

A FEMINIST STYLISTICS ANALYSIS IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S SONG "THE MAN"

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Abstract

Feminist stylistic analysis of song lyrics can reveal how gender and power relations are represented in music. This research uses observation methods in collecting data by note-taking techniques. The analysis of transitivity choices using Halliday's systemic functional grammar theory can provide a deeper perspective on the relationship between language structure and meaning in the context of feminist song lyrics. The song aims to talk about a strong feminist message, permeating the narrative of gender inequality in society. The highlight of the song which is also the key reason for the stigma and stereotypes that arise in the society was found through the technique of portraying women's experience and their comparison with men's experiences in the community and because this through the desire to "be a man" the song wants to convey the message of gender equality.

Keywords: *feminist stylistics, gender equality, song, stereotype*

INTRODUCTION

Attempting to define feminism (or more specifically, feminisms) can be difficult in itself, given the rise of various forms of feminism today. The majority of feminists believe that discrimination against women occurs both personally and in institutions, and that women are treated oppressively and differently than men. Moreover, feminists hold that society is patriarchal because it is structured to generally serve the interests of men rather than women. Since the last ten years, feminist theory has focused on analyzing how various forms of oppression and/or discrimination, like racism and homophobia, may overlap and interact with forms of sexism, many feminists are aware of the challenges associated with assuming that all women and men are the same. Feminists are acutely aware of the dangers of oversimplifying analyses based on the assumption that 'women' are a homogeneous group. So many differences exist between women—differences of class, race, age, education, wealth—that the very category 'woman' is difficult to maintain, since there appear to be perhaps as many differences amongst women as there are differences from men (Butler 1990; Fuss 1990). Feminism indicates a dedication to modifying the social structure to make it less oppressive to women and, by extension, males.

Stylistics has been characterized as the study of the language of literary writings, with theoretical models drawn from linguistics. Carter and Simpson make a distinction between linguistic stylistics and literary stylistics; for them linguistic stylistics is where 'practitioners attempt to derive from the study of style and language a refinement of models for the analysis of language and thus to contribute to the development of linguistic theory' (Carter and Simpson 1989:4); literary stylistics is more concerned with providing 'the basis for fuller understanding, appreciation and interpretation of avowedly literary and author-centred texts.'

Both the 'feminist' and 'stylistics' components of this statement are complex and may have distinct meanings. Because it is evident that many of these representational practices are not in the interests of either women or men, feminist analysis strives to raise attention to and modify the way gender is represented. Thus, feminist stylistic analysis is concerned not only with describing sexism in a text, but also with analyzing how point of view, agency, metaphor, or transitivity are unexpectedly strongly tied to gender issues, determining whether women's writing practices may be articulated, and so on. Thus, analyzing images and texts that depict gender difference allows us to trace the alternatives available to subjects in terms of the development of subject positions or roles. As Rajan states, 'our understanding of the problems

of “real” women cannot lie outside the “imagined” constructs in and through which “women” emerge as subjects.

Feminist stylistic analysis of song lyrics can indicate how gender and power relations are represented in music. Some common themes in feminist stylistic analysis of song lyrics include challenging patriarchal and religious norms, promoting self-acceptance and empowerment, promoting LGBTQA+ representation and equality, exploring femininity, feminism, and female rage, and drawing the portrayal of women in song lyrics.

In the context of feminism and gender analysis, the fundamental question that arises is how feminist stylistic analysis can be applied to song lyrics to unpack gender representations, explore alternatives available to the subject in terms of developing the subject's position or role, and identify patriarchal norms that women continue to face in society, Swift when representing her experiences in the music industry. The formulation of this problem leads to an attempt to understand the complexity of how women are represented and to give voice to women's experiences through the medium of song lyrics.

Taylor Alison Swift is an American singer-songwriter who was born on December 13, 1989. She is a well-known 21st-century cultural icon, renowned for her songwriting, musical adaptability, creative reinventions, and influence on the music business. American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift recorded the song "The Man" for her seventh studio album, *Lover* (2019). Critics applauded the song's feminist message and gave it high reviews.

