

‘Hey, Jude! I Wanna Hold Your Hand’: Transitivity Process Analysis on Popular Songs by The Beatles

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Abstract

Needless to say, The Beatles is the most popular rock band in the world. Their huge popularity has sparked a phenomenon known as ‘Beatlemania’. In 2001, the Guinness World Records acknowledged The Beatles as the best-selling group for their achievement for selling more than 1 billion units worldwide. Thus, this paper attempts to reveal how language is used in widely recognized songs by The Beatles from the transitivity perspective, primarily, the process. Halliday (1994) proposes six different transitivity processes which are material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential. Ten popular songs by The Beatles are selected in this study. Unlike other prior studies done on transitivity to various types of literature, this study is different due to its unique data set which is The Beatles’ popular songs. By focusing on the process according to the different types of processes in the experiential metafunction, this study reveals how The Beatles employs different processes in their lyrical writing of their popular songs in order to communicate their experiences of the world.

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Keywords: Metafunction; The Beatles; Transitivity process; Systemic Functional Grammar.

INTRODUCTION

The Beatles needs no introduction anymore. It is even an understatement to say that The Beatles is one the world most popular bands when in fact The Beatles is the most popular rock band in the world (Huffa, 2010). Needless to say, the founding members of The Beatles are the icon to pop culture. Their mop tops and psychedelic shags have created craze and madness and are still being followed (Hillel, 2014). Not only that, their huge popularity has emerged a phenomenon known as ‘Beatlemania’ (Spitz, 2005). This Liverpool-based band was formed in 1960 by Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. In 2001, the Guinness World Records acknowledged The Beatles as the best-selling group for their achievement for selling more than 1 billion units worldwide, and their huge influence has prompted Liverpool Hope University to come up with a Master of Arts programme named as The Beatles, Popular Music and Society, which indicates not only their popularity but significance contributions to the music and entertainment industry and the society.

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Relatively, the primary function of language is as a tool of communication. It is used as a mean of expressing and transferring ideas, thoughts or experiences among people, not just within the circle of the society, but also to those from different social background. Kroger and Wood (2000) suggest that language is taken to be not simply a tool for description and a medium of communication but as a social practice, a way of doing thing. It is agreed by Bloor and Bloor claiming that “when people use language, their language acts produce – construct meanings” (2004, p.2). Thus, this paper attempts to reveal how language is used in The Beatles famous songs from the transitivity perspective. According to Zahoor and Janjua (2016), transitivity analysis has been widely used as an analytical tool for discourse analysis. Transitivity analysis has been applied to various texts and discourses to investigate and understand how linguistic patterns encode distinctive meanings in them. Halliday (1994) proposes that there are six different transitivity processes which are material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential.

Unlike other prior studies done on transitivity which focus more on literary texts, this study instead focuses on the lyrics of popular songs by The Beatles. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of transitivity processes in The Beatles popular songs. Analysis of transitivity processes on The Beatles lyrics is to reveal the experiential metafunction from the selected songs stylistically. Due to their colossal impact specifically to music industry and their immense influence to the world in general, it is hoped that the exploration of experiential metafunction through the processes of transitivity on the selected songs may construe the stylistic lyrical writing of this very popular band, The Beatles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Transitivity Process

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a theory that was developed by Halliday (1969) for more than 50 years ago. Unlike Chomsky’s (1956) Transformative Generative Grammar (TGG) which focuses on the structures, the SFG approaches language from a different perspective by focusing on the functions. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), experience and interpersonal relationships are transformed into meanings and the meaning is transformed into wording. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) elaborated that the clause consists of three distinct yet interrelated metafunctions which are; ideational, interpersonal and textual. Each metafunction is concerned with a meaning and each meaning forms part of a different functional configuration, making up a separate stand in the overall meaning of the clause.

Transitivity is a core of SFG. Through transitivity theory, language is viewed as a meaning-making system with an emphasis on choice (Neale, 2002). Moreover, according to Halliday (1969), language is a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. Transitivity belongs to the experiential metafunction and therefore is a resource for construing our experience in terms of configurations of a process, participants and circumstances (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997). Transitivity functions to provide a theory of human experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) further explained that reality is made up of processes of going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. According to Thompson (2004), the experiential sees language as a set of resources for referring to entities in the world and the ways in which those entities act on or relate to each other. In a simplest manner, language echoes our view of the world as consisting of verbs involving nouns which may have adjectives and which go on against the adverbials.

