

How Betrayal and Mental Struggle Are Represented through Lyrics: Ideational Metafunction Study of Yebba's My Mind

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Abstract

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Language is very important because people use it to share their thoughts and feelings. This study talks about how a singer named Yebba shows her feelings of betrayal and sadness in her song My Mind. Many people listen to songs, but not many understand how the words in a song can show deep emotions. The purpose of this study is to find out how Yebba uses language to express her mental struggle and broken heart. The writers used a qualitative method, which means studying the song's lyrics carefully to find the meaning behind the words. The research used Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the part called transitivity, which looks at actions, feelings, and people in sentences. The results show that most of the sentences use material processes, which describe real actions like closing the door or leaving. There are also mental processes that show what the singer thinks and feels, and relational processes that describe what something is like. The song uses language to show both outside actions and inner emotions. In the end, this study shows that Yebba's My Mind tells the story of betrayal and emotional pain through the way the words are used. It also helps us understand how songs can use simple language to show deep feelings. The study suggests that other researchers can use this method to study different songs and learn how singers express their emotions through words.

Kata Kunci:

Ekspresi emosional,

Metafungsi

ideasional,

Linguistik,

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Abstrak

Bahasa sangat penting karena digunakan manusia untuk menyampaikan pikiran dan perasaan mereka. Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana seorang penyanyi bernama Yebba mengekspresikan perasaan pengkhianatan dan kesedihannya dalam lagu *My Mind*. Banyak orang mendengarkan lagu, tetapi tidak banyak yang memahami bagaimana kata-kata dalam lagu dapat menunjukkan emosi yang mendalam. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana Yebba menggunakan bahasa untuk mengungkapkan pergulatan batin dan patah hatinya.

Penulis menggunakan metode kualitatif, yaitu dengan menganalisis lirik lagu secara cermat untuk menemukan makna di balik kata-kata tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (SFL) dari Halliday, khususnya bagian yang disebut *transitivity*, yang meneliti tindakan, perasaan, dan pelaku dalam kalimat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar kalimat menggunakan *material processes*, yang menggambarkan tindakan nyata seperti menutup pintu atau pergi. Selain itu terdapat *mental processes* yang menunjukkan apa yang dipikirkan dan dirasakan penyanyi, serta *relational processes* yang menggambarkan sifat atau keadaan sesuatu. Lagu ini menggunakan bahasa untuk menampilkan tindakan lahiriah sekaligus emosi batiniah. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa lagu *My Mind* karya Yebba menceritakan kisah pengkhianatan dan luka emosional melalui penggunaan kata-kata. Penelitian ini juga membantu kita memahami bagaimana lagu dapat menggunakan bahasa sederhana untuk mengekspresikan perasaan yang mendalam. Selain itu, penelitian ini menyarankan agar peneliti lain dapat menggunakan metode yang sama untuk menganalisis lagu-lagu berbeda guna mempelajari bagaimana penyanyi mengekspresikan emosi mereka melalui kata-kata.

INTRODUCTION

Language stands as a defining feature of human existence. It is not only a medium of message transmission, but a successful medium of thought, feeling, and experience-sharing. Language occupies a pivotal position in human life, as it is a medium of experience-sharing as well as an instrument for the formation of meaning (Trinh et al., 2017). Human beings use language to build their reality, build relationships, and express their inner feelings. The way in which individuals choose words, structure sentences, and use expressions often says more than what is meant. Language can be described as a mirror that reflects human understanding of the world. With it, individuals learn and read the world and not only express the essence of life but also the dominant state of mind, cultural background, moral opinions, and social values that distinguish different societies (Kachur, 2021). Thus, language is both a manifestation of thought and an instrument of the representation of human experience on social and psychological levels.

A significant framework that provides some insight into the way language generates meaning is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than considering language as a stable framework based on rules, this theory considers language to be a resource employed in constructing meaning in diverse contexts of use. Halliday and SFL is termed systemic because every linguistic feature is viewed as a conscious choice among several available options within a specific system of language. All of these systems interact with each other, forming a system of interconnectedness that impacts how meaning is constructed using language (Adenan, 2001). SFL situates language as a social semiotic system, emphasizing how it is utilized in real communication and not focusing on the form only. From this point of view, language emerges to meet the communicative needs of its users; it acts, interacts, and represents experience in a social world (Almurashi, 2016).

