

**Ideational Metafunctions in Noah Kahan’s Stick Season Album: A
Discourse Analysis**

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Abstract

This research analyzes the realization of metafunctions in selected songs from Noah Kahan’s Stick Season album using Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The study focuses on ideational metafunction and explores how language constructs meaning in song lyrics. A qualitative descriptive method was applied to five selected songs: Stick Season, All My Love, Strawberry Wine, Growing Sideways, and You’re Gonna Go Far. Data were collected from official lyric videos and analyzed at the clause level. Findings reveal that mental processes dominate the ideational metafunction, as seen in “I am terrified of weather ’cause I see you when it rains,” reflecting inner experiences.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Metafunctions, Song Lyrics, Systemic Functional Linguistics

Introduction

Language is a fundamental aspect of human existence. It is not merely a communication system, but rather a complex and dynamic tool through which humans interpret, express, and construct their experiences, emotions, and social realities. According to Gumperz in (Puranjani & Rajeg, 2022), a language is a set of rules that allows speakers to convert information from their surroundings into sound.

Among the world’s many languages, English holds a particularly influential position. It is widely regarded as a global lingua franca, functioning as a bridge language across diverse nations, cultures, and disciplines. This widespread usage of English also renders it highly relevant as an object of linguistic inquiry. English-language media content, including songs, has become an abundant source of textual data reflecting contemporary social, cultural, and ideological patterns, and

therefore, an ideal subject for discourse analysis.

A song is a creative piece combining lyrics and music, with the lyrics intended to be sung in a way that evokes certain feelings or emotions connected to specific themes (Rohmah, 2023). Songs often reflect personal narratives, societal issues, cultural identities, and emotional experiences. Due to its stylized and carefully constructed lexical, grammatical, and semantic features, songs have been increasingly studied not just from artistic or musical perspectives, but also from linguistic and discursive lenses. This intersection between linguistics and music is where discourse analysis becomes highly relevant. Discourse analysis is a branch of linguistic study that focuses on analyzing language use in both spoken and written forms, exploring patterns within texts, and investigating how language interacts with the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs.

The term discourse analysis was introduced by Zellig Harris in 1952, as cited in (Azaria, 2023), to refer to the examination related to speech and written texts. Discourse analysis involves studying language as it is used within social contexts, focusing on how meaning is constructed and interpreted in communication. This field is closely tied to the practical use of language and always involves an interaction between an addressor and an addressee. In spoken discourse, particularly, the addressor is the speaker, and the addressee is the audience (Arviyeti, 2024). From a linguistic perspective, songs are often categorized as a form of spoken discourse, especially when attention is given to the lyrics and how language is employed to convey emotion and meaning. The lyrical content of songs functions as discourse, and analyzing it can provide valuable insight into how communication, identity, and narrative are constructed in musical texts (Ardiantari et al., 2023). In this research, the discourse analysis of song lyrics is carried out using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework developed by M.A.K. Halliday.

A powerful and comprehensive approach to discourse analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theory developed by M.A.K. Halliday, which emphasizes the relationship between grammar and meaning. At its core, SFL posits that language is a resource for meaning-making, and it operates through a system of choices that speakers and writers make in various contexts. (Halliday &

Matthiessen, 2014) articulates that “language is, in the first instance, a resource for making meaning,” which underscores the functional nature of linguistic structures. This perspective shifts the focus from traditional grammar, which often emphasizes form and structure, to a more dynamic understanding of how language operates in real-world situations. A critical aspect of SFL is its emphasis on the relationship between language and context. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) asserts that “language operates in context,” highlighting the importance of situational factors in shaping linguistic choices. The context of a situation can be analyzed through three variables: field (what is happening), tenor (the participants and their relationships), and mode (the form of communication). This contextual framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of how language functions in various social settings.

Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) differs from other systemic language theories that simply view language as a part of social activity linked to context. SFL goes further by focusing on how language functions in various contexts and how it can be used to address language-related problems. It helps in understanding language functions, interpreting and producing speech, evaluating text quality, transforming written texts into spoken ones, and exploring the connection between language and culture. In studying discourse, SFL uses a thematic, semiotic, and interdisciplinary approach grounded in a deep understanding of how language works (Putri, 2022). SFL introduces three metafunctions that describe how language operates, namely: ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction.

