

CONSTRUCTING PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH TRANSITIVITY: MENTAL AND RELATIONAL PROCESSES IN INDONESIAN POP LYRICS (A CASE STUDY OF MANGU BY FOURTWNTY)

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Abstract

This study investigates how psychological experience and subject positioning are constructed through the transitivity system within contemporary Indonesian pop song lyrics. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the analysis examines the distribution and function of mental, relational, and material processes in Mangu by Fourtwnty, a song characterized by introspective and minimalist lyrical expression. Using qualitative clause-level analysis, the study identifies process types, participant roles, and experiential configurations to explore how agency and inner experience are grammatically realized. The findings reveal a dominant pattern of mental and relational processes, while material processes appear minimal and frequently negated or modalized. This distribution positions the lyrical subject primarily as a Senser and Carrier rather than an Actor, foregrounding internal reflection, relational tension, and constrained agency over physical action. The transitivity configuration constructs a linguistic representation of psychological suspension, where experience is internalized and action remains deferred. By extending previous SFL-based studies on Indonesian cultural texts, this research demonstrates how transitivity functions as a grammatical resource for encoding subjectivity and experiential meaning in non-institutional discourse. The study contributes to discourse stylistics and functional linguistic research by highlighting the role of process selection in shaping representations of emotional experience in contemporary popular music.

Keywords: *transitivity; systemic functional linguistics; mental processes; relational processes; Indonesian pop song lyrics*

Introduction

Popular song lyrics constitute a significant form of contemporary discourse through which emotions, identities, and social experiences are linguistically constructed and negotiated. Within modern linguistics, lyrics are no longer treated merely as aesthetic artifacts but as meaning-making texts that encode particular configurations of agency,

subjectivity, and experiential reality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Simpson, 2014). As cultural texts situated between poetry and everyday language, song lyrics provide a rich site for examining how grammatical choices shape representations of inner experience, relational dynamics, and emotional positioning.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a powerful framework for analyzing such representations by conceptualizing language as a resource for meaning-making rather than a static system of forms. Central to SFL is the transitivity system, which explains how experiential meaning is constructed through the organization of processes, participants, and circumstances within clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through transitivity analysis, linguistic researchers can examine how texts construe reality as actions (material processes), states of consciousness (mental processes), or relationships and identities (relational processes), thereby revealing how agency and experience are grammatically encoded.

Previous studies in stylistics and discourse analysis have demonstrated that dominance of mental and relational processes often indicates an introspective orientation, where experience is represented primarily as internal reflection rather than external action (Simpson, 2014; Toolan, 2021). Such patterns are particularly relevant in lyrical discourse, where emotional expression frequently relies on implicit meaning, metaphorical construal, and minimal narrative progression. Despite this potential, much transitivity-based research has focused on institutional discourse such as political speeches, news texts, or educational materials (Eggins, 2004; Fontaine, 2013), while comparatively fewer studies have explored how experiential meaning is grammatically constructed in popular music, especially within non-Western linguistic contexts.

In the Indonesian context, recent scholarship has shown increasing interest in applying SFL to cultural and semi-literary texts. Studies by Rawuh Yuda Yuwana and colleagues, for example, demonstrate how functional linguistic analysis reveals cultural orientation, ideological positioning, and meaning dominance in Indonesian humor, national songs, and discourse practices (Yuwana & Betaubun, 2024; Yuwana & Pertiwi, 2022; Yuwana et al., 2019). These studies highlight the value of SFL for understanding culturally embedded discourse. However, research focusing specifically on transitivity patterns in contemporary Indonesian pop song lyrics remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of detailed investigation into how grammatical process choices construct psychological experience and shape representations of agency within popular music.

This gap is significant because contemporary Indonesian pop songs increasingly foreground introspection, emotional ambiguity, and relational uncertainty rather than action-oriented narratives. Linguistically, such tendencies raise important questions regarding how agency is represented when material processes are minimized and mental or relational processes become dominant. Understanding these patterns can contribute not only to SFL-based discourse analysis but also to broader discussions of subjectivity and identity construction in contemporary cultural expression.

