

A Critical Discourse Analysis of BTS' Song "ON" (Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach)

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Abstract

Song is a type of transactional discourse which contains a singer's message or ideology to be delivered to their fans or general public about certain issues, either related to personal or social ones. The ideology and the relative power of a song can be analyzed through linguistic perspective using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach by investigating its discourse meaning and its relevance to the surrounding social and cultural context. This is a descriptive qualitative study which aims at revealing the ideology of acceptance, self-love and self-perseverance of the song ON by BTS through Halliday's (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Fairclough's (1995) concept of CDA by analyzing the transitivity, mood types and metaphors. The followings are the results namely 1) the transitivity comprises 46 material process, 8 mental process, 16 relational process, 3 behavioral process and 2 verbal process; 2) the mood system consists of 47 indicative declarative, 3 indicative interrogative and 25 imperatives; and 3) there are 5 metaphors found in the song. In a nut shell, this song delivers an important message of accepting and loving their true selves, self-reliance and perseverance towards prejudice and bullying from others, as well as confidence towards any challenges ahead.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, song, systemic functional linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

South Korea is one of a few developed Asian countries known for its global spread of technology and pop culture. After recovering from the severe Asian economic crisis in the 1997 – 1998, South Korea has revolutionized its economy through the advancement of technology and export of pop culture. Thanks to its government new planning on infrastructure, economy, technology and culture and the self-discipline and hard work by its citizens, over the last two decades, South Korea has become very rich and very futuristic and it has become the 12th world largest economy (Roll, 2018). However, in spite of its economic and cultural success, South Korea faces some of side impacts, one of them is mental health. In fact, South Korea

is one of the countries with highest suicide rate in the world (World Population review, 2020) due to depression which occur to both elderly and young generation. It is also a common truth that South Korea has their own standard of physical beauty, which explains the high rate of plastic surgery there that the failure of fulfilling this standard becomes another case of depression.

The K-Pop industry as the primary product of Korean hallyu, which put looks and performance as primary factor, also encounters such problem of mental health. Several K-pop artists committed suicide in the past few years due to pressure from the media and fans, and not many artists acknowledge and address this issue. Among the few artists, BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan, or Beyond the Scene) is one of them to address some social issues in their songs. The song that is closely relevant to the above issue is entitled ON, which was released with their latest album. Originally written for reflecting their musical journey, this song is an acknowledgement of all of the challenges and consequences of being famous singers and as the representation of their belief towards life and music industry, including the issue of mental health.

In relation to social lives' phenomena among the youths mentioned above, songs may not only be able to entertain the consumers but may also be one of media to voice someone's feelings and thoughts about the reality. Due to having issues on aspects of lives expressed in songs, many studies have been conducted to explore the intentions behind the songs via Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Some scholars reveals that issues of ideology, politics, economics, social and culture are conveyed through songs (Merita & Sumarlam, 2018; Wibowo, 2018; Astuti, 2017; Setiowati & Wahyuningtyas, 2011). These are reviewed using perspectives and approaches used in CDA offered by the experts like Van Dijk, Fairclough, Mills, etc (Sumarlam et. al, 2009). The studies done are emphasized on political and social phenomena which contribute to someone's point of views on how they see meanings behind the lyrics that arise from the currently local/national/global situations or settings encountered; as a consequence, these stimulate a song writer or a singer to verbalize their message through songs as their ideology aligning with their entertaining purposes to their fans and consumers.

Having the background of Korean youths' problematic lives, this study is therefore put forward to investigate the ideology and power relation conveyed by the song entitled "ON" sung by the young boyband group, BTS, as a representation of the young Korean public figures. The approach used is one proposed by Fairclough (1995) aligned with the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) as the analytical procedures. The study investigated how the transitivity, mood system, modality and metaphors represent the song's powerful message of self-acceptance, self-love and perseverance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

“Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) stems from the critical theory of language which sees the language as form of social practice” (Fairclough in Janks, 2006). It means language is seen as text or discourse, in that any use of language is bound to social contexts to serve certain purpose. Due to the interconnectedness between linguistics and social phenomenon, CDA makes use of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) to reveal the meaning behind the use of discourse, as SFL also views language as a verbal social process which represent social and cultural norms (in Riyadi, 2016).

There are three dimensions comprised in CDA, namely text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1995); so, in CDA there are three processes to accommodate these three dimensions (Janks, 2006), namely: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), social analysis (explanation). This study followed the framework of CDA by Fairclough as the conceptual framework, and SFL as the analytical framework. The conceptual of Fairclough’s is construed by a relationship between social structure and text production process (in Fauzan, 2014). He then states that discourse shapes and is shaped by the society; assists to form and change the social knowledge, identity and relationship; is formed by relationship of power and related to ideology; and indicates a wrest of power or authority.

