

NOT LIKE US: IMAGINING MEANING IN SYNTACTIC PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF THE TO-BE VERB

Agnes Pebriananda Simanjuntak

Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Padjadjaran

E-mail: agnes23005@mail.unpad.ac.id

ABSTRACT. A sentence consists of a deep and surface structure that could contain different propositions, which are used to transfer meanings to the addressee. This study examines the syntactic structure of a song lyric entitled *Not Like Us*, which was sung by Kendrick Lamar, to analyse the meanings conveyed in the sentences expressed with linguistic deviation. This research is conducted using a qualitative method where sentences in every line of the lyrics are analysed in terms of the presence and absence of the to-be verb. This study aims to categorize the use of the to-be verb in the song *Not Like Us* and find the implied meaning found in sentences with both the syntactic presence and absence of the to-be verb. This classification is decided under the theory of English grammar syntax and Systemic Functional Grammar, which is then analysed regarding its implied meaning with the theory of Argument Structure Construction and creativity in word formation, resulting in the descriptive analyses of the phenomena. This research argues that the absence of the to-be verb is a communicative way to convey a particular meaning, rather than being considered a grammatical error. The result of this study concludes that word arrangement in song lyrics conveys meanings differently depending on the use of English grammar and syntactically unaccepted structure. The findings of this study contribute to the study of meaning in song lyrics using syntax and grammar theory to reduce bias in interpretation.

Keywords: grammar, meaning, syntax, to-be verb, zero copula

ABSTRAK. Kalimat terdiri dari struktur dalam dan struktur permukaan yang dapat mengandung proposisi yang dapat berbeda-beda untuk mentransfer makna kepada penerima. Studi ini meneliti struktur sintaksis dalam lirik lagu *Not Like Us* yang dinyanyikan oleh Kendrick Lamar untuk menganalisis makna yang diungkapkan dalam kalimat-kalimat dalam lirik lagu tersebut yang diekspresikan dengan struktur yang tidak berterima dengan aturan tata bahasa. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk menganalisis kalimat-kalimat dalam setiap baris dari lagu berdasarkan keberadaan dan ketiadaan verba to-be. Pengklasifikasian ini dihasilkan menurut teori sintaksis gramatika Inggris dan fungsional sistemik, yang selanjutnya dianalisis berdasarkan implikasi makna menurut teori konstruksi struktur argumen dan kreativitas dalam formasi kata, untuk mendapatkan analisis deskriptif dari fenomena linguistik tersebut. Penelitian ini mengajukan argumen bahwa ketiadaan verba to-be adalah cara komunikatif yang menyatakan suatu makna tertentu, bukan hanya sesuatu yang bisa dinilai sebagai kalimat yang menyalahi aturan tata bahasa. Hasil dari penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa susunan kata dalam lirik lagu mengungkapkan makna yang berbeda berdasarkan penggunaan tata bahasa dan pengabaian terhadap tata bahasa sintaksis. Temuan dalam penelitian ini berkontribusi pada studi makna lirik lagu menggunakan teori gramatika dan sintaksis untuk mengurangi bias interpretasi.

Kata kunci: kalimat, sintaks, makna, verba to-be

INTRODUCTION

Copula, which includes the to-be verb, has been a subject of research since the 18th century, which has been discussed in the context of sentence arrangement in languages or parts of languages (McWhorter, 1995), such as the standard one (Al-Horais, 2021). The study of copulas concerns what kind of word class it co-occurs with and whether it contributes to meaning-making, in which the study concludes that copulas are complex linguistic items that belong to different categories and stimulate uncommon agreement patterns that vary across languages (Arche, Fábregas, & Marin, 2019). One of the debates that emerges from the study of the copula is the factors involved in the presence and absence of the copula in certain languages.