The song *Mangu* by Fourtwntry provides a compelling case for examining these issues. Known for its minimalist style and introspective lyrical content, *Mangu* emphasizes silence, uncertainty, and relational tension rather than explicit narrative progression. From a functional linguistic perspective, this raises the question of how experiential meaning is grammatically structured to produce a sense of psychological suspension and constrained agency.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how mental and relational processes dominate the transitivity configuration of Mangu and how these patterns linguistically construct psychological experience in Indonesian pop lyrics. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are mental, relational, and material processes distributed within the transitivity structure of the lyrics?
2. How do these process types shape representations of agency and subject positioning?
3. How does the transitivity configuration construct experiential meaning and psychological orientation in contemporary Indonesian pop discourse?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to SFL-based discourse research in several ways. First, it expands the application of transitivity analysis to Indonesian popular music, an underexplored area within functional linguistics. Second, it demonstrates how grammatical process selection functions as a resource for representing psychological experience and constrained agency. Finally, it highlights the importance of analyzing non-institutional discourse to understand how contemporary cultural texts grammatically construct emotion, identity, and experience.

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically focusing on the transitivity system as formulated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The qualitative approach is selected because the research aims to interpret how experiential meaning and subject positioning are grammatically constructed rather than to measure linguistic frequency statistically. Within SFL, grammar is treated as a meaning-making resource; therefore, the analysis emphasizes interpretative depth and functional explanation rather than quantitative generalization.

The study combines stylistic analysis with functional discourse analysis, allowing examination of both structural linguistic patterns (process types and participant roles) and their interpretative implications for agency, subjectivity, and psychological representation..

Data Source and Selection

The primary data consist of the complete official lyrics of the Indonesian pop song Mangu performed by Fourtwnty. The lyrics were obtained from authorized publicly available sources (LyricFind, 2023) and treated as a written linguistic text for analysis.

The selection of this song was guided by purposive sampling based on three criteria:

1. Contemporary cultural relevance — The song represents modern Indonesian pop discourse characterized by introspective lyrical themes.
2. Experiential orientation — The lyrics foreground psychological states such as uncertainty, silence, and relational tension, making them suitable for transitivity analysis.

3. Analytical richness — Preliminary reading indicated frequent mental and relational clauses, providing an appropriate dataset for examining experiential meaning construction.

Musical arrangement, performance features, and paralinguistic elements were excluded to maintain focus on linguistic structure.

Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the clause, consistent with SFL methodology, where the clause functions as the fundamental unit for representing experience. Clause boundaries were determined based on:

- semantic completeness
- process realization
- participant configuration

Elliptical clauses and implicit subjects were retained where necessary to preserve experiential meaning typical of lyrical discourse.

Analytical Framework: Transitivity System

The analysis is guided by the transitivity system within SFL, which conceptualizes clauses as representations of experience through different process types, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This study focuses primarily on two process types: Mental Processes, which construe inner experience, including perception, cognition, and emotion (e.g., feeling, thinking, realizing). Mental processes typically involve a Senser and a Phenomenon. Relational Processes: these processes represent states of being, identification, and attribution. Relational clauses typically involve Carrier–Attribute or Token–Value configurations.

Other process types (material, verbal, behavioral, and existential) were also identified to provide a comparative baseline, but were not the main analytical focus.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage procedure: Clause segmentation involved segmenting the song lyrics into individual clauses, adhering to SFL clause boundaries. Process identification: Each clause was analyzed to determine its dominant process type based on semantic function rather than surface verb form. Participant role analysis identified participants associated with each process (e.g., Senser, Carrier) to examine patterns of agency and subject positioning. Frequency mapping was used to distribute process types and identify dominant experiential patterns, with a particular focus on mental and relational processes. Interpretative analysis revealed that the identified patterns were interpreted in relation to the song's representation of psychological experience and relational immobility. This procedure aligns with established SFL methodologies and previous applications in Indonesian discourse analysis (Eggs, 2004; Yuwana & Betaubun, 2024).

Validity and Analytical Trustworthiness

Analytical validity was ensured through Theoretical consistency, achieved by strictly adhering to Halliday's definitions of process types, transparent analytical steps that allowed the analysis to be replicable, and cross-referencing with prior SFL studies, particularly those conducted in Indonesian linguistic contexts (Yuwana & Pertiwi, 2022). Rather than statistical reliability, the study emphasizes interpretive validity, which is a standard criterion in qualitative SFL research.