This research focuses on the ideational metafunction. This metafunction focuses on how language represents experiences and events. It answers questions like who is doing what, to whom, where, and how. It encompasses both logical and experiential meanings, allowing speakers to categorize, relate, and make sense of the happenings around the world. Analyzing the lyrics of some selected songs from the Stick Season album through the ideational metafunction allows for an exploration of how the songwriter represents experiences, constructs realities, and conveys personal and social identity within the narrative of each song.

The ideational function of language can be further divided into the logical and experiential components. From the experimental perspective, language is a set of

resources for referring to entities in the world and describing how those entities act. Meanwhile, the logical perspective relates to the connections made and how each experience is related. The ideational metafunction, particularly the experiential component of it, is expressed through the use of the transitivity system (Fadhillah & Rahmadina, 2021).

In the transitivity system, analysis takes place at the level of the clause, which holds a central role in functional grammar as it carries a series of ideational meanings. Transitivity consists of three main components: process, participants, and circumstances (Putri, 2022). These components are semantic categories that broadly describe how real-world events and experiences are represented through language.

As cited in (Sagareni, 2023), six types of processes are identified by Halliday, namely: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process.

In the context of contemporary English-language music, Noah Kahan's album *Stick Season* presents an ideal subject for such an analysis. The album, which has gained substantial critical acclaim since its release in 2022, explores themes such as mental health, isolation, loss, and rural identity. Through his lyrics, Kahan constructs deeply personal narratives that simultaneously resonate with a wider audience navigating post-pandemic anxieties and changing social dynamics. By applying the framework of systemic functional linguistics to selected songs from the *Stick Season* album, this study seeks to explore how meaning is made and conveyed through metafunctions of language in song lyrics. In doing so, it contributes to the understanding of how contemporary songs function as both personal expression and cultural discourse, mediated through the linguistic resources of the English language.

A study was conducted by Hiace Vega Fernando Siahaan, Jenheri Rejeki Tarigan, Desmalia Purba, and Ismarini Hutaraba in 2024. The study called "Exploring Transitivity System Realization in Batak Toba Song Lyrics Discourse: Systemic Functional Linguistic Study," aimed to analyze how the transitivity system is realized in Batak Toba song lyrics, particularly songs addressed to children, and to explore the interaction between language and culture within these

lyrics. The theoretical framework employed in this study is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (2014), with a focus on the transitivity system as part of the ideational metafunction. The researchers also adopted Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive model of qualitative data analysis. The data consisted of twenty Batak Toba song lyrics, which were examined using a descriptive qualitative approach to determine the frequency and variation of transitivity processes, as well as the reflection of cultural values in language use. The findings revealed that material processes were the most frequently used process type (47.8%), indicating a dominant focus on actions and events in the lyrics. The actor was the most commonly used participant (47.4%), and the circumstances of location appeared most often (37%). These patterns show how Batak Toba songwriters construct meaning by embedding cultural values and social norms into the lyrics. The study highlights the importance of considering cultural elements in song writing to ensure that messages are conveyed effectively and resonate with the intended audience, especially children. This study is relevant to the current research because it demonstrates the value of transitivity analysis in uncovering ideational meaning in song lyrics and emphasizes the role of culture in shaping language use, which parallels the thematic and linguistic layers explored in Noah Kahan's *Stick Season* album.

