

TRANSITIVITY AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN CHILD-PARENT SONG LYRICS ACROSS CULTURES

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Abstract

This study examines transitivity processes in English and Indonesian parent-child-themed song lyrics using Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. By analyzing six transitivity process types—material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral, and existential—the study explores how linguistic choices construct emotional relationships, social roles, and family values across different cultural contexts. The data consisted of twenty song lyrics collected from YouTube channels. Data were gathered through listening and note-taking techniques and analyzed using an interactive qualitative model involving identification, classification, and interpretation of transitivity processes. The findings reveal that material processes are the most dominant (33.4%), indicating that song narratives primarily rely on concrete actions to express emotions and interpersonal experiences. Mental processes (24.9%) and relational processes (22.4%) follow, contributing psychological and descriptive dimensions to the portrayal of parent-child relationships. Verbal, existential, and behavioral processes occur less frequently and serve complementary narrative functions. The predominance of material processes demonstrates that meaning construction in both English and Indonesian song lyrics is strongly grounded in physical actions and observable events. Common actions represented include giving, accompanying, caring for, and supporting, reflecting parental affection and responsibility. The findings suggest that, despite cultural differences, both groups of songs emphasize similar familial values through action-oriented representations. This study contributes to cross-cultural discourse research by demonstrating how song lyrics function as a medium for conveying emotional meaning and intergenerational social relationships across cultural communities.

Keywords: *cross-cultural communication; metafunction; song lyrics; systemic functional linguistics; transitivity system.*

1. Introduction

Songs are a medium of communication that are popular and effective in delivering emotional messages and human experiences. Songs function not only as a medium of

communication but also as a representation of social reality encoded in language. Within the lyrics of such songs, songwriters do not merely tell stories; they encode social experiences and emotional dynamics through specific linguistic choices. One of the most universal and emotional themes in the world of music is the relationship between child and parents. This theme is often raised to describe the affection, sacrifice, longing, and conflict that make up a person's identity.

Although song lyrics are often poetic and metaphorical, their meanings can be systematically analyzed through linguistic approaches. One way to uncover how meaning is constructed in song lyrics is through transitivity analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday (2014). This linguistic approach offers a relevant analytical tool, in particular the transitivity system. The transitivity system represents human experiences in clauses through six process types: material, mental, relational, verbal, and behavioral.

In the context of the relationship between child and parents in song lyrics, the choice of verbs is crucial. For example, whether relationships are more explained through tangible action (material process), through the depth of inner feelings (mental process), through the definition of identity and status (relational process) or through utterance of words (verbal process). These process patterns reveal how songwriters position the roles of children and parents within musical narratives. Thus, the analysis of transitivity in parental-themed song lyrics has the potential to reveal the power structure, emotional burden, and identity construction in child-parent relationships that are often considered natural and rarely subjected to critical analysis.

However, despite the proliferation of research on transitivity in song lyrics that has been done previously (Afifah, 2021; Liztiawati, 2021; Siahaan, 2021; Dita, 2024; Siahaan, 2024; Sitinjak, 2025; Simbolon, 2025), research that specifically examines child-parent relationships across two languages (English and Indonesian) still needs further exploration. Further, although the previous studies have investigated transitivity in song lyrics, most focus on a single language and primarily describe process distribution. Little attention has been paid to how transitivity choices reflect culturally specific representations of parent-child relationships across linguistic contexts. Often, there are differences and similarities in how Western and Eastern cultures linguistically construct family relationships in transitivity system. Transitivity system proposed by Halliday (2014), views song lyrics as representations of human experience that form ideational meanings through clause construction. From SFL's perspective, song lyrics are not huts an aesthetic wording, but a whole text that reflects the internal and external realities of the songwriter. Halliday (2014) dissects this construction into three main elements: process (action), participant (actor), and circumstance (background of events). Through the dominance of certain types of processes in song lyrics, such as dynamic material processes, reflective mental processes, or relational processes that identify status, the transitivity analysis is able to uncover the ideological message, emotional depth, and hidden world of experience that the songwriter wants to convey to the listeners.

Consequently, despite the abundance of transitivity research in formal discourses and in addressing the research void, the application of transitivity in comparing cross-cultural creative works like song lyrics remains limited. Therefore, this research aims to bridge this gap by examining how types of process (material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, behavioral) differ across cultures in family-oriented lyrics, thereby revealing the diverse ways experiential meanings are constructed and understood globally. Most studies

focus on a single language, overlooking how cultural ideologies shape the linguistic construction of emotional bonds. Then, unlike previous transitivity studies that primarily focus on single-language lyrical discourse, this study comparatively examines experiential meaning across English and Indonesian cultural contexts. The study contributes to cross-cultural discourse analysis by revealing how linguistic processes encode culturally specific representations of parent-child relationships. This present study aims to identify the most dominant types of process and how these processes build a deep meaning about family ties.

Therefore, this research has three research questions:

1. What types of transitivity process are used in child-parent relationship themed song lyrics in English and Indonesian?
2. How are these processes realized in the song lyrics?
3. How does the dominant use of transitivity processes construct meaning about child-parent relationships across cultures?