Within this theoretical model, Halliday introduces the concept of metafunctions, which describes how language simultaneously fulfills three interrelated purposes: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction focuses on how people use language to describe actions, participants, and the circumstances surrounding an event. The ideational metafunction concerns how language serves as a means of representing reality. It enables individuals to express their perception of the world, both the external environment and the inner world of thoughts and experiences, through linguistic choices (Laosrirattanachai, 2018). It operates through the transitivity system, which identifies processes (types of actions or states), participants (the entities involved), and circumstances (contextual details such as place, time, or manner) (Eggins, 2004). In this sense, language becomes a means of constructing experience, both external events and inner consciousness.

This perspective proves valuable in analyzing artistic texts, such as literature and song lyrics, where emotions and personal struggles are expressed through linguistic form. Music stands as a universal language of emotion, capable of voicing feelings that often lie beyond the reach of spoken words. Through melody and rhythm, it translates the deepest human experiences into sound (Phillips et al., 2020).

Artistic language transforms private emotions into a shared aesthetic experience, revealing how people make sense of their feelings through words. Song lyrics often perform a communicative role similar to that of daily speech, using familiar language that makes the emotions and ideas within them easily accessible to listeners to Benneth (1999), cited in (Sinaga et al., 2024) . Through the lens of the ideational metafunction, it becomes possible to explore how emotions such as pain, loss, or betrayal are linguistically encoded and symbolically represented.

A clear example of this emotional articulation can be found in Yebba's song "*My Mind*" (2016). The lyrics tell a story of betrayal and emotional turmoil, portraying the mental suffering that follows a broken relationship. The singer's words reflect an inner conflict between anguish and confusion, illustrating how linguistic expression captures psychological pain. Thus, the song serves as an instance of how emotional trauma can be represented through language.

Using Halliday's ideational meta function as a framework, the language of "*My Mind*" can be examined to uncover how experiences of betrayal and mental struggle are depicted. Different process types reveal distinct layers of meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). Material processes reflect outward actions, mental processes disclose inner thoughts and emotions, while relational processes describe identity and state of being. Halliday's framework extends across multiple lexicogrammatically systems, one of which involves process types, particularly affective mental processes that express emotions and inner experiences (Martin, 2014). Participants and circumstances in the song illustrate how the persona defines herself and others within her emotional world. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that linguistic form is not a passive reflection of feeling; it actively shapes how emotion is structured and experienced.

This study, therefore, investigates how "*My Mind*" represents experiences of betrayal and psychological conflict through Halliday's transitivity system. The transitivity system consists of various types of processes that represent how ideas and experiences are expressed through language. Each process, typically realized by a verb, reflects the way phenomena or events are conceptualized in meaning (Hutabarat et al., 2020). The analysis seeks to reveal how linguistic patterns embody emotional

meaning and demonstrate the expressive potential of language. By interpreting the song through this framework, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how language mirrors human consciousness and emotional reality.

Ultimately, this study belongs to the field of systemic functional stylistics, where linguistic and literary interpretation intersect. It highlights that meaning is not determined only by what is expressed, but also by how it is constructed linguistically. As Almurashi (2016) points out, the strength of SFL lies in its ability to connect linguistic structure with real-life meaning-making. In the case of Yebba's "*My Mind*," this theoretical lens allows a deeper reading of how betrayal and mental struggle are represented, revealing the intricate relationship between emotion, experience, and language.

Literature Review

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), positions language as a social system that functions to represent human experience through three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Within the ideational metafunction, the transitivity system serves to reveal how actions, feelings, and social relations are constructed in language. Bakuuro (2017) explains that the ideational function plays a role in projecting both the external reality and the inner world of the speaker through the combination of process, participant, and circumstance elements that shape human experience. Nur and Widodo (2022) found that material, mental, and relational processes dominate the lyrics of Taylor Swift's *Midnights* album, indicating an interweaving of concrete experiences and emotional struggles. Emotional processes such as love, for instance, and hide depict emotional engagement, and interlocutors such as I and you represent close interpersonal relations. The study confirmed that language in song lyrics functions in the same manner as in everyday conversation; it expresses emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are universally shared (Pranoto et al., 2020; Sinaga et al., 2024). This type of analysis confirms that songs are not merely artistic compositions but also linguistic vehicles that express human inner experiences. Thus, SFL provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the linguistic representation of psychological experiences in musical texts.