It is said to be difficult to explain the systematic semantic interpretation of when the sentence is with

copular verbs or without one (Dalmi, 2016). To cover this limitation in the independent research of the syntactic presence and absence of the to-be verb, this paper uses the interdisciplinary approach between syntax and semantics, which studies the interpretation of language. This is to apply the statement said by Labov (1995), which supports the analysis of the presence and absence of the to-be verb by saying, “No part of cognitive science illustrates the problem of abstract inference better than the interpretation of *linguistic zeroes*: the absence of the very behavior that we have come to observe.”

The presence and absence of the to-be verb is mainly analysed in Black English Vernacular (BEV) as the most intricate and challenging problem of the vernacular (Labov, 1972). The book states that the center of BEV spoken today is in the United States, where the description of this phenomenon can be drawn from everyday conversation, especially

from the youth. However, the *blackness* in the English language is also studied from the music as performative utterances, particularly to invent the identity of self and other (Havis, 2009). This statement is one of the reasons linguists study Black culture in music, such as blues, jazz, and hip-hop.

Based on the linguistic perspective of syntax, song lyrics are able to be examined from their structure, in which each structure implies meaning and significance (Thompson et al., 2004). The syntax study of hip-hop music has coined the term Hip-Hop Language (HHL), which is largely concerned with the grammar and vocabulary within the works that replicate the grammar of African American English (AAE) (Cutler, 2007). This study from Cutler (2007) states that the absence of the copula in hip-hop music conveys the same meaning as if the to-be verb is embedded in the lyrics, and the grammar follows the regular AAE conversations to show the street identity in hip-hop music. Agreeing to this study, another research on the absence of copula in hip-hop suggests that it is a morphosyntactic property of hip-hop that overlaps with AAE, without further analysis (Werner, 2019).

The study of the copula absence in hip-hop music works focuses on its relation to street speech, where the hip-hop lifestyle is rooted (Alim, 2002). The research directly connects the copula absence as a linguistic effort of styling the lyrics to show resistance towards the notion of standard-English-centered, which functions to represent values, morals, and aesthetics in urban America. Another study focuses on the general rules under which certain copula deletion can occur with restriction in the deletion of certain copulas, namely *was*, *were*, and *am* (Skrypzak, 2016). This research also compares the copula *is* and *are* deletion in hip-hop within different age ranges, which shows that the rate of copula absence dropped in adults' speech.

With readings of the existing literature, it can be concluded that research on the sentence structure of song lyrics in hip-hop music is rather lacking in syntax meaning-making because the scope of interest is larger in how songs affect psychology and emotional response (Kazuma, 2009). There is a limited study that analyses the pattern of copulas', including the to-be verb, presence and absence in hip-hop song lyrics to convey a particular meaning and relate the styling of the lyrics to things outside the song that are related to the song creation, which is common in hip-hop music, such as in a genre of song derived from the Black culture, which is called diss track.

A diss track is a rap or music work where the artists insult another party and boost themselves to belittle the other as part of rivalry or competition (Ross & Rivers, 2018). However, this expected impact from a diss track has not been integrated to the study of the presence and absence of the to-be verb. One of the globally-known artists from the African American ethnic acknowledged by his diss tracks is Kendrick Lamar. The work from Lamar that reached its impact worldwide is a song entitled *Not Like Us*, which was released in 2024. *Not Like Us* is an example of a diss track commonly produced in hip-hop culture, which has attracted global attention to the diss battle between the singer Kendrick Lamar and his fellow artist, Drake. This song consists of lines where the copula is present and absent, which arguably carries another function, rather than just a replication of AAVE grammar.

This paper aims to examine the structure of the language used in rap songs so that the sentences with linguistic deviation are able to be seen as a particular way of conveying meaning, rather than grammatical mistakes in songs. After observing the pattern of how the syntactic presence and absence of the to-be verb is made in the song lyrics, this paper will try to propose that this function portrays a certain meaning that can be intentionally constructed in song lyrics. This paper also attempts to interpret the different possible meanings to support the argument of how the chosen sentence structure of the absence of the verb is debatably most suitable only in rap songs, but not in others.

