



A Semantic Analysis of Referential Expressions in NIKI Zefanya's Album: Buzz

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Abstract: This study explores the use of referential expressions in six selected songs from NIKI Zefanya's 2024 album Buzz. Using a qualitative descriptive method and Halliday and Hasan's theory of reference, the research aims to identify the types of referential expressions used in the lyrics and analyze their contribution to meaning and emotional impact. The findings reveal a total of 74 referential expressions, consisting of 53 personal references, 9 demonstrative references, and 12 comparative references. Personal references, such as I, you, and my, are the most dominant and function to express intimacy, personal emotion, and connection with the listener. Demonstrative references, like this and that, help point to emotional states or symbolic meanings. Comparative references, including like, better, and too much, are used to express metaphor, contrast, or emotional intensity. The study concludes that referential expressions not only serve grammatical functions but also shape how meaning is constructed in song lyrics. These expressions enhance narrative clarity, emotional depth, and listener engagement, showing that even small linguistic choices can have a strong impact on how music is experienced and understood.

Keyword: NIKI Zefanya, reference, semantics, song lyrics

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, song lyrics serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium for individual and emotional storytelling. Through poetic language and expressive tone, songs often convey layered meanings that resonate deeply with listeners. Linguistically, these lyrics frequently feature semantic and pragmatic elements that can be analyzed to uncover deeper communicative intentions (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2015). One of the artists known for her introspective and emotionally charged songwriting is NIKI Zefanya, an Indonesian singer-songwriter who has gained international acclaim for her lyrical depth and vulnerability. Her album "Buzz" is part of her third studio album, which was officially released on 9 August 2024 under the 88rising music label. This album represents a significant phase in NIKI's artistic evolution, showcasing themes of self-reflection, emotional complexity, and relational ambiguity.

Music appreciation is often reflected in one's active engagement with music in daily life. Regardless of individual preferences, activities such as listening, playing instruments, or composing songs are strong indicators of musical appreciation (Pigarasam, Majid, & Jelas, 2013). Furthermore, the lyrical complexity of the songs allows the listeners for multiple interpretations, making the songs open to personal and varied meanings.

References is the broad term that used to describe how language points to or identifies things in the real world (Cruse, 2006). References function as tools that help listeners identify

who is being talked about, when, where, and under what context. Reference is used to identify entities within discourse. Analyzing these elements within song lyrics not only reveals how an artist builds a personal narrative but also how meaning is interpreted by listeners through contextual clues and inference.

The study is conducted to examine how referential expressions are employed in the lyrics of NIKI Zefanya's 'Buzz' album and how these expressions function to construct meaning within the song. Specifically, the research is guided by two core questions: (1) What types of referential expressions were used dominantly in the lyrics of the song in *Buzz* album? (2) How do these references contribute to the listener's interpretation and emotional engagement? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to understand how reference, as a semantic-pragmatic feature, allows language in music to be both personally expressive and open to multiple interpretations of the listeners.

The selection of *Buzz* album as the object of this study is not arbitrary; it is grounded in the song's rich linguistic content and narrative depth. The lyrics of songs in *Buzz* album are minimalistic yet emotionally intense, utilizing a range of deictic expressions and referential forms that invite interpretive involvement from the listener. The song frequently uses first and second-person pronouns, ambiguous references, and context-dependent expressions that make it ideal for a semantic-pragmatic analysis. Moreover, the emotional nuance and subtle ambiguity in the lyrics reflect a conscious use of language to create intimacy and universality, characteristics that align with the functions of deixis and reference in discourse. Therefore, *Buzz* album provides a relevant and compelling text to examine how language can construct meaning beyond the literal level, especially in a performative and poetic medium such as music.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Semantics Meaning in Context

As defined by (Yule, 2006), semantics is the scientific study of meaning in language, specifically how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning. Semantic analysis aims to understand the standard, rather than individual interpretations in specific situations. This approach prioritizes objective and general meanings, avoiding subjective or context-dependent interpretations. Linguistic semantics focuses on the use of words and sentences in a language. In the context of song lyrics, semantic analysis is particularly useful because lyrics often contain implied messages, emotional subtleties, and figurative expressions (Diko, 2024).

Listeners interpret lyrics not just based on the words themselves, but also on the context surrounding the performance, the artist's identity, and shared cultural understanding.

References

Reference is the act of identifying entities or people through language. It allows the speaker to "point to" something, whether physically present or conceptually understood by the listener. According to (Cruse, 2006), reference is central to semantics and pragmatics because it helps determine *who* or *what* is being talked about in discourse.

