A syntactical analysis of sentence structures and types in the song lyrics of *"To The Bone"* and *"Lathi"*

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study aims to analyze the sentence structures and types found in two popular Indonesian songs written in English, *"To the Bone"* by Pamungkas and *"Lathi"* by Weird Genius ft. Sara Fajira, and to examine how the songwriters' syntactic choices contribute to the song lyrics' expressive impact. Using Carnie's phrase structure rules (PSRs) for tree diagram constructions, the study identifies constituents, categories, and grammatical functions in the lyrics written by non-native English speakers, especially Indonesians. The results show that simple declarative sentences appear most frequently, with *"To The Bone"* containing 15 simple sentences within 39 declaratives and *"Lathi"* containing 9 simple sentences within 22 declaratives. Such syntactic patterns are commonly chosen for emotional clarity and accessibility. On the other hand, *"To the Bone"* also uses imperatives and interrogatives to enhance emotional engagement, whereas *"Lathi"* exclusively uses declaratives. Lastly, these songs use fragments and interjections to create emotional impact and support rhythmic flow. In conclusion, these results outline how non-native songwriters manipulate English syntax to create clear narratives and evoke strong emotions in the song lyrics.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who need a system for communication, and to do so, they create language. As a system, language is arranged by a set of sentences that enable people to communicate with one another (Burton-Roberts, 2011). Language also allows people to express their feelings and thoughts to the world. Besides, language provides a variety of ways of communication, both spoken and written. One of the ways that people use to express feelings and ideas to the rest of the world is via music.

In learning languages, it is not far from discussing about sentences. Greenbaum and Uqik (2016) define sentences as language units that comprise a minimum sense of completeness and unity. They minimally consist of a subject and a predicate, constructing grammatical completeness. In accordance with Müller (2016), sentences can be considered larger linguistic units constructed from smaller units such as words or phrases. On a broader scope, one of the fields that discusses sentences is called Syntax.

Chomsky (2002) states, "Syntax is the study of principles and the process of how sentences are formed in a particular language" (p. 11). Kim and Sells (2008) pronounce that syntax is the principle that enables native speakers to generate an infinite number of grammatical sentences from a finite set

of words. This principle allows the systematic construction of phrases, clauses, and sentences, which are necessary for language communication. In simplification, another linguist says, "Syntax is the study of the way in which phrases and sentences are structured out of words" (Radford, 2009, p. 1). From the explanation of linguist experts above, the researcher concludes that syntax is the arrangement of words into phrases and sentences, which is critical in any language for the aim of communication.

Music can be defined as the creative skill of arranging sounds to produce elements such as rhythm, melody, and harmony. Music serves as a medium through which emotions and feelings on various levels are expressed. As one of the manifestations of expressing emotions, songs are a common form of music that employs a melody and lyrics to convey feelings, tell stories, or deliver messages. Within this framework, the literary part of the song is called lyrics, which in most cases consists of words created to fit the tune. (Lems, 2018; Murphey, 1992).

Murphey (1992) notes that songs have always been an effective tool for helping in language skill development. Songs can be an enjoyable way as well for practicing grammar, vocabulary, and repetition. As Lems (2018) points out, learning with the help of songs is a natural and fun way to practice language skills towards achieving fluency. It is for this reason that the researcher chooses song lyrics in this study because they frequently contain varied sentence structures (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex) and types of sentences (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory), which allows them to be analyzed syntactically. The objects of analysis in this study are *"To The Bone"* by Pamungkas and *"Lathi"* by Weird Genius featuring Sara Fajira.

Pamungkas, an Indonesian singer, released the Official MV *"To The Bone"* in 2020. The song had almost 415 million views on YouTube, reached 500 million streams on Spotify by the end of 2024. *"To The Bone"* is one of the most popular songs composed by Pamungkas. The song got along to maintain its position at the top of the Indonesian Top 50 charts for seven consecutive weeks, starting March 9, 2021. In addition, Pamungkas received the 2021 Indonesian Music Awards (IMA) trophy in the Alternative Song of the Year category for this song.

