The Linguistic Construction of Meaning in Niki's "La La Lost You" through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract

This study explores the linguistic construction of meaning in NIKI's song "La La Lost You" by applying Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, particularly focusing on the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. As a lyrical text that expresses loss, longing, and emotional vulnerability, "La La Lost You" offers rich data for analyzing how language conveys both personal emotion and social meaning. The purpose of this research is to identify how NIKI's linguistic choices represent experiences, establish emotional relationships with the listener, and organize ideas cohesively through the metafunctional framework. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, using textual analysis of the song lyrics to examine transitivity structures, mood and modality patterns, and thematic organization. The findings reveal that mental and relational processes dominate the ideational metafunction, emphasizing the singer's inner feelings and perceptions. The interpersonal metafunction highlights the use of declarative moods and personal pronouns, which create an intimate and confessional tone between the singer and the audience. The textual metafunction demonstrates cohesive thematic progression, contributing to the emotional flow of the lyrics. Overall, this study illustrates how the three metafunctions interact to construct emotional depth and coherence, revealing the linguistic strategies through which NIKI communicates personal loss and emotional resonance in "La La Lost You".

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics, metafunction, Halliday, NIKI, song lyrics, La La Lost You.*

INTRODUCTION

Language in song lyrics serves as a meaningful system through which artists express their emotions, ideas, and social realities. Songwriters often make deliberate linguistic choices to create specific meanings, enabling listeners to interpret their messages through both language and melody. According to Tampubolon et al. (2024) song's ability to evoke strong emotions is a testament to the power of language in music, illustrating how lyrics can connect deeply with listeners' experiences. One song that exemplifies the intricate interplay between emotion and language is "La La Lost You" by NIKI, an Indonesian singer-songwriter signed to the 88rising label. Released in 2019 as a part of the album Head in the Clouds II, the song garnered significant attention for its melancholic tone and poetic lyrics that explore themes of love, loss, and emotional distance. According to Ekasaputri, et al., (2023) NIKI's lyrical storytelling in this song captures the complexity of human relationship and the pain of separation, conveyed through gentle yet expressive language that deeply resonates with her audience.

Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a suitable framework for uncovering how these meanings are constructed linguistically. Halliday (1994) contends that language is a social semiotic system that fulfills multiple functions in communication. Within this framework, metafunction theory divides language into three primary components: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The ideational metafunction addresses how language represents humans including thoughts, feelings, and actions through transitivity and process types. The interpersonal metafunction examines how speakers or writers establish relationships with the audience by expressing attitudes, judgments, and emotions. According to Bakuuro (2017) the textual metafunction analyzes how language is structured to generate coherence and cohesion, therefore shaping the effective delivery of messages within a text.

Hidayah et al, (2023) stated applying these metafunctions to "La La Lost You" enables a deeper exploration of how NIKI utilizes linguistic resources to express her emotional turmoil and

sense of longing. Through ideational analysis, the song reveals the singer's internal conflict and memories of love that once were secure but have now faded. Interpersonal analysis helps us understand the emotional connection between the singer and her lost lover, demonstrating how mood and modality convey vulnerability and regret. Finally, the textual analysis illustrates how cohesive devices, repetition, and clause structure enhance the song's lyrical flow and emotional impact.

This study aims to interpret "La La Lost You" using Halliday's metafunction theory, viewing the song not only as a work of art but also as a meaningful linguistic text. This approach demonstrates how each word choice, clause, and grammatical structure contributes to the creation of emotion and meaning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perceives language as a system of significance that enables individuals to communicate and convey their experiences. It emphasizes that language fulfills several roles in human interaction. In this framework, Halliday outlines three primary metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

According to Huang dan Zhou (2024), the ideational metafunction is related to the expression of thoughts, experiences, and actions through language. Specifically, it explains how clauses communicate the actors involved in actions, the recipients of these actions, and the circumstances surrounding them, using transitivity processes. On the other hand, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on the ways speakers employ language to foster social bonds and communicate emotions, opinions, and judgments. This particular function manifests itself through elements such as mood, modality, and the utilization of personal pronouns.

