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## Conveying the Meaning through Experiential Metafunction on Song Lyrics: A Case on Ideational Metafunction

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### Abstract

This research explores the song "Better Man" by Westlife to uncover its experiential meaning and how it impacts the audience. Using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, the study analyzes the song's meaning by examining the processes, participants, and circumstances in the lyrics. Qualitative content analysis is employed to identify various emotional experiences expressed through language. The study involves deconstructing each sentence to understand how participants, processes, and circumstances are used in the song. The primary data source is the authentic lyrics from reliable sources like official songbooks and verified lyric websites to ensure accuracy. The SFL theory helps examine experiential meta function and its components in the lyrics, considering the entire complexity of language in social contexts. The analysis reveals that "Better Man" predominantly employs mental processes, reflecting the singer's personal thoughts and perspectives. The use of verbs like "love," "say," and "hidden" effectively conveys emotions and interactions between individuals. The song's participants, such as "better man" and "her," create emotional connections with listeners. The findings emphasize the importance of language as an expressive tool in art and music, guiding songwriters in effectively communicating deeper messages and meanings. Song lyrics, with their emotional storytelling, establish powerful connections with the audience. While this study offers valuable insights into "Better Man," there is potential for further research. Analyzing more songs and genres can deepen the understanding of how language conveys experiences and emotions in music's broader context.

**Keywords:** Experiential Metafunction, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Ideational Metafunction

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received

June 02, 2023

Revised

September 30,  
2023

Accepted

October 29, 2023

Published by  
Website

ISSN

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CV. Creative Tugu Pena

<https://attractivejournal.com/index.php/anglophile>

2746-8631

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### INTRODUCTION

Music, as an expressive art form, has the remarkable ability to convey deep emotions (Juslin, 2013), tell compelling stories (Phillips et al., 2020), and reflect the complexity of the human experience (Leman, 2016). The combination of melody and lyrics allows artists to communicate effectively about their thoughts, feelings and views, forming a deep connection with listeners. In song analysis, one aspect that often attracts attention is the functional use of language (Fitch, 2006), especially the experiential metafunction (Pranoto et al., 2020), which reveals how experience and action are woven into the lyrical content (Chappell & Varelas, 2019).

This research aims to dive into the song "Better Man," performed masterfully by the famous Irish boy band Westlife, to uncover the hidden dimension of experiential meaning and its role in shaping the song's overall impact on listeners. Released in 2019 as part of their memorable album, the song "Better Man" managed to steal the hearts of millions of people around the world with its touch of genuine emotion and introspective themes.

The main objective of this study is to conduct a thorough analysis of the experiential metafunction contained in the lyrics of "Better Man." Using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), we aim to explore how the meaning of the song is realized through an intricate experiential game (Schmidt & Little, 2017), including the processes (Susanto & Watik, 2017), participants (Siwek et al., 2016), and circumstances depicted in the song (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

SFL has another name, also known as systemic functional grammar (hereafter, SFG) which refers to the same science and there is no difference except only the term (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Herman et al., 2022; Lock, 2008; Martin & Matthiessen, 1997). The definition according to Emilia (2014) is a social linguistic theory used to construct meaning within the scope of human interaction with others based on the context of the situation and cultural context. In addition, Eggins (2004) pointed out that SFL has recently been used for something meaningful and useful (Hutabarat et al., 2020). The function of speech in song lyrics can work the same as daily conversation activities because most song lyrics can be easily understood and related to understood and related to ideas (Bennett, 2016), thoughts and feelings that are commonly experienced by humans (Perlovsky, 2010).

In this article, the author intends to use the lyrics of the song "Better man" performed by Westlife as the object of study and analysis. The reason the author chose the song is because through the song, the singer has always been an inspiration and motivation for the author to become a better person like the meaning contained in the song. In this case, the author intends to describe and dissect each sentence in the song lyrics to find out the use of participants, processes, and circumstances in each lyric.

