evidence of the intention to send a certain message or meaning, and this is then inferred by the listener on the basis of the evidence that has been provided. An utterance is a linguistically coded piece of evidence, so that verbal understanding involves an element of decoding. The linguistic meaning gained by decoding a message is just one of the inputs to a non-demonstrative inference process, which allows an interpretation of the meaning conveyed by the speaker (<http://www.dan.sperber.fr/?p=93>).

Relevance theory is also based on that utterances automatically create expectations to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. These expectations of relevance are precise and predictable enough to help the hearer understand the speaker's meaning, and to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations amount to, and in what ways they might add to an empirically reasonable explanation of understanding. The search for relevance in, for example, an utterance, is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators can use. An input, that is, a sight, a sound, an utterance or a memory, is relevant among other competing stimuli not only because it is relevant, but because of that it is more relevant than the alternative inputs available. When identifying meaning in, for example, an utterance, one has to deal with possible ambiguities and decide on referential ambivalences, interpret metaphors and ironies, together with many other indeterminable units of the content. To do this, one requires an appropriate set of contextual assumptions, which the listener must supply while hearing or reading a conveyed message [ibid.].

The key features of relevance theory for the understanding of idioms are firstly *optimal relevance*, that is, the audience is entitled to expect the ostensive stimulus to be at least relevant enough to be worth processing and, secondly, the hearer is likely to follow the path of least effort in processing the meaning, and will stop processing when their expectations of relevance have been satisfied (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; pp. 144-157).

2.5 Linguistics in Music

Lindberg (1995) has written a thesis about the meaning of rock lyrics. He writes how the meaning of a song springs up from the receivers or listeners when they are situated in certain contexts while they decode a musical work. The meaning of a song tends to have a semantic or thematic dimension which is referring to the surrounding world. Lindberg claims that songs usually have a syntactic or linguistic dimension regarding the relationship between the parts of the song itself, and also a pragmatic aspect concerning the relationship between the parts of the song and the receiver (Lindberg, 1995; p. 16).

Lindberg asserts that rock lyrics are not lyrics as in poetry, but lyrics in the sense of a material for a voice. The pragmatic emphasis of rock lyrics limits the interpretations of a song but, at the same time, it contributes to it with new ones since intonation or phrasing challenges the semantic meaning of the words (Lindberg, 1995; p. 61). In a concluding chapter, Lindberg claims that, from a syntactic point of view, words in rock lyrics provide the music with references to the surrounding world, that is, it gives the music a semantic dimension. The words or phrases then rouse the desire for a hinted, larger entirety in the listener's consciousness. Rock lyrics have a tendency to make it easier for a listener to acquire the song for his or her own purposes since words in combination with music or melodies make it easier for them to remember, and to identify themselves with the song (Lindberg, 1995; pp. 70-71).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 A Qualitative Research Method

A qualitative research method will be used to conduct the survey in this essay. Maykut and Morehouse (1994; p. 2) describe how qualitative methods generally facilitate the description of people's words and actions in such a way that they represent situations as they were experienced by the participants. In contrast, a quantitative study is based on observations that are changed into small units. These units can then be compared and contrasted to other units with the help of a statistical analysis.

Dahlgren and Florén (2010; p. 180) illustrate how qualitative methods in historical research are mostly focused on interpretation of the material, while quantitative methods analyze the material in a mathematical and statistical way. The authors claim the line between qualitative and quantitative methods is quite unclear. Quantitative methods can have qualitative elements which are then subordinate to the quantitative analysis. They further claim that the difference between the methods is but a way to separate between methods focused only on numbers, and methods focused on spoken or written material expressed in words. Even though the authors' work chiefly considers historical research, it is important, in my view, to stress that there is no clear separation between a qualitative and a quantitative study. In this essay, I have focused primarily on a qualitative study, but the material is also presented in a table format to help gain an overview and to structure the results.

In qualitative research in general, the researcher needs to have an exploratory and descriptive focus, and the participants should be chosen based on the possibility that they will expand the variability of the sample. It is not possible to decide beforehand how large a sample should be for a full understanding of the chosen field of study. Ideally, one continues to collect and analyze data in an ongoing process up until the point where there is no new information to be uncovered. Practically speaking, the data collection and analysis have to be balanced with limitations of time, money and other factors (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; p. 43-45, 61-63). In a qualitative research process, there needs to be emphasis on *human-as-instrument*, even though other instruments, such as questionnaires or tests, can be used to gather data as well. The primary material is the participants' words and actions, and common methods to collect these are observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews and collection of relevant documents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; pp. 46-47).

3.2 The Survey in This Essay

In this survey, the qualitative methodology has mainly been used in terms of interpreting what the participants are saying. The interviews have been conducted at Halmstad University in April 2012, and students studying different subjects participated.

3.2.1 Sample

The participants have been chosen on the basis that they are university students with Swedish as their native language. There were a total of twelve students, four females and eight males. This was due, in part, to the random selection and a shortage of time where I had to put a limit on the number of interviews and could not persuade any more females to agree on the interview. All of the students were studying at undergraduate level at the time of the interview.

Eleven of the participants had never previously lived in an English speaking country. One student was born in the USA, but emigrated to Sweden at the age of two and she considered Swedish as her native language. Five of the students recognized all of the songs, five students recognized 1-2 songs and two students recognized one song or none of the songs in this survey.

Table 1. *The table shows the subjects participants were studying at the time of the interviews. The right column shows the number of students under each subject, and their sex.*

Currently studying	No. of students (male/female)
Chemistry	0/1
Economics and Technology	1/0
English	4/2
Physics Education	1/0
Political Science	0/1
Sociology	1/0
Swedish	1/0

3.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were carried out by following questions in a questionnaire where the students were asked to explain their understanding of the meanings of the idiomatic expressions. Next, the students listened to the relevant songs and read the lyrics and were then again asked to give an explanation of the idiomatic expression in its context. I chose to play the songs to the students in addition to showing them the lyrics, since I believe that hearing the words in a context may influence the students' understanding of the expressions as well. The interviews were not recorded, but notes were taken contemporaneously. The data were collected in a non-emergent way since it was first collected and then analyzed. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994; p. 44), this is still a qualitative research method, although it is less open and responsive than an emergent research design. The analysis is presented in its entirety in Chapter 4 and, in Chapter 5, there is a summary of what was discovered and analyzed in Chapter 4. The explanations and understandings of the idiomatic expressions have been compared and contrasted to the underlying theories, such as relevance theory and research about second language learning, and terms discussed in the literature review, such as *metaphors*, *idioms* and *metonymy*.

3.2.3 Criticism of the Sources and Methods

Dahlgren and Florén (2010; p. 180) claim that, in a qualitative study, there is usually a certain amount of interpretation of the material, which the researcher uses to analyze the material, and this information can be non-measurable (expressed in words) or measurable (expressed in numbers). In this survey, the information has been non-measurable which, inevitably, gives a degree of subjectivity to the analysis, but heed has been paid to the fact that I have been both the collector of data and the interpreter of the material. I do not consider this especially problematic, since the questions asked were the same for every student, and the survey was quite simple, with no follow-up questions or in-depth discussions. I have not consciously interfered with the students' answers, save for unintentional nods and fillers here and there.

4. THE SURVEY – UNDERSTANDING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

The purpose of the survey in this essay has been to gain a deeper understanding about Swedish university students' knowledge about English idiomatic expressions in song lyrics. Since music with English lyrics is so common in Sweden today, and song lyrics often contain numerous idioms, metaphors, fixed expressions etc., it is interesting to try to discover the extent to which such expressions are really understood by the listener. It is also of interest to discover whether the understanding of the idiomatic expression differs, depending on whether it is out of its context or in its context. As seen in Chapter 2, researchers have struggled to agree on an absolute definition of the term *idiom*. In this survey, the term *idiomatic expressions* has been used as an umbrella term for the chosen lines of words, and I have defined it as follows; *A way of speaking or writing that does not make any literal sense, even though the expressions are used all the time and people familiar with the language generally recognize them and understand their meaning.*

I would like to stress the fact that there is no general or universal definition of the term *idiom*, and this fact has left the results of this survey open to my interpretation. I have tried to stay as objective as possible and not interfere in the participants' explanations, but it has still been up to me to interpret and decide the nature of any differences in meaning between, for example, a spiral, as in '*downward spiral*' and a circle, as in '*bad circle*'. In this survey, it is also important to remember that the discussions concerning second language acquisition are between the students' native language, Swedish, and their second language, English.

4.1 Analysis of the Understanding of English Idiomatic Expressions

The analysis is structured so as to deal with one expression at the time. There is a table of each expression, showing the number of students who have understood it divided into one of the four following categories; *Fully understood*, *Partially understood*, *Misunderstood*, or *Not understood*. After each table, there is a summary of the understanding and explanations of the expression, and an analysis of the results with guidance from the theories discussed in Chapter 2. The students' full answers and explanations can be found in the appendices, together with a table for an easy overview of the students' understanding, the briefing sheet and the questionnaire – in English and Swedish, and the lyrics for the three songs in this survey.

4.1.1 Downward Spiral

Question 1 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'downward spiral'</i>	Fully understood	5	5
	Partially understood	7	6
	Misunderstood	0	1
	Not understood	0	0

The expression *'downward spiral'* was explained by the students with a partial understanding as something negative, for example *"It has a negative meaning, something goes downwards, 'utför' in Swedish"* (see Appendices; Respondent 3, Questions 1), while the students with a full understanding explained it as something that goes from bad to worse, which is the general meaning. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001; pp. 406, 1385) explains that *'downward'* means going down to a lower level or place, whereas a *'spiral'* is explained as a process, usually harmful, in which something gradually but continuously rises, falls, or gets worse. Many of the students have associated *'downward spiral'* to the Swedish expression *'ond cirkel'*, which literally translated is something like *'evil circle'* or *'bad circle'*. That the expression *'ond cirkel'* has been considered as a partial understanding is because it means that something is continuously the same, continuously bad, which is akin to another English idiom, *'vicious circle'*, and is conceptually different from *'downward spiral'*.

The understanding of the expression *'downward spiral'* might be connected to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980; pp. 56-57) assert about the human conceptual system being metaphorically structured. The expression is connected to the spatial concepts, such as *up-down*, *near-far* etc., which are the main candidates for a direct understanding of human concepts without the use of metaphors. The spatial orientations of human concepts emerge from the fact that humans have the bodies that they have, and that they function as they function in the physical environment. This category of metaphors encourages a concept of spatial orientation, for example, happy is up, and sad is down. Expressions such as *'I'm feeling up'*, *'My spirits rose'*, or *'I'm feeling down'*, *'My spirits sank'*, come from a physical basis where an erect posture is connected with a positive emotional state, and a drooping posture signals sadness and depression (<http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>).⁴

⁴ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html> (accessed 2012-05-06)

The idiomatic expression ‘*downward spiral*’ could be one of the idioms Glucksberg (2001; p. 87) illustrates, whose meaning could be inferred from its literal meaning. The author claims that such idioms are generally better known by second language learners than opaque idioms. In this case, it is likely that the students with a partial understanding have had a negative transfer, as Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) explains it, from their L1, Swedish, into their L2, English. The Swedish expression ‘*ond cirkel*’ has been directly translated into ‘*bad circle*’ by some as a substitute for ‘*downward spiral*’.