Stated by Kang (2016), the textual metafunction focuses on how messages are structured to establish coherence and cohesion within a text, accomplished through thematic organization and cohesive elements. Language functions as a means of communication and a framework for building and understanding meaning within social contexts through these three metafunctions Wang (2022). Song lyrics represent a unique form of writing that blends linguistic ingenuity, emotional sentiment, and rhythmic organization. Utilizing SFL in song lyrics enables researchers to examine how musicians make linguistic selections to convey feelings, shape identities, and connect with audiences (Sinaga et al., n.d.)

In the ideational metafunction, lyricists frequently employ mental and relational processes to express emotions, reminiscences, and contemplations (Tampubolon et al., 2024). According to Packard et al., (2020) Verbs such as feel, remember, wish, and long for are typically used to express internal experiences. The interpersonal metafunction in music is demonstrated by how performers establish emotional connections with listeners through the use of pronouns, declarative or interrogative tones, and varying degrees of certainty or modality, which convey genuineness and openness.

The textual metafunction offers coherence and continuity to the lyrics. Repetition, parallelism, and thematic development establish coherence in the song, aiding listeners in navigating the emotional experience. In this manner, SFL fosters a greater comprehension of how songs operate as linguistic texts that convey individual feelings and shared significance via organized language. Gagliardi, G. (2024) stated they involve the representation of dialogue, speech, or other forms of linguistic expression.

NIKI is recognized for her reflective, lyrical, and emotionally sincere songwriting approach. Her track “La La Lost You” illustrates themes of loss, separation, and acceptance through vibrant imagery and introspective reflection. The differing visuals of “Sunset” and “Subway” illustrate two distinct realms, emphasizes the emotional and physical separation between two individuals. The phrase “Did I lose you at the airport?” conveys a sense of uncertainty and remorse, underline the singer’s emotional fragility.

Throughout the song, NIKI merges reflective verbs, rhetorical questions, and repetition to foster closeness with the audience. Roberts (2024) explored the role of repetition in spirituals, emphasizing how linguistic patterns contribute to their emotional and communicative impact.

The inclusion of first- and second-person pronouns enhances the feeling of personal intimacy, transforming the song into a heartfelt emotional revelation. These linguistic selections convert personal experiences of heartbreak into a collective human experience, illustrating how language can render emotion concrete and relatable.

Systemic Functional Linguistics offers an extensive framework for examining the construction of meaning in song lyrics. Analyzing the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions allows for an understanding of how language elements collaborate to convey emotions, establish connections, and structure communications. In NIKI's "La La Lost You," these metafunctions engage to demonstrate how language expresses themes of loss, yearning, and emotional acceptance. The examination emphasizes the influence of linguistic composition in influencing the emotional richness and unity of musical expression.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method within the framework of Halliday's Functional Linguistic (SFL), with a particular on the theory of metafunctions. The qualitative approach is used because this research seeks to interpret and describe meanings rather than quantify data. According to (Sopah et al., 2023) Qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allows for in-depth exploration and interpretation of the text, particularly focusing on the experimental metafunctions present in the lyrics (Lestari, 2023). The data were collected through a careful, line-by-line analysis of the lyrics to identify relevant linguistic features. The analysis was carried out by examining the song's linguistic components through Halliday's three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational analysis centers on identifying processes, participants, and circumstances to comprehend how experiences and emotions are conveyed. The interpersonal analysis pronouns, mood types, and modality to uncover the relationship between the singer and the listener.

The textual analysis examines theme-rheme structures, repetition, and cohesion to explore how the text achieves coherence and emotional resonance. The findings are presented and discussed descriptively, spotlight how linguistic choices in the song create meaning and express the emotional depth of NIKI's personal narrative.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the linguistic analysis of "La La Lost You" by NIKI, using Halliday's (2014) framework. The analysis examines how emotional meaning is constructed through the interaction of the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The results show that NIKI's lyrical choices, particularly her use of verbs, pronouns, and cohesive structures, depict a nuanced representation of confusion, regret, and longing following the end of a relationship.

A. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction, NIKI uses linguistic structures to express her emotional experiences and reflections, which is represented by the ideational metafunction. In the phrase "While I'm on Sunset, are you on the subway?" in order to represent emotional separation, NIKI compares two geographical locations. Two lives that are parallel but separate are feature by the spatial imagery of "Sunset" (Los Angeles) and "Subway" (New York). This contrast expresses physical and emotional distance by using relational and circumstantial processes to construct meaning.

The same emotional tension is also reinforced by the question, "Are you getting on the L-train while I drive?" When "while" is used repeatedly, simultaneity is established, giving the impression that two people are present at the same time but are in separate universes. This duality is similar to what Puspitasari et al. (2022) discovered in The Walters' "I Love You So," where the artist's introspection and emotional conflict were revealed by the predominance of mental and relational processes over physical activity.

The material act of "writing" has symbolic meaning in "Now you're back in the city, I'm here writing this song." In this situation, writing turns into an emotional and creative act that helps people deal with heartbreak. It is a prime example of Halliday's (2014) theory that language can encode lived experiences through ideational meaning. A mental landscape of sentimentality and emotional processing is produced by NIKI's use of reflective verbs and a vivid setting, demonstrating how language construction makes memory concrete.

Metafunction	Lyric Excerpt	Emotional Expression	Explanation
Ideational	"While I'm on Sunset, are you on the subway?"	Expressing distance and separation.	NIKI contrasts two geographical settings "Sunset" (Los Angeles) and "Subway" (New York) to represent emotional and physical distance. The relational and circumstantial processes highlight two parallel yet disconnected lives, symbolizing separation in love.
	"Are you getting on the L-train while I drive?"	Showing simultaneity and emotional contrast.	The repeated use of "while" establishes simultaneous but separate actions, portraying two individuals living in different worlds.
	"Now you're back in the city, I'm here writing this song."	Conveying reflection and creative healing.	The material process of "writing" symbolizes emotional release and coping through art.

B. Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with how NIKI uses tone, pronouns, and modality to establish an emotional bond with the listener. The questioning tone of the song "Did I lose you at the airport?" is used to express apprehension and self-doubt. Lose is a metaphorical

verb that denotes a separation on both a literal and emotional level. By involving the listener as a silent participant, this rhetorical question strengthens empathy and vulnerability.

In "Hope you're good, hope that you're doin' fine," NIKI conveys a sense of quiet resignation mixed with concern. The word "hope" is used repeatedly to convey emotional sincerity and self-control while striking a balance between acceptance and affection. This is consistent with Lee's (2022) analysis of affective stance-taking, in which speakers use modality rather than overt statements to subtly convey emotion.

There is a tone of gentle acceptance in the final line, "Guess this is the way that love goes." The low guessing modality expresses both uncertainty and contentment with the result. The audience is involved in NIKI's emotional resolution as it shows her transition from emotional turmoil to serene acceptance. She preserves intimacy and immediacy by consistently using first-person and second-person pronouns (I, you), which strengthens what Puspitasari and Handayani (2022) refer to as "emotional solidarity" between artist and audience.

Metafunction	**Lyric Excerpt**	**Emotional Expression**	**Explanation**
Interpersonal	"Did I lose you at the airport?"	Expressing uncertainty and vulnerability.	The interrogative mood and metaphorical use of "lose" reveal emotional doubt and introspection. The rhetorical question invites listener empathy, creating intimacy through shared vulnerability.
	"Hope you're good, hope that you're doin' fine."	Expressing care and quiet resignation.	The repetition of "hope" conveys sincerity, affection, and emotional restraint.
	"Guess this is the way that love goes."	Showing acceptance and emotional resolution.	The use of low-modality "guess" expresses soft acceptance of loss, signaling emotional maturity.