Halliday (1976) in (Genc & Bada, 2006), emphasize that reference involves retrieving referential meaning and recognizing the entity that being referred to, thereby contributing to textual cohesion through the continuity of a reference. (Hidayat, 2016) adds that reference reflects the interaction between language and real world meaning, where words relate to other words or elements within a context.

This study adopts the theory of reference proposed by (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) as a part of their broader framework of textual cohesion. Reference is defined as a semantic relationship in which a linguistic element, such as a pronoun, demonstrative, or comparative, points to another entity for its meaning. This function plays a vital role in helping readers or listeners track who or what is being talked about throughout a text. According to (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), reference provides continuity within discourse by linking words to either something already mentioned (anaphora), something that will be mentioned (cataphora), or something outside the text (exophora).

Types of Reference

Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorize reference into three main types: personal, demonstrative, and comparative.

1. Personal Reference

Personal reference involves the use of personal pronouns, possessive determiners, and possessive pronouns to indicate participants in the discourse. These references often relate to persons or entities already introduced or assumed to be known.

- a. Personal pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they
- b. Possessive determiners: my, your, their, its, our, his, her
- c. Possessive pronouns: mine, yours, hers, theirs, ours

Example:

"John is a smart student. He always does his homework."

He and his refer back to John (anaphoric reference).

2. Demonstrative References

Demonstrative reference is expressed through demonstrative determiners (this, that, these, those, the) and adverbs (here, there, then, now), which refer to the location, time, or identity of a referent within or outside the text. This type of reference may be selective (pointing to something specific) or non-selective (e.g., "the").

Example:

"These abuses are clearly unreasonable."

These refers back to abuses mentioned in previous discourse (anaphoric).

(Halliday & Hasan, 1976) further classify demonstrative reference based on proximity:

- a. Near: this, these, here
- b. Far: that, those, there
- c. Neutral: the (used generically or specifically)

3. Comparative Reference

Comparative reference signals that two items are being compared, based on similarity, difference, or quantity. This is expressed using adjectives (e.g., same, similar, better) and adverbs (e.g., more, equally, otherwise).

Comparative reference is divided into two subtypes:

- a. General comparison (identity/similarity/difference): same, other, different, similarly, otherwise
- b. Particular comparison (specific quantity or degree): more, better, so many, less, equally

Example:

"The newer sounds were more disruptive."

Newer is a comparative adjective that indirectly refers back to earlier or more traditional sounds.

2.3 Song Lyrics

A song is a form of artistic expression that combines music and lyrics to convey meaning, emotion, and human experience. While many people enjoy songs for the voice or musical quality, songs also serve as a powerful medium for communication. Songs are understandable, pleasurable, and authentic, containing everyday language that people use in real life. They function not only as entertainment, but also as tools for expression and learning. (Pakpahan, Herman, Purba, & Purba, 2020) emphasize that songs are a way for humans to communicate

and collaborate, while Thao and Herman (2021) describe music as a lifelong companion that provides amusement and emotional support. In essence, songs reflect various aspects of life, with lyrics adding depth, beauty, and resonance that make the listening experience more meaningful and engaging.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the use of referential expressions in selected song lyrics. A qualitative approach is chosen to allow for an in-depth interpretation of how reference functions in natural, expressive language such as song lyrics. The analysis is grounded in Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of reference as part of textual cohesion.

Data Sources

The primary data of this research are the official lyrics of six selected songs from NIKI Zefanya's album Buzz. The selected songs are:

- Buzz
- Did You Like Her in the Morning?
- Tsunami
- Too Much of a Good Thing
- Heirloom Pain
- Paths

These 6 songs were chosen because of their lyrical richness, emotional tone, and the presence of pronouns, demonstratives, and comparative structures that are relevant to the reference analysis. The lyrics were collected from the official releases and reliable music platforms to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

Data Collection

Data were collected through document analysis. The researcher first transcribed and segmented the lyrics line by line, then identified all words and phrases that function as referential expressions. The expressions were grouped based on Halliday and Hasan's classification, including personal reference, demonstrative reference, and comparative reference.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study follows the model proposed by (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013), which consists of three interrelated components: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions/verification. These components are used to systematically analyze the referential expressions found in the lyrics of selected songs from NIKI Zefanya's Buzz album. This model is considered appropriate for qualitative research, as it emphasizes the simplification, organization, and interpretation of textual data.

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing the raw data obtained from the song lyrics. After collecting the official lyrics of six selected songs, the researcher began the analysis by identifying all instances of referential expressions, particularly personal, demonstrative, and comparative references as categorized by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Each relevant phrase or word was highlighted, labeled, and sorted based on its type and function.

