



## From Underdog to Anthem: A Stylistic Analysis of Taylor Swift's 'Change'

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| <b>Received:</b><br>05/05/2026                                                                                                                                   | <b>Abstract</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Accepted:</b><br>08/06/2026                                                                                                                                   | This study examines the stylistic construction of transformation in Taylor Swift's <i>Change</i> . Guided by a qualitative research design, it employs textual analysis anchored in Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework, Halliday's (1961) SFL transitivity system, and Mills' (1995) feminist stylistic approach. The corpus consists of the authorized lyrics from <i>Change</i> , extracted from Swift's <i>Fearless Platinum Edition</i> album. The analysis reveals a diverse presence of transitivity processes—most notably material processes, which dominate the song's narrative. These processes foreground concrete acts of defiance such as “stand,” “fight,” and “sing”, symbolizing the speaker's reclaiming of power amid systemic barriers. Mental, relational, verbal, and existential processes serve complementary functions, enriching the emotional depth and ideological nuance of the lyrics. Furthermore, the analysis reveals four (4) themes from the song lyrics, and these are: 1) Empowerment, 2) Emotional Depth, 3) Solidarity, and 4) Transformation. The study concludes that material processes linguistically construct a narrative of empowerment and ideological redefinition, aligning with feminist calls for agency and transformation. It affirms the role of music as a semiotic tool for challenging gender norms and articulating collective strength. Future research is recommended to explore Swift's discography further using expanded stylistic frameworks, including Leech and Short's stylistic checklist, to deepen linguistic insight and feminist critique. |
| <b>Keywords:</b><br>Change,<br>Critical<br>Discourse<br>Analysis,<br>Feminist<br>Stylistics,<br>Systemic<br>Functional<br>Linguistics,<br>Transitivity<br>System |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

### 1. Introduction

#### Background of the Study

##### Music and Language as Semiotic Systems

Language serves as a medium for conveying the author's thoughts and perspectives, often manifested through artistic works and expressed in diverse forms, one of which is music, particularly song (Octofiany and Halim, 2022). Music is both the written symbol that denotes musical sound and the pattern of sounds made by persons playing instruments or singing that has rhythm, melody, or harmony (Daemesya et al., 2023). Pareyon (2009), stated the diverse stylistic features and influences found in both music and language suggest that these forms operate as integral components of broader semiotic systems embedded within a complex ecological framework. Positioning language and music as semiotic systems underscores their shared function as symbolic frameworks for personal and cultural expression—especially when examined through stylistic and narrative lenses.

In songwriting, stylistic choices in language serve as tools for creative expression and storytelling, allowing artists to convey their narratives, emotions, and concepts in ways that engage and resonate with audiences. Notably, the incorporation of colloquial language adds a

sense of authenticity and relatability to the lyrics, helping listeners connect more deeply with the emotions and experiences presented in the song (Aboagye, 2022).

### **Songwriting as Personal Narrative in Music**

One of the prominent artists in the music industry is Taylor Swift, she is widely acknowledged for her songwriting proficiency, which integrates emotionally resonant narratives, memorable melodic structures, and introspective themes drawn from personal experiences (Kendong et al., 2023). Harvey Young, dean of the College of Fine Arts, affirms that Taylor Swift represents a generational talent. He likens her impact to that of the Beatles, particularly Paul McCartney during the height of their fame. Young notes that with a 17-year-long career, Swift has accompanied a generation from adolescence to adulthood, much like Madonna or Michael Jackson did for listeners now in their 50s. Her music has served as the defining soundtrack of their formative years. Notably, she is the first and only woman solo artist to win the Grammy for Album of the Year three times for her solo recordings (Laskowski, 2023).

Taylor Swift is renowned for her autobiographical songwriting style. Her lyrics feature her friends, lovers, enemies, frenemies and partners. Her fans love her for the personal stories of heartbreak, joy and revenge she includes in each and every song (Faichney, 2024). According to Fitzgerald (2024) of Forbes, Swift has released 14 albums and one of these is the “Fearless” album, which was released on November 11, 2008 by Machine Records. Moreover, the song lyrics of this album contain so many figurative languages (Elsawati et al., 2022).