4.1.2 Make out Like

Question 2 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>‘make out like’</i>	Fully understood	3	10
	Partially understood	3	1
	Misunderstood	5	1
	Not understood	1	0

‘*Make out like*’ was explained in different ways among the participants. The general meaning of the expression is widely understood to equate to ‘*pretend*’, or claim that something is true when it is not (Longman, 2001; p. 866). According to a dictionary on the Internet, the intransitive verb, ‘*make out*’, is often used with ‘*like*’ as slang for to pretend or to imitate (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/make+out>).⁵ I have also counted explanations from the respondents, such as “*Make something look like something or maybe make it seem like something.*” (see Appendices; Respondent 4, Question 2), “*In this context it’s more like to tell somebody a story, a story that isn’t true, an unrepresentative proclamation of reality.*” (see Appendices; Respondent 12, Question 2), ‘*act like*’, and ‘*portray something*’, as accurate interpretations. In the category where the students have misunderstood the expression, three of the students have associated it to the term ‘*make out*’, as in kissing. The student who could not explain it, first guessed on something like kissing as well. Other explanations were that it meant to recognize something, something became something else, or something was the result of something. In the online dictionary, the phrasal verb ‘*make out*’ is commonly used as slang for ‘*to neck*’ or ‘*to pet*’, that is, kissing and caressing [ibid].

⁵ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/make+out> (accessed 2012-05-09)

The term *'make out'* as in *'kissing'* appears to have been more commonly known amongst the students. With some students the expression *'make out'* seems to have been understood as one word, kissing, and when the third word *'like'* was added, it was still understood as something in terms of *'to kiss like'*. According to Saville-Troike (2012; p. 29), second language learning can be studied from either social contexts of interaction, production and interpretation, or from cultural, political and educational settings. English is a language studied in Swedish schools, but school is by no means the only place where students come in contact with the language. Music, computers, television, and films are other areas where English is commonly used. As a result, it is possible that the expression *'make out'*, meaning *'to kiss'*, has been heard in a social context of series and films on the television.

The meaning of the expression *'make out like'* might also be translated from the words' literal meaning (Glucksberg, 2001; p. 87). In Swedish, a literal translation would be something in terms of *'göra ut som'*, which is by no means an expression in Swedish or a grammatically correct phrase, but from the words themselves, it is possible to derive the meaning *'låtsas som något'*, which is quite equivalent to *'make out like'*.

4.1.3 Get Along

Question 3 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'get along'</i>	Fully understood	12	9
	Partially understood	0	3
	Misunderstood	0	0
	Not understood	0	0

The expression *'get along'* could be said to have two meanings depending on context, either it could mean *'to get along'*, as in if two or more people get along, they have a friendly relationship, or *'to get along'*, as in to progress in something one is doing (Longman, 2001; p. 592). Therefore, students with a full understanding of the expression out of its context had understood it as in *'good together'*, but then thought it still meant the same when they heard it in the song in which, in the case of the song, should be interpreted as *'to survive'*. One student explained the expression as; *"Get along well together, we're on the same page, we work together. Yeah, I think that's it."* before the song had been played and then, in context, understanding it as the same, but with the addition that the person singing is not able to get along; *"The same as before, you're on the same page. But in this context he's not able to do*

that, to get along.” (see Appendices; Respondent 7, Question 3). In context, the partial understanding, therefore, comes from the fact that the students did not diverge from their first explanation. None of the students considered *‘to get along’* in the meaning of *‘to survive’* when they explained the expression out of context. This might indicate that the first meaning, *‘good together’*, is more commonly understood. The three students with a partial understanding of the expression in the song might not have fully understood the context, or not reflected over the possibility that an expression can have somewhat different meanings, depending on context.

In Swedish, there is an expression, *‘komma överens’*, with a similar meaning as *‘get along’*, in the meaning of people being on friendly terms with each other. It is likely that the students have had a positive transfer, that is, that they have had advantages from structures in the Swedish language when translating the English expression (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19).

4.1.4 Screw Someone Over

Question 4 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>‘screw someone over’</i>	Fully understood	12	12
	Partially understood	0	0
	Misunderstood	0	0
	Not understood	0	0

The word *‘screw’*, as a noun and a verb, has, in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001; p. 1279), twelve meanings. The twelfth listed meaning, *‘screw somebody’*, is to cheat someone or to treat a person in a dishonest way, especially to get money from someone [ibid; p. 1279]. It was well understood by all the students in this survey, which is interesting because of the word’s many different meanings in the dictionary. According to Saville-Troike (2012; p. 29) there are two areas of focus for the study of second language acquisition from a social perspective. One is microsocial focus, concerning language acquisition and use in the immediate social contexts of production, interaction and interpretation, and the other is macrosocial focus, which relates language learning and use to cultural, political and educational settings. Swedish students learn English in school, but deal with the English language much in their interaction with the world around them as well, for example in online computer games, films and series on the television, and also in music played on the radio. It is possible that the expression *‘screw someone over’*, or similar ones

such as ‘*screw you*’, have been learned by the students in a social context of television, computers and radio.

4.1.5 Go Viral

Question 5 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>‘go viral’</i>	Fully understood	0	3
	Partially understood	7	6
	Misunderstood	1	1
	Not understood	4	2

The word ‘*go*’ has many meanings. The verb ‘*go*’, can be used as part of a phrasal verb, for example, ‘*go up*’, or ‘*go off*’. It can also be used together with adjectives, for example, ‘*go mad*’ (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/go>),⁶ and to the latter category is also the expression ‘*go viral*’. Expression like these, for example, ‘*go insane*’ or ‘*go bad*’, together with ‘*go viral*’ are polysemic.⁷ The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001; pp. 604-605, 1596), lists one meaning of the word ‘*go*’, among many others, as to become something different, and that it means to be or remain in a particular, usually bad, state. The meaning of the word ‘*viral*’ is something connected with or caused by a virus. According to a native English speaker, working at Halmstad University, a more modern meaning of the expression ‘*go viral*’ is when something, for example, on the Internet, becomes very popular and something everyone is doing all of a sudden (Foster, 2012; pers.). In the context of the song, however, the meaning is more in terms of his love for her went viral; it suddenly became a very widely known matter. In this survey, students with a partial understanding of the expression of the meaning of something that has to do with Internet or viruses is in the same category as students explaining it as something that goes crazy and “*became real or strong or alive...*” (see Appendices; Respondent 2, Question 5). This is because the students, who explained it as something that has to do with Internet or viruses, could not comprehend the explanation perfectly, which was interpreted as they did not fully understand what it meant.

⁶ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/go> (accessed 2012-05-11)

⁷ Polysemy is when a one form, written or spoken, has multiple meanings that are all related by extension. Some examples of polysemy are; *foot* (of person, of mountain, of bed), or *run* (a person does, colours do, water does) (Yule, 2010; p. 120).

This expression has been somewhat difficult to analyze, since students with the understanding of it as something that has to do with the Internet and viruses did not understand it in the context of the song. The students, who explained it as something that went crazy and all over the place, seemed to have found it easier to apply their understanding of it in context.

Glucksberg (2001; p. 87) claims that there is a problem for second language learners when an idiomatic expression has culture-specific knowledge, or when the expression’s literal meaning interferes with the understanding. In this case, students appear to have been bothered by the literal meaning of ‘*go viral*’, and, therefore, not being able to understand it at all. The meaning of ‘*go*’, as described above, seems to have been understood in the way that something becomes something which, in the context of the song, is what happens. The line reads; “*My love for you went viral*” (see Appendices). Some students have guessed at the word ‘*viral*’, in terms of having something to do with viruses, and this might have come from a similar meaning in the Swedish word ‘*viral*’. As Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) describes, this can be a sign of positive transfer, since the word has the same spelling and meaning in both languages and can, therefore, be considered a cognate. However, in the case of the song, this did not help the students understanding of the full expression.

4.1.6 Up One’s Sleeve

Question 6 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>‘up one’s sleeve’</i>	Fully understood	7	10
	Partially understood	1	1
	Misunderstood	3	1
	Not understood	1	0

The expression ‘*up one’s sleeve*’ means that someone is keeping something to him- or herself that no one else knows about, for example, a secret plan or idea that can be used later (Longman, 2001; p. 1351). One student had not heard the expression before and could not explain it out of context; he had misunderstood it in context, believing it to relate to someone who cannot think about something other than his love for the girl mentioned in the song. The expression was also misinterpreted as meaning having too much to do, something that was in the way, or where someone is too close to another person. Three students with a full understanding have associated it to the Swedish expression ‘*Ett ess i rockärmen*’, literally ‘*An ace up your sleeve*’, in English, and experienced a positive transfer from Swedish to English.

One student also connected it with a card game, where one can have a card up one's sleeve when wanting to cheat. A misunderstanding of the expression, out of context, was that someone has too much to do: *"I would guess it means that you have too much to do. Yeah."* (see Appendices; Respondent 9, Question 6), which could indicate a negative transfer from the Swedish expression *'ha händerna fulla'*, literally *'having one's hands full'* in English.

As Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) asserts, it is likely that the similarity in structure and meaning between the expressions *'Ett äss i rockärmen'* and *'An ace up your sleeve'*, which have then been associated to *'up one's sleeve'*, has rendered a positive transfer with a full understanding as a result. In the same way, the structure and meaning of the Swedish expression *'ha händerna fulla'* might have been negatively transferred by the student who misunderstood it.

4.1.7 Hung Up on Somebody

Question 7 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'hung up on somebody'</i>	Fully understood	9	9
	Partially understood	3	1
	Misunderstood	0	1
	Not understood	0	1

To be *'hung up on somebody'* means that someone is putting down the phone before they have finished speaking, or one can be hung up on/about someone/something in terms of being anxious about something when there is no reason to be (Longman, 2001; p. 646). According to a native English speaker working at the university, it can also mean that someone cannot get over another person. Both these explanations have been accepted as a full understanding. The expression was partially understood as being the end of a relationship, being angry at someone, or being very much in love. In context, the expression was misunderstood by a student who, out of the context, had a full understanding as: *"In this context, I think it's like being with someone else"* (see Appendices; Respondent 7, Question 7). One student with a partial understanding of the expression out of context did not understand it in its context.

It is possible to understand this expression from its literal meaning (Glucksberg, 2001; p. 87), even though it does not literally mean that someone is hanging on someone else, but rather his or her thoughts are constantly on a specific person, at least in case of the song used in this survey. The literal translation of *'hung'* into Swedish is *'hänga'*, and it is possible that the

expression as been translated into *‘hänga upp sig på någon’*, from which the meaning is *‘hung up on somebody’*. Therefore, the students with a full understanding could have had a positive transfer from this structure in Swedish into English (Saville-Troike, 2012; p.19).