Other research was conducted by Muhammad Khamaduddin in 2021 titled "Exploring the Ideational Meaning in Selena Gomez's *Rare* Album" and aimed to explore and examine how ideational meaning is constructed in the song lyrics of Selena Gomez's *Rare* album. The study specifically focused on identifying both congruent and metaphorical realizations of ideational meaning as expressed through the transitivity system within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction. The data consisted of 79 selected lyrics from 17 songs in the *Rare* album, obtained from the lyric videos on Selena Gomez's official YouTube channel. The lyrics were chosen based on their indirect construction of ideational meaning and non-typical participant references. The findings indicate that process types alone are insufficient to fully uncover the intended ideational meanings in the lyrics due to the presence of figurative expressions, such as metaphors and idioms. The study emphasizes the importance

of considering the field (context of situation) to interpret ideational meaning holistically. Five types of experiential processes were found: material, mental, relational, behavioral, and verbal. Additionally, the research highlights the linguistic uniqueness of the lyrics, such as non-standard references where pronouns like “she” and “you” are used to refer to the singer herself, reflecting ideational metaphor. This study is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates how song lyrics are a fertile site for ideational meaning construction and how the transitivity system in SFL can be used to uncover deeper layers of experience and identity, a framework that is also applied in analyzing the lyrics in Noah Kahan’s *Stick Season* album.

Compared to previous studies, this research offers a more comprehensive and discourse-oriented perspective on transitivity analysis. Earlier studies on *Stick Season* by Noah Kahan mainly focus on identifying dominant process types at the clause level. Similarly, studies on albums like *Rare* by Selena Gomez emphasize metaphorical meaning but tend to analyze lyrics as isolated texts. In contrast, this research examines how transitivity patterns function across multiple songs to construct narrative identity and thematic continuity within the album. It goes beyond classification by linking linguistic choices to recurring themes such as memory, emotional experience, and sense of place. Therefore, this study provides a more holistic understanding of ideational meaning by integrating clause-level analysis with discourse-level interpretation.

Methods

This study concentrates on a qualitative analysis of selected songs from the *Stick Season* album by Noah Kahan, specifically focusing on how language is employed to realize the metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), especially ideational. The analysis draws upon the theoretical framework of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, further developed by scholars such as Halliday and Matthiessen, Eggins, and Gerot & Wignell. The scope is confined to linguistic analysis, which examines the selected songs for ideational (transitivity) through clause-level analysis. These tracks were chosen based on their linguistic richness, narrative depth, and thematic cohesion, which allow for a comprehensive

metafunctional analysis. The songs included in the analysis are *Stick Season*, *All My Love*, *Strawberry Wine*, *Growing Sideways*, *You're Gonna Go Far*. The songs selected for this study were chosen based on their prominence and popularity within *Stick Season* by Noah Kahan. These tracks represent the central themes of the album, including nostalgia, emotional struggle, and personal growth. In addition, their lyrics exhibit strong narrative depth and linguistic richness, making them suitable for transitivity analysis. The selection also ensures thematic variation while maintaining coherence across the dataset. Therefore, these songs provide a representative basis for examining ideational meaning in the album.

This research falls under the category of descriptive discourse analysis, as it thoroughly examines texts using specific theoretical frameworks. The primary theory applied is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, also referred to as Systemic Functional Grammar. The qualitative approach demands a detailed explanation of how the data are gathered and analyzed, along with the researcher's role throughout the study process.

Data collection is a crucial component of research, as the primary goal is to obtain relevant information. Creswell, as cited in (Munawaroh, 2024), explained that there are various techniques for gathering data, including observation, interviews, questionnaires, documentation, and audio-visual materials. In this study, the researcher employs the documentation method to collect the data. This approach is used to gather the lyrics of selected songs by Noah Kahan from the *Stick Season* album. The data are collected through several techniques, as outlined below:

1. Searching for Noah Kahan's songs from the *Stick Season* album and gathering the lyrics. To ensure the accuracy of the lyrics and avoid potential misinterpretation from mishearing, the researcher did not transcribe the lyrics manually. Instead, the lyrics were obtained from Noah Kahan's official YouTube channel, where they are provided in the form of lyric videos. The researcher selected five songs for analysis: "*Stick Season*," "*All My Love*," "*Strawberry Wine*," "*Growing Sideways*," and "*You're Gonna Go Far*."
2. Copying the lyrics and compiling them into a Word document to serve as

the primary data source.

3. Identifying clauses or sentences and selecting lyrics that reflect the ideational metafunctions.
4. Organizing the selected data according to its classification based on each metafunction.

