



A Grammatical Aspects of Song Lyrics “As It Was” by Harry Styles (A Discourse Analysis)

Refina Silonita^{1*}, Ch Evy Tri Widyahening¹, Sumardiono¹

¹Universitas Slamet Riyadi

*Corresponding Author's e-mail: refinasi17@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study analyze the grammatical aspects of song lyrics “As It Was” by Harry Styles using Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) discourse analysis theory. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method with the lyrics as the primary data. The analysis focused on grammatical cohesion, namely 1) Reference, 2) Substitution, 3) Ellipsis, and 4) Conjunction. The results show that the lyrics are dominated by personal reference such as “you” (11 times) and “it” (21 times), which construct intimacy and emphasis on emotional conditions. Demonstrative reference such as “this” and “that” highlight the contrast between past and present situations. Comparative reference with the word “same” (7 times) strengthens the theme of inevitable change. Ellipsis appears through contractions like “don’t”, “it’s”, and “Holdin’”, which create a casual and personal tone. Conjunctions, though limited (e.g., “and”), maintain coherence. These grammatical devices contribute to expressing themes of change, longing, and personal struggle in the lyrics.

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INTRODUCTION

Music is a universal medium that transcends language and cultural boundaries. Songs, as a form of art, not only function as entertainment but also serve as a powerful means of communication to convey messages, emotions, and social experiences that resonate with diverse audiences around the world. Through lyrics, artists can express personal narratives, cultural identities, and societal issues, making songs an important subject of linguistic and literary analysis. Harry Styles, an English singer and songwriter known for his distinctive style and lyrical depth, released the song “As It Was” in 2022, which quickly became an international hit from his album *Harry’s House*. The lyrics of this song provide insight not only into Styles’ personal journey but also into the broader social atmosphere following the global Covid-19 pandemic, a time marked by significant uncertainty, change, and reflection. The juxtaposition of a cheerful melody with melancholic lyrics creates a compelling contrast that deepens the emotional impact and invites listeners to engage more thoughtfully with the content.

Despite the rich potential for linguistic exploration in song lyrics, most prior studies have concentrated on critical discourse analysis or thematic interpretation, often overlooking the underlying grammatical structures that contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the text. Grammatical cohesion plays a crucial role in how meaning is

constructed and interpreted, especially in contemporary English songs where language tends to be creative and dynamic. This gap in research highlights the need for a focused examination of cohesive devices, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, that bind the text together and help listeners derive a unified understanding.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the grammatical aspects of Harry Styles' "As It Was" by applying Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion. By investigating how these cohesive devices function within the lyrics, the research seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which meaning is strengthened and coherence is achieved, offering a more nuanced understanding of how language operates in modern songwriting. This analysis not only contributes to the field of linguistics but also enhances appreciation of the artistic complexity behind popular music.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is the study of language in its context of use. Halliday and Hasan (1976) explained that a text can be understood not only from its sentence structure but also from the relations of meaning built through cohesion.

Grammatical cohesion is the grammatical device that holds a text together. According to Halliday dan Hasan (1976), the forms of grammatical cohesion include:

- 1) Reference: the use of pronouns or demonstratives (personal, demonstrative, comparative)
- 2) Substitution: replacing one word with another to avoid repetition.
- 3) Ellipsis: the omission of sentence elements that can be understood from the context.
- 4) Conjunction: the use of linking words to connect ideas.

There four devices construct textual unity, allowing song lyrics to convey a complete and coherent message

Music and Songs

Music is an art form that involves sound, although its exact definition has long been debated among musicologist. The Oxford Dictionary defines music as "sound arranged in such a way as to be pleasing to the ear". According to Levinson (2012), music is the art of sound that is temporally organized by musicians to enrich or deepen experiences such as listening, dancing, and performing. Music can thus be seen as a means of artistic expression, possessing the power to influence emotions and provide profound experiences.

Song lyrics are verbal elements in music that function to convey messages, emotions, and stories from musicians to listeners. According to Dallin (in Firdaus, 2013), music is composed of two primary components: sound as the main element and lyrics as the supporting element. Lyrics play an essential role in shaping meaning and emotional connecting between the song and its audience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method (as stated in Ch. Evy Tri Widyahening, 2015) with a discourse analysis approach, since it utilized textual data from song lyrics examined through observation, documentation, and content analysis to uncover contextual, inferential, grammatical, and lexical elements."The primary data source was the lyrics of "As It Was" by Harry Styles, which were collected through documentation by carefully reading and noting the lyrics. The data were then analyzed

using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which involves four main stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was conducted within the framework of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of grammatical cohesion, focusing on the identification of reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction as cohesive devices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study presented result and discussions, the analysis shows that the lyrics of "As It Was" by Harry Styles contain several forms of grammatical cohesion, namely:

1. Reference

a. Personal Reference

In discourse analysis, reference is one of the main forms of grammatical cohesion used to link meaning across sentences. Personal reference is a grammatical device that refers to the speaker, the listener, or others mentioned in spoken or written discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:37).

