

Thanks and Goodbye: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis on Emotional Distress in BTS Suga's K-pop Compositions

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Abstract: Mental health issues have become prevalent among music artists, more specifically among Korean pop (K-pop) idols. Bangtan Boys' (BTS) Agust D (aka Suga), for a time adopted his *alter ego* to voice out his inner turmoil. Using corpus discourse analysis grounded on emotion-focused therapy framework, we analysed the linguistic patterns used by Agust D in his trilogy of mixtapes viz., Agust D, D-2, and D-day released in 2016, 2020, and 2023. Findings showed his creative use of language in describing his contrasting emotions e.g., fear and anger. Linguistic evidence suggests that his anger is a primary maladaptive emotion which channelled self-criticism triggered by fear and shame, and denial of his feelings was a form of self-defence. Changes in the linguistic patterns were significant as they presented his state of mental well-being, coming to terms with his inner struggles, and fully embracing his true self.

Keywords: linguistic markers, social anxiety disorder, corpus discourse analysis, mental health, K-pop, emotional distress

1. Introduction

“Hallyu”, Korean word for “Korean Wave”, has become a worldwide phenomenon in recent years. According to Asia Fund Managers, South Korea, as the fourth-largest economy in Asia, has gained huge revenue from its music industry viz., the well-known Korean popular music (K-pop) industry. Among all the groups in this industry, Bangtan Boys (BTS), a seven-member boy band, is reportedly bringing in \$5 billion to South Korea annually, and their collective net worth is increasing (AFM Editorial Office, 2018). The group embodies the whole package of what makes a K-pop celebrity i.e., young men who look stunning, sing, and dance well. The K-pop industry is laden with artists and their candy-coated outlook yet hidden from the limelight is an industry that arouses concern of/from the public after a few publicised K-idol-related suicides and mental health distress caused by extreme work stress, problems with drugs and alcoholism, etc. – all in the name of fame. According to reports, the training that these young idols endure is rigorous, some lasting 16 hours a day, controlled diets, and restricted social life and even phone usage (Lee, 2019). This is part of a Korean-talent-agencies system that often starts quite early on in their lives; the aim is to create an

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image of perfection, where the idols act as role models for a highly dedicated consumer-fan base (Williams, 2016; University Wire, 2017). However, as Mysyk (2023) pointed out, “K-pop stars, who are known for their intense work schedules, fan culture, and societal expectations, face unique challenges that may impact their mental health and well-being.” (p. 213). Padgett (2020) also asserts that the challenges viz., verbal and physical abuse that come with the vocation and lifestyle cannot be outweighed by the few potential rewards, such as more creative freedom, fan support, and personal pleasure. While there have been news reports of serious accidents or death by suicide happening to K-pop idols (Gibson, 2018; Saeji et al, 2018), there are numerous unreported problems among those who are striving hard alone behind the scenes (Williams, 2016). And like many other K-pop idols, Suga (aka Agust D) and his BTS band mates went through similar experiences. Their mental health issues and suicidal ideations are manifestations of their inner conflict. Hence, this study aimed to explore the relationship between discourse and emotions to get a deeper understanding on the emotional state of pop idols, especially those who wrote their own songs, hoping to shed some light on Suga’s emotional distress and his manner of expressing it.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded on psychology, in particular, social anxiety, depression and emotions focusing on anger.

2.1 Social Anxiety Disorder and depression

Mayo Clinic (2021, 2022) referenced the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM)-5 explaining the diagnostic criteria for Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD or Social Phobia) and symptoms of depression. These two sets of criteria set an important part of the framework for our study. Below are the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for SAD (Mayo Clinic, 2021, para 3):

- *Persistent, intense fear or anxiety about specific social situations because you believe you may be judged negatively, embarrassed or humiliated.*
- *Avoidance of anxiety-producing social situations or enduring them with intense fear or anxiety*
- *Excessive anxiety that's out of proportion to the situation.*
- *Anxiety or distress that interferes with your daily living.*
- *Fear or anxiety that is not better explained by a medical condition, medication, or substance abuse.*

Even though a person may only experience depression once in their lifetime, most people have many bouts. Symptoms may include, but are not limited to, the following when these episodes are present (Mayo Clinic, 2022):

- *Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, or hopelessness*
- *Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters*
- *Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities, such as sex, hobbies, or sports*
- *Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much.*
- *Tiredness and lack of energy, so even small tasks take extra effort.*

- *Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased cravings for food and weight gain*
- *Anxiety, agitation, or restlessness*
- *Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements.*
- *Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame*
- *Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things.*
- *Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts or suicide*
- *Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches*