METHOD

The starting step of the analysis was to read the song lyrics from one song entitled *Not Like Us* (Lamar, 2024) several times. This step is to analyze each line of the song, with a total of 102 lines as follows: Intro (2 lines), Verse 1 (26 lines), Chorus 1 (2 lines), Verse 2 (32 lines), Chorus 2 (2 lines), Verse 3 (18 lines), Bridge (16 lines), Outro (4 lines) (Lamar, 2024). With the focus of this study being the copula, the lines to be analysed consist of lines with the presence of the to-be verb and lines with the absence of the to-be verb, as analysed with the grammar rules.

This study applied the set rules of English Grammar, as conducted by Lindley Murray (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011), specifically the rules on verbs in Syntax that correspond to Rule 1 about how "a verb must agree with its nominative case"; otherwise, it is a violation of the rule (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011). After a close reading of the lyrics, the lines in which the to-be is present, which are referred to as the Present

To-Be Lines, and the lines that violate the traditional grammar, which are referred to as the Absent To-Be Lines, were collected which results on the compilation of 49 lines.

For further analysis on meaning-making, the research study approaches the object as a part of the field of Systemic Functional Grammar in Halliday and Matthiessen's book entitled Introduction to Functional Grammar to determine descriptive meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). The perspective of text, explained in the book, as a resource of meaning-making that reveals the system of language, is the approach this study concerns to analyse the presence and absence of the to-be verb.

In an effort to make a multipronged study of the to-be verb, this study also used the theory of Argument Structure Construction (Goldberg, 1992) to account for the constructed grammar in the lyrics as a matter of competence or knowledge of language. This research also practically used the theory of Chomsky, which analyses creativity in word formation, particularly in diss-track culture (Chomsky, 2014).

The analysed data collection was presented by listing the lines and categorizing them into two big categories, which are Present To-Be Lines and Absent To-Be Lines. Below those categories mentioned, the lines were also explained and divided into smaller categories based on the application of analysis from the theories listed previously. In the big categories, this study presented tables with some of the bolded words to point out which part of the lines is being mainly discussed. Later in the discussion, some of the examples were written again and presented with a further analysis taking account of the construction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Classification of Syntactic Presence and Absence of the To-Be Verb

This paper finds the classification of the syntactic presence and absence of the to-be verb in the lyrics into two categories, which are the Present To-Be Lines (when the sentence is with the to-be verb) and the Absent To-Be Lines (when the sentence is without the to-be verb where it should be). The first category is the classification of data in which the lines of the song lyrics are written with the presence of the to-be verb. It is also according to Murray's theory on how correctly a verb agrees with its nominative case (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011). There are 30 lines with 1 repetition, in which the song corresponds to the rule, making the data 29 lines. The other classification that is applied to this data is the Referent of Self and

Other, which refers to what the line refers to in its relation to the world. This data was further discussed later.

Table 1. Syntactic Presence of the To-Be Verb

No	Data	Referent	
		The Pronoun /	Other
1	What's up with these jabroni-ass niggas tryna see Compton?		v
2	How many opps you really got? I mean, it's too many options		v
3	a) I'm finna pass on this body,	v	
	b) I'm John Stockton	v	
4	Certified boogeyman, I'm the one that up the score with 'em	v	
5	And Baka got a weird case, why is he around?		v
6	Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, I'ma do my stuff	v	
7	Why you trollin' like a bitch? Ain't you tired?		v
8	Tryna strike a chord and it's probably A minor (Repeated 1 time)		v
9	What is the owl? Bird niggas and burnt bitches, go		v
10	Shape the stories how you want, hey, Drake, they're not slow		v
11	Rabbit hole is still deep, I can go further, I promise		v
12	Ain't that something? B-Rad stands for bitch and you Malibu most wanted		v
13	Ain't no law, boy, you ball boy, fetch Gatorade or somethin'		v
14	You niggas'll get a wedgie, be flipped over your boxers		v
15	And I'm hands-on, he fuck around, get polished	v	
16	Fucked on Wayne girl while he was in jail, that's connivin'		v
17	I'm glad DeRoz' came home, y'all didn't deserve him neither	v	
18	That name gotta be registered and placed on neighborhood watch		v
19	a) Yeah, it's all eyes on me, and b) I'ma send it up to Pac, ayy	v	
20	Put the wrong label on me, I'ma get 'e, dropped, ayy	v	
21	Devil is a lie, he a 69 God, ayy		v
22	a) City is back up, b) it's a must, we outside, ayy		v
23	Once upon a time, all of us was in chains	v	
24	Atlanta was the Mecca, buildin' railroads and trains		v
25	The settlers was usin' townfolk to make 'em richer		v
26	Quavo said you can be from Northside (What?)		v
27	It was God's plan to show y'all the liar		v
28	Are you my friend?		v
29	Are we locked in?	v	