4.1.8 On the Edge of the Seat

Question 8 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>‘on the edge of the seat’</i>	Fully understood	7	9
	Partially understood	0	1
	Misunderstood	4	2
	Not understood	1	0

The general meaning of the expression *‘on the edge of the seat’* is basically anticipation. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001; p. 441), *‘be on edge’* means to be nervous, especially because something unpleasant is expected to happen. In this survey, variations of nervous, edgy, ready to go, and prepared have been accepted as belonging to the category of full understanding. Misunderstandings were in terms of someone falling down, one is in serious trouble, one is being out of line, and to pull or bring something forward. One student did not understand the expression and got stuck on the word *‘seat’* and what it had to do with the meaning of the whole expression. *“Maybe the top of the iceberg, no, that’s not it. Maybe like you’re at a crossroads and must make a choice, no really, I have no idea. What is meant by the seat, ‘sätet’. I don’t get it.”* (see Appendices; Respondent 3, Question 8). In context, this student attained a partial understanding of the expression; *“He’s a daredevil, I dare you. It’s like he’s asking, I dare you, are you ready to use this machinegun now, are you ready for it. At least that’s what I think.”* [ibid.].

As Glucksberg (2001; p. 87) claims, there can be problems for a person trying to understand a figurative expression’s literal meaning. This seems to have been the problem for one student in this survey, who tried to understand the expression’s literal meaning, and got stuck on the word *‘seat’*. Another misunderstanding was that one is a bit out of line; *“I suppose it means you’re a bit out of line, you take water over your shoulders perhaps, if it’s called that in English, ‘Ta sig vatten över huvudet’ in Swedish.”* (see Appendices; Respondent 9, Question 8). The student fully understood the expression in context, but might have experienced a negative transfer from the Swedish expression *‘Ta sig vatten över huvudet’* when first presented with the expression (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19). To fall down was also a

misinterpretation and might have come from a literal translation from *'on the edge'* into Swedish, meaning something in terms of that someone or something is close to falling.

4.1.9 The Upside

Question 9 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'the upside'</i>	Fully understood	11	12
	Partially understood	0	0
	Misunderstood	1	0
	Not understood	0	0

'The upside', the general meaning being the positive part of a situation that is generally bad (Longman, 2001; p. 1582), was not a difficult expression to explain for the participants in this survey. Only one student misunderstood it as someone showing his or her true nature, how they really are; *"Out of context, it could mean... eh, that you show one's true nature, how they really are, the upside of things perhaps."* (see Appendices; Respondent 9, Question 9), but in context it was fully understood. In the Swedish language, the word *'upp'* is associated to being happy and feeling good. This experience of the word might have been positively transferred from Swedish to English when the students explained the meaning of the expression. The expression *'the upside'* is, just like *'downward spiral'*, likely to be an idiom that can be understood from its literal meaning (Glucksberg, 2001; p. 87).

As with the expression *'downward spiral'*, the understanding of *'the upside'* might be discussed from what Lakoff and Johnson (1980; pp. 56-57) claim about the human conceptual system being metaphorically structured. *'The upside'* might also be connected to the spatial orientation of human concepts, such as happy is up, and sad is down. These metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary, but have their foundation in the human physical and cultural experience. However, the polar oppositions *up-down, in-out* etc., are physical in nature, the metaphorical orientations that can be based on them vary from culture to culture. In some cultures, for example, the future is in front of us, while in others it is behind us (<http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>).⁸

⁸ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html> (accessed 2012-05-03)

4.1.10 Cut Someone Off

Question 10 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'cut someone off'</i>	Fully understood	9	10
	Partially understood	2	1
	Misunderstood	1	1
	Not understood	0	0

The original meaning of the expression *'cut someone off'* is to interrupt someone from speaking, usually over a telephone. However, there is a more general meaning which is in terms of cutting someone off which can be understood as to stop having a friendly relationship with someone (Longman, 2001; p. 335). Both these explanations have been accepted as fully understood in this survey. One student misunderstood the expression both times as meaning the same as *'screw someone over'*, that is, that someone is tricking another person. One student with a partial understanding explained it, out of context, as cutting in front of someone in a line, but in context fully understood it. Another student in the same category associated it to the meaning of *'hung up on somebody'*, or when someone is fired or excluded from a group, and persisted with that explanation in context as well.

According to Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk and Schreuder (1995; p. 6), *'cut someone off'* is an expression with a different meaning than what the words are literally saying. The expression does not mean that one should cut someone off with a knife or a sword or something, but is rather something in terms of to have no more contact with a person. From its literal meaning, however, it is possible that some students have derived a negative association to the expression, and the associations to two other idiomatic expressions in this survey might come from the fact that they appear to share a negative tone, a negative meaning. The expressions seem to resemble one another in structure and might, therefore, have been misinterpreted as having the same meaning.

4.1.11 Read into Every Word

Question 11 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'read into every word'</i>	Fully understood	10	10
	Partially understood	2	1
	Misunderstood	0	1
	Not understood	0	0

The meaning of *'read into every word'* is to understand something in a particular way, to choose to understand a situation or remark in certain way (Longman, 2001; p. 1175). In other words, it is basically *'to overanalyze'* or to look for a subtext in something someone has said. Explanations such as taking things too literally and reading too much into things have also been accepted as a full understanding. The two students with a partial understanding had some difficulties explaining what they meant which, in this case, was interpreted as they did not understand the whole meaning of the expression. One student with a partial understanding misunderstood it in its context and could not really explain what it meant, he said; *"Not sure, really. I'm not really sure what she means, in the context though, she's not happy. But it's hard to translate it to Swedish, hard to translate word for word what it means and I'm not sure about the Swedish meaning either."* (see Appendices; Respondent 9, Question 11).

As Glucksberg (2001; p. 87) argues, the meaning of *'read into every word'* appears to have been quite easily inferred by the students from its literal meaning. In Swedish, a literal translation word-for-word, *'läsa in i varje ord'*, would provide a very similar meaning. Although those words do not render an idiomatic expression in Swedish, the meaning is quite obvious.

4.1.12 Get One's Head Together

Question 12 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'get one's head together'</i>	Fully understood	12	12
	Partially understood	0	0
	Misunderstood	0	0
	Not understood	0	0

To *'get one's head together'* means, according to a native English speaker working at the university (Foster, 2012; pers.), something in terms of to sort oneself out and get one's thoughts straight, and all students fully understood it. There is a similar Swedish expression that is something like *'samla sig/samla sina tankar'* or *'skärpa sig'*, literally, *'to collect yourself/to collect your thoughts'*, or *'to pull yourself together'*, in English.

In this case, the participants might have experienced a positive transfer from the similar structures and meaning of the Swedish expressions (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19). As Glucksberg (2001; p.87) claims, the meaning of the words in the expression can be literally translated to a similar expression in the students' native language. There might also be an association between the Swedish word *'tankar'* (thoughts) and the word *'head'*, which is a metonym, in the English expression, basically due to that one has one's thoughts in one's head. The expression can also be an example of what Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk and Schreuder (1995; p. 6) claim to be an expression with a meaning different from the literal meaning of the words themselves. *'Get one's head together'* does not mean to collect pieces of one's head but rather to get one's thoughts straight. *'Get one's head together'* is an example of metonymy, where one entity is used to refer to another, and allows the language user to understand the literal absurdity in the expression (Yule, 2010; p. 121).

4.1.13 Bite the Dust

Question 13 –		Out of context	In context
Idiomatic expression: <i>'bite the dust'</i>	Fully understood	3	4
	Partially understood	0	0
	Misunderstood	9	7
	Not understood	0	1

The general meaning of *'bite the dust'*, is according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001; p. 119), to die, fail or be defeated. After consulting a native English speaker working at the university (Foster, 2012; pers.), the most general and common meaning of the expression is *'to die'*. Therefore, students explaining it as something in terms of someone ending up last in a race, losing a race, to accept defeat and move on, someone being strong and confident, someone hitting rock bottom, screw someone over, and one not being afraid to get one's hands dirty, have been interpreted as misunderstandings of the expression, which, in this survey, both in and out of context, means *'to die'*. The expression

was by two students misunderstood as the Swedish phrase *'Bita i det sura äpplet'*, in English the literal translation would be *'Bite the sour apple'*, that is, something in terms of taking the consequences of one's actions. In the context of the song, seven of the nine students that had misunderstood the expression persisted with their initial explanation, while one fully understood it in context, explaining it as; *"I guess it means something like something slips in through the cracks, someone is able to escape like in an attack, and then he's gonna get him next... Or, wait, it could mean that you're in the grave, someone's dead. You're in the dust, you're dead and then he's after another one."* (see Appendices; Respondent 7, Question 13). One student misunderstood the expression out of context and did not understand it in context, while three of the participants fully understood it out of context.

The two students misunderstanding the expression as *'Bita i det sura äpplet'* might have experienced negative transfer as Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) explains it. It is possible that the similarity and meaning of the word *'bite'* in *'bite the dust'*, and *'bita'* in the Swedish expression have caused this transfer. The explanation that it means that someone accepts defeat and moves on might come from this Swedish expression as well, even though the students did not say the expression in itself, but the meaning is similar.

'Bite the dust' can be associated to the spatial orientation of the human concepts. The expression implies that one is being laid down with the face on the ground, where down is a spatial orientation of the human concepts. To be down on the ground is also an unnatural position for a living human being, and the open-mouth suggestion of the word *'bite'* can be likened to the open mouth one might see on a dead body, face down in the dirt. Health and life are up, while sickness and death are down. The expressions *'He's at the peak of health'*, or *'He fell ill'*, *'He dropped dead'*, are connected to the human physical basis where serious illness force humans to lie down physically, and when one is dead, one is physically down (<http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>).⁹ The expression *'bite the dust'* is a metaphor with an obvious physical as well as orientational parallel.

⁹ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html> (accessed 2012-05-06)

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of the Analysis

Three expressions, '*get one's head together*', '*screw someone over*', and '*get along*', was fully understood out of the context of the song by all participants in this survey. '*Get one's head together*' and '*screw someone over*' was also understood by all students in context. The expression '*get along*' can be said to have two meanings, to be good together and to survive. The latter meaning was the one in question in the case of the song, which was not fully understood by everyone. The meaning, to be good together, has a somewhat similar equivalent in Swedish, which might have been positively transferred into English since the structure and meaning is so similar in both languages. It is likely that the participants experienced a positive transfer from Swedish to English when explaining '*get one's head together*' as well, since there is a similar expression in Swedish (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19). The understanding of the expression '*screw someone over*' might have come from the social context in which this expression is often used, for example, on television and in film. Saville-Troike (2012; p. 29) describes that second language learners often use and learn languages either in immediate social contexts, such as production, interaction and interpretation, or in political, cultural and educational settings. The English language is present in so much more than only classes in school, and it is likely that the students have gained an understanding of the expression in one of the many other ways that they use English, for example on the television or the computer.

