

## Interpersonal Meaning in Avenged Sevenfold's Song 'So Far Away': A Systemic Functional Linguistics Analysis

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### Abstract

*This study investigates interpersonal meaning in Avenged Sevenfold's song "So Far Away" using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Focusing on the interpersonal metafunction, the study analyzes how meaning is realized through the grammatical systems of mood and modality. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the data consist of clauses taken from the song lyrics, which are analyzed at the clause level.*

*The findings reveal that declarative mood is the most dominant clause type, indicating that the song primarily functions as an expressive and reflective text rather than an interactive one. Interrogative and imperative clauses occur infrequently and mainly serve rhetorical and emotive functions. In terms of modality, epistemic modality appears more frequently than deontic modality, reflecting the songwriter's emphasis on belief, emotional stance, and personal evaluation rather than obligation or authority.*

*These findings suggest that interpersonal meaning in "So Far Away" is constructed through a combination of declarative mood and epistemic modality, which intensifies the expression of grief and emotional intimacy characteristic of rock ballads. This study contributes to SFL-based discourse analysis by extending the investigation of interpersonal meaning to the rock ballad genre, which has received relatively limited attention in previous research.*

**Keywords:** systemic functional linguistics, interpersonal meaning, mood, modality, song lyrics

### INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics are not only artistic expressions but also linguistic texts that convey meanings through particular grammatical choices. As a form of discourse, song lyrics reflect how songwriters communicate emotions, experiences, and perspectives to listeners. Because of their expressive nature, lyrics provide a rich site for linguistic analysis, especially in exploring how language is used to build relationships and convey attitudes. One aspect of meaning that is particularly prominent in song lyrics is interpersonal meaning, which concerns how speakers or writers position themselves and interact with others through language.

Within linguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing meaning in texts by relating language use to its social functions. SFL views language as a resource for meaning-making and proposes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Among these, the interpersonal metafunction is especially relevant to song lyrics because it focuses on interaction, stance, and evaluation. Through grammatical systems such as mood and modality, interpersonal meaning allows researchers to examine how emotions, judgments, and degrees of certainty are encoded in language.

Previous studies applying SFL to song lyrics have demonstrated that interpersonal meaning plays a central role in shaping how songs communicate with audiences. Research on various popular songs has shown that declarative clauses tend to dominate lyrical texts, indicating that songs often function as personal statements or narratives rather than direct interactions. In addition, modality choices in lyrics frequently reflect emotional states such as uncertainty,

longing, or reflection. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the interpersonal construction of meaning in song lyrics, most of them focus on pop or mainstream genres and well-studied artists.

Compared to these genres, rock and metal ballads have received relatively limited attention in interpersonal meaning studies using SFL. In particular, the works of Avenged Sevenfold, a band known for emotionally charged lyrics and reflective themes, have rarely been examined from an interpersonal perspective. One of their songs, "So Far Away," presents themes of loss, remembrance, and emotional distance, making it a suitable text for exploring how interpersonal meaning is linguistically realized. However, research that specifically investigates interpersonal meaning in this song using an SFL framework remains scarce.

In response to this gap, the present study aims to analyze interpersonal meaning in Avenged Sevenfold's song "So Far Away" by applying the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The analysis focuses on the systems of mood and modality to examine how interpersonal relationships and emotional stances are constructed in the song lyrics. By doing so, this study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how interpersonal meaning operates in song lyrics, particularly within the context of rock ballads, and to extend the application of SFL to less explored musical genres.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday, conceptualizes language as a resource for making meaning in social contexts. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic form, SFL emphasizes how grammatical choices are shaped by social purpose and situational context. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013, 2014) propose that language simultaneously realizes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction construes experience, the textual metafunction organizes discourse, and the interpersonal metafunction enacts social relationships between language users.

The interpersonal metafunction is particularly relevant for the analysis of song lyrics because songs are inherently expressive and evaluative. Bloor and Bloor (2013) explain that interpersonal meaning concerns how language is used to enact social relations, express attitudes, and negotiate roles between speakers and listeners. This metafunction is primarily realized at the level of the clause through grammatical systems such as mood and modality. The mood system organizes clauses according to their communicative function declarative, interrogative, and imperative while modality allows speakers or writers to express degrees of certainty, obligation, and personal stance.

Egins (2004) further emphasizes that mood and modality are central resources for negotiating relationships and positioning audiences within a text. In expressive texts such as song lyrics, these interpersonal resources enable writers to construct intimacy and emotional alignment with listeners. Thompson (2013, 2014) adds that declarative clauses are commonly used in reflective and non-dialogic texts to present personal experiences, while epistemic modality functions to express belief, evaluation, and emotional stance. These insights demonstrate that SFL provides a systematic and appropriate framework for examining interpersonal meaning in lyrical discourse.