The latter category is when the to-be verb is absent in the song lyrics line that violates the rule of Syntax according to traditional grammar, Murray's theory of RULE 1 of Verb in Syntax, which says a verb must agree with its nominative case (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011). This study believes that this rule means that when a nominative case is present in a sentence, so must be the verb. However, in the song *Not Like Us* by Kendrick Lamar, there are 27 lines with 7 repetitions—making the data consist of 20 lines—which have nominative case and the rest of the sentence without the presence of the verb, particularly the to-be verb, which are represented below with its correction above the so-called violation to the set of rules in English Grammar. This data was further discussed later.

Table 2. Syntactic Absence of The To-Be Verb

No	Data	Modified Data
1	Deebo any rap nigga, he a free throw	Deebo any rap nigga, he is a free throw
2	Beat your ass and hide the Bible if God watchin'	Beat your ass and hide the Bible if God is watchin'
3	To any bitch that talk to him and they in love	To any bitch that talk to him and they are in love
4	And Party at the party playin' with his nose now	And Party is at the party playin' with his nose now
5	Why you trollin' like a bitch? Ain't you tired?	Why are you trollin' like a bitch? Ain't you tired?
6	They not like us, they not like us, they not like us (Repeated 3 times)	They are not like us, they are not like us, they are not like us
7	You think the Bay gon' let you disrespect Pac, nigga?	You think the Bay is gon' let you disrespect Pac, nigga?
8	I think that Oakland show gon' be your last stop, nigga	I think that Oakland show is gon' be your last stop, nigga
9	Did Cole foul, I don't know why you still pretendin'	Did Cole foul, I don't know why you are still pretendin'
10	The audience not dumb	The audience is not dumb
11	Ain't that somethin'? B-Rad stands for bitch and you Malibu most wanted	Ain't that somethin'? B-Rad stands for bitch and you are Malibu most wanted
12	What OVO for? The "Other Vaginal Option"? Pussy	What is OVO for? The "Other Vaginal Option"? Pussy
13	Devil is a lie, he a 69 God, ayy	Devil is a lie, he is a 69 God, ayy
14	City is back up, it's a must, we outside, ayy	City is back up, it's a must, we are outside, ayy
15	Let me break it down for you, this the real nigga challenge	Let me break it down for you, this is the real nigga challenge
16	Thug made you feel like you a slime in your head (Ayy, what?)	Thug made you feel like you are a slime in your head (Ayy, what?)
17	2 Chainz say you good, but he lied	2 Chainz say you are good, but he lied
18	a) No, you not a colleague, b) you a fuckin' colonizer	a) No, you are not a colleague, b) you are a fuckin' colonizer

19	He a fan, he a fan, he a fan (Mm) (Repeated 1 time)	He is a fan, he is a fan, he is a fan (Mm)
20	Freaky-ass nigga, he a 69 God (Repeated 3 times)	Freaky-ass nigga, he is a 69 God

Imagining The Meaning of The To-Be Verb

Within the implementation of the theory of relational clauses on functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) as processes of being and having, this study differentiates functions of meaning into two categories, which are On representing the Self and its Opinion and Query and On representing Others. This study argues that all 29 of the Present To-Be Verb lines are the function of to-be verbs of imagining the self and also its opinion and query over the world. Meanwhile, the other meaning making in the song lyrics fit the category of On representing Others is actualized with the Absent To-Be Verb Lines.