Halliday (1994) states that each situation type is made up of three components; the process, participants in the process, and the circumstances associated with the process. The process is realized by a verb and it is the central part of the situation. Participants are realized by a nominal group, meanwhile circumstances are realized by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. As the central part of the situation, there are six different transitivity processes which are material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential. These processes are categorized into two; main processes and minor processes. The major processes are material, mental and relational while minor processes are behavioral, verbal and existential.

Material processes of transitivity are processes of doing, usually physical and tangible actions.

Halliday (1969) calls them action clauses expressing the fact that something or someone undertakes some action or an entity does something – which may be done to some other entities. These processes can be probed by asking what did x do? Two essential participants appear in material process are the Actor – the doer of the process and the Goal – the entity affected by the process.

For example:

She [actor] is standing [pro: material] right in front of [circumstance] me [goal].

Mental processes usually encode mental reactions such as perception, cognition, desideration and affection. Mental processes give an insight into people's consciousness and how they sense the experience of the reality. These can be probed by asking what do you think/ feel/ know about x? Mental processes have two participants which are the Senser – the conscious being who is involved in a mental process and the Phenomenon which is felt, thought or seen by the conscious Senser.

For example:

Cause [/] I [senser] don't care [pro: mental] too much for [circumstance] money [phenomenon].

Relational processes construe the relationships of being and having between two participants. There are two different types of Relational processes; Identifying and Attributive. Identifying serves the purpose of defining and the participants involved are Token and Value. Value serves to define the identity of the Token, while Attributive serves to describe. The participants associated with Attributive are the Carrier and the Attribute and we can say that the x (realized by Carrier) is a member of the class y (realized by Attribute).

For example:

Hey Jude [carrier] don't be [pro: relational] afraid [attribute].

Behavioral processes characterize the outer expression of inner working and reflect physiological behaviors such as behaving, smiling and laughing. Behavioral processes usually have one participant who is typically a conscious one known as Behaver.

For example:

So why on earth [circumstance] should I [behave] moan [pro: behavioral].

Verbal processes represent anything that involves the act of saying. There are three participants involve in Verbal process which are; Sayer – the utterer, Receiver – the person at whom the verbal process is directed and Verbiage – the nominalized statement of the verbal process.

For example:

You [sayer] say [pro: verbal] goodbye [verbiage].

Existential processes are the states of being, existing and happening. Existential processes employ the verb be or its synonyms such as exist, arise or occur. The only participant in this process is Existent which follows the there is/ are sequences.

For example:

There will be [pro: existential] an answer [existent]

2.2 Previous Studies on Transitivity

Transitivity analysis is widely used as analytical tool for discourse analysis. Previous studies on transitivity show that it has been applied on various texts and discourses to examine and understand the distinctive meaning encoded on linguistic patterns. Transitivity analysis has also been applied, rather rigorously over the last few years, on the language of media i.e. news articles (Ben Cheikh, 2017; Isti'anah, 2014; Ong'onda, 2016; Seo, 2013) and political speeches (Kondowe, 2014; Shariffar & Rahimi (2015); Zhang, 2017; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Studies on transitivity analysis of literary texts and song lyrics have also gained momentum.

Zahoor and Janjua (2016) examine the transitivity patterns used in the popular song “I am Malala”. More specifically, the study analyses the character of Malala reflected and portrayed in the selected text throughout the song through transitivity analysis. The main character in the song is an anonymous girl who echoes the voice and character of Malala. Findings from the analysis of processes and the participants related to these processes revealed that Malala possesses a weak, timid and inept characteristic similar to most girls her age, but her spirituality, resilience and high psychological forbearance in enduring oppression is applaudable. This shows that transitivity analysis can be used as a portrayal of individuals through the processes and by relating them to the involved participants.