Furthermore, several studies have shown that the analysis of the ideational metafunction can reveal the psychological and ideological dimensions of language. Mental and relational processes in Whitney Houston's The Greatest Love of All serve to express self-reflection and inner struggles (Hutabarat et al., 2020). Rahayu et al. (2025) emphasized that the transitivity system not only describes linguistic structures but also contains social perspectives that shape the meaning of texts. Meanwhile, Max et al. (2023), highlighted how the analysis of ideational metafunction in non-literary texts can uncover humanitarian values and moral messages embedded within them. Therefore, the study Representing Betrayal and Mental Struggle: An Ideational Metafunction Study of Yebba's 'My Mind' aims to expand SFL research by examining how betrayal and mental struggle are linguistically represented through the use of process types that construct emotional and reflective meanings.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design grounded in the theoretical perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). A qualitative method is selected because the study aims to interpret meanings rather than measure them numerically. According to Halliday and Mathiessen (1999), language functions as a social semiotic system that conveys human experiences and thoughts through specific linguistic structures and choices. In this view, meaning is understood as something socially shaped and realized through patterns of language use. The SFL framework has been extensively applied to analyse how deeper meanings are constructed in literary and musical works (Alaei & Ahangari, 2016; Cruz-Reyna, 2022). Building on this approach, the current study investigates how the themes of betrayal and mental struggle are represented in Yebba's *My Mind*, particularly through the transitivity system within the ideational metafunction.

The data for this study consists of the lyrics to Yebba's 2016 single *My Mind*. The lyrics were accessed from several verified online sources and thoroughly cross-checked against the official soundtrack in order to verify authenticity. This particular song was chosen because of its deep emotional content and intricate detailing of psychological distress, which fit the research emphasis on betrayal and conflict

themes. The selection also aligns with previous research that has employed the SFL model to examine experiential and emotional meaning in song lyrics (Sulistyawati et al., 2022).

The data were collected through a documentary technique, emphasizing textual observation and linguistic analysis. The researcher first transcribed the lyrics and segmented them into clausal units, since the clause serves as the central unit of analysis in Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each clause was treated as a distinct representation of experience and was examined for its processes, participants, and circumstances according to Halliday's transitivity system. Following (Harahap et al., 2024). Observational notes were also made to capture relevant aspects such as emotional tone, repetition, metaphorical expression, and other figurative elements that contribute to meaning construction. These additional observations supported the contextual interpretation of the linguistic data.

The analysis of data in this research was conducted based on the transitivity framework within the ideational metafunction. Bakkuuro's (2017) explanation, the ideational metafunction reflects human experience through three interrelated components: processes, participants, and circumstances. The analytical procedure started with dividing the song lyrics into individual clauses, which were then categorized according to their process types, including material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal, and existential. Afterward, each clause was examined to identify its participants (for example, Actor, Senser, Carrier, or Sayer) and circumstantial elements (such as location, manner, or cause) that supply contextual meaning to the process. The outcomes of this analysis were subsequently interpreted to reveal how Yebba conveys the intertwined emotions of betrayal and mental struggle through her linguistic choices within the patterns of transitivity.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted with linguistics experts to assess the consistency and accuracy of interpretation. The researcher also maintained theoretical consistency by consulting relevant literature on SFL and previous studies that applied the ideational metafunction to the analysis of literary and musical texts. These strategies collectively strengthened the reliability and

validity of the qualitative analysis, ensuring that the interpretation of the linguistic representation in Yebba's *My Mind* is both credible and theoretically grounded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show how Yebba's *My Mind* expresses the themes of betrayal and mental struggle through different process types in Halliday's transitivity system. Each clause in the song reflects the singer's emotional experience, combining actions, thoughts, and states of being that reveal her pain and confusion. The following table summarizes the analysis of process types, participants, and circumstances found in the lyrics.