Such an argument is derived from the analysis presented in this paper. The relational clause marked with the use of to-be verb has a character of identifying, nature of unfolding, and the modal feature of ability as the linguistic picture of the creature (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Thus, the first category of Representing the Self is Representing the Body, which is to identify the articulator of the lyrics. The lines categorized in this section are ones consisting of the pronoun *I*. This research finds 9 lines with 10 occurrences (Present To-Be Verb Line Number: 3a,b; 4, 6, 15, 17, 19b, 20, 23, 29) in which this argument occurs.

The analysis of one of the examples is in the 3a,b line where the singer talks about themselves with "a) *I'm finna pass on this body*, b) *I'm John Stockton*".

This line links two identities, which are *I* and John Stockton, as related with one relation, which is the specialty of passing where John Stockton is famously known to be an iconic NBA player with his acknowledged passes as assists and *I* as a passer to an unknown thing in this line. As the meaning-making intention of this line is to build an identity of an *I*, as music in its performative utterances enable the performer for thinking identity (Havis, 2009), the presence of the to-be verb is important to construe this meaning.

Several other examples also appear when the singer represents the Self as a Body of *I* who is linked to another identity. Line 4 of the Present To-Be Verb Lines category is another example where the identity building of *I* is related to another identity which is a *certified boogeyman*. This line intends to be a performance of *I* to be related to a certified boogeyman because *I* involve to *up the score* with

them. Different from the previous line that connects the identity of an *I* to another identity because of similar skill capability, this line invents the identity of *I* by relating the two identities because of the abstract relationship of being in the same team or group. The presence of the *am* as the to-be verb is to perceive an act as an attribute of being and inventing selves (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Havis, 2009).

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), the modal feature of ability contributes to the self as being because it concerns a particularized entity which will result in failure if the rule of the to-be verb is to be violated. The first example of the line that shows *I* in performing *to be myself*, borrowing the term used by Havis (2009), is in Line 6 which says, "... **I'ma** do my stuff." This line is preceded with the repeated sounds of "wop" that is represented as whacking an owl-shaped piñata in the music video (Richardson, 2024). Revealed also later in the lyrics, owl is directly related to Drake, as the target of the diss track. This building of Self as an identity carries the meaning making of the *I* who has the responsibility to do something—in this line, whacking—to the a signifier of being myself (Havis, 2009). This can be concluded also in Line 20 with "... **I'ma** get 'e ...". In both of the occurrences the *am* as a to-be verb is important to create the modal feature of ability of *I'ma* or *am going to*.

The second category of Representing the Self is Representing the Opinion, where the lines categorized in this section are ones that consist of statements of unfolding opinion. This argument is derived from the nature of unfolding that belongs to the process of being in relational clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), as the other lines with the present to-be verb shows that it unfolds in a static state. The static state in the lines represents opinions which means that it is a subjective or personal opinion that the fact cannot be checked. Therefore, this paper argues that the meaning and intention implied in the sentence within the relation to the to-be verb is that it attempts to give remarks to the reader that the Opinion is important to contribute to the process of being in the world.

There are 15 lines with 16 occurrences (Line: 2; 8; 10–11; 13–14; 16; 18; 19a; 21; 22a,b; 24–27) found in the lyrics that correspond to this kind of function, and some of them are explained in this paper. The first example that represents static state is static location in space in Line 16 of the Present To-Be Verb Lines which is "... *he was in jail* ...". This line intends to discredit the action of the target of the diss track who "*fucked on Wayne girl*" while he was away. In this line, the location is construed relationally to unfold a condition which supports

the opinion of the composer of the diss track, not to explain the dynamic motion of, for example, moving to jail. Thus, the presence of the to-be verb here is to reveal inertly the condition in being in the world.

