



## **Processes, participants' roles and circumstances in Taylor Swift's song bridge: Cruel Summer (a discourse analysis)**

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**Abstract.** This study is conducted based on a phenomenon of a viral song "Cruel Summer" by Taylor Swift. The "Cruel Summer", particularly in the bridge part, is a well-known and is used as the part that fans have been waiting for. Many teenagers in Indonesia sing this song on TikTok. However in fact, the audience may not be aware of the intended message conveyed by the lyrics, only enjoy with the beat rhyme, without focus on how the experience and expression of emotions through this song. Thus, in this study, there is an interest to analyze the lyrics in terms of the experiential function of discourse analysis focusing on participant, process, and circumstances. The objective of this study is to find out if the lyrics success in conveying the emotions and experiences to the listeners. This study employed a qualitative research design. The data were the bridge lyrics of "Cruel Summer". The data were analyzed by conducting data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the process, participants, and circumstances as part of the representation of experience as much as 80% of the bridge lyrics "Cruel Summer". The dominant type is material process where this process is related to actions. The lyrics of the song reflect Taylor's behaviours, including being intoxicated, crying, persisting, screaming, and so on. All the mentioned actions fall under the category of material process.

**Keywords:** Cruel Summer, discourse analysis, experiential function

## **INTRODUCTION/PENDAHULUAN**

Taylor Swift is a highly acclaimed and influential singer-songwriter known for her insightful and emotionally charged lyrics. Her songs often provide a glimpse into her personal experiences and capture universal themes of love, heartbreak, and self-discovery. One of her popular songs, "Cruel Summer," from her album "Lover" released in 2019, has garnered significant attention and critical acclaim. The bridge section of this song is a crucial component that often carries emotional weight and provides a narrative shift within the overall composition. Besides, "Cruel Summer," the bridge represents a pivotal moment in the song that may introduce new perspectives, emotions, or plot development. Understanding the processes, participant roles, and circumstances presented in the bridge section of this song can shed light on the overall meaning and impact of the composition.

Discourse analysis, as an approach to studying language and communication, provides a framework for examining the use of language in various contexts, including music. It allows researchers to analyze the ways in which language constructs meaning, reflects social dynamics, and influences interpretation. Applying discourse analysis to the study of the bridge section in "Cruel Summer" can offer valuable insights into the underlying processes, the roles played by participants (such as the singer, other characters, or the audience), and the circumstances that shape the communication within the song. Song Isti'anah (2019) explains that transitivity can be defined as a grammatical system that manages the various processes in language structure.

The experiential function is expressed through the transitivity system. This system encompasses the major system of transitivity (process type), which determines the roles and configurations of associated participants. Choices in transitivity relate to the field dimension, reflecting how participants encode their experiential reality, including actions, relations, participants, and circumstances that give meaning to their discourse. According to Ahmad (2019), transitivity focuses on the examination of how meaning is generated and conveyed through clauses.

The transitivity system consists of three components: participant, process, and circumstances. The process serves as the central part of the clause, realized through a verbal group, while the participant is represented by a noun group. Circumstantial elements, on the other hand, are not mandatory in a clause Firdaus & Mahdi (2020). The classification of each component can be found in the following tables (Eggins, 2004; Laosrirattanachai, n.d.). In this study, there is an interest to analyze the lyrics in terms of the experiential function of discourse analysis focusing on participant, process, and circumstances. The objective of this study is to find out if the lyrics success in conveying the emotions and experiences to the listeners. In Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer," a discourse analysis can examine the processes, participant roles, and circumstances to better understand the themes and messages conveyed in the song. The music in "Cruel Summer" plays a crucial role in conveying the emotions and enhancing the overall message of the song.

By delving into the processes, participant roles, and circumstances in the bridge section of Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer," researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how Swift's lyrics and musical composition intertwine to convey complex emotions and narratives. This analysis can contribute to the broader understanding of Taylor Swift's artistic expression, the themes explored in her music, and the ways in which her work resonates with listeners. Additionally, it can provide insights into the broader field of discourse analysis and its application to the study of popular music.

The research problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive analysis regarding the processes, participant roles, and circumstances within the bridge section of Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer" using a discourse analysis approach. While Taylor Swift's music is widely recognized for its emotional depth and storytelling, the specific analysis of the bridge section, which often holds significant meaning and narrative shifts, remains relatively unexplored. Understanding the underlying processes, the roles played by participants, and the circumstances depicted in this section can provide valuable insights into the overall communication and artistic expression within the song. Therefore, the research problem is to investigate and analyze the processes, participant roles, and circumstances in the bridge section of "Cruel Summer" through the lens of discourse analysis, filling the gap in the current understanding of Taylor Swift's songwriting and the impact of this particular section on the song's narrative structure and emotional resonance.