2.2 Emotion-focused Therapy (EFT) Mode of Anger

To explore how hate and anger affected Agust D's linguistics choice on his lyrics, we also used Pascual-Leone et al's (2013) work on emotion-focused therapy (EFT), which was deemed to be invaluable as it is widely used by behavioural and psycho-therapists when helping clients deal with emotions like hate, rage, and destructive anger. EFT is a therapy focusing on "a taxonomy of different kinds of emotions and associated emotional processing difficulties" (Greenberg & Watson 2006 as cited in Pascual-Leone et. al., 2013, p. 84; see also Greenberg & Pascual-Leone 2006; Greenberg & Paivio 1997). Its classification includes primary (adaptive or maladaptive), secondary, and instrumental emotions. Primary adaptive responses are reviewed in therapy to see if the right one is being accessed and if it can help with problem-solving. Primary maladaptive responses are abnormal emotional reactions to stimuli that are comparable to primary adaptive responses (Greenberg, 2023; Greenberg & Goldman, 2019; Shahar, 2020). In other words, both negative and positive emotions can be adaptive and maladaptive; however, maladaptive behaviour does not reduce anxiety in a positive way; adaptive behaviour does. Zwack & Greenberg (2020) postulate that instrumental emotions are those that are used to manipulate a partner or elicit a specific reaction from them. While secondary emotions are characterised as defensive feelings that keep a person from feeling a deeper, more vulnerable emotion. They react to primary emotions; thus, they are protective in nature and disguise basic emotions, which are often activated by a comment or situation (Elliot & Shahar, 2019). Pascual-Leone and his team believed that it is important for therapists to understand that secondary emotions such as anger expressed by people might be simply a primary emotion "in response to changing circumstance or simply when they are being suitably expressed" (p.88), but it might also be secondary emotions to consciously or unconsciously covering hatred, shame or fear, which are the real cause of anger that therapists shall not miss" (p.88). These conceptual frameworks were adopted to explore the relationship between discourse and emotions found in the lyrics of Agust D.

2.2.1 On anger as self-criticism

One of the expressions of anger is self-criticism. It may manifest as having low self-esteem, feeling ashamed, and eventually turning into self-hatred, when people focus more on their unmet needs than they do on loving themselves for their flaws and mistakes (Faccini et al, 2020). The expression of harsh self-criticism rather than its actual content would be more prevalent in people who are vulnerable to depression (Brogaard, 2020).

2.2.2 On anger as self-defence

Another expression of anger is self-defence. It can be in the form of hostility, or rage and contempt. The former expression can protect an angry person from being hurt again while the latter can empower the angry person by “belittling and shaming another person (Greenberg and Goldman, 2008 as cited in Pascual-Leone 2013, p.87).

2.3 Contrasting Emotions

As this study delves into contrasting emotions of Agust D, we also resorted to the seminal work of Robert Plutchik who invented the Plutchik Model of Emotions (Plutchik, 1991; Plutchik & Conte, 1997), “a wheel-like diagram” (Six Seconds, 2023, para 1) similar to an eight-petals flower with eight different colours on each petal, to indicate eight types of emotions: Surprise (light blue), Joy (yellow), Disgust (purple), Sadness (dark blue), Anger (red), Trust (light green), Fear (dark green), and Anticipation (orange); each colour grows denser from the tip to the centre, meaning the emotions intensity towards the centre (Donaldson, 2017). To communicate the strength of each emotion, Plutchik employed the intensity of each colour. Each hue starts out darker and progressively becomes lighter as one advances toward the finish of each colour, mirroring the strength of the feeling. Physiological opposites were also exploited by Plutchik, for instance, the contrast between joy vs sadness, the contrast between fear and anger, the contrast between expectation and surprise, and the contrast between disgust and trust. The corresponding physiological reactions for each contrasting emotion pair are “reject vs embrace; connect vs withdraw; jump back vs examine closely; and get small and hide vs get big and loud respectively (Donaldson, 2017, para. 3; Plutchik, 1991; Molina et al, 2019). The emotion wheel helps people visualise their emotions and comprehend which combinations of emotions led to a particular result or behaviour, which helps them get in touch with their feelings. It fosters greater self-awareness in people, thus improving their emotional intelligence. In addition, his concept of contrasting colour emotions also aids designers and other professionals to analyse the complexity of emotion and serve as a colour palette for emotional design (Semeraro, Villela, & Ruffo, 2021). The accuracy of the emotion recognition is significant in improving the mapping of personality traits.

2.4 Choice of linguistic indicators vs emotions

Vine, Boyd, and Pennebaker (2020) presuppose that there is a correlation between the intensity of emotions and the lexical choices for conveying them. A person's emotional state can affect all aspects of spoken language output, including what to say and how to say it (Stein & Levine, 2022). Fiske (2020) states that different emotional intensities (or degrees) can be correlated with specific words. For example, anger is the most intense emotional response to violation, threat, or injustice (West, 2021). Vlasenko, Rogers, & Waugh (2021) also corroborate that putting feelings into words, also known as affect labelling, can reduce the intensity of these highly triggering emotional experiences.

How much was said, why, and how can describe a narrative of emotional incidents but still could miss out the most important part of the content (Argaman, 2009), thus single words used most frequently and the context(s) of linguistic patterns, particularly in song lyrics are therefore relevant when analysing discourse and emotions (Philippou & Yeh, 2023; Yeh & Trang, 2022). The following are some of the lexical items that are often used repeatedly in songs.