The expressions the participants misinterpreted the most were '*make out like*', '*go viral*', and '*bite the dust*'. The first expression, '*make out like*', was by some misunderstood as meaning kissing. This might be because of the common use of '*make out*' as to kiss and caress (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/make+out>).¹⁰ It is possible that this expression also have been attained from the social context of television, which is often showing English-speaking programmes and, by doing so, exposing viewers to the English or American language culture (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 29). Other misunderstandings of the expression were that it meant to recognize something, or that something was the result of something. These interpretations could have come from the expression's literal meaning (Glucksberg, 2001; p. 87), although a literal translation to Swedish does not give a correct grammatical phrase, but from the words' meaning these misinterpretations might have been derived. On the contrary, '*go viral*', could

¹⁰ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/make+out> (accessed 2012-05-09)

not be literally translated into Swedish, which might have interfered with the understanding. The expression was difficult to analyze since it could mean different things depending on context. Even though its direct translation into Swedish seems to have been confusing, the Swedish word '*viral*' might have been positively transferred, in both spelling and meaning, into English as having something to do with viruses (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19), which have brought some of the students a partial understanding of the expression. In this survey, the meaning of '*bite the dust*' has been interpreted as to die. It was misunderstood as to lose a race, to accept defeat and move on, to be strong and confident, to hit rock bottom, to screw someone over, to not be afraid to get one's hands dirty, and to take the consequences of one's actions. The latter most likely negatively transferred, as Saville-Troike (2012; p. 19) explains it, from the Swedish expression; '*Bita i det sura äpplet*'. The word '*bite*' and its literal translation into Swedish, '*bita*', might have caused this transfer. The expression can also be associated to the spatial orientation of the human concepts, whereas health and life are up, and sickness and death are down. An expression like '*He dropped dead*' is connected to the human physical basis, and when one is dead, one is physically down on the ground as well (<http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>).¹¹

The expression '*downward spiral*' and '*the upside*' can both be related to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980; pp.56-57) claim about the human conceptual system being metaphorically structured. In other words, the spatial orientational human concepts emerge from the fact that human bodies are what they are and function as they function in the surrounding world, up is up, and down is down. '*The upside*' was understood as something good and can be related to that an erect posture is signalling a positive emotional state of mind, and, on the contrary, '*downward spiral*' was understood as something negative related to a drooping posture connected to sadness (<http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>).¹² '*Downward spiral*' was explained by some students as a bad circle, '*ond cirkel*' in Swedish, which might indicate a negative transfer from the native language to the second language (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19). '*The upside*', as well as '*downward spiral*', are both expressions whose meaning can be derived from a literal translation of the words themselves into Swedish, and help the understanding of the idiomatic expression (Glucksberg, 2001; p. 87). These expressions are good examples of where a literal meaning can be both a positive and a negative thing for the

¹¹ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html> (accessed 2012-05-06)

¹² <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html> (accessed 2012-05-06)

learner. *'The upside'* has the same equivalent in Swedish, while *'downward spiral'* was thought to equal a bad circle, not the same as a spiral, by some participants.

It is likely that the expression *'up one's sleeve'* had been positively transferred from the Swedish expression *'Ett äss i rockärmen'*, while it might have been negatively transferred by one student presumably associating *'sleeve'* to *'hands'*, *'händer'* in Swedish and as in the expression *'ha händerna fulla'*, *'having one's hands full'*, and thereby understanding it as someone that had too much to do. The student might have associated the Swedish word *'händerna'* (the hands) with the English word *'sleeve'* basically because they are found near one another on the human body. Positive transfer is likely to have occurred in understanding the expression *'hung up on somebody'*, while *'on the edge of the seat'* was negatively transferred by some students in this survey (Saville-Troike, 2012; p. 19). It is also possible that the constituents of the expressions, i.e. the words, were literally translated into Swedish, generating a beneficial understanding of *'hung up on somebody'*, but a non-beneficial understanding of *'on the edge of the seat'*, where one student did not understand the meaning of the word *'seat'* in the context of the expression.

'Cut someone off' was an expression that some students believed had the same meaning as *'screw someone over'* and *'hung up on somebody'*. These expressions have in common that their meaning is different from what the words themselves are saying (Everaert, van der Linden, Schenk and Schreuder, 1995; p. 6). The literal meaning of *'cut someone off'* would be something in terms of cutting someone off with, for example, a knife, and the meaning is, in this case, to have no more contact with a person. From its literal meaning however, it is likely that some of the students have derived a negative association to the meaning of the whole expression, and the two other expressions mentioned above might have been derived in somewhat the same way, since they too appear to have a negative literal translation, giving the expressions a negative meaning.

In the category of fully understood idiomatic expression, seven of the thirteen expressions appear to have been easier to understand in context. These expressions were; *'make out like'*, *'go viral'*, *'up one's sleeve'*, *'on the edge of the seat'*, *'the upside'*, *'cut someone off'*, and *'bite the dust'*. Five of the expressions were fully understood out of context as well as in context, and these were; *'downward spiral'*, *'screw someone over'*, *'hung up on somebody'*, *'read into every word'*, and *'get one's head together'*. One expression had more students fully understanding it out of context than in context, this expression was *'get along'*.

It appears as if most of the expressions were easier for the students to explain and understand when they were heard in the context of the song. Although many students had a partial understanding of an expression out of context, they found it easier to explain it when it was shown to them in the lyrics. The expressions that had the same understanding or explanations out of context as well as in context, might come of the possibility that these expressions have a Swedish equivalent and, therefore, were positively transferred from the L1 to the L2 already in the first part of the survey.

5.2 Relevance Theory in This Survey

Relevance theory deals with the expression and recognition of intentions, which is an essential feature of both verbal and non-verbal human communication. In relevance theory, also called the “inferential model”, a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is then inferred by the listeners on the basis of the evidence supplied (<http://www.dan.sperber.fr/?p=93>).¹³ Utterances raise expectations of relevance that are precise and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning. Relevance is a potential property of utterances and other phenomena, and also of thoughts and memories. The search for relevance in, for example, an utterance, is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators can use. According to relevance theory, what makes an input, that is, a sight, a sound, an utterance or a memory, worth picking out from other competing stimuli is not only that it is relevant, but that it is more relevant than the alternative inputs available at the specific time [ibid.].

When identifying a speaker/writer meaning, one has to deal with ambiguities and resolve referential ambivalences, interpret metaphors and ironies, together with many other indeterminable units of the explicit content in, for example, an utterance. To do this, one requires an appropriate set of contextual assumptions, which the listener must supply while hearing or reading the message conveyed [ibid.]. Therefore, it is possible that some students in this survey, when they have not had a mental referent for a particular metaphor, have used the closest Swedish metaphor that they come to think of, and understood the English expression as having the same or a similar meaning. This might be because of that they have had no other point of reference. As examples, the expressions ‘*cut someone off*’, ‘*screw someone over*’, ‘*hung up on somebody*’ and ‘*bite the dust*’, are likely to have been inferred in this way from a Swedish simile.

¹³ <http://www.dan.sperber.fr/?p=93> (accessed 2012-05-15)

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this survey has been to gain a deeper understanding of how English idiomatic expressions in song lyrics are understood, in and out of the context of the songs chosen, by Swedish university students. I have focused mainly on two questions:

- How are the chosen English idiomatic expressions understood by Swedish university students when shown to them out of context?
- How does the understanding of the idiomatic expression change, if it changes at all, when it is shown in the context of the lyrics and heard together with the music?

To answer these questions, I have chosen a total of thirteen idiomatic expressions in three different songs played on the radio. In the first part of the survey, I asked the participants to explain their understanding of the expression when they read it out of context. In the second part, I played the song to the students and showed them the lyrics, and then they were asked to explain what they thought it meant in the context of the song. The interviews have been conducted at Halmstad University in April 2012, and a total of twelve students, four females and eight males studying different subjects, participated. The participants have been chosen on the basis that they are university students with Swedish as their native language. All of the students were studying at undergraduate level at the time of the interview.

In this study, I have used a qualitative methodology, which basically means that people's words and actions are used to represent situations as they were experienced by the participants. A qualitative method is, in large part, focused on interpretation of the material and data, and this is true also for this survey. The qualitative methodology has mainly been used in terms of interpreting what the participants are saying.

Three of the thirteen expressions were fully understood out of context by all the students participating in this study, and two of these were fully understood in context as well. The expression, '*get along*', can be said to have two different meanings depending on context, to be good together and to survive, and, therefore, it was not fully understood in the context of the song where the latter meaning was the one in question. It is likely that the expressions '*screw someone over*' and '*make out like*' might have been understood from the social context, that is, on English/American television, film and computers, where the students are likely to have heard these expressions. In my analysis, there are also examples of where students might have experienced positive or negative transfer, for example, '*the upside*'.

which have a similar positive meaning in Swedish, and *'downward spiral'*, where the Swedish word *'cirkel'* in some cases was thought of, and, therefore, negatively transferred as an equivalent to the English word *'spiral'*. Other expressions appear to have been literally translated into Swedish and although the words themselves, directly translated into Swedish, does not equal any directly corresponding Swedish expression, the participants seem to have associated the expression's literal meaning with something negative, as was the case with, for example, *'cut someone off'*, and *'hung up on somebody'*. An expression that could not be directly translated into Swedish without interfering with the understanding of it was *'go viral'*. The direct translation seems to have been confusing to many of the students, who could not explain the full meaning of it.

Most of the expressions appear to have been easier for the students to explain and understand when they were heard in the context of the song. Many students had a partial understanding of an expression out of context, but found it easier to explain when it was shown to them in the lyrics. Some students understood the expressions, both out of and in context, which might indicate that they have been positively transferred from Swedish to English already in the initial stage of the survey.

In an attempt to answer the thesis questions, I would like to claim that the students, in general, appear to have had a better understanding of the thirteen chosen English idiomatic expressions in the context of the songs in question (lyrics are available in the Appendices). The results show that students, when shown the lyrics, were likely to have put the expression in a larger context and thereby gaining a better understanding of the whole expression. There were, of course, exceptions, whereas some expressions had a very similar Swedish equivalent and, therefore, were fully understood or partially understood before the song was played. On the contrary, some expressions had no Swedish equivalent and were then misunderstood or not understood at all out of context or in context. However, in general most expressions were recognized and explained with a full or partial understanding out of context, and in context the students showed a better and deeper understanding of the expressions in question.

The results of this study indicate that Swedish people listening to music with English lyrics appear to understand the content of the song quite well. To a large extent, it seems as though Swedish people understand the messages in the music they listen to, even though each song is interpreted in a slightly different way by every listener, the main part of the message is, in large parts, understood. The results also indicate that Swedes have an ability to recognize and

comprehend English idiomatic language, especially when read or heard in a context. Since English is such a large part of the Swedish society, it is heard and seen daily on television, radio and computers, it is likely that Swedish people exposed to English in this way, inevitably also learn to use and understand it in communication with other people around the world. Another possibility, adding to this, is that English is considered a world-wide language and Swedes appear to be very aware of the possibilities that knowledge of English open up to them in terms of, for example, studying abroad, career possibilities and travels. As a future teacher of English, I believe it is possible to use music as a way to teach, for example, figurative language or idioms to students. By doing this, students can listen to their own music and try to find certain expressions, which they can then bring to class and discuss.