One of the songs in the Fearless album is *Change*. This song was recorded in December 2007, when Taylor recognized it applied to more scenarios and had a “bigger meaning” than originally. Swift (2007) explained the reason of writing this song in “The Recording Session of *Change*” found in the release DVD of the album Fearless. Initially, Swift wrote *Change* as a personal narrative rooted in her early experiences with Big Machine Records, a small, emerging label. She evokes the image of “huge buildings” and “rockstars” to contrast the industry giants with her humble beginnings. The song was, at first, a tribute to perseverance an anthem for those who feel overshadowed yet remain hopeful about creating change and finding recognition. Over time, Swift acknowledges that the meaning of *Change* grew beyond the music industry. It transformed into a universal call to resilience. She mentions thinking of “world issues,” and how the song began to resonate with anyone who feels “on the bottom” and dreams of rising above their circumstances. This shows how her lyrics transitioned from a personal story to a broader commentary on injustice, ambition, and collective transformation.

### **The Strategic Use of Stylistic Devices in Taylor Swift's Songwriting**

According to Obenza and Teringtering Jr. (2024), Swift strategically employs stylistic devices to construct a compelling narrative, resonating deeply with listeners' personal experiences. Additionally, as stated by Doley (2021), despite the circumstances that go into painting a hit song, the use of stylistic devices, figurative language especially metaphor, rhyme, repetition were very effective tools for the songwriting of Swift.

However, despite widespread recognition of her artistic impact, academic analysis of the specific techniques underlying Taylor Swift's songwriting remains notably limited. Existing studies offer meaningful perspectives on her general writing style, yet research dedicated to the song, *Change* in the Fearless album remains limited. For instance, the study of Firdausyi (2024), identified the types and the most dominant figurative language used in Taylor Swift's Speak Now (Taylor's Version) album, focusing on six “From the Vault” tracks, based on Leech's (1969) theory. Similarly, Auliani et al. (2023), investigated figurative language used in songs in the 1989 album by Taylor Swift, and analyze the meaning of figurative language found in 1989 album using Perrine's (1969) theory related to Figurative Language. Furthermore, there is one study of Max et al. (2023) which focuses on investigating the transitivity process in Swift's songs in Midnights album revealing that the processes embedded within the lyrics contribute to the album's ideational meaning and reflect the songwriter's worldview.

While earlier studies explored the use of figurative language in Taylor Swift's discography, only one from the cited works have conducted a transitivity analysis of her songs focused only on selected songs in the *Midnights* album. This highlights a gap in the literature concerning Swift's stylistic construction through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly about transitivity processes in the song *Change* from the *Fearless* album. To address this gap, the present study integrates SFL framework with Feminist Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how linguistic structure (SFL), thematic construction and gender representation (Feminist Stylistics), and power dynamics (CDA) encode deeper meanings.

## Literature Review

### SFL Transitivity Process in Song Lyrics

Based on Darong (2021), transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1961) has been explored through two distinct approaches, each presenting a unique perspective on how language conveys both internal thoughts and external realities. The most prominent model, widely utilized by discourse analysts, was originally developed by Michael Halliday and later refined in collaboration with Christian Matthiessen. Additionally, it is widely agreed that every person has a unique way of using language, reflecting not only individual expression but also the aspects they choose to emphasize when describing reality. Consequently, the linguistic decisions one makes such as word choice and sentence structure, reveal their viewpoint and are shaped by how they understand a situation and the messages they aim to communicate. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the transitivity system comprises various process types used to represent different kinds of experiences and meanings in language namely material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes.

Several scholars have explored transitivity processes in the lyrics of various songwriters and performers. For instance, Riandini (2024) examined selected songs by SIA using Systemic Linguistic Analysis as the primary framework. Their study revealed that five of SIA's songs contain all six transitivity processes, mental, relational, material, verbal, behavioral, and existential with the material process occurring most frequently. Likewise, Siahaan (2021) analyzed Bon Jovi's song lyrics and found that they predominantly reflect physical activities linked to social phenomena.

Locally, Juyad et al. (2024) explored the Transitivity System in selected Original Pilipino Music (OPM) song lyrics performed by Lea Salonga, employing Halliday's SFL framework. The thematic elements found in the investigated songs enriched the songs' narrative structure and emotional resonance. Notably, the lyrics frequently employ material processes, emphasizing actions and events as central to their construction.

### Feminist Themes in Music

Rooted in critical theory, feminist theory seeks to challenge systems of power and oppression by examining how individuals engage with these structures. Through a feminist lens, scholars aim to uncover lived experiences, particularly those marked by marginalization and explore pathways for resisting and dismantling oppressive frameworks. While its classification as a theory or paradigm remains debated, the central commitment of feminist thought lies in confronting and disrupting systems of inequality affecting all people, not exclusively women (Arinder, 2020). According to Ufot (2012), Feminist stylistics analysis reveals how language reflects and reinforces power dynamics, particularly in how linguistic structures perpetuate patriarchal control over female representation within texts.

