

TAYLOR SWIFT'S COUNTER-NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN RECLAIMING FEMALE AGENCY IN *THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL*

Jonathan Irene Sartika Dewi Max, Yofi Irvan Vivian

Universitas Mulawarman (UNMUL), Samarinda, Indonesia

E-mail: irenesartika@fib.unmul.ac.id

Received: 2026-01-20

Accepted: 2026-02-13

Published: 2026-06-05

Abstract

This study is among the first to analyze agency through clause-level transitivity in Swift's lyrics. This study applies a feminist stylistic framework, supported by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), to analyze lyrics from her 12th album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, as a counter-narrative resisting patriarchal master plots. The analysis comprised three stages: clause segmentation and coding, discovery of linguistic patterns via quantitative and qualitative methods, and interpretation of these patterns to elucidate themes of agency and identity. The findings demonstrate that agency is constructed through a strategic foregrounding of the Actor in material processes, reframing identity in articulated cognition through mental processes, and introspecting the external constraints through mental processes. These techniques are central to the making of counter narrative and underscore Swift's innovative reassertion of discursive authority. The developed self-narrative is contesting gendered power dynamics and affirming epistemic independence. Findings advance feminist stylistics by showing how linguistic form becomes a locus of resistance.

Keywords: *agency; counter-narratives; feminist stylistics; systemic functional linguistics; Taylor Swift*

1. Introduction

Female artists are constantly under societal constraints in a male-dominated pop industry. Taylor Swift responds to this issue through her song lyrics. However, studying her career, most investigations focus on her global impact on politics and economics that shape the media landscape (Dahlberg, DeWind, Geerling, Green, & Mateer, 2024; McCann, Faichney, Trelease, & Whatman, 2025). For language scholars, examinations of her lyrics focus on the characters, the point of view, and the uses of poetic devices (Bagasbas, Cuadro, & Luares, 2025; Jimmi & Hafizah, 2025; Max, 2022a, 2025; Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). Attempts to dissect the clause level to uncover experiential meaning have only shown the theme building of her album (Max, 2022b; Max, Vivian, Putra, & Kuncara, 2023). Therefore, the syntactic choices at the clause level to understand agency in Swift's lyrics remain underexplored.

To investigate how a female songwriter posits agency in song lyrics, this study uses a feminist stylistic approach through counter self-narratives. The research question is "How does the distribution and strategic use of transitivity processes in *TLoaS* construct the agency

throughout the album's themes?" Thus, this study contributes to feminist stylistics by offering a replicable, clause-level linguistic analysis of agency construction in popular music lyrics, an area that remains underexplored in existing scholarship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Song Lyrics as Cultural Texts

Song lyrics reflect the values, struggles, and triumphs of the eras in which they were created (Schreiber, 2020). Corpus-linguistic studies have shown that lyrical trends can either reflect or differ from the language used by society as a whole (Cheung & Feng, 2021). As a creative arena, song lyric is also a site of variation and innovation because nonstandard grammatical forms can become unstigmatized and even enregistered as features of a specific genre (Poliakova, 2023). Further, protest songs in Central America serve as powerful tools for mobilizing collective action against repressive and economic threats, resonating with marginalized communities and inspiring social movements (Almeida & Márquez, 2023). Song lyrics give space for mutual influences, cultural significance, and arenas that shape human creativity and empathy through lyrics making (Wang, 2024).

Song lyrics are recognized not merely as accompaniments to melody but as multilayered cultural texts that link the artist's assertion and the listener's experience. However, song lyrics lend a tight space for construing experiences due to the modern recording format. This space demands a meticulous strategy for meaning-making. Therefore, song lyrics are well suited for a transitivity analysis because it foregrounds linguistic through process types, participants, and circumstances. Transitivity looks for who does what, who feels or perceives, who says or performs, or how states are ascribed through the choice of processes, revealing how song lyrics construct or contest agency.

2.2 Feminist Stylistics and Counter-Narratives of Agency

Feminist Stylistics has evolved into a prominent field. It investigates how language both reflects and sustains gendered power structures while concurrently enabling agency through counter-narratives. The field originated from feminist literary criticism in the late twentieth century and is evolving into stylistics to furnish methodologies for examining the micro-level of language use in conjunction with the main cultural critique (Mills, 1995). Feminist stylistics scrutinizes lexis, grammar, and discourse structures to elucidate the positioning of women under patriarchal hierarchies (Montoro, 2023).