The data analysis in this research followed the interactive model technique developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, as referenced in (Siahaan et al., 2024). In qualitative research, data analysis takes place throughout the data collection process and continues afterward within a defined time frame. This interactive model comprises four interconnected and simultaneous steps: (1) data collection, (2) data condensation or reduction, (3) data display or classification, and (4) drawing conclusions.

As mentioned earlier, the data collection process in this research involved copying and pasting song lyrics from official lyric videos into a Word document. During the data condensation stage, the gathered data were refined by summarizing, selecting, and concentrating on parts relevant to the study's objectives. The next step, data display, involves organizing and integrating the condensed data. This display may take the form of extended texts, diagrams, charts, or matrices that offer a clearer structure and perspective on the data, making analysis more manageable for the researcher (Lestari et al., 2021). Lastly, in the conclusion-drawing phase, the researcher begins interpreting findings from the outset of data collection, continuing through data condensation, data display, and the coding process. The coding process involves identifying, labelling, and categorizing transitivity elements such as processes, participants, and circumstances found in the selected lyrics. These coded data are then organized and reduced to highlight relevant linguistic patterns before being displayed in tables or descriptive forms. The conclusions are drawn and continuously verified throughout the analysis to ensure accuracy and consistency. All interpretations are supported by solid linguistic evidence to effectively address the research questions posed in the study.

Findings and Discussions

After conducting the data collection process by transcribing the complete lyrics of the selected songs from the official lyric videos on Noah Kahan's YouTube

channel, the next step was data condensation, which involved focusing on selecting lyrics that are relevant to the objective of the study to explore how ideational metafunction is applied in the chosen songs from Noah Kahan’s Stick Season album.

In the first song Stick Season by Noah Kahan, there are a total of 42 lines of lyrics. After selection, 19 lines were identified as containing the ideational metafunction. Among the 19 lines of lyrics that were analyzed, the researcher identified a total of 28 processes that realize the ideational meaning, which were then divided and classified into six types of processes according to Halliday’s theory.

Table 1. The Use of Process Types in Stick Season

No.	Types of Process	Frequency
1.	Mental Process	10
2.	Relational Process	8
3.	Material Process	5
4.	Verbal Process	3
5.	Behavioral Process	1
6.	Existential Process	1
TOTAL		28

As previously mentioned, the ideational metafunction can be analyzed using the transitivity system. Transitivity consists of three main components: process, participants, and circumstances. Below, the researcher will present or translate three examples of the ideational metafunction realized in the song Stick Season, each example chosen from the three most frequently occurring process types. These can be seen as follows:

Excerpt 1: And I am terrified of weather 'cause I see you when it rains

This data is taken from the 8th line of the Stick Season’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“I</i>	<i>am terrified</i>	<i>of weather</i>	<i>‘cause</i>
	(senser)	(mental process)	(phenomenon)	

Analysis:	<i>I</i>	<i>see</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>when it rains.</i> "
	(senser)	(mental process)	(phenomenon)	(circumstance of time)

The lyric constructs a mental landscape in which external environmental phenomena are inseparable from internal emotional experience. The words ‘and’ at the beginning and ‘cause’ in the middle of the lyric, which serve as conjunctions, will be excluded from the analysis since the analysis is limited to participants, process, and circumstances. The lyric “And I am terrified of weather 'cause I see you when it rains” contains mental processes, both the affective and perceptive kind, reflecting the speaker's internal experience. The first clause, “I am terrified of weather”, represents a mental process of affect, where “I” is the Senser and “of weather” expresses the Phenomenon, indicating the speaker's strong emotional reaction toward the weather. The use of “am terrified” points to a deep fear or emotional state, classifying it under affective mental processes. In this sense, “weather” functions as a trigger for trauma rather than a neutral phenomenon, indicating that the speaker’s perception of reality is shaped by emotional memory.

The second clause, “I see you when it rains”, introduces a perceptive mental process, with “I” again as the Senser, “you” as the Phenomenon, and “see” as the mental process of perception. The perceptive mental process “I see you when it rains” further intensifies this psychological entanglement, where sensory experience is not grounded in present reality but in recollection or hallucinated presence. The Phenomenon “you” is constructed as an absent yet persistently reactivated figure, suggesting unresolved emotional attachment. The phrase “when it rains” functions as a circumstance of time, providing temporal context to the perception. Together, these two clauses portray a deeply emotional and psychological state, where the external stimulus of weather triggers both fear and vivid recollection, illustrating how the natural world is interwoven with memory and emotional trauma.