Meanwhile, Nguyen (2012) investigates the construction of personality through the transitivity analysis of language used in Hao Pham’s Heroic Mother. The Heroic Mother describes the locked-in solitude of the elderly who often talks about their past memories, struggles and victories to educate the younger generations. Thorough textual analysis shows that the main character, the heroic mother, is suffering from loneliness, boredom and lack of care from her family. The heroic mother depicts the struggles of women who survived the war and live their life in sorrows and their sacrifices ignored by younger generations. The study contributes to the understanding of how linguistic analysis of texts can be used to interpret meanings in a literary text to display the experiential metafunction.

Furthermore, Afrianto and Seomantri (2014) analyses the text from three Shakespeare’s sonnets by using descriptive analysis method to type of process in transitivity. Findings show that there are four process types of six types appearing; they are material process, mental process, relational process and existential process. Material process appeared more often than others; followed by, mental process, relational process and existential process. In addition, the researchers identified some archaic words; such as ‘hath’, ‘mayst’, ‘see’st’, ‘fadeth’, ‘doth’, ‘perceivest’, ‘ere’, ‘thou’, ‘thy’, and ‘writ. This stylistic analysis indicates that transitivity can be applied to any sort of texts to represent the meaning beyond the written or uttered words.

As suggested by Thompson (2004), language comprises a set of resources for referring to entities in the world and the ways in which those entities act on or relate to each other. Therefore, the analysis on transitivity processes to the selected songs by The Beatles is a mean to discover the experiential metafunction of which represented through the processes, participants and the circumstances. Since language is a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning, the studies on transitivity support this claim by exploring function and meaning beyond the uttered or written words.

METHODOLOGY

Deciding on The Beatles popular songs could be very subjective due to personal preferences. Therefore, to objectify the selection of The Beatles popular songs, this research refers to the www.billboard.com. Billboard is an established entertainment company which deals with among others the worldwide music industry. Therefore, referring to its top chart to decide on the popularity of The Beatles songs is justified. For this study, The Beatles’ top ten songs were chosen and they are; “Hey, Jude”, “I Wanna Hold Your Hand”, “She Loves You”, “Get Back”, “Let It Be”, “Come Together”, “Hello Goodbye”, “A Hard Day’s Night”, “We Can Work It Out” and “Can’t Buy Me Love”. All songs were co-written by Lennon and McCartney. For the lyrics of the selected songs, this study refers to www.thebeatles.com.

The lyrics were examined by omitting the repeated verses, which is the repeated lines with the very exact similarity. This is to ensure an accurate number of analyzed processes for all the lyrics. For comparison purposes, the full lyrics and the analyzed lyrics were put into a table. Table 1 shows the comparison between the full lyrics and the analyzed lyrics for the song “I Wanna Hold Your Hand”. The same process was carried out to all the selected songs for this study.

Table 1. Comparison between full lyrics and analyzed lyrics.

I Wanna Hold Your Hand	
Full lyrics	Analyzed lyrics
Oh yeah, I'll tell you something, I think you'll understand, Then I'll say that something, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.	Oh yeah, I'll tell you something, I think you'll understand, Then I'll say that something, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.
Oh please say to me You'll let me be your man, And please say to me, You'll let me hold your hand, Now let me hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.	Oh please say to me You'll let me be your man, And please say to me, You'll let me hold your hand, Now let me hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.
And when I touch you I feel happy inside, It's such a feeling That my love I can't hide, I can't hide, I can't hide.	And when I touch you I feel happy inside, It's such a feeling That my love I can't hide, I can't hide, I can't hide.
Yeah, you got that something, I think you'll understand, When I feel that something, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.	Yeah, you got that something, I think you'll understand, When I feel that something, I wanna hold your hand. I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.
And when I touch you I feel happy inside, It's such a feeling That my love I can't hide, I can't hide, I can't hide.	And when I touch you I feel happy inside, It's such a feeling That my love I can't hide, I can't hide, I can't hide.
Yeah, you got that something, I think you'll understand, When I feel that something, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.	Yeah, you got that something, I think you'll understand, When I feel that something, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand.