Debates around agency in feminist theory begin with the fundamental question of how individuals act within, against, and through social structures. It is because women cannot solely be regarded as passive victims of the framework, as they are actively opposing and adapting. The concept of agency has to do with the capacity of a subject to act, choose, and influence their environment within the constraints of social structures (Crossley, 2021). Language structurally delineates genders, situates subjects within power systems, and facilitates resistance and subversion (Srivastava, 2022). Nonetheless, feminist theory posits a tension between 'structure' (institutions, norms, etc.) and 'agency' (individual decision) (Lee, 2023). Structure may manifest as memory embodied in human action, with the agent perpetuating the structure. Additionally, it provides varied starting points, particularly for women, to respond to oppression, which is perpetuated by the structure that sustains power inequality (Clavijo & Perray-Redslob, 2024). Feminist stylistics has been researched by systematically linking linguistic form with ideological function, illustrating how stylistic

choices can either reinforce or contest cultural norms. This dual focus allows feminist stylistics to highlight the exclusion of women's voices while also showing how they can assert their agency through counter-narratives (Hatavara, 2025).

Feminist narratives express agency through both topic elements and language structures (Tian & Ge, 2025). Here, counter self-narration arises as a stylistic approach by which women inventively reclaim discursive power, fight dominant representations, and assert agency by altering the linguistic frames that have previously constrained them, challenging cultural imperialism (Fabry, 2025). While Mills's narrative resistance treated creativity as a rhetorical resource as a form of public counter-discourse, Fabry's concept sees creativity as central to restoring epistemic agency and autonomy that reconfigures individual life within a socio-cultural niche. It also shows how an ideological absorption or victim-blaming frame might make the effects less effective (Fabry, 2025).

2.3 Transitivity of Agency through SFL

This study implements a feminist stylistic approach to systematically analyze the album's lyrics, where quantitative and qualitative aspects are used for treating linguistic choices as deliberate tools that shape narrative, theme, and interpretation (Lugea & Walker, 2023). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), primarily developed by M.A.K. Halliday support this purpose because it grounds all interpretations in verifiable textual evidence (Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023). SFL sees language as a way for people to make sense of the world, not just a set of abstract rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hart, 2014). It provides a methodology for connecting linguistic choices to the contexts in which they operate (Gebhard, Accurso, & Harris, 2019). In SFL, ideational metafunction is done by categorizing clauses into different transitivity process types, such as Material (doing), Mental (sensing), and Relational (being). Meanwhile, SFL also deals with interpersonal metafunction that offers the sight to how social roles are enacted and textual metafunction to describe the aspect coherence and cohesiveness of a text. Despite what is unrevealed by the ideational metafunction, the transitivity system offers a precise and powerful tool for deconstructing how a text represents the world, assigns agency to its participants, and constructs a particular version of reality (Schneider, 2023).

Table 1

Sample of *Transitivity Processes Analysis and Agency in Lyric Excerpt*

Song Title: The Life of a Showgirl			
I	paid	my dues	with every bruise
Actor	Material Process	Goal	Circ: Means

Speaker agentive claim as active bearer of cost and effort framed through embodied sacrifice.

SFL reveals how agency is distributed across gender lines (Hunt, 2024). The framework integrally centers questions of agency by forcing an examination of who is doing what to whom, who is thinking or feeling, and what is simply being defined. SFL examines agency as a grammatical and semantic phenomenon rather than an abstract notion, utilizing transitivity (Montoro, 2023). This analysis illustrates the distribution of power, responsibility, and voice among text participants. Material, mental, relational, and other processes

demonstrate who acts and is affected (Calubayan & Raymundo, 2022). SFL also analyzes agency visibility and erasure, discovering inclusion and exclusion patterns based on names and omissions (Jeffries, 2023) and demonstrates unequal distributions of gender agency, reinforcing stereotypes, albeit feminist literature can challenge them (Angel, Bathran, & Goswami, 2026). Agency in SFL is the center of ideological struggle, determining how reality and power relations are linguistically formed as both grammatical instrument and social practice.

3. Research Method

The data source for this study comprised the complete official lyrics from the 12 tracks of the *TLoaS* album acquired from the Genius website and the Spotify App. Analyzing the whole album instead of just a few songs showed a commitment to approaching it as a single semiotic work.