Building on this comparative framework, by uncovering the dominant processes used in both languages, this cross-cultural musical text study investigates whether parental love is portrayed universally or shaped by specific cultural codes. Ultimately, the findings of this research are expected not only to enrich in the realm of popular music, but also to provide practical implications for songwriters, translators, and educators in understanding and highlighting how language choices ideologically shape societal views on child-parent dynamics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

The theoretical foundation of this research is rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It is a framework developed by Halliday (2014). Unlike traditional grammar, SFL views language not merely as a set of grammatical rules, but as a system of resources for creating meaning in social contexts (Halliday, 2014). From an SFL perspectives, language performs three main functions called metafunction: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Specifically, the ideational metafunction represents human experience, both external (physical) and internal (thought/feeling), through experiential and logical components. Thus, this ideational metafunction focuses on representing the experience of the real or abstract world through the language. Beyond the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction relates to social interaction, shaping relationships between speakers and listeners. The use of this interpersonal metafunction regulates the way human exchange information, attitudes, and opinions. Furthermore, textual metafunction is a metafunction of language that focuses on organizing how messages are assembled into cohesive, coherent, and contextual texts. This textual metafunction organizes the flow of information in a text through a theme-rheme structure and cohesion to ensure the text is functional and contextually appropriate. However, this research directs its focus toward

However, this research focuses on the ideational metafunction, specifically the experiential function, analyzed through the transitivity system. This transitivity analysis aims to uncover how the types of processes are constructed in texts to construct the meaning of experiences in clause units, particularly in song lyrics that are themed on the relationship between child and parent in two different languages.

2.2 Transitivity Studies in Song Lyrics

In the perspective of SFL, the experiential function and transitivity system have a close relationship, which complement each other in constructing meaning. The experiential function itself is a language function that encodes human experience, both in the real world and in the imaginary world. Meanwhile, the transitivity system is a grammatical tool to realize the experiential function in the clauses. Therefore, the transitivity system is the main analytical tool for understanding how actions, events, and circumstances are represented in a clause. According to Halliday (2014), the transitivity system consists of three components, namely: process (verbs), participants (entities involved), and circumstances (time, place, manner). In transitivity system, there are six types of process: (1) material, (2) mental, (3) verbal, (4) relational, (5) behavioral, (6) existential as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of Transitivity Process

No.	Types of Process	Construing	Examples of Verbs
1.	material	creating, changing, doing, acting	go, run, walk
2.	mental	seeing, feeling	love, think, believe
3.	verbal	saying	say, talk, sing
4.	relational	attributing, identifying, symbolizing	to be, linking verbs, has/have
5.	behavioral	behaving	sleep, cough,
6.	existential	existing	there is, there are, there was

a. Material Process

Material process is a process represents an experiential function that encodes physical, tangible actions. It explicitly details the concrete events or activities taking place in reality. Within SFL perspective, material process is a process of 'doing/happening'. Functionally, material process is the driving force that brings abstract ideas into reality.

b. Mental Process

Mental process is a type of process that construes the inner world of human consciousness and experience. It involves processes of perception (e.g., see, hear, feel), cognition (e.g., think, know, understand), and affection or emotion (e.g., love, fear, worry). Unlike material processes, which represent actions and events in the physical world, mental processes depict how individuals perceive, think about, and emotionally respond to phenomena. Through these processes, reality is interpreted and given meaning, linking external experiences with internal states of consciousness. Consequently, mental processes reveal how individuals construct knowledge, form beliefs, and experience emotions in relation to the world around them.

c. Relational Process

Relational process is a process used to identify, classify, or characterize something. In contrast to material and mental process, this process does not describe actions or thoughts, but rather expresses a logical relationship between two entities. Relational process realized through two distinct modes: attributive (assigning qualities) and identifying (defining values).

This process heavily relies on relational verbs like 'be, become, represent, or consist of' to establish permanent states of being.

d. Verbal Process

Verbal process is a type of process that represents acts of saying and symbolic communication. It includes activities such as speaking, telling, asking, commanding, reporting, and discussing. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, verbal processes occupy an intermediate position between mental and material processes because they externalize internal thoughts, beliefs, and feelings through language. The central participant in a verbal process is the Sayer, who produces the verbal expression, while other participants may include the Receiver, the person to whom the message is directed, and the Verbiage, the content of what is said. Verbal processes play a crucial role in constructing social relationships, exchanging information, and expressing viewpoints within discourse.

e. Behavioral Process

Behavioral process is a process that shows physiological and psychological behavior. It represents typically human activities that manifest physically but are rooted in internal mental or bodily states. In the study of SFL, this process becomes an attractive bridge that manifests inner experience such as: sadness or thinking into tangible observable actions such as: crying or smiling. In the other words, this process is our body language where every breath, laughter, or eye look is a direct reflection of what is going on in our minds and organs.

f. Existential Process

Existential process is a process that states the existence of something. This process is a grammatical process used to assert that something exists, occurs, or is present within a specific space and time. In SFL perspective, it plays a vital role in the experiential function by mapping out how human perceive reality.

Song lyrics are emotional expressions conveyed through language. Etymologically, song lyrics have closeness to a short poem because both of them are the result of word and language processing that aims to create certain attractiveness and peculiarities. In this case, the use of English and Indonesian language in the song lyrics has its own characteristics in expressing the emotional expression of the songwriter with the child-parent relationship themed. As it is known, song lyrics function as a medium for conveying ideas or opinion from the songwriter to the audience. The message contained in the song lyrics can reflect various aspects, ranging from social issues, culture, or certain ideologies. Song lyrics, as a textual medium, embody ideological and emotional meanings that seek to engage listeners on both cognitive and affective levels. Therefore, examining transitivity processes in song lyrics allows researchers to investigate how songwriters construct and represent social realities through language. Specifically, this analysis reveals how the dynamics of child-parent relationships are discursively shaped through the selection of particular verbs and process types.

