

Appraisal Analysis on The Album *Midnights*: Graduation System Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Appraisal appears to be interpersonal meaning system in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1994). Appraisal negotiates the social relationship by expressing to the reader or the listener how the one who expresses about people or things. A song must contain a story or meaning behind the lyrics. This study explores the use of amplifications, namely graduation, in lyrics of 5 selected songs by Taylor Swift. The data were taken from the best-selling album of 2022, *Midnights*, by the American singer-songwriter. The songs discussed in this research were: *Anti-Hero*, *Lavender Haze*, *Karma*, *Mastermind*, and *Midnight Rain*. The reasons researchers chose the sampling songs are: (1) the collected data consisting all of the graduation systems, (2) the album is known as the record-breaker in any music category. The type of the research is descriptive qualitative method. The method of the data collection is the researchers listened to the selected songs on the singer's YouTube channel and then got the transcript lyrics on Genius website. The technique of the data analysis of this study employed the appraisal system by Martin and Rose's framework 2007. This research aims to discover the categories in the graduation system, force and focus, in the five selected songs from the album *midnights*. Force and focus still can be classified deeper. In force there are: (1) attitudinal lexis, (2) intensifiers, (3) metaphors, and (4) swearing. Meanwhile Focus consists of sharpen and soften. The finding shows that force happens to be used more often than focus. The observed data found out there are 72 graduation systems from 60 lines. The data mostly contains focus subsystem, metaphors with 32 lines (44,4%). The least graduation subsystem that is used in the data is Sharpen Focus with only 3 lines (4,2%).

Keywords: Appraisal, Focus, Force, and Graduation System

INTRODUCTION

An album is a collection of songs, normally 7 through 29 songs, that represents a snapshot of an artist at a certain point in time (Crawfoot, 2019). A song itself is a part cultural legacy, it does not stand alone but associated to social affairs, politics and history to which the song was born, grow and advance (Alatas, 1982). A song is a piece standardly contains of two main aspects which are vocally and melodically recorded as the primarily and linguistically meaningful words, lyric as the secondary (Hewett & Corke, 2002) ; (Griffiee, 1992). The song lyrics bring the heart of the song meaning. Lyric is the main communication aspect in a song which used human language to express the writer's feelings and ideas which later will be composed for singing (Agustin, Tanduklangi, & Sapan, 2019). By that point, it can be translated that lyrics in a song is capable to be written rely on someone's experiences or imaginaries about life such as, love, happiness, sadness, anger, insecurity, regret, grief, relationship, hobby and such others.

This study observes the data based from song lyrics. The songs were taken from Taylor Swift's album, *Midnights*. The researchers selected five songs out of 13 songs in total on the album. Those songs are called *Anti-Hero*, *Karma*, *Lavender Haze*, *Mastermind*, and *Midnight Rain*. The researchers decided to choose those ones because of the songwriters' diction in the selected song lyrics. The lyrics seem to have a good number of appraisals, specifically, the graduation system. The lyrics that have been chosen in the songs are casual, yet somehow the lyrics deliver such great and deep messages.

To acknowledge the background of its appreciation deeper, it needs a tool to see its meaning of song lyrics amplification in words. Appraisal is expected to be the best 'knife' to analyze English songs' lyrics. Appraisal appears to be interpersonal meaning system in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1994). Appraisal is connected to evaluation in written text, it has capability to find out the strength between the feelings and the sources of the values as well as the target readers intertwined (Martin & Rose, 2007). They also define that appraisal systems are segmented into attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude has three primary types (affect, judgment, and appreciation). The source namely, heteroglossia, it has monogloss and heterogloss. Graduation, herewith amplification, contains by force (intensifier, attitudinal lexis, metaphor, and swearing) and focus

(sharpen and soften). The graduation system focuses on the gradable system of how powerful human expresses their feeling towards something.

In line with the problem stated earlier, there are some previous studies conducted on graduation system such as Qomariyah, 2018; Putri & Cahyono, 2021. They observed texts from online news. In conducting their studies, they employ Martin and White theory on graduation. The results show that Qomariyah found Force as the most dominant, whereas in Putri & Cahyono, Focus is the most appeared in the data. Meanwhile, Panjaitan, Herman, & Sinaga, 2020; Yunanda, Pardede, Wati, Deaparin, & Tafonao, 2021; Hasanah, 2022, they utilize song lyrics as their main data, but they analyze the data using figurative language. However, Jatikusumo, 2012 and Carretero, Tabaoda and Hinnell, 2014, they analyze the data by all appraisal subsystems from (Martin and Rose, 2003) and (White, 2003). Meanwhile, the present study explores the use of graduation by using different data that is songs' lyrics by Taylor Swift. Besides, this study also different from those previous ones because this study uses Martin and Rose's 2007 framework by classifying types of, one of the appraisal subsystems, graduation.