Songs belong to a transactional text which is performed verbally. The song communicates the content of language as Lyons (1977) states that language is not only used to the notion of communication of feelings, moods, attitudes but also is “the intentional transmission of factual or propositional information” (cited in Brown & Yule, 1983:2). This also interrelates with the manner of production by a speaker (or a writer) in which voice quality effects play an important role for the speaker (or a writer) to convey his or her message – in terms of message orientation – as an efficient way of information transference in order to exchange facts and opinions. Some studies investigated songs in the CDA perspective, among others by Setyono & Wahyuni (2013), Putri & Tiyono (2018), and Merita & Sumarlam (2018), which focused on songs in the humanity, political and socio-religious views. This research filled the gap as it focused on the social issue, especially dealing with youth mental problem.

Regarding to examine and interpret the song via the CDA perspective, the followings are the related definitions given in order to scope the intention of this study. There are numbers of scholars claim that CDA is an approach to analyse a language use beyond the boundary of a sentence or utterance, interrelationship between language and society as well as the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication (Stubbs, 1983; Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Labov & Fanshel 1977; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; cited in Farclough (1995), Brown & Yule, (1983). However, there are some experts emphasized CDA on context that plays a significant role to affect a function and meaning of the text (Fairclough, 1995;

Cutting, 2008; Huang, 2007; Van Dijk, 1985; Leech; 1997). In addition, Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1985) state that critical discourse analysis should be constructed by the question why and how discourse cummulatively contributes to the reproduction of macro, super and micro structures.

2.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics

As stated in the background, this study uses Systemin Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (1985) as the analytical Framework. (SFL) sees language we produce, either spoken or written, is systemic and functional (Halliday in Riyadi, 2016) and a form of social practice. In this phenomenon, the social practice is the source of meaning, while language in use is the meaning maker. SFL is closely related to CDA because SFL makes sense of the phenomena CDA wants to reveals through linguistics point of view, something that sociologists could not do.

Language is structured into metafunctions that construe three types of functions, namely

1. Ideational metafunction, representing experiential and logical realities in language (Riyadi, 2016). The user's experience of the external and internal worlds. This is realized in the Transitivity system which comprise process, participants and process, and taking the clause as representation. Process types consist of material, mental, behavioral, relational, verbal and existential.
2. Interpersonal metafunction, expressing social realities in language (Riyadi, 2016), how language encodes between speakers. This metafunction is realized in the Mood structure and mood system of the clause which has two types, namely indicatives (declaratives and interrogatives), and imperatives (commands and exclamations).
3. Textual metafunction, symbolizes the ideational and interpersonal meanings into text or discourse (Riyadi, 2016), which is represented in the thematic structure of clause (Theme – rheme pattern) and lexical cohesion.

This study focused on how the transitivity and mood systems realized the ideational and interpersonal meanings of the song ON.

2.3 Metaphorical expressions

In relation to the metaphorical expressions, semantic and lexicogrammatical domains play an important role of creating logogenic patterns and cohesive markings (Halliday & Matheissen, 2004). Both have their own characteristics but they are also accumulated in all types of texts (register) in terms of word or group/phrase formation and their meaning at clause level in a text. This is due to the fact that the text is the most extensive unit of meaning as the upper bound of the semantic stratum. While, the clause is the most extensive unit of wording as the upper bound of the lexicogrammatical system.

In addition, metaphor deals with the metafunction as of Halliday's analysis concepts. Firstly, textual is the combination of messages in forming periodic of information movements. For example, a paragraph begins with a phase of message

regarded with one's motion through space and then moving onto a phase of message containing interest points. Secondly, interpersonal concerns to the combination of propositions/proposals in forming pattern exchanges involving two or more interactants like an interview, classroom discourse quiz, etc. The adequate regularity and predictability of patterns appears to be in natural composition. Thirdly, ideational regards with the combination of figures forming sequence in time or known as episodic patterns like in narratives and other chronologically organized texts or chronological passage.

Simply, cohesive relations of conjunction play a distinctive role to shape semantic and lexicogrammatical domains that are thoroughly classified through the manifestation of expansion comprising elaboration, extension and enhancement of a text. Each has their own function in indicating metaphor expressions into the metafunctions of SFL.

