



## Language Metafunctions in Pamungkas's "To the Bone" (A Systemic Functional Linguistics Analysis)

Nabilah Ani Soraya<sup>1</sup>, Dwi Zalfa Zahirah<sup>2\*</sup>, Naila 'Ilmi Khofifah<sup>3</sup>,  
Arya Gandhi Narendra<sup>4</sup>, Reni Oktafia Agustin<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1-5</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri K,H, Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

\*Correspondence author: [dwi.zalfa.zahirah@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:dwi.zalfa.zahirah@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** This study examines Pamungkas's song "To the Bone" through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions as proposed by M.A.K. Halliday. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research explores how the lyrics represent emotional depth, longing, and devotion through linguistic choices. The ideational metafunction reveals the representation of personal experiences and emotional states, as seen in the recurring mental processes that express desire and affection. The interpersonal metafunction highlights the close emotional relationship between the singer and the listener, employing personal pronouns, modality, and mood to convey sincerity, vulnerability, and affection. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction ensures cohesion and coherence through repetition, thematic structure, and parallelism, which emphasize the constancy of emotion and strengthen the lyrical unity. By uncovering these linguistic processes, this study demonstrates how "To the Bone" serves as a powerful medium of emotional expression, illustrating how language in music functions not only as art but also as a reflection of human intimacy and emotional truth.

**Keywords:** Ideational Meaning; Interpersonal Meaning; Metafunction; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Textual Meaning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in human life, not only as a means of communication but also as a way of creating and interpreting meaning. In line with this idea, Halliday (1978) explains that language functions as a *social semiotic system*, meaning it is used by people to make sense of their experiences and relationships within society. Through this perspective, language is seen as more than just a structure of words or grammar; it is a living system that reflects how humans think, feel, and interact with one another. Language is an essential part of human life, as it serves as the primary medium for expressing thoughts, emotions, ideas, and intentions. As stated by Borghi (2023) in his book *Language as a Social Tool*, language acts as both a communicative and cognitive instrument that helps individuals coordinate actions, share emotions, and build social relationships. This shows that language is deeply connected to human cognition and interaction, forming the foundation of social life. Similarly, Fudhaili (2024) points out that through language, people engage in meaningful exchanges that strengthen understanding, emotional awareness, and communication skills. Nani (2024) also emphasizes that language plays an important role in shaping identity and relationships, serving as a bridge for expressing ideas and emotions in various social contexts.

In linguistics, language is examined not only for its structure but also for the ways it functions as a medium of meaning in communication. One of the most prominent approaches

that explores this functional aspect is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), proposed by M.A.K. Halliday. Rather than viewing language as a fixed system of grammar, Halliday interprets it as a dynamic process through which people construct and exchange meaning in different situations. This theory highlights that every linguistic choice whether in words, clauses, or structures reflects specific social purposes and contexts. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) identify three interrelated metafunctions that operate simultaneously in all communication: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Each of these functions contributes to how language represents experience, builds relationships, and organizes messages into coherent discourse.

These three metafunctions play a vital role in showing how meaning is created through language. The ideational metafunction focuses on how language represents human experience and the surrounding world. It explains how people use linguistic choices to describe actions, thoughts, and relationships, allowing them to make sense of both external events and internal feelings. As Bakuuro (2017) notes, this function enables individuals to express what they do, think, and feel in daily life through linguistic processes that reflect their experiences. The interpersonal metafunction highlights how language helps speakers interact with others and form relationships through expressions of attitude, judgment, and emotion. Within SFL theory, linguistic resources such as Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation (Martin & White, 2005) are used to show personal stance or emotional involvement. A practical example can be seen in Saghir (2020) analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "*I Have a Dream*," where features like mood and pronouns were used effectively to build solidarity and persuade listeners. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction deals with how information is structured so that meaning can be delivered smoothly and coherently. As explained by Halliday and Matthiessen (2009) it involves organizing ideas, linking sentences, and emphasizing key points to make a text cohesive and easy to follow. Collectively, these metafunctions illustrate how language works not only to communicate but also to reflect human experience, thought, and emotion within a social context.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has been widely used in various fields, including education, media, and literature, because it provides tools to understand how language expresses meaning in real situations Martin and White (2005) In the field of literary and discourse studies, SFL helps researchers identify how writers or speakers convey messages, attitudes, and ideologies through linguistic choices. In the context of music, song lyrics are a rich form of linguistic expression that combines emotion, rhythm, and meaning. Machin and