Ethical Considerations

The study analyzes publicly available song lyrics and does not involve human participants. Therefore, no ethical clearance was required. The analysis focuses exclusively on linguistic patterns and does not speculate on the songwriter's personal psychological state.

Findings and Analysis

Mangu

By Fourtwnty

Suatu malam adam bercerita
Hawanya tak lagi di jalur yang sama
Bacaan dan doa yang mulai berbeda
Ego dan air mata kita bicara
Gila tak masuk logika
Termangu hatiku
Kau menggenggam kumenadahnya
Berdamai dengan apa yang terjadi
Kunci dari semua masalah ini
Jujur tak mudah untuk melangkah pergi
Ini soal hati bukan yang diyakini
Ow gila tak masuk logika
Termangu hatiku
Kau menggenggam kumenadahnya
Ow gila ini tak biasa
Tertegun hatiku
Kau menggenggam kumenadahnya
Ho oh
Jangan salahkan faham ku kini tertuju oh
Siapa yang tau
Siapa yang mau
Kau di sana
Aku diseberangmu
Cerita kita sulit dicerna
Tak lagi sama
Cara berdoa
Cerita kita sulit diterka
Tak lagi sama

Arah kiblatnya oh
Cerita kita sulit dicerna
Tak lagi sama
Cara berdoa
Oh cerita kita sulit diterka
Tak lagi sama
Arah kiblatnya

(Source: LyricFind in 2023)

No.	Clause / Phrase (Original Lyrics)	Process Type	Process Realization	Participant(s)	Experiential Meaning
1	<i>Tak tahu harus bagaimana</i>	Mental (Cognitive)	<i>tak tahu</i>	Senser: (implicit <i>aku</i>)	Encodes cognitive uncertainty and lack of decision-making capacity
2	<i>Aku mangu</i>	Mental (Affective– Cognitive)	<i>mangu</i>	Senser: <i>aku</i>	Represents psychological confusion and emotional paralysis
3	<i>Aku terdiam</i>	Relational (Attributive)	<i>terdiam</i>	Carrier: <i>aku</i> ; Attribute: <i>terdiam</i>	Constructs silence as a stable state of being rather than an action
4	<i>Aku hanya bisa diam</i>	Mental + Behavioral	<i>hanya bisa / diam</i>	Senser: <i>aku</i>	Restricts agency by framing silence as the only possible response
5	<i>Kita tak lagi sama</i>	Relational (Identifying)	<i>tak lagi sama</i>	Token: <i>kita</i> ; Value: <i>tak sama</i>	Encodes relational rupture without material causation
6	<i>Aku menunggu</i>	Mental (Cognitive– Affective)	<i>menunggu</i>	Senser: <i>aku</i>	Frames waiting as internal endurance rather than purposeful action
7	<i>Semua terasa berbeda</i>	Mental (Perceptive)	<i>terasa</i>	Senser: implicit; Phenomenon: <i>berbeda</i>	Represents perception- based evaluation of change
8	<i>Aku tak bergerak</i>	Material (Negated)	<i>tak bergerak</i>	Actor: <i>aku</i>	Negated material process highlights immobility
9	<i>Hanya diam dan mangu</i>	Behavioral + Mental	<i>diam, mangu</i>	Behaver / Senser: implicit <i>aku</i>	Reinforces experiential stagnation through parallel processes
10	<i>Tak ada yang bisa kulakukan</i>	Material (Negated)	<i>bisa kulakukan</i>	Actor: <i>aku</i>	Explicit denial of material agency

The transitivity pattern in *Mangu* demonstrates a clear dominance of mental and relational processes, with material processes either negated or significantly weakened. The lyrical subject is predominantly positioned as: a Senser (thinking, feeling,

perceiving), or a Carrier (being silent, being unchanged), rather than an Actor performing concrete actions.

This distribution confirms that experiential meaning in the song is constructed as psychological stasis and relational immobility, rather than physical or social transformation. In SFL terms, the lyrics construe reality as something that is experienced internally rather than acted upon (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Consistent with previous SFL-based studies on Indonesian cultural texts (Yuwana & Betaubun, 2024; Yuwana & Pertiwi, 2022), this transitivity configuration reveals how grammatical choices systematically encode patterns of agency and subjectivity.