Systemic Functional Linguistic

Systemic functional linguistics or commonly called SFL is a grammar model developed by Halliday (1994, 2004, 2014) as the model of language as social semiotics. Meanwhile, Eggins (1994) argue that SFL is an approach to language which is centered on how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life. As cited in Halliday & Mattiessen (2004); Hart (2014); Cahyono (2018) SFL provides two theories of language that base on choice and purpose. In so doing, in communicating, people can use the language properly based on the purpose and the choice of the communication they made. In SFL, there are three realizations of meanings such as ideational, textual, and interpersonal meanings. In this study, the focus of this study is the use of interpersonal meaning under appraisal system called graduation.

Appraisal

Appraisal under interpersonal meaning is an approach to explore, describe, and explain how language is used to evaluate a language (Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007; Hood, 2012). Furthermore, Thompson (2014) states that the aim of appraisal is to systematize the set of linguistics resources that the speakers and writers use to negotiate evaluations. Martin

and White (2005) classify appraisal into three systems comprising attitude, engagement, and graduation. Meanwhile, this study focuses on one type of appraisal systems called graduation. Whist, graduation, according to Martin & Rose (2007) distributes graduation into three including attitudinal lexis, intensifiers, metaphor, and swearing. In addition, below is figure of graduation system proposed by Martin and White (2005)

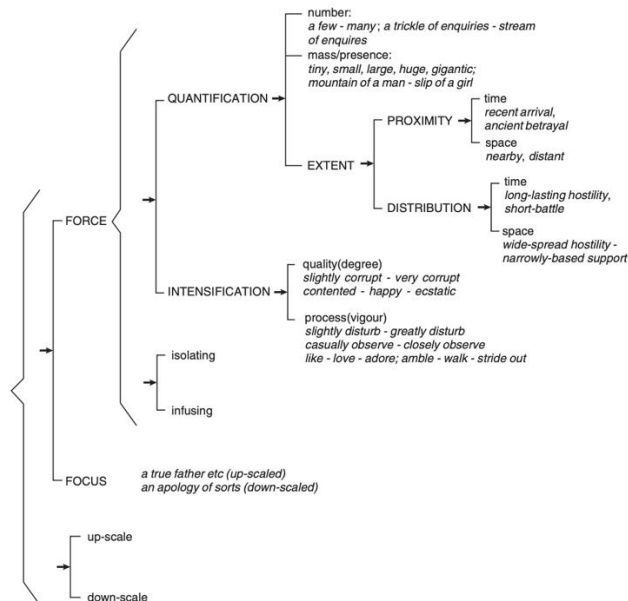


Fig. 1 System network for graduation

Song lyrics

Song lyrics are one of the variations in terms of textual meaning (Wati, 2014). A song lyric is word-based language that demonstrated absurd emotional meanings which set in the song stated by (Dorrell, 2021). Song Lyrics are a set of words that build up a song which have to be analyzed with esteem. Lyrics, as the main linguistic aspect in song, help the listeners to feel and to understand better the sense of what the meaning of the lyrics have been expressed throughout the song. Lyrics hand over deep personal emotion or observations. Lyrics are created by the writers revolved around the society where it is produced, include what the song is about, the word choices, the slangs, the accent and so on.

METHOD

In this study, the method used in this study is qualitative method. Meanwhile, the data used in this study were five selected songs from the

latest Taylor Swift album called *Midnights*. The album was released in October 28th 2022. These five selected songs are *Anti-Hero*, *Karma*, *Lavender Haze*, *Mastermind*, and *Midnight Rain*. Each song's average duration is 3 minutes. The songs were taken from the artist's official YouTube account, @TaylorSwift. Furthermore, the researchers obtained the transcript of the songs from Genius music website (<https://genius.com/albums/Taylor-swift/Midnights>). In analyzing the data, the researchers applied a framework proposed by Martin and Rose (2007) on appraisal. Whilst, the researchers focused only on one system of appraisals namely graduation/amplification which comprises of attitudinal lexis, intensifier, metaphor, and swearing, as well as sharpen and soften.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier above, this present research aimed to expound the appraisal subsystems, graduation, in five selected songs from *Midnights*, Taylor Swift's album. The song lyrics were observed line by line. There are 60 lines from those songs contain every single one of the graduation systems. The graduation systems appeared 72 times as which shown in Table 1 based on the analysis.