Van Leeuwen (2007) explain that song lyrics are not only artistic texts but also social texts that reflect the songwriter's feelings and the culture they belong to

Pamungkas's "*To the Bone*" (2019) is one of the Indonesian songs written in English that beautifully illustrates this. The song expresses deep emotion, longing, and devotion through simple but powerful lyrics. Phrases like "*I want you to the bone*" and "*Maybe the greatest love of all is who the eyes can't see*" show strong feelings and reflective thought. The song's language choices such as the use of repetition, modality, and personal pronouns reveal how meaning is built through both linguistic and emotional dimensions.

Previous studies have applied SFL to analyze the metafunctions in song lyrics by international artists. For instance, Sari & Anindita (2020) studied Adele's 25 album and found that mental and relational processes were dominant in expressing emotion. Rahayu et al. (2025) analyzed Whitney Houston's "*The Greatest Love of All*" and showed how interpersonal meaning was used to convey empowerment and hope. However, there are still few studies focusing on English-language songs by Indonesian artists using all three metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the language metafunctions found in Pamungkas's "*To the Bone*" based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. The study explores how the song's lyrics represent experiences, express interpersonal meanings, and organize ideas textually. By doing so, it is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how language in music conveys meaning, emotion, and cultural identity.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M.A.K. Halliday views language as a social semiotic system used to construct meaning in context. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), language simultaneously realizes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction represents human experience through processes such as mental, material, and relational processes, which are often dominant in song lyrics to express emotions and inner states (Bakuuro, 2017; Yati, 2022). The interpersonal metafunction focuses on how language builds relationships and expresses attitudes through mood, modality, and personal pronouns (Halliday, 1978; Martin & White, 2005). Meanwhile, the textual metafunction organizes messages into cohesive and coherent texts through thematic structure, repetition, and parallelism (Egins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Previous studies have shown that SFL is effective in analyzing song lyrics as it reveals how linguistic choices convey emotion, intimacy, and meaning (Rahayu et al., 2025). However, studies

applying all three metafunctions to English-language songs by Indonesian artists remain limited, which makes this study on Pamungkas's *"To the Bone"* relevant and necessary.

### **3. METHOD**

This study applied a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The main purpose of this method was to describe and interpret how language was used in Pamungkas's *"To the Bone"* to express meaning through the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. A qualitative approach was considered suitable because this study aimed to explore meaning rather than to measure or count linguistic elements statistically. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explained, qualitative research focused on understanding human experiences through language and interpretation, allowing the researcher to identify patterns and meanings as they naturally occurred in a text.

The design of this study was descriptive in nature because it focused on explaining how linguistic elements functioned in expressing meaning. According to Ary et al. (2009) descriptive qualitative research was appropriate when the goal was to describe characteristics, functions, and patterns of a phenomenon, in this case, the linguistic realization of meaning in song lyrics. The researcher acted as the main instrument of analysis, responsible for interpreting the data based on theoretical principles SFL framework from (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through careful observation and interpretation, the researcher identified how different linguistic choices in the lyrics realized the three metafunctions simultaneously.

The primary data of this study were taken from the lyrics of Pamungkas's *"To the Bone,"* released in 2019. The lyrics were taken from official sources available online and were verified through the artist's official platforms to ensure accuracy. This song was chosen because it expressed complex emotional and interpersonal meanings through simple yet powerful language, making it suitable for metafunctional analysis. The lyrics were also written in English by an Indonesian artist, which added another layer of cultural and linguistic interest to the study.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques. The researcher first read the lyrics thoroughly to understand their general meaning and emotional tone. After that, the lyrics were divided into clauses to identify meaningful units that carried specific linguistic functions. Each clause was then examined to determine how it contributed to the ideational, interpersonal, or textual meanings in the song. Particular attention was paid to process types (such as material, mental, and relational verbs), mood structures (declarative, interrogative, imperative), and cohesive devices like repetition or conjunctions. These features were carefully identified and classified to reveal the song's metafunctional patterns.

Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), focusing on how language expressed meaning through the three metafunctions. The analysis began by examining how the lyrics represented experience and emotion through ideational meaning, identifying process types and participants in each clause. Then, the study explored how the song established relationships and expressed attitudes through interpersonal meaning, focusing on pronouns, modality, and mood. Finally, the textual metafunction was analyzed to see how the song achieved cohesion and coherence through thematic structure and repetition. The findings from these three metafunctions were interpreted together to show how language worked as a complete system for expressing meaning in music.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of the song *“To the Bone”* by Pamungkas using Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, focusing on the three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The purpose of this analysis is to explain how Pamungkas expresses emotion, relationship, and structure through his linguistic choices in the song lyrics.

##### Ideational Metafunction

**Table 1.** Results Ideational Metafunction By Song To The Bone.

| Lyrics   | Type Of Process                        | Explanation   |
|--|--|---|
| <i>“Have I ever told you I want you to the bone?”</i>      | Mental process ( <b>want</b> )         | The mental process <b>“want”</b> shows deep desire and emotional longing.                           |
| <i>“Maybe if you can see what I feel through my bone.”</i> | Mental process ( <b>see, feel</b> )    | Expresses emotional transparency and sincerity.   |
| <i>“I’m already be yours.”</i>                             | Relational process ( <b>be</b> )       | Indicates belonging and commitment.   |
| <i>“Take me home, I’m fallin’.”</i>                        | Material process ( <b>take, fall</b> ) | The material process <b>“take”</b> and <b>“fallin’”</b> shows emotional movement toward connection. |

The clause *“Have I ever told you I want you to the bone?”* features the verb *want*, which belongs to the category of desiderative mental process a type of mental process that expresses deep emotional desire or longing. Within the framework of the ideational metafunction proposed by M.A.K. Halliday, such mental processes represent the speaker’s inner experiences, including feelings, desires, and thoughts.

Yati (2022), in her study of Bruno Mars’s song lyrics, found that *wanting* appears as one of the subtypes of mental processes alongside *thinking*, *feeling*, and *seeing*. Similarly,

Sinaga et al. (2024) in "Conveying the Meaning through Experiential Metafunction on Song Lyrics" observed that mental processes are often dominant in song lyrics as they portray the internal emotional state of the singer or the lyrical persona. Furthermore, Ismail and Dahlia (2023) explain that in transitivity analysis, mental processes are categorized into three main types: cognitive (thinking/knowing), perceptive (seeing/hearing), and affective/desiderative (feeling, liking, wanting). The verb *want* clearly falls under the desiderative type, indicating emotional yearning or affective condition.

Therefore, the use of *want* in this lyric does not simply express an action or request but reveals an intense emotional experience the singer's existential desire to be connected "to the bone." This exemplifies the essence of the ideational metafunction, where language represents both internal and external human experiences through deliberate linguistic choices.

### Interpersonal Metafunction

**Table 2.** Results Interpersonal Metafunction By Song To The Bone.

| Lyrics  | Type Of Process                     | Explanation  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| "I want you to the bone."                                 | Personal pronouns ( <b>I, You</b> ) | The use of "I" and "you" builds closeness and shows sincerity. |
| "Would that be alright?"                                  | Mood type interrogative             | Shows hesitation and emotional need.                           |
| "Maybe we seek for something that we couldn't ever have." | Modality ( <b>maybe</b> )           | A relational clause showing belonging and devotion.            |
| "Should I keep holding on?"                               | Mood type Modal question            | Expresses inner conflict and uncertainty.                      |

The interpersonal metafunction in Pamungkas's "To the Bone" illustrates how language is used to express emotions, attitudes, and relationships between the singer and the listener. Through the use of pronouns, mood, and modality, Pamungkas conveys intimacy, vulnerability, and emotional negotiation all of which represent the interpersonal aspect of language as described by (Halliday, 1978).

The line "I want you to the bone" uses the first-person pronoun *I* and the second-person *you*, forming a direct and personal connection between the speaker and the listener. This creates a sense of closeness and emotional honesty, as if the singer is directly confessing his feelings to the listener. This finding aligns with Silalahi et al. (2024) in the *Bulletin of Science Education*, who explain that the use of pronouns in song lyrics functions as a means of building intimacy and engaging the audience emotionally, showing that language operates not only structurally but also socially as a medium of relationship building.

In the clause “*Would that be alright?*”, the interrogative mood expresses uncertainty and the need for reassurance from the listener. This linguistic structure reflects an emotional negotiation where the singer seeks validation and emotional reciprocity. Similarly, Purwandari et al. (2022) found that mood and modality in song lyrics are essential linguistic tools for expressing dependence, vulnerability, and emotional reassurance. The question form here acts as an interpersonal exchange, strengthening the emotional bond between the singer and the listener.