The lyrics were then coded into clauses since the unit of analysis for SFG is a clause. The clauses were numbered according to their appearances in the lyrics, and for clauses that contain more than one process, the clauses were numbered with alphabets. Table 2 shows the numbering of the clauses for the lyrics “I Wanna Hold Your Hand”. The same process was carried out on all the lyrics.

Table 2. Numbering of the clauses for analysis.

I Wanna Hold Your Hand			
Clause No	Phrase	Clause No	Phrase
1	I'll tell you something,	10	I wanna hold your hand
2a	I think	11	And when I touch you
2b	you'll understand ,	12	I feel happy inside
3	Then I'll say that something,	13	It's such a feeling
4	I wanna hold your hand	14	That my love I can't hide
5	Oh please say to me	15	I can't hide
6a	You'll let	16	Yeah, you got that something
6b	me be your man	17a	I think
7	And please say to me	17b	you'll understand
8a	You'll let	18	When I feel that something
8b	me hold your hand	19	I wanna hold your hand
9	Now let me hold your hand		

The next step is categorization of the clauses. Each clause was categorized into Participant and Process, and the type of the processes and participants for each clause was identified. This is due to the reason that certain processes can only be initiated by certain participants. That is why the participants need to be identified for the processes. However, the circumstances were not identified because they are not part of the scope for this study. Therefore, each clause was categorized into participant and process and the type. The total number of identified processes was recorded. Table 3 shows the process of categorization for the lyrics of the song "I Wanna Hold Your Hand". The same process was done to all the lyrics of the selected songs.

Table 3. Categorization of the clauses.

I Wanna Hold Your Hand				
Clause No	Participant	Process / Type		Total
1	I	'll tell	Verbal	
2a	I	think	Mental	Mental 9
2b	you	'll understand	Mental	
3	I	'll say	Verbal	
4	I	wanna hold	Mental	
5	(you)	say	Verbal	Behavioral 5
6a	You	'll let	Behavioral	
6b	me	be	Relational	
7	(you)	say	Verbal	
8a	You	'll let	Behavioral	Verbal 4
8b	me	hold	Material	
9	me	let ... hold	Behavioral	
10	I	wanna hold	Mental	
11	I	touch	Material	Relational 3
12	I	feel	Mental	
13	It	's	Relational	
14	I	can't hide	Behavioral	
15	I	can't hide	Behavioral	Material 2
16	you	got	Relational	
17a	I	think	Mental	
17b	you	'll understand	Mental	
18	I	feel	Mental	Existential 0
19	I	wanna hold	Mental	

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings from the analysis of transitivity processes on the lyrics of the selected songs by The Beatles. From the findings, all types of processes are found from the analyzed lyrics. Halliday (1994) proposes three main types of processes which are Material (doing and happening), Mental (sensing) and Relational (being and having). There are also other minor processes which are Behavioral (behaving), Verbal (saying) and Existential (existing). The findings show similar trait as proposed by Halliday (1994) where the three main processes; Material, Mental and Relational, are the most notable processes. Meanwhile, the other three minor processes; Verbal, Behavioral and Existential, are also found in the lyrics of the selected songs but not as weighty as the main processes.

