

The Ideology in Broken-Heart Songs: A Functional Perspective

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Abstract. To the present time, it has been known that song lyrics bring certain values even ideologies. The ideology can be also found in song lyrics about broken heart. The ideology needs to be disclosed as a way to increase the level of critical literacy. The present study aims to reveal the hidden ideology behind song lyrics about broken heart by investigating how the word 'love' in relation to 'kill' is represented in song lyrics. As the data sources, one Korean pop song entitled "Let's Kill this Love" and one Indonesian pop song "Cinta ini Membunuhku" translated as "This Love Is Killing Me" were selected. They were selected purposively due to their similarity in topic. Then their clauses were analyzed using the Hallidayan transitivity system. The finding reveals that love in the first data tends to be represented as the goals with humans as the actors. In the second data, love is inclined to be represented as the actors with humans as the goal. The different findings reflect that a broken-heart lover in the Korean song is seen as the controller of his/her feeling. On the other hand, a broken-heart lover in the Indonesian song is viewed as a powerless and fragile person controlled by his/her feeling. Based on the former, a broken-heart lover is portrayed as a creature that has a freewill to choose whether to be happy or not. It is inferred that the perspective of "Let's Kill this Love" song lyrics tends to give emphasis on the power of logic. In comparison, the song of "This Love Is Killing Me" tends to emphasize the trait of being emotionally dependent. As we are living in the advanced literate society, public awareness of song lyrics needs to be increased. In the context of language education, selected song lyrics can be used as the literary work to be assessed by students, as way of improving their critical literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics to the present time have been an eminent object of linguistic and literacy studies. This phenomenon is due to the roles of songs not only as a medium for entertaining but also for spreading values. It has been cogently proved that songs also play a role as a medium for disseminating values even ideology (Dahlan & Adi, 2025; Mustopa et al., 2020; Sukma et al., 2025). Songs allow the dissemination of ideology since it has power in communication and emotion. When the emotions of song listeners are moved by means of words and rhythms, ideologies are subconsciously transferred. This implies that songs are constructed not only to entertain but also to shape the mind of their listeners. This phenomenon occurs across different kinds of songs either in the lyrics of traditional or modern songs.

In the folk song, it has been shown that song lyrics bring inherited cultural values to the listeners (Rengko et al., 2024). The analyses on Selayar's folk songs, for example, have disclosed that their lyrics contain the values about politeness and mutual respect. In the pop song, the analysis conducted by Marsela et al. (2023) in Demi Levato's song has found that the lyrics contain positive values, namely self-confidence to achieve success. Based on the song of Demi Levato it is indicated that shortcomings are the characteristic of human beings and they should be made as a factor of encouragement to achieve success in life. The values about self-confidence are also revealed by the study of Cevania & Merrita (2023) analysing denotative and connotative meanings in three song lyrics. In the larger scope, like in an album, songs have also been shown to have a tendency in terms of values. A semantic study relying on sentiment analysis on five songs sung by Maroon Five has pointed out that overall the song lyrics represent positive meanings although the negative and neutral have been also found (Putra et al., 2024).

Apart from values, song lyrics have been also researched in terms of their benefit for pedagogical implication. The content analysis of Chotimah et al. (2021) on the county song lyrics of the album of Pony has found that the song lyrics have various contextual meanings that can be applied to contextual teaching and learning. In contextual teaching and learning, language materials are connected to the real-life situations. This makes the instructions more authentic and meaningful. Further, materials with various and rich contextual meanings are believed to stimulate students' critical thinking and critical literacy because they prompt language learners to interpret the contextual meaning of a word. As we are living in the middle of wars of paradigm, song 'listeners' need to be made aware of the 'other side' of song lyrics that has been taken for granted. This 'other side' of song lyrics can be consciously or subconsciously constructed by the author. Regardless of the motivation of song writers, it is the role of linguistic studies to reveal the ideologies brought by songs. Linguistics studies contribute to reveal the elusive meaning in songs so that it can be used to develop the literacy and thinking levels of the listeners.