The next clause, “*Maybe we seek for something that we couldn’t ever have,*” employs the modal adverb *maybe*, indicating probability and doubt. This lexical choice conveys reflection and emotional hesitation, as the singer contemplates the complexity of love and the sense of longing for something unattainable. Therefore, Pamungkas’s use of *maybe* reflects a reflective and introspective emotional tone that invites the listener to share his uncertainty.

Finally, the line “*Should I keep holding on?*” combines modality (*should*) with an interrogative mood, revealing inner conflict and emotional struggle. The singer questions his perseverance in maintaining the relationship, exposing the tension between hope and despair. As Pranoto et al. (2020) also highlight, the combination of mood and modality in such expressions portrays emotional dilemmas and deepens the listener’s empathy with the lyrical persona.

Overall, the interpersonal metafunction in “*To the Bone*” demonstrates how Pamungkas uses language to build an emotional dialogue with his audience. Pronouns establish intimacy, modality conveys hesitation and reflection, and interrogative mood expresses emotional negotiation. Together, these linguistic choices show that language, as Trinh et al. (2017) emphasizes, functions not only to represent meaning but also to *enact relationships* and reveal human emotions in social interaction.

### Textual Metafunction

**Table 3.** Results Textual Metafunction By Song To The Bone.

| Lyrics   | Type Of Process              | Explanation                              |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| “ <i>I want you to the bone.</i> ”<br>(repeated throughout)  | Repetition                   | Creates cohesion and emotional emphasis. |
| “ <i>Maybe we seek for something that we couldn’t ever have / Maybe we choose the only love we know we won’t accept.</i> ” | Parallelism and conjunctions | Connects ideas and shows reflection.     |
| “ <i>I’m fallin’, I’m fallin’.</i> ”   | Repetition and rhythm        | Reinforces emotional intensity.          |

The textual metafunction focuses on how language is organized to make a message flow smoothly and meaningfully. In "To the Bone," Pamungkas demonstrates this function through the use of repetition, parallelism, and conjunctive elements such as *maybe*, which together create cohesion and emotional continuity throughout the song.

The repeated phrase "I want you to the bone" acts as a form of lexical cohesion that holds the song's central theme intense longing and affection together. According to Sujatna et al. (2021), repetition serves as a key textual strategy that reinforces the dominant idea and helps listeners trace recurring meanings across different sections of a text. In this context, Pamungkas uses repetition not only for rhythmical appeal but also to emphasize emotional persistence and textual unity.

A similar cohesion effect can be observed in the lines "Maybe we seek for something that we couldn't ever have / Maybe we choose the only love we know we won't accept." Through parallel structure, the songwriter connects two related yet contrasting ideas: desire and hopelessness. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe this as *grammatical cohesion*, where structural similarity supports logical progression while maintaining emotional harmony. This pattern gives the lyrics a reflective rhythm and strengthens the song's internal coherence. The line "I'm fallin', I'm fallin'" also contributes to the textual flow. Pamungkas achieves this by repeating the same clause to express deepening emotion an ongoing descent into love and vulnerability. In musical texts, such repetition reinforces both cohesion and affective intensity, creating a seamless connection between structure and feeling (Barman, Awekar & Kothari, 2019).

Taken together, the textual patterns in "To the Bone" illustrate how linguistic choices shape coherence, rhythm, and emotional depth. Repetition highlights the persistence of longing, parallelism balances contrasting ideas, and conjunctions maintain reflective flow. As noted by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), textual organization ensures that meaning is not only conveyed but also felt, allowing listeners to experience the song as an integrated emotional narrative.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that Pamungkas's song "To the Bone" effectively realizes the three metafunctions of language proposed in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The ideational metafunction is mainly expressed through mental and relational processes that represent deep emotional experiences and longing. The interpersonal metafunction is realized through the use of personal pronouns, modality, and interrogative mood, which build intimacy and convey

sincerity and vulnerability. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction is achieved through repetition and parallel structures that create cohesion and reinforce emotional consistency. Overall, the findings show that language in song lyrics functions as a powerful medium for expressing human emotion and interpersonal meaning. This study suggests that future researchers explore a wider range of song genres or compare works from different artists using the SFL framework to gain broader insights. Further studies may also combine SFL with other linguistic approaches to deepen the analysis of meaning in musical texts.

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