

EXPERIENTIAL METAFUNCTION ANALYSIS ON A THOUSAND YEARS SONG BY CHRISTINA PERRI

Lihardo Manik^{a,1}, Selviana Napitupulu^{b,2}

^a Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen, Pematangsiantar, Indonesia

^b Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen, Pematangsiantar, Indonesia

Corresponden E-Mail; Lihardomanik000@gmail.com

INFO ARTIKEL

Sejarah Artikel: (Diisi Editor)
Diterima: 05 Desember 2025
Direvisi: 25 Desember 2025
Disetujui: 30 Desember 2025
Tersedia Daring: 29 Januari 2026

Kata Kunci:

Kata Kunci 1 Metafungsi
Eksperiensial
Kata Kunci 2 Linguistik
Fungsional Sistemik
Kata Kunci 3 Analisis
Transitivitas
Kata Kunci 4 Lirik Lagu
Kata Kunci 5 Makna
Emosional

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menganalisis metafungsi pengalaman dalam lagu A Thousand Years karya Christina Perri menggunakan Linguistik Fungsional Sistematis Halliday, dengan penekanan pada sistem transitivitas. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif diterapkan dengan membagi lirik menjadi klausa dan jenis proses, peserta, serta keadaan. Analisis menunjukkan enam jenis proses, dengan proses mental mendominasi (39%), diikuti oleh proses relasional (28%) dan proses material (22%), sementara proses verbal, perilaku, dan eksistensial muncul secara minimal. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa lagu tersebut membangun makna secara utama melalui ekspresi emosional, keadaan psikologis, dan identitas, bukan melalui tindakan fisik. Secara linguistik, pola transitivitas mewakili tema cinta abadi, ketakutan, harapan, dan ketahanan emosional. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa lirik lagu berfungsi sebagai data linguistik bermakna untuk mengeksplorasi makna pengalaman dan dapat diterapkan secara efektif dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa, terutama dalam pengajaran tata bahasa fungsional dan analisis wacana.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Keyword 1 Experiential
Metafunction
Keyword 2 Systemic
Functional Linguistics
Keyword 3 Transitivity
Analysis
Keyword 4 Song Lyrics
Keyword 5 Emotional
Meaning

This study analyzes the experiential metafunction in Christina Perri's song A Thousand Years using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, with emphasis on the transitivity system. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed by segmenting the lyrics into clauses and identifying process types, participants, and circumstances. The analysis reveals six process types, with mental processes dominating (39%), followed by relational (28%) and material processes (22%), while verbal, behavioral, and existential processes appear minimally. The findings indicate that the song constructs meaning primarily through emotional expression, psychological states, and identity rather than physical action. Linguistically, the transitivity patterns represent themes of eternal love, fear, hope, and emotional endurance. This study demonstrates that song lyrics serve as meaningful linguistic data for exploring experiential meaning and may be effectively applied in language learning contexts, particularly in the teaching of functional grammar and discourse analysis.



1. Introduction

Song lyrics convey meaning that goes beyond literal interpretation. They serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as a valuable linguistic resource for representing psychological states, social interactions, and ideological values. Songwriters make deliberate linguistic choices to express emotions such as love, fear, and devotion in a structured and meaningful manner. Language can be viewed as a resource for producing meaning through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual, according to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The ideational metafunction, namely the experiencing component, is concerned with how language conveys human experiences. This experiential meaning is realized via the transitivity system, which includes processes, participants, and situations. Researchers can learn about how sensations and emotions are grammatically constructed in texts by examining transitivity patterns.

Many previous studies have applied transitivity analysis to song lyrics, especially those with romantic themes. Research has shown that love-themed songs frequently employ mental and relational processes to express emotions, perceptions, and identity. However, despite the popularity and lyrical richness of Christina Perri's *A Thousand Years*, limited research has focused on how experiential meaning is constructed in this song using Halliday's transitivity framework.

A Thousand Years is well-known for its poetic picture of unending love, emotional endurance, and dedication. The song provides a wealth of linguistic data for investigating how interior sentiments and emotional states are expressed through grammatical structures. As a result, evaluating the experiential metafunction in this song is critical to understanding how language encodes emotional experiences and ideological implications of timeless love.