Previous studies applying SFL to song lyrics consistently report the dominance of declarative mood. Research by Ariska et al. (2019), Alfian and Khristianto (2022), and Purwandari et al. (2022) shows that declarative clauses are frequently used to convey personal narratives and emotional reflections rather than to negotiate direct interaction with listeners. This pattern suggests that song lyrics tend to function as monologic expressions of experience rather than dialogic exchanges.

Studies on modality in song lyrics also reveal a strong preference for epistemic modality. Daryanto et al. (2022) and Zahro and Sa'diah (2024) argue that epistemic modality enables

songwriters to express belief, uncertainty, hope, and emotional vulnerability, which are central to lyrical meaning. Such modality choices contribute to the construction of sincerity and intimacy, strengthening the emotional bond between songwriter and audience.

Recent scholarship further confirms the relevance of SFL for analyzing creative and expressive texts. Cheng (2024) highlights that interpersonal analysis within SFL focuses on stance-taking and interaction, making it highly applicable to music discourse where meaning is closely tied to subjectivity and emotion. In addition, SFL-based studies outside the domain of song lyrics, such as Sujatna's (2016) analysis of clause processes in Indonesian texts, demonstrate the robustness of SFL as a methodological framework for analyzing how grammatical choices systematically realize meaning across different genres.

Although many SFL studies have examined popular songs, research focusing on rock or metal ballads remains limited. This gap is significant because rock ballads often address intense emotional themes such as loss, grief, and remembrance. Studies on song lyrics from an SFL perspective, including Silalahi et al. (2024), confirm that clause-level analysis is effective in revealing how meanings and emotions are constructed in songs. However, these studies largely emphasize ideational meaning, leaving interpersonal meaning in rock ballads relatively underexplored. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by analyzing how interpersonal meaning is realized through mood and modality in Avenged Sevenfold's song "So Far Away."

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, as it aims to explore and interpret meanings embedded in language rather than to measure numerical data. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the focus of the study is on analyzing how interpersonal meaning is constructed linguistically in song lyrics using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

The data of this study consist of the lyrics of the song "So Far Away" by Avenged Sevenfold. The song was selected because it contains emotionally expressive language that reflects themes of loss, remembrance, and personal reflection, making it relevant for interpersonal meaning analysis. The lyrics were obtained from an official and reliable online source to ensure accuracy.

The unit of analysis in this study is the clause. Clauses were chosen because, within the SFL framework, interpersonal meaning is primarily realized at the clause level through the systems of mood and modality. Each clause in the song lyrics was treated as a unit for identifying mood types and modality expressions.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument. In this study, the researcher analyzed the data by applying SFL concepts, particularly interpersonal metafunction, mood, and modality. To support systematic analysis, data tables were used to classify clauses based on their mood types and modality features.

The data were collected through a documentation technique. The researcher first transcribed the song lyrics and then segmented them into clauses. Each clause was carefully examined to identify its grammatical features related to mood and modality. This process ensured that all relevant linguistic elements were included in the analysis.

The data analysis was conducted through several steps. First, the song lyrics were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text. Second, the lyrics were divided into clauses. Third, each clause was analyzed to determine its mood type, such as declarative, interrogative, or imperative. Fourth, modality expressions found in the clauses were identified and categorized based on their type. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how interpersonal meaning is constructed in the song lyrics.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher applied theoretical triangulation by referring to established SFL theories and previous related studies. Consistency in clause classification and interpretation was maintained throughout the analysis to enhance the credibility of the findings.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents and discusses the findings of the analysis of interpersonal meaning in Avenged Sevenfold’s song “*So Far Away*.” The discussion integrates the results with relevant theories and previous studies in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to provide a deeper interpretation of how interpersonal meaning is constructed through mood and modality.

**Mood Analysis**

**Table 1. Mood Analysis of Clauses in “So Far Away”**

No	Clause	Mood Type	Interpersonal Function
1.	I love you	Declarative	Giving emotional information
2.	I miss you	Declarative	Expressing personal feeling
3.	I never meant to leave this world alone	Declarative	Sharing reflection
4.	Do you know how much I miss you?	Interrogative	Internal questioning
5.	Sleep tight	Imperative	Emotional appeal
6.	I’ll see you when He lets me	Declarative	Expressing belief
7.	It won’t be long	Declarative	Stating expectation

The analysis reveals that declarative clauses dominate the lyrics of “*So Far Away*.” This dominance indicates that the song primarily functions as an expressive and reflective text rather than an interactive one. Through declarative clauses, the songwriter positions himself as a provider of emotional information, allowing listeners to access his personal experiences of loss, remembrance, and emotional distance. Within the SFL framework, declarative mood is typically used to exchange information, suggesting that the interpersonal relationship constructed in the song is based on sharing feelings rather than negotiating social roles or actions.