Yeah

“Yeah” is a polyfunctional word that is “frequent in natural speech” (Gibb-Reid & Foulkes, 2022, p.2) with various functions such as assumption of speakership (p.3) and “affirmative response to a question” (Fuller, 2003, p.29 as cited in Gibb-Reid & Foulkes, 2022, p.3). Truong & Heylen (2010) gave a definition of “yeah” that is more suitable for Agust D the rapper: “some ‘yeah’ items display a greater intent of the speaker to take the floor... prosody indeed plays a role in disambiguating dialogue act functions and in determining degree of speaker incipiency of ‘yeah’” (p. 2553). Camp (2020) further analysed the use of “yeah” in song lyrics by categorising the word into four meanings: 1) fillers (p. 4); 2) meaningless utterance (p. 12); 3) to create “A B A B rhyme scheme (p. 14); and self-affirmation (p. 14)” (pp. 4-14).

I'm

The research of Gilboa-Schechtman et. al. (2018) investigated the interpersonal sensitivity to ambiguous facial expressions of emotions among people with social phobia (now social anxiety disorder) and depression (p. 605). Their results shed light on the use of “I'm” in negative contexts by people suffering from SAD and depression. They argue that “socially anxious individuals direct their attention inwards, to the processing of internal thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. ...” (p. 614) and the negativity in their minds increased the chance of sufferers of depression to “enhance interpersonal stress and increase ruminative self-focus.” (p.615).

2.5 Previous studies

There have been many studies analysing the relationship between discourse and emotions triggered by mental problems (Hunt & Brooks, 2020; Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019). Philippou and Yeh (2023) examined the songs written by Amy Winehouse using corpus analysis using the colours of grief in expressing emotions. Their study relied on public documents such as news reports and published biographical anecdotes to establish her psychological trauma was rooted from her childhood experiences which worsened as she gained international status; the more famous she became, the more she got hooked on drugs and alcohol. Their findings suggest an overwhelming use of dark colours viz., blue, green, and black relating to her negative emotions and suicidal ideation. Another corpus study was conducted by Walters (2023) where she investigated the songs by Kurt Cobain and their relation to suicide risk. Her findings based on Cobain's grunge music revealed the frequent use of *depress* and *death* although they did not produce any significant collocates. Frequent use of words related to capacity was also detected, hence, the word *gun* which correlated with *shoot*,

was strong linguistic evidence that also highlights the implications for applying linguistic markers for suicide risk as an intervention. Yeh and Trang (2022) also used the corpus psychobiographical approach in examining Avicii's songs and his suicidal ideation. They argue that his lyrics were a call for help, his SOS as he was drowning in his own mental anguish. Their findings suggest high use of first-person deixis and death-themed linguistic references as triggered by his personal relationships. Another study is Kresovitch et al's study (2021) where they used content analysis of mental health discourse in popular rap music; their findings revealed the presence of anger, sadness, and other emotional cues in American pop music lyrics. They argue that anxiety and depression are constant reference found in popular rap music. All these studies have made a dent on the literature on corpus analysis of songs, however, there is still a gap in knowledge concerning Korean pop idols and their compositions.

2.6 Research questions

1. What are the linguistic indicators reflecting Suga's emotions brought by social phobia and depression?
2. Has there been any changes on the linguistic pattern(s) of his lyrics according to his emotional changes through the years?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research adopted the diagnostic criteria for SAD and depression as well as the emotion-focused therapy model of anger as the framework of analysis; with the help of Voyant Tools, a web-based tool for text analysis created by Stéfan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell (2023) for analysing a corpus of text for frequency, keyword-in-context (KWIC), concordances, links, and correlations and so on. Corpus-based analysis is used by researchers to examine linguistic features in testing their hypotheses, to count and group the lexical features (Mukhamadiarova et al, 2020). Researchers can also analyse frequency, correlations, and extracted context to validate or reject initial theories (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2016; Egbert, Larson, & Biber, 2020). Many have argued and demonstrated the advantages of combining qualitative data collecting and analysis with quantitative corpus-based analysis (Reinhart 2016; Meyer, 2019). However, when combining both corpus and discourse analysis, they may offer a complete examination of naturally occurring language (Gray et al, 2021; Hunt & Brooks, 2020; Tenbrink, 2020; Egbert & Baker, 2019), which supported the choice of using the same method for our study. As Pennebaker, Mehl, and Niederhoffer (2003) posit that there are psychological aspects of natural language when used to communicate since the words people use and the reasons for choosing them are tools that can be strategically applied to express their thinking and emotions.

3.2 Research Subject

The Bangtan Boys or BTS is a Korean boy band under Big Hit Music of Hybe Company Limited established by Bang Sihyuk, with seven members Jin, Suga, RM (the leader), J-hope, V, Jimin, and Jungkook (Branigin, 2023). Debuted in 2013, the style of the group, i.e. rap and hip hop, was unique compared to other K-pop groups. The form of management and directives were different as well: the group was allowed to write their own songs injecting their personal views and feelings in the lyrics; they also had the freedom to interact indirectly with fans via social media using videos and texts etc. (Tammy, 2022). BTS is now famous worldwide with many songs charted number one in different platforms like Billboard and Spotify, and they have been nominated three times for The Grammy Awards (Benjamin, 2022). The group is well known for caring for the wellbeing, including mental health of fans, society, and even the Earth so much that it has launched a campaign to promote love and care for oneself and one another (Artz, 2021).