2. Method

Since the object of analysis in this study was a written text, no human respondents were involved. The data source consisted of the official lyrics of Christina Perri's song *A Thousand Years*, released in 2011 as part of the soundtrack for *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1*. The song was selected due to its rich emotional content and poetic language, which provide suitable linguistic data for analyzing experiential meaning within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The data gathering technique began with the selection of the research item and the validation of the lyrics' source on respectable and certified lyric platforms. The lyrics were then split into clauses using Halliday's transitivity framework. Each clause was thoroughly reviewed and categorized according to its process type, participant roles, and circumstantial aspects. This methodical procedure ensured that the data was correctly prepared and available for future examination. The data is examined using Halliday's (1994, 2014) transitivity system from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each clause was examined to discover the process type, participants, and circumstances, in order to explain how language communicates human experience and emotion.

Verbs expressing cognition, emotion, and perception (e.g., believe, fear, wait, love) were categorized as mental processes. Relational processes were identified through verbs of being and possession (e.g., be, have), while material processes included verbs indicating physical actions (e.g., stand, hold, be brave). Other types such as verbal, behavioral, and existential processes were also identified. Following classification, the frequency and dominance of each process type were analyzed to uncover linguistic trends. The interpretation focused on how grammatical choices in the song shape meanings of love, endurance, and emotional identity. To increase validity, theoretical triangulation and peer debate with a linguistics lecturer were carried out.

3. Result and Discussion (Hasil dan Pembahasan)

3.1 Distribution of Process Types in the Song Lyrics

This study identified 36 clauses in the lyrics of Christina Perri's *A Thousand Years*. Each clause was analyzed using Halliday's transitivity framework to determine the types of processes, participants, and circumstances that realize experiential meaning. Six types of processes were identified: mental, relational, material, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. The analysis shows that mental processes dominate the song lyrics (39%), followed by relational processes (28%) and material processes (22%). In contrast, verbal (6%), behavioral (3%), and existential (2%) processes occur infrequently. This distribution indicates that the song primarily emphasizes inner experiences, emotional states, and identity rather than observable physical actions.

The dominance of mental processes suggests that the songwriter foregrounds feelings, thoughts, and perceptions as the core of experiential meaning. Meanwhile, relational processes contribute to the construction of emotional attachment and identity, particularly in expressing long-term love and commitment.

3.2 Transitivity Patterns Across the Text

A clause-by-clause analysis reveals variations in process types across different parts of the song. In the opening verses, mental processes are predominant, reflecting emotions such as fear, longing, and anticipation. This is evident in clauses such as "*I have died every day waiting for you*", which portray prolonged emotional struggle and psychological endurance. In the chorus, relational processes become more prominent, as seen in clauses like "*I have loved you for a thousand years*". These processes function to establish emotional stability and reinforce the identity of the speaker as someone devoted to enduring love. Toward the final sections of the song, material and verbal processes appear more frequently, for example in "*I'll be brave*" and "*I'll say goodbye to fear*". These clauses indicate a shift from internal emotional conflict to emotional resolution and personal determination. This progression reflects a movement from uncertainty to acceptance and commitment.

3.3 Interpretation of Experiential Meaning

The findings demonstrate that *A Thousand Years* predominantly constructs experiential meaning through mental and relational processes, with material processes serving as supportive elements. The limited use of verbal, behavioral, and existential processes reinforces the reflective and introspective nature of the song.

Grammatically, the prevalence of mental processes highlights the speaker's inner world, emphasizing emotions such as love, fear, hope, and patience. Relational processes further strengthen the theme of identity and emotional permanence, while material processes symbolize moments of emotional action and resolve. Overall, the transitivity patterns reveal that the song encodes love not as a series of physical actions, but as a deeply internalized and enduring emotional experience. This linguistic configuration supports the theme of timeless love and emotional resilience conveyed throughout the lyrics.

3.4 Picture and Table (Gambar dan Tabel)

The analysis identified a total of **36 clauses** in the song lyrics. Each clause was classified according to its process type within Halliday's transitivity system. The overall distribution of process types is presented in **Table 1**, which illustrates the dominance of mental, relational, and material processes in constructing experiential meaning.

Table 1. Distribution of Process Types in the Song Lyrics.