The official music video for Swift's song "The Man" was released on February 27, 2020. It was her first time directing a film by herself. In this satirical film, Dwayne Johnson plays Swift's supposed male alter ego, "Tyler Swift," who presents a number of common instances of sexist double standards in society, such as objectification, sexualization of women, toxic masculinity, and patriarchy. The idea behind the film, as well as Swift's transition into a man, won it praise from critics.

Taylor Swift's song "The Man" has been examined through the lens of feminist stylistics. The song is about the unequal treatment of women in comparison to men, especially in the music business. The song is a feminist plea to the audience, focusing on Swift's lived experience as a woman in the business and emphasizing the differences in terminology between men and women in the music industry. Swift examines standards that encourage men

to act like "playboys" in the song's words and visuals, and she takes aim at cultural norms that allow, and often even encourage, men to grow overinflated egos.

This research aims to explore and analyse how feminist stylistic analysis can be applied to song lyrics, specifically through a case study of Taylor Swift's "The Man." The main objective is to highlight and expose elements in the song lyrics that reflect or challenge patriarchal norms, as well as to identify alternatives available to women. In addition, this research also aims to provide a better understanding of how song lyrics can be a medium to convey feminist messages and understand the role of a woman.

Several relevant previous studies have been reviewed as references for this research. The first is an article entitled *Feminist Stylistic Analysis and LGBTQA+ Representation in Lady Gaga's Born This Way* written by Rahmadsyah Rangkuti and colleagues in 2022. This research aims to find out the true meaning of song lyrics at different language levels and phonetic devices while revealing how stylistic devices work in the song *Born This Way*.

The next article is entitled *A Feminist Stylistics Analysis in Rupi Kaur's The Sun and Her Flowers* written by Saskia Febiola Siregar and colleagues in 2020. This study aims to analyse the language style that describes women and men displayed in the text using a feminist stylistic approach.

The last article entitled *A Feminist Stylistics Analysis of "Broken Verse"* by Kamila Shamsie was written by Amna Noor Hussain and colleagues in 2019. This research seeks to determine the differences between female and male characters in this novel which then aims to investigate the text at the word, phrase/sentence level by identifying the most dominant features present in the novel.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, language phenomena are attempted to be explained from a legal standpoint. Feminist stylistics should to be applied in this study. Aprilia (2021) stated that the data in descriptive research is analyzed through qualitative methods because it is not a numerical data. This research used observation methods in collecting data by note-taking techniques. Three steps were taken by the researchers in order to acquire the data. The researchers first watched a movie clip of Taylor Swift's "The Man". Second, look for the lyrics of the song. Finally, the researcher used feminist stylistics theory developed by Sara

Mills to analyze this song. This approach was used because it provides a clear description of the feminist stylistic analysis of Taylor Swift's song "The Man."

FINDINGS

a. Analysis at Word Level

In this song, Swift does not use gender-specific pronouns such as "he" and "she" but she uses general pronouns that do not refer to a specific gender directly. The song begins with the use of the pronoun "I" which refers to the narrator or Taylor Swift herself. The pronoun "I" is used to bring the listener closer to Swift's personal narrative and describe her personal view of the situation described in the song. The pronoun "I" represents the broad female experience represented by Swift as the narrator, who is a woman.

Figure 1. word/pronoun 'i'

the pronoun I in the pre-chorus

- *I'm so sick of running as fast as I can*
- *Wondering if I get there quicker if I was a man*

the pronoun I in the chorus

- *I'd be a fearless leader*
- *I'd be an alpha type*
- *They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to*

the pronoun I in the bridge

- *If I was out flashin' my dollar bills I'd be a bitch, not a baller*

"They" is used to refer to the general public or external parties, who judge and view Swift's behaviour. This pronoun does not refer to a specific gender, either female or male, which can be interpreted to refer to a wide audience, in this case the public; who judge and have views on Swift.

Figure 2. word/pronoun 'they'

the pronoun they in verse 1

- *They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to*

the pronoun they in verse 2

- *They'd say I hustled*
- *They wouldn't shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve*

The word "you" is used to refer to the party Swift is talking to in her conversation. Swift starts the song by using the pronoun "I" as if she is talking to someone who in this case is represented by the pronoun "you". The word "you" itself becomes the person Swift is comparing her experience with. The use of "you" represents the experience of men at a broad level in society.