Daemeysa et al. (2023) examined Taylor Swift's *The Man* using a Feminist Stylistics approach, revealing how societal discourse often elevates men while diminishing women in communal settings. The lyrics reflect the systemic bias that portrays men as inherently strong and autonomous, while women endure the consequences of gendered inequality. Inspired by her own experiences within the entertainment industry, Swift used the song as a platform to challenge these norms and voice her critique through music.

Feminist stylistic analysis of song lyrics offers a lens for examining how gender and power dynamics are portrayed in music. Common thematic concerns include challenging patriarchal and religious norms, promoting self-empowerment and LGBTQIA+ representation, and exploring concepts such as femininity, feminism, and female rage. Central to this approach is the question of how such analysis can unpack gender representations, highlight alternatives for agency and self-positioning, and expose the ongoing influence of patriarchal structures. In the case of Taylor Swift, this lens facilitates a deeper understanding of how she articulates women's experiences and asserts her voice within the music industry (Dharmaya et al., 2024).

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### **General Question**

This study aimed to examine Taylor Swift's distinctive style in the song *Change* from her *Fearless* album that draws on Feminist Theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

#### **Specific Questions:**

1. What types of transitivity processes are manifested in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, *Change*?
2. What themes are depicted from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, *Change*?
3. What power dynamics are revealed in the themes?

#### **Significance of the Study**

This study sets apart from the previous studies by offering a multilayered stylistic analysis of *Change*. It uniquely integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Feminist Stylistics, and Discourse Analysis (CDA). While earlier studies have examined figurative language or general stylistic tendencies in Taylor Swift's discography, few have explored the ideological and transitivity dimensions of her songwriting using this triangulated framework.

Moreover, the study's significance lies in its contribution to the evolving discourse of English as a Second Language (ESL) as a field of inquiry. By treating music as a legitimate cultural text for linguistic and ideological analysis, it expands the scope of ESL research beyond traditional academic genres. It affirms that stylistic inquiry into authentic texts can deepen our understanding of how language encodes meaning and its identity, especially in contexts where English functions as a second language and a medium of cultural negotiation.

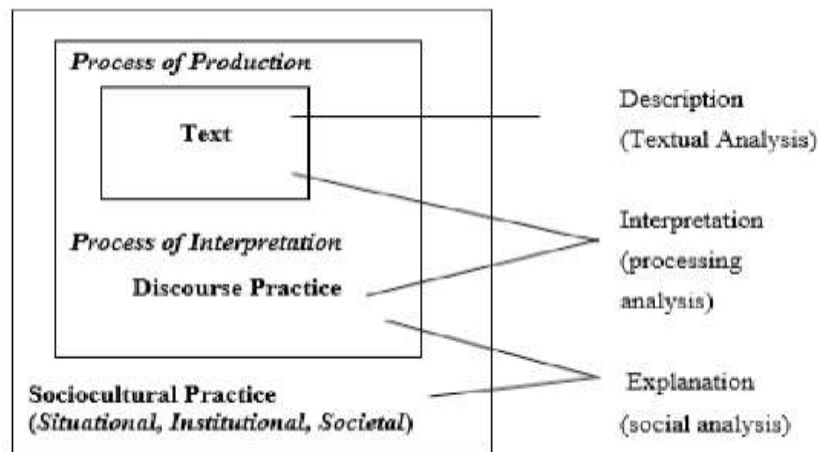
## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study applied Halliday's (1961) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with a specific focus on the Transitivity System. This framework was originally developed by M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues in the 1960s in the UK and later expanded in Australia. It is now widely applied in language education and discourse analysis across the globe (Almurashi, 2016; O'Donnell, 2012). Rather than investigating how language is processed in the brain, SFL focuses on examining discourse as it appears in spoken or written texts, aiming to uncover the meanings embedded within them. This framework was applied to examine how stylistic choices in the song *Change* construct meaning through linguistic processes. By analyzing the six transitivity processes—material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential, the study uncovers how Swift's language use reflects internal experiences, external actions, and social relationships. This framework enables a detailed reading of how the song's stylistic form encodes personal agency, emotional depth, and transformative themes, aligning with its narrative.