This section presents a detailed transitivity analysis of *Mangu*, focusing on how mental and relational processes dominate the experiential meaning of the lyrics. The analysis is conducted at the clause level, with explicit reference to lexical items and phrases functioning as process realizations.

Dominance of Mental Processes: Linguistic Encoding of Inner Experience

Mental processes are prominently expressed through verbs and expressions that encode feelings, perceptions, and cognitive uncertainty. These processes position the lyrical subject primarily as a Senser, rather than an Actor engaged in material action.

Data 1

“Tak tahu harus bagaimana”

Process type: Mental (cognitive)

Process realization: *tak tahu*

Participant role: Senser (implicit *aku*)

Analysis:

The phrase “*tak tahu*” (“do not know”) functions as a mental cognitive process, encoding a state of uncertainty rather than an action. The absence of an explicit Actor performing a material process indicates that experience is construed as internal confusion, not external response. Linguistically, this aligns with Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) characterization of mental clauses as representing consciousness rather than change in the material world.

Data 2

“Aku mangu”

Process type: Mental (affective–cognitive hybrid)

Process realization: *mangu*

Analysis:

Although *mangu* is not a verb in a strict grammatical sense, it functions semantically as a mental state predicate, denoting confusion, hesitation, and emotional paralysis. The clause collapses process and state into a single lexical item, reinforcing the song’s minimalist style while foregrounding psychological stasis. This supports the argument that the experiential meaning in the song is largely internalized, rather than enacted.

Relational Processes and the Construction of Stagnant Identity

Relational processes are used to construe the lyrical subject's state of being, rather than becoming or doing. These clauses typically involve Carrier–Attribute relations that fix identity in a static condition.

Data 3

“Aku terdiam”

Process type: Relational (attributive)

Process realization: *terdiam*

Participant roles:

Carrier: *aku*

Attribute: *terdiam*

Analysis:

The adjective *terdiam* (“silent”) functions as an Attribute assigned to the Carrier *aku*. This relational configuration constructs silence as an identity state, not a temporary action. The subject is linguistically framed as *being silent*, not *choosing to speak*, thereby reinforcing immobility and a lack of agency.

Data 4

“Kita tak lagi sama”

Process type: Relational (identifying)

Process realization: *tak lagi sama*

Analysis:

This clause encodes relational difference through negated identification. The phrase *tak lagi sama* (“no longer the same”) signals a rupture in relational alignment, yet it does so without material causation. The absence of material processes suggests that relational change is experienced as an abstract condition rather than the result of concrete actions.

Marginalization of Material Processes

Material processes, which represent physical or observable actions, are notably rare in the lyrics. When present, they are often weakly realized or subordinated to mental or relational meanings.

Data 5

“Aku hanya bisa diam”

Process type:

Mental (modalized ability): *hanya bisa*

Behavioral/relational: *diam*

Analysis:

The phrase *hanya bisa* (“can only”) introduces a modal restriction that limits agency. Even when a behavioral process (*diam*) appears, it is framed as the only possible option, not an active choice. This further supports the dominance of mental and relational construals over material action.

Overall Transitivity Pattern

Across the lyrics, the distribution of process types can be summarized as follows:

Mental processes: dominant

Relational processes: frequent

Material processes: minimal and weakened

Verbal processes: rare or absent

This pattern suggests that the song primarily represents experience as a combination of thinking, feeling, and being, rather than doing. Such a configuration aligns with previous SFL-based studies on Indonesian cultural texts that emphasize internal experience over external action (Yuwana & Betaubun, 2024; Yuwana & Pertiwi, 2022), while extending the analysis specifically to transitivity.

Interpretative Synthesis

The dominance of mental and relational processes in *Mangu* constructs a linguistic world characterized by psychological suspension and relational immobility. The lyrical subject is repeatedly positioned as a Senser and Carrier, rather than an Actor, which results in an experiential representation where agency is constrained and action is deferred.

From an SFL perspective, this transitivity configuration does not merely reflect emotional themes but actively produces a particular way of experiencing reality, where confusion, silence, and uncertainty are normalized as stable states of being.