Even though BTS talks about social issues and personal viewpoints or feelings of members, as a group with worldwide fame and esteemed reputation, every member including Suga had to handle their personal affairs and emotions with extra care so as not to affect the group in any way since the success of the group did not come easily. Suga of BTS was purposefully selected for this study because of the following reasons:

- he is iconic enough to attract attention of the result of the research.
- he has been talking about his mental illnesses openly and proactively promoting a better environment for people suffering from the problems, "I hope we can create an environment where we can ask for help." (CBC, 2018, Line 71)
- he has demonstrated a successful healing or encountering of his mental illness through the power of linguistic expression.

In Episode 19 of IU Palette, a YouTube programme hosted by a famous Korean artist called IU, Suga revealed why he created Agust D as his alter ego:

“at first, I was so fed up back then... ‘why would people (mainly those other senior rappers and hip hop singers) look down on me?’”...“as [sic] idol, there’s a lot of things I can’t say out loud...I needed a means to let my feelings out...I created another self-called Agust D...”

The American Psychology Association (APA, 2023) defines alter ego as “a second identity or aspect of a person that exists metaphorically as his or her substitute or representative, with different characteristics” (para 1). Suga is not the first one in the music industry to create a second self to express another side of oneself. John Lennon, a member of the famous western group The Beatles, also created his alter ego “Beatle-John” to please his fans, the press, and the society, since his real persona was believed to be “less inviting and more aggressive” (Beller-McKenna, 1999, p. 255). Suga had disclosed his struggles coping with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) and depression in various media including his own Twitter account, official fan page, press interviews, and his songs. He could not help but become extremely anxious and depressed about being negatively evaluated by others, and the

hardship he encountered while chasing his dream, a dream that was frowned upon by others, including his beloved parents and friends. This was the catalyst for carrying a pseudonym for his alter ego, one that could serve as a “a vehicle to express those fiery emotions” (Daly, 2023, para. 2). He was quoted saying,

“I came up with the name because I had [this] hate, [this] anger inside me [...] I couldn’t control that anger.” (Daly, 2023, para. 1).

As SAD is a prevalent mental illness with covert symptoms (Hunter et al, 2022) this study contributes to exploring and understanding the linguistic indicators about the artist’s state of emotions and mental health. We adopted the combined framework of medical diagnostic criteria, emotion-focused therapy framework, and corpus-assisted analysis to categorise and analyse the linguistic patterns and intensity of lexical modalities when expressing emotions. As Argaman (2009, p.98) succinctly puts it, “even the most skilled speaker will find it difficult to control every word that he [sic] chooses to use to communicate... Words can tell us more about an entire story than just content.”

3.3 Corpus

This study analysed the songs written by Suga viz., his three mixtapes released in 2016, 2020 and 2023 respectively, to discuss how he made use of different linguistics patterns to convey and release his emotional distress brought about by his mental health. A total of 29 songs written by Agust D with English translations were collected via websites named Genius and AZ lyrics that are operated by volunteers with translation talents (Appendix I for the complete song list). The data collected was then cleaned and compiled into four categories according to the release dates of the songs i.e., 2016 (9 documents with 3,399 total words), 2020 (10 documents with 3,835 words), and 2023 subcorpus (10 documents with 4,295 total words), with one for the combined songs. The entire corpus is made up of 29 songs with 11,529 words; the longest text was from his song *Snooze* with 680 words, while the shortest work was *Interlude Dawn* (9), which was mostly instrumental music.

4. Results and Analysis

Agust D publicly announced that he was diagnosed of having social anxiety disorder (SAD) and depression when he was 18 years old (which was also referred to in the lyrics of *At Dawn*), the year that he joined Hybe Music Company as a trainee of its one and only one idol group with hip hop theme. His mental health issues cast a heavy toll on his life and emotional state as the more adversities and negative evaluation by others he had got, the more serious his illnesses had become. Table 1 below outlines Suga’s ups and downs as well as BTS that contributed to the onset of his social anxiety disorder and depression:

Table 1. Ups and Downs of Suga and BTS from 2010 to present.

2010-2013	2013-2016	2016-2018	2018-present
Got second place in audition; Secured a trainee position in Big Hit Music	Debuted 13 June 2013 with little noise	Always being attacked by haters and other rappers.	Contract renewed
Left his hometown to Seoul; away from family and friends; no support	Little exposure on media due to company's small size	Members having their own interests e.g. acting	Three times nominated at Grammys but did not get any award
Came to city with no money; felt bad in front of city teenagers	Songs and albums did not receive good results	Faced contract renewal dilemma	Extremely tight schedule; no rest time
Big Hit is only a small company; endless practices without an exact debut time	Company almost closed	The group has gained popularity locally and internationally	Pandemic, many schedules including world tour cancelled
Social phobia, depression, OCD			

4.1 Linguistic indicators of emotions triggered by SAD and depression

Below are the diagnostic criteria of SAD and symptoms of depression adopted from DSM-5 (Mayo Clinic, 2021, 2022, Diagnosis and symptoms) to categorise the relevant linguistic indicators showing the emotions as explicitly mentioned in the lyrics:

a. Anxiety, especially over negative judgement/ evaluation

"I know that it seems pathetic to not have a dream like everyone" (So Far Away)