The main insight of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes, participant roles, and circumstances depicted in the bridge section of Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer" through the application of discourse analysis. By delving into the language and communication strategies employed in this specific section, the study aims to unravel the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the song's narrative structure and emotional impact. This research seeks to address the gap in existing literature, which has not extensively explored the nuances of the bridge section in "Cruel Summer" or its significance within the broader context of the song.

The existing literature on discourse analysis in popular music has made significant contributions to understanding the language and communication strategies employed in songs. However, there is a noticeable gap in the research when it comes to analyzing the bridge section of songs, particularly in the context of Taylor Swift's "Cruel Summer." Previous studies have primarily focused on the overall lyrical content or the broader narrative structure of songs, neglecting the specific analysis of the bridge section's processes, participant roles, and circumstances.

Several studies have explored the use of discourse analysis in popular music, highlighting the significance of language, symbolism, and narrative devices in song lyrics. These studies have shed light on how artists construct meaning, convey emotions, and engage with their audience through music. However, the specific examination of the bridge section as a distinct segment within a song has been largely overlooked.

The present study aims to fill this research gap by conducting a discourse analysis of the bridge section in Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer." By applying discourse analysis methodologies to this specific section, the study seeks to uncover the unique processes, participant roles, and circumstances portrayed within the bridge. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies employed in this section and the impact they have on the song's overall narrative structure and emotional resonance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Discourse analysis provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how language is structured, organized, and utilized within specific contexts (Aprilia et al., 2020). It investigates the relationships between language and social interactions, delving into the patterns, meanings, and functions of linguistic elements. By applying discourse analysis to the study of popular songs, researchers can uncover the underlying messages,

emotions, and narratives embedded in their lyrics. Language serves as a fundamental means of communication, enabling individuals to convey information and express their thoughts and feelings (Rabiah et al., n.d.). It can be used both verbally and in written form, with songs representing a unique form of spoken language. (Eka Rosita et al., 2019) highlights those songs, as a genre of written literature, allow artists to articulate their innermost sentiments and ideas through carefully crafted lyrics. The application of discourse analysis to song lyrics provides a comprehensive framework for uncovering the patterns, processes, and participant roles within the text. This approach examines the contextual factors, including social, cultural, and personal aspects, influencing the creation and interpretation of song lyrics. By analyzing the linguistic elements and narrative structures, discourse analysis enables a deeper understanding of the intended meanings behind the lyrics and the emotions they evoke.

According to Triana et al., (2020) transitivity analysis is a method for generating interest in reviews and using them as analytical tools. This implies that transitivity analysis is employed in both oral and written analysis. It is one of the systems that handles linguistically expressed content. The goal of transitivity is to understand the elements and connotations that make up a literary work's transitivity, among other things. According to Rajendra (2020), transitivity seeks to understand how semantic structures might serve as the foundation for verbal representations of visual adaptations. From this vantage point, elements of process, participant, and situation connect how we perceive the world to the language structures that contribute to meaning. Language-based processes called transitivity are defined by the existence of participants and external factors. Additionally, there are a variety of transitivity-based techniques that may be used to examine any language's grammatical structure or phrases. Transitivity is the study of how meaning is created and presented through sentences (Ahmad, 2019). These phrases signify that clause can represent many sorts of processes and occurrences. Every phrase that is written or uttered has a meaning. The goal of transitivity analysis is to make the process of an activity clear.

## METHOD

The qualitative method commonly emphasizes deeper understanding aspects by using data interpretation and analysis (Ratna Sari et al., 2020). In this research, the researchers analyse each word descriptively and will provide conclusions in the form of words that are supported by facts. This is supported by the statement of Setiawan & Anggito (2018) which states that the phenomena that appear in the field are sometimes not the same as what is the goal, become the core of the problem or in other words that look different from the main intent, so there needs to be a detailed, detailed and systematic explanation. So that objective clarification needs to be done to avoid misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations (Merriam & Grenier, 2019)

Data have very important role in research, because without data it is impossible to get result of the research. The data taken from the Taylor Swift's song with the title Cruel Summer and the source data used in this research is based from the lyrics in bridge part. To obtain the data, the research has to use instruments of collecting data, namely: (1) observation; (2) interview, and (3) documentation. This research is used the document as the instrument of collecting the data. The document is a kind of source data involves anything notes aimed to examine research, such as an article, book, etc. The data analysis in this study is aimed at describing the process, participants and circumstances in Taylor Swift song cruel summer. The data were analyzed through the following

steps: (1) separating the text into clauses, (2) analysing clauses in terms of experimental function, (3) classifying the elements of experimental function, (4) deriving patterns of experience, and (5) evaluating the success of the text (Saragih & Saragih, 2021)