Tabel 1.1 Personal Reference in "As It Was" by Harry Styles

Pronoun / Noun	Lyrics Evidence	Frequency
I	[Line 3] <i><u>I</u> want you to hold out the palm of your hand</i> [Line 8] <i>And <u>I</u>'m the one who will stay, oh oh oh</i> [Line 30] <i><u>I</u> don't wanna talk about the way that it was</i> [Line 32] <i><u>I</u> don't wanna talk about who's doin' it first, (Hey!)</i>	4×
Me	[Line 1] <i>Holdin' <u>me</u> back</i> [Line 2] <i>Gravity's holdin' <u>me</u> back</i>	2×
You	[Line 3] <i>I want <u>you</u> to hold out the palm of your hand</i> [Line 7] <i>Seems <u>you</u> cannot be replaced</i> [Line 10] <i><u>You</u> know it's not the same as it was (repeated 5 times in Chorus and Outro)</i> [Line 14] <i><u>You</u> know it's not the same (repeated 2 times in Chorus)</i> [Line 17] <i>Why are <u>you</u> sittin' at home on the floor?</i> [Line 18] <i>What kind of pills are <u>you</u> on?"</i>	11×
Your	[Line 3] <i>I want you to hold out the palm of <u>your</u> hand</i> [Line 21] <i><u>Your</u> daddy lives by himself</i>	2×
It	[Line 4] <i>Why don't we leave <u>it</u> at that?</i> [Line 10] <i>You know it's not the same as <u>it</u> was (repeated 5 times in Chorus and Outro)</i> [Line 13] <i>As <u>it</u> was, as <u>it</u> was (repeated 6 times in chorus and outro)</i> [Line 30] <i>I don't wanna talk about the way that <u>it</u> was</i>	21×

	[Line 32] <i>I don't wanna talk about who's doin' <u>it</u> first, (Hey!)</i> [Line 33] <i>As <u>it</u> was</i>	
Her	[Line 31] <i>Leave America, two kids follow <u>her</u></i>	1×

The data show that the personal references in the lyrics of “*As It Was*” are dominated by the pronoun “*it*” (21 occurrences) and “*you*” (11 occurrences), followed by “*I*” (4), “*me*” (2), “*your*” (2), and “*her*” (1). The frequent use of “*it*” emphasizes the central theme of change expressed in the phrase “*as it was*”, while the repetition of “*you*” highlights the direct emotional address to the listener or a specific interlocutor. The presence of “*I*” and “*me*” reflects the singer’s personal involvement in the narrative, whereas “*your*” and “*her*” provide additional relational context. Overall, the pattern of pronoun usage demonstrates how Harry Styles constructs intimacy and contrast within the song, blending personal emotion with broader reflections on change

b. Demonstrative Reference

Demonstrative reference is a type of grammatical reference used to indicate a specific object, place, or situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:37). In song lyrics, it often functions to emphasize the presence of something in space and time, making the meaning clearer to the listener.

Tabel 1.2 Demonstrative Reference in “*As It Was*” by Harry Styles

Pronoun / Noun	Lyrics Evidence	Frequency
That	[Line 4] <i>Why don't we leave it at <u>that</u>?</i> [Line 22] <i>He just wants to know <u>that</u> you're well, oh oh oh</i> [Line 30] <i>I don't wanna talk about the way it was</i>	3×
This	[Line 9] <i>In <u>this</u> world, it's just us</i> (repeated 4 times in chorus)	4×
The	[Line 3] <i>I want you to hold out <u>the</u> palm of your hand</i> [Line 6] <i>When everything gets in <u>the</u> way</i> [Line 8] <i>And I'm <u>the</u> one who will stay, oh oh oh</i> [Line 10] <i>You know it's not <u>the</u> same as it was</i> (repeated 5 times in chorus and outro) [Line 14] <i>You know it's not <u>the</u> same</i> (repeated 2 times in chorus) [Line 15] <i>Answer <u>the</u> phone</i> [Line 17] <i>Why are you sittin' at home on <u>the</u> floor?</i> [Line 19] <i>Ringin' <u>the</u> bell</i> [Line 30] <i>I don't wanna talk about <u>the</u> way that it was</i>	14×

The data indicate that the demonstrative references in the lyrics of “*As It Was*” are dominated by “*the*” (14 occurrences), followed by “*this*” (4 occurrences) and “*that*” (3 occurrences). The frequent use of “*the*” functions to specify objects or situations in the narrative, thereby creating clarity and precision in the lyrics. Meanwhile, “*this*” emphasizes the current state of being “*In this world, it’s just us*” which conveys intimacy and a sense of immediacy. The limited use of “*that*” is mainly employed to refer back to previous contexts, marking contrast between past and present experiences. Overall, demonstrative references in the song strengthen the cohesion of the text by situating the message within specific contexts of time and space.

c. Comparative Reference

Another type of grammatical reference commonly found in discourse is comparative reference. Comparative reference refers to a linguistic device that is used to show comparison, either by highlighting similarities or differences between two or more elements with a particular language structure (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:37).