According to Santika (2023), the song lyrics are a short literary work written by a writer to convey a simple message to the readers. Furthermore, songwriters frequently

utilize poetic devices and figurative expressions to make the message more engaging and relatable to the audience. Meanwhile, according to Izu (2022), in understanding a song's cultural meaning requires the analyzing of its lyrics within their broader socio-cultural context. In SFL perspective, song lyrics serve as a social semiotic system where language choices and structural patterns are analyzed to reveal how songwriters convey lived experience, build relationships with listeners, and organize cohesive musical narratives. Song lyrics can be analyzed through transitivity systems to uncover how songwriters represent human experiences, actions, and inner emotions into concrete linguistic processes.

Transitivity studies in song lyrics is a language analysis that uses the SFL approach to study how songwriters convey meaning and emotion through word choice and clause structure. This approach dissects song lyrics based on processes, participant, and circumstances to uncover hidden messages. By unravelling these three components, researchers can see how songwriters represent reality, express ideologies, and build emotional closeness to their listeners based on objective linguistic data. In essence, the transitivity studies confirm that every choice of diction by songwriters is a deliberate step, serving as a bridge to express their emotions to the public.

The relationship between transitivity, ideology, emotions, and cultural representations in songs particularly in child-parent themed forms a network of interlocking meanings. The analysis of transitivity becomes a linguistic foundation that unpacks how roles and power are distributed in song lyrics. This linguistic choice process directly projects emotions and forms a unique cultural representation. In SFL initiated by Halliday (2014), transitivity dissects human experiences into six type processes, as shown in Table 1.

Transitivity determines the dominant ideology in the song. Does the song carry patriarchal ideology, authoritarian upbringings, or actually prioritize equal and emphatic relationships. Then, emotion in song lyrics is a form of realization of diction choices and mental processes. Lyrics that express regret, longing, or a sense of security are responses to how singers position themselves and their parents in the clause. Emotions become a bridge that makes listeners connect personally with the inner experience of the songwriter. The combination of the three elements (transitivity, ideology, emotions) forms a cultural representation of how a society defines the family. Therefore, songs are not just an arrangement of tones and words, but a complex cultural representation. Through transitivity, it can be seen how ideologies and emotions intertwine to shape the image of a socially and culturally accepted child-parent relationship.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Meaning Construction

Cross-cultural meaning construction is a psychological, social, and linguistic process in which individuals from different cultural backgrounds actively negotiate and agree on new understandings as they interact. This understanding is based on the idea that meaning is dynamic and shaped by the symbols and language of a community, not something universal. Referring to Samovar (2009), culture greatly influences the way a person views the world and conveys a message. Therefore, in order to build mutual understanding and avoid miscommunication, this intercultural meeting requires in-depth interaction to unite the differences in values and norms brought by each group. Conversely, cross cultural meaning constructions proves that language is not just a mechanical tool for transferring information, but a dynamic space in which human beings are constantly re-knitting the reality of their experiences in order to achieve global harmony.

Cross-cultural meaning construction based on the transitivity system examines how various linguistic communities encode real-world experiences into grammatical choices. By examining processes, participants, and circumstances within Halliday's SFL (2014), the researcher can uncover the unique cultural mindsets and ideologies within discourse. Within SFL, the experiential metafunction frames languages as a cognitive and communicative instrument that allows individuals to segment the chaotic flux of reality into structured, meaningful concepts.

Every culture unconsciously molds its worldview through its preferred transitivity patterns. When comparing Western (often individualistic) and Eastern (often collectivistic) discourses, stark grammatical differences emerge. Western discourse that tends to be individualistic is often dominated by material processes with dynamic and active actors to accentuate personal agency. Meanwhile, Eastern or collectivist discourse, such as in Indonesian or Javanese culture, more often utilizes relational processes or passive structures that prioritize the harmony of relationships, social contexts, and environmental situations rather than individual domination. Ultimately, this choice of transitivity system reveals how a culture views the main drivers in life, whether human beings are positioned as active actors in control of circumstances or as participants in harmony with destiny and the surrounding environment.

2.4 Research Gap

Studies on the construction of meaning across cultures are indeed widespread, but research linking the transitivity analysis within SFL framework to song lyrics about child-parent relationship is still rare. Generally, cross-cultural communication research focusses on direct interactions, business, or global news. Meanwhile, the study of family themed song lyrics is more often approached from a literary, psychological, or cultural point of view, thus ignoring the grammatical aspects of its function. This present study is here to fill this gap by dismantling how the reality of parents' relationships is constructed linguistically through song lyrics.

In the linguistic landscape, this embodiment of human experience is accurately reflected through of a transitivity system. Some researchers have used transitivity to dissect the construction of meaning in cross-cultural news text, political speech, and classroom discourse. Meanwhile, the study of parents' relationships in music is generally approach from a psychological standpoint to look at the emotional impact of melodies on family closeness. However, there is still a research gap where the transitivity system has not been optimized to dissect the lyrical text of songs with the theme of parental relationship in a cross-cultural perspective. Song lyrics are often thought of as static art products, when they are dynamic spaces where the cultural baggage of parenting values and norms is linguistically embedded. In addition, there has been no research that has mapped whether cultural differences affect the dominance of process choices in representing parent-child relationships.