Excerpt 2: Now I am stuck between my anger and the blame that I can't face

This data is taken from the 6th line of the Stick Season’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>I</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>stuck</i>	<i>between the anger...</i>
	(carrier)	(relational process)	(attribute)	(circumstance of location)

Even though the word “now” appears in the lyric, it will not be included in the analysis, as it does not contribute to the transitivity structure, which focuses solely on identifying the participant, process, and circumstances. This clause centers on a relational process, specifically an intensive attributive relational clause, where the subject “I” as the Carrier is assigned an Attribute “stuck.” The relational process is realized through the verb “am,” which expresses a state of being or condition rather than an action or event. The relational process “am stuck” positions the speaker not as an agent of action but as a participant trapped within a condition, indicating a loss of experiential control. The Attribute “stuck” functions as a linguistic realization of constrained agency, suggesting that emotional experience overrides the possibility of response or resolution. The clause is then followed by a prepositional phrase, “between my anger and the blame that I can't face,” as the circumstance, specifically the circumstance of location. The transitivity system here effectively reveals the internal struggle of the speaker, caught between two emotionally charged forces, anger and blame, without taking physical action, highlighting the theme of emotional paralysis. Overall, the clause represents a construction of identity defined by emotional entrapment, where language encodes psychological conflict as a static experiential condition rather than a dynamic process of resolution.

The second song All My Love by Noah Kahan consists of 49 lines of lyrics in total. From these, 23 lines were selected for analysis based on their inclusion of the ideational metafunction. Of the 23 lines that qualified for ideational metafunction analysis, the material process was identified as the most frequently occurring type, appearing 11 times. This was followed by the relational process, which occurred 7 times, and the verbal process, found 6 times. The mental process appeared 5 times, while both the behavioral and existential processes were the least common, each occurring only once.

Table 2. The Use of Process Types in All My Love

No.	Types of Process	Frequency
1.	Material Process	11

2.	Relational Process	7
3.	Verbal Process	6
4.	Mental Process	5
5.	Behavioral Process	1
6.	Existential Process	1
TOTAL		31

Each example has been selected to represent one of the three most frequently occurring process types, as identified in the analysis. The examples are as follows:

Excerpt 1: Well, I leaned in for a kiss thirty feet from where your parents slept

This data is taken from the 32nd line of the All My Love’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“I</i>	<i>leaned in</i>	<i>for a kiss</i>	<i>thirty feet from where... ”</i>
	(actor)	(material process)	(goal)	(circumstance of location)

The clause constructs a moment of embodied action in which physical movement is closely intertwined with social boundary and emotional restraint. The lyric “Well, I leaned in for a kiss thirty feet from where your parents slept” can be analyzed using the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a material process, which represents an action or event performed by an actor. In the clause “I leaned in for a kiss”, “I” serves as the Actor, “leaned in” is the material process, and “for a kiss” functions as the Goal, representing the entity or outcome the action is directed toward. The material process “leaned in” positions the speaker as an active participant, yet the action itself is minimal and anticipatory rather than fully realized, suggesting hesitation within intimacy. The Goal “for a kiss” functions not merely as a physical target but as a socially and emotionally loaded intention, indicating desire that is constrained by context. The phrase “thirty feet from where your parents slept” acts as a circumstance of location (spatial), specifying the physical proximity of the action. This location is especially meaningful, as it implies tension or secrecy within the situation. Overall, the line constructs a vivid physical action layered with emotional and social implications, using the transitivity system to convey both movement and atmosphere.