"Lathi" is a unique song that mixes Javanese and English. Weird Genius, who collaborated with Sara Fajira, released *"Lathi"* in 2020. The song had been viewed 148 million times on YouTube and had 70 million streams on Spotify by the end of 2024. Weird Genius is a group from Indonesia with three members: Reza Oktovian, Eka Gustiwana, and Gerald Liu (now replaced by Roy Leonard). Reza Oktovian and Eka Gustiwana, together with Sara Fajira, who sings and raps, created the lyrics for the song. In the same year of its release, *"Lathi"* took home three 2020 AMI Awards trophies, a prestigious Indonesian award, including the Best of the Best Production Work category.

Based on the explanation above, the study focuses on songs by non-native English speakers, Indonesian artists, in order to explore how these songwriters use English sentence structures and functions in their lyrics. Besides, there are three reasons for choosing *"To The Bone"* and *"Lathi"*: first, both songs are written by Indonesian artists; second, the songs were very popular at the time and won some awards; third, neither song's lyrics have been analyzed yet, especially regarding sentence structures and types. On the other hand, syntactical analysis in this study is to understand how language functions in song lyrics written by non-native speakers. Following Radford (2009), syntactical analysis implies examining how phrases and sentences are structured by identifying their constituents, categorizing them, and determining their grammatical functions. To conduct this analytical process, the theory in this study will employ phrase structure rules (PSRs) and will be illustrated by tree diagrams.

Several previous studies have discussed the syntactic structures and types of sentences applied in song lyrics. However, there are still limitations in the analysis of English songs written by non-native English speakers. For example, Ma'rif and Pramudyawardhani (2017), Daulay et al. (2021), Andrani (2022), Nenojata et al. (2023), and Herlyna and Yudanto (2023) focused on Western artists. In addition, the study conducted by Lubis et al. (2024) focused on speech functions rather than syntactic structures. Meanwhile, the analysis conducted by Kaefiyah (2015) focused on

children's programs. Thus, there is a gap in analyzing how non-native English speakers, especially Indonesian artists, construct sentences in English.

To address this gap, this study conducts a syntactic analysis of the sentence structures and types in the lyrics of *"To The Bone"* and *"Lathi."* Drawing on generative grammar, the theoretical foundation includes the following key concepts.

Word Classes

Words are the smallest unit of syntax that form larger syntactic constructions (Kim & Sells, 2008). The categorizations of words are lexical and functional. The lexical categories consist of nouns (N), verbs (V), adjectives (Adj), adverbs (Adv), prepositions (P), while functional consist of determiners (D), pronouns (Pron), auxiliaries (Aux), conjunctions (Conj), complementizers (C), and degree words (Deg).

Phrases

Phrases are the result of merging two or more words together. According to Radford (2009), phrases combine constituents to form larger units. The five common types in English are noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), adjective phrases (AdjP), adverb phrases (AdvP), and prepositional phrases (PP).

Clauses

Clauses must have at a minimum a subject NP and a VP (Carnie, 2006). Clauses can fall into independent and dependent clauses. Independent clauses mean they can stand alone as sentences, while dependent clauses—which appear as complements, relative clauses, or adverbials—need independent clauses for their full meaning.

Sentences

Sentences are independent clauses with a subject and a predicate that have a complete thought. Sentences have both structures and functions. There are four major types of sentences by their structures, such as simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Besides, their functions serve as declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory units depending on the speaker's purpose. (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2016).

Fragments

Verspoor et al. (2022) define fragments as "incomplete sentences" (p. 199). By definition, such sentences strip away either the subjects or the finite verbs and can show up as single phrases or dependent clauses.

Interjection

Interjections drop into sentences in the form of emotive words. They stay separate from grammatical rules and never act as subjects or objects but reveal the speaker's feelings. (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2016; Verspoor et al., 2022).

Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) and Tree Diagrams

Generative grammar uses PSRs to illustrate hierarchical sentence structure (Carnie, 2006). Rules guide the construction of tree diagrams, which visually represent syntactic relationships. Here are examples of concluding phrase structure rules (PSRs) by Carnie (2006):

- **CP → (C) + TP**
- **TP → {NP/CP} + (T) + VP**
- **NP → (D) + (AdjP+) + N + (PP+) + (CP)**
- **VP → (AdvP+) + V + (NP) + ({NP/CP}) (AdvP+) + (PP+) + (AdvP+)**
- **PP → P + (NP)**
- **AdjP → (AdvP) + Adj**
- **AdvP → (AdvP) + Adv**
- **XP → XP + conj + XP**
- **X → X + conj + X**

Although the study formally adopts Carnie's (2006) rule TP → {NP/CP} + (T) + VP, in every tree diagram, the T is merged into the VP node so that the trees remain simple and easy to read. Even so, whenever a tense word—like "is," "have," or "was"—appears, it is still understood to occupy the T position—even though that position is not drawn as its own node.