Therefore, this research is crucial to be conducted to fill the research gap. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of micro-linguistic analysis (transitivity in SFL framework) with macro sociocultural phenomena (the construction of meaning of cross-cultural family relationships). The results of this present study are expected to unravel how

the reality of parenting is linguistically rewoven through music in various different cultural settings.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze a cross-linguistic corpus of song lyrics. This study applied adopted Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly on the transitivity system as the analytical lens. The researcher selected this approach to explore and uncover how the type of process is represented in the song lyrics in delivering the message. Processes were coded manually according to Halliday's transitivity categories (2014), with inter-rater checks to ensure reliability. The research data consists of 20 child-parent themed song lyrics from YouTube channel. The corpus data for this study was developed using a systematic selection framework, comprising an equal sample of 20 child-parent themed song lyrics (10 English, 10 Indonesian). Criteria strictly required verified textual lyrics, thematic focus on direct child-parent interaction, and cultural representation from English and Indonesian traditions to facilitate balanced transitivity analysis. Song lyrics were purposively selected based on their explicit child-parent themes and availability in both English and Indonesian. The analysis focused on verb elements in clauses across English and Indonesian song lyrics. Data were collected using a listening method combined with systematic note-taking. The data of English and Indonesian in child-parent song lyrics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
English and Indonesian in Child-Parent Song Lyrics

No.	English	Indonesian
1.	Yusuf/Cat Stevens. 2018. <i>Father & Son</i> . YouTube.	Meimusic / Iwan Fals. 2025. <i>Nak</i> . YouTube.
2.	Ourlovestory2012 / Tim McGraw. 2012. <i>My Little Girl</i> . YouTube.	Meimusic / Iwan Fals. 2025. <i>Galang Rambu Anarki</i> . YouTube.
3.	Avicii. 2014. <i>The Nights</i> . YouTube.	Musisa Studios / Iwan Fals. 2020. <i>Ibu</i> . YouTube.
4.	Dudedudette3 / Heartland. 2012. <i>I Loved Her First</i> . YouTube.	GP Records / Seventeen. 2021. <i>Ayah</i> . YouTube.
5.	Sam Fender. 2021. <i>Spit of You</i> . YouTube.	Purnama Records / Rinto Harahap. 2020. <i>Ayah</i> . YouTube.
6.	Carrie Underwood. 2010. <i>Mama's Song</i> . YouTube.	Trinity Optima Production / Ungu. 2010. <i>Doa Untuk Ibu</i> . YouTube.
7.	Ed Sheera Music / Ed Sheeran. 2026. <i>May Daughter</i> . YouTube.	Soundera / Eddy Silitonga. 2026. <i>Mama</i> . YouTube.
8.	Alan Jackson. 2021. <i>You'll Always Be My Baby</i>). YouTube.	Vidi Aldiano. 2015. <i>Cinta Untuk Mama</i> . YouTube.
9.	Shane Mercury / ABBA. 2023. <i>Slipping Through My Fingers</i> . YouTube.	Vanny Vabiola. 2019. <i>Mama</i> . YouTube.
10.	Forever Country Lyrics / Morgan Wallen. 2026. <i>Mom I Miss You</i> . YouTube.	Virgoun. 2025. <i>Saat Kau Telah Mengerti</i> . YouTube.

Then, the data were analyzed using Miles (2014) interactive model of qualitative analysis. This model analysis involves four interconnected elements: data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. This model enabled the integration of quantitative tendencies and qualitative elaborations to produce more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study. This model also allowed the researcher to move beyond mere description into deeper interpretation in both sets of the song lyrics analyzed in this research. Ethical considerations were observed by using publicly available lyrics and acknowledging sources. To ensure analytical reliability, each clause in the song lyrics was independently classified based on Halliday's transitivity framework (2014) before being cross-checked for consistency. Then, this study applied the model of integrated quantitative frequency counts of processes with qualitative interpretation of meaning.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the research on the analysis of English and Indonesian song lyrics within the child-parent relationship themed show that verbs in the transitivity system function not only as grammatical choices but also as reflections of emotional depth in child-parent relationships. Based on the analysis that has been carried out, a total of 713 processes were identified across English and Indonesian song lyrics. In addition, the results of the study also showed that the six types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral were found in both sets of the song lyrics. Table 3 below shows the results of the findings of the use of process types in English and Indonesian child-parent song lyrics.

Table 3.

Distribution of Process Types in English and Indonesian Child-Parent Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	242	33,94
Mental	176	24,68
Relational	155	21,74
Verbal	60	8,41
Existential	58	8,14
Behavioral	22	3,09
Total	713	100

Based on the distribution data on the types of processes showed in Table 3, this research shows that from 713 processes found in the song lyrics of English and Indonesian within the child-parent relationship themed, the distribution of process types is varied. From the results of this study, it shows that the clauses across the corpus are dominated by material, mental and relational processes, followed by another process types such as: verbal, existential and behavioral.

However, while material, mental, and relational processes were equally dominant in both songs categories in this research, the comparative data in Table 4 and Table 5 indicate that the specific distribution of process types still differed between the English and Indonesian versions.

Table 4.

Process Types in English Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	188	33,4
Mental	139	24,9
Relational	125	22,4
Verbal	52	9,3
Existential	41	7,3
Behavioral	14	2,5
Total	559	100

Referring to the data in Table 4, it was found 559 processes in English song lyrics with varied distributions. The results of the analysis showed the dominance of material process which reached 33.4% (188 frequencies), followed sequentially by mental processes of 24.9% (139 frequencies) and relational processes of 22.4% (125 frequencies). Meanwhile, other types of processes have a smaller proportion, namely: verbal process (9.3%; 52 frequencies), existential process (7.3%; 41 frequencies) and behavioral process (2.5%; 14 frequencies).

Conversely, to understand the process types in Indonesian song lyrics, Table 5 presents the distribution found in the data.

Table 5.