The following is the bridge lyrics:

I'm drunk in the back of the car  
And I cried like a baby coming home from the bar (oh)  
Said, "I'm fine", but it wasn't true  
I don't wanna keep secrets just to keep you  
And I snuck in through the garden gate  
Every night that summer just to seal my fate (oh)  
And I screamed for whatever it's worth  
"I love you," aint that the worst thing you ever heard?  
He looks up grinning like devil

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Separating the text into clauses

1. I'm drunk in the back of the car
2. And I cried like a baby coming home from the bar
3. Said, I'm fine
4. But, it wasn't true
5. I don't wanna keep secrets Just to keep you
6. And I snuck in through the garden gate
7. Every night that summer just to seal my fate
8. And I screamed for whatever its worth
9. "I love you",
10. Aint that the worst thing you ever heard?
11. He looks up grinning like devil

### 2. Analyzing the clauses in terms of experiential function

- 1) I'm drunk in the back of the car

Table 1. Transitivity Process

<b>I'm</b>	<b>drunk</b>	<b>in the back of the car</b>
Actor	material	circumstances:location;where

- 2) And I cried like a baby coming home from the bar

Table 2. Transitivity Process

<b>And</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>cried</b>	<b>like a baby</b>	<b>coming home from the bar</b>
Actor	material	goal	circumstances:contingency	

- 3) Said, "I'm fine,"

Table 3. Transitivity Process

<b>Said,</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>fine</b>
verbal	sayer	existential	circumstances;contingency

- 4) but it wasn't true

Table 4. Transitivity Process

<b>But</b>	<b>it</b>	<b>wasn't</b>	<b>true</b>
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Carrier	process:attribution	attribute
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5) I don't wanna keep secrets just to keep you

**Table 5.** Transitivity Process

<b>I don't wanna</b>	<b>keep</b>	<b>secrets</b>	<b>just to keep you</b>
actor	Material	goal	Circumstances; Cause

6) And I snuck in through the garden gate

**Table 6.** Transitivity Process

<b>and I</b>	<b>snuck in</b>	<b>through the garden gate</b>
actor	material	circumstances:location,spatial(place)

7) Every night that summer just to seal my fate

**Table 7.** Transitivity Process

<b>every night</b>	<b>that summer just to</b>	<b>seal</b>	<b>my fate</b>
temporal(duration)	actor	material	goal

8) And I screamed for whatever it's worth

**Table 8.** Transitivity Process

<b>and I</b>	<b>screamed</b>	<b>for whatever its worth</b>
actor	material	circumstances: Cause

9) "I love you,"

**Table 9.** Transitivity Process

<b>I</b>	<b>love</b>	<b>you</b>
Senser	mental	phenomenon

10) ain't that the worst thing you ever heard?

**Table 10.** Transitivity Process

<b>Aint</b>	<b>that the worst thing you ever heard</b>
Relational(identification)	value

11) He looks up grinning like a devil

**Table 11.** Transitivity Process

<b>He</b>	<b>looks up</b>	<b>grinning like devil</b>
Actor	material	goal

### 3. Classifying the elements of experiential functions

The analysis conducted in section (b) reveals that the text uses different types of process, participants and circumstances. The occurrences are included in tables by which proportion of each component is counted and converted into percentage. As seen in table below the occurrences of the six types of process are presented and converted into percentage by which the proportion of each type of process is derived.

**Table 12.** The Proportion of Process in The Text

No.	Types of Process	Number	Percentage
1.	Material	7	63,63
2.	Mental	1	9,09
3.	Relational	1	9,09

4.	Behavioural	-	-
5.	Verbal	1	9,09
6.	Existential	1	9,09
<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is found that out of the six types of process used in the Brain Sex test, the Material process is dominantly used with the proportion of almost 64%. In other words, more than one half of the processes in the text belong to the Material process.

The occurrences of circumstances are presented in table below. The table shows that the most dominantly use circumstance is that of location and contingency out of three types of circumstances in the text almost two-thirds are the Circumstances of location and contingency.