Another example is Line 10 which says "... *they're not slow*." This line unfolds a static quality that is construed relationally of *they* being *not slow*. This line also intends to discredit the target of the diss track, this time with an articulated name, who is Drake. The static quality of being *not slow* is unfolded to shame the act of Drake who, according to the composer of the diss track, shapes stories like the way he wants people to perceive it to be. Another of the examples is in Line 2 which says, "... *I mean it's too many options*". In this line, it is rather clear that it conveys the meaning of the line with the clause *I mean* in the beginning. This particular line represents the idea that *too many options* is the reality that the line tries to deliver to the reader.

This type of line represents the Opinion, such as in Line 8 that says "... *it's probably A minor*" when the opinion of the singer is expressed because there is no fact statement as signed with the word *probably*. The function of the to-be verb is as an effort to categorize the opinion of the singer to be true. The common characteristic that the previous examples carry is that it unfolds the static state of another entity, whether it is particular, such as Drake, or an unspecified phenomenon or things, such as *it*. The quality of it cannot be determined, but the singer put the opinion in a structure in traditional grammar so that the intention to unfold the concept of being is more acceptable to the mind of the reader (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

The last interpretation of Representing the Self is when the Present To-Be lines are used on the Representing Query. This research found 6 lines (Line: 1, 5, 7, 9, 12, 28) that represent a query in the song lyric of *Not Like Us*. This finding puts forward the argument that the to-be verb has another function to represent the query of the Self, especially when the Self has already had the answer of their own. The placement of the to-be verb in every query creates meaning of the Self asking questions to two categories, which are questioning the unalignment reality to their ideal one, and asking verification that the ideal reality they realize is true.

This list of lines is found to be closely related to the function of Representing the Opinion, but these are composed in an interrogative structure. For example, it occurs in the Line 1 with "*What's up with these jabroni-ass niggas tryna see Compton?*" According to the theory of clause by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), this line is categorized as a demanding role in

exchange for information as a commodity. This line also corresponds to the characteristics of a clause, as an exchange in meaning that this line mimics the nature of dialogue, where the reader is able to interpret that there is an addresser-addressee role in the context. This study argues that the significance of the to-be verb in this line is that it shows the complete thought. This line is embedding information to the mind of the reader that *these jabroni-ass niggas* who are *tryna see Compton* is rather not appropriate and should be stopped. This is meant to propose to the addressee or the reader that the action happening in reality is in the opposition of the idea of the speaker of what should happen.

Another occurrence shows that the to-be verb functions as the extension of the reason that the singer has the opinion. It functions to engage the reader in the quality of Baka, who *got a weird case*, and extend it to the mind of the reader so that they could also question the ‘happening’ that *he* is around and in “*And Baka got a weird case, why is he around?*” And in another line of “*What is the owl?*” where the to-be verb especially functions in this line because if it is absent, the reader would not have the same idea of this line of questioning *the owl* as the participant in this line. The common characteristic of the examples of the query using the to-be verb lines show that the presence of the to-be verb enables the questioning to be successful, as the omission of it creates confusion that will betray the intention of representing the query of the self.

In contrast, this research finds that *Not Like Us* does not use the To-Be Verb to refer to things outside of the Self. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) present the role of Actor to transitive and intransitive to create a world view which is particularly specific to one text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Referring to the function of the to-be verb as to the relation of the Actor and the rest of the sentence, this paper argues that the absence of the to-be verb in *Not Like Us* represents the meaning of the text to decline the importance of Being in the relation of the rest of the sentence. Without the presence of the to-be verb as the sign of relational function (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), this study argues that the implicit meaning of the specific word arrangement is to say that the Subject does not function as an Actor, hence the Subject cannot act on the Rest of the sentence, according to traditional grammar (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011).