First, lyrics were segmented into clauses and coded for process types, including the non-finite clauses, ellipsis, or embedded clauses, and also metaphorical expressions to ensure consistency. Coding reliability for the process types was ensured through independent checks. Stage two was the pattern discovery. For instance, the number of times each type of process occurred, including the participants and circumstances. Stage three was for interpretation to explain how agency, perception, and identity were built across the lyrics.

In this instance, a feminist style approach was employed to emphasize how linguistic choices either disperse or hide agency, illustrating how women's voices navigate institutional limits through counter self-narratives. This procedure provided evidence-based interpretation so that all thematic conclusions were bound in a systematic and replicable analysis of the lyrical text.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Process Types and Thematic Construction

The transitivity analysis of Taylor Swift's twelfth studio album, *TLoaS*, reveals a distinct linguistic assembly that both aligns with and swerves from the established stylistic patterns of her previous eleven albums. The results indicate a clear dominance of Material processes (37.7%), followed by a near-even split between Relational (23.6%) and Mental (23.3%) processes. This distribution is the grammatical fuel for the album's primary themes of action-oriented romance, identity construction, and introspective desire. Table 2 shows the distribution of the transitivity process in the song lyrics, and it will provide further explanation of the relation of the linguistic features to the theme building of each song.

Table 2

Transitivity Processes of Taylor Swift's 12th Album

Song Title	Process Type						Total Clauses
	Material (MtP)	Mental (MnP)	Relational (RP)	Behavioural (BP)	Verbal (VP)	Existential (EP)	
1. The Fate of Ophelia	15	4	7	1	3	0	30
2. Elizabeth Taylor	6	6	11	2	5	1	31

3. Opalite	8	6	7	1	2	0	24
4. Father Figure	11	5	4	0	0	0	20
5. Eldest Daughter	6	2	6	2	1	1	18
6. Ruin the Friendship	14	4	8	1	3	3	33
7. Actually Romantic	8	4	6	0	1	0	19
8. Wi\$h Li\$t	11	18	5	0	1	0	35
9. Wood	13	4	4	0	1	0	22
10. Cancelled!	8	8	5	0	1	1	23
11. Honey	10	3	5	2	9	1	30
12. The Life of a Showgirl	5	7	4	0	4	0	20
Total	115	71	72	9	31	7	305

MtP is dominant in “Fate of Ophelia” to emphasize that love is a series of actions rather than just being someone’s fate. Being the first song on the album and first single, this track is a goal statement. It uses Shakespeare’s tragedy Ophelia to represent loneliness and public life’s hardships. The transitivity pattern shows that agency is a changing dynamic in which the addressee is always the Actor in material clauses (honing, coming, wrapping, pulling), while the narrator switches between Senser (“Now I can see it all”), Actor (“I might’ve lingered in purgatory”), and Sayer (“I swore my loyalty to me, myself, and I”). Overall, the song dramatizes a contested redistribution of agency that shows how vulnerable the narrator is and how powerful the addressee is in deciding loyalty, fate, and survival. Thus, the song establishes the album’s central narrative, saying that love is a powerful force to change one’s fate.

Transitivity in “Elizabeth Taylor” constructs agency as a negotiation between glamour and vulnerability. RP appears dominant, and it shows how the spectators address female stardom (“You’re only as hot as your last hit”). However, the narrator frequently embodies the roles of Senser (“And I think you know why”) or Carrier (“I’m bad news”), reflecting internal states, while the addressee is emphasized as Actor in material and behavioral clauses (calling, blooming, looking, leaving). This goes along with the idea of comparing two lives where Swift creates an imaginary talk to Taylor as a friend who could have the possibility to advise about surviving public scrutiny that appears “in the papers, on the screen, and in their minds.” Consequently, the song produces the suspension of agency between the external forces of fame and the intimate power of relationships, underscoring the tension between public identity and private dependence.

“Opalite” uses cosmic images to talk about fate, focusing on the change from an “onyx night” to an “opalite sky.” This transition means going from the pain of being alone and the impossibility of experiencing love in a difficult situation. MtP foreground to show resilience via physical effort, such as “dancing through the lightning strikes”, “making your own sunshine”, and “This life will beat you up”. The patterns support the idea of resilience, destiny, and change (“But failure brings you freedom”). Agency is granted to the narrator as

she shifts from receiver ("my mama told me") to sayer ("And that's when I told you") as a result of the endurance earned.

