

Transcending the Power of Language: A Metadiscourse Analysis of Selected Song of Taylor Swift

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Abstract

This study qualitatively explores the use of metadiscourse in Taylor Swift's songwriting using a descriptive research approach. The primary objective is to examine how metadiscourse markers contribute to the narrative structure and emotional depth of her lyrics. Using the advanced text analysis tool Text Inspector, six songs—"Enchanted," "Mr. Perfectly Fine," "My Tears Ricochet," "Sparks Fly," "Electric Touch," and "Fifteen"—were analyzed to identify and interpret various metadiscourse elements. The results indicate that personal markers were the most frequently used metadiscourse type across the selected songs. "My Tears Ricochet" ranked the highest, containing four types (5.97%), followed by "Mr. Perfectly Fine" (4 types, 4.88%), "Electric Touch" (5 types, 3.94%), "Enchanted" (3 types, 3.95%), and "Sparks Fly" (3 types, 2.86%). "Fifteen" stood out due to its notable use of sequencing markers, which accounted for 4.23% of its textual markers. These findings highlight Taylor Swift's distinct songwriting style, particularly her strategic use of personal markers to establish emotional connections with her listeners. Her lyrics provide an introspective and expressive lens into her personal experiences, reinforcing the importance of metadiscourse in lyrical storytelling. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic markers enhance musical narratives. Future research is recommended to explore metadiscourse in the works of other artists to compare linguistic styles and their effects on audience engagement.

Keywords: metadiscourse analysis, Taylor Swift, personal markers, text inspector

Introduction

Metadiscourse is often described by researchers as "the bridge between the writer's mind and the reader's understanding" because it helps structure communication in a way that enhances comprehension and engagement (Baguing, 2024). It allows writers to guide their audience through the text, making content accessible and meaningful (Hyland, 2017). With the rise of digital communication technologies, metadiscourse has become even more significant, as it provides new ways to present

information clearly and effectively. Digital platforms, such as social media and streaming services, have reshaped the writing landscape, emphasizing the need for reader-centered and purposeful text construction.

Despite extensive research on Taylor Swift's songwriting, few studies have explored her explicit use of metadiscourse. Most academic discussions focus on themes of love, separation, self-development, and personal discovery in her lyrics, overlooking the linguistic strategies she employs to connect with listeners. Given the narrative and emotional impact of metadiscourse, analyzing Swift's lyrics through this lens is essential. Understanding how she constructs meaning within her songs can reveal the meta-disciplinary role of language in music. While metadiscourse has been widely studied in academic writing (Liu & Chen, 2022), its role in song lyrics remains underexplored.

This study examines six of Taylor Swift's popular songs—"Enchanted," "Mr. Perfectly Fine," "My Tears Ricochet," "Sparks Fly," "Electric Touch," and "Fifteen"—to analyze how metadiscourse enhances lyrical storytelling. These songs were chosen based on their popularity, lyrical complexity, and thematic diversity, ensuring a well-rounded representation of Swift's songwriting techniques. By investigating the use of pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references, this research provides new insights into the relationship between language, music, and emotional engagement. The findings contribute to the existing literature on metadiscourse in music, offering a fresh perspective on how linguistic elements enhance both narrative and emotional depth in contemporary songwriting.

Research Objective

This study aims to analyze metadiscourse usage in Taylor Swift's lyrics and how it contributes to the narrative and emotional depth of her songs. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify and examine the linguistic elements (pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references) that shape Swift's songwriting.
2. Explore how these elements help construct her lyrical identity and strengthen her connection with listeners.
3. Analyze selected songs ("*Sparks Fly*," "*Mr. Perfectly Fine*," "*My Tears Ricochet*," "*Electric Touch*," and "*Fifteen*") to determine the metadiscourse strategies used to evoke emotional responses and enhance storytelling.

Methodology

Taylor Swift's songs have often been described as "music to braid your best friend's hair to" (Gutowitz, 2020), a phrase that captures the intensity and intimacy defining her songs. As one of the most influential pop artists of the 21st century, Swift possesses a rare talent for writing songs that brings intense feelings in listeners and forge a close bond with them through her words. Her songs are more than just catchy tunes; they tell tales and awaken feelings that allow her to express herself.

