

Emotional Expression in Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris" Through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract

This research explored emotional expressions in the song "Iris" by Goo Goo Dolls through the lens of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. Using qualitative analysis, this study examines how the song lyrics perform ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of language, which reveal expressions of affection, vulnerability, and the desire to connect. The ideational metafunction highlights the songwriter's use of imagery and symbolism to show emotional intensity and specific personal struggles. With the interpersonal metafunction, the intimate tone of the lyrics and the use of direct connection create a strong emotional bond between singer and listener, evoking empathy and shared sentiments. The textual metafunction guarantees brotherly love and flow, guiding the target market through an emotional narrative with readability and resonance. The findings imply that "Iris" not only communicates the artist's inner feelings, but also resonates universally, emphasizing the song's function as a medium to express complex human feelings and foster an emotional connection between artist and audience. This research contributes information on how linguistic choices in song lyrics shape emotional verbal exchanges in famous songs.

Keywords: Emotional Expression, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Goo Goo Dolls, "Iris" song

INTRODUCTION

Language served as an important tool that humans used to clear their emotions, thoughts, and recollections, because it actively customary and built emotional and cognitive stories (Satpute, corner, & Cakar, 2020). In Systemic functional Linguistics (SFL), language changed into now not visible genuinely as a fixed grammatical shape but as a social semiotic device that allowed human beings to create meaning in numerous contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Trough SFL, any utterance or text might be tested in terms of its functions in representing experiences (ideational metafunction), building relationships (interpersonal metafunction), and organizing messages (textual metafunction), as tested in students' writing analysis and pedagogical planning (Alwasilah & Gunawan, 2023).

The ones three metafunctions labored collectively to reveal how which means became original and communicated in a textual content. The usefulness of SFL in studying and enhancing which means-making in writing became additionally supported through studies, together with the have a take a look at through Emilia and Hamied (2015), which located that making use of Systemic practical Linguistic style Pedagogy (SFL GP) helped university college students increase their writing abilities and awareness of linguistic functions in English instructional settings.

Music lyrics, as an revolutionary shape of language, often serve as a powerful medium for expressing deep feelings and personal have a look at (Sulaiman & Djauhari, 2025). The emotional capability rooted inside the textual part of songs, specifically through conceptual metaphors, is situation to reinforcement or amendment through multimodal factors like track and vocal recognition, which give sonic opposite numbers to the linguistic expression of emotion (Zyga, 2020).

The usage of Halliday's Systemic purposeful Linguistics (SFL) framework, this examine explored the emotional expression embedded in the lyrics of the music "Iris" by way of the Goo

Goo Dolls by way of analyzed how the three metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual represent the singer's emotions and intentions. This method is supported by means of Ngo and Spreadborough (2021), who highlight the cost of systemic practical semiotics in capturing emotional meanings in music, demonstrating how language capabilities in tandem with musical overall performance to express affect. Furthermore, Yuningsih (2018) emphasizes the position of interpersonal which means in tune lyrics using the Appraisal framework, revealing how emotional attitudes are linguistically constructed through evaluative language. Drawing from these studies, the present studies aim to find how language choices in "Iris" construct emotion that mean and how linguistic systems support the expressive strength of song within innovative discourse.

Literature Review

Several studies have analyzed song lyrics using linguistic and stylistic frameworks, including those that focus on Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris." One of the most relevant studies is conducted by Ariya Jati (2017) entitled "Stylistic Communication Deciphered from Goo Goo Dolls' 'Iris'." The purpose of this research is to explore the stylistic communication features found in the song lyrics. The analysis discusses several aspects, such as sound devices (rhythm and rhyme), process participants related to ideational metafunctions, and vocabulary use. Jati's study highlights how stylistic elements contribute to the song's emotional depth and overall meaning. However, the research mainly focuses on stylistic communication and does not specifically analyze the interpersonal meaning or emotional realization using Halliday's linguistic functional systems such as Mood, Modality, or Appraisal Theory.

Another study was conducted by Bayu Adhi (2022) under the title "An Analysis of Bound Morphemes in the Goo Goo Dolls' Song Lyrics Entitled 'Iris'." This research focuses on the morphological aspects of the lyrics, specifically on identifying bound morphemes, both derivational and inflectional. The results show that "Iris" mostly uses inflectional affixes to indicate grammatical categories such as tense, plurality, and comparison. Although the study provides insight into the structure and word formation of the song, it does not investigate how linguistic choices contribute to emotional expression. Therefore, Adhi's study serves as a structural foundation that the present research develops further through the functional linguistic perspective of SFL.