"Father Figure" constructs agency as a power struggle. Swift uses George Michael's 1987 hit song as a base. The message of loyalty imbued in the original song is reframed into an accusation of treachery caused by a manipulative 'father figure' who acts as a mentor at first but is exploitative in the end. The speaker is the agent that turn the situation ("You made a deal with this devil, Turns out my dick's bigger"). MtP domination ("turned your rags into gold," "pulled the wrong trigger") portrays the speaker as a powerful actor who provides, controls, and eventually threatens. MnP reveals motivations and judgments ("I saw potential") and recklessness ("Mistake my kindness for weakness and find your card canceled"). RP asserts power and ownership ("I'll be your father figure," "this empire belongs to me"), and VP is used to frame warnings and terms of that type of relationship ("Said," "asked for"). Agency is contested between paternal authority and rebellious defiance, highlighting themes of control, protection, and betrayal.

"Eldest Daughter" constructs agency as a negotiation between inherited vulnerability and self-assertion. It defines the stereotype of premature responsibility attached to the role of the oldest daughter, being weighed by society's expectations. Eldest daughters are positioned as Tokens in relational clauses that mark them as "first lambs to the slaughter". Here, RP is dominantly used for describing the given identity of the firstborn and also rejecting the involuntary persona ("I'm not the baddest and "this isn't savage"). Meanwhile, MtP describes the coping actions ("dressed up as wolves") and the partner's protective role ("never going to let you down"). The song stages agency as a transition from imposed victimhood to selected resilience, emphasizing the active redefinition of identity and loyalty in opposition to generational expectations.

"Ruin the Friendship" talks about a missed opportunity, as repeatedly stated in the line "Should've kissed you." Agency is depicted as a tension between hesitation and desire where the narrator is often emphasized as an Actor in material clauses (kissing, leaving, flying home, whispering), while also appearing as a Senser in mental processes (seeing, knowing, regretting). Circumstances and existential clauses place these actions in vivid contexts ("Glistening grass from September rain"), thereby performing agency as conflicted between active impulses and reflective restraint. The lyrics underscores the struggle between friendship, longing, and the potential for regret ("My advice always ruins the friendship").

The addressee in "Actually Romantic" is emphasized as the Senser and Actor in mental and material clauses (thinking, spending time, putting in effort) as in "Wrote me a song," "High-fived my ex". The song sharpens such effort ("No man has ever loved me like you do."). BP's simile of "chihuahua barking" marks the addressee's verbal attacks ("call me 'Boring Barbie'"). Being observant of others' actions, the narrator shifts between Senser ("I know you think", "Feels like you're flirting with me") and Actor ("I don't provoke it"). RP ascribes the situation as "nasty" and "God's my witness" but also reframes the ruinous deed into ironic states ("It's actually romantic", "It's honestly lovely"). The narrator's undertaking to the situation is "Really got to hand it to you, to you". Thus, the song presents agency's capability to shift external provocations into relational investments.

The transitivity patterns in "Wi\$h Li\$t" put the narrator as detached across social aspiration, personal desire, and external intervention. MnP places "they" as the Senser,

especially for verbs that express overriding desire like want, hope, and dreaming of ‘Yacht life’, ‘complex female character’, and ‘Oscar on their bathroom floor’. The narrator contrasts them with her own very personal (“I just want you”) and naive hopes (“I made wishes on all of the stars”) for a quiet existence and a family of commoners (“Got me dreaming about a driveway with a basketball hoop”). It serves as the emotional centerpiece of the album's love story, presenting a candid and heartfelt vision of a future beyond the trappings of celebrity. Then, MtP grounds the desire in tangible domestic actions to “have a couple kids,” and of a future where she can “boss up” in her career and “settle down” in her personal life. In addition, VP fills the expression of powerful departure from the outside world (“We tell the world to leave us”). The song highlights that agency persists even amid the tension between collective fantasies and intimate relational fulfillment. It reveals how individuals assert desire and identity within competing social and personal pressures.

The transitivity in “Wood” constructs agency standing as both self-asserted and environmentally mediated. It emphasizes how intimacy and fate intertwine through action, belief, and circumstance. The narrator and addressee are foregrounded as Actors in material clauses (dancing, knocking on wood, making luck), while natural and relational elements like curses, love, and redwood trees take on agentive roles in relational and causative processes. Focusing on the real world, the lyric highlights a safe and private relationship with action-oriented words. The lyrics talk about a relationship that feels so safe that it goes against superstition (“I ain't got to knock on wood”). MnP shows up rarely, meaning that people finally understand that they do not need luck from outside sources (“it's understood”). At the beginning, RP majorly appears to create the first universe of bad, superstitious states (“I was distraught”). VP, then, frames the narrative shift from superstition to confidence (“I'll admit”) and BP describes past superstitious habits (“wishing on a falling star”) and omens (“the black cat laughed”). In addition, VP fills the expression of powerful departure from the outside world (“We tell the world to leave us”).