One of the prominent linguistic approaches to reveal the hidden meaning in song lyrics has been associated with Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics (SFL). This linguistic framework compliments the formal grammar since it positions language as the tool of meaning-making in context. In Hallidayan perspective, linguistic features are strategies for achieving certain communicative goals of a particular genre. Rather than in isolation, the grammar choices based on systemic functional linguistics is suited to the goal of its genre. Briefly speaking, each genre has its own typical grammar that is not necessarily the same with others. The typical grammar of the knowledge-building genre, for example, is different from that of the mass-media genre. This indicates that grammar according the Hallidayan perspective is neither prescribed nor arbitrary. It is structured based on a distinct goal to achieve, as in line with the expectation of the

community of discourse. Thus, the studies relying on linguistic features of functional grammar are data-driven with bottom-up pattern.

One of functional tools in SFL is Hallidayan transitivity system. The system of transitivity has been found as the most frequently employed SFL framework among other SFL tools (Manar, 2022). Compared to theme-rheme focusing on textual meaning and mood structure emphasizing interpersonal meaning, the system of transitivity realizes the ideational meaning. In particular, it represents all kinds of experiences of the 'world'. Due to its function as the representation of experiences, the transitivity system can be considered as the basic meaning-making resources. In representing experiences, the transitivity system is framed into six types of clauses. Each clause contains one process. This is what characterizes SFL, that one process or meaning is represented by one clause. The complete categories of processes in SFL from the concrete to the abstract one are material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, and relational processes.

Material process refers to the process of doing or happening (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014) like actions and activities, involving at least a doer termed actor. It can also involve another thing affected or targeted by the doer and it is termed goal or range. When the second participant is affected by the first participant through the process, it is called goal. When it is only as the extension of the process itself and it is not affected by the first participant, it is termed range or scope. A material process can also involve the third thing known as beneficiary. When the beneficiary receives a thing from the actor, it is called recipient. When it only receives service or information, it is named client. By means of material clauses, an experience is represented explicitly and measurably.

Different from material process, mental process represents the conscious inner experiences that can occur in the perceptive, cognitive, and emotive domains (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). The experiencer is called sensor and the experienced one is phenomenon. Another process, verbal clause, represents the process of saying (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014), involving basically sayer as the first participant and verbiage as something told. When there is another participant that receives the process of saying, it is called target. The fourth type of process is the combination between material and mental experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). This type of process is known as behavioural process. It occurs in the mental domain but the effect is observable like smiling and crying. The first participant of behavioural clause is known as behavior and the second participant is behaviour.

Apart from the four types of rather concrete processes, there are two other process types considered as being abstract. They are existential and relational clauses. Whereas in the four process types elaborated earlier there are the predicators that represent a quantum of change, in existential and relational processes the predicators represent something static (realized in the forms of 'being' or 'having'). A relational clause establishes the link or connection between a thing with its attributes or identities while an existential clause represents the existence of things (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). Relational clauses are divided into two, namely attributive relational clause and the identifying one. In the former, the attribute is a part entity of a thing so the entity and its part cannot be exchanged. In the latter, the attribute is a whole entity of a thing so both can be exchanged. In relational clause, there is carrier/identified as the first participant and attributes/identifiers as the second participant. In existential clause, there is only one participant known as existent.

The advantage of employing the system of transitivity for revealing meaning-making in song lyrics is that it allows researchers to critically evaluate elusive values even ideologies embedded in the songs. The transitivity system helps to assess meaning critically because it categorises experience into different functions systematically. The attributive relational clause, for instance, allows the creation of

values addressed to an entity while the identifying relational one enables the establishment of identity of an entity. To the present time, there has been myriads of systemic functional linguistic studies relying on Hallidayan transitivity system to evaluate the meaning-making in song lyrics. The transitivity analysis of Zahoor & Janjua (2016), to illustrate, has disclosed that the dominant relational clauses and material clauses on the song “I am Malala” were employed to represent Malala as an inspirational figure. Relying on more data sets, the functional analysis of Siahaan (2021) on twelve songs of Bon Jovi has revealed that the songs tend to portray the importance of physical activities, as proved by the dominant material clauses. Different from this, the transitivity study of Putri et al. (2020) on German song for kids reported relational clauses as the dominant type of process. The frequent occurrences of relational clauses were claimed as strategies for embedding values for children as the listeners, namely the harmony between human beings, animals, and the nature. Other transitivity studies are the one conducted by Harbi et al. (2019) on The Beatles’ songs and the one carried out by Afifah et al. (2021) on Lewis Capaldi’s songs but these studies only tend to reveal the distribution of process types.