2. Data Display

In the second stage, the identified data were displayed in the form of tables and thematic groupings to allow for easier interpretation. These displays included categorized examples of each type of referential expression found in the lyrics, along with contextual explanations. This process made it easier to observe patterns, such as which type of reference appeared most frequently and how they were distributed across different songs. The use of data display also supported the analysis of how referential expressions contribute to the emotional tone and interpretive experience of the listener.

3. Drawing Conclusions and Verification

The final step in the analysis involved drawing conclusions based on the condensed and displayed data. The researcher interpreted how each type of reference contributed to meaning construction within the song lyrics. Conclusions were drawn regarding which referential types were dominant and how they functioned to build narrative cohesion and listener engagement. Verification was conducted by cross-checking findings with the research objectives and ensuring the consistency of interpretations across the analyzed songs.

By applying this structured approach, the study provides insight into the dominant use of referential expressions and their semantic and emotional impact within NIKI's songwriting style. This process supports the overall goal of understanding how reference serves as a meaningful linguistic device in song lyrics.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Types of Referential Expressions in NIKI's Zefanya's Selected Songs

1. Buzz

Table 1. Referential expressions identified in Buzz

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	I feel like hot shit, wanna make out In your car in the lot of a drugstore	I, your	Personal	"I" refers to the speaker, "your" refers to the addressed listener/partner
2.	I'm about to fall for you	I, you	Personal	Indicates emotional openness and directness
3.	The song's about to start (can you hear it?) The door's about to open (can you feel it?) The flower's about to fruit (can you see it?)	You	Personal	Second-person engagement
4.	It's that feeling, a propeller The first line of a fucking bestseller	That	Demonstrative	Refers to shared but abstract emotion
5.	The song's about to start (can you hear it?) The door's about to open (can you feel it?) The flower's about to fruit (can you see it?)	The song, the flower	Demonstrative	Symbolic reference
6.	Like hot shit/Like a propeller	Like	Comparative	Similes enhance emotion
7.	So stellar	So stellar	Comparative	Emphasizes the intensity of "that feeling"
8.	Wondering why you're so nervous around your so-called friend	You, your, friend	Personal	"you/your" continues the second-person intimacy, "friend" is a third-party mention

2. Did You Like Her in the Morning?

Table 2. Referential expressions identified in Did You Like Her in the Morning?

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	Did you like her in the morning?	You, her	Personal	Addresses listener and another person
2.	I know it'd be easier if I just didn't ask	I	Personal	Expresses internal dialogue
3.	Did your hands find her waist when she got sloppy?	You, her	Personal	Evokes jealousy
4.	And the story goes you blame it on the lonely nights	That	Demonstrative	Simile enhancing emotional impact

3. Tsunami

Table 3. Referential expressions identified in Tsunami

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	You came crashing in like an act of God	You	Personal	Emotive address of lover
2.	It's like you've known me through all my past lives	You, me, my	Personal	Building intimacy and shared history
3.	Like an act of God	Like	Comparative	Second-person engagement

4. Too Much of a Good Thing

Table 4. Referential expressions identified in Too Much of a Good Thing

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	You're the bee's knees, I'm the bull's eye	You, I	Personal	Expresses mutual admiration
2.	Too much of a good thing	Too much	Comparative	Emotional excess
3.	Isn't that a real good thing?	That	Demonstrative	Points to previously stated phrase

5. Heirloom Pain

Table 5. Referential expressions identified in Heirloom Pain

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	My dad's temper and mom's mistakes	My	Personal	Shows personal and familiar connection
2.	This heirloom pain	This	Demonstrative	Emotional reference
3.	Only half is sure	Half	Comparative	Degree of certainty

6. Paths

Table 6. Referential expressions identified in Paths

NO	Lyrics	Referential expressions	Type	Explanation
1.	My youth is in your past	My, your	Personal	Expresses reflective relationship
2.	This path / That feeling	This, that	Demonstrative	Symbolic and emotional expression
3.	Better as being you / Just young and entitled	Better, just	comparative	Comparative references to identity

Table 7. Total referential expressions identified across all selected songs

Type of Reference	Total Occurrences	Percentage
Personal reference	53	71.6%
Demonstrative reference	9	12.1%
Comparative reference	12	16.2%
Total	74	100%

Based on the analysis of six selected songs by NIKI's Zefanya, a total of 74 referential expressions were identified and categorized into three types. Personal reference occurred the most frequently, with 53 instances found across the lyrics. These are primarily realized through personal pronouns (*I, you, we, me, her*) and possessive determiners (*my, your, our*), serving to express intimacy, subjectivity, and relational stance between the speaker and the listener. Demonstrative references, which appeared 9 times, are constructed using demonstrative determiners (*this, that, these, the*) and typically function to anchor specific emotional or narrative elements that are context-dependent.