## **METHOD**

The research design for this study involved a qualitative content analysis of the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allows for in-depth exploration and interpretation of the text (Sopah et al., 2023), particularly focusing on the experimental metafunctions present in the lyrics (Lestari, 2023). The aim is to identify the different types of experiences and processes contained in this song, providing a picture of emotions, perceptions and actions expressed through language.

The main data source for this research is the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife. Lyrics will be obtained from reliable sources, such as official song books, verified lyric websites, or official song releases. Using authentic and trustworthy data ensures the accuracy and integrity of the analysis (Noviza et al., 2022).

The main instruments used in this study are the researcher's interpretation skills and linguistic analysis expertise. To conduct the analysis effectively, the researcher will rely on an understanding of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, which provides a framework for examining experimental metafunctions and their components in texts (Santiago Schwarz & Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). SFL examines different contexts not only with regard to grammar, but includes the entire semiotic complexity of language in social contexts (Gusnawaty, 2017; Ngongo et al., 2022).

The data collection process involves obtaining the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife from the selected sources. Once the lyrics are collected, the researcher will read and recognize them carefully to gain an initial understanding of their content and context. During this stage, important elements related to the experimental metafunction, such as processes, participants, and circumstances, will be identified and recorded.

The data analysis method will utilize Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an analytical framework (Cahyono, 2018). This linguistic approach helps identify and interpret experiential metafunctions, which deal with how language represents human experiences and actions (Halliday, 1993). The analysis will involve categorizing processes into different types (e.g., material, mental, relational) and examining the participants and circumstances associated with each process.

The data analysis process will follow the following steps:

- a) Identifying processes: Determine the main actions, emotions, and states represented in the lyrics.
- b) Identifying participants: Recognizing the individuals or entities involved in the identified process.
- c) Identifying circumstances: Examining the contextual information surrounding the process and participants, including time, place, manner and cause.

By applying this comprehensive analysis, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiential metafunction in the song "Better Man" by Westlife and its significance in conveying emotions and stories through language.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the lyrics of the song "Better Man" the author analyzes the entire lyrics of the song using experiential metafunction and the following are some clauses that have been analyzed by participants, processes, and circumstances into the experiential metafunction table.

**Table 1. Clause 1**

You and I	Had	Something Special	Baby
Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon	Circum: accompaniment

**Table 2. Clause 2**

That's the way	To go
Behaver	Process: Behavioural

**Table 3. Clause 3**

Why'd	You	Let me	In just to let me go
Circumstances: Cause	Actor	Process: Material	Goal

**Table 4. Clause 4**

They	Have hidden	Their wings	I Know
sayer	Process: Verbal	Target	Verbiage

**Table 5. Clause 5**

It	Is	Been	A While
Token	Process: Identifying	value	Cir: Loc: Temporal

In our analysis of the song "Better Man," we will explore how metafunctional experiential functions are used to convey themes of personal growth and transformation. By identifying various processes, participants, and circumstances, we will uncover how the songwriter expresses the experiences and emotions that define the song's narrative.

Grammar sees the particular form taken by a language's grammatical system as closely related to the social and personal needs that the language must serve, and to uncover this, it is essential to look at language systems and functions at the same time

(Halliday, 1970, 1995; Halliday, 1993). Grammar identifies three meta-functions of language with their situational correlates. Ideational metafunctions correlate with discourse fields, while interpersonal and textual metafunctions correlate with the tenor and mode of discourse (Mehmet & Clarke, 2016; Morley, 2000; Parkwell, 2019). The ideational function serves to express content, i.e. the speaker's experience of the real world including the inner world of his consciousness. The interpersonal metafunction serves to establish and maintain social roles, while through the textual metafunction, language serves to make connections with itself and with the features of the situation in which it is used (Halliday, 1970; Herman et al., 2022; Simanjuntak et al., 2022).

According to (Halliday, 2020), the experiential function provides the speaker with a means of communicating ideas. Through this function, language gives structure to experience and helps determine ways of looking at things.