Table 1. Analysis Transitivity Ideational My Mind By Yebba

Clause	Process Type	Process (Verb)	Participant (s)	Circumstances
I heard you come in at a quarter 'til three	Mental	Heard	I (senser)	at a quarter 'til three
You come in	Material	Come in	You (actor)	None
You closed the door And laid down next to me	Material	closed Laid down	You (actor) The door (goal)	Next to me
I heard	Mental	heard	I (actor)	None
You say her name	Verbal	Say	You (sayer) Her name (verbiage)	None
Your dirty secrets too far gone to keep	Relational	Is	Your dirty secret (carrier) too far gone to keep (Attribute)	None
I'm 'bout to lose my	Material	lose	I (actor)	None
I think about you all the time	Mental	Think	I (senser) You (Phenomenon)	All the time
You can't even look me dead in the eyes	Behavioral	look	You (behave) Me (goal)	Even
Her love is strong	Relational	is	Her love (carrier)	None
She got you hypnotized	Material	Got	She (actor) You (goal)	None
You say you love me	Verbal	Say	You (sayer) you love me (Verbiage)	None
But I know it's a lie	Mental	Know	I (senser) It's a lie (Phenomenon)	None
When I work so hard to keep you satisfied	Material	Work	I (actor) You (goal)	So hard to keep you
How could ya do this to me	Material	Do	Ya (actor) This (goal)	To me
She can't take you away from me	Material	Take	She (actor) You (goal)	Away from me

I sure won't stay	Material	Stay	I (actor)	Sure
I'll be damned if I ever leave	Mental	Be damned Leave	I (carrier in be damned) I (actor in leave)	If I ever
She won't take you away from me	Material	Take	She (actor) You (goal)	Away from me
Anybody know what I'm talking about	Material Verbal	Know (Material) Talking (Verbal)	Anybody (sensor) What I'm talking about (phenomenon)	None
You will be mine	Rational	Be	You (carrier) Mine (attribute)	Always

The transitivity analysis of Yebba's song "My Mind" reveals that the experiences of betrayal and mental struggle are expressed through various process types within Halliday's ideational metafunction system. These processes reflect the interrelation between physical actions, psychological states, and self-reflection of the singer as representations of deep emotional conflict. As Bartley (2018) explains, transitivity enables speakers to encode both external experiences and internal consciousness through different process types. In general, the most dominant process type found in the lyrics is the material process, followed by mental, relational, and verbal processes, with several occurrences of behavioral and existential processes. Consistent with Siahaan (2021) findings, the dominance of material processes indicates that Yebba portrays pain and loss through concrete actions related to the experience of betrayal, while mental processes highlight the internal conflict and psychological suffering experienced by the lyrical persona.

Material Processes

The analysis shows that material processes are the most dominant type found in Yebba's "My Mind." These processes describe concrete actions related to betrayal, heartbreak, and emotional resistance. Clauses such as "You closed the door," "She got you hypnotized," and "How could ya do this to me" illustrate the physical dimension of betrayal, where the participants you and she act as Actors harming the Goal (I). This dominance highlights how Yebba transforms emotional pain into visible actions that symbolize loss and detachment. This finding supports Siahaan (2021) conclusion that material processes dominate song lyrics because they represent physical activity and social phenomena that build the experiential meaning of the text. Likewise, Darmawan and Rohmah (2025) assert that material processes

“embody physical actions and concrete experiences that construct the creator’s psychological and social meaning.” Through clauses like “I sure won’t stay” and “I’ll be damned if I ever leave,” Yebba portrays empowerment and self-assertion, shifting from passive suffering to active decision-making. processes represent tangible activities in the physical world, making them effective in portraying the external aspects of betrayal Halliday and Mathiessen (1999). Similarly, Rahayu et al. (2025) found that material processes dominate emotionally charged song lyrics because they translate abstract pain into visible human actions. In Yebba’s song, these processes externalize her inner struggle, transforming sorrow into a physical and assertive form of self-expression. In short, material processes in this song externalize betrayal while also embodying the persona’s internal act of reclaiming self-worth.