Figure 3. word/pronoun 'you'

the pronoun you in verse 1

- *Every conquest I had made would make me more of a boss to you*

the pronoun you in bridge

- *And it's all good if you're bad*
- *And it's okay if you're mad*

Furthermore, the nouns found in the song, such as "field," "conquest," "boss," "fearless leader," "alpha type," "dollars," "bitch," and "baller" are words that refer to the experiences of women and men in society. Nouns such as "boss," "leader," and "conquest" were chosen to emphasise power and dominance. This choice may be intended to respond to stereotypical views often associated with men. The choice of the word "bitch" can be taken as an allusion to the gender stereotypes often attached to women who pursue success without regard to social norms. Phrases such as "flashing my dollars" and "baller" may refer to financial success and social status. This choice may reflect social norms that link financial success with masculinity. The word choice in these lyrics reflects an attempt to explore and challenge long-established gender norms. Swift seems to be using words to highlight gender injustice and satirise the derogatory views of successful women. With

this, it can be seen that the song seeks to shift or develop the meaning of the above nouns that tend to have a masculine tone to highlight gender inequality.

The discourse is rhymed with the /æɪn/ sound at the end of the word, reinforcing the message or narrative being conveyed. In this case, the similarity of the /æɪn/ sound may be used to emphasise a feeling of fatigue or boredom (expressed in "I'm so sick of running as fast as I can") and make a comparison with the desire to be a man ("If I was a man").

Figure 4. Scheme of analysis of the rhyme with sound /æɪn/

I'm so sick of running as fast as I can
If I was a man

The discourse is rhymed with the sound /æd/ at the end of the word, to reinforce the presence of the sentence And it's all good if you're bad by placing the sentence And it's okay if you're mad (as marked in blue in figure 5).

Figure 5. Scheme of analysis of the rhyme with sound /æd/

And it's all good if you're bad
And it's okay if you're mad

The discourse, rhymed with the sound /mæɪn/ at the end of the word, reinforces the message or narrative. In this case, the similarity in sound is intended to create a sense of power or authority related to the concept of "the man" in the context of gender.

Figure 6. Scheme of analysis of the rhyme with sound /mæɪn/

*'Cause if I was a man
Then I'd be the man
I'd be the man
I'd be the man*

b. Sentences Unit of Feminism

The analysis of transitivity choices using Halliday's systemic functional grammar theory can provide a deeper perspective on the relationship between language structure and meaning in the context of feminist song lyrics. This theory views language as a functional system that reflects the understanding and organisation of human experience. By integrating Halliday's theory with Sara Mills' views on feminism, we can explore how language structures reflect and shape feminist messages. In Halliday's theory of transitivity, the agent is the element responsible for the action. Verb choices and sentence structures that give empowerment to the agent can reflect the social construction of gender roles. This analysis can be linked to Mills' views on women's empowerment. Language structures that give power to female agents can be interpreted as a step towards eliminating gender inequality. This can be seen in the line, "If I was the man, then I'd be the man." The choice of the verb "be" emphasises identity, giving the agent (speaker) the authority to equate herself with the concept of "the man." Transitivity theory also involves understanding different types of processes, including positive or negative processes. Emphasised processes can shape the understanding of certain events or circumstances. In the context of feminism, the emphasis on positive processes can illustrate resistance to negative stereotypes associated with gender roles. This can be seen in the line, "I'd be a fearless leader, I'd be an alpha type." The choice of the verb "be" here highlights a positive process, such as being a fearless leader, without limiting oneself to traditional gender stereotypes. Through transitivity analysis, we can examine how language portrays gender roles and whether sentence structures support or reject certain stereotypes. The rejection of gender stereotypes is an important focus in feminism, and language can be a tool to express resistance to restrictive norms. As in the stanza, "I'd be a fearless leader, I'd be an alpha type." The choice of verbs and sentence structure here can be interpreted as a rejection of gender stereotypes that might associate courage and leadership with masculinity.

c. Discourse Unit of The Man

Referring to the text, the chorus is the highlight of the song. The idea of being accepted in society and having the freedom to express oneself would be much easier if there was no stigma, or one-sided social standards (only to men) created by society. One of the techniques of describing humans is by differentiating responses and perceptions, for example towards power, love life and the portion of women in expressing themselves and this is one of the reasons why Swift in this song wants to 'become a man' so that her steps are smoother in expressing, working and creating (as shown in Figure 7).

