

Gendered Perspectives in Pop Lyrics: A Linguistic Analysis of Bruno Mars' "When I Was Your Man" and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers"

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Abstract

This study is urgent because a gendered linguistic analysis of "When I Was Your Man" and "Flowers" reveals how popular music constructs, reinforces, or challenges contemporary gender perspectives and relationship narratives. This study examines gendered perspectives in pop song lyrics through a qualitative linguistic analysis of Bruno Mars' "When I Was Your Man" and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers." The main research objectives are to identify and compare the linguistic features used to construct gendered voices in both songs and to analyze how emotional expression and self-identity are represented through these gendered perspectives. Song lyrics function as cultural texts that reflect social constructions of gender, particularly in emotional expression and identity formation. Previous studies have largely focused on female representation or gender bias using semiotic, discourse, or computational approaches, leaving a gap in comparative linguistic analysis across genders. To address this gap, this research applies lexical, semantic, and syntactic analysis within the framework of gender and language studies. The data consist of the official lyrics of the two songs, collected through documentation techniques and analyzed qualitatively. The findings reveal clear contrasts between male and female perspectives. The male perspective is characterized by lexical choices expressing regret and emotional vulnerability, semantically framing love as loss, and syntactically relying on reflective and conditional structures. In contrast, the female perspective emphasizes empowerment and independence through assertive diction, self-directed meaning, and simple declarative sentence patterns. This study contributes to gender and language research by offering a comparative linguistic perspective on how male and female identities are constructed in contemporary pop music.

Keywords: *Gender And Language, Pop Lyrics, Linguistic Analysis, Gendered Perspectives, Song Lyrics*

Introduction

Song lyrics function not only as artistic expressions but also as cultural texts that reflect social values, identities, and power relations. One of the most prominent issues frequently represented in popular music is gender, particularly how men and women express emotions, relationships, and self-identity through language. Popular songs often reproduce or challenge traditional gender roles, making them a rich source for linguistic and gender studies (Surbakti et al., 2025). Previous studies have extensively explored gender representation in song lyrics. The presence of sexism and gender bias in a large corpus of English song lyrics using computational methods (Betti et al., 2023). Other studies, focused on gender inequality, women's stereotypes, and feminist messages in song lyrics using semiotic, feminist, discourse, and descriptive qualitative approaches such as (Fadila & Nisa, 2024; Damayanti et al., 2023;

Mairanata et al., 2024; Aprilia & Neisya, 2022). These studies successfully demonstrated how language in songs reflects gender ideology and social expectations (Surahim & Ramli, 2023, Ferlitasari, 2025).

However, most previous research tends to focus primarily on female representation or women's empowerment in song lyrics (Azzahra et al., 2024). Very few studies directly compare male and female perspectives within related or thematically connected songs, particularly from a linguistic point of view. Moreover, many studies employ semiotic analysis, critical discourse analysis, or computational approaches, leaving a gap in micro-level linguistic analysis, especially in terms of lexical choice, semantic meaning, and syntactic structure. To address this gap, the present study analyzes two thematically interconnected pop songs: Bruno Mars' "When I Was Your Man" and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers". These songs are widely perceived as expressing opposite emotional standpoints—male regret and vulnerability versus female self-empowerment and independence. This study aims to explore how gendered perspectives are linguistically constructed through diction, tone, and sentence structure.

Therefore, this research is entitled "Gendered Perspectives in Pop Lyrics: A Linguistic Analysis of Bruno Mars' 'When I Was Your Man' and Miley Cyrus' 'Flowers'." This study is expected to contribute to the field of gender and language studies by providing a systematic comparative linguistic analysis of how male and female artists construct emotions, self-reflection, and identity through popular music lyrics. By examining lexical choices, thematic patterns, and modes of emotional expression, the research highlights how gendered voices are linguistically shaped within contemporary pop culture. Furthermore, this study seeks to demonstrate that song lyrics are not merely artistic expressions, but also cultural texts that reflect and negotiate broader social norms related to gender, vulnerability, empowerment, and emotional agency. Through this comparative approach, the research offers deeper insight into the role of language in representing gendered experiences in popular music and enriches discussions on how gender identities are articulated and interpreted in modern media discourse.