Process Types in Indonesian Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	54	35,1
Mental	37	24
Relational	30	19,5
Existential	17	11
Verbal	8	5,2
Behavioral	8	5,2
Total	154	100

The findings of this research based on Table 5 show that the song lyrics in Indonesian identify 154 processes with varying distributions. In line with the English song lyrics, material process still dominates with a proportion of 35.1% (54 frequencies), followed by mental process at 24% (37 frequencies) and relational process at 19.5% (30 frequencies). The other categories of processes have lower frequencies, including existential (11%; 17 frequencies), verbal process (5.2%; 8 frequencies) and behavioral process (5.2%; 8 frequencies).

The results of this research presented in Table 4 and Table 5 reveal significant quantitative differences. English song lyrics integrate 559 processes, while Indonesian song lyrics only include 154 processes. This substantial gap indicates that the length and word count of the lyrics directly dictate the volume of clauses available for transitivity analysis, which is supported by research showing that English song lyrics have a greater length compared to Indonesian song lyrics. The higher frequency in English song lyrics allows for a more complex and multilayered construction of experiential meaning, whereas the shorter Indonesian song lyrics reflect a more condensed syntactic structure that relies on fewer,

highly-selective process types to convey its message. Despite the difference in realizing process types in song lyrics, both sets of the song lyrics consistently show the dominance of material process in conveying the message. This indicates a tendency to prioritize concrete actions and physical activities carried out by actors (parent and child), in order to emphasize the direct impact of the manifestations of real actions in the narrative of the song.

In light of these findings, it is interpreted that, from the SFL perspective, the dominance of material processes in the two corpuses of songs confirms that the experiences of child-parent relationships are primarily represented through physical activity. This finding shows that the role of parents and children in the song lyrics is not only interpreted through static condition and feelings, but also through the dynamics of actions that shape the reality of relationship each other concretely.

Synthesizing these interpretations, the findings of this research indicate that all categories of processes according to Halliday's theoretical framework, including material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes are identified in both of English and Indonesian song lyrics. To deepen the analysis, the following are some illustrations of selected data from song lyrics of English and Indonesian that represents each type of process.

a. Material Process

Material process is defined as the process of 'doing' or 'happening' (Halliday, 2014). This process describes a person's physical experience of the outside world, includes real actions, physical activities. This process serves to build a dynamic and concrete reality of experience. The samples of data of material process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6.
Material Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	'take' [material] it easy	<i>Jauh jalan yang harus kau 'tempuh' [material]</i> 'you have a long way to go'
(2)	when I 'do' [material]	<i>Engkau 'lewat' [material] dengan kaki tak bersepatu</i> 'you pass by with barefoot feet'
(3)	he 'turns away' [material] again	<i>Jangan kau 'ganggu' [material] ibumu</i> 'don't disturb your mother'
(4)	I let you 'go' [material]	<i>Galang rambu anarki anakku 'lahir' [material]</i> <i>awal Januari menjelang pemilu</i> 'my son was born in early January ahead of the election day'
(5)	'chase' [material] your dreams	<i>ribuan kilo jalan yang kau 'tempuh' [material]</i> 'thousands of miles of road you walk'
(6)	the animals inside 'came out' [material]	<i>lbuku sayang masih terus 'berjalan' [material]</i> 'my dear mother is still walking'
(7)	he 'took' [material] me in his arms	<i>engkaulah nafasku yang 'menjaga' [material] di dalam hidupku</i> 'you are my breath that take care in my life'

(8)	I'll 'guide' [material] you home	<i>kau 'berikan' [material] aku semua yang terindah</i> 'you give me all the most beautiful'
(9)	I'm not gonna 'stand' [material] in your way	<i>'datanglah' [material] aku ingin 'bertemu' [material]</i> ' come on, I want to meet you'
(10)	you've 'given' [material] me everything	<i>kau 'memberikanku' [material] kasih sayang</i> 'you give me love'

Based on Table 6, the material process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'take, do, turns away, go, chase, came out, took, guide, stand, given'. Meanwhile, the material process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*tempuh, lewat, ganggu, lahir, berjalan, menjaga, berikan, datanglah, bertemu, memberi*'. All of these verbs represent material processes related to physical activity which indicates that the song lyrics both in English and Indonesian tend to describe real actions or events performed by actors against the goals in the context of child-parent relationship life. The use of material process emphasises the dynamic and concrete physical experience that the songwriter wants to deliver to the listeners.

b. Mental Process

In the framework of Halliday's transitivity (2014), mental process represents the inner world of human experience, such as what is perceived, thought, and perceived. In contrast to material process that focus on physical actions (doing), mental process focuses on awareness (sensing). In the context of song lyrics about the relationship between children and parents, mental processes are crucial to describe the emotional closeness and inner perception between the characters. The samples of data of mental process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7.
Mental Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	you have to 'know' [mental]	<i>Galang Rambu Anarki 'dengarlah' [mental]</i> 'Galang Rambu Anarki listens '
(2)	if you 'want' [mental]	<i>Galang Rambu Anarki 'ingatlah' [mental]</i> 'Galang Rambu Anarki remembers '
(3)	though you 'think' [mental]	<i>'maafkan' [mental] kedua orangtuamu</i> ' forgive your parents'
(4)	I 'remember' [mental]	<i>janganlah 'ragu' [mental]</i> 'don't be worry '
(5)	but always 'know' [mental] the road	<i>kau tak pernah 'lelah' [mental]</i> 'you are never tired '
(6)	I 'heard' [mental] him	<i>aku hanya 'mengingatmu' [mental] ayah</i> 'I just remember you, father'
(7)	'think' [mental] of everything	<i>hatiku selalu 'ingin' [mental] bertemu</i> 'my heart always wants to meet'
(8)	But I 'loved' [mental] her first	<i>aku 'ingin' [mental] berjumpa</i> 'I want to meet'