Excerpt 2: I'm [I am] the same as I was, it's [it is] all okay

This data is taken from the 13th line of the All My Love’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>I</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>the same as I was,</i>
	(carrier)	(relational process)	(attribute)

Analysis:	<i>It</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>all okay.</i>
	(carrier)	(relational process)	(attribute)

The lyric “I’m the same as I was, it’s all okay” can be analyzed using the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as consisting of relational processes, which are used to describe states of being, identity, or qualities. In the first clause, “I’m the same as I was”, the participant “I” functions as the Carrier, “am” is the relational process (attributive), and “the same as I was” is the Attribute, describing the state or characteristic of the speaker as unchanged over time. This construction reflects a sense of self-continuity. In the second clause, “It’s all okay”, the participant “it” functions as the Carrier, “is” is again the relational process, and “all okay” is the Attribute, describing the condition or evaluation of the situation. Both clauses use intensive attributive relational processes to construct a tone of self-acceptance and reassurance, focusing on identity and emotional state rather than action or perception.

The third song Strawberry Wine by Noah Kahan contains a total of 24 lines. Out of these, 12 lines were selected for analysis due to their reflection of the ideational metafunction. Of the 12 lines that qualified for ideational metafunction analysis in Strawberry Wine, a total of 18 processes were identified and categorized based on Halliday’s transitivity framework. The material process appeared most frequently, occurring 8 times, indicating that the song often emphasizes physical actions or events. This was followed by relational processes, which occurred 4 times, typically used to express states of being or identity. Both mental and verbal processes were identified 3 times each, reflecting moments of inner reflection and communication. Notably, there were no instances of behavioral or existential

processes in the analyzed lines.

Table 3. The Use of Process Types in Strawberry Wine

No.	Types of Process	Frequency
1.	Material Process	8
2.	Relational Process	4
3.	Mental Process	3
4.	Verbal Process	3
5.	Behavioral Process	0
6.	Existential Process	0
TOTAL		18

The next section showcases three examples that illustrate the ideational metafunction within the song Strawberry Wine. Each example has been carefully chosen to represent one of the three most commonly occurring process types identified in the analysis. These selected examples are presented below:

Excerpt 1: We buried your bones in plywood

This data is taken from the 6th line of the Strawberry Wine’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“We</i>	<i>Buried</i>	<i>your bones</i>	<i>in plywood.”</i>
	(actor)	(material process)	(goal)	(circumstance of location)

The lyric “We buried your bones in plywood” can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a material process, which represents a physical action performed by an actor that affects a goal. In this clause, “We” functions as the Actor, the one who acts. The verb “buried” is the material process, indicating a concrete act of doing. The material process “buried” does not merely represent a past action, but functions as a linguistic realization of finality, suggesting the closure of a relationship or emotional experience. The phrase “your bones” serves as the Goal, the entity directly affected by the action of burying. Lastly, “in plywood” operates as a circumstance of location (spatial), specifying the place or material context in which the action occurs. This circumstance is significant because it suggests an unconventional or emotionally charged burial setting, adding symbolic weight to the action. Overall, the

transitivity structure effectively conveys a somber and possibly metaphorical event, emphasizing both the physical act and the emotional or situational context in which it takes place.

Excerpt 2: I'm [I am] in love with every song you've ever heard

This data is taken from the 3rd line of the Strawberry Wine’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“I</i>	<i>Am</i>	<i>in love with every song you’ve...</i> ”
	(carrier)	(relational process)	(attribute)

The clause constructs identity through relational attribution, where emotional experience is not represented as an action but as a defining state of being. The lyric “I’m in love with every song you’ve ever heard” can be analyzed using the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a relational process, specifically an intensive attributive process, which is used to identify or describe the state or quality of a participant. In this clause, “I” functions as the Carrier, the participant whose identity or condition is being described. The verb “am” serve as the relational process, linking the Carrier to their state. The Attribute “in love with every song you’ve ever heard” extends beyond literal affection for music, suggesting an emotional alignment with another person’s experiences, tastes, or memory traces embedded in those songs. In this sense, “songs” operate as symbolic carriers of lived experience and emotional history rather than mere objects of preference. The phrase “in love with every song you’ve ever heard” acts as the Attribute, specifying the emotional condition experienced by the Carrier. Overall, the main clause presents a relational process conveying a deep emotional state, making it a rich representation of personal affection within the transitivity framework.