Song lyrics are considered a form of discourse that both reflect and actively shape social perceptions of gender. From the perspective of gender and language studies, men and women are often found to differ in their linguistic choices, particularly in how they express emotions, negotiate power, and represent interpersonal relationships. These differences are not merely individual stylistic preferences but are closely connected to socially constructed gender roles and expectations. Popular music, as a widely consumed form of mass culture, plays a significant role in constructing, reinforcing, and sometimes challenging prevailing gender norms. Through repeated exposure and broad circulation, song lyrics can influence listeners' understanding of masculinity and femininity, shaping attitudes toward emotional expression, agency, and identity within contemporary society. Several studies have examined gender issues in song lyrics from different perspectives:

Conducted a large-scale computational analysis of English song lyrics and found that sexism and gender bias are more prevalent in songs performed by male artists. Their study highlights how language choices in music can reinforce unequal gender representation (Betti et al., 2023). Applied Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory to analyze Taylor Swift's songs and identified symbols representing gender inequality, such as male privilege and patriarchal expectations. Their study emphasizes symbolic meaning rather than linguistic structure (Fadila & Nisa, 2024). Used feminist literary criticism to analyze the song "The Man", revealing feminist resistance against gender discrimination. This study focuses on women's perspectives and empowerment (Damayanti et al., 2023). Examined women's stereotypes in ABBA's song lyrics through poetic

and figurative language, finding that women are often portrayed as emotional and romantic figures (Mairanata et al., 2024). Using Critical Discourse Analysis, showed how the song “Pretty Girl” challenges stereotypes that reduce women to their physical appearance (Aprilia & Neisya, 2022).

Although these studies provide valuable insights into gender representation in song lyrics, they predominantly focus on a single gender perspective either male or female and often examine lyrical content through thematic, ideological, or macro-discursive approaches. As a result, they tend to overlook the fine-grained linguistic mechanisms through which gendered meanings are constructed at the micro level of language, such as word choice, meaning construction, and sentence structure. Furthermore, few studies conduct direct comparisons between male and female perspectives within thematically connected songs, particularly those addressing similar emotional experiences like love and relational loss. This lack of comparative linguistic micro-analysis reveals a clear research gap, which the present study seeks to address by systematically examining how gendered perspectives are linguistically encoded across lexical, semantic, and syntactic levels in pop song lyrics.

Existing studies on gender representation in popular music have extensively examined themes such as gender stereotypes, sexism, and female empowerment, often through thematic, critical discourse, or corpus-based approaches. While these studies provide valuable insights into how gender ideologies are embedded in song lyrics, most of them tend to focus on either male or female perspectives in isolation or analyze large datasets without close textual comparison. Moreover, previous research frequently prioritizes semantic themes or ideological content while paying limited attention to how gendered meanings are systematically constructed across multiple linguistic levels, particularly through the interaction of lexical, semantic, and syntactic features within thematically related songs. As a result, there remains a lack of fine-grained comparative linguistic analysis that directly contrasts male and female perspectives in songs addressing similar emotional experiences, such as love and loss, from opposing gender viewpoints.

This study offers novelty by adopting a comparative linguistic approach that simultaneously examines lexical, semantic, and syntactic patterns in two thematically connected pop songs performed by artists of different genders. By analyzing Bruno Mars’ “When I Was Your Man” and Miley Cyrus’ “Flowers” as dialogic texts responding to similar relational experiences, the research moves beyond single-perspective or large-corpus analyses to reveal how gendered perspectives are constructed relationally through language. The study highlights how male and female emotional orientations are not only thematically different but also linguistically encoded through distinct diction, meaning construction, and sentence structures. In doing so, this research contributes a nuanced understanding of how gender identities and emotional positions are negotiated in contemporary popular music, offering a micro-level linguistic insight that complements and extends existing gender and music studies. Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to identify and compare the linguistic features through which gendered emotions and identities are constructed in the two songs, focusing on lexical choice, semantic patterns, and syntactic structures.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design combined with a linguistic comparative approach to provide a detailed examination of language use. Specifically, the research focuses on analyzing and comparing the linguistic features present in the lyrics of two