3. METHODS

This study belongs to descriptive qualitative research whose data are in the form of words, sentences, quotations, manuscript of interviews, photos and videotapes (Moleong, 2007). It followed Fairclough's concept of analysis: description of text, interpretation and explanation (Fairclough, 1995). The primary data of this study is the song ON in the form of words, phrases and clauses, taken by transcribing the English subtitle from its music video, whereas the secondary data are the results of interviews, press conference done by BTS as the group of bandboy singers, and also some relevant researches to support our findings. Data were analyzed using constant comparative method through the following procedures: clauses and phrases from the song lyrics were analyzed in terms of their transitivity system, mood system, mood structure and metaphorical expressions to find out the experiential and interpersonal meanings; then, the result of the lexico-grammatical features were analyzed in terms of its discourse semantics to reveal its ideology or meaning; finally, this finding from the second step were explained with relevant concepts and other researches.

4. FINDINGS/RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Context Description

ON is a four-minute length song and is one of the 19 songs of BTS' new album Map of the Soul: 7 (MOTS:7) which was officially released on February 21, 2020. As the title track (the hit song) of the album, it is accompanied by music videos, which have two versions of it available on YouTube. The original song is in Korean, but for the study we use the official English subtitle as the primary data. The structure of the song consists of verse 1, verse 2, pre-chorus, chorus, verse 3, verse 4, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge and outro. Since the pre-chorus and chorus are repeated twice, in this study they will be analyzed as one verse each (the full lyrics are in the Appendix).

About BTS' new album, BTS leader RM said that MOTS is the reinterpretation (reboot) of their first album and to reflect their seven-year career as a band, whereas they consider the song ON as admittance of their past selves as well as their destiny, acceptance of the challenges, struggles, shadows they face as part of them, and a big statement that they will carry on with their music despite what has happened and will happen in the future. It is generally known that K-pop industry is highly competitive; it is extremely difficult to survive in such environment especially those coming from small entertainment companies. Even after they are successful, BTS still face the dark consequences and impact of being in the stardom to have to struggle with the bright side they want to show to the world, and their internal struggles and fears as individuals and as a band.

4.2. Interpretation

The song lyrics have total 75 clauses (only major clauses are counted; ellipsis and minor clauses are excluded). Repeated chorus and bridge are also excluded for more simplicity of analysis.

Table 1. Transitivity system of *ON*

No	Processes	Number of clauses
1	Material process	46
2	Mental Process	8
3	Relational Process	16
4	Behavioral Process	3
5	Verbal	2
Total clauses		75

Most of the processes, 46 out of 75, are material processes, which mean that the representation of the world is seen as active physical experiences and happenings. The "Actor" of the material processes can be divided into two categories:

1. The actor "I" "my knees", "they" represent the speaker of this song that is BTS. Some examples of this case are:
 - a. I get up, steady on my feet.
 - b. Even if my knees drop to the ground.
 - c. They don't get buried.
 - d. (I) throw myself whole into both worlds.
 - e. (I) win no matter what.
 - f. I'm takin' over.

Through the use of material processes, the speakers represent themselves as active participants doing the action showed in the processes (I get up; they don't get buried; (I) throw myself), (I) win, I'm takin' over. The sequence in which those processes appear in song represent the speakers' journey from being weak and worthless becoming strong and powerful, implicating spirit of perseverance and self-reliance towards life difficulties.

2. The actor which represents an entity other than the speakers, are, for example "the shadow", "you" (implicit), "rain":
 - a. With each step then again grows the shadows.
 - b. (You) can't hold me down.
 - c. (You) bring the pain.
 - d. Rain be pourin'.
 - e. Sky keep fallin'.

The use of imperative clauses in clauses b, c and d implies the power relation of the speakers (BTS) towards whom the message is addressed, represented by the action in the process (can't hold me down; bring the pain; rain be pourin), implicating the equal power status. The entity represented by the implicit actor "you", "rain" and "sky" are those people, situation which are against them and look down on them.

A considerable number of relational processes are also found in the song, for example:

- Of course I'm not unafraid.
- I'm a fighter.
- The shadow resembles me.

The relational processes represent the relation of the subject I and the attribute (unafraid, a fighter); the shadow and me. Here the speakers admit being in the opposite or contradictory situation through the use of shadow and a fighter and not unafraid, that they are willing to accept the negative impact of being famous, but they will keep fighting as a fighter.