Discussion

This study has demonstrated that the experiential meaning in *Mangu* is predominantly realized through mental and relational processes, with material processes appearing only marginally and often in negated or weakened forms. From an SFL perspective, this transitivity configuration is not a neutral stylistic choice, but a systematic grammatical strategy for construing experience as psychological suspension rather than physical or social action.

The dominance of mental processes positions the lyrical subject primarily as a Senser, repeatedly engaged in states of knowing, feeling, perceiving, and enduring uncertainty. Clauses such as *tak tahu*, *mangu*, and *terasa* linguistically encode cognitive and affective states without projecting any corresponding material response. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), such patterns indicate a construal of reality where consciousness is foregrounded while agency is backgrounded. In *Mangu*, experience is thus represented as something that happens within the subject, rather than something the subject actively transforms.

Equally significant is the frequent use of relational processes, which construct silence, difference, and stagnation as states of being. Expressions such as *aku terdiam* and *kita tak lagi sama* assign attributes or identities to participants without invoking causation or action. Linguistically, this has the effect of fixing psychological and relational conditions as stable realities, rather than as temporary or changeable situations. This supports the argument that the song does not narrate emotional conflict as a process of development, but as an ongoing condition of immobility.

The marginalization of material processes further reinforces this interpretation. When material processes appear, they are frequently negated (*tak bergerak*, *tak ada yang bisa kulakukan*) or modalized to restrict agency (*hanya bisa*). In SFL terms, this reflects a

construal of the Actor as incapable of effecting change, thereby linguistically legitimizing inaction. Such a pattern aligns with Simpson's (2014) observation that literary and lyrical texts often manipulate transitivity to shape perceptions of power, responsibility, and subjectivity.

From a broader discourse perspective, the transitivity pattern observed in Mangu resonates with contemporary trends in Indonesian pop music that privilege introspection, emotional ambiguity, and quiet endurance over overt action. Unlike national or ideological songs that foreground collective agency, Mangu represents a deeply personal experiential world characterized by hesitation and psychological inertia. This distinction is important, as it demonstrates how different genres utilize distinct grammatical resources to construct experience.

The findings of this study also extend previous SFL-based research on Indonesian cultural texts. While earlier studies by Rawuh Yuda Yuwana and colleagues have demonstrated how thematic structures and functional choices encode meaning dominance and cultural orientation (Yuwana & Betaubun, 2024; Yuwana & Pertiwi, 2022), the present study shows that transitivity patterns play an equally crucial role in shaping experiential meaning. Specifically, it reveals how mental and relational processes function as grammatical mechanisms for representing psychological stagnation in contemporary pop lyrics.

Importantly, this analysis avoids speculative psychological interpretation by grounding its claims strictly in linguistic evidence. Rather than asserting what the songwriter or persona "feels" in a psychological sense, the study demonstrates how psychological experience is linguistically constructed. This distinction is crucial for maintaining analytical rigor and aligns with SFL's commitment to explaining meaning through language itself.

Overall, the discussion suggests that Mangu constructs a world in which action is suspended, identity is static, and experience is internalized. Such a representation is not merely reflective of emotion, but actively produced through grammatical choices, confirming Halliday's view that grammar is a theory of human experience.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Mangu constructs experiential meaning primarily through the dominance of mental and relational processes, while material processes are systematically minimized or negated. Through a transitivity-based analysis grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, the lyrics represent human experience as one of psychological uncertainty, silence, and relational stagnation rather than physical action or change. The lyrical subject is consistently positioned as a *Senser* and *Carrier*, not as an *Actor*, which linguistically frames emotional experience as an internalized and enduring state of being. The findings contribute to linguistic scholarship by demonstrating how grammatical choices—specifically process types in the transitivity system—function as powerful resources for encoding psychological experience in contemporary Indonesian pop song lyrics. By extending previous SFL-based research on Indonesian cultural texts, including the work of Rawuh Yuda Yuwana, this study highlights the analytical value of transitivity in revealing subtle representations of agency and subjectivity in non-institutional discourse. Future research may expand this approach through comparative analyses across songs, genres, or languages to further illuminate how popular music grammatically shapes the ways people experience emotion and selfhood.

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