Until now, despite the plethora of existing body of literature on the application of Halliday’s transitivity system for investigating song lyrics, there has been the tendency to only disclose the linguistic feature especially the process distribution. Most have tended to position the transitivity system as the linguistic features to be reported, rather than as an analytical tool to reveal hidden values. As it has been known, the system of transitivity can function both as the issue of study and as the analytical tool of study.

Further, although few studies have investigated the transitivity system in relation to values in songs, none has explored the ideology of romance in relation to the word of ‘kill’. Besides, all of existing studies to the present time have relied on one-side data set. None have adopted the comparative data sets. The present study hence complements the existing body of literature on transitivity system and song lyrics by examining the ideology behind two different songs about a broken-heart lover. To achieve to purpose of the present study, a research question is formulated as follows: How ‘love’ in relation to ‘kill’ is represented in the material clauses of broken-heart songs?

METHOD

The present linguistic scrutiny aims to reveal the implicit ideology brought by the song lyrics by investigating the representation of ‘love’ in relation to ‘kill’. To achieve its purpose, the present study adopted qualitative approach. As the method, text analysis relying on systemic functional linguistic framework was employed to examine two cases of song lyrics. Due to the qualitative nature of the current study, the tendency of findings of the present study were data-driven.

The object of this study was the lyrics of two broken-heart songs associated with ‘love’ and ‘kill’. They were purposively selected as they were perceived equal in terms of the topic. The first song was one of the prominent pop songs sung by a Korean pop group. The second data source was one of the popular pop songs sung by an Indonesian pop group. The former was entitled “Let’s Kill this Love” while the latter was entitled “*Cinta ini membunuhku*” translated as “This Love is Killing Me”. The original Korean song lyrics were in both Korean and English while the original Indonesian lyrics were in Indonesian. On account of both Korean and Indonesian data sources, English-translated lyrics from reputable webs of English-version song lyrics were selected as the data. However, related to the Korean data set, there was no

change in the refrain and some other parts because they were originally sung in English.

After the lyrics of both “Let’s Kill this Love” and “This Love is Killing Me” were collected purposively, the representation of ‘love’ in relation to ‘kill’ in the song lyrics were evaluated by employing one of the Hallidayan analytical frameworks, namely the transitivity system. All analyses were carried in clauses with the transitivity table of Halliday and Matthiessen (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). The total clauses in “Let’s Kill this Love” was 65 while in “This Love is Killing Me” was 30. The clauses were firstly classified into each of material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, and relational process types. Then the analysis focused specifically on material clauses. The material process was further employed because it represents the process of doing or happening while the titles and topics of songs in the present study were also associated with the process of action, namely ‘kill’. Besides, a material clause has been claimed as a process associated with higher-level meaning (Bangga & Doran, 2021). This type of Hallidayan transitivity framework enables the examination on power relation between different parties so that hidden ideologies can be disclosed. The total numbers of material clauses in the current study were 48 clauses, namely 34 in “Let’s Kill this Love” and 14 in “This Love Is Killing Me”. Forty eight clauses of the 65 total clauses in the present study were about 73.84 per cent. In particular, 34 material clauses of the 65 total clauses in the Korean song lyrics were 52.30 per cent while 14 material clauses of the 30 total clauses in the Indonesian data were about 46.66 per cent. Both were the highest percentage compared to other types of clauses. Besides, since the present study adopted the qualitative approach relying on the case study of two songs with a similar theme, its aim was not to generalize the finding, but to reveal the tendency of both song lyrics.

Further, based on the framework of material clauses, the patterns of participant roles, namely the first participant known as actor and the second participant defined as goal were evaluated. This evaluation phase was conducted to disclose the ideologies constructed in both songs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this SFL comparative study is to reveal the constructed ideologies in the song lyrics about broken-heart lover of “Let’s Kill this Love” and “This Love Is Killing Me”. The representation of broken-heart lover is displayed in the following transitivity system framework of material clauses.