The framework of Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics (1995) was also applied which established a foundational approach to analyzing texts through the lens of feminist theory by integrating linguistic research and stylistic analysis. Mill (1995), has dual emphasis on feminist discourse and stylistic form enables a nuanced reading of contemporary texts, especially those that navigate themes. Even decades after its publication, the work remains influential for its accessible structure and its dual focus on feminist discourse and stylistic features, making it especially valuable for emerging scholars in the field (Daemeysa et al., 2023).

Mills' (1995) framework, with its dual focus on stylistic form and feminist discourse, enables a critical interrogation of how the song negotiates gendered experiences and agency. By applying this lens, the analysis explores how Swift's lexical choices and narrative perspective construct a voice that challenges marginalization and affirms resilience, aligning with the song's evolution from a personal reflection to a universal anthem of change.

In the final layer of analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the overarching interpretive framework, integrating insights from both Systemic Functional Linguistics and Feminist Stylistics. Positioned as the "umbrella" mode, CDA enables the study to transcend stylistic and linguistic elements by situating the findings within broader sociocultural and ideological contexts. This approach not only illuminates the power dynamics embedded in the song's language but also reveals how stylistic and grammatical choices reflect and challenge prevailing structures of marginalization and agency. Moreover, the framework of Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis consists of three interconnected levels. The first, Textual Analysis (Description), involves close linguistic examination of the song *Change*, including vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and structure to uncover embedded ideologies, power dynamics, and social identities. The second level, Processing Analysis (Interpretation), investigates how figurative language shapes recurring themes that align with broader discursive patterns in pop music, enhancing emotional resonance. Lastly, Social Analysis (Explanation) explores how the lyrics engage with sociocultural contexts, revealing, contesting, or reinforcing existing power structures. Through this multi-layered approach, *Change* is viewed not only as a personal expression but as a cultural text that dialogues with issues of gender, identity, and resistance.



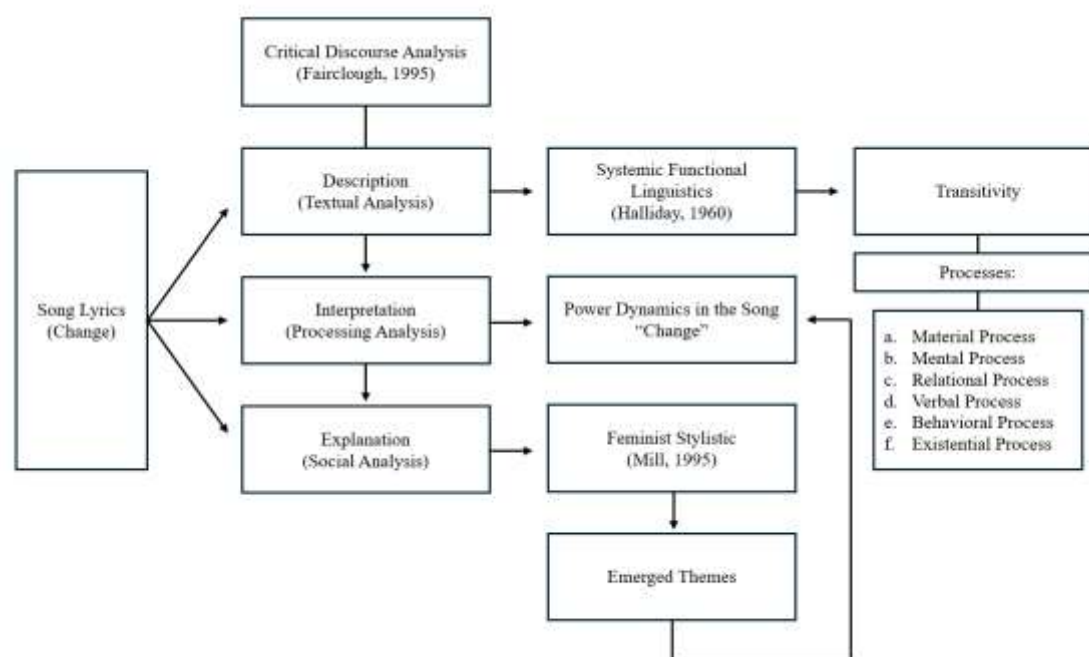
**Figure 1**

*Diagrammatic representation of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, adapted from Fairclough (1995: 98)*

### 3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored in a multilayered linguistic and critical approach to analyzing Taylor Swift's song *Change*. At the core is Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, which guides the interpretive flow across three dimensions: textual description provides stylistic evidence, processing interpretation extracts thematic meaning, and social explanation situates themes within sociocultural critique. The description stage draws upon Halliday's (1961) Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically the Transitivity system, to categorize Swift's lexical choices through various process types—(a) material, (b) mental, (c) relational, (d) verbal, (e) behavioral, and (f) existential. These linguistic elements then feed into the interpretation stage, where underlying power dynamics in the lyrics are explored, reflecting the emerged thematic patterns. Finally, the explanation stage integrates Mills' (1995) Feminist Stylistic lens to interrogate how gendered expressions, and ideological positions emerge from Swift's language. This layered framework enables the study to critically

trace how stylistic and grammatical features encode narrative identity and sociocultural meaning, positioning *Change* not merely as a personal reflection but as a lyrical anthem of transformation.