contemporary pop songs. The primary research instrument used in this study is an analytical coding sheet developed by the researcher, which serves as a systematic guide for identifying and categorizing linguistic features in the song lyrics. This instrument includes categories for lexical choice, sentence structure, figurative language, stylistic devices, and indicators of emotional expression and gendered perspective.

By scrutinizing elements such as word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and stylistic devices, the study aims to uncover how language reflects different gender perspectives. Attention is given to how male and female experiences, emotions, and social roles are expressed through the lyrics, highlighting patterns of expression that may be influenced by cultural and societal norms. Through the use of this structured instrument, the analysis is conducted consistently and transparently, allowing for a systematic comparison between the two songs. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how gendered meanings are constructed in popular music and how these linguistic choices contribute to the songs' overall emotional and communicative impact.

The study aims to uncover nuanced differences in the ways male and female perspectives are represented in song lyrics. This approach not only highlights patterns of gendered expression in popular music but also sheds light on the broader social and cultural constructs that shape language in lyrical compositions. By conducting a comparative analysis, the research provides insights into how gender is linguistically encoded in popular media, revealing the subtle ways in which emotions, experiences, and social roles are communicated through language (Damayanti et al., 2024). Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, gender, and cultural representation in contemporary music.

Data Source: The data for this study consist of the official lyrics of two pop songs: "When I Was Your Man" by Bruno Mars and "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus. These lyrics were obtained from verified online lyric sources and official music streaming platforms to ensure their accuracy and reliability. By selecting songs from well-known artists with distinct gender perspectives, the study provides a clear basis for comparing linguistic features. The chosen songs serve as representative texts for examining how language reflects male and female viewpoints, allowing for a focused and meaningful analysis of gendered expression in contemporary popular music.

Technique of Data Collection: Since this study analyzes song lyrics rather than movies or visual media, the appropriate data collection technique used is documentation. The steps are as follows: 1). Collecting the official lyrics of both songs. 2). Reading and re-reading the lyrics carefully. 3). Selecting linguistic units such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences related to gendered expression. 4). This study does not use movie scripts or virtual observation because the object of analysis is textual (song lyrics), not audiovisual interaction.

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative linguistic approach, which involved multiple levels of analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the lyrics. The main research instrument used in this stage was a structured linguistic analysis framework in the form of a coding and analysis table developed by the researcher. This instrument functioned as a guideline for systematically examining the lyrics and recording analytical findings at each level of analysis.

First, lexical analysis was conducted using the coding table to identify word choices and diction that reflect emotions such as regret, independence, and self-worth. Each lexical item was categorized based on its emotional and gendered connotations, allowing for the identification of recurring language patterns associated with male and female expression.

Second, semantic analysis was employed by documenting interpreted meanings for each coded lyric segment, enabling the researcher to capture implied messages and emotional nuances beyond literal meanings. Third, syntactic analysis was carried out by mapping sentence structures and grammatical patterns within the same instrument, highlighting how syntactic choices contribute to the overall emotional tone and stance of the songs.

Finally, the data recorded in the analysis framework were compared across both songs to identify similarities and differences in the linguistic representation of male and female perspectives. By using this structured research instrument, the analysis was conducted in a consistent and transparent manner, strengthening the reliability of the comparative findings and providing deeper insights into how gender influences language use in contemporary pop music.