“CANCELLED!” scaffolds agency as contested between oppressive collective power and the narrator's embrace of scandalous solidarity. The dominance of MtP borders cancellation as actions done to a person (“picked out your grave,” “stood by me”), so it construes cancel culture as an active, physical battle. Meanwhile, the narrator's defiant response is likewise action-based, offering solidarity (“Come with me,” “they'll run”). The lyrics create an “underworld” for the publicly shamed, where infamy forges bonds expressed through RP (“They're the ones with matching scars,” “cloaked in scandal”). VP validates the outcasts (“I salute you”), while sharp lines critique double standards for women (“Did you girl-boss too close to the sun?”).

“Honey” shapes agency as shifting from external control to relational empowerment by highlighting how affectionate naming reclaims identity against social hostility. Others are foregrounded as Sayers and Behavers in verbal and behavioural clauses that critique or police the narrator. VP is used to say that the endearments are said and weaponized (“called me ‘Sweetheart,’” “was tellin’ me to back off”). Then, RP states that “It was passive-aggressive,” while BP conveys emotional fallout as a result of the hidden intention (“I cried the whole way home”). In contrast to past verbal cruelty with present intimacy, MtP grounds the theme in tangible acts (“touched my face,” “kicking in doors,” “graffiti my whole damn life”), showing how the uttered word can also provide a safe physical reality when used by a

loved one. MnP highlights the partner's sincerity ("cause you meant it"). The narrator reclaims the words once used against her to into acts of confidence-building.

Lastly, "The Life of a Showgirl" lyric summarizes the reflection and thematic capstone of the whole album. It underlines how the showgirl asserts resilience and identity against mortality, judgment, and spectacle. MtP narrates the other showgirl's performance ("She's dancing"), to exploitation ("They ripped me off"), to triumph ("I'm making money"). But, dominated by MnP, the song focuses on self-awareness and acceptance ("I know the life of a showgirl," "I love you"). MnP also charts evolution from ignorance ("You don't know") to knowledge ("Now I know"). RP is used to define identity at each stage ("She was a menace," "I'm immortal now"). VP then affirms the transformation and encapsulates this ethos by saying, "So I say thank you for the lovely bouquet / I'm married to the hustle." The lyric puts agency as reclaimed through self-definition and verbal affirmation.

4.2 Swift's Reclamation of Female Agency

The most important thing that *TLoaS* found is that Material processes are the most common, making up 115 of the 305 clauses that were found. So, as the first linguistic strategy, Agency is thus gained through material processes. The album's story also progresses because of the processes of "doing" and "happening," which turn experiences into real events. This high frequency puts *TLoaS* in line with Swift's established style, which is seen in *Midnights*, where Material processes were also dominant (Max et al., 2023), as well as in songs like *King of My Heart* and *London Boy* (Nurwidya, 2024). In songs like "Father Figure" and "CANCELLED!," business disagreements and social conflicts are seen as violent actions (e.g., "turned your rags into gold," "pulled the wrong trigger"), which shows how Material processes shape the album's view of conflict as a visible fight. People assume the tracks as a metaphor for her legal battle with Scooter Braun over the rights to her albums (Judkins, 2025). Swift rerecorded and released some of her previous albums under the label 'Taylor's Version' to save her art. In "The Fate of Ophelia," Material processes depict romance as a physical rescue. It also resonates with "Wood" being with direct references to Travis Kelce, now Swift's fiancé, as the line "New Heights of manhood" is a pun on the name of his podcast. The "Redwood tree" lyric is a nod to an inside joke about the couple's notable bodily height, which an acquaintance described as being like standing in the Redwood Forest. Both of these songs show that a relationship can only work when affection is manifested in events and actions. The transitivity provides an intervention that contrasts with the "disnarration" and introspective "non-events" present in the studies of Swift's previous albums named *folklore*, *Evermore*, and *The Tortured Poets Department* (Harrison & Ringrow, 2022; Max, 2025).