"I feel anxious as time passes by" (So Far Away)

"Even my family couldn't foresee my success What's the point of talking about it when I wasn't sure myself" (Give It To Me)

"Around the age of 18, I developed social anxiety Right, that was when my mind was gradually polluted" (The last)

b. Avoidance

"Pretending not to be lonely, pretending not to be in pain Pointlessly pretending to be okay, Pointlessly pretending to be strong" (At Dawn)

"I always prepare two masks Hiding my true self Behind the defensive image" (At Dawn)

"I don't care now how it turns out anymore Living, living, living Without worries for just a day Without concerns for just a day" (28)

c. Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, or hopelessness

"I'm in so much pain and loneliness... It feels like I'm all by myself" (So Far Away)

"But sociophobia develops and my human relations is 0" (At Dawn)

"I don't understand myself well either Then who would understand? Friends? Or you? Nobody knows me well" (The last)

"Well, well, well Someone tell me whether life is pain Well, well If there is a God, tell me whether life is happiness" (Strange)

"Sometimes I would burst into tears for no reason The life I'd hoped for, the life I'd wanted, just that kind of life" (28)

"Between so many truths and so many lies Are we seeing this world, right? (Polar Night)

d. Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters

"They've here in their foreign brand cars, Well that makes me quite jealous, envious I knew the world was unfair" (724148)

"I try to vent my anger, but I only got myself" (So Far Away)

"Sometimes I resent God, asking why he made me live a life like this What I'm doing, and if I love music at all" (Moonlight)

"Damn only strong ones can mess with me Some think it was easy for me to reach my position Fuck you I'm the thorn in the eyes of those hyungs Who have no chances of becoming successful" (Agust D)

"Hey ho I don't give a shit When you're busy being a moron I will simply bury you alive in the grave" (Agust D)

"keep blabbing your mouth But I wouldn't live like that even if I had to die" (Give It To Me)

"That asshole's doing his shit again" Look closely assholes, you guys are losing again (724148)

"No matter what you think, I'm sorry, but shit, I have no fucking interest Sorry, I have no fucking interest in your meddling life" (What do you think)

"Maybe we do it to ourselves Slaves to capitalism, slaves to money Slaves to hatred and prejudice Slaves to YouTube, slaves to flexin" (Haegeum)

e. Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities, such as sex, hobbies or sports

"I don't have anything I want to do" (So Far Away)

f. Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame

"The time that had destroyed me, Jealousy, hatred, and the feeling of inferiority" (Burn It)

"Was it me?" (Dear my friend)

g. Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts or suicide

"Min Yoongi is dead already (I killed him)" (The last)

"I'll get on the guillotine" (The last)

"I hope my damn self disappears" (So Far Away)

4.2 Emotion-focused Therapy (EFT) on Anger

Echoing with above, the framework established by Pascual-Leone et. al. (2013) provided a comprehensive analysis of anger that it is not only one of the symptoms of SAD and depression but also a secondary emotion of some other primary emotions. According to their research, "emotion should be considered in terms of clinically relevant types of affective-meaning experiences: Primary (adaptive or maladaptive), secondary, and instrumental emotions" (p. 84). By saying "anger was what mainly created my music" (IU Palette, 2023, Ep. 19), it was not surprising to find linguistic markers and sentences in the lyrics by Agust D indicating his angry emotions. However, after applying the framework conceptualising problem anger with self-criticism and self-defence separately to the lyrics

by Agust D, we found that much of his lyrics showing angry emotions was secondary anger to cover his primary (both adaptive and maladaptive) anger.

When conceptualising problem anger as a self-critical process, one would become harsh and critical to oneself to cover primary maladaptive anger triggered by fear, shame, or guilt etc.; when thinking of problematic anger as a kind of defence, one would reject it by either being assertive and hostile or to become strong(er) and big(ger). In this way, one could gain positive reinforcement of pain being removed or displaced, while becoming strong and big brings negative reinforcement of feeling in control. This is further demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Linguistic markers in Agust D’s lyrics analysed with EFT conceptual frameworks of secondary anger.

Being self-critical	To cover Primary maladaptive anger (fear, shame, guilt)	<i>“I keep getting scared I’m afraid” (Life goes on)</i> <i>“I was scared of people that time” (The last)</i> <i>“Even my friends and family are drifting away” (So far away)</i> <i>Sometimes I feel like I have no talent(moonlight)</i> <i>Was it you who changed? Or was it me? (Dear my friend)</i>
Being self-defensive: rejecting anger	To cover primary adaptive anger (assertive) and gain positive reinforcement. (removal/displace pain) hostility	<i>“I see no pain” (D-day)</i> <i>“pretending not to be in pain” (burn it)</i> <i>“I flow the way water flows” (People)</i> <i>“I don’t care” (What do you think)</i> <i>“I’ll stop myself” (The last)</i>
	To cover primary adaptive emotions (hurt, grief, love) to gain negative reinforcement. (feel big, strong, dominant; feel in control; get one's way)	<i>“Which company would say no to this genius?” (724148)</i> <i>“I am the king I am the boss” (Daechwita)</i> <i>“I am the public enemy” (Give it to me)</i> <i>“Everything is under control” (Strange)</i> <i>“The emptiness that I feel after flying fucking high” (moonlight)</i> <i>“only strong ones can mess with me” (Agust D)</i>

4.3 Choice of linguistics markers vs emotions

Voyant Tools (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2023) not only helped facilitate and fasten the keyword searching among thousands of words of lyrics for the above analysis, but also provided useful KWIC analysis. Table 3 shows the most frequent words in the corpus and subcorpus.