Results

The study aims to uncover nuanced differences in the ways male and female perspectives are represented in song lyrics. This approach not only highlights patterns of gendered expression in popular music but also sheds light on the broader social and cultural constructs that shape language in lyrical compositions. By conducting a comparative analysis, the research provides insights into how gender is linguistically encoded in popular media, revealing the subtle ways in which emotions, experiences, and social roles are communicated through language. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, gender, and cultural representation in contemporary music.

Lexical Analysis: Gendered Word Choice

Lexical analysis reveals a clear contrast in diction between the male and female perspectives, highlighting how each gender expresses emotions, desires, and personal experiences differently. The male perspective tends to employ words that convey regret, longing, or introspection, reflecting emotional reflection on past actions. In contrast, the female perspective often features diction that emphasizes independence, self-empowerment, and self-worth, illustrating a forward-looking and assertive emotional stance. This contrast in word choice underscores the ways in which language is used to construct and communicate gendered identities within pop song lyrics.

In “When I Was Your Man”, Bruno Mars frequently uses words that express regret, loss, and emotional vulnerability, such as “should have,” “wasted,” “miss,” and “never get to clean up the mess.” These lexical items reflect a self-blaming tone and emphasize emotional dependency on the former partner. The repeated use of first-person pronouns (“I,” “me”) further highlights personal accountability and remorse.

In contrast, Miley Cyrus’ “Flowers” employs diction associated with self-sufficiency and empowerment, such as “buy myself flowers,” “hold my own hand,” and “I can love me better.” These lexical choices convey independence and emotional autonomy. The repetition of the phrase “I can” reinforces agency and self-confidence, presenting the female speaker as emotionally resilient.

From a gender and language perspective, this lexical contrast aligns with traditional gendered patterns in which men are often portrayed as emotionally dependent or reflective following relational loss, whereas women are depicted as actively reclaiming autonomy and asserting personal strength. This pattern not only reflects societal expectations and cultural norms surrounding gendered emotional expression but also demonstrates how language in popular music reinforces or challenges these conventional roles. By examining such lexical

choices, the study highlights the ways in which song lyrics serve as a medium for constructing and communicating gendered identities.

Semantic Analysis: Meaning Construction and Emotional Orientation

Semantically, both songs revolve around themes of love and loss; however, they construct meaning in opposing directions. In the male-perspective song, the focus is on regret, longing, and reflection on past mistakes, emphasizing a sense of emotional dependence and remorse. In contrast, the female-perspective song conveys empowerment, self-reliance, and personal growth, framing the experience of relational loss as an opportunity for independence and self-discovery. This semantic divergence illustrates how similar thematic content can be interpreted and expressed differently based on gendered perspectives, highlighting the role of language in shaping distinct emotional and experiential narratives.

In “When I Was Your Man”, the dominant semantic fields include regret, past mistakes, and unfulfilled responsibility. The meaning conveyed emphasizes reflection on past failures and the irreversible consequences of neglect. Love is semantically framed as something that was lost due to personal shortcomings.

Meanwhile, “Flowers” constructs meaning around self-love, healing, and emotional independence. Love is redefined not as dependence on a partner but as self-affirmation. The semantic shift from romantic love to self-directed love represents a transformation in female identity from relational dependence to empowerment.

This semantic contrast reflects a broader cultural shift in gender representation, in which female narratives increasingly emphasize autonomy, self-worth, and empowerment rather than emotional dependence or reliance on others. Such a shift highlights changing societal expectations regarding gender roles, suggesting that contemporary media such as popular music serves as both a mirror and a driver of evolving perceptions of femininity and masculinity. By contrasting these gendered semantic constructions, the study demonstrates how language not only conveys emotion and experience but also participates in the negotiation and redefinition of cultural norms surrounding gender.

Syntactic Analysis: Sentence Structure and Emotional Expression

Syntactic analysis further highlights the differences in emotional orientation between the two songs. In the male-perspective lyrics, sentence structures often include subordinate clauses, conditional phrases, and reflective constructions, which convey introspection, regret, and a sense of emotional dependency. In contrast, the female-perspective lyrics frequently employ short, declarative sentences, imperatives, and parallel structures that create a tone of confidence, assertiveness, and empowerment. These syntactic patterns reinforce the respective emotional orientations of each perspective, demonstrating how grammatical choices contribute to the overall expression of gendered experiences in the songs.