This study employs metadiscourse analysis to examine selected songs of Taylor Swift using a qualitative descriptive approach. Six popular songs were chosen based on their popularity with audiences, ensuring their relevance to the study's objectives (Billboard, n.d.). The analysis focuses primarily on the introductions and

choruses of the songs, as these sections are pivotal in establishing their narratives and emotional tones.

The data collection process involved selecting lyrics based on the specified criteria. Text Inspector, a tool that generates word lists and frequency counts for metadiscourse markers, processed these lyrics (Bax et al., 2019). The markers were categorized and prioritized for analysis according to their frequency and functional significance. Examples of metadiscourse elements analyzed included interactive features such as personal pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references, as well as interactional devices contributing to audience engagement and emotional impact. The number of tokens analyzed varied per song, with a maximum of 250 words, providing a thorough understanding of how metadiscourse shapes listeners' emotional and cognitive experiences. Furthermore, the results were presented through tables, which visually represented the distribution and significance of the analyzed metadiscourse markers. These visualizations thoroughly provided a comprehensive understanding of the language metadiscourse in Swift's songwriting, emphasizing how metadiscourse shapes the listener's emotional and cognitive experience.

Results

This section outlines the results obtained from the study. The data were presented, analyzed, and interpreted using tables to provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Table 1

Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	All	69 (90.79%)	97 (80.83%)
Logical connective	And	1 (1.32%)	2 (1.67%)
Personal Marker	I	3 (3.95%)	10 (8.33%)
Relational marker	You	3 (3.95%)	11 (9.17%)
Total		7 (9.21%)	23 (19.17%)

Table 1 presents the overall results from the text inspector metadiscourse analysis of the song "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift, highlighting the frequent use of personal pronouns such as "I" and "you," which collectively account for 3 (3.95%) types and 10 (8.33%) of the total metadiscourse markers. This usage underscores the song's focus on individuality, with the singer's voice central to the narrative. As Shi, Y. (2021) suggests, first-person pronouns foster a sense of involvement on the part of the listener by engaging them in the artist's narrative. Supporting this, Graesser et al. (2018) point out that frequent personal pronouns in lyrics significantly boost listeners' engagement, while O'Sullivan (2019) further opines those personal experiences nurture more emotive significance. In contrast, metadiscourse elements like logical connectives are used less frequently, such as the word "and," making up only 1 (1.32%) type and 2(1.67%) tokens of the total. According to Promova (n.d), the conjunction "and" links words, phrases, or clauses, contributing to logical coherence and the flow of ideas within a sentence. This indicates that the song emphasizes urgency, synonymous with emotions such as infatuation and awe, to pump emotion into the song for its audience.

Table 2*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Mr. Perfectly Fine" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	Everything	68 (82.93%)	102 (80.31%)
Emphatic	Always	3 (3.66%)	3 (2.36%)
Endophoric	See	1 (1.22%)	1 (0.79%)
Hedge	Would	1 (1.22%)	1 (0.79%)
Logical connective	But	3 (3.66%)	5 (3.94%)
Person Marker	Me	4 (4.88%)	9 (7.06%)
Relational marker	Your	2 (2.44%)	6 (4.72%)
Total		14 (17.07%)	25 (19.69%)

For Table 2, the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "Mr. Perfectly Fine" reveals significant findings, with the most frequently used word list "me," a person marker, which appears in 4 (4.88%) types and 9 (7.09%) tokens in total. Swift's use of "me" strengthens the emotional connection with listeners, positioning the song as an intimate reflection on personal heartbreak. This usage aligns with the narrative techniques observed in "In-the-Picture," where first-person pronouns immerse the audience in the subject's perspective (Parry, 2014; Altair, 2021). Furthermore, Swift's willingness to share her personal experiences through her music has strongly connected with her audience (Graham, 2023), making her songs emotional touchstones that help fans navigate their experiences. However, the least frequently used words were "see," categorized as an endophoric marker, and "would," classified as a hedge, each occurring 1 (0.79%) type and 1 (1.22%) token. Although these markers may appear insignificant, they are essential to the song as "see" aids in creating vivid imagery, making the song more relatable and emotionally engaging (Fitzpatrick, 2022), while "would" introduces a sense of possibility and emotional depth, encouraging reflection and connection with the listener (Daisie Team, 2023). Together, these metadiscourse elements help to craft a song that emotionally connects with its audience, deepening their connection to the song.