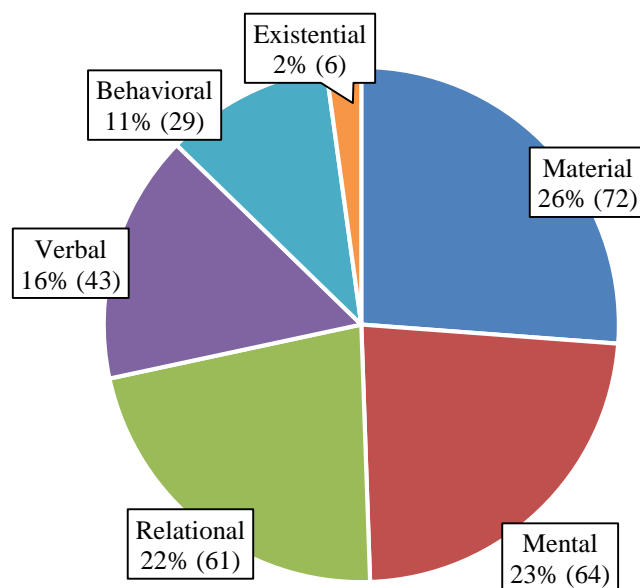


Figure 1. Percentage of the Occurrence of all Types of the Transitivity Processes.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage for all type of transitivity processes from the analyzed lyrics of the selected songs by The Beatles. A total occurrence for all the processes is 275. The three major processes (Material, Mental, and Relational) have the most significant occurrences. It shows that all the three main type of transitivity processes are dominantly occurring for a significant total of 71%. Material process has the highest occurrences in all the selected popular songs by 26% with a total of 72 occurrences. Mental process comes second by 23% with a total of 64 occurrences. On third is Relational process with a slender difference from the second process for 22% with a total of 61 occurrences.

On the other hand, minor transitivity processes (Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential) come at fourth, fifth and last. Collectively, these minor processes contribute to a total of 29% of occurrences. Verbal process comes fourth for 16% with a total of 43 occurrences. The fifth process is Behavioral by 11% with a total of 29 occurrences. The last process is Existential for only 2% with only 6 occurrences.

Table 4 illustrates the occurrences of processes in every song. From the table, it is deducible that the most frequently occurring process is Material. Material process occurs highest in four songs; “Hey Jude”, “Get Back”, “A Hard Day’s Night” and “Can’t Buy Me Love”. The majority of material processes in the aforementioned songs are being acted out by *Jude* and *you* (Hey Jude), *Jojo*, *Loretta* and *your mother* (Get Back), *I* (A Hard Day’s Night), and *I*, *money* and ∞ (Can’t Buy Me Love). However, Material process does not appear on two of the selected songs; “She Loves You” and “Hello Goodbye”. These findings indicate that The Beatles may have employed Material processes the most in order to express physical and

tangible actions through their songs (Halliday, 1994).

Table 4. Process Occurrences in Every Song.

Process \ Song	Hey, Jude	I Wanna Hold Your Hand	She Loves You	Get Back	Let It Be	Come Together	Hello Goodbye	A Hard Day's Night	We Can Work It Out	Can't Buy Me Love	Total
Material	15	2	0	11	5	9	0	10	7	13	72
Mental	6	9	14	3	1	5	3	7	7	9	64
Relational	4	3	7	7	9	15	0	6	8	2	61
Verbal	0	4	6	1	5	2	15	1	5	4	43
Behavioral	14	5	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	2	29
Existential	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	6
Total	39	23	28	24	27	31	18	25	30	30	275

The second most frequently occurring process is Mental, where it occurs the highest in two songs; “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” and “She Loves You”. In the song “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” the mental processes are represented by the verbs *think* (2a and 17a), *‘ll understand* (2b and 17b), *wanna hold* (4 and 19), and *feel* (12 and 18). In “She Loves You”, mental processes can be observed in the utilization of verbs *loves* (1, 6b and 8), *think* (2 and 17a), *saw* (3), *‘s thinkin’* (4b), *know(s)* (7a, 9a, 12b, 15a and 16a), *hurt* (10b), and *can hurt* (18). Unlike other processes which occur only on certain songs, Mental process is the only process to occur in all selected songs. The evidently high use of Mental processes may be associated with The Beatles’ expressions of consciousness and their experience of the reality through their lyrical writing as Mental process represent perception (see, hear, feel), cognition (know, understand, believe), affection (feeling i.e. like, love) and desire (hope, want, wish) (Ezzina, 2016; Zahoor & Janjua, 2016).

As the third highest process employed, Relational occurs highest in three songs; “Let It Be”, “Come Together” and “We Can Work It Out”. The Relational process is a process type which occurs outside and inside human being and is often realized by the verb ‘be’ or some verbs of the same class (known as copular verbs i.e. seem, become, appear), or at times by other verbs (have, own, possess) (Ezzina, 2016). In “Let It Be”, the occurrence of Relational process can be seen in the use of ‘be’ verb *Let [it] be* (3b, 6b, 7, 8b, 11b, 14b, 17b and 20b) and *is* (15). In “Come Together”, occurrences of verbs such as *got* (2, 3, 5b, 6a, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16), *got to be* (4a, 8b and 18a) and ‘be’ verbs such as *is* (8a, 17b) and ‘s (18b) are realized. In addition, verbs such as *may ... be gone* (4b), *can get* (7a), ‘be’ verbs i.e. ‘s (7c and 13b), *is* (11a) and *am* (16b and 16c) and copular verb such as *have* (13a) occurred in the song “We Can Work It Out”. The use of Relational process in their lyrics signifies that The Beatles maintains the relationships between two participants in their songs.