Interrogative clauses occur infrequently and tend to function as internal or rhetorical questions. Rather than genuinely seeking responses from listeners, these interrogatives reflect moments of emotional uncertainty and introspection. This finding supports Thompson’s (2013) view that interrogative clauses in reflective texts often serve an expressive function instead of an interactional one. Imperative clauses are also used minimally and mainly function as emotional appeals or wishes, rather than commands. The limited use of imperatives reduces interpersonal pressure on the listener and reinforces the inward-looking and personal nature of the song.

The dominance of declarative mood is consistent with previous SFL-based studies on song lyrics. Studies by Ariska et al. (2019), Alfian and Khristianto (2022), and Purwandari et al. (2022) similarly report that declarative clauses are the most frequent mood type in lyrical texts. However, in the context of a rock ballad, this dominance carries additional interpretive significance. Rather than merely narrating experiences, declarative clauses in “*So Far Away*” intensify the expression of grief and emotional intimacy, suggesting that genre-specific characteristics influence how interpersonal meaning is realized.

These findings show that declarative clauses function as the main linguistic resource for constructing interpersonal meaning in the song. By minimizing direct interactional demands, the songwriter creates an intimate relationship with listeners based on shared emotion rather than dialogue.

## Modality Analysis

**Table 2. Modality Analysis of Clauses in “So Far Away”**

No	Clause Modality	Modality Type	Interpersonal Meaning
1.	I’ll see you when He lets me will	Epistemic	Belief / prediction
2.	It won’t be long won’t	Epistemic	Expectation
3.	You should have known	Deontic	Emotional obligation
4.	I know you’ll find your own way will	Epistemic	Certainty

The analysis of modality shows that epistemic modality appears more frequently than deontic modality in the song lyrics. Epistemic modality is used to express degrees of certainty, belief, and emotional stance toward the events described in the song. Modal expressions such as will and won’t indicate the songwriter’s personal assessment of future events and emotional expectations. This frequent use of epistemic modality reflects an attempt to communicate inner beliefs and emotional states rather than to impose obligations or authority.

Deontic modality occurs only rarely and is generally associated with expressions of emotional expectation rather than social obligation. This finding aligns with Daryanto et al. (2022) and Zahro and Sa’diah (2024), who argue that song lyrics tend to favor epistemic modality because songs function primarily as media for emotional expression rather than directive communication. In “So Far Away,” the limited presence of deontic modality further emphasizes themes of acceptance and resignation, which are central to the experience of loss and mourning.

From an interpersonal perspective, the dominance of epistemic modality contributes to the construction of sincerity and emotional vulnerability in the song. As noted by Thompson (2014), epistemic modality enables writers to express stance and evaluation, allowing listeners to align emotionally with the songwriter. In this sense, modality choices in “So Far Away” help establish an intimate interpersonal relationship between the songwriter and the audience.

### Interpersonal Meaning in the Context of Rock Ballads

When mood and modality are considered together, the findings demonstrate that interpersonal meaning in “So Far Away” is constructed through a combination of declarative mood and epistemic modality. This combination allows the songwriter to share deeply personal emotions without demanding responses or actions from listeners. Compared to previous studies focusing mainly on pop songs, the present findings suggest that rock ballads employ similar grammatical resources to convey more intense emotional themes, such as grief and remembrance.

These results indicate that while the grammatical realization of interpersonal meaning may be consistent across musical genres, the interpretation and emotional impact of these meanings are shaped by genre-specific contexts. Therefore, this study extends previous SFL research on song lyrics by demonstrating how interpersonal meaning operates within a rock ballad, a genre that has received relatively limited attention in SFL-based interpersonal studies.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined interpersonal meaning in Avenged Sevenfold’s song “So Far Away” using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, with particular attention to the systems of mood and modality. The findings indicate that declarative mood is the dominant clause type, suggesting that the song functions primarily as an expressive and reflective text rather than an interactive exchange. Interrogative and imperative clauses appear infrequently and mainly serve rhetorical and emotive purposes, reinforcing the inward-looking nature of the lyrics.

In terms of modality, epistemic modality occurs more frequently than deontic modality, highlighting the songwriter's focus on belief, emotional stance, and personal evaluation instead of obligation or authority. These grammatical choices contribute to the construction of sincerity, emotional vulnerability, and intimacy between the songwriter and listeners.

Overall, the study demonstrates that interpersonal meaning in "So Far Away" is realized through a combination of declarative mood and epistemic modality, which intensifies the expression of grief and remembrance typical of rock ballads. By focusing on a genre that has received relatively limited attention in previous SFL-based studies, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how interpersonal meaning operates in song lyrics and highlights the applicability of SFL to diverse musical contexts.

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