In addition, Sari and Lestari (2021) conducted a study entitled "Transitivity Analysis on Song Lyrics of Billie Eilish's 'Everything I Wanted'." This research applies Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory to analyze the transitivity system of the song. The researchers identify various process types, participants, and circumstances that form the ideational meaning in the lyrics. Their results reveal that mental and relational processes are the most dominant, showing how emotions, thoughts, and reflections are linguistically represented. This finding proves that the SFL approach can effectively uncover emotional nuances in song lyrics. However, Sari and Lestari's study focuses mainly on the ideational metafunction, while the interpersonal metafunction, which deals with emotion, attitude, and interaction has not been explored in depth.

Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as explained by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and supported by Lee (2021), views language as a social semiotic system that represents meaning through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction reflects experience and reality, the interpersonal metafunction expresses emotion, attitude, and relationship between writer and reader (or singer and listener), and the textual metafunction organizes messages coherently. This theory provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing how emotions are expressed through linguistic choices in song lyrics.

Based on these previous studies, it can be seen that earlier research on "Iris" by Goo Goo Dolls mostly focused on stylistic and morphological analysis, while studies such as Sari and Lestari (2021) proved the usefulness of SFL in identifying meaning and emotion in song lyrics. However, there is still a research gap in examining "Iris" specifically from the perspective of emotional expression through interpersonal metafunctions in Halliday's SFL. Therefore, the present study

aims to fill this gap by analyzing how the Goo Goo Dolls express emotions linguistically through the metafunctional system, revealing how language choices construct feelings, attitudes, and interpersonal meanings within the song.

METHOD

This had a look at employing qualitative content evaluation to research how emotions are expressed inside the music “Iris” by the Goo Goo Dolls. A qualitative technique is selected due to the fact the focal point is on knowledge meanings and interpretations instead of numerical statistics, as supported through Flick (2014) and Miles and Saldaña (2014). The respectable lyrics, written through John Rzeznik, had been sourced from credible platforms which includes the band’s lyric video, Genius, and Spotify to ensure facts reliability.

The lyrics were divided into clauses as units of which means and analyzed using Halliday’s Systemic practical Linguistics (SFL) framework, which emphasizes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction becomes examined via identifying mental, relational, and fabric techniques in every clause to uncover how the songwriter represents experiences and emotional expression through language.

Finding and Discussion

The findings from the evaluation of the Goo Goo Dolls’ song “Iris” monitor how emotional expression is realized through the linguistic elements of Halliday’s Systemic purposeful Linguistics (SFL), specifically inside the interpersonal metafunction. The evaluation demonstrates that emotions which include vulnerability, longing, and sincerity are linguistically constructed through mood, modality, and appraisal systems.

1. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction specialized in how thoughts, stories, and emotions were represented via language. Inside the music “Iris” with the aid of Goo Goo Dolls, this metafunction became realized through various manner sorts, which include mental, cloth, and relational processes that expressed the songwriter’s internal struggles, goals, and perceptions. These linguistic capabilities served to construct emotional meaning and pondered the songwriter’s psychological kingdom. According to Sinaga et al. (2024), the ideational metafunction, mainly through the experiential element, performed a crucial role in conveying meaning in music lyrics because it allowed listeners to apprehend how language encoded human reviews and feelings. This attitude bolstered how “Iris” linguistically portrayed complicated emotional reports via the songwriter’s desire of techniques and participants.

Metafunction	Lyric Excerpt	Emotional Expression	Explanation
Ideational Metafunction	“And I don’t want the world to see me, ‘cause I don’t think that they’d understand.”	It shows feelings of fear and self-doubt, representing emotional isolation.	The songwriter’s struggle between being understood and feared misunderstood makes the song relatable.
	“When everything feels like the movies, yeah, you bleed just to know you’re alive.”	It shows pain and the need for emotional validation.	The word “bleeding” is used as a metaphor to describe deep emotional suffering and the songwriter’s longing to be honest and authentic.

In analysis of the song “Iris” by Goo Goo Dolls, it can be seen that the songwriter conveys deep emotions through the use of significant and simple words. As shown in the song through Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), “And I don't want the world to see me, 'cause I don't think they'd understand,” the use of verbs “don't want” and “don't think” conveys the use of mind language that illustrates ideas and feelings rather than actions. The above illustrates fear and uncertainty and shows the songwriter's struggle with his own desire to be recognized and his fear of being understood. As stated by Halliday (1978), “Language is the vehicle carrying instances of human experience,” and the above illustrates feelings that convey loneliness and uncertainty through the use of significant and simple words.