It has been a very interesting survey to conduct, and hopefully further research might find this data useful as a starting point into deeper research focused on the understanding of English idiomatic expressions. As a future English teacher, I think it is very important to consider possible ways of expanding Swedish students' vocabulary, not just of English lexemes, but of both British English and American English idioms as well. The English language is full of these and Swedish students are exposed to English to such a large extent, both in school and at home. If there had been enough time, the whole essay could have been expanded and improved upon, for example, using more participants, or compare and contrast British English idioms and American English idioms in an attempt to see which influence the Swedish learners the most.

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8. APPENDICES

IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH SONG LYRICS – A SURVEY

My c-essay this term is to do a study regarding English idiomatic expressions in song lyrics and how these are understood by Swedish university students with English as their second language. Therefore, I have chosen three songs commonly played on the radio where the lyrics contain a number of idiomatic expressions, and then I have selected three to five idiomatic expressions from each song, a total of 13 idiomatic expressions in all.

The survey consists of two parts. In the first part, the chosen idiomatic expressions are shown free from any context. I would then like you to explain to me what you consider the meaning to be. In the second part, I will show you the printed lyrics of the song, and play the song to you, with the idiomatic expressions marked, to establish what you understand by the meaning of the idiomatic expressions within the songs in question.

The survey will not take longer than about 20-30 minutes and I will have to see you in person to carry out the interview and record your answers.

What is an idiomatic expression?

An idiomatic expression is a way of speaking or writing that does not make any literal sense – we use these expressions all the time in speech and people familiar with our language generally recognise them and understand the meaning.

An example of what an idiomatic expression could be to *fall for someone*. We know that the word “fall” usually relates to move or drop down from a higher position, often by accident. However, we know that to *fall for someone* means something else – we usually understand it to mean to be strongly attracted to someone or even to think we love them, as in the expression to *fall in love*.

Lastly, please remember this is not a test. If you are not sure of the meaning, either free from context or within the song, don't just guess – be honest and say you are not sure, because that will help me to discover how well understood these expressions are to Swedish speakers of English.

Thank you very much for your assistance!

IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH SONG LYRICS

Explain what is meant by '*downward spiral*'?

What is meant by '*make out like*'?

What does it mean to '*get along*'?

Explain the meaning of '*screw someone over*'?

What is meant by '*go viral*'?

What is the meaning of '*up one's sleeve*'?

What does it mean to be '*hung up on somebody*'?

Explain the meaning of '*on the edge of the seat*'?

What does '*the upside*' mean?

What does it mean to '*cut someone off*'?

What does it mean to '*read into every word*'?

What is meant by '*get one's head together*'?

What is meant by '*bite the dust*'?

IDIOMATISKA UTTRYCK I ENGELSKA LÅTTEXTER – EN UNDERSÖKNING

Min c-uppsats i engelska den här terminen går ut på att jag ska göra en undersökning hur engelska idiomatiska uttryck i låttexter förstås bland svenska universitetsstudenter som har engelska som sitt andraspråk. Jag har valt ut tre låtar som spelas på radio, vilkas texter är fulla av idiomatiska uttryck, och jag har sedan plockat ut tre-fem idiomatiska uttryck ur varje låt vilket gett 13 idiomatiska uttryck allt som allt.

Undersökningen består av två delar. I den första har de idiomatiska uttrycken tagits ur sitt sammanhang (låten) och presenteras för dig. Jag vill sedan att du ska förklara för mig vad du tror att uttrycket betyder. I den andra delen spelar jag låten för dig och visar låttexten där de idiomatiska uttrycken är markerade. Detta för att se om du anser att betydelsen av uttrycken har ändrats när du får se/höra dem i sitt sammanhang.

Undersökningen kommer inte att ta mer än ca 20-30 minuter men jag behöver träffa dig personligen för att göra intervjun.

Vad är då ett idiomatiskt uttryck?

Ett idiomatiskt uttryck är ett sätt att tala eller skriva som inte har någon bokstavlig betydelse. Dessa uttryck används hela tiden i tal och skrift och människor som känner till språket känner vanligen igen uttrycken och vet vad de betyder.

Ett exempel på vad ett engelskt idiomatiskt uttryck kan vara är *'fall for someone'*. Vi vet att ordet *'fall'* vanligen har att göra med att någon eller något flyttas eller tappas från en högre position, ofta som en olyckshändelse. Vi vet samtidigt att *'fall for someone'* betyder någonting annat - i regel att någon är starkt attraherad av någon eller rent av kär i någon, ungefär som det engelska uttrycket *'fall in love'*.

Slutligen vill jag bara säga att den här undersökningen inte är något test. Om du är osäker på vad betydelsen av ett uttryck kan vara, antingen taget ur sitt sammanhang eller i låttexten, chansa inte utan var ärlig och säg att du är osäker eller inte vet. Detta kommer att hjälpa mig att upptäcka hur väl dessa uttryck förstås av svenska studenter med engelska som sitt andra språk.

Tusen tack för hjälpen!

IDIOMATISKA UTTRYCK I ENGELSKA LÅTTEXTER

Förklara betydelsen av '*downward spiral*'?

Förklara vad som menas med '*make out like*'?

Vad menas med '*get along*'?

Vad menas med '*screw someone over*'?

Vad betyder '*go viral*'?

Förklara vad som menas med '*up one's sleeve*'?

Vad betyder '*hung up on somebody*'?

Förklara betydelsen av '*on the edge of the seat*'?

Vad menas med '*the upside*'?

Vad betyder '*cut someone off*'?

Förklara betydelsen av '*read into every word*'?

Vad betyder '*get one's head together*'?

Vad betyder '*bite the dust*'?

**GOTYE ft. KIMBRA – SOMEBODY
THAT I USED TO KNOW**

Now and then I think of when we were
together
Like when you said you felt so happy you
could die
Told myself that you were right for me
But felt so lonely in your company
But that was love and it's an ache I still
remember

You can be addicted to a certain kind of
sadness
Like resignation to the end, always the end
So when we found that we could not make
sense
Well you said that we would still be
friends
But I'll admit that I was glad that it was
over

But you didn't have to cut me off
Make out like it never happened and that
we were nothing
And I don't even need your love
But you treat me like a stranger and that
feels so rough

No you didn't have to stoop so low
Have your friends collect your records and
then change your number
I guess that I don't need that though
Now you're just somebody that I used to
know

Now you're just somebody that I used to
know
Now you're just somebody that I used to
know

Now and then I think of all the times you
screwed me over
But had me believing it was always
something that I'd done
But I don't wanna live that way
Reading into every word you say
You said that you could let it go
And I wouldn't catch you hung up on
somebody that you used to know

But you didn't have to cut me off
Make out like it never happened and that
we were nothing
And I don't even need your love
But you treat me like a stranger and that
feels so rough

And you didn't have to stoop so low
Have your friends collect your records and
then change your number
I guess that I don't need that though
Now you're just somebody that I used to
know

Somebody
(I used to know)
Somebody
(Now you're just somebody that I used to
know)

Somebody
(I used to know)
Somebody
(Now you're just somebody that I used to
know)

(I used to know)
(That I used to know)
(I used to know)
Somebody

TRAIN – DRIVE BY

On the other side of a street I knew
Stood a girl that looked like you
I guess that's déjà vu
But I thought this can't be true
Cause you moved to west L.A or New
York or Santa Fe
Or wherever to get away from me

Oh but that one night
Was more than just right
I didn't leave you cause I was all through
Oh I was overwhelmed and frankly scared
as hell
Because I really fell for you

Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by
Just a shy guy looking for a two ply
Hefty bag to hold my love
When you move me everything is groovy
They don't like it sue me
Mmm the way you do me
Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by

On the upside of a downward spiral
My love for you went viral
And I loved you every mile you drove
away
But now here you are again
So let's skip the "how you been" and
get down to the "more than friends" at last

Oh but that one night
Is still the highlight
I didn't need you until I came to
and I was overwhelmed and frankly scared
as hell
Because I really fell for you

Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by
Just a shy guy looking for a two ply
Hefty bag to hold my love
When you move me everything is groovy
They don't like it sue me
Mmm the way you do me

Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by

Please believe that when I leave
There's nothing up my sleeve but love for
you
And a little time to get my head together
too

On the other side of a street I knew
Stood a girl that looked like you
I guess that's déjà vu
But I thought this can't be true
Cause

Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by
Just a shy guy looking for a two ply
Hefty bag to hold my love
When you move me everything is groovy
They don't like it sue me
Mmm the way you do me
Oh I swear to you
I'll be there for you
This is not a drive by

**QUEEN – ANOTHER ONE BITES
THE DUST**

Steve walks warily down the street
With the brim pulled way down low
Ain't no sound but the sound of his feet
Machine guns ready to go

Are you ready
Are you ready for this
Are you hanging on the edge of your seat
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
To the sound of the beat

Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
And another one gone, and another one
gone
Another one bites the dust
Hey, I'm gonna get you too
Another one bites the dust

How do you think I'm gonna get along
Without you, when you're gone
You took me for everything that I had
And kicked me out on my own

Are you happy, are you satisfied
How long can you stand the heat
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
To the sound of the beat
Look out

Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust

And another one gone, and another one
gone
Another one bites the dust
Hey, I'm gonna get you too
Another one bites the dust

Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust

There are plenty of ways you can hurt a
man

And bring him to the ground
You can beat him
You can cheat him
You can treat him bad and leave him
When he's down
But I'm ready, yes I'm ready for you
I'm standing on my own two feet
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
Repeating the sound of the beat

Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
And another one gone, and another one
gone
Another one bites the dust
Hey, I'm gonna get you too
Another one bites the dust

Questions for the survey

- Q1 Explain what is meant by '*downward spiral*'?
- Q2 What is meant by '*make out like*'?
- Q3 What does it mean to '*get along*'?
- Q4 Explain the meaning of '*screw someone over*'?
- Q5 What is meant by '*go viral*'?
- Q6 What is the meaning of '*up one's sleeve*'?
- Q7 What does it mean to be '*hung up on somebody*'?
- Q8 Explain the meaning of '*on the edge of the seat*'?
- Q9 What does '*the upside*' mean?
- Q10 What does it mean to '*cut someone off*'?
- Q11 What does it mean to '*read into every word*'?
- Q12 What is meant by '*get one's head together*'?
- Q13 What is meant by '*bite the dust*'?

R1 (female)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized all the songs in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: That something is going bad, like your life isn’t going very well and you’re feeling bad.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): When something negative is happening in your life, for example, your state of health could be a downward spiral.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: When you are... When something is gonna become something, I don’t know how to explain. Like a situation is gonna be made out like, gonna look like this...

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Well, make out like... Rather describing something like it never happened.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: When you’re friends and respect each other, for example, a relationship between friends or lovers.

After the song has been played (How do you think I’m gonna get along): It means that you can get along with another person or get along with life.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: I know this from before, for example, when you are selling a car and want more money than it is worth and get it, then you screw someone over. You trick someone.