Apart from that, minor processes are also found in the selected songs. Verbal process occurs highest in “Hello Goodbye” but does not occur in Hey, Jude. To quote some lyrics from the song, the first two lines are, “You say yes, I say no, You say stop and I say go...” It can be observed from these lines that the Beatles had inserted utterances and sayings in their lyrics, also referred to as ‘Verbiage’- *Yes, No, Stop and Go*, uttered by the ‘Sayer’- *You and I*. The experiential meaning portrayed through these usage of *You and I* demonstrate an intimate relationship between the ‘Sayer’ throughout the conversation that they had. The nature of the lyrics throughout the song is a conversation between the two of participants, and this implies

the state of proximity of the 'Sayer'.

The fifth process, Behavioral, occurs as the second highest process on "Hey, Jude". In the song, the lyrics are mostly about how the 'Behaver', in the song referred to as I, demonstrating the processes such as let, and waiting. Behavioral process expresses the inner feeling and reflect someone's physiological behaviors at the same time. This process does not occur on two songs; "Come Together" and "Hello Goodbye". This shows that in some songs, the Beatles does not demonstrate relationship between inner feeling and physiological behaviors.

It is also notable that Existential process is the process with the least occurrence in all of the selected songs. Unlike other processes that occur on most selected songs, Existential process was employed only in two songs; "Let It Be" and "We Can Work It Out". Existential processes illustrate states of being, existing, and happening and utilize the 'be' verb and/or its synonyms such as exist, arise, occur. The only participant in this process is Existent which follows the There is /are sequences (Ezzina, 2016). The Existential process in the song "Let It Be", can be observed in clauses 11a and 14a (There will be) and in clauses 12b and 16a (There is). Additionally, in "We Can Work It Out" there are only two instances of Existential process in clauses 11b and 18a (There's). Since Existential process indicates that something merely exists, or happens, these findings corresponds to The Beatles' significant preference of expressing physical and tangible actions in their lyrical writing through the use of Material processes, rather than processes which implies mere existence.

CONCLUSION

From the analyzed data, all the six types of transitivity processes are found in the selected popular songs by The Beatles. However the occurrences of these processes are different from one song to another. The three main processes; Material, Mental, and Relational, are dominating the total number of occurrences in the selected songs. Material process is the highest for 26% with a total of 72 occurrences. Mental process comes second for 23% with a total of 64 occurrences. The smallest percentage for the main processes is Relational for 22% with a total of 61 occurrences. On the other hand, the minor processes; Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential, are the least dominating in the selected songs. Verbal process as the biggest in minor processes, comes in forth for 16% with a total of 43 occurrences. Behavioral is fifth for 11% with a total of 29 occurrences. Existential is the last process with the least number of six occurrences for 2% only.

This suggests that The Beatles use different processes to communicate their experiences through their songs. Furthermore, transitivity analysis is the widely used under Halliday (1994) SFL framework. It is due to its diverse scopes in text and discourse analysis. Moreover, transitivity analysis can provide a comprehensive linguistic evidence to readers regarding the processes, participants and circumstances by aiming to connect the semantic and grammatical points to extract the meaning through language. Depending on the transitivity analysis, it discloses the types of processes that are used in The Beatles songs to represent the experiential meaning of individual songs.

The use of functional labels can express the 'content' of clauses in terms of processes involving participants in certain circumstances. Thus, to explore more on the experiential meanings of these selected popular songs, a more elaborated study is recommended by looking at the sub-category of the main processes. Not only that, the involved participants in the processes can be studied to relate the connection between the processes and the participants. Circumstances, as the other unit of analysis in transitivity, can be studied as well to encode the background against which the processes take place.

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