METHODS

The data source of the study is the lyrics of two popular Indonesian songs: *"To The Bone"* by Pamungkas and *"Lathi"* by Weird Genius featuring Sara Fajira. These song lyrics are composed of words, phrases, and sentences. Consequently, the researcher adopted a descriptive qualitative

method. This method is chosen to explore language data in context and to describe its patterns. Since qualitative research is well-suited for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the application of qualitative analysis is clearly effective in analyzing song lyrics (Czechowski et al., 2016).

The researcher obtains the lyric texts from an online source, retrieves the complete lyric texts from Musixmatch, the world's well-known and largest lyrics database. The researcher begins by carefully reading through the lyrics obtained from Musixmatch, then synchronizing them to the official song provided on YouTube. Some lines are repeated in the text or analysis exactly as they occur in the lyrics. Because song lines often span multiple lines, the researcher combines lines or clauses when they form single or larger grammatical sentences.

The researcher applies data analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2014) to analyze sentence structures and types in the study. The steps are as follows: (1) Identifying and categorizing the sentence based on its structure (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex) and function type (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory), including any fragments and interjections. (2) Presenting the categorized sentence data in the form of a description, which is supported by a tree diagram to display syntactic hierarchies and relationships within selected sample sentences. (3) Drawing conclusions based on the data obtained from the previous steps.
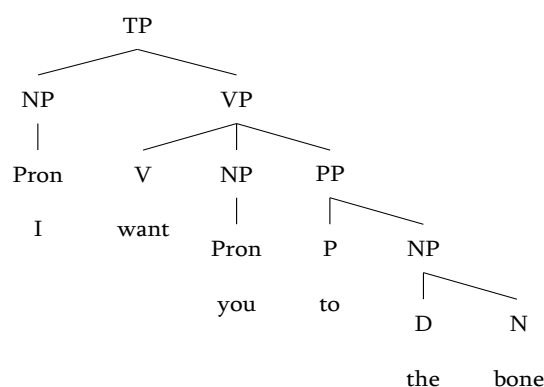
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following are some samples of sentence structures and types found in the lyrics of *"To The Bone"* and *"Lathi"* that are analyzed syntactically:
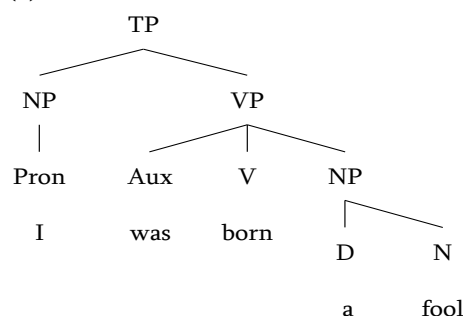***Simple sentence***
"To The Bone"
(1) I want you to the bone.

The tree diagram above shows the syntactic structure:

- TP → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → V + NP + PP
- NP → Pron
- PP → P + NP
- NP → D + N

"Lathi"
(2) I was born a fool.

The tree diagram above shows the syntactic structure:

- TP → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → Aux + V + NP
- NP → D + N

In *"To The Bone,"* example (1), "I want you to the bone," consists of a single independent clause. Its structure is TP → NP (Pronoun *I*) + VP (V *want* + NP *you* + PP *to the bone*). The sentence has a clear subject and predicate, so it is classified as a simple declarative sentence. Likewise, in "Lathi," example (2), "I was born a fool," has the structure TP → NP (Pronoun *I*) + VP (Aux *was* + V *born* + NP *a fool*). This, too, is a simple declarative sentence. In both songs, then, the simple declarative sentence type—an independent clause with subject + verb providing a statement—is commonly used.