C. Textual Metafunction

In NIKI's lyrical narrative, coherence and emotional continuity are guaranteed by the textual metafunction. Through a parallel structure that establishes mood and setting, the opening line, "While I'm on Sunset, are you on the subway?" introduces the main theme, which is distance. The emotional framework of the song is established by this thematic pattern, which instantly places the listener in two disparate settings.

Both textual and phonological cohesion are served by the refrain "La la lost you." Repetition of "la la" emphasizes the cyclical nature of missing someone by simulating the rhythm of memory and thought. Repetition in lyrical texts maintains thematic unity and emotional resonance, as Yuwana and Riwu (2024) propose. It serves as an emotional anchor in this instance, connecting the verses of the song.

The final line of the song, "I guess this is how love goes," provides thematic closure. The final stanza's repetition of the phrase creates textual coherence by connecting the narrative's emotional beginning and conclusion. This structure is similar to what Rahayu (2017) found in pop music lyrics: the predominance of unmarked topical themes like "I" and "you" to convey continuity and personal emotion.

The results demonstrate how all three metafunctions interact to produce emotional expression in "La La Lost You." The interpersonal metafunction establishes emotional intimacy through direct address and modality; the ideational metafunction converts memories and feelings of separation into linguistic imagery; and the textual metafunction organizes the emotional journey through closure and repetition.

Metafunction	**Lyric Excerpt**	**Emotional Expression**	**Explanation**
Textual	"While I'm on Sunset, are you on the subway?"	Establishing thematic coherence and setting.	The parallel structure creates a vivid spatial contrast that introduces the song's main theme distance. This serves as the thematic foundation for the emotional narrative.
	"La la lost you."	Reinforcing emotional rhythm and cohesion.	The repetition of "la la" provides both phonological and textual cohesion, mimicking the cyclical rhythm of memory.
	"I guess this is how love goes."	Providing closure and emotional balance.	The repetition of this line at the end forms a cohesive textual loop, linking the song's opening and conclusion.

These metafunctions work in concert to create a cohesive emotional story that progresses from perplexity to comprehension and, ultimately, acceptance. The lyrics' blend of relational, material, and mental processes illustrates how NIKI's songwriting effectively conveys the

complexities of emotional loss. In line with research by Yuwana et.al (2024) and Handayani et al. (2022), the findings demonstrate how pop music lyrics use linguistic devices to replicate the experience of emotion as well as to describe feelings.

In the end, "La La Lost You" is a prime example of how language in music serves as an emotive narrative. NIKI affirms Halliday's (2014) idea that language is a reflection of experience and a way to express emotion by skillfully transforming a personal heartbreak into a universally relatable story through the use of verbs, pronouns, and repetitions.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusions, this study analyzed NIKI's "La La Lost You" using Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, focusing on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions to explore how linguistic choices constructed emotional meaning. The findings reveal that NIKI's lyrics depict a profound emotional journey from separation and confusion to acceptance and healing. Through the ideational metafunction, NIKI conveys personal experiences of loss and distance by employing relational, material, and mental processes to create vivid linguistic imagery. The interpersonal metafunction conveys her emotional vulnerability and sincerity through the use of pronouns, modality, and interrogative mood which together foster intimacy between the singer and the listener. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction ensures coherence and emotional continuity by using repetition, parallel structure, and cohesive patterns that link the beginning and end of the song. Overall, these three metafunctions interact harmoniously to create a cohesive emotional narrative that reflects the process of coping with heartbreak. The analysis shows that language in song lyrics does more than convey meaning; it also embodies emotion and experience. NIKI's "La La Lost You" demonstrates how linguistic elements like verbs, pronouns, and repetition can turn personal pain into a universal narrative of love and loss. This study thus underscores the power of language in music as both a medium of artistic expression and a reflection of human emotion.

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