Table 1:
The systems of graduation

| Graduation Systems | Recurrence | Percentage | |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------|-------|
| Force | Attitudinal Lexis | 10 | 13,9% |
| | Intensifiers | 13 | 18,1% |
| | Swearing | 6 | 8,3% |
| | Metaphor | 32 | 44,4% |
| Focus | Soften | 8 | 11,1% |
| | Sharpen | 3 | 4,2% |
| Total | 72 | 100,0% | |

The Table 1 points out the main result of the research. The result revealed that Force is used more often than Focus, which differentiate from Putri & Cahyono's 2021 study that Focus is the dominant one. Metaphor is being use almost as half as the whole graduation systems with 32 lines (44,4%) as the songwriters intended to bear as creative as they could to write the song lyrics beautifully. Whereas the Focus, subsystem Sharpen has only 3 clauses as the lowest (4,2%).

Force: Attitudinal Lexis

- (1) Slowly lurching toward your favorite city.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|---|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Slowly lurching toward your favorite city | favorite | city | Force: Attitudinal Lexis |

In the data above, the adjective 'favorite' as appraising item appraised the 'city' as the noun. The singer used the lexis 'favorite' to explain that the city the singer's speaks about is well liked by "you" in the line. It makes the lexis an attitudinal lexis, force.

(2) It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero | exhausting | it | Force: Attitudinal Lexis |

Based on the second data "it must be exhausting" contains the lexis 'exhausting' which expresses the tiredness in higher level. It is one of the vocabulary items that include degrees of intensity. It comprises in the force as in Attitudinal lexis. Instead of saying 'tired' or 'worn out', the songwriter chose 'exhausting' as very tired. It appraised the word 'it', refers to "always rooting for the anti-hero".

(3) You're terrified to look down.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| You're terrified to look down | terrified | you | Force: Attitudinal Lexis |

The last excerpt is "You're terrified to look down". This clause has the same appraisal subsystem as the second data. The appraising item includes in the degrees of intensity. 'you' is appraised by 'terrified'. The songwriter picked the word 'terrified' which is a higher level than 'scared' or 'afraid' to bold the frighten level that 'you' feels.

The result revealed that graduation system force, attitudinal lexis only appeared 10 times (13,9%) in the data. However, it is in the top 3 most appeared in the data.

Force: Intensifiers

(4) Tale as old as time.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
|------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|

| | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|------|-----------------------|
| Tale as old as time | as old as time | Tale | Force: Intensifier |
|---------------------|----------------|------|-----------------------|

The data (4) is intensifier force due to the appraising item. The “as old as time” hyperbolically used to describe the noun ‘tale’. By that means, the tale written in the song lyric has been existed for a long time. The appraising item follows the noun as in which includes the intensify comparison in exposition.

(5) I’m a monster on the hill, too big to hang out.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| I’m a monster on the hill, too big to hang out | too | I | Force: Intensifier |

The data points out that ‘I’, the singer, felt toward her appearance, “Too big to hang out”. The appraising item ‘too’ which is an intensifier force, is used to refer on how overwhelm the singer feels. She is insecure that she has bigger body than some of her friends in comparison.

(6) And you don't really read into.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| And you don't really read into my melancholia | really | you | Force: Intensifier |

Build upon the data (6), it is obvious that the appraising item is an intensifier force. The Intensifier force designed to have the ‘turning volume up and down’ words. Lexis ‘really’ is one of the ‘turning the volume up’ words. It appraised the pronoun in the lines “you don’t really read” to expose that the ‘you’ is not literary give effort to do the act, ‘read’.

The intensifier in the entire data is placed 13 times (18,1%). However, the force: intensifier is in the top 2 of the most used graduation subsystems in this study.

Force: Swearing

(7) You're talking shit for the hell of it.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| You're talking shit for the hell of it | shit | You | Force: Swearing |
| | hell | It | Force: Swearing |

The data (7) contains two swear words, 'shit' and 'hell'. Both technically are swearing in force graduation subsystem. The first swear word 'shit' is an appraising item and the appraised item is 'you' which means that the line "You're talking shit" clarifies that the singer intends to show the anger against the 'you' by adding the swear word. 'Talking shit' can be interpret as talking something that is not necessary. Which then two lexes later the singer gives another swear word, 'hell'. The entire clause is "The hell of it". It is a slang word which means 'just for fun'. The songwriter seems to use the lexis to show the anger further.

(8) If I do give a damn what people say.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| If I do give a damn what people say | damn | I | Force: Swearing |

The phrase "give a damn" consists of the swear word 'damn'. It certainly is amplifying the force of attitudes, swearing. The phrase is such a popular phrase in English speaking society. Simply it means 'care'. Nevertheless, people typically use the phrase to negative sentences by putting 'don't' in front of the phrase. The songwriter utilizes the phrase to declare that she really do not care about what the 'you' speaks about.