Compound sentence
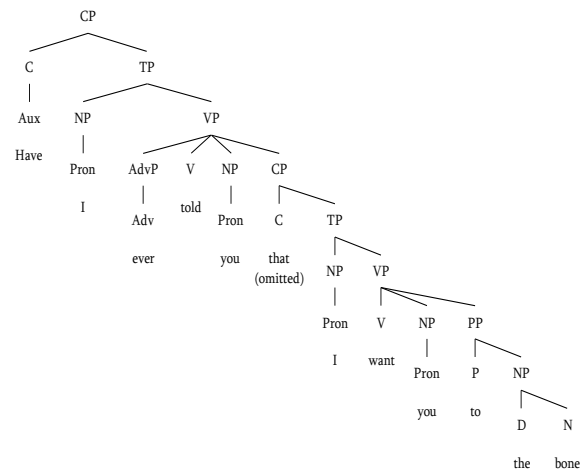***"To The Bone"***
(3) Take me home, I'm fallin'.

TP₁

NP VP

Pron V NP AdvP

You take Pron Adv
(omitted)

me home

TP₂

NP VP

Pron Aux V

I am falling
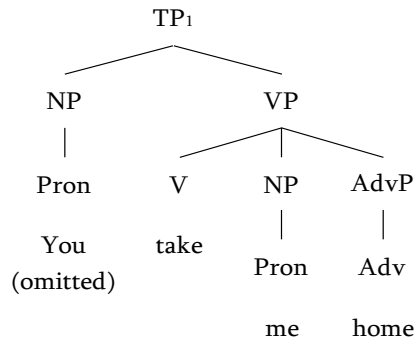
The 2 tree diagrams above show the syntactic structure:

- TP → TP₁ + Conj (omitted) + TP₂
- TP₁ → NP (omitted) + VP
- NP (omitted) → Pron
- VP → V + NP + AdvP
- NP → Pron
- AdvP → Adv
- TP₂ → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → Aux + V

"Take me home, I'm fallin'" (example (3) from *"To The Bone"*) illustrates a compound sentence. It contains two clauses: the first is an imperative clause, "Take me home" (with an implied subject you), and the second is a declarative clause, *"I'm fallin'."* In phrase structure terms, this is represented by TP → TP1 + (Conj) + TP2 (with the conjunction omitted in the lyrics). Clause TP1 (imperative) is VP-dominated (V *take* + NP *me* + AdvP *home*), and TP2 is NP (Pronoun I) + VP (Aux *am* + V *fallin'*). Thus, example (3) functions both as an imperative (first clause giving a command) and as a declarative statement (second clause with subject and verb).

Complex sentence
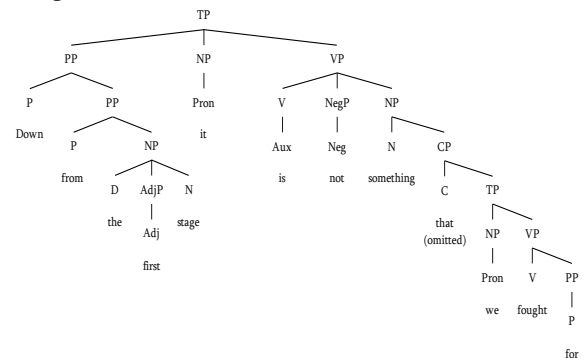***"To The Bone"***
(4) Have I ever told you I want you to the bone?

CP

C TP

Aux NP VP

Have Pron AdvP V NP CP

I Adv told Pron C TP

ever you that NP VP
(omitted)

Pron V NP PP

I want Pron P NP

you to D N

the bone

The tree diagram above shows the syntactic structure:

- CP → C + TP
- TP → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → AdvP + V + NP + CP
- AdvP → Adv
- NP → Pron
- CP → C + TP
- TP → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → V + NP + PP
- NP → Pron
- PP → P + NP
- NP → D + N

"Lathi"
(5) Down from the first stage, it isn't something we fought for.