Figure 7. The peak part of the song The Man

[Chorus]
I'm so sick of running as fast as I can
Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man
And I'm so sick of them coming at me again
'Cause if I was a man, then I'd be the man
I'd be the man
I'd be the man

Based on the above review, it can be seen that the song aims to talk about a strong feminist message, permeating the narrative of gender inequality in society. Swift, through her lyrics, reflects on the female experience by imagining being a man. Her bold and expressive language choices challenge gender stereotypes, voicing a determination for female empowerment. Her lyrics investigate how societal views of women can influence identity and treatment. Swift explores the concept of "the man" as a form of critique of norms that limit women through the use of language represented in the song, which will be described one by one below. Firstly, based on the analysis in terms of words and phrases above, it can be seen that the pronouns do not follow the pattern of moving directly from gender-specific to non-gender-specific personal pronouns. Instead, Swift specifically focuses on the comparison between the experience of living as a woman and imagining being a man. In most of the lyrics, Swift uses masculine third-person pronouns ("he" and "him") to detail how life and social treatment would change if she were a man.

However, there are parts of the lyrics that use first-person pronouns ("I" and "me") to describe how she imagines herself as a man.

Based on the research above, the pronoun "I" itself also functions to represent women who also feel the meaning of this song by using the first person point of view and can feel to be the perpetrator or main character of this song. In addition, based on the study above, the choice of pronouns can function to make the song sound more intimate, especially from Swift to the listeners of the song, as evidenced by the pronouns found in addition to I, there are they, then you. The pronouns found in the song have been highlighted in the above study referring to the experiences of women who want to become men in order to get the same opportunities that men get in society. In the perspective of linguists, it has been said that pronouns change more slowly than other words because they belong to the so-called 'function words' or 'closed word classes' (Milles, 2013; Paterson, 2014). Function words are used to organise the grammatical structure in a sentence and their meaning is only derived from how the word is used in context (Chung & Pennebaker, n.d.).

Furthermore, the phonetic elements contained in the songs, based on the above research, it can be seen that the songs are designed and found rhymes that serve to emphasise some important morphological elements such as "field", "conquest", "boss", "fearless leader", "alpha type", "dollar", "bitch", and "ball player" are words that refer to the experiences of women and men in society. Then, based on the study of the sentence unit section, the sentences in the song can be seen from the choice of transitivity and modality contained in the song lyrics. Transitivity analysis can provide readers with comprehensive linguistic evidence of "who/what does what to whom/what?" so that it can help readers to gain a better understanding of the characters in a literary text (Zahoor & Janjua, 2016). Lastly, based on the above study, it was also found that the highlight of the song which is also the key reason for the stigma and stereotypes that arise in the society was found through the technique of portraying women's experiences and their comparison with men's experiences in the society and because of this through the desire to "be a man", the song wants to convey the message of gender equality. At the time, the song successfully conveyed its feminist message and echoed gender equality in society, encouraging women to express themselves without feeling inhibited by gender. The choice of words, phrases, clauses and sentences as well as the discourse units in it honour

women's experiences to get equal treatment in society, opening the eyes of the public to let women and men have the same opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion above, the main point of this analysis is that Taylor Swift's song "The Man" serves as a feminist critique of gender inequality in society. Through her lyrics, Swift challenges gender stereotypes and explores the concept of "the man" as a form of critique against societal norms that limit women. She uses language choices to voice a determination for female empowerment and to investigate how societal views of women can influence identity and treatment.

Taylor Swift is one of the singers who has taken up the issue of feminism through her art, as the song "The Man" cleverly investigates the experience of being a man and how it increases acceptance in society. In this context, women sometimes have to struggle to maintain their freedom due to the effects of gender discrimination. Therefore, feminist theory is an appropriate framework to analyse the lyrics of this song, as Taylor Swift attempts to convey her concerns on the issues of gender discrimination and gender equality. Dissecting the elements of language and writing style in this song helps to reveal its true meaning. In this context, Taylor Swift expresses her dissatisfaction with the stereotypes and labels given to women when they try to do the same things as men. Through this song, Swift also wants to raise public awareness of the importance of respecting everyone's rights and not discriminating against gender, be it against men or women.

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