Bruno Mars’ lyrics predominantly use complex sentences and conditional structures, such as “I should have bought you flowers” and “If I had known.” These syntactic forms express reflection and hypothetical regret, reinforcing the theme of missed opportunities and emotional introspection.

Conversely, Miley Cyrus’ lyrics largely consist of simple, declarative sentences, for example, “I can take myself dancing” and “I can hold my own hand.” The simplicity and directness of these structures convey certainty, confidence, and control. The repeated syntactic pattern strengthens the assertive tone of the song.

From a gendered linguistic standpoint, this syntactic contrast suggests that male emotional expression is predominantly framed through structures of reflection, hesitation, and regret, whereas female emotional expression is constructed through affirming and decisive syntactic patterns. These differences indicate how grammatical choices shape distinct emotional orientations, reinforcing gendered modes of expressing vulnerability and strength. Consequently, syntax functions not merely as a structural element but as a meaningful resource for encoding gendered identities and emotional positions within song lyrics.

Discussion

Gendered Perspectives in Linguistic Expression

The findings of this study demonstrate that gendered perspectives in pop song lyrics are constructed through the interaction of multiple linguistic levels, namely lexical, semantic, and syntactic choices. Rather than operating independently, these levels work together to shape distinct emotional orientations and narrative positions for male and female speakers. This interconnected linguistic construction reveals how popular music serves as a meaningful site for the expression and reinforcement of gendered identities (Bao & Wijitsopon, 2025).

At the lexical level, the analysis reveals a clear contrast in diction between male and female perspectives. Male-authored or male-voiced lyrics tend to employ vocabulary associated with regret, longing, self-blame, and emotional dependency (Waldan & Sari, 2025). Words and phrases expressing apology, loss, and missed opportunities dominate the male narrative, suggesting an inward-looking emotional stance that focuses on reflection, regret, and accountability for past actions and their consequences. This linguistic pattern highlights a tendency toward self-blame and emotional vulnerability, where meaning is constructed through expressions of remorse and longing. In contrast, the female perspective is characterized by lexical choices that emphasize empowerment, independence, and self-worth.

These expressions project a forward-looking orientation, framing personal growth and emotional resilience as central themes. The contrast between these lexical patterns illustrates how gendered experiences are linguistically encoded, with male discourse leaning toward introspection and retrospection, while female discourse foregrounds agency, confidence, and self-affirmation.

Words related to self-care, autonomy, and resilience reflect an outward-looking and forward-oriented emotional position that emphasizes personal growth and self-affirmation. From a gender and language perspective, this contrast aligns with traditional gendered patterns in which men are often portrayed as emotionally affected by relational loss and introspective regret, while women are increasingly represented as reclaiming strength, agency, and autonomy after emotional rupture. However, the prominence of empowerment-related diction in the female narrative also signals a significant shift away from passive, dependent, or emotionally subordinated representations of women that have historically dominated popular music. Instead, it highlights the emergence of a more assertive and self-defined female voice, suggesting changing cultural attitudes toward gender roles, emotional expression, and identity construction in contemporary pop discourse (Siregear & Ulfa, 2025).

Semantically, both songs revolve around the shared themes of love and loss, yet they construct meaning in opposing directions (Fatonah & Handayani, 2024). The male narrative semantically frames love as something lost due to personal failure, emphasizing accountability, regret, and emotional emptiness. Loss is presented as a source of lingering pain and unresolved

emotion, reinforcing a narrative of vulnerability and dependence. Conversely, the female narrative constructs loss as a transformative experience that leads to healing, growth, and independence. Rather than dwelling on the absence of a partner, the female perspective redefines love as self-directed and restorative. This semantic contrast reflects a broader cultural shift in gender representation, where female narratives increasingly emphasize autonomy and self-worth rather than emotional reliance on romantic relationships. Through these contrasting semantic constructions, the study illustrates how similar thematic material can be shaped into divergent meanings depending on gendered perspectives (Benmassoud & Kroum, 2025).