Table 3. List of 4 sets of “most frequent words in the corpus” generated by Voyant Tools.

Most frequent words in the corpus set 1 (songs of mixtape Agust D)	i’m (53) ; dream (45); like (27); away (24); shit (17)
Most frequent words in the corpus set 2 (songs of mixtape D-2)	yeah (71) ; daechwita (blow or hit) (55); think (53); i’m (52) ; day (29)
Most frequent words in the corpus set 3 (songs of mixtape D-Day)	yeah (107) ; okay (58); know (51); life (36); i’m (34)
Most frequent words in the corpus set 4 (songs of all three mixtapes)	yeah (183) ; i’m (139) ; know (93); dream (70); like (69)

“yeah”

The most frequently used word in the corpus is “yeah”, which is a very common but crucial word with various intentions and meanings. Camp (2020) classified the word into four functions: 1) being “fillers

(p. 4); 2) bring meaningless utterance (p. 12); to create “A B A B rhyme scheme (p. 14); and to show self-affirmation (p. 14)”. Referencing these four functions, the word “yeah” was not in top 5 of most frequently appeared words among the songs of the first mixtape was due to his lack of confidence and full of anger, which blocked him from affirming himself.

Gibb-Reid & Foulkes (2022) also commented that “yeah” is a polyfunctional word that is “frequent in natural speech” (p.2) with various functions such as assumption of speakership (p.3) and “affirmative response to a question” (Fuller, 2003, p.29 as cited in Gibb-Reid & Foulkes, 2022, p.3). Truong & Heylen (2010) gave a definition of “yeah” that is more suitable for Agust D the rapper: “some ‘yeah’ items display a greater intent of the speaker to take the floor... prosody indeed plays a role in disambiguating dialogue act functions and in determining degree of speaker incipiency of ‘yeah’.” (p.2553). Not only from data set 4 but also set 2 and set 3, the word “yeah” topped the chart of most frequently appeared words, which highlighted the eagerness, confidence, and firmness of Agust D to answer questions (of haters) affirmatively and to “take the floor”.

“The beginning was small, Daegu, yeah, from a basement in Namsandong to a penthouse in Hannam the hill now, ha” (Moonlight)
“yeah, uh, born a slave but now a kind” (Daechwita)
“oh yeah money, honor, wealth, the trophies and stadiums” (Honsool)
“I’m doing great, you know, yeah” (Dear my friend)
“the past is just the past, yeah” (D-day)

I’m

The second most frequently used word among all the mixtapes of Agust D is “I’m”, first person singular with the verb be, which indicates the focus of self. “I’m” also topped in the statistics of set 1, all the lyrics by Agust D in his very first mixtape. From the research by Gilboa-Schechtman et. al. (2018) that assessed the interpersonal sensitivity of patients with social phobia and depression to ambiguous facial expressions of emotions pointed out a critical reason to explain for the frequent use of “I’m” in the lyrics of Agust D: after getting self-interpreted negative nonverbal expressions of others, people with social anxiety would “direct their attention inwards, to the processing of internal thoughts, feelings, and body sensations.” (p.614); and the interpersonal stress may lead them to become more self-focused (p.615). This inward attention and increased ruminative self-focus justified the frequent use of the first-person singular “I’m” as Agust D highly concerned about the evaluation of others thus he wanted to protect himself by focusing on doing the best of himself.

“I’m the guy that will carve history on the ground” (Agust D)
“I’m born to be a tiger” (Give it to me)
“I’m living because I can’t die” (So far away)
“I’m just doing it” (Moonlight)
“I’m doing great” (Dear my friend)
“I’m the cautious type I want” (People pt. 2)
“I’m trying figure out what’s wrong” (D-day)

4.4 Emotional changes

With reference to the Plutchik Model of Emotions (Plutchik, 1991; Donaldson, 2017), we were able to relate it to the eventual emotional changes of Agust D throughout his ten-year production of the three mixtapes. Highlighting the contrast of emotions and emotional pairs, we found that *Trust vs Disgust*; *Joy vs Sadness*; and *Fear vs Anger* were very much apparent in the text. As Donaldson (2017) posits that every achieved emotion goes with its respective physiological reaction: the physiological reactions of “joy vs sadness” are “*connect vs withdraw*”; that of “disgust vs trust” are “*reject vs embrace*” while that of “fear vs anger” are “*get small and hide*” vs “*get big and loud*”. As in the case of Agust D, he had been sort of trapped in the emotions of anger, disgust, and sadness thus he found it very hard to find or feel the relative opposite emotions of fear, trust, and joy. He felt withdrawn, rejected, and aggressive.