(9)	I 'knew' [mental] the love of a father	<i>takkan pernah 'terlupakan' [mental] 'never forgotten'</i>
(10)	that I will 'need' [mental]	<i>sebenarnya, 'kucayang' [mental] padamu mama 'really, I love you mother'</i>

Based on Table 7, mental process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'know, want, think, remember, know, heard, loved, knew, need'. Meanwhile, mental process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*dengarlah, ingatlah, maafkan, ragu, lelah, mengingat, ingin, terlupakan, kusayang*'. All of these verbs are mental processes related to the human inner world, which include perception, cognition, affection (feelings) and desires. This shows that in both English and Indonesian song lyrics, songwriters tend to use mental process to express deep emotions, thoughts, and subjective experiences, so that the listener can feel the inner atmosphere that is meant to be conveyed in the song. Based on the framework of SFL, the verb 'forgive' in English is categorized as a mental process. On the other hand, in Indonesian, this lexem '*memafkan*' can be realized as a material or behavioral process, depending on the context of its use. If the verb is associated with physical activity, the categorization shifts to material or behavioral processes. However, in this present study is in the form of song lyrics, the word '*memafkan*' is more accurately classified as mental process.

c. Relational Process

According to Halliday (2014), relational process is the process of 'being' and 'having'. In contrast to material (action) and mental (feeling) process, this process serves to connect one entity with another or with certain characteristics to provide a definition or description to the entities. The samples of data of relational process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8.
Relational Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	You 'are' [relational] still young	<i>Kelak kau kan 'jadi' [relational] orang tua 'Someday you will become parents'</i>
(2)	but I 'am' [relational] happy	<i>jika aku 'telah' [relational] jauh darimu 'if I have been far away from you'</i>
(3)	you 'have had' [relational] me	<i>aku 'menjadi' [relational] yang terbaik 'I become the best'</i>
(4)	you will 'be' [relational] always my little girl	<i>'hanya' [relational] dirimu harapanku, oh mama 'you are the only one I hope for, oh mama'</i>
(5)	these 'are' [relational] the nights	<i>'hanya' [relational] dirimu pelita hidupku 'you are the only light of my life'</i>
(6)	I 'was' [relational] enough for her not long ago	<i>tak 'kumiliki' [relational] sesuatu berharga untuk mama tercinta 'I don't have anything precious for my dear mama'</i>

(7)	I 'was' [relational] her number one	' <i>hanya</i> ' [relational] <i>sebuah lagu sederhana</i> 'it is just a simple song'
(8)	it 'was' [relational] only a matter of time	' <i>lagu cintaku</i> ' [relational] <i>untukmu mama</i> 'my love song is for you mom'
(9)	and they 'are' [relational] not wrong	' <i>segalanya</i> ' [relational] <i>untukmu mama</i> 'everything is for you mom'
(10)	he 'is' [relational] good, so good	' <i>badanmu</i> ' [relational] <i>kurus dan letih</i> 'your body is thin and tired'

Based on Table 8, the relational process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'to be (is, am, are, was), have had'. Meanwhile, the relational process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*naik, telah, menjadi, hanya dirimu*'. The whole of the verb is relational process that connects two entities whether it is as attribute or identity, thus creating a cohesive meaning in delivering the message of the song to the listener. The differences in verb markers show that there is a stylistic variation between English song lyrics that tend to use verbs 'to be' and 'have/has' to describe the situation, while Indonesian song lyrics use more dynamic verbs to connect the subject with the predicate.

d. Verbal Process

According to Halliday (2014), verbal process is the process of 'saying' or the process of exchanging information symbolically. The verbal process in this research is important to see how verbal communications is a means of strengthening the emotional relationship between children and parents in song lyrics. The samples of data of verbal process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in the following Table 9.

Table 9.
Verbal Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	From the moment I could 'talk' [verbal]	<i>aku hanya 'memanggilmu'</i> [verbal] <i>ayah</i> 'I just call you, father'
(2)	I try to 'explain' [verbal]	<i>untukmu aku 'bernyanyi'</i> [verbal] 'for you I sing '
(3)	he will 'say' [verbal]	<i>Oh ibu 'terima kasih'</i> [verbal] 'oh mother, I say thank you'
(4)	he 'told' [verbal] me	<i>hanya ini 'kunyanyikan'</i> [verbal] 'this only I sing '
(5)	I hear him 'say' [verbal]	<i>walau tak dapat selalu 'kuungkapkan'</i> [verbal] 'even though I can't always say it'
(6)	my father 'told' [verbal] me	<i>hatiku 'berkata'</i> [verbal] 'my hearts says '

Based on Table 9, the verbal process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'talk, explain, tell, say, told'. Meanwhile, the verbal process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*memanggil, bernyanyi, terimakasih, kuungkapkan, berkata*'. The wholeness of the verbs is a verbal process that represents the action of

‘saying’. This difference in the use of verbs shows that there is a variation in language styles and cultural contexts in conveying emotions or messages, where English song lyrics tend to use more explicit and direct verbs, while Indonesian lyrics emphasize the expression of poetic and emotional feelings.

e. Existential Process

Existential process is a process that represents the existence of something or states that something “exists” (Halliday, 2014). The samples of data of existential process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10.