“When everything feels like the movies, yeah, you bleed just to know you're alive” is another lyrical phrase that expresses feelings of pain in a dramatic and poetic way. “When everything feels like the movies” means that everything seems like it's happening in movies, that reality lacks authenticity but “you bleed just to know you're alive” is also symbolic here since “you bleed” means that one suffers in reality. “Feel” is what occurs within one's mind, while “bleed” symbolizes reality. When people use metaphors to understand their feelings, it makes those feelings more understandable since metaphors compare feelings to something that has actually happened. The song has only a few lyrics that are vivid enough and full of meaning.

2. Interpersonal Metafunction

Language serves as a medium via which people express feelings, mind, and relationships, and its use in track lyrics often displays the interpersonal connections between the singer and the listener (Bamberg, 1997). According to Halliday's (2000), Systemic useful Linguistics (SFL) framework, the interpersonal metafunction explores how language enacts social relationships via the systems of temper and modality. This perspective allows researchers to uncover the attitudes, emotions, and personal stances conveyed in a text or song.

According to Ariska et al (2018) on Adele's 21 album, for instance, revealed that the dominant use of declarative temper and medium-level modality of obligation signifies the singer's try to speak her emotions and reports without delay to the target market. In addition, in Goo Goo Dolls' “Iris,” the interpersonal meaning is expressed through choices of mood and modality that show inner struggle, affection, and a desire for emotional connection, allowing the songwriter to connect with the listener on a deeply personal level (Langstraat, 2002).

According to Medina and Noorman (2020), who tested Queen's finest Hits lyrics and observed that declarative temper and median modality had been predominantly used to convey feelings and support the connection among the performer and the target market.

Metafunction	Lyric Excerpt	Emotional Expression	Explanation
Interpersonal Metafunction	“I'd give up forever to touch you.”	showing strong affection	The lyrics describe how love conquers all worldly interests.
	“And I don't want the world to see me.”	showing strong emotions and unwillingness to open up	creating a personal narrative that allows listeners to feel the emotional turmoil of the songwriter.

Interpersonal functions show how language choices are used to build rapport between songwriters and their listeners. The use of personal pronouns such as I and you, as well as statements expressing wishes and hesitancies, make the lyrics feel like honest and emotional

personal conversations (Martin J.R., 2018). For example, in the lyrics "And I don't want the world to see me," there is a sense of weakness and hesitation to open up, while "I'd give up forever to touch you" describes a love so strong that it overshadows everything else. This choice of language creates a deep emotional connection with the listener, as they can relate to the songwriter's feelings. The balance between strength and weakness in these lyrics also emphasizes the sincerity of the emotions, making the song's message universal and touching Daryanto et al., (2022).

3. Textual Metafunction

According to LinAiAi (2024), the textual metafunction explains how language is arranged to create connection, rhythm, and emotional flow in a song. In Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris," this function appears through repetition, parallel lines, and cohesive patterns that keep the lyrics connected and meaningful (Silalahi et al., 2024).

As noted by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the textual metafunction helps organize meaning so it flows naturally. While Martin and White (2005) explain that repetition makes emotions more consistent and expressive. This idea supports Zyga's (2020) view that the way lyrics are structured also adds to how emotion and coherence are conveyed in music.

Metafunction	Lyric Excerpt	Emotional Expression	Explanation
Textual Metafunction	"I don't want the world to see me... I just want you to know who I am."	Repetition enhances emotional emphasis and cohesion.	The repetitive structure shows a strong emotional desire, emphasizing the song's main theme of honesty and self-disclosure.
	"When everything feels like the movies."	Imagery strengthens emotional coherence.	Cinematic metaphors create powerful emotional imagery and help listeners understand the songwriter's reflective journey.
	"Yeah, you bleed just to know you're alive."	Climactic realization of emotional pain and awareness.	This closing statement brings the themes together, showing recognition of human vulnerability and feelings.

Meanwhile, the textual metafunction contributes to the emotional flow and coherence of the song. The repetition of key clauses, such as "I don't want the world to see me" and "I just want you to know who I am," establishes thematic continuity and rhythmic emphasis. This cohesion intensifies the emotional progression from fear and pain to acceptance and authenticity Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The organization of the song mirrors an inner emotional journey beginning with concealment, moving through conflict, and ending with self-realization Zyga (2020).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the song "Iris" by the Goo Goo Dolls through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework to reveal how emotions are expressed linguistically. The findings show that the three metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual work together to construct the song writer's feelings of love, fear, and sincerity. Through these metafunctions, the lyrics transform personal emotions into a universal message that listeners can relate to.

The ideational metafunction reflects the songwriter's inner experiences through vivid imagery and metaphorical language, illustrating struggles with vulnerability and identity. The interpersonal metafunction builds emotional intimacy using personal pronouns, declarative mood, and modality, allowing the singer to communicate sincerity and closeness with the listener. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction provides cohesion and rhythm through repetition and parallelism, reinforcing the emotional flow and central themes of honesty and self-acceptance.

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