This paper finds that the Absent To-Be Verb mostly occurs when the lines are expressing the opposition, which are the things/people in contrast with the side of the singer. This paper analyses 20

lines in which this argument is applied, and some of them are explained. According to the categories of syntactical clauses in which the Actors occur, there are two types, which are ‘happening’ and ‘doing’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). This occurs in Line 1 of the Absent To-Be Verb Lines, which says “... *he a free throw*” For the reason that the to-be verb is absent in this line, it cannot be concluded that *he* is the Actor because the sign to function as it is absent. This paper argues that this particular construction in the making of the line is carrying meaning that *he* is not important to the message that is to be delivered. This counts as the function of the to-be verb in its absence to create a subordinating making of an idea in the mind of the reader, so that the importance of the *he* is not significant compared to the attribute of *a free throw*.

This also applies when the singer wants to imply that the Subject is subordinate to the presence of the Self such as in Line 2 which says “... *hide the Bible if God watchin*”. In this line, this paper interprets that the line is taking a different side with God, and so God is not given with a to-be verb to restructure the way the reader thinks. It implies that in this particular line, the singer neglects the control that God has by hiding *the Bible* and the realization of God as an Actor in an Absent To-Be Verb Line, so that the figuration of the process is erased. It corresponds to another line of “*To any bitch that talk to him and they in love*”. This line consists of *they* which is not embodied with the to-be verb, so it cannot be agreed on what information it is trying to convey about *they*. This is another function of the Absent of To-Be Verb Line to give a vague reality of the Subject because there is no formal function word that gives a complete thought of the association of the Subject and the explanation after it.

Furthermore, this paper realizes the similarity between the use of African-American Vernacular English and the use of language in Hip-Hop Culture, which is the absence of the copula that agrees with previous research (Labov, 1972). The data includes the analysis of the syntactic presence and absence of the to-be verb, where the observation can only be understood when the to-be verb is entered into the empty position when it is absent (Labov, 1995). This paper then argues that Kendrick Lamar, part of the African-American community, is using this sentence structure in representing the relation-oriented work to address his issue with other significant parts of African-American Culture, such as Drake, the N-word, and Compton.

CONCLUSION

The zero-to-be verb or syntactic absence of the to-be verb in song lyrics is increasing with the rise of hip-hop culture and the widening use of social media. This also remains possible because more African-American singers and artists in numbers are becoming globally acknowledged. Hip-hop culture, well-known with its popular artists such as Kendrick Lamar, is a part of the African-American community and, for that reason, is chosen to be the object of this study. The massive impact of Kendrick Lamar and his works is what this paper realizes to select *Not Like Us*, as one of hip-hop songs that uses the style of African-American Vernacular English, which is known to eliminate the to-be verb in its word arrangement, to be the object of this study.

This analytical study presents the function of the to-be verb in a sentence with observation of the syntactic structure of the presence and absence of the verb in relation being and others. This paper finds that the syntactic presence of the to-be verb has the tendency to signify the importance of representing the self in relation to himself and to the member of the same group with the singer in a grammatically accepted sentence structure to ensure the stated notion of the sentence is delivered to the listener of the song as the actualisation of the relational clause with the to-be verb. In contrast, within the scope of this research, the syntactic absence of the to-be verb is used to signify that the other person, outside of the community of the singer, is alienated and subordinate to the singer of the song as the absence of the to-be verb results in omission of certain syntactical function, such as the vague relation of the Actor to the rest of the sentence. The finding of this research is able to be implicated

in the realization that certain lyrical word arrangements can be interpreted to add a certain meaning to the song lyrics. This finding is to be applicated in the study of semantics in song lyrics in relation to its syntactical structure, which commonly seems as two distinct study fields, to further conduct a thorough observation on hip-hop songs based on the to-be verb to realize there is a particular structure especially in African-American Vernacular English that conveys implied meaning.

However, this research is far from knowing whether this representation of the importance of being and the alienation of others also applies in other types of copula verbs besides the to-be verb. The limitation of this research also lies in the narrow representativeness of the small data used in this study, as the object is only one song of a particular artist from the African-American people.

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