Existential Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	now ‘there is’ [existential] a way	<i>duduk ‘sini’ [existential] nak dekat pada bapak</i> ‘sit here to be close to daddy’
(2)	‘there is’ [existential] so much you have to go through	<i>doa kami ‘di’ [existential] nadimu</i> ‘ there is our pryers in your veins’
(3)	like ‘there is’ [existential] nobody else	<i>walau air mata ‘di’ [existential] pipiku</i> ‘although there is tears on my cheeeks’
(4)	your alone ‘in’ [existential] this place	<i>hangat ‘dalam’ [existential] dekanmu</i> ‘ there is a warm in your surroundings’
(5)	and a place ‘in’ [existential] my heart	<i>putih kasihmu kan abadi ‘dalam’ [existential] hidupku</i> ‘your love will be eternal in my life’
(6)	mama, ‘there is’ no way [existential]	<i>tidurlah mama sayang ‘di’ [existential] sisiku</i> ‘sleep on my side my beloved mother’
(7)	I hope tears of joy are ‘in’ [existential] your eyes	<i>aku masih ‘ada’ [existential] ‘di’ sisimu</i> ‘I am still by your side ’
(8)	Tiny hands wrapped around my thumb ‘in’ [existential] that quite hospital room	<i>berilah senyum yang indah ‘di’ [existential] bibirmu</i> ‘give a beautiful smile on your lips ’
(9)	and ‘there is’ [existential] a broken heart	<i>Ku ‘ada di sini’ [existential]</i> ‘I am here ’
(10)	I sit ‘there’ [existential] alone	<i>dan aku ‘sudah tak ada’ [existential] lagi</i> ‘and there is no longer me’

Based on Table 10, the existential process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of ‘there is, in, there’. Meanwhile, the existential process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of ‘ada, sudah tidak ada, di, sini’. The whole of the word is an existential process that states ‘the existent’ of something which closely related to the concept of existence in the study of SFL. Through the use of verbs such as ‘there is/there’ in English and ‘ada’ in Indonesia, the song lyrics in both of the languages construct the presence of a particular entity without the need for active or complex possessive relationships. These findings suggest that both English and Indonesian song lyrics utilize existential processes to emphasize the presence, appearance, or existence of a person/thing in a particular space and time. Based on the framework of SFL, an existential process functions represent the existence or existence of an entity. However, in Indonesian, this

construction is often realized implicitly. For example, the phrase *'doa kami di nadimu'* semantically projects into *'ada doa di nadimu'*, and *'duduk sini nak dekat pada bapak'* implies *'ada anak yang duduk dekat pada bapaknya'*. Therefore, the identification of existential processes in Indonesian requires a deep understanding of the markers of existence, both explicit and implicit.

f. Behavioral Process

Behavioral process is a process that describes human's behaviour physiologically and psychologically (Halliday, 2014). This process is often thought as the 'gray area' or bridge because it is between material process (physical action) and mental process (consciousness/feeling). In contrast to material process that has 'actor' and mental process that has 'senser', behavioral process has a main participant called 'beholder'. Beholder is human consciousness in action, which reflects a combination of physical activity such as 'breathing, coughing, smiling' and physiological activity such as 'dreaming, contemplating, staring'. In linguistic analysis, this process often appears in clauses describing physical actions triggered by mental condition, such as *"dia tersenyum (he smiled)"* or *"mereka menangis (they cry)"*. Therefore, the behavioral process plays an important role in describing how human beings express their internal experiences through visible physical actions. The samples of data of behavioral process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11.
Behavioral Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	that I have 'cried' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] yang keras</i> <i>'cry loudly'</i>
(2)	that crooked little 'smile' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] janganlah ragu</i> <i>'cry loudly, don't be worry'</i>
(3)	From the first breath she 'breathed' [behavioral]	<i>sampai aku 'tertidur' [behavioral]</i> <i>'until I sleep'</i>
(4)	Every breath late night 'cries' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] di pangkuanmu</i> <i>'cry in your lap'</i>
(5)	'sleep' [behavioral] in our eyes	<i>aku 'menangis' [behavioral] seorang diri</i> <i>'I cry alone'</i>
(6)	I 'wake up' [behavioral]	<i>'tidurlah' [behavioral] mama sayang</i> <i>'sleep my beloved mother'</i>
(7)	I 'cry' [behavioral] in every dream	<i>janganlah kudengar lagi engkau 'menangis' [behavioral]</i> <i>'I don't want listen you cry anymore'</i>

Based on Table 10, the behavioral process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'cried, smile, breathed, cries, sleep, wake up, cry'. Meanwhile, the behavioral process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs *'menangis, tertidur, tidurlah'*. All of these words represent behavioral process that is a physical reflection of mental and physiological condition which shows the differences as well as similarities in the way the songwriters express the deepest human's emotions. The use of these verbs both in English and Indonesian song lyrics equally highlights how physical

reactions such as crying or smiling are used to describe specific mental condition such as sadness, joy, or calmness which often aim to reinforce the meaning of the song and establish a stronger emotional connection with the listener.

Based on the results, this study showed that material processes dominate quantitatively, mental and relational processes provide qualitative depth, showing how action, emotion, and identity intertwine in song narratives. This parallelism is reinforced by the finding that English and Indonesian song lyrics both prioritize material processes, which proves that cross-cultural lingual popular music narratives are always driven by real action to convey the emotional messages. The dominance of material processes in these two cultures shows that both in Western society (English representation) which is often considered individualistic, and in Eastern society (Indonesian representation) collectively, the expression of emotions is not solipsistic. Instead, emotions and identities must be manifested through tangible actions in order to be understood socially. In other words, the lyrics of a song are no longer merely a space of passive philosophical contemplation, but rather a dynamic space in which the identity of the subject is constructed through what they do (material), not just what they think (mental). This proves that culturally, people from different backgrounds rely on embodied experience to build empathy and social attachment through music.