The researchers examined in the data that amplification of swearing barely used by the songwriter to point out the feeling. It only pops out six times (8,3%). It can be viewed that the singer rather using another word than swear word.

Force: Metaphor

(9) Karma's a relaxing thought.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Karma's a relaxing thought | Relaxing thought | karma | Force: Metaphor |

The data (9) is focused on the metaphor. 'Karma' is being appraised by 'relaxing thought' as an appraising item. Instead of describing karma that generally seems as a bad thing that comes to someone for doing something bad in the past, the songwriter portrays karma as a good thing that keeps her in peace and has a nice relationship with it.

(10) He was sunshine.

| Data (Line) | Appraising | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|
| He was sunshine | sunshine | He | Force: Metaphor |

"He was sunshine" is another metaphor that the researchers

discover in the data. After understanding the whole song, “Midnight Rain”, it can be translated that the data (10) and the data (11) connected to each other as comparison of He and the singer in the song. The data (10) defines that the singer illustrates ‘he’ has a bright future, he has a nice normal job, and he wants to get married. Therefore, the singer has a vision of him as sunshine.

(11) I was midnight rain.

| Data (Line) | Appraising | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------------|
| I was midnight rain | midnight rain | I | Force: Metaphor |

It has been discussed that data (11) is the continuation of the data (10). This line is also a metaphor. In this following line, the singer defines herself ‘midnight rain’ as appraising item, a total opposite of the significant other. It can be portrayed that the ‘I’ is a wild girl, she doesn’t want to settle down and get married, and she is chasing her dreams to be the most popular singer in the world.

The amplification of metaphor is the most dominant subsystem found in the data. It has 32 clauses in total (44,4%). It is recognizable in order that the data source is song lyrics. The songwriters acknowledge that song lyrics should be written as beautiful as it could to be a masterpiece.

Focus: Soften

(12) I feel like everybody is a sexy baby.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Like some kind of congressman? | kind of | Congressman | Focus: Soften |

It is revealed in the data (12) that the appraising item, ‘kind of appraised the ‘congressman’. The appraising item is graded by softening lexis. The singer uses the lexis by reason of she is unsure whether her political voice is heard by people or not. The singer opened up about her political statement in late 2019.

(13) To make them love me and make it seem effortless.

| Data | Appraising item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| To make them love me and make it seem effortless | seem | It | Focus: Soften |

The phrase ‘seem’ in the line (13) is a softening lexis. It is hedging the appraised ‘it’ because the singer tries to hide that she gives an effort to

what she is doing.

The total data has 8 soften lexis (11,1%). The singer seems certain about what she sings in most of the lyrics. Some song lyrics contain story-telling that has happened so the singer informed a certain story without hesitation which makes her barely uses soften focus.

Focus: Sharpen

(14) I should not be left to my own devices.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| I should not be left to my own devices | own | devices | Focus: Sharpen |

The appraising item is 'own' and the appraised item is 'devices'. The appraising item is used for sharpening the appraised item. The appraising item is not mandatory in the first place. It is used to emphasize that the appraised item is hers truly.

(15) It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero.

| Data | Appraising Item | Appraised | Graduation Type |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero | must | it | Focus: Sharpen |

The data (15) enlighten the appraised item, 'it', followed by appraising item lexis, 'must'. The lexis *must* is the highest degree of modality. The use of the modality *must* is to emphasize or sharpening the boundaries of appraised item that it is "exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero".

Focus: sharpen happens to be the rarest graduation system in the data. It only presents three times. The main reason that the researchers could explain is as just same as the soften data. The singer mainly certain about what she sings. The focus subsystems are really not necessary.

CONCLUSION

All of the discussion above can be summarized that graduation subsystem, Force: Metaphor is the most used by the singer with 32 lines almost as half as the whole data. There are found 72 graduation subsystems in total. It demonstrates that the songwriters wrote the song lyrics by expressing the feeling through metaphors most of the time. Meanwhile the focus: sharpen lexis appeared three times as the lowest. The data, Taylor Swift's album, *Midnights* offers all of the graduation subsystems, namely force (intensifier, attitudinal lexis, swearing, and metaphor) and focus

(soften and sharpen). However, force is utilized more often than focus. Few advices that can be suggested for the researchers who are studying appraisal, first understanding the appraisal from as many sources as possible. The second, the researchers might do appraisal analysis, specifically graduation system, in other kinds of data as such advertisement, slang phrases, and live streams.

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