Experiential meaning is the meaning of linguistic experience, which includes processes, participants, and circumstances (Saragih, 2006). Language that serves to describe the user's process includes activities that are built into the experience. Experiential meaning in SFL clauses, which in formal and traditional theories as a grammatical form of language user experience known as verbs. The participant is a finite description, realized through the transitivity system (Martínez, 2001). The non-linguistic experience of the language user is realized into linguistic experience (Chiaro & Nocella, 2004). It is realized in three elements of linguistic experience, which include process, participant, and situation (Saragih, 2006). Processes include activities built into clauses, which in formal and traditional grammar are known as verbs. Participants are restricted as people or things involved in the process (Hammel et al., 2008). Circumstances are the environment and setting of the ongoing process involving the participants (Halliday, 1995).

Where Participant I is Actor, senser, token, carrier, behavior, sayer. Next Participant II includes Goal, Phenomenon, Value, Attribute, Possessed, Verbiage, existent. And the last is the process which in Traditional grammar is commonly known as a verb. Process includes Material, mental, Relational (attribution, possession, behavioral, verbal, existential). These three parts are arranged in pairs according to their pairs as in the following table.

**Table 6. Tables of Participants**

<b>Participant I</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Participant II</b>
Actor	Material	Goal
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon
Token	Relational: identification	Value
Carrier	Relational: attribution	Attribute
Possessor	Relational: Possession	Possessed
Behavior	Behavioural	--
Sayer	Verbal	Verbiage
--	Existential	Existent

- a) Material processes are processes of doing in the physical world
- b) Mental Processes encode the meaning of feeling or thinking
- c) Relational Intensive Attributive Processes is the relationship between the attribute and the carrier is commonly expressed by the verb be.
- d) Relational Intensive Identifying processes is the intensive identifying process can be characterized as "x" serves to define the identity of "Y".

- e) Relational Intensive possession Process is the usually presented with has/have to show ownership
- f) Behavioral Process are processes of physiological and psychological behavior and they are on the borderline between material and mental processes.
- g) Verbal Process is the process of saying to express the relationship between ideas constructed in human consciousness and the ideas enacted in the form of language.
- h) Existential Processes are the process of existing and happening, typically having the word "there is".

Based on the results of the author's analysis of the song "Better Man" by Westlife using experiential metafunction analysis, the author has obtained the percentage results of each song lyric that is dissected into the form of Process. Based on the author's analysis of the song lyrics, the use of process in the lyrics of the song "Better Man" is displayed in the following percentage table.

**Table 7. Frequency distribution of the six types of processes**

<b>Process Types</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Material	3	5%
Mental	29	48,3%
Relational	1	1,6%
Behaviour	10	16,6%
Verbal	17	28,3%
Existential	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>99,8%</b>

This research produces an in-depth understanding of how experiential metafunction is used in the context of the song "Better Man" by Westlife. In this song, the lyrics contained in the song dominantly use mental processes as much as 48.3%, while the relational identifying process is the least in the lyrics with a percentage of 1.6%. Based on SFG, each process consists of three components: (i) the process itself; (ii) the participants in the process; (iii) the circumstances associated with the process (Bloor & Bloor, 2001, p. 107). This lyric does not experience the existential process so the percentage is empty.

## **DISCUSSION**

Experiential Metafunction is one of the three metafunctions in Systemic Functional Linguistics theory (Van, 2021). This theory was developed by Michael Halliday and emphasizes on understanding language as a means of communication that reflects various social functions or purposes (Law & Matthiessen, 2023).

The Experiential Metafunction deals with how language is used to reflect and convey real-world experiences (Moya Guijarro, 2011). This function focuses on the representation and organization of human experience in language through three main components:

**Process:** Process refers to the action, event, or state expressed by a verb in a sentence. These verbs reflect activities or events that occur in the real world, such as "eating," "running," "speaking," and so on. This process represents how humans interact with the environment and experience events.

**Participant:** Participants are the elements involved in the process expressed by the verb. Participants consist of the "actor" or "cause" of the process and the "experiencer" or "receiver" of the process. For example, in the sentence "Anita ate an apple," "Anita" is the participant who acts as the actor, while "apple" is the participant who acts as the object that receives the action.