The dominance of material processes in this study proves that both Western and Eastern cultures rely on tangible actions to convey emotional messages, but the way the two cultures construct them culturally different. In Western context (English), the emphasis on concrete actions and explicit verbal processes is in line with Afifah's (2021) findings on Lewi Capaldi's song that bluntly describe the reality of relationships to convey regret, and supported by Siahaan (2021) that material processes in the Western are closely related to universal social phenomenon that help listeners capture the true meaning of songs. On the other hand, in the Eastern context (Indonesia), the delivery of physical actions is strongly tied to existential nuances and the value of togetherness. The important role of cultural adaptation in these lyrics is validated by Siahaan (2024), who asserts that the use of specific material processes and cultural locations is vital for message communication to be effectively received by certain groups of people. Thus, although both cultures use real action (material) as a driving force for stories, Western (English) societies use them for transparent and dialogical communication, while Eastern (Indonesia) societies use them as a reflection of the harmony of social relations and the subtlety of cultural expression.

This present study also found that English songs rely more on explicit verbal and relational markers, while Indonesian songs highlight existential and behavioral nuances, reflecting cultural differences in expressing family ties. Culturally, these hierarchical differences in processes reflect unique characteristics in the way English and Indonesian societies construct meaning and express emotions. The greater use of verbal processes in English lyrics suggests that emotional intimacy is frequently constructed through explicit verbal interaction, whereas Indonesian lyrics tend to represent intimacy through presence and relational closeness. This finding indicates that linguistic representations of family relationships may be culturally mediated through different experiential resources.

The tendency of English song lyrics to prioritize explicit verbal processes shows a transparent, outspoken, and dialogical Western communication pattern. This characteristic is supported by the findings of Dita (2024) that verbal process is the predominant element because Western songs rely heavily on conversations and direct narrations to the listener for

conflict resolution. On the other hand, the lyrics of Indonesian songs that highlight existential and behavioral processes reflect Eastern cultural values that are more contemplative, poetic, and prioritize implicit emotional presence over verbal confrontation. These nuances of implicit behavior and emotions in Eastern societies are in line with the argument of Liztiawati (2021), who states that more complex and mature emotional expressions, such as in family relationships, do require a variation of real behavioral processes to describe deep relationship dynamics. This is in line with her findings that adult songs express love through complex behavioral processes, in contrast to children's songs that only focus on simple emotional reflections (mental process).

Further, although existential processes are prominent in the Indonesian song data in this present study to capture the essence of 'presence', this structure can vary greatly depending on the focus of the song theme. This can be seen from the contrast of the findings of Sitinjak (2025), stated that mental process actually dominates absolutely while the existential process is in the lowest position. Ultimately, this cross-cultural linguistic variation is validated by the systematic review of Simbolon (2025), which confirms that song lyrics use the structure of Systemic Functional Linguistics and figurative language not just as a textual tool, but as a medium to reflect broader sociocultural narratives, such as identity, power, and cultural heritage values in expressing life experiences.

5. Conclusion

Utilizing the transitivity model of SFL, this study investigated how songwriters employ process types to convey lyrical meaning. The findings reveal that all six process types are utilized to communicate the song's messages. Thus, this research shows that English and Indonesian song lyrics with the theme of child-parent relationships are built on three cores of meaning: actions (material processes), feelings (mental processes), and relationships (relational processes). The other three processes (verbal, existential, behavioral) serve as secondary elements that enrich the narrative. However, the cross-cultural corpora song lyrics differ in their stylistic approach to these secondary elements. English song lyrics favor verbal over existential processes to remain more direct. Conversely, Indonesian song lyrics prioritize existential over verbal processes, creating more poetic and reflective tone that highlights distinct cultural ways of creating meaning. This present study contributes to SFL and cross-cultural analysis by expanding transitivity process analysis into the modern, emotionally charged domain of popular music, while providing a comparative model to analyze how different language utilize core and secondary linguistic processes for similar thematic narratives. Furthermore, it offers valuable cultural insights by demonstrating how grammatical choices, such as English directness and Indonesian reflectiveness are deeply embedded within the structural choices of songwriters to reflect distinct cultural worldviews. In short, the transitivity system is not merely a grammatical framework but a blueprint for how humans construct and negotiate meaning across cultures.

In the context of cultural and music studies, this present study implies that child-parent themed song lyrics are not merely aesthetic entertainment, but vital cultural artifacts that record how societies uncover meaning and express intimate emotional bonds. For researchers, this study offers a new methodological lens to analyze music not just by 'what' is said literally, but 'how' meaning is structurally built, bridging, the gap between linguistics and local songwriting traditions in a globalized world. Furthermore, for the global creative industry, these insights underscore the necessity of cultural adaptation in cross-border music

production; to maintain authentic emotional resonance, international adaptations or translation must alter the narrative structure itself – shifting between direct verbal communication and reflective existential framing – to match the emotional habits of the target audience. Ultimately, this study is limited by the relatively small corpus and focus on only two linguistic traditions. Building upon these insights, future research directions should expand this comparative model into more than two linguistic studies, diverse musical genres such as hip-hop or traditional folk music, explore broader interpersonal themes like romantic love or social protest, and integrate multimodal analysis to investigate how these linguistic choices interact with musical elements like melody, tempo, and visual music videos to fully shape audience reception.

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