After the song has been played (Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over): It is to trick someone.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Isn't it like go crazy? I go crazy, for example, when I like somebody I can go viral because that person makes me feel romantic feelings for that person.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Maybe it means that it got bigger? His love for her grew bigger.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Could it be like a person is getting closer, getting to know the other person's secrets? Getting to know that person and find out that person's secrets.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): It means that he hasn't got any other motives than his love for her.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: You can't forget that person, you think of that person constantly.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): The same as I said before.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Could it be like you're in big trouble and soon will "fall down"? Yeah, you're in big trouble.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Could it be someone's angry? No, same as before, someone is in trouble.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: The upside is the positive thing, the positive side.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The positive side, same as before.

10. What does it mean to *'cut someone off'*?

Before the song has been played: Cut someone off could be a relationship that ends, you have no more contact with that person. Or it could be money, you don't supply money for someone else anymore.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): I think it means the same, that a relationship has ended.

11. What does it mean to *'read into every word'*?

Before the song has been played: Meaning that if someone is listening to you when you speak and analyzes every word you say. Then that person is reading into every word you say. Could lead to misunderstandings.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): The same as before.

12. What is meant by *'get one's head together'*?

Before the song has been played: In a context it could be to calm down and figuring something out. Like if you have a problem you can figure out how to solve it.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same as before.

13. What is meant by *'bite the dust'*?

Before the song has been played: Could it be the same as in Swedish; "Bita i det sura äpplet?" I don't know, perhaps it means you don't get anything, you get nothing out of a deal, for example.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): The same as I said before.

R2 (female)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized songs 1 and 3, and had heard other songs by the artist in song no. 2 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: I’m not sure how to explain. It’s something bad, you’re going down. It’s hard to explain, I guess it’s like a bad circle.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): A bad situation, something is bad.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Isn’t it like an act or, how do you say, like act, yeah I guess like act.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing): Act, the same as I said before.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: Swedish “komma överens”, to, not to agree, but to not argue, to be able to work together and respect each other.

After the song has been played (How do you think I’m gonna get along): Here, more like move on or make it.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: To let somebody down, or fool someone, like with a mean purpose, betrayal maybe.

After the song has been played (Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over): Yeah, the same I guess.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I have no idea. But... Maybe go crazy?

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): I'm not sure. Maybe my love for you grew, became real or strong or alive, I don't know.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: I think it's like in Swedish "trumfkort", triumph card, can you say that in English? Like a back-up plan. A card up one's sleeve, having a back-up plan, something to pull out of the sleeve in case of an emergency.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): I don't have anything to hide. I don't have anything else in here but my love for you. It's not like cheating as in a card game.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Yeah, it's when you can't stop thinking of that person. Like when you're seeing someone you don't want to see anyone else. I guess it could be negative as well because you could miss opportunities.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): The same as I said before.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Isn't it like to be nervous or anxious?

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Like I said, but rather eager than anxious perhaps in this context. You just can't wait to get going.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: A metaphor for something else, the advantage, the good things. Like if you have "pros and cons" the upside would be the pros.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): How do you say, it's hard to find the words. The positive, like, how do you say... Like the small glimpse of the sun on a very cloudy sky. Like the small part of something good in a bad situation.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: To lose contact with somebody on purpose. Kind of like breaking up, or maybe not, it depends on the context I guess. If a parent says I cut you off to a child, then he or she gets no more money.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Ok, it's not like money. To not want to have anything to do with that person anymore.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: Isn't that like you have to interpret every word? Like analyzing and interpreting too much into things.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): The same as I said.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: "Samla sig", to pull yourself together. I don't know really.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same as I said before; pull yourself together, to be able to think clearly or something like that.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: What is meant by bite the dust? Guess it could be doing something you don't want to or taking the consequence of one's act. Like Swedish "Bita i det sura äpplet", bite the sour apple literally. No, to do something you don't want to do or take the consequences of your actions.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): To do something that you don't want to do but have to do. The first of what I said before.

R3 (female)

Studies: currently studying chemistry at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized all of the songs in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: It has a negative meaning, something goes downwards, ”utför” in Swedish.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): Everything’s going down, going bad.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Sounds like someone’s kissing, it’s the first thing I come to think of.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Kissing still maybe, “kissing” like it never happened? I’m not sure.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: “Komma överens” in Swedish, agree perhaps. When you get along well with someone you’re like fine together, you get along.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): Still the same as before.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: “Köra över någon”, run someone over as we would say in Sweden, like trick or fool, humiliate. Someone’s being mean to another.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): The same as before.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I think it has something to do with to go online or on the Internet. Maybe something becomes online or more lively... No, I have no idea, just guessing.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Hmm, now I have no idea, in this context... Maybe not online as I thought. I don't know.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Up one's sleeve? Have something in your sleeve? I think it is when you have something there as an extra resource to take out when you need it.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): "Baktanke" in Swedish, you don't have any secret motives.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Either in love, like very much in love, or... No, that must be it I think.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): You can't let go of that person in any way.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Maybe the top of the iceberg, no, that's not it. Maybe like you're at a crossroads and must make a choice, no really, I have no idea. What is meant by the seat, "sätet". I don't get it.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): He's a daredevil, I dare you. It's like he's asking, I dare you, are you ready to use this machinegun now, are you ready for it. At least that's what I think.

9. What does *'the upside'* mean?

Before the song has been played: I know this, but can't put my finger on it... Something positive, an event can be on the upside. The positive thing.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The upside, the positive side.

10. What does it mean to *'cut someone off'*?

Before the song has been played: You don't want any contact with that person, it's like the end of a chapter in a way.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Something like I said before I think.

11. What does it mean to *'read into every word'*?

Before the song has been played: This must be something negative, you should not read into every word, but see to the whole. Like a dispute between two parts, they read too much into what's been said. It might be better to read between the lines. Sounds like a female thing though, guess maybe women could do this a lot.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): Also the same I think.

12. What is meant by *'get one's head together'*?

Before the song has been played: Get one's head together, collect your thoughts, focus and concentrate.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): Still the same.

13. What is meant by *'bite the dust'*?

Before the song has been played: Bite the dust, I think like bite my ass. I'm like in front of someone, way in front as in like I'm already there and you can bite my dust, I don't want anything to do with you anymore. I'm ahead of you and better than you.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): I don't know, someone else loses, and then it's another's turn to do the same.

R4 (female)

Studies: currently studying political science at university level. Student was born in the USA and lived there until she was two years old.

Student recognized all of the songs in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: The first thing I come to think of is an evil circle, an evil circle of something bad. It’s when one bad thing leads to another.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): It’s a bad spiral, a negative spiral, bad circle.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Make something look like something or maybe make it seem like something.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Make it seem like, yeah, as I said before.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: Being friends or being friendly may be more accurate perhaps.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): Now I think it’s more like to move on, moving forward, no move on.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: To fool someone, to, yeah, to fool someone.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): It’s more like he’s stringing me along, string you along, like leading someone on in a deceiving manner perhaps.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I think that it's like when you go crazy, or you get very excited, yeah, getting a little crazy.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Basically the same as I said before I think.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: I think it's like when you're up to something. You have a trick up your sleeve, there's something going on.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): Pretty much the same as I said before.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: It's like when you're a little bit obsessed, maybe obsessed is a strong word for it, but I think it's something like that. You're obsessed with somebody.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Obsessed, the same as I said before.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: I think it's like you're ready, ready to do something, ready to go and do something.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): The same as I said.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: Good times, maybe it means like there are good things going on, good times. You look at the positive side of things. To see the positive side.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The positive thing.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: Not to give anyone anymore, not give them anymore help, or no more drinks or yeah, it could be almost anything I guess. It could be money as well. You can be cut off in many ways, and it means something like you're not helping anybody.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): To not care, to ignore, yeah, to ignore.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: To... to pick something apart, like... Yeah, like to pick apart and analyze what someone's saying.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): To analyze really, quite the same.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: To get yourself together and to think clearly.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same, to think straight and clear.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: To die. It's the first think that comes to my mind. To die, or maybe to miss out on something, but I think it's to die.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): It's definitely to die, at least in this context.

R5 (male)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country but lived together with an English speaking friend for about six months and they spoke only English together.

Student had never heard song 1 and had heard other songs by the artist in song no. 2, recognized song 3 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: When something is taking a bad turn. You’re, how should I explain it, taking a bad turn, hmm, that’s another idiom right? Something bad happens and then more bad things add to it, adds to the mess.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): The same.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: I guess it’s not make out as in “*make out*” meaning kissing. Maybe to figure something out, to understand something.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing): More something like pretend I think.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: Relationships that work I guess you can say. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a personal relationship, a c-essay can get along as well I suppose.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): More in the lines of to manage something, I think.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: Screw someone over, well, I would say that you rip someone off. You create a bad situation for someone else.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): The same. In the context it has to be that way.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Go viral, I don't really know what viral means? Ain't got a clue.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Maybe something like you turn alive.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Like a "secret weapon", you got something up your sleeve. You got something stored that can't be seen.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): The same as before.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: You're stuck on somebody, you're obsessed. Can't get someone out of your head. Rather this than "hang up the phone".

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Pretty much the same.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: You can't really relax, you're like needles and pins. On the verge of doing something.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): More like you're ready to go.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: On the bright side, good side, happy side.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The same, the happy side.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: To either cut someone out of your life as in a relationship, or intervene someone when they're speaking. Intervene their dialogue.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Pretty much the same as before.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: To overanalyze, really. Reading too much into things.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): The same as I said before.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: To get focused, to clear your thoughts, or some of your thoughts.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): Pretty much the same as before.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: To hit rock bottom, or not rock bottom, but to accept a defeat and move on.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): Pretty much the same.

R6 (male)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized songs 1 and 3, and had heard other songs by the artist in song no. 2 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: I think that’s like when you’re in a situation where something negative happens and it just gets worse and worse. When something bad happens in your life you’re in a downward spiral.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): As I said before.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Well, I’m really not sure. I think a situation could be made out like to look a certain way. I’m not sure if it has a double meaning, when you make out something to look a certain way, you change it to look like something. Or maybe the way you understand something; the way you make out a thing like. I’m not really sure.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing): Kind of like I said before. It makes me think that the person is trying to make it look like it never happened.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: If you get along you just click. There’s harmony between personalities and you get along well, there’s no fighting.

After the song has been played (How do you think I’m gonna get along): How do you think I’m going to make it? It’s like I can’t live my life without you. His life is not going to work without him, or is it her?