**Attribute:** An attribute is an element that provides additional information about a participant or process. It can be an adjective or noun group that further describes the

participant or qualifies the expressed process. An example of an attribute is in the sentence "A big tree fell," where "big" is an attribute that describes the tree.

Through the Experiential Metafunction, language has an important role in representing the real world and human experience. By understanding this function, we can identify how language is used to convey various actions, events, and human interactions that occur around us including in the song "Better Man" by this Irish boy band. The meaning of the song contained in this song is based on the singer's experience so that the lyrics of this song belong to the experiential metafunction section where the author analyzes each sentence of the song.

The results of the experiential metafunction analysis on the lyrics of the song "Better Man" in depth reveal a rich representation of human experience expressed through song lyrics. The findings identify how language is used to reflect and convey sensory experiences, emotions, cognitive, and interpersonal aspects in songs. The processes expressed by the verbs in the lyrics, such as "love", "say" and "hidden," indicate deep emotional experiences and human interactions. The participants in the lyrics, such as "better man" and "her," help create a narrative and emotional connection for the listener.

These findings are relevant to our research objective of analyzing Experiential Metafunction in the lyrics of the song "Better Man." The findings provide deep insights into how language is used in a musical context to represent and convey human experience. The results of our analysis confirm that the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife contain experiential elements that reflect feelings, emotions, and interpersonal relationships, thus strengthening the song's message and emotional appeal to listeners. The implication of these findings is the importance of awareness and appreciation of language as a means of expression in art and music. This research can pave the way for further analysis of how language is used in other song contexts and its effect on the listener's experience.

The results of the analysis show that the lyrics of the song "Better Man" consistently use experiential metafunction to create a strong representation of emotional experience. The dominant verbs used in the lyrics, such as "love," express feelings and interactions between subjects and objects. By using these verbs, the lyrics successfully evoke deep feelings of love, warmth and affection.

In the participles section, the song highlights the relationship between "I" as the subject and "you" as the object, reflecting the interpersonal relationship between two individuals. The use of participles reinforces the message of love and commitment contained in the song.

In addition, it was found that the lyrics contain a strong use of attributions to clarify the experiences and emotions expressed. "better" provides a positive qualifier and reinforces the narrative of how love in this song is able to transform a person into a better version of themselves.

Overall, the experiential metafunction analysis on the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife shows that language is used effectively to represent and describe emotional experiences in a song. The findings provide important insights into how language can be used as a means of expression in musical art, and add to the understanding of how song lyrics can influence listeners' emotions and perceptions. The implication of these findings is the important role language plays in creating powerful and evocative works of art for listeners. This research can also open up opportunities for further research in experiential metafunction analysis on other songs and different music genres.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the experiential metafunction analysis on the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife, this research successfully reveals how language is used to represent human experience and emotions in the context of songs. The use of verbs in the lyrics of this song effectively describes feelings of love, hope, and commitment, and

expresses the emotional interaction between the subject and the object. The results of the analysis show that the lyrics of the song "Better Man" predominantly use mental processes that reflect the singer's personal feelings and views. The use of participants, such as "I" and "you," shows a deep interpersonal relationship in this song. The use of attributes, such as "better" gives a positive qualification to the experience expressed, reinforcing the message and emotional appeal of the song. This research confirms the relevance of Experiential Meta function in song lyrics as a tool to convey and represent human experience in a musical context. The findings confirm the research objective to analyze the use of language in reflecting experience and emotion through the lyrics of the song "Better Man." The implication of this finding is the importance of awareness and appreciation of language as a tool of expression in works of art and music. Song lyrics are able to portray stories and emotions powerfully, creating an emotional connection with the listeners. The findings can provide guidance for songwriters and musicians in using language effectively to communicate deeper messages and meanings in their work. Although this study has provided valuable insights into Experiential Meta function in the lyrics of the song "Better Man" by Westlife, there remains potential for further research. The analysis can be expanded to include more songs and different music genres, as well as deepen the understanding of how language is used to convey experiences and emotions more broadly in the context of music.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research work was supported by the Institute for LPPM Universitas Papua Manokwari,

#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

All authors have contributed and participated in conducting this research.

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