The Material Clauses in the Broken-heart Songs

Table 1 Material Process in “Let’s Kill this Love”

No	Processes	Frequency	Percent
1	<i>kill</i>	11	32
2	<i>give</i>	3	9
3	<i>do</i>	2	6
5	<i>force</i>	2	6
6	<i>cut off</i>	2	6
7	<i>cover</i>	2	6
8	<i>hang</i>	1	3
9	<i>erase</i>	1	3
10	<i>kick</i>	1	3

No	Processes	Frequency	Percent
11	<i>fall</i>	1	3
12	<i>make</i>	1	3
13	<i>hurt</i>	1	3
14	<i>come</i>	1	3
15	<i>go</i>	1	3
16	<i>get</i>	1	3
17	<i>owe</i>	1	3
18	<i>plus</i>	1	3
19	<i>screw</i>	1	3
Total		34	100

Table 2 Material Process in “This Love Is Killing Me”

No	Processes	Frequency	Percent
1	<i>Break</i>	5	36
2	<i>Kill</i>	4	29
3	<i>Hurt</i>	3	21
4	<i>Ignore</i>	1	7
5	<i>Reject</i>	1	7
Total		14	100

Based on the two tables displayed earlier, there are gaps both in terms of the variability of material clauses and in terms of the meaning of the processes. In terms of the former, eighteen predicators in representing the experience about love and ‘kill’ are found in the Korean data set. They encompass *kill, give, do, force, cut off, cover, hang, erase, kick, fall, make, hurt, come, go, get, owe, plus, and screw*. The dominant experiences are represented with the process of *kill* (32 %). In the Indonesian data set, only five predicators are used, namely *break, kill, hurt, ignore, and reject*. The dominant experiences are represented with the process of *break* (36 %) and *kill* (29 %). In terms of the types of meaning, the material processes of Korean data set represent not only negative meanings but also neutral even positive meaning. In the Indonesian counterpart, all material processes represent negative experiences as shown in the five predicators mentioned previously. The contradictory material processes between the Korean and Indonesian data sets can be seen in the following extracts.

Positive Material Process in Korean Data Set

Give me some more Data-K-64
Process

Neutral Material Process in Korean Data Set

I come Data-K-7
Process

Negative Material Process in Indonesian Data Set

You **broke** me Data-I-19
Process

The Relationship between Actors and Goals

Further, *the* distinct representation between Korean and Indonesian data sets is also found in the types of actors and goals in the material clauses. The different roles of material-process participants are displayed in the following charts.

Figure 1 *Actors in the Material Clauses*

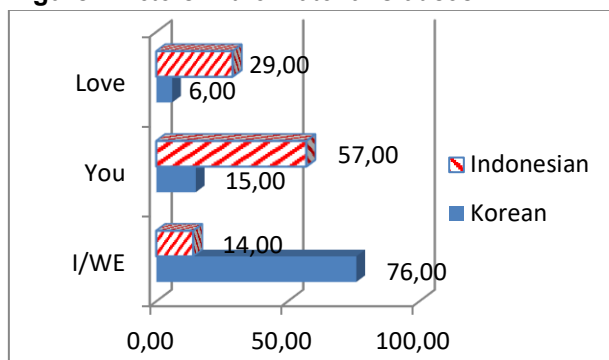
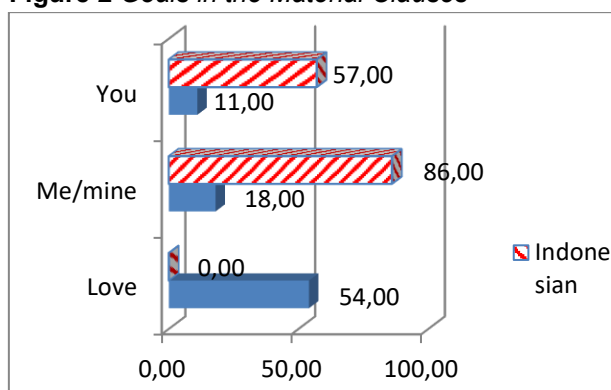


Figure 2 *Goals in the Material Clauses*



Based on both charts displayed previously, the first noticeably gap between the Korean and Indonesian data sets is in the types of actors. In the analysed Korean data set, the most frequent actors of material clauses are first persons (76%) especially *I/we* followed by *you* (15%) in the second place and *love* (6%) in the third position. In its Indonesian counterpart, the most frequently employed actors in sequence are *you* (57%), *love* (29%), and *I/we* (14%). Comparatively, there is a gap or difference of 62% in first persons as actors. Whereas the Korean song lyrics tend to represent the process of doing/happening with *I/we* as the doers, the Indonesian song lyrics are inclined to employ *you* as the doer material processes.