Not until the release of his third mixtape Suga announced a farewell to Agust D due to his emotional changes after all these years of fighting with his mental illness:

“it might be hard to see him again...as I get older...the less and less I get angry...they referred to us as ‘BTS is back from hell’ ...we were beaten up by so many haters...but I’ve forgiven all those people now...” (IU palette, 2023, Ep. 19)

It is interesting to note that *anger* appeared in the 2016 and 2020 sub-corpus (Figures 1 and 2), which suggests that from the early onset of his career, there was already anger inside him and in 2016, it was about “venting” out his angry feelings. In the 2020 song collection, his linguistic modality has changed; he was aware and recognized that his anger could trigger lashing out at someone, and that this anger was his “biggest enemy”. Its manifestation could just be “dreadful”. This resonates with what Faccini et al (2020) and Brogaard (2020) claim that this form of self-criticism manifests on people vulnerable to depression. The linguistic evidence of his exposition above is also clearly shown in Voyant’s concordance for words with negative sentiment results for the 2023 subcorpus i.e., the word “anger” did not appear from the lexical list with negative context patterns.

Left	Term	Right
I try to vent my	anger	but I only got myself
the point of venting my	anger	I'm scared to open my

Figure 1. 2016 subcorpus, Negative sentiment results on “anger”.

Left	Term	Right
word 'original intention', don't be	afraid	Set fire to it, set
My biggest enemy is the	anger	inside me The more dreadful
want to try *?" I got	angry	and cursed at you There's

Figure 2. 2020 subcorpus, Negative sentiment results on “anger” and “afraid”.

As mentioned earlier, fear or being afraid is the contrasting emotion of anger. It is worth noting that the word “afraid” did not appear in the 2016 song collection, and it only appeared in the 2020 subcorpus with a single contextual entry, the connotation of which suggests carrying out a violent act i.e., “don’t be afraid, set fire to it”. However, in the 2023 subcorpus, there were 7 entries (Figure 3); the contextual clues suggest his recognition of his fear but still holds a positive attitude towards the future. The entries below also show an interrogative stance, addressing people as “you” and asking them “what are you afraid of” with reference to the “past”. The use of “just” as a hedging device also infers that it is unlikely to be worse or serious. The conditional stance “if” in the linguistic pattern “if you’re afraid to crash”, followed by a promise “I’ll willingly receive” also indicates a positive connotation, a verbal assurance that he will be around when things go awry.

Left	Term ↑	Right
regret the past, don't be	afraid	of the future, man I
far away What are you	afraid	of? The past is just
worry too much If you're	afraid	to crash, I'll willingly receive
worry too much If you're	afraid	to crash, I'll willingly receive
worry too much If you're	afraid	to crash, I'll willingly receive
I keep getting scared I'm	afraid	we'll go far away forever
become a memory Don't be	afraid	until the end of my

Figure 3: Afraid in 2023 sub-corpus

The ability to forgive enabled Suga to open himself up and freed himself from his own world of always being looked down upon or negatively evaluated by others. He was able to let go of Agust D- his alter ego. Only then was he able to embrace his feelings towards the songs he has written and was glad to have his emotions recorded and expressed linguistically through his lyrics, and in doing so he offers words of consolation to others who may feel anxiously vulnerable.

He also wrote songs related to relationships in his third mixtape, which many of the words chosen were not seen in the first and second mixtapes. He started thinking about connecting with others, supporting those young people who would like to be idols like he did. Referencing the Plutchik Model of Emotions, to connect one needs to let trust outweighs disgust (Six Seconds, 2023, Trust); This proactive attitude to re-connect with people and the outside world indirectly reflects that his emotion of trust is overriding his emotion of disgust.

“I’m always here behind you” (Snooze)

“don't worry too much” (Snooze)
“it's okay to rest” (Snooze)
“I'll cheer you on anytime, anywhere” (Snooze)
“but don't forget to find me” (Life goes on)

Not only has he reached out to others, but he also started to love and be loved. Although “love” was not one of the five most frequently appeared words in all lyrics of Agust D, it is a word worth investigating both quantitatively and qualitatively as it somehow proved the changes and healings in his emotional status via linguistic power of his alter ego.

The “wheel of emotions” showed that one needs joy and trust to start loving (Six Seconds, 2023). The word “love” did not appear in the first mixtape (Agust D); 2 times in the second mixtape (D-2), but 26 times in the third mixtape (D-day).

“somebody does love...I'm thinking about you” (SDL)
“love is pouring out in the spring day” (SDL)
“this thing called love (finally)” (People pt. 2)
“is love wholly perfect on its own” ((People pt. 2)

We also observed that Suga's use of colours as a metaphoric expression of his feelings was limited. None was used in the 2016 sub-corpus, however, in 2020 he used the word “blue” to describe his emotional state i.e., “these days I feel *blue* for some reason...” (Figure 4). In the same concordance results, *black and white* were also used to refer to dualities of direction such as *left and right*, or a choice between good or bad, which resonates with Philippou and Yeh's (2023) findings on colours of emotions. In the same song collection, *Black* was also used to refer to a premium credit card with no monetary limit, which is reserved for the ultrarich; so, in the text pattern “give it to you, my *black* card”, suggests that he was wealthy who possesses an ultra-exclusive high-end card, the ultimate status symbol, and that he is giving it to someone. *White* was also used to literally describe the White House referring to the time he and his BTS bandmates were invited by President Joe Biden (Smith, 2022) to “discuss Asian inclusion and representation and address hate crimes against Asian people” (para. 2). For Suga, this event was a “success, do fly to the White House” (Figure 4). These colour references to emotions and contrasting descriptions of things and events, ascribes to Putchik's (1991) model of emotions.