Syntactic analysis further highlights the difference in emotional orientation between the two songs. Male lyrics tend to utilize reflective sentence structures, including conditional clauses, subordinate constructions, and expressions of hypothetical situations (Garini & Mualimin, 2025). These syntactic patterns convey hesitation, self-reflection, and emotional uncertainty, reinforcing the theme of regret and introspection (Fathimatuzzahra et al., 2025). The frequent use of conditional forms suggests a preoccupation with alternative pasts and unrealized possibilities. In contrast, female lyrics predominantly employ short, declarative sentences, imperatives, and parallel structures. These syntactic choices create a tone of confidence, decisiveness, and assertiveness. From a gendered linguistic standpoint, this syntactic contrast suggests that male emotional expression is framed through reflection and regret, while female emotional expression is framed through affirmation and decisiveness. Syntax, therefore, functions not merely as a grammatical framework but as a powerful linguistic resource for encoding emotional stance and gendered identity (Chen et al., 2025).

Taken together, the lexical, semantic, and syntactic findings reveal a coherent pattern in which male and female perspectives are linguistically constructed in contrasting yet interconnected ways. The male perspective is characterized by retrospection, emotional dependence, and self-critique, while the female perspective emphasizes recovery, empowerment, and self-definition. These patterns suggest that gendered expression in pop music is not accidental but systematically shaped through language choices that reflect broader social and cultural ideologies.

The findings of this study support previous research on gender representation in music, which has documented the tendency for male narratives to focus on emotional vulnerability and for female narratives to increasingly foreground empowerment. However, this study extends existing scholarship by adopting a comparative linguistic approach that directly examines male and female perspectives within thematically connected songs. Unlike earlier studies that often focused exclusively on female empowerment or gender bias in isolation, this research highlights how male and female narratives interact, contrast, and respond to one another through language. By comparing songs that address similar relational experiences from different gendered viewpoints, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how gendered meanings are constructed relationally rather than independently.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that popular song lyrics function as more than artistic expression; they are cultural texts that reflect and shape evolving gender norms. Through interconnected lexical, semantic, and syntactic choices, pop music encodes shifting representations of masculinity and femininity, revealing changing expectations surrounding emotional expression, independence, and identity. As such, linguistic analysis of song lyrics offers valuable insight into the dynamic relationship between language, gender, and contemporary culture.

Conclusion

This study explored gendered perspectives in pop song lyrics through a qualitative linguistic analysis of Bruno Mars' "When I Was Your Man" and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers". By applying lexical, semantic, and syntactic analysis within the framework of gender and language studies, the research examined how male and female artists linguistically construct emotional expression, identity, and agency. The findings reveal a clear contrast between male and female perspectives. Lexically, the male perspective is characterized by words expressing regret, loss, and emotional vulnerability, while the female perspective emphasizes empowerment, independence, and self-worth. Semantically, "When I Was Your Man" frames love as something lost due to personal failure, whereas "Flowers" redefines love as self-directed healing and autonomy. Syntactically, the male narrative relies on conditional and reflective sentence structures, while the female narrative employs direct and declarative forms that reinforce confidence and control.

These results indicate that pop lyrics do not merely convey personal emotions but also reflect broader social constructions of gender. The male perspective tends to align with introspective and remorseful emotional expression, while the female perspective represents a shift toward self-empowerment and emotional independence in contemporary popular music. This study contributes to gender and language research by offering a comparative linguistic approach that highlights how gendered identities are shaped through language at multiple levels. However, the research is limited to two songs and focuses solely on textual analysis. Future studies are encouraged to include a wider range of songs, artists, or genres, as well as incorporate multimodal analysis involving music videos or audience reception to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender representation in popular music.

Acknowledgment

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