Lastly, comparative references were observed 12 times, commonly expressed through comparative forms such as *better, like, too much, or only half*. These are used to emphasize contrast, evaluate emotional states, and enhance poetic imagery within the lyrics. The distribution of these referential types reflects the artist's heavy reliance on personal and emotive language to construct lyrical meaning and emotional connection.

The Contribution of Referential Expressions to Emotional Engagement and Interpretation in NIKI Zefanya's Selected Songs

1. Personal Reference

Personal references in the six selected songs are the most frequently used type, primarily realized through personal pronouns (*I, you, we, me, her*) and possessive determiners (*my, your, our*). Linguistically, these forms serve to identify participants in discourse and are essential in constructing interpersonal meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

In NIKI's lyrics, the frequent use of personal references contributes to a strong sense of emotional intimacy and vulnerability. For example, in *Buzz*, the repetition of "*I'm about to fall for you*" positions the speaker in a moment of emotional exposure, inviting listeners to empathize with the unfolding romantic tension. Likewise, in *Did You Like Her in the Morning?*, personal references such as *you* and *her* create emotional friction and relational conflict, intensifying the listener's emotional investment.

These references allow the audience to interpret the lyrics as a personal confession, making the experience feel direct and relatable. The use of first-person (*I, me*) also adds authenticity and internal perspective, while second-person references (*you, your*) draw the

listener into a dialogic space. Altogether, personal references act as linguistic bridges between the speaker and the audience, enhancing emotional connection and understanding.

2. Demonstrative Reference

Demonstrative references in the lyrics, such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *the*, are used to point to emotional states, objects, or situations that are either known in the shared context or metaphorically constructed. These forms are deictic, meaning their interpretation relies on contextual cues

For instance, in *Buzz*, the phrase “*that feeling, a propeller*” doesn’t refer to any concrete object, but rather invokes a shared, abstract emotion, one the listener is expected to interpret intuitively. In *Heirloom Pain*, “*this heirloom pain*” symbolizes generational trauma. The demonstrative *this* emotionally localizes the pain, making it feel personal and urgent.

By using demonstratives metaphorically, NIKI invites the audience to project their own emotional interpretations, creating an affective engagement that transcends literal language. These references signal emotional turning points, highlight symbolic moments, and contribute to the poetic ambiguity that makes the lyrics emotionally layered.

3. Comparative Reference

Comparative references, expressed through comparative adjectives and adverbs (*like*, *better*, *too much*, *only half*), function to create evaluation, metaphor, and contrast. These expressions amplify emotional states by comparing them to more vivid or exaggerated imagery. In *Tsunami*, the line “*like an act of God*” equates the entrance of a lover to a powerful natural force, dramatically emphasizing emotional impact. In *Too Much of a Good Thing*, “*too much*” is used to describe overwhelming emotional pleasure that might become unbearable.

Such references contribute to listener engagement by appealing to metaphorical thinking. They make abstract emotional states more tangible and memorable, allowing the listener to feel the intensity of what is being described. Comparatives often enhance the poetic and artistic depth of the lyrics, turning internal feelings into shareable mental images.

5. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to explore the types and functions of referential expressions in six selected songs from NIKI Zefanya’s 2024 album *Buzz*. The analysis identified a total of 74 referential expressions, with personal references being the most frequent (53 occurrences), followed by comparative references (12), and demonstrative references (9). Personal references, such as *I*, *you*, and *my*, help build emotional closeness between the speaker and the listener, creating a sense of direct connection. Demonstrative references like *this* and *that* are

used to refer to feelings, moments, or ideas that are emotionally important or shared. Comparative references, such as like and too much, allow the artist to describe emotions by comparing them to something else, adding depth and imagery to the lyrics.

These referential expressions are not only part of the grammar but also play an important role in how meaning is built in the songs. They help the listener feel personally involved in the story, understand the speaker's emotions, and interpret the lyrics in a deeper and more relatable way. Through personal, demonstrative, and comparative forms, the lyrics become more expressive, poetic, and emotionally engaging. This shows that small linguistic choices, like using pronouns or comparisons, can have a strong effect on how music communicates meaning and emotion.

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