**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework on Stylistic Analysis of Taylor Swift's 'Change'*

#### **4. Methodology**

##### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative research method, employing the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis design, using textual analysis guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), System Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1961), and Feminist Stylistic (Mill, 1995). Descriptive research, as defined by Calderon and Gonzales (2006), involves a systematic and structured process of collecting, analyzing, and organizing data to provide insights into existing conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect relationships. In this context, textual analysis refers to the methodical examination of written or spoken material, emphasizing its content, structure, and language to uncover embedded meanings, social implications, and ideological influences (Que & Patty, 2023). Specifically, investigating the writing style, the meaning, and the theme being revealed in the song *Change* of Taylor Swift was the main objective of the study.

##### **Corpus**

The lyrics of the selected song *Change* was extracted from the album sleeves of Taylor Swift's *Fearless Platinum Edition* for accuracy and the authorized version of the lyrics. Following the transcription, line numbers were also assigned to each song's lyrics to facilitate the analysis.

##### **Selection Criteria**

The song *Change* by Taylor Swift was chosen as the main corpus for this study based on carefully defined selection standards. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the text, the lyrics were sourced directly from the album sleeves of the *Fearless Platinum Edition*, which provides the official and original version of the song. This method avoids inconsistencies often found in unofficial lyric sources and preserves the integrity of the artist's linguistic and stylistic choices. Only the Platinum Edition was used, while other versions such as *Taylor's Version* were intentionally excluded to maintain uniformity in both thematic and linguistic analysis. The lyrics were transcribed exactly as they appeared, with original punctuation, capitalization,

and formatting preserved. Each line was numbered sequentially to support detailed analysis, including thematic categorization and syntactic examination. The song was selected for its linguistic depth and relevance to the research focus, particularly its use of metaphor, modality, and narrative perspective. Additionally, the context of its original release during Swift's early career with Big Machine Records was retained to strengthen the interpretive framework within sociolinguistic and discourse analysis.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The following steps detail the methodological approach undertaken to prepare the lyrics for analytical interpretation.

1. The official lyrics of Taylor Swift's song *Change* were identified and retrieved from the *Fearless Platinum Edition* album sleeve to ensure the use of an authorized and accurate source.
2. This version was selected to maintain textual authenticity and avoid inconsistencies commonly found in unofficial or fan-transcribed materials.
3. The lyrics were manually transcribed and formatted to preserve the original structure, including punctuation, capitalization, and line breaks.
4. Each line was assigned a sequential number to support systematic analysis and facilitate precise referencing of linguistic features, thematic elements, and discourse patterns.
5. The transcription was reviewed for fidelity to the original source before being finalized as the primary corpus for analysis.

### Data Analysis

This study employs a triangulated approach to data analysis to provide a multifaceted interpretation of Taylor Swift's song *Change*. To ensure analytical clarity and depth, this study distinctly organizes its data analysis into three interconnected stages. First, textual analysis draws on Halliday's (1961) transitivity system, the first layer of analysis identifies the types of processes embedded in the song's lyrics—material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, existential, thus revealing how Swift linguistically encodes action, emotion, and existential states. Second, these transitivity patterns are then examined through the descriptive and interpretive stages of Fairclough's (1995) CDA model, where lexical choices, mood structures, and stylistic devices are assessed to extract core themes embedded in the song *Change*. Finally, to interpret the sociocultural meanings behind these themes, the study applies Mills' (1995) Feminist Stylistics and CDA's explanatory dimension, exploring how the lyrics articulate power dynamics related to gender and collective agency. By synthesizing insights from these three complementary lenses, the study ensures analytical rigor and depth, revealing how Swift's stylistic strategies shape narrative, identity, and sociopolitical resonance in her songwriting.

### Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, establishing the trustworthiness of findings is essential to ensure the credibility and rigor of the study. This research adopted the evaluative criteria proposed by Stahl and King (2020), which emphasize credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although the study focused on lyrical analysis rather than interviews or field observations, detailed documentation was maintained throughout the data gathering and analysis process. The transcription of the lyrics was conducted with strict adherence to the official source, and line numbering was systematically applied to support transparency and traceability. Reflexive notes were also kept monitoring researcher bias and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the textual data. These measures collectively reinforce the trustworthiness of the study and support the validity of its sociolinguistic and discourse-based insights.

### Ethical Considerations

The following ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the conduct of this study to ensure respect for intellectual property, transparency in data handling, and integrity in analysis:

1. The lyrics of *Change* were obtained directly from the official album sleeve of *Fearless Platinum Edition*, which helped maintain copyright compliance and avoided the use of unofficial or altered versions.
2. Since the research did not involve human participants or personal information, ethical risks were minimal.
3. The transcription and analytical process were thoroughly documented to support clarity and accountability.
4. All interpretations were based strictly on the original lyrics and guided by established linguistic and analytical frameworks, helping to minimize personal bias.
5. Throughout the study, proper referencing and citation practices were followed to maintain academic integrity and recognize the work of previous scholars.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

### ***I. Types of transitivity processes manifested in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, Change***

The table below illustrates how various transitivity processes are linguistically realized in selected clauses from Taylor Swift's *Change*. Each entry outlines the process type and offers interpretive insight into how the lyrics convey action, identity, and emotional depth.

**Table 1**

*Types of transitivity processes in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, Change*

| Clause of the Song                                                                     | Types of Transitivity | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lyrics                                                                                 |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <sup>1</sup> <i>the final blow <u>hits</u> you</i>                                     | material process      | This describes a physical action, <i>the final blow</i> (actor) performing an action <i>hits</i> on <i>you</i> (goal). This part of the first line conveys concrete impact, a powerful pairing to illustrate emotional weight and physical consequence.               |
| <sup>3</sup> <i>You <u>know</u> it's all the same,</i>                                 | mental process        | The verb <i>know</i> expresses a cognitive state, an internal mental activity of perception or understanding. Swift's use of " <i>know</i> " establishes personal insight.                                                                                            |
| <sup>10;26</sup> <i><u>It's</u> a revolution,</i>                                      | relational process    | The verb " <i>is</i> " links " <i>it</i> ", likely referring to the transformation or moment of change with " <i>a revolution</i> ". This expresses identity or characterization.                                                                                     |
| <sup>12;28</sup> <i>And we'll <u>sing</u> hallelujah, we'll <u>sing</u> hallelujah</i> | material process      | The verb " <i>sing</i> " denotes a concrete, external action, an act of musical expression. Despite its spiritual resonance, singing remains a material process, representing something being physically done. The use of " <i>hallelujah</i> " conveys reverence and |

triumph, emotional closure after struggle.

|                                                                |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <sup>21</sup> <i>But there's <u>something</u> in your eyes</i> | existential process | The construction “ <i>there's</i> ” typically introduces an existential process, which asserts the existence of something. Here, “ <i>something</i> ” is said to exist “ <i>in your eyes</i> ”, implying emotional depth or unspoken meaning. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Additional examples of transitivity processes are provided in *Appendix A*, which contains the complete table for reference.

The lyrics of Taylor Swift's *Change* demonstrate a diverse and meaningful use of transitivity. Material processes appear most prominently, emphasizing dynamic actions such as fighting, standing, and overcoming barriers. Swift highlights movement and intensity through strong, dynamic verbs, giving the song an urgent and rebellious feel. The dominance of material processes shows how the speaker takes action to fight back and regain control. These are not just emotional reactions, they represent real steps toward change, proving that transformation is achieved through direct action, not just inner reflection. Similarly, Swift's lyrics exhibit material processes that resemble those in Beatles and Bon Jovi's music, where expressions of physical action are prominently featured and intricately tied to broader sociocultural experiences (Harbi, 2019; Agung, 2021). Overall, material processes dominate, emphasizing dynamic actions such as fighting, standing, and overcoming barriers. These highlight urgency and rebellion, showing that transformation is achieved through direct action. Relational processes redefine group identity, while mental processes deepen emotional engagement. Verbal processes transform struggle into collective expression, and the existential clause adds subtle emotional revelation.

Thus, the analysis demonstrates how Swift linguistically constructs action, identity, and emotional depth, directly show the interplay of linguistic processes in shaping meaning.