Relational processes serve to classify and identify, and thereby construct Swift's persona by filling the 23.6% of all other process types in *TLoaS*. While Material processes drive the narrative progression through action, Relational clauses fasten identity. Swift used the process to define the states of being in relation to fame and legacy. The line "All my white diamonds and lovers are forever," inventively links the two through symbols of luxury and legacy. *White Diamonds* is a perfume from 1991, iconic of Elizabeth Taylor (Derval, 2024). "Been number one, but I never had two" is the affecting part of the song, for it implies that success has not made it easy for the individual to be happy under circumstance of being "in the papers, on the screen, and in their minds". These thematic motifs of public

scrutiny also appeared in *Reputation* (Nisbett & Dunn, 2019), but TLoaS uses Relational processes mostly to articulate the tension between public and private selves. This strategy of agency reveals a layered construction. When doing and happening dramatize conflict and transformation, and internal cognition sustains desire and reflection, Relational clauses function to stabilize persona, ensuring that Swift's narrative voice remains both embodied and self-defining. It is a creative linguistic choice that confronts "master plots" and sustains one's epistemic agency (Fabry, 2025).

Third, introspection is fabricated through mental processes, for human agency possesses the capacity to digest the exterior world with cognitive strengths and form desires. Mental processes (23.3%) give Swift's writing the "diary-like" quality as they balance the external Material actions with internal desire and cognition. This strategy has been found throughout Swift's discography to be an act of confession (Blansjaar & Downs, 2023). In *Wish List*, verbs that express desire, like "want" and "hope," are much more common than other kinds. The song sets an internal world that is different from the external trappings of fame. The occurrence of cognition-based clauses (e.g., "I know what I want") exemplifies the continuity of the personalized style identified in the analyses of her work from the debut to the album *Midnights* (Kendong, Daud, & Joharry, 2023). MnP makes the speaker sound distant and knowledgeable about others' actions ("I know you think", "I heard you call me 'Boring Barbie'"). Swift's strategy of agency uses processes of desire and cognition to articulate inner absorption for the staged of doing and happening from the external conflicts and relationships. Charli XCX's song, "Sympathy is a Knife", is echoed in the song entitled *Actually Romantic* (Sharf, 2025), connecting the music to real people and events as it deals with her past relationship with a male singer, Matty Healy. It connects the music to real people and events. This creates a balance between perceptible action and introspective reflection that defines her creative strategy to gain counter-narrative. Thus, it reflects the singer's private responds to the public constraint.

In addition, Swift's lyrics are replete with intertextual references to the literary canon, from Shakespeare to Fitzgerald, showing a reflective and sustained engagement with literary history (Reid & MacKee, 2024). She has affected her listeners' collective consciousness and consistently challenged industry norms so that Taylor Swift is not merely a pop star. She is a cultural force whose lyrical output provides an exceptionally rich and relevant corpus for scholarly investigation (Klimchynskaya, 2024). Though the repeated framing of the female narrator as rescued through active deeds resonates with cultural tropes of female vulnerability and male heroism, Swift's consistent positioning of herself as the Actor in this scene. And through the lens of a showgirl, she reframes female agency in the public sphere. By grammatically reclaiming agency, she challenges traditional gender scripts and reasserts her celebrity persona as one who acts rather than merely a receiver of actions. Taylor Swift shows a creative and imaginative as the act of resistance. While some criticism label her as 'play victim' (Hirsch, 2022), she constantly speaks through song lyrics to actualize and affirm a strong sense of agency and autonomy instead of addressing them directly or through media commentary. This case happens particularly when members of structurally oppressive groups are among the addressees (Fabry, 2025). However, these findings are limited to one album and may not generalize across her broader corpus.

5. Conclusion

Approached with feminist stylistics, Taylor Swift reins in her creative power to expose and challenge those very structures, positioning creativity as the precise means through which she remains both relevant and resilient. First, she puts material processes at the center of her work to show that she is an active agent and takes back control of the story from conventional ideas of female passivity. Second, she balances relational and cognitive processes to build a complex identity that shows how other people see her and how she thinks about herself. Third, she redefines conflict as active resistance to confront patriarchal systems. Thus, this study advances feminist stylistics by integrating SFL analysis to show how agency is linguistically constructed.