4. Explain the meaning of 'screw someone over'?

Before the song has been played: Well, if you screw someone over you take advantage of that person and do something on his or her expense. You trick them.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): That's just what I said before. Someone has treated him/her badly.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I think it has something to do with the Internet. When you go viral it's like you have a project, or it could be an invention or something, which you post on YouTube for everyone to see. Or like you have a website and present it there. Something to do with Internet.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): My love for you went viral. A conclusion, like a clip on YouTube where you've posted something that has gone public, even though it might not have been supposed to. Something with Internet.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: You have something that could be unexpected. For example in a football game when you're down one goal, the coach may have something up his sleeve, like a really super good player that just goes in and scores.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): He has no other intentions, he's really honest. No tricks waiting up his sleeve, just plain honesty.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Well, I think it means that you can't stop thinking about that person. Obsession, can't like let that person go. It could be both negative and positive, to me it has a negative ring as well. Hung up on someone in a negative way.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): The same as before. Obsessed and thinking and focusing on someone.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: When you're on the edge of the seat you're waiting, you're nervous. Something is going to happen. It's like when you're watching a horror movie and you just wait for something to scare the shit out of you. You're on the edge, ready to explode.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): On the edge of your seat? Well, basically "Are you ready?" Something's going to happen real soon.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: It must mean the positive aspect, for example if you have lost your house in a hurricane, the upside could be that the garage is still there.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): Basically same as before, the positive thing. The positive thing of a downward spiral means something like you can see a ray of light, "the upside", in the darkness.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: Well, to cut someone off, I guess my natural assumption would be when you're driving and suddenly drives in front of someone you're cutting someone off. I'm not sure that's the only meaning but maybe it's the most common.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): This is how it could be used in another situation than what I said before. He didn't have to interrupt it, or end it "just like that". In the lyrics it is a relationship that has ended, he has cut her off.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: I think it is when you overanalyze. When you take everything too literally. You base everything on what a person has said, literally, you read into every word.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): The same as before. She doesn't want to overanalyze what he says in order to get his message through.

12. What is meant by ‘*get one’s head together*’?

Before the song has been played: It means to focus. Someone tells me to focus and get in the game again. Someone wants you to “shake out of it” and just focus.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): He has no time to get his shit together. Yeah, it’s like he’s too far down and there’s no way he’s gonna get his head together.

13. What is meant by ‘*bite the dust*’?

Before the song has been played: When you bite the dust you’re trying to do something but you fail. For example if you enter a car race and end up dead last they say that you bit the dust. When something goes really bad you bite the dust, I think.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): Another one loses, maybe someone dies? Another one loses the game but many have done it before too.

R7 (male)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized none of the songs in this survey, save song no. 3 of which a cover had been heard.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: Downward spiral, ehm, I believe it would be something like... How to explain? Something that is continuing down a path that is a little bit wrong, it’s not a path that you would want to go on.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): It’s about how you go from asking someone if they want to be your friend and then how you’re becoming more than friends and so on, that’s the downward spiral in this context I think.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Ehm, make out like. Something that it would become, the result of something.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): I would translate it like pretend. They pretend it never happened.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: Get along well together, we’re on the same page, we work together. Yeah, I think that’s it.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): The same as before, you’re on the same page. But in this context he’s not able to do that, to get along.

4. Explain the meaning of 'screw someone over'?

Before the song has been played: I guess it would mean something that you're... it means that you're playing a trick on someone. Or doing something that would result in something bad to that person. When you have an ally or friend and you turn your back on that person in a certain situation.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): You're playing with someone, like playing with their feelings and you're not completely committed into the relationship.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Go viral? I'm not sure about the meaning of the word viral. I'm not sure if it's a positive or negative thing, either you're very, very happy, or very, very angry. Not completely sure. Very angry is a guess.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): In this context I think it is that his love became alive.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: If I remember correctly I would say it means something like you have something hidden, or you have something, how do you say... a piece of information that the other part don't know about. You have certain information that you're not telling anyone about.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): He's not hiding anything, just showing his love for the person he's singing about, a girl.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Right away I could say that it has two meanings, either hanging up the phone on somebody or it could also mean that you're fed up on someone. You don't want to have anything to do with that person anymore.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): In this context, I think it's like being with someone else.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Wow, never heard that one before... Maybe something like you're like preparing yourself that something will happen, you're on the edge of your seat. And then when something happens you like jump up and scream or something, I don't know.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Someone's a little bit nervous, edgy perhaps.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: The upside, hmm? I would say something positive, like a pro instead of a con.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): Well, the positive thing.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: I guess it would mean something like when you're cutting someone off you don't want them to benefit from you anymore... Like if you're paying them money they won't get any more from you.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Ok, well basically the same meaning I would say, but in this context; a love story, it means that they've split up and one partner is cutting the other off completely, no more contact with that person.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: If I remember correctly it's something like you're analyzing every word of a sentence, seeing every word instead of the whole meaning of the sentence itself. Basically overanalyzing.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): I still think it's overanalyzing. She's trying to understand why everything is going down this specific path.

12. What is meant by '*get one's head together*'?

Before the song has been played: I guess that expression means that you're trying to collect all your thoughts and things straight. Focusing on one thing instead of having a split focus.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same meaning as I said before, to think straight, to concentrate his focus.

13. What is meant by '*bite the dust*'?

Before the song has been played: I'm not completely sure of the meaning. But bite the dust could either mean stay strong and be confident or just that you're like moving on from another person, you tell them that you don't care anymore you tell them to bite the dust.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): I guess it means something like something slips in through the cracks, someone is able to escape like in an attack, and then he's gonna get him next... Or, wait, it could mean that you're in the grave, someone's dead. You're in the dust, you're dead and then he's after another one.

R8 (male)

Studies: currently studying English at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized all of the songs in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: Ehm, when you’re stuck and it feels like life is going down in some ways. Like negative, downward spiral, when everything feels like crap.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): I guess it means that things go down, so it’s quite the same.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: I’ve never heard this one. Is it an expression or is it just the words? Make out as in kiss? I’ve no idea, make out like... No idea.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Say it like it was nothing. Or make it sound like it was nothing, or make it look like it was nothing.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: I suppose it is what it is, when you feel like you like someone’s company.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): How do you think I’m gonna live my life, or something like that.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: Ehm, when you’re fooling someone, in a bad way. Not like an April joke, but in a bad way. It’s planned, you go behind someone’s back.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): The same. Like you’ve really planned on fooling someone. Go behind someone’s back, and it’s not like a small thing, not like a small joke.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Go viral? I have no idea.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Viral like "viral" in Swedish, can't remember if it's like a positive thing or a negative thing. Not sure what "viral" means in Swedish either. Could be that his love for her died, or it could mean like love for her, or that he loved when she drove away, or maybe he loves her more for every mile she drove away. Went viral? It took a spin, like it lightened up?

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Hmm, I have no idea. Never heard that one.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): That feels just like he's trying to rhyme, I don't get what he means. Maybe it's like he can't think of something else. Like Swedish; "Upp över öronen" perhaps.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: That's like maybe when you're in love with someone you can't really let go of, or yeah, I suppose that's it.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Yeah, I still feel like it, like someone's hung up on someone. Not necessarily like in love, it could be someone that has done something to you. Maybe you miss like a friend you haven't seen in a while and you think too much about that person. In the song... I can't really tell what they mean.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Maybe it's when you're about to fall, not necessarily from a chair or a couch, but when something bad could happen anytime. Like a relationship could be on the edge of the seat, maybe.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Feels something like he says to fasten your seatbelt or hang on.

9. What does *'the upside'* mean?

Before the song has been played: Maybe it's like positive things in life, or... the upside? Yeah, if you lose a game you could have the upside of it anyways because you take some positive things out of it.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): I feel like he's just trying to make some rhymes. The upside, above something maybe? No idea. On the top?

10. What does it mean to *'cut someone off'*?

Before the song has been played: Maybe end a friendship or a relationship or, like not going to talk to that person again.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Maybe being rude to someone, like really showing that you have moved on and being rude to the person that has not moved on. I get the feeling it means something like that.

11. What does it mean to *'read into every word'*?

Before the song has been played: When someone reads too much in the words you say.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): I suppose I think the same.

12. What is meant by *'get one's head together'*?

Before the song has been played: Like get someone to think straight.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): To get your thought sorted out.

13. What is meant by *'bite the dust'*?

Before the song has been played: Bite the dust? Like being kicked down on the floor or maybe it's emotional. I get the feeling it means like sometimes it has to be bad for things to be good.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): Still no idea, maybe the same. But it's hard, I don't really get what he means.

R9 (male)

Studies: currently studying physics education at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized all of the songs in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: How should I try to explain? I think it’s when a thing... or when you make a thing and it goes bad and then the next thing goes bad, and bad and bad, as in a bad circle.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): The same as before.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Could it be like someone’s kissing? Or like... or how you look in front of people.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): To... Hmm, it’s how you portrait something or someone.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: For me it’s either that you have a best friend and you get along with him, or just like should we hang together, should we get along together.

After the song has been played (How do you think I’m gonna get along): Not quite right what I said before, about friends. Here it’s more like, how can you take care of yourself. How can you get on without me.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: I would say it is like if a promise, like today, if I wouldn’t have come I’d have screwed you over.

After the song has been played (Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over): Yeah, the same as letting one down, I think. Could it be like he cheated on her?

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I'm not familiar with the word viral... Hmm, go crazy or something perhaps.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Could it be something like crazy? Or maybe something true. I'll go with something like crazy still.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: I would guess it means that you have too much to do. Yeah.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): I didn't get that right before, it's more like there's nothing else but love for you, there's only love, he's not there to lure her.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: That sounds like if you call a friend on a phone and just hang up, and also I think it could be if you turn someone down.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Not quite right from what I said before. I think she means he should not hang after her, he should let her go, she thinks they're done.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Another one I haven't heard before. I suppose it means you're a bit out of line, you take water over your shoulders perhaps, if it's called that in English, "Ta sig vatten över huvudet" in Swedish.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Well, I think, I explained it was... Out of line? No, more like you're ready for the fight, you should be ready for the fight and just run out there, like you're really prepared.

9. What does *'the upside'* mean?

Before the song has been played: Out of context, it could mean... eh, that you show one's true nature, how they really are, the upside of things perhaps.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): Well, I didn't get that one right. I understand now, the right, the good side of a downward spiral.

10. What does it mean to *'cut someone off'*?

Before the song has been played: For me it's the same as no 4; screw someone over. You bail on them, you make a promise and then don't care to show up, like today with this interview, if I shouldn't have come.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): The same as I said before.

11. What does it mean to *'read into every word'*?

Before the song has been played: I suppose it's the opposite to read between the lines, perhaps you get stuck on some specific word I said and don't get the whole context of what I say.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): Not sure, really. I'm not really sure what she means, in the context though, she's not happy. But it's hard to translate it to Swedish, hard to translate word for word what it means and I'm not sure about the Swedish meaning either.

12. What is meant by *'get one's head together'*?

Before the song has been played: I suppose that is when you collect your thoughts and try to focus on the first and most important thing to do. If your thoughts are divided, you should get your head together.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): Yeah, quite the same. You collect your thoughts and focus on the one thing you have to do.

13. What is meant by '*bite the dust*'?

Before the song has been played: Hmm, it could be when you're getting screwed by someone, the one getting screwed then bites the dust.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): Let someone down. But more like literally beaten down, you're going down either in a fight or a ball game or something, but you're getting beaten.

R10 (male)

Studies: currently studying sociology at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student did not recognize song 1 and 2 but had heard song no. 3 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: Something that gets worse and worse, ehm, yeah, that’s it. That’s the best description of it I think.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): The same as before.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: I don’t know this one, maybe, how you imagine something, or not really, but it is when, when you’re... No, I have it in my head but I can’t find the words for it. But I’ll go with how you imagine something.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Two things I think, to pretend like something’s happened that hasn’t really happened, and it’s could be when you make this appearance to either a person, the one in the text, the one you’re in a relationship with, or in a more general way, to the rest of the world. Something has been but is now changed and you pretend it’s something else.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: Get along, hmm, “komma överens” in Swedish. In English I guess it’s how two or more persons agree or... It can also be how they manage to live with each other.