## II. Themes depicted from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, *Change*

Analyzing the transitivity processes in *Change* through Mills' feminist stylistic lens reveals a compelling narrative of gendered resistance, collective empowerment, and ideological redefinition.

**Table 2**

*Themes depicted from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, Change*

| Themes | Meaning |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Empowerment | Material processes like “ <i>fight</i> ,” “ <i>stand</i> ,” “ <i>get off our knees</i> ,” and “ <i>throw your hands up</i> ” foreground physical and metaphorical action. These verbs depict a shift from passivity to intentional resistance, underscoring a reclamation of agency often denied in patriarchal discourse. Even in passive constructions such as “ <i>been outnumbered</i> ” or “ <i>raided and now cornered</i> ”, the lyrical persona later transitions to assertive control, resisting silencing or submission. This subverts traditionally feminized linguistic tropes of compliance, replacing them with action-oriented expressions of self-assertion and collective strength. |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Emotional Depth | Mental processes like “ <i>know</i> ,” “ <i>believe</i> ,” “ <i>feel</i> ,” and “ <i>see it now</i> ” emphasize personal insight and emotional labor, areas historically marginalized in masculinist stylistics. These lines validate internal experience as a form of resistance, situating the speaker’s feelings as credible and transformative. Rather than dismissing emotion as irrational or secondary, Swift leverages affect as epistemological ground, what Mills might read as a politicized form of female voice. Additionally, the existential clause “ <i>there’s something in your eyes</i> ” adds nuance, gesturing toward emotional depth and hidden truths, often coded female in stylistic representation. This line brings introspection and perception to the fore, suggesting women’s insight as pivotal to collective realization. Feminist stylistics celebrates such moments as recognitions of suppressed knowledge, where what is “ <i>seen</i> ” is not just visual, but symbolic of deeper ideological awareness. |
| Solidarity      | Verbal processes such as “ <i>say we don’t need this</i> ,” “ <i>says we can beat this</i> ,” and “ <i>we’ll sing hallelujah</i> ” help establish a shared sense of unity and collective spirit among the participants. The shift from individual pronouns to “ <i>we</i> ” reflects a move toward collective identity formation, one that is inclusive, defiant, and celebratory. This use of collective language breaks away from depictions of women enduring hardship alone and instead highlights unity in resistance and strength through shared experiences.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Transformation  | Relational processes like “ <i>we’re faster and never scared</i> ,” “ <i>it’s a revolution</i> ,” and “ <i>it’s the fight of our lives</i> ” redefine the speaker’s social role, from victim to agent of transformation. These affirmations function as identity re-attributions, reversing stereotypical associations with weakness or inferiority. This is interpreted as critical acts of semantic reversal, where language is consciously used to re-label the female subject with strength, courage, and legitimacy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Feminism plays a vital role in addressing gender issues, functioning as a movement for women’s emancipation that seeks to end injustice and eradicate gender bias (Tarigan et al., 2023). Within this framework, music becomes a powerful medium for challenging gender norms, advocating for equality, and empowering women and marginalized genders. It promotes diverse representation, confronts stereotypes in lyrics and visuals, and inspires listeners to rethink societal expectations.

Taylor Swift’s *Change* offers a compelling narrative of female empowerment when viewed through the lens of Mills’ Feminist Stylistics. The lyrics employ transitivity processes—material, mental, verbal, relational, and existential, to highlight themes of empowerment, agency, emotional depth, solidarity, and transformation. Material verbs such as “*fight*,” “*stand*,” and “*get off our knees*” foreground intentional resistance, allowing the female speaker to reclaim power in a world where women are often linguistically portrayed as passive. Mental processes including “*know*,” “*believe*,” and “*feel*” validate the speaker’s emotional

insight, challenging patriarchal notions that dismiss emotion as irrational. Even the existential line “*there’s something in your eyes*” gestures toward emotional revelation, making inner truth visible and significant. Through verbal processes like “*we’ll sing hallelujah*” and “*say we don’t need this*”, Swift constructs a collective voice rooted in unity and defiant hope. Meanwhile, relational clauses such as “*we’re faster and never scared*” redefine identity, turning vulnerability into strength through acts of semantic reversal. Altogether, *Change* does more than tell a story; it stages a stylistic revolt against silencing, affirming empowered female subjectivity, community, and transformation through the language of resistance. These findings reinforce the insights of Sitorus et al. (2025), who emphasized that music reflects broader social and cultural realities. This is also exemplified in Gloria Gaynor’s iconic song *I Will Survive*, which serves as a linguistic expression of resistance, challenging and transforming conventional representations of women in mainstream media.