TP

PP NP VP

P PP Pron V NegP NP

Down P NP it is Aux Neg N CP

from D AdjP N not something C TP

the Adj stage that NP VP
(omitted)

first Pron V PP

we fought P

for

The tree diagram above shows the syntactic structure:

- TP → (PP) + NP + VP
- PP → P + PP
- PP → P + NP
- NP → D + AdjP + N
- AdjP → Adj
- NP → Pron

- VP → V + NegP + NP
- V → Aux
- NegP → Neg
- NP → N + CP
- CP → C + TP
- TP → NP + VP
- NP → Pron
- VP → V + PP
- PP → P

Example (4) "Have I ever told you I want you to the bone?" (from *"To The Bone"*) is a complex sentence. It begins with the interrogative C *Have* introducing a TP *Have I ever told you…?* that includes an embedded complement clause *"I want you to the bone."* In tree-diagram terms, this is CP → C + TP, where the matrix TP *Have I ever told you* is NP (Pronoun *I*) + VP (AdvP *ever* + V *told* + NP *you* + CP), and its complement is another TP *I want you to the bone* NP (Pronoun *I*) + VP (V *want* + NP *you* + PP *to the bone*). The whole sentence is interrogative in type (a question). In *"Lathi,"* example (5), "Down from the first stage, it isn't something we fought for," is also complex but declarative. It features an initial preposed adverbial PP *Down from the first stage* modifying the main clause *"it isn't something we fought for"* (TP with NP *it* + Aux *is* + NegP *not* + NP *something we fought for*, where *we fought for* is a relative clause inside that NP). Thus, the structure reflects a complex declarative sentence.

Fragment

Both songs include many fragmentary lines, which are phrases or subordinate clauses standing alone without a finite verb or explicit subject. According to Verspoor et al. (2022), fragments are sentences that do not express a complete thought. In *"To The Bone,"* example (6), "I want you to" (without finishing the clause) is found. In *"Lathi,"* fragments include (7), "Broken all the rules." These fragments go without complete clause structures. Even with their incompleteness, they still convey meaning (Fernández, 2006, as cited in Dragone & Lison, 2016)—emphasizing emotion or imagery—but do not form full sentences in the traditional sense.

Interjection

Verspoor et al. (2022) define interjections as "words that literally are interjected into a sentence, *oh*, *well*, *blast*, *damn*, and so on. They do not have a function like subjects or objects, but express the speaker's attitude towards something" (p. 111). Building on this, the interjections found in contemporary song lyrics (e.g., "oh," "yeah," "ooh-ooh") do not function as syntactic elements but as non-lexical vocal expressions that increase emphasis or rhythm. Such repeated exclamations add emotional and melodic texture to the songs. It is common in music to use these filler utterances to maintain musicality and convey feeling.

The Frequency of Sentence Structure and Function Type in "To The Bone" and "Lathi"

Table 1. The Frequency of Sentence Structures

Sentence Structure Type	"To The Bone"	"Lathi"
Simple Sentence	25	9
Compound Sentence	4	-
Complex Sentence	11	3
Sentence Fragment	12	10

Table 2. The Frequency of Sentence Function

Sentence Function Type	"To The Bone"	"Lathi"
Declarative Sentence	39	22
Imperative Sentence	5	-
Interrogative Sentence	12	-
Interjection Usage	14	2

Note. Some of those declaratives are non-finite fragments.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that *"To The Bone"* by Pamungkas and *"Lathi"* by Weird Genius ft. Sara Fajira tends to use a straightforward clause structure. Pamungkas and Weird Genius frequently use simple declaratives in their lyrics, such as "I want you to the bone" and "Everything has changed." The data found that in *"To The Bone,"* simple sentences appear 25 times and declaratives 39 times, whereas in *"Lathi,"* simple sentences appear 9 times and declaratives 22 times. Of the 25 simple sentences that occur in *"To The Bone,"* 15 are simple declarative sentences; while in *"Lathi,"* all 9 simple sentences are fully declarative. These data make our findings clear that simple declarative sentences are the most frequent. This argument is supported by previous studies: Ananda and Purbasari (2022) found that 81.48% of clauses in rap lyrics are declaratives, and Sumbad (2025) notes that direct, simple sentences enable listeners

to understand and remember the message more effortlessly.