After the song has been played (How do you think I’m gonna get along): “Klara sig” in Swedish, in this context though, it’s how to manage living your life. Yeah, that’s the short of it.

4. Explain the meaning of 'screw someone over'?

Before the song has been played: I've heard this, but it's difficult to explain it. It can mean to fool somebody, but also to use someone. I think that's it.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): It's the same as I said before.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: I haven't heard this one before. I don't know. A hunch would be that, well... Maybe, I think it got something to do with "virus" in Swedish, a virus. Something goes berserk, something gets very angry and uses for example violence.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): I still think it comes from like a virus and it turned, yeah... Ehm, yeah, maybe it became a lot all of a sudden, wild. It went in to hyper drive.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Isn't it like, well in Swedish, "När du har ett ess i rockärmen", an ace up your sleeve, to have a hidden trick or something.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): The same, but in the context also that he has nothing to hide.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: It would seem like... Or is it if you're in love with someone or angry at someone. For me it's like being angry at someone, without context I think it means to be irritated at somebody.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Maybe it is love in this case. But I associate it to hanging up on a telephone, which you might do when you're upset with someone, it sounds like something negative to me.

8. Explain the meaning of ‘on the edge of the seat’?

Before the song has been played: To be like very tense, on the edge, often in a positive way but not always. And well, no I think that’s one way to explain it.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): The same as I said before.

9. What does ‘the upside’ mean?

Before the song has been played: The positive side of something. Yeah, that’s that I think.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The same, positive, the beginning. In this context the upside means in the beginning or in the best face of something that will sooner or later be bad or get worse.

10. What does it mean to ‘cut someone off’?

Before the song has been played: To cut someone off is to, for example, break contact with someone and never see them again and never talk to them again.

After the song has been played (*But you didn’t have to cut me off*): The same, the first description is ok.

11. What does it mean to ‘read into every word’?

Before the song has been played: Overanalyze, to overanalyze. Take too much meaning into every single word someone says, something like that.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): A matter of interpretations I guess. The same as I said, you take everything literally but it could also be to follow everything that person said and believing in it.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: If you're either distracted or something makes you, ehm, well something that makes you distracted. Being angry or in love or whatever, but mainly to be distracted by some reason. The meaning of get one's head together is to start thinking rationally again. That's one aspect of it I think.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same. When you're in love you can feel like it's spinning away but to get your head together means to calm yourself down and get your thoughts in place.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: "Another one bites the dust", that's the one right? It can be that somebody dies, but also that you just put someone down in the sense of incapacitating that person.

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): The same as I said before.

R11 (male)

This student preferred to do the interview in Swedish, therefore I had to translate the answers into English myself, and they will follow in *italics* **after** the Swedish answers.

Studies: currently studying economy and technology at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student did not recognize song 1 but had hears song 2 and 3 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: Jag tänker så här, typ ond cirkel. Finns en sång av ”The haunted” som går typ ”I’m trapped in a downward spiral”, så jag säger nog ond cirkel.

Hmm, I think it’s like a bad circle, I’ve heard a song by ”The Haunted” in which they sing like “I’m trapped in a downward spiral” or something like that, so I think it means like you’re in a bad circle.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): Ja, typ samma.

Still the same as I said.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: Den här är svår, hmm, make out like, typ hångla. Vet inte riktigt, hångla som?

This was a difficult one, hmm, make out like? Is it like kissing? I don’t really know.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): Typ få det att de ut som om någonting inte hänt. Tolkar jag det som.

My interpretation would be like they try to make it look like it didn’t happen.

3. What does it mean to 'get along'?

Before the song has been played: Det är som att komma överens, ja, man är överens.

It's like when you're agreeing with someone, you can have a good relationship with that person.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I'm gonna get along*): Kunna fortsätta snarare än komma överens i detta sammanhanget

I think it's rather like how to go on in this context than agree on something.

4. Explain the meaning of 'screw someone over'?

Before the song has been played: Jag hade gissat att man lurar någon, som att lura någon.

I would say that you trick someone, yeah, it's like you're tricking someone.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): Ja, samma.

The same as before.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Go viral? Vet inte vad viral betyder, aldrig hört viral vad jag vet, ingen aning.

Go viral, I don't know what viral is? Never heard it before, I don't have a clue.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Jag antar att det är något att hans kärlek flödar eller något liknande typ.

I still don't know what is meant by "viral" but in this context I guess it's like his love is flowing or something like that.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: Svår, men jag tror, jag har svårt att uttrycka det, typ vara i vägen, lite som, ja, man kan vara i vägen.

This is a difficult one to explain, I find it hard to express it, maybe something like being in the way. Yeah, one could be in the way.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): Inte samma som innan, men det finns inget hinder, typ. Inget i vägen.

Not quite the same as before. Rather there's nothing in the way, no obstacle in the way for them.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Kan vara typ att avsluta en relation eller något sådant, eller inte nödvändigtvis en relation, kan vara som att sluta prata i telefon också eller något sådant.

Maybe to end a relationship, or not necessarily a relationship but it can also be that you're ending a conversation on the phone or something like that.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): Vet inte riktigt, tror inte riktigt samma som innan, men nej, jag vet inte riktigt i det här sammanhanget.

I'm not really sure, not quite the same as before, but I still can't understand what is meant by it in this context. No, I don't know.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: Utan att veta, men rent spontant skulle jag säga typ att det är som att föra någonting framåt. Svårt att förklara, typ dra någonting framåt. Elle ja, typ så. Har det i huvudet men kan inte riktigt förklara.

I do not really know this, but spontaneously I would say it's to pull something forward, or to bring something forward I think. It's hard to explain, can't really find the words for it.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): Tycker ändå jag var hyfsat bra ute, lite samma, ehh, är du redo för att.. Alltså, så svårt, men vara på tå, vara redo.

I don't think that I was that for off before really, but more like, ehm, are you ready to... Well, yeah, this was a difficult one to pin down, but like if you're ready I think.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: Det tror jag är som en fördel, en fördel.

It's when you have an advantage, or like something is a pro and not a con.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): Det positiva med en negativ spiral, något bra som kommer ur något dåligt.

It's the positive thing of for example a negative spiral.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: Liknande "Hung up on somebody", typ, ja som att sparka någon kanske, eller försöka utesluta någon kanske.

I think it's kind of similar to 'hung up on somebody'. But maybe like you fire someone, or maybe exclude someone from something.

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): Ja, typ samma.

I think it is the same as I said before.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: Typ som, svår den också. Men jag tror det är att tolka saker bokstavligt.

This was a difficult one, but I think it is when you interpret things too literally.

After the song has been played (Reading into every word you say): Nu skulle jag vilja säga att det handlar om att tolka varje ord som han säger, eller försöka tolka, rättare sagt.

Now I think it is more like when you interpret every word that someone's saying, or rather you try to interpret or find a meaning in every word someone is saying.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: Typ som att samla sig, eller så, men ja, om man är tankspridd så måste jag "Get my head together", samla mig.

To collect yourself I think, if you're very absent in your mind you need to get your head together, to collect yourself.

After the song has been played (And a little time to get my head together too): Fortfarande detsamma. Samla sig, eller tänka igenom.

I'd say it's the same as I said before. Collect yourself and think things through.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: Ta i med hårdhandskarna skulle jag vilja säga. Inte rädd för att få lite skit under naglarna.

I think it is when you take a strong line, you're not afraid to get your hands dirty.

After the song has been played (Another one bites the dust): Intrycket är att det är så här... att jag börjar tänka typ som att man slagit ner någon, så har den liksom bitit i marken, "bit the dust".

I get the impression that it's like if you strike someone down, the one on the ground has bit the dust. He's down.

R12 (male)

Studies: currently studying Swedish at university level. Student has not lived in an English speaking country.

Student recognized song 1 and song 3, but had not heard song no. 2 in this survey.

1. Explain what is meant by ‘downward spiral’?

Before the song has been played: Downward spiral? I would say it’s when you’re in a bad place and it’s continuously the same.

After the song has been played (...of a downward spiral): The same as I said before.

2. What is meant by ‘make out like’?

Before the song has been played: I would say it is to recognize something, to make out something.

After the song has been played (Make out like it never happened and that we were *nothing*): In this context it’s more like to tell somebody a story, a story that isn’t true, an unrepresentative proclamation of reality.

3. What does it mean to ‘get along’?

Before the song has been played: It means to be comfortable with someone and it can be both a good thing if you and I get along well, but it can also be that we get along and no more than that.

After the song has been played (*How do you think I’m gonna get along*): Still what I said, but it is also used in a negative, yeah, like it’s the negation of that positive connotation, you can get along without someone as well as with someone.

4. Explain the meaning of ‘screw someone over’?

Before the song has been played: It is to betray someone.

After the song has been played (*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*): The same as before.

5. What is meant by 'go viral'?

Before the song has been played: Go viral? I don't know, haven't heard this one, but I recognize viral. But I don't know, not his one.

After the song has been played (*My love for you went viral*): Now I think it means something like go crazy... It probably comes from something with viruses and from scientists when they've got a kind of mixture I suppose it can go viral.

6. What is the meaning of 'up one's sleeve'?

Before the song has been played: It could be when you're too close to someone, almost like aggressively making a connection with someone.

After the song has been played (*There's nothing up my sleeve but love for you*): I would say it's more like I have nothing to hide. I guess it's both in a good way and a sneaky way, as in card play you can have an ace up your sleeve, "Ett ess i rockärmen" I suppose.

7. What does it mean to be 'hung up on somebody'?

Before the song has been played: Something like, well... It could be either that you're disturbed by someone or perhaps the opposite. You like someone and can't get that someone out of your head for some reason.

After the song has been played (*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*): The same as I said before.

8. Explain the meaning of 'on the edge of the seat'?

Before the song has been played: It's when you're really nervous and cannot sit still so to speak.

After the song has been played (*Are you hanging on the edge of your seat*): The same as I said before.

9. What does 'the upside' mean?

Before the song has been played: The upside is the positive side of a situation, which means there's a negative side as well.

After the song has been played (*On the upside*): The same as I said previously.

10. What does it mean to 'cut someone off'?

Before the song has been played: You interrupt someone in a line like at a gas station or you speak when someone else is speaking, like you're saying; "that's enough".

After the song has been played (*But you didn't have to cut me off*): The same as I said before.

11. What does it mean to 'read into every word'?

Before the song has been played: Hard one to explain. I would say it's when you're taking something too literally. Almost like being hung up on every word someone says.

After the song has been played (*Reading into every word you say*): The same as I said before.

12. What is meant by 'get one's head together'?

Before the song has been played: To pick yourself up, "skärp dig" in Swedish, if I can say that.

After the song has been played (*And a little time to get my head together too*): The same as I said before.

13. What is meant by 'bite the dust'?

Before the song has been played: Literally it means kill, I think. Someone dies, or maybe it could be like; "I got you".

After the song has been played (*Another one bites the dust*): The same.