Limited to the reliance on SFL's ideational metafunction, this article leaves interpersonal and textual metafunctions unexplored. It opens further analysis on how Swift organizes her narratives rhetorically in this album. The discussion for future research can situate the findings above alongside or against Swift's current discography and public persona. The analysis is limited to one album and requires expansion to other artists for more female songwriters. It's worth considering seeing how gendered agency interacts with class, race, and celebrity culture. For now, this study notes that lyrics serve as powerful counter-narratives, reclaiming agency in male-dominated cultural industries.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the generous support of Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Mulawarman (Unmul). This is evidence for the commitment to progressing scholarship. Thus, it nurtures the critical inquiry that is helpful to the completion of this work.

References

- Almeida, P., & Márquez, L. R. G. (2023). Interpreting repressive and economic threats: Música contestataria and collective resistance in Central America. *Latin American Perspectives*, 50(3), 134–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X231194310>
- Angel, S., Bathran, R., & Goswami, M. P. (2026). Gender discourse and femadvertising in India: A multi-modal discourse analysis. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 114, 103204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2025.103204>
- Bagasbas, L., Cuadro, S., & Luares, E. S. C. V. (2025). Anatomizing Taylor Swift's '1989 (Taylor's Version)' album. *Journal of Professional Communication and English Studies*, 1(1), 46–60. Retrieved from ejournal2.pnp.ac.id/index.php/PROCESS/article/view/1808
- Blansjaar, M., & Downs, J. K. (2023). On Taylor Swift and broken glass: Confessional pop, psychological intimacy, and two-way authentication. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 37(2), 117–128. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2025.37.2.117>
- Calubayan, F. S., & Raymundo, C. Y. (2022). Jouissance: Uncovering the ideological positions in the selected poems of contemporary Filipino Women poets through M.A.K. Halliday's transitivity analysis. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijhss.14.1.1>
- Cheung, J. O., & Feng, D. (2021). Attitudinal meaning and social struggle in heavy metal song lyrics: A corpus-based analysis. *Social Semiotics*, 31(2), 230–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2019.1601337>

- Clavijo, N., & Perray-Redslob, L. (2024). "We don't want to be accused of being feminists". A gender equality measure for leadership positions and the perpetuation of patriarchal arrangements. *Ludivine Perray-Redslob*, 1000, 102754. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2024.102754>
- Crossley, N. (2021). A dependent structure of interdependence: Structure and agency in relational perspective. *Sociology*, 56(1), 166–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038521102023>
- Dahlberg, K. H., et al. (2024). Swiftonomics: Using Taylor Swift to teach economics. *Journal for Economic Educators*, 24(2), 47–62.
- Derval, D. (2024). *Designing luxury brands: The art and science of creating game-changers* (2nd ed.). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54093-6_11
- Fabry, R. E. (2025). Counter self-narration: A creative-imaginative practice of resistance. *Topoi*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-025-10260-x>
- Fernandez-Quintanilla, C., & Stradling, F. (2023). Introduction: stylistic approaches to narrative empathy. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 52(2), 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2023-2008>
- Gebhard, M., Accurso, K., & Harris, G. (2019). Putting it all together: SFL in action. In M. Gebhard (Ed.), *Teaching and Researching ELLs' Disciplinary Literacies* (pp. 239–272). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315108391-9>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Harrison, C., & Ringrow, H. (2022). Disnarration and the performance of storytelling in Taylor Swift's folklore and evermore. *International Journal of Literary Linguistics*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.15462/ijll.v11i1.140>
- Hart, C. (2014). *Discourse, grammar, and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hatavara, M. (2025). Analyzing master and counter-narratives in the multilayered narrative communication of literary fiction. *Frontiers of Narrative Studies*, 11(1), 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.1515/fns-2025-2011>
- Hirsch, L. E. (2022). "Nasty" Taylor Swift. In *insulting music: A lexicon of insult in music*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16466-8_9
- Hunt, S. (2024). Investigating social actions (transitivity) with corpora. In F. Heritage & C. Taylor (Eds.), *Analysing Representation: A Corpus and Discourse Textbook* (1st ed., pp. 115–13). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003350972>
- Jeffries, L. (2023). Critical stylistics. In M. Burke (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (pp. 436–450). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367568887>
- Jimmi, J., & Hafizah, N. F. (2025). Figurative language analysis of Taylor Swifts song lyrics in 1989 album. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 778–784. <https://doi.org/10.30998/scope.v9i2.24480>
- Judkins, J. (2025). Taylor Swift and the philosophy of re-recording: The art of Taylor's versions. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 83(3), 287–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaac/kpaf033>
- Kendong, F. A., Daud, A. S., & Joharry, S. A. (2023). A Corpus-driven analysis of Taylor Swift's song lyrics. *International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics*, 7(2),