In terms of the second participants, the dominant goals in the Korean data set are *love* (54%) followed by *me/mine* (18%) and *you* (11%) respectively in the second and third position. In the data set of Indonesian counterpart, the most frequent goals in sequence cover *me/mine* (86%), *you* (57%), and *love* (0%). Comparatively, the Korean song lyrics tend to represent the doing/happening experiences with *love* as the one affected by the actor while the Indonesian song lyrics are inclined to represent the experiences of doing/happening with *me/mine* as the goal affected by the actor. In general, the song lyrics of “Let’s Kill this Love” tends to represent the experiences about love in relation to ‘kill’ with *I/we* as the actors which affect *love* as the goals. This means that *love* is the thing that receives action from *I/we*. On the other hand, in those of “This Love Is Killing Me”, the experiences about love in relation to ‘kill’ are inclined to

involve *you* and *love* as the doers affecting *me/mine* as the goals. This shows that *me/mine* is the one that is affected by *you* and *love*. The contradictory representation of actor and goal in “Let’s Kill this Love” and “This Love Is Killing Me” can be seen in the following extracts.

First Person as Actor with Love as the Goal
 (.....) ***Gotta kill this love*** Data-K-66
Elliptical Actor Process Goal

Love as Actor with First Person as the Goal
This love is killing me Data-I-14
Actor Process Goal

The findings of the present study have revealed the gap of meaning making in representing the experiences about love in relation to ‘kill’ between a prominent Korean pop song “Let’s kill this love” and an English-translated popular Indonesian pop song “This love is killing me”. The first noticeable gap lies in the types of processes of material clauses. The doing and happening processes in the former compared with the latter are more various in terms of the predicators and their meanings. This reflects that the flow of meaning making in the Korean song is more dynamic. In the Indonesian data set, the variability of predicators of material clauses are in limited numbers. As the effect, the flow of meaning making towards breaking-heart love is less dynamic. The existence of various ‘physical’ processes in the “Let’s Kill This Love” indicates that there is a change from love failure to taking actions as the attempt to cope with the problem. In the beginning of the song, there is the conflict about bad love experiences. Then there is the resolution taken to respond to the breaking-heart love. In its Indonesian counterpart, there are no taken actions or resolution as a response to recover from the bad love experiences. All material processes in the Indonesian data set are about the victim of heart-breaking love without active initiatives to raise and fight for happiness.

Another noticeable gap of material clauses between both data sets is in the types of actors and goals. The “Let’s Kill This Love” emphasises more on first person (I/we) as the main actors affecting the third singular thing (love) as the goals. The song of “This Love Is Killing Me”, on the other hand, gives more emphasis on second person singular (you) and third singular thing (love) as the actors affecting the first person as the main goals (me). The implied meanings of both types of different representation are contradictory. When a thing is position as the actor, it is the one that has more power controlling the action as well as the thing being affected. Adversely, when a thing is represented as a goal, it is the one that is affected by the actor.

In material clauses, the goal is divided into different categories. When it is the one that is affected by an actor, it is known as ‘affected thing’ because it experiences changes. When the goal is created from absence into existence, it is considered as the ‘effected thing’. The Indonesian process of *membunuh* (kill) is categorised as a material process that involves an ‘affected thing’ as the second participant (Sujatna, 2009). When a thing is represented as an affected goal in the process of doing or happening, it is interpreted as a weak thing that is controlled by the actor. On the other hand, when a thing is positioned as an actor, it is perceived as a strong thing. A similar thing can be represented either as an actor or a goal in material clause, depending on the ideology or value brought by the text producer. This phenomenon has also been previously found especially in the genre political discourse of media (Kondowe, 2014; Manar, 2016). The comparative study of Manar (2016) has pointed out that a political opponent was tended to be represented by an opposing media as a weak party,

namely as the second participant affected by the first participant. In the media that took stance to the politician being reported, he was represented as a more powerful position, that is, as the first participant. This distinct representation of participant roles reveals that a similar issue can be represented with contradictory linguistic strategies according to the different ideology of the text producers.