Tabel 1.3 Comparative Reference in “As It Was” by Harry Styles

Pronoun / Noun	Lyrics Evidence	Frequency
Same	[Line 10] <i>You know it's not the <u>same</u> as it was</i> (repeated 5 times in chorus and outro) [Line 14] <i>You know it's not the <u>same</u></i> (repeated 2 times in Chorus)	7×

The data reveal that the comparative reference “*same*” appears **7 times** in the lyrics, primarily in the repeated phrase “*You know it’s not the same as it was.*” Its repetition emphasizes the theme of inevitable change and highlights the contrast between past and present situations. Through this comparison, the lyrics convey a sense of longing while acknowledging transformation, making “*same*” a central marker of the song’s meaning and cohesion.

2. Substitution

No substitution was found in the lyrics.

3. Ellipsis

Ellipsis refers to the omission of certain sentence elements that can still be understood from the surrounding context without obscuring the meaning. Halliday and Hasan (1976:144) explain that ellipsis serves as a cohesive link in a text, since the omitted part is usually something that has already been mentioned earlier.

Tabel 3.1 Ellipsis in “As It Was” by Harry Styles

Abbreviated Form	Underlying Full Form	Lyrics Evidence	Frequency
Holdin’	Abbreviated form of “Holding”	[Line 1] <i><u>Holdin'</u> me back</i>	2×

		[Line 2] <i>Gravity's holdin' me back</i>	
I'm	Abbreviated form of "I" and "am"	[Line 8] <i>And I'm the one who will stay, oh oh oh</i>	1×
Gravity's	Abbreviated form of "Gravity" and "is"	[Line 2] <i>Gravity's holdin' me back</i>	1×
Don't	Abbreviated form of "Do" and "not"	[Line 4] <i>Why don't we leave it at that?</i> [Line 30] <i>I don't wanna talk about the way that it was</i> [Line 32] <i>I don't wanna talk about who's doin' it first, (Hey!)</i>	3×
Nothin'	Abbreviated form of "Nothing"	[Line 5] <i>Nothin' to say</i>	1×
It's	Abbreviated form of "It" and "is"	[Line 9] <i>In this world, it's just us</i> (repeated 4 times in chorus) [Line 10] <i>You know it's not the same as it was</i> (repeated 5 times in chorus and outro) [Line 11] <i>In this world, it's just us</i> (repeated 2 times in chorus)	11×
You're	Abbreviated form of "You" and "are"	[Line 16] <i>"Harry, you're no good alone</i> [Line 22] <i>He just wants to know that you're well, oh oh oh</i>	2×
Sittin'	Abbreviated form of "Sitting"	[Line 17] <i>Why are you sittin' at home on the floor?</i>	1×
Ringin'	Abbreviated form of "Ringing"	[Line 19] <i>Ringin' the bell</i>	1×
Nobody's	Abbreviated form of "Nobody" and "has"	[Line 20] <i>And nobody's comin' to help</i>	1×
Who's	Abbreviated form of "Who" and "is"	[Line 32] <i>I don't wanna talk about who's doin' it first, (Hey!)</i>	1×
Doin'	Abbreviated form of "Doing"	[Line 32] <i>I don't wanna talk about who's doin' it first, (Hey!)</i>	1×
Comin'	Abbreviated form of "Coming"	[Line 20] <i>And nobody's comin' to help</i>	1×

The analysis shows that the lyrics of “*As It Was*” by Harry Styles employ several abbreviated forms, with “*it’s*” being the most dominant (11 occurrences), followed by “*don’t*” (3), “*holdin’*” (2), and “*you’re*” (2). Other abbreviated forms such as “*I’m*”, “*nothin’*”, “*sittin’*”, “*ringin’*”, “*nobody’s*”, “*who’s*”, “*doin’*”, and “*comin’*” occur only once each. The frequent use of contractions and shortened forms reflects the casual and conversational tone of the song, making it sound more natural and relatable to listeners. Overall, these ellipses contribute to the lyrical cohesion by creating rhythm and intimacy while maintaining clarity of meaning.

4. Conjunction

Conjunction elements contribute to textual cohesion not by direct reference, but through the specific meanings they express. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:227), these elements indicate relationships between parts of discourse, helping connect ideas coherently.

Table 4.1 Conjunction in “*As It Was*” by Harry Styles

Conjunction Word	Lyrics Evidence	Frequency
And	[Line 8] <i>And I'm the one who will stay, oh oh oh</i> [Line 20] <i>And nobody's comin' to help</i>	2×

The analysis shows that the conjunction “*and*” appears only **2 times** in the lyrics of “*As It Was*.” Although limited in frequency, its presence plays an important role in linking ideas and maintaining the flow of the narrative, such as connecting the singer’s role with a promise to stay and describing situations of helplessness. This indicates that while conjunctions are not heavily used in the song, they still contribute to the overall cohesion of the lyrics by ensuring logical continuity.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the lyrics of “*As It Was*” by Harry Styles use various forms of grammatical cohesion, dominated by personal and demonstrative references, comparative reference (*same*), ellipsis through contractions, and limited conjunctions. These elements create intimacy, highlight change, and maintain coherence. The findings confirm that grammatical cohesion plays an essential role in shaping meaning and emotion in song lyrics. Future studies are recommended to explore lexical cohesion or compare multiple songs to gain broader insights into discourse and music.

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