Mental processes

Mental processes reveal the persona’s inner thoughts, perceptions, and realizations that define her emotional suffering. Clauses like “I heard you come in at a quarter ‘til three,” “I think about you all the time,” and “I know it’s a lie” show how the *Senser (I)* experiences betrayal through perception, memory, and cognition. These processes portray the transition of pain shifts from external events to feelings or awareness within the mind. The verbs heard, think, and know emphasize how the mind becomes a space of conflict between denial and acceptance. This finding is in line with Tampubolon et al. (2024), who discovered that the dominant transitivity process in the song *Imagination* is a mental process (39%), indicating that inner reflection and thought largely construct meaning in the lyrics. Similarly, Larbaoui (2019) explains that in literary discourse, mental processes uncover the inner self of participants’ emotions, perceptions, and beliefs, which reflect both the writer’s ideology and the characters’ consciousness. This aligns with the findings of Mulyati et al. (2022), who argue that mental clauses in song lyrics often function as representations of emotional depth, self-reflection, and pain. Through these clauses, Yebba transforms her heartbreak into a form of psychological introspection, giving listeners access to her emotional landscape. Through such mental clauses, Yebba transforms emotional trauma into reflection and awareness, turning private sorrow into a meaningful psychological experience.

Relational Processes

Relational processes such as “Her love is strong” and “Your dirty secrets too far gone to keep” function to describe states of being rather than actions. These clauses define emotional conditions and moral realities that cannot be changed, with Carriers like her love or your dirty secret linked to Attributes expressing power, permanence, or guilt. Max et al. (2023) note that relational processes serve to connect one aspect of experience to another, constructing classification and identity that represent how reality is perceived in the song lyrics. Harbi et al. (2019) note that relational processes are often used in song lyrics to establish emotional identity and moral evaluation, reinforcing the permanence of emotional conditions. Through this linguistic structure, Yebba captures the essence of heartbreak as a fixed reality rather than a temporary event. Likewise, Larbaoui (2019) emphasizes that relational processes, both attributive and identifying, establish the link between emotional states and moral identities, revealing how language portrays value and permanence in human experience. Through these relational clauses, Yebba constructs emotional identity and contrast, portraying others as powerful and herself as vulnerable yet self-aware, thereby solidifying betrayal as an unchangeable truth.

Verbal and Behavioural Processes

Verbal and behavioural processes enhance the expressive dimension of “My Mind.” The verbal clauses “You say her name” and “You say you love me” expose false communication, where spoken words become proof of deceit. Meanwhile, the behavioural clause “You can’t even look me dead in the eyes” reveals visible signs of guilt and avoidance. According to Riandini, (2024), verbal processes represent acts of expressing or communicating, while behavioural processes illustrate psychological or physiological actions such as smiling, staring, or crying, bridging inner emotion and outward manifestation. Sitinjak et al. (2025) further show that in Ariana Grande’s thank u, next album, behavioural and verbal clauses communicate affective tension and self-assertion, turning personal pain into performative expression. Similarly, Yebba’s verbal and behavioural processes bridge the emotional and physical realms, showing that communication itself becomes a medium of pain and psychological tension.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed how Yebba's song "My Mind" expresses feelings of betrayal and mental struggle through Halliday's ideational metafunction, particularly the transitivity system. The results revealed that various process types, material, mental, relational, verbal, and behavioural, work together to construct meaning. Material processes dominate, depicting real actions that represent betrayal and emotional pain, while mental processes show the singer's thoughts and sadness. Relational processes describe emotional states and identity, and verbal and behavioural processes reflect how pain is expressed through words and actions. These findings demonstrate that language can effectively convey deep emotions and experiences. In "My Mind," Yebba transforms her heartbreak into a meaningful narrative, supporting Halliday's view that language not only communicates but also constructs human emotion and reality. This research highlights how song lyrics can be analysed linguistically to understand how language expresses genuine human feelings and suggests that future studies explore other songs and integrate linguistic and musical analysis to gain deeper insight into the relationship between words and emotion.

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