Contexts Bubblelines Correlations				
Document	Left	Term	Right	
202003...	give it to you, my	black	card The bastards that received	
202004...	In the world there's only	black	and white, those two In	
202307...	of plays, left and right,	black	and white The audie	
202009...	free, these days I feel	blue	for some reason My day	
202004...	world there's only black and	white	, those two In an endless	
202010...	winter with heavy snow like	white	tofu And after a long	
202303...	success Do fly to the	white	House, guys I don't know	
202307...	left and right, black and	white	The audience sees	
202307...	line Noise made by the	yellow	press Makes a choice by	

Figure 4: Concordance results for colours Suga used.

Also in Figure 4, his colour reference to the News Media as *Yellow* was also intriguing i.e., “Noise made by the yellow press”. This text pattern and structure is loaded with contextual meaning. The passive tense focuses on what was *made*, which is *noise* produced by *yellow press* alluding to form of yellow journalism, which according to Britannica (n.d., para. 1) refers to “the use of lurid features and sensationalised news in newspaper publishing to attract readers and increase circulation” – tactics often employed by media conglomerates. This lexical pattern is also evident in Voyant’s collocates graph results for the word *yellow*; Figure 5 presents the network graph of high frequency terms (*press* and *makes*) appearing in proximity to the lexical item *yellow*. This finding strongly implies that the *noise* the press makes is something unpleasant, which is unwanted and perhaps uncalled for, but certainly one that affects his emotional state and mental health.

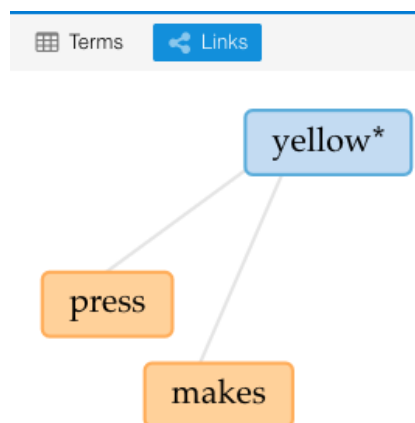


Figure 5: Concordance results for Yellow

In summary, the linguistics patterns of Suga’s songs convey multitude of emotions with anger as the most visible as it was his mask for deeper emotions viz. anxiety, helplessness, worthlessness, sadness, loneliness, shame and so on. These pent-up vulnerable feelings were hinged on an anger funnel that translated them into an outburst of rage. An overwhelmed Agust D represented these complicated and

overpowering negative emotions, a heavy dysfunctional personality cloak that Suga used to conceal his true self.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the linguistic indicators that reflect Suga's breadth of emotions triggered by social phobia and mental health issues. The results presented in this paper clearly showed changes in the linguistic patterns found in the lyrics, which were correlated with his life events and experiences. His alter ego, Agust D, gave him the voice to express and release his emotional distress through skilful use of words. Through Agust D he was able to tell his story in a way that funnelled out his negative and aggressive thoughts - his dark side. It was not an easy path for an eighteen-year-old teenager to go through mental health issues; the emotional distress brought by SAD and depression was intense that he had no other recourse but to write them all down in his songs. As the title of this study aptly suggests, "Thanks and goodbye, August D", Suga allowed his inner self to vent his negative emotions which inevitably enabled him to let go and live authentically. This study bridged the gap in literature in the field of applied linguistics and psycholinguistics by presenting the linguistic values of song lyrics, especially in their potential to unearth and connect the relationship between discourse and emotions, which might be able to help understand or disclose the affective message(s) of the writer(s) indicators of their mental health or hidden emotional issues. Due to language issues, only the English translation versions of the lyrics were used instead of the original Korean ones for this research, in which discrepancy could not be avoided, hence a limitation of this study. Future research endeavour could focus on a comparison between K-pop and western pop idols who write their own lyrics and the differences in discourse patterns and the impact of culture in their creative expressions.

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Appendix I

Songs list

Agust D (2016)	D-2 (2020)	D-day (2023)
Intro: Dt sugA (Feat. DJ Friz)	Moonlight	D-DAY
Agust D	Daechwita	Haegeum
Give It to Me	What do you think?	HUH?! (feat. j-hope)
Skit*	Strange (feat. RM)	AMYGDALA
724148	28 (feat. NiiHWA)	SDL
140503 at Dawn	Burn It (feat. MAX)	People, Pt. 2) (feat. IU)
The Last	People	Polar Night
Tony Montana (feat. Yankie)	Honsool	Interlude: Dawn*
Interlude: Dream, Reality	Interlude: Set me free	Snooze (feat. Ryuichi Sakamoto)
So Far Away (feat. Suran)	Dear my friend) (feat. Kim Jong-wan)	Life Goes On

*instrumental music