### III. Power dynamics revealed in the themes

The power dynamics revealed through the lens of Mills’ Feminist Stylistics are both nuanced and ideologically charged. The song articulates a shift in power relations, from marginalization to empowerment through strategic stylistic choices. Thus, it explicitly frame each theme as discursive strategy of resistance.

#### 3.1 Empowerment as resistance

Material processes such as “*fight*,” “*stand*,” “*get off our knees*” are not only thematic markers of agency but also discursive strategies that linguistically resist dominant ideologies. By foregrounding action verbs, the speaker contests passivity and reclaims agency, directly addressing power imbalances (Alvarez & Daga-as, 2024). As Heni et al. (2022) highlight, song lyrics serve as a powerful medium for expressing personal observations, emotions, and lived experiences.

#### 3.2 Emotional depth as resistance

Mental and existential processes “*know*”, “*believe*”, “*feel*”, “*there’s something in your eyes*” challenge the privileging of rational, masculine-coded discourse. By elevating emotion as knowledge, the song repositions affective language as a legitimate counter-discourse, resisting structures that marginalize subjective experience.

#### 3.3 Solidarity as resistance

Verbal processes “*say we don’t need this*”, “*we’ll sing hallelujah*” construct collective voice. The use of “*we*” transforms individual struggle into communal resistance, disrupting hierarchical power by redistributing agency across a collective.

#### 3.4 Transformation as resistance

Relational processes “*we’re faster and never scared*”, “*it’s a revolution*” redefine identity and social roles. This semantic reattribution resists imposed patriarchal definitions, reframing the speaker’s position from subordination to empowerment (Pitliya, 2025).

Thus, the power dynamics revealed in the song are not only thematic but discursively enacted through strategies of resistance. Empowerment, emotional depth, solidarity, and transformation each represent linguistic mechanisms by which the speaker contests marginalization and reconfigures power relations. This directly show how stylistic choices function as discursive tools of resistance against dominant ideologies.

## 6. Conclusion

Drawing from the analysis of Taylor Swift’s *Change*, the study reveals a powerful interplay between transitivity processes and feminist discourse that constructs a narrative of transformation, resistance, and collective empowerment. Material processes dominate the lyrical landscape, affirming the speaker’s agency and refusal to remain passive within oppressive structures. Mental and existential clauses lend emotional and epistemic weight, reframing introspection and feeling as legitimate sites of knowledge. Verbal processes build solidarity and community through shared declarations, while relational expressions redefine identity from subordination to self-determination. Through Mills’ Feminist Stylistics and

Critical Discourse Analysis, *Change* becomes a powerful expression of transformation, linguistically challenging gender social norms and asserting female subjectivity through emotional depth, ideological resistance, and collective triumph. Lastly, these findings affirm that music is not merely aesthetic, it becomes an ideological tool for articulating lived experience, reshaping narratives, and catalyzing social awareness.

However, this study is not without limitations, as it draws on a single-song corpus that restricts the generalizability of findings, relies on interpretive stylistic and discourse analysis that introduces a degree of subjectivity, and focuses solely on linguistic features without incorporating a multimodal perspective on melody, rhythm, or performance.

Nevertheless, despite these constraints, this study offers a nuanced reading of *Change* as a symbolic text that linguistically constructs empowerment, resistance, and transformation. The findings reveal how transitivity processes and thematic structures encode ideological positions and gendered experiences, contributing to broader conversations on language, identity, and agency. By foregrounding the stylistic and ideological dimensions of a popular song within the framework of ESL scholarship, the study challenges conventional boundaries between literary and linguistic analysis. It contributes to the body of knowledge by demonstrating how authentic cultural texts can serve as a rich site for exploring the intersections of language, power, and meaning, especially in multilingual contexts where English operates as a second language and a tool.

## **7. Recommendation**

The study suggests conducting future research that applies Leech and Short's stylistic checklist to explore Swift's songs in detail, and it recommends extending transitivity analysis to other works in Swift's discography for broader linguistic insight.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Types of transitivity processes in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song, Change**

*[The full clause-by-clause breakdown of the song lyrics is omitted here in accordance with copyright restrictions on reproducing complete song lyrics. A representative sample of the transitivity analysis is provided in Table 1 above.]*

## **Appendix B**

*[The full lyrics of "Change" by Taylor Swift (2008) are omitted here in accordance with copyright restrictions on reproducing complete song lyrics. Readers may consult the official release for the full text.]*

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