Based on the representation of love in relation to 'kill' in the lyrics of "Let's kill this love" and in its counterparts of "This love is killing me", a different ideology is disclosed. In the former, a broken-heart lover is represented as 'something' fragile and emotionally-dependent only in the beginning. The rest of the lyrics reflects strong and emotionally-independent character. On the other hand, the song lyrics of "This love is killing me", overall indicate fragile, powerless, emotionally-dependent broken heart lover. Whereas the first lyrics indicate the ideology of being logically driven, the second lyrics tend to represent the ideology about being more emotionally driven. This contradictory representation might indicate either the paradigm of the singer (song writer) himself/herself or the perspective of common song listeners. To the best of our knowledge, literary products such as films, novels, song lyrics, etc. can be constructed based on what the 'market' likes (based on the perspective of the majority of song listeners in the society) or based on what the singer/song writer intends to achieve. An ideal song lyric is the one that not only entertains people but also that educates them. A song writer is expected to construct and deliver educative values to the society through his/her lyrics regardless of the expectation of the listeners. An educative literary product including song lyrics is the one that promotes a role model for the society.

Based on the analysed song lyrics of both "Let's Kill This Love" and "This Love Is Killing Me", it is indicated that the choices of grammar in the former are driven by the expectation of the discourse community of the songs. Love in relation to 'kill' in the Korean data set has been represented with logical approach. On the other hand, love in relation to 'kill' in the Indonesian counterpart has been represented with rather emotive approach. While the former disseminates the belief that humans being have the capacity to control his/her feeling and to end the relationship, the latter spreads the notion that a broken-heart lover is a mentally weak person who is controlled by his/her own feeling. Song lyrics to the present time has been known as a medium of ideology construction. The construction of ideology in song lyrics has been exposed by various analysis methods. The study of Dahlan & Adi (2025) have relied on ethnography while that of Mustopa et al., (2020) has made use of the approach of feminism and Michael Foucault approach. Another study has employed a thematic analysis in revealing the ideology in songs (Sukma et al., 2025).

Unlike previous studies, the present study has relied on the Hallidayan transitivity system especially material clause in revealing an ideology in song lyrics of a globally prominent pop song and in the song lyrics of the national one. By employing material-clause framework, it is hinted that the song written and sung for the global community of discourse tends to represent lyrics that promote logics. On the other hand, the topically equivalent song produced for the national market of a developing country tend to represent emotionally-dependent perspective.

In relation to the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the current study has proved that the same event, in this case, experiencing broken heart can be represented in distinct ways. This different representation is determined by the ideology or belief of the song writers. In particular, the distinct representation is determined by the roles of participants especially in material clauses. As reiterated by Eggins (2004), when a thing or participant is represented as the actor, it is the one who/that affects the second participant. On the other hand, when a thing or participant is represented as the goal, it is the one who/that is affected by the actor (see Eggins,

2004). This means that the actor has more power compared to the goal. In SFL, each text has its own 'typical' grammar that is driven by the purpose behind the text.

CONCLUSION

The present study has found that there is a gap of meaning-making between the song lyrics of "Let's Kill this Love" and those of "This Love Is Killing Me". Based on the analyses in material clauses, the first analysed data compared to the second ones tend to be more dynamic, as revealed by its more diverse material processes. Further, while the actors in the former is inclined to represent the first singular persons with love as the goals, the actors in the latter tend to represent love itself as the actors with the first singular persons as the frequent goals. It can be inferred that the song lyrics of "Let's Kill this Love" tend to promote the logic ideology while those of "This Love Is Killing Me" tend to promote the emotionally-driven ideology where lovers are considered as powerless parties in terms of their feelings. The former in comparison to the latter indicates that human beings are individuals who have the capacity and power to control their feelings especially love. The findings of the present study, in relation to language education especially English as a second or foreign language, are expected to contribute to providing insight to language educators. In particular, they can be used as the literary work to be analysed by students, as a way of increasing their critical literacy.

Despite its findings, this research had limitations. The first drawback lies on the difference in the production years of both songs. In addition, the current study only relied on text-analysis as the method of study and on the transitivity system as the analysis tool. Thus, further related studies can extend the present research by incorporating multimodal analysis including other semiotic resources such as picture, video, colour, brightness, etc. In particular, further studies can combine systemic functional linguistics and multimodality in investigating the meaning-making in song lyrics.

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