Table 3*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "My Tears Ricochet" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	The	60 (89.55%)	70 (76.09%)
Attitude maker	Even	1 (1.49%)	1 (1.09%)
Logical connective	And	1 (1.49%)	3 (3.26%)
Person marker	I	4 (5.97%)	13 (14.13%)
Relational maker	You	1 (1.49%)	5 (5.43%)
Total		7 (10.45%)	22 (23.91%)

Moving on to Table 3, the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "My Tears Ricochet" highlights the prominent use of personal markers such as "I," which accounts for 4 (5.97%) types and 13 (14.13%) tokens. The singular first-person pronoun "I" indicates an emotional connection between the artist and the song's

themes, particularly in expressing personal trauma and grief. As Nordquist (2023) noted, "I" in lyrical writing heightens the personal perspective, drawing listeners closer to the speaker's experience. This means that the frequent use of the word "I" conveys that Taylor Swift herself relates to the song's situation. On the other hand, attitude markers such as "even" appear infrequently, comprising just 1 (1.49%) type and 1 (1.09%) token. Thus, this minimal usage contributes to the song's emotional weight, drawing attention to the stark contrast between the narrator's vulnerability and the unjust cruelty she faces. Swift's careful use of "even" intensifies the emotional depth, highlighting themes of injustice and unresolved grief (Leach, 2020). Overall, these words reinforce the song's intimate, emotionally charged narrative, contributing to the betterment of the song.

Table 4

Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Sparks Fly" by Taylor Swift

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	The	93 (88.57%)	132 (71.74%)
Attitude Marker	Even	1 (0.95%)	1 (0.54%)
Emphatic	Know	2 (1.90%)	3 (1.63%)
Endophoric	See	1 (0.95%)	3 (1.63%)
Hedge	Would	2 (1.90%)	3 (1.63%)
Logical Connective	And	2 (1.90%)	7 (3.80%)
Person Marker	Me	3 (2.86%)	22 (11.96%)
Relational Marker	You	1 (0.95%)	13 (7.07%)
Total		12 (11.43%)	52 (28.26%)

Turning to Table 4, the results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "Sparks Fly" show the frequent use of personal markers such as "I," "me," and "my," which collectively account for 3 (2.86%) types and 22 (11.96%) tokens. The use of "I" signifies the speaker as the subject of the action, "me" as the object, and "my" as a possessive marker, emphasizing the personal and introspective nature of the song (Pinto, n.d.; Carter et al., 2016). These pronouns help Taylor Swift convey an intensely personal narrative, allowing her to connect with the audience emotionally as she shares her feelings, experiences, and views through the music. In contrast, the other three that have the lowest average of 0.95% are classified as the attitude marker, "even" with a token of 1 (0.54%), endophoric, "see" with a total of 3 (1.63%) tokens and a relational marker, "you" has 13 (7.07%) tokens. Using these markers, she enhances the emotional connection with her listeners, allowing them to feel the nuances of her relationships and experiences. As Swift explores growth, love, heartbreak, and self-discovery themes in "Sparks Fly," these pronouns and markers draw listeners into her journey, fostering a sense of shared experience (Songfacts, n.d.; Kartika, 2024).

Table 5*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Electric Touch" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	To	106 (83.46%)	170 (76.92%)
Emphatic	Know	3 (2.36%)	3 (1.36%)
Endophoric	See	1 (0.79%)	1 (0.45%)
Hedge	Could	4 (3.15%)	11 (4.98%)
Logical connective	And	4 (3.15%)	11 (4.98%)
Person Marker	I	5 (3.94%)	14 (6.33%)
Relational marker	Your	2 (1.57%)	9 (4.07%)
Sequencing	First	2 (1.57%)	2 (0.90%)
Total		21 (16.54%)	51 (23.08%)

Table 5 presents the overall results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of the "Electric Touch" song by Taylor Swift. It emphasizes the dominant use of person markers like "I" and "you," which account for 5 (3.94%) types and 14 (6.33%) tokens. This prevalence reflects the song's intimate and personal narrative, placing the speaker at the center of the emotional journey. In contrast, endophoric markers are the least frequent, with just 1(0.79%) type and 1(0.45%) token, highlighting a focus on emotional immediacy over textual cohesion. The frequent use of first-person markers underscores the deeply introspective nature of the lyrics, where the personal perspective fosters emotional authenticity and relatability (Stavrou, 2022). Similarly, Ransom (2021) observes that the repeated use of "I" and "me" in Electric Touch draws listeners into the speaker's vulnerability and reflection, enhancing the song's relatable and authentic appeal. Together, these linguistic features create a narrative that resonates emotionally with its audience.