**Table 13.** The Proportion of Circumstances in the Text

No.	Types of Circumstances	Number	Percentage
1.	Location	2	40
2.	Extent	-	-
3.	Manner	-	-
4.	Cause	1	20
5.	Contingency	2	40
6.	Accompaniment	-	-
7.	Role	-	-
8.	Matter	-	-
9.	Angle	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>

The participant is dominated by that is related to the material process, that is the actor. The participants used in this text are categorized into two groups, name those related to men and women and others with their related varieties of meaning. The two groups occurred either as the first or second participant and none are as the third participant (beneficiary) as specified in the following table.

**Table 14.** Occurrences of the Participants

Participants	Related varieties	Occurring as	Occurrence
Men and Women	I, He, like a baby, you	Participants 1 (8x)	10X (Major)
		Participants 2 (2x)	
others	It, that summer, true, secrets, my fate, grinning like devil	Participants 1 (2x)	6X (Minor)
		Participants 2 (4x)	

#### 4. Deriving patterns of experience

With reference to the classification of the elements of experience, particularly to the dominant element used in the text as previously done in the patterns of experience we derived. Furthermore, with reference to the patterns, the meaning of the text is derived. The patterns of experience are as the following. The dominant process is that of material, the minor circumstances is cause and the dominant circumstances are that of

location and contingency and dominant participants is that of the actor, which is related to the material process.

### **5. Evaluating the success of the text**

The social context of the text covers the field tenor and mode. The field of the text is cultural problem in the sense that the text is cultural problem in the sense that the text is influenced by outside culture which makes the text in the form of slang sentences. The text contains about how he doesn't feel well. The tenor involves the singer of the culture text in which she is the native language speaker of the song. The mode is that of spoken text. The text has successfully got to its objective text has. Culturally, the text was created in western society with a liberal capitalistic ideology underlying the creation of the text. After the data were analyzed, it was found that there were 11 clauses in the lyrics and there were 11 processes. The characterized processes were material, mental, verbal, relational and existential processes. There were 16 participants found in the lyrics. The result of the participants of experiential function analyzed that were characterized in lyrics "Cruel Summer" song bridge by Taylor Swift include participants of actor, goal, senser, phenomenon, sayer, carrier, and attribute. There were 5 circumstances found in the lyrics. The result of circumstances in lyrics "Cruel Summer" song bridge by Taylor Swift are location, manner, and contingency.

The result of the analysis showed that, it is known that experiential function in the lyrics "Cruel Summer" song bridge by Taylor Swift found 11 clauses in the song bridge. Each of them consists of processes, participants and circumstances. The first aspect is process. Part of process consists of material, mental, verbal, relational and existential processes. It found 11 processes which refer to process types. The second aspect is participants, part of participants the researcher found 16 participants in the lyrics. It consists of actor, goal, senser, phenomenon, sayer, carrier, and attribute. The last aspect is circumstances, there are 5 circumstances found in the lyrics which are involved in circumstances of location, manner, and contingency.

In line with that, each aspect of experiential function was done. The first aspect is process. It was found the process type is material process because the researcher found 7 frequencies and 63.63% percentage found in the lyrics. 7 clauses related to the process types. The most dominant result of the second aspect is participant, the researcher found 16 participants in the lyrics. The most dominant of participants in this research is participants of actor with 6 frequencies and 37.5% percentage found in the lyrics. The last aspect is circumstances, the researcher found 5 circumstances in the lyrics. Then, the most dominant circumstances types are circumstances of location part of place and contingency which amount 2 frequency for each type and 40% percentage. In general, it can be concluded that the dominant aspect used in the lyrics "Cruel Summer" song bridge by Taylor Swift is participant because it was found 16 frequencies the lyrics.

### **CONCLUSION**

.Based on the findings it is concluded that the discussions from the previous chapters were to be summarized and the summary may be concluded that: experiential function has three aspects including process, participant roles and circumstances. Firstly, the process types of experiential function like material, mental, verbal, relational, and existential processes. Secondly, participants' such as actor, goal, senser, phenomenon, sayer, carrier, and attribute. Then, there were circumstances such as location, manner, and contingency. After the data analysis the types of process found in the lyrics "Cruel Summer" song bridge by Taylor Swift the researcher found 11 clauses. The researcher



found 11 processes and the most dominant appearance in the lyrics song bridge was material process as the highest frequency of 7 frequencies and 63.63% percentage. Moreover, there were 16 participants found in the lyrics of the song bridge, and the most dominant of participant was actor, with the highest frequency of occurrence with 6 frequencies and 37.50% percentage. Then, there were 5 circumstances found in the lyrics of the song bridge, circumstances of location part of place and contingency have the highest frequency of 2 frequencies and 40% percentage for each type.

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