- 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ijmal.v7i2.7489>
- Klimchynskaya, B. W. T. A. (2024). Blank spaces, fresh pages: Taylor Swift and/as literature. In B. W. T. A. Klimchynskaya (Ed.), *The Literary Taylor Swift: Songwriting and Intertextuality* (pp. 1–9). London: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798765104545.0003>
- Lee, J. Y. (2023). Relational approaches to personal autonomy. *Philosophy Compass*, 18(5), e12916. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12916>
- Lugea, J., & Walker, B. (2023). *Stylistics: Text, cognition and corpora*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10422-0>
- Max, J. I. S. D. (2022a). Mythical car: Metonymy in Taylor Swift's song lyrics. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics*, 9(2), 219–235. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22219/celtic.v9i2.23139>
- Max, J. I. S. D. (2022b). Three speakers' perspectives on experience in Taylor Swift's selected lyrics from Folklore album. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 11(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v11i1.50485>
- Max, J. I. S. D. (2025). An anthology of visual imagery, allusion, and symbolic meaning in Taylor Swift's The Tortured Poets Department. *Eliterate: Journal of English Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 4(3), 288–301. <https://doi.org/10.26858/eliterate.v4i3.75313>
- Max, J. I. S. D., Vivian, Y. I., Putra, B. A., & Kuncara, S. D. (2023). Transitivity analysis of Taylor Swift's lyrics in *Midnights* album. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 8(2), 279–294. <https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v8i2.688>
- McCann, H., Faichney, E., Trelease, R., & Whatman, E. (2025). Why Taylor? On Taylor Swift as the anti-hero we need. In H. McCann, E. Faichney, R. Trelease, & E. Whatman (Eds.), *Taylor Swift: Culture, Capital, and Critique* (pp. 1–7). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/0.4324/9781003509271-1>
- Mills, S. (1995). Feminist stylistics. In *The Bloomsbury -Companion to Stylistics* (1st ed.). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203408735>
- Montoro, R. (2023). Feminist stylistics. In M. Burke (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (pp. 367–384). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367568887>
- Nisbett, G., & Dunn, S. (2019). Reputation matters: Parasocial attachment, narrative engagement, and the 2018 Taylor Swift political endorsement. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 29(1), 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2019.1704758>
- Nurwidya, A. (2024). Realization of romance in song lyrics: A transitivity analysis. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 1(1), 1–18. Retrieved from journal.beaninstitute.id/index.php/ijoel/article/view/39/47
- Poliakova, H. (2023). Means of creation of conceptuality in modern song texts. *Humanities Science Current Issues*, 2(70), 200–204. <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/70-2-28>
- Reid, B., & MacKee, T. (2024). What are my 'Wordsworth'? Taylor Swift's new romanticism. In B. W. Tontiplaphol & A. Klimchynskaya (Eds.), *The Literary Taylor Swift: Songwriting and Intertextuality* (pp. 49–62). London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Santika, P., & Syafryadin. (2023). An analysis of figurative language in song lyrics of the album "Midnights" by Taylor Swift. *Wiralodra English Journal*, 7(1), 14–28. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v7i1.189>
- Schleppegrell, M. J., & Oteiza, T. (2023). Systemic functional linguistics: Exploring meaning in language. In *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 156.
- Schneider, U. (2023). Reflexive analytic causatives: a diachronic analysis of transitivity

- parameters. *English Language and Linguistics*, 27(4), 789–813. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S136067432300028X>
- Schreiber, B. (2020). *Music is power*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978808157-017>
- Sharf, Z. (2025, October 5). *Taylor Swift and Charli xcx Feud Rumors explode over 'actually romantic' song. How did we get here?* AOL Today website: <https://www.aol.com/articles/taylor-swift-charli-xcx-feud-181723384.html>
- Srivastava, S. S. (2022). Agency and resistance in feminist discourse. *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 75(3), 319–338. Retrieved from https://serialsjournals.com/abstract/72396_9-sumit_s_srivastava_agency_and_resistance_in_feminist_discourse_prof_sukant_sir_the_eastern_anthropologist.pdf
- Tian, W., & Ge, J. (2025). The womb as battleground: Negotiating motherhood and feminism on Chinese social media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 25(4), 843–864. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2024.2323653>
- Wang, H. (2024). The aesthetic interplay between music and literature: From narrative to lyricism. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, 21(5), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.70082/cijpca.v21i5.1050>