Process Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example Clause
Mental	14	39%	<i>I have died every day waiting for you.</i>
Relational	10	28%	<i>I have loved you for a thousand years.</i>
Material	8	22%	<i>I'll be brave.</i>
Verbal	2	6%	<i>I'll say goodbye to fear.</i>
Behavioral	1	3%	<i>Time stands still.</i>
Existential	1	2%	<i>There's beauty in all she is.</i>

4. Conclusion

The experiential metafunction in Christina Perri's song A Thousand Years was explored using Halliday's transitivity framework as part of the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach. In accordance with the study's goal and scope, the analysis focused on detecting and interpreting process types, participants, and conditions in the song lyrics. The findings found that mental and relational processes dominate the text, followed by material processes, with verbal, behavioral, and existential processes appearing infrequently. This distribution suggests that the song's meaning is mostly conveyed through emotional experiences, perceptions, and identity, rather than physical activities or external events. The language patterns represent the concepts of eternal love, emotional vulnerability, and personal commitment. The songwriter's emphasis on mental and

relational processes demonstrates how he sees love as an interior experience founded on long-term belief and emotional commitment. Given its linguistic richness, this song exemplifies the value of song lyrics as meaningful data for functional grammar research and authentic material in language learning settings. Further study is recommended to broaden the corpus to include other songs, genres, or metafunctions to gain a better grasp of how language encodes emotion and meaning in musical discourse.

5. Acknowledgement

The author wishes to express heartfelt gratitude to the supervisor and the linguistics instructor for their invaluable help and input during the study process. Special thanks are also offered to colleagues and peers for their helpful conversations and assistance over the course of this project. The author is grateful to Christina Perri for her inspired work, *A Thousand Years*, which served as the major data source for this study. Appreciation is also extended to all those who helped directly or indirectly to the creation of this text.

References

- Sari, H. P., Dartini, N. R., & Mulyani, E. R. (2019). Interpersonal Meaning Analysis of Adele's Song Lyric in 21 Album. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 2(1), 94–101. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v2i1.p94-101>
- Angeli, E., Wagner, J., Lawrick, E., Moore, K., Anderson, M., & Soderlund, L. (2010). *APA style workshop*. Purdue University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Eggs, S. (2004). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1989). *Language, context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Martin, J. R., & Rose, D. (2007). *Working with discourse: Meaning beyond the clause*. Continuum.
- Bloor, T., & Bloor, M. (2004). *The functional analysis of English* (2nd ed.). Arnold.
- Thompson, G. (2014). *Introducing functional grammar* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Saragih, F. (2019). Transitivity analysis in Ed Sheeran's "Perfect" song lyric. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, 13(2), 125–132.
- Putri, D. A., & Sari, R. A. (2021). Experiential metafunction in Adele's "Someone Like You" song lyric. *Journal of Language and Education Research*, 4(1), 77–84.
- Siahaan, H. V. F. (2021). Transitivity process in Bon Jovi's selected song lyrics. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics*, 1(2), 117–125. <https://doi.org/10.47709/ijael.v1i2.1043>

- Siahaan, H. V. F., Tarigan, J. R., Purba, D., & Hutarabat, I. (2024). Exploring the transitivity system realization in Batak Toba song lyrics discourse: A systemic functional linguistic study. *JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature)*, 9(2), 533–558. <https://doi.org/10.33369/joall.v9i2.35306>
- Silalahi, R., et al. (2024). Learning the meaning of song lyrics through the elements of ideational metafunction: A systemic functional linguistics study. *Anglophile Journal*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.51278/anglophile.v4i1.413>
- Puspitasari, M. I., Baity, A. N., & Juppy, D. (2022). Songwriter's emotions and feelings in popular music lyrics. *DIKSI*, 30(2), 149–159. <https://doi.org/10.21831/diksi.v30i2.46569>
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Gerot, L., & Wignell, P. (1995). *Making sense of functional grammar*. Gerd Stabler.
- O'Halloran, K. L. (2004). *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic functional perspectives*. Continuum.
- Butt, D., Fahey, R., Feez, S., Spinks, S., & Yallop, C. (2000). *Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide* (2nd ed.). Macquarie University.
- Eggs, S., & Slade, D. (1997). *Analysing casual conversation*. Cassell.
- Hasan, R. (2014). *Towards a paradigmatic description of context: Systems, metafunctions, and semantics*. Routledge.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and context: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge University Press.