In contrast, compound and complex sentences appear less frequently. *"To the Bone"* has only 4 compound sentences and 11 complex sentences, while *"Lathi"* has no compound sentences and just 3 complex sentences. The existence of compound sentences in *"To The Bone,"* such as "Take me home, I'm fallin'" (an imperative + a declarative clause), shows how coordinated clauses can create emotional tension while keeping the structure simple (Sumbad, 2025). Turning to complex sentences, the line in *"To The Bone"* lyrics, "And if I ever forget to tell you how I feel, listen to me now, babe" presents a conditional clause that adds nuance, and in *"Lathi,"* the relative clause in "Down from the first stage, it isn't something we fought for" serves a narrative purpose. Overall, songwriters favor brevity and clarity, using subordinate clauses sparingly, likely to keep the flow smooth and emotional—an observation that Sumbad (2025) also makes, noting that such clauses in songs serve to add depth or narrative detail.

At the same time, the two songs differ in their use of non-declarative forms. *"To The Bone"* includes 12 interrogative sentences (e.g., "Have I ever told you...?") and 5 imperative sentences (e.g., "Take me home"), while *"Lathi"* contains neither. This likely causes genre and stylistic factors. *"To The Bone"* adopts a conversational tone, using commands and questions to create intimacy and emotional nuance. For example, by phrasing "Have I ever told you...?" as a question, the song adds rhetorical effect and creates dramatic emphasis. Such questions are generally intended to emphasize the point and engage the listener rather than to get an elicited answer (Rohmiyati et al., 2025). Likewise, the compound sentence "Take me home, I'm fallin'" opens with an imperative mood followed by a declarative. Imperatives often serve to add urgency or a command-like tone. Sumbad (2025) notes that imperative sentences in song lyrics can create a sense of directness and immediacy; here, "Take me home" directly addresses the listener or a lover with an immediate request. By contrast, *"Lathi"* stays in a fully declarative mode. Even so, the low use of these forms matches earlier findings (Ananda & Purbasari, 2022). However, *"To the Bone"* leverages

non-declarative moods to enhance emotional engagement, while *"Lathi"* sustains a more observational, narrative stance.

In *"To The Bone,"* it has twelve fragments and fourteen interjections, whereas *"Lathi"* contains ten fragments and two interjections. According to Fernández (2006, as cited in Dragone & Lison, 2016), fragments may not require every test for grammatical completeness but can still deliver clear meanings, either statements or questions. While the term originally describes spoken dialogue, it transfers easily to song lyrics, where structurally incomplete lines often carry powerful and meaningful messages. In the lyrical context of *"To The Bone"* and *"Lathi,"* lines such as "Losing control, body and soul" and "Broken all the rules," which lack an explicit subject and finite verb, still function as fully declarative statements; although structurally incomplete, their meanings are still clear and powerful. Moreover, interjections—in lyrics for musical effect—are non-grammatical utterances that express emotion or fill space (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2016). Such emotive words (e.g., "oh," "yeah," "ooh-ooh") do not serve any traditional syntactic role, but they convey the speakers' emotions (Verspoor et al., 2022). These stylistic tools enable artists to emphasize emotion and maintain rhythmic flow without confusing the listener.

In conclusion, these songs exemplify how language, art, and emotion converge through syntax. Not only does this syntactical analysis support language learning, as noted in prior research, but it also offers a deeper understanding of how lyrical composition can reflect internal character dynamics and narrative intention.

CONCLUSION

The results show that simple declarative sentences appear most frequently, with *"To The Bone"* containing 15 simple sentences within 39 declaratives and *"Lathi"* containing 9 simple sentences within 22 declaratives. Such syntactic patterns are commonly chosen for emotional clarity and accessibility. On the other hand, *"To the Bone"* also uses imperatives and interrogatives to enhance emotional engagement, whereas *"Lathi"* exclusively uses declaratives. Lastly, these songs

use fragments and interjections to create emotional impact and support rhythmic flow.

The study adds uniqueness by exploring works from non-native songwriters, suggesting that syntactic choices are influenced by cultural, emotional, and musical factors. Despite its scope, this study is limited by its focus on only two songs. Future research could expand the analysis to a larger corpus of Indonesian songs in English or explore additional layers of syntax such as ellipsis, coordination, or code-switching. Ultimately, syntactical analysis not only enhances understanding of musical language but also deepens our appreciation for how linguistic form contributes to artistic expression.

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