The fourth song Growing Sideways consists of 46 lines in total. From these, 22 lines were chosen for analysis based on their relevance to the ideational metafunction. The analysis of 22 selected lines from Growing Sideways revealed a total of 31 processes, distributed across six types based on Halliday’s transitivity system. The material process emerged as the most frequently used, appearing 11

times, indicating a strong emphasis on actions and events. This was followed by mental processes, found 9 times, reflecting the speaker’s internal thoughts and perceptions. Relational processes were identified 7 times, showing how states of being or identity are constructed in the lyrics. Meanwhile, verbal processes appeared 2 times, and both behavioral and existential processes occurred just once each.

Table 4. The Use of Process Types in Growing Sideways

No.	Types of Process	Frequency
1.	Material Process	11
2.	Mental Process	9
3.	Relational Process	7
4.	Verbal Process	2
5.	Behavioral Process	1
6.	Existential Process	1
TOTAL		31

These findings suggest that the song primarily focuses on doing and sensing, with occasional references to being, speaking, and existing. The following examples have been thoughtfully selected to represent the three least frequently occurring process types identified in the analysis. Each example offers insight into how these less common processes contribute to the overall meaning of the song and is presented below for further examination.

Excerpt 1: I said ‘I’m [I am] cured’

This data is taken from the 4th line of the Growing Sideways’ song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>I</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>‘I am cured.’</i>
	(sayer)	(verbal process)	(verbiage)

The clause constructs a distinction between spoken identity and underlying experiential reality, where language functions as a site of self-representation rather than transparent truth. The lyric “I said ‘I’m cured’” can be analyzed using the

transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a clear example of a verbal process, which represents acts of saying. In this clause, “I” serves as the Sayer, the participant responsible for the act of communication. The verb “said” functions as the verbal process, signaling the act of expressing something verbally. The quoted content “I’m cured” acts as the Verbiage, which is the content or message that is being conveyed by the Sayer. In this sense, the clause suggests a potential gap between linguistic declaration and lived reality, where healing is articulated through language before it is fully realized experientially. Overall, the verbal process here highlights how speech acts can function as a mechanism for self-framing, identity construction, and possible emotional masking.

Excerpt 2: At the end of the day, I know there are worse ways to stay alive

This data is taken from the 11th and 12th lines of the Growing Sideways’ song lyrics. These song lyrics can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“At the end of the day,</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>know</i>
	(circumstance of time)	(senser)	(mental process)

Analysis:	<i>there are</i>	<i>worse ways to stay alive.”</i>
	(existential process)	(existent)
	(phenomenon)	

The clause constructs a cognitive and existential framing in which hardship is linguistically normalized through comparative evaluation of survival. The lyric “At the end of the day, I know there are worse ways to stay alive” can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) primarily as a mental process, specifically one of cognition. In the main clause “I know there are worse ways to stay alive”, “I” serves as the Senser, the conscious participant who is experiencing the mental activity, and “know” is the mental process, not merely indicating cognition, but functioning as a form of internal rationalization, where the speaker actively reorganizes experience into an acceptable interpretation. The entire clause “there are worse ways to stay alive” functions as the Phenomenon, which is the content of what is known. Within that embedded clause, “there are”

introduces an existential process, where “worse ways to stay alive” is the Existent, referring to alternative, though less desirable, means of survival. The opening phrase “At the end of the day” is a circumstance of time, situating the mental process in a broader temporal context. Overall, the clause constructs a worldview in which survival is linguistically justified through comparison, and emotional hardship is managed through cognitive reframing rather than resolution, highlighting how language encodes resilience as ideological acceptance.

The last song *You're Gonna Go Far* by Noah Kahan comprises a total of 56 lyrical lines. Of these, 32 lines were selected for analysis due to their clear representation of the ideational metafunction. The analysis of the 32 selected lines from *You're Gonna Go Far* identified a total of 39 process instances distributed across six different process types. Material processes were the most frequently occurring, appearing 16 times, indicating a strong emphasis on actions and events. This was followed by relational processes, which appeared 12 times, reflecting the song’s focus on states of being, identity, and relationships. Mental processes occurred 6 times, highlighting inner experiences such as thoughts, perceptions, or feelings. Both verbal and behavioral processes appeared twice each, suggesting limited but notable instances of communication and physical behavior. Lastly, there was one instance of an existential process, indicating the presence or existence of something.