Table 6*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Fifteen" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	Gonna	59 (85.51%)	75(75.00%)
Emphatic	Know	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Endophoric	Figure	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Evidential	Believe	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Logical Connective	And	1 (1.45%)	6 (6.00%)
Person Marker	I	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Relational Marker	You	2 (2.90%)	12(12.00%)
Sequencing	Next	3 (4.35%)	3 (3.00%)
Total		10 (14.49%)	25 (25.00%)

Finally, Table 6 presents the overall results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of the song "Fifteen" by Taylor Swift. The study classifies the song's words into numerous linguistic types, totaling 69. The results revealed that multiple terms (85.51%) fell into the unlisted category, indicating that they did not fit into the pre-defined types used for the analysis. Among the categorized words, "you,"

as a relational marker, was the most often used word among the categorized words, appearing in 2 (2.90%) types out of a total of 12 (12%) tokens overall. It emphasizes how "you" connects the narrator and the listener, transforming the narrative into a shared experience. This style involves an imagined or recalled relationship where the narrator engages with the listener or a silent protagonist, establishing a mutual sense of presence and co-action Rembowska (2022). This perspective aligns with how Taylor Swift uses "you" in *Fifteen* to draw listeners into a reflective and personal dialogue. In contrast, the last words used in *Fifteen* were "known" as Emphatic, "figure" as Endophoric, "I" as Person Maker, and "believe" as an Evidential in the analysis. They all have the same number of occurrences, 1 (1.45%) type and 1 (1.00%) overall. These linguistic words emphasize the song's emotional depth and personal reflection, enhancing its ability to engage the listener meaningfully and authentically.

Discussions

The metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's selected songs reveals that personal markers are the most frequently used linguistic elements, emphasizing the artist's strong personal connection with her lyrics. Among the six songs analyzed, "My Tears Ricochet" contained the highest percentage of personal markers (5.97%), followed by "Mr. Perfectly Fine" (4.88%) and "Electric Touch" (3.94%). This highlights Swift's use of first-person pronouns like "I" and "me" to engage listeners emotionally and create a more personal storytelling experience.

In contrast, metadiscourse elements like logical connectives (e.g., "and") were used less frequently, indicating that Swift prioritizes emotional intensity over structural cohesion in her lyrics. Additionally, "Fifteen" stood out for its use of sequencing markers (4.23%), which contribute to its reflective storytelling style.

Overall, Swift's strategic use of metadiscourse enhances the narrative depth and emotional engagement of her lyrics, making them more relatable to listeners. The findings suggest that personal pronouns and relational markers play a crucial role in shaping the listener's experience, reinforcing the impact of her storytelling through music.

Recommendations

By using the findings of the research that showed the existence of personal markers in Taylor Swift's lyrics, further studies may go into the different roles that these markers play. By studying personal pronouns, self-referential elements, and other markers, scholars can determine how they contribute to the development of the lyrical persona and create an emotional connection with the listener, thereby improving understanding of their role.

Other forms of metadiscourse markers such as hedges, boosters, and logical connectives would give a deeper understanding of the linguistic moves done by Taylor Swift and other musicians. The relationships among different types of markers can be seen to converge and produce specific rhetorical effects. For example, by comparing Taylor Swift's work with that of other authors, it is possible to determine unique and special traits in her songwriting artistry. Therefore, with such an investigation of metadiscourse in various styles of music and their specific cultural environments, one would be able to find what similarities and differences exist among those different musicians in the strategies to create meaning and evoke feeling in communication.

As subsequent research focuses on the metadiscourse discourse of the current popular music, given the changing popular music trends and the expanded roles of modern digital technologies in changing consumption behaviours, the windows into which researchers may see the degree by which the discursive dynamics of artists, music, audiences, and technology have changed are through the metadiscursive frameworks that take the shape of the current mass medias through which popular music audiences receive their favorite music.

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