Table 5. The Use of Process Types in *You're Gonna Go Far*

No.	Types of Process	Frequency
1.	Material Process	16
2.	Relational Process	12
3.	Mental Process	6
4.	Verbal Process	2
5.	Behavioral Process	2
6.	Existential Process	1
TOTAL		39

These findings demonstrate the diverse use of experiential meanings within the song’s lyrics. The following examples have been carefully chosen to illustrate the three least frequently occurring process types identified in the analysis. Although less prominent, these processes offer valuable insight into the nuanced ways meaning is constructed throughout the song. Each example is presented below

to highlight how these less common experiential choices enrich the overall message and emotional depth of the lyrics.

Excerpt 1: You told me you would make a difference

This data is taken from the 34th line of the You’re Gonna Go Far’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“You</i>	<i>told</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>you would make a difference.”</i>
	(sayer)	(verbal process)	(receiver)	(verbiage)

The clause constructs a discourse of projected change in which language functions as a mechanism for shaping expectation rather than merely conveying information. The verbal process “told” positions the speaker as a recipient of constructed meaning, indicating an asymmetry of authority where “you” functions as the source of promised transformation. The Verbiage “you would make a difference” operates not simply as reported speech, but as a projected future-oriented commitment that frames identity and expectation around anticipated change. However, the modal structure “would” simultaneously introduces conditionality, suggesting that the promised transformation is not guaranteed, thereby creating a tension between expectation and realization. The Receiver “me” is linguistically positioned as dependent on this projected narrative of change, highlighting emotional reliance on external validation or intervention. Overall, the clause constructs communication as a site of unrealized potential, where promises function as ideological projections that may shape emotional experience even in the absence of fulfillment.

Excerpt 2: We'll [We will] be waitin' for you, love

This data is taken from the 26th line of the You’re Gonna Go Far’s song lyrics. This song lyric can be analyzed through the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which focuses on how experiences are represented in language through processes, participants, and circumstances.

Analysis:	<i>“We</i>	<i>will be waitin’</i>	<i>for you,</i>	<i>love.”</i>
	(behaber)	(behavioral process)	(circumstance of cause)	vocative

The clause constructs waiting as a socially shared emotional state in which action is replaced by sustained anticipation, indicating that meaning is generated through temporal suspension rather than physical activity. The behavioral process “will be waitin’” does not merely denote an ongoing action, but encodes a prolonged emotional commitment, where time itself becomes a site of relational endurance. The Behaver “we” constructs a collective identity, suggesting that emotional experience is shared and reinforced through communal expectation rather than individual feeling. The circumstance “for you” positions the addressee as the organizing center of meaning, implying that the emotional state of waiting is contingent upon the absence or delayed presence of the other. The vocative “love” functions as an interpersonal intimacy marker that reinforces emotional closeness while simultaneously highlighting distance, creating a paradox of connection through separation. Overall, the clause constructs waiting as an affective condition in which relational meaning is sustained through absence, positioning time, emotion, and identity within a framework of prolonged attachment.

Conclusion

Noah Kahan realizes the ideational metafunctions through vivid imagery and personal metaphors that connect internal emotions with external experiences. For example, in “I am terrified of weather ’cause I see you when it rains”, he externalizes memory and grief into natural phenomena, showing how the environment becomes a trigger for emotional recollection. Similarly, in “I’m in love with every song you’ve ever heard”, he portrays affection by linking love with music, transforming abstract feelings into tangible representations. Both linguistic choices show how external experiences mirror inner emotions. Overall, these findings indicate that ideational meaning in the selected songs is consistently constructed through the transitivity system that externalizes inner emotional states into experiences of nature, memory, and interpersonal relations, suggesting that the lyrics systematically encode human experience as a continuous interaction between psychological processes and environmental or relational contexts, thereby answering the research question on how meaning is ideationally realized in the album.

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