Table 2. Mood system of ON

No	Mood types	Number of clauses
1	Indicative Declarative	47
2	Indicative Interrogative	3
3	Imperative	25
Total clauses		75

In terms of the mood types, most of the clauses are in indicative declarative, meaning that the song uses the text as proposition or giving information or statement. However, there are a considerable number of imperatives (25 clauses), indicating that the speakers (BTS) are trying to take control or have higher power relation to whom they address in the lyrics. For example, in the clause bring the pain, the speakers ask the implicit subject "you", which represent difficulties, challenges or whoever is against them, to bring the pain; BTS ask them to bring in on so they can face these challenges without fear. The repeated use of imperatives in several parts of the song (pre-chorus, chorus, verse 3, and outro) indicates the emphasis of message the speakers want to address. The use of clauses as proposal represent the power and equality, meaning that they are no longer in inferior position towards things and people who are against them.

Table 3. Metaphors and their meaning in ON

No	Metaphors	Meaning
1	I fly together with that black wind.	<i>Black wind</i> represents the shadow, the external as well as internal problems BTS face as individuals as well as band. <i>I fly together with that black wind</i> means that BTS already accept the consequences that come with the fame as superstars.
2	Throw myself whole into both worlds.	<i>Both worlds</i> mean the two sides of a coin of being popular artists, the bright happy life of getting famous and successful, and the dark life or problems of losing personal lives, work pressure and fulfilling people' expectation. <i>Throw myself whole into both worlds</i> means that BTS are willing to live the live and accept both consequences.
3	Carried myself into this beautiful prison.	<i>This beautiful prison</i> is BTS current state of fame and success, a beautiful place but it locks them down from freedom like normal people. By this statement BTS again state their will to live in the beautiful but full of problems life.
4	Rain be pourin', sky keep fallin' everyday.	<i>Pouring rain, falling sky</i> both represent the prejudice, the negativity, the problems they face at the moment. It is a statement that they will take anything, including challenges and problems, ahead of them. They are willing to face everything in life.
5	Choosing the descend into the dark abyss.	The literal definition of <i>abyss</i> is a dark and deep place, like hell. In this contexts, <i>dark abyss</i> is the shadow, the dark consequences of being superstars. By this statement BTS have decided choose to challenge and embrace the shadows in their lives instead of run from them.

The song lyrics contain some metaphorical expressions which represent the other side life of being a popular band, such as black wind, both worlds, beautiful prison, and dark abyss (clauses no. 1, 2, 3, and 5). All of these expressions represent all the negative or the dark side of BTS current life. Together with fame and success, many consequences also come after them: the negativity or prejudice from people or haters, the loss of personal space and life, the loneliness and depression, the absolute perfection that people ask of them, something that is very common in the K-pop

industry. The meanings of metaphors suggest the speakers' admittance of their past selves and courage and willingness to face and accept both the bright and dark sides of their lives ahead.

However, the transitivity system for those clauses which reveal BTS as the main actor, senser of the process, and most of the clauses are material processes indicate that BTS take an active role (fly, throw, carried), and mental process which represents their mental activity (choosing) in relation to the negativity and challenges. In clause no. 4, again the song addresses the challenges by using the phrases rain be pourin, sky keep falling everyday. In this case, the mood type is imperative, indicating that BTS positions themselves in superior position over "rain" and "sky", meaning that the challenges and problem no longer matter for them, and they are ready to face.

4.3. Discussion

This part of the article discusses how the text which was analyzed in terms of their linguistic features revealed the ideology and power relation, and how the text works in the social practices as suggested in critical discourse analysis by Fairclough (1995).

The creation of a song is often inspired by a person's either personal experience or social situation where he or she lives. The song can be the artist's personal opinion or commentary towards the situation. The song ON by BTS was inspired by their journey and experience as a band and collective individuals who reflect on what they have been through in the music industry, but also at the same time relevant to many other people who have shared the same challenges. The creation of the song ON cannot be separated from the artists' background in the South Korean K-pop music industry and later global music industry as part of cultural diplomacy and glocalisation of oriental and western values combination (Kwon, 2017).

It is a generally known fact that K-pop industry has two sides; on the one hand, the bright, stylish and perfectly-polished visuals appearing on television and other media, and on the other hand, the dark, frightening hidden truth behind the curtain, ranging from grueling training and working years, scrutiny over artists' personal lives by media and fans, fulfilling the Korean beauty standard, pressure from their label companies, and even sexual harassment, which often leads to depression and suicide. Although South Korea is known for its modern science and technology, their society is still conservative that discussing mental health like depression is considered taboo (Bracket, 2018; Campbell & Kim, 2019).

BTS is quite anomaly to K-pop industry from the beginning because they do not fit the standard of K-pop artists. BTS came from a small entertainment company not really known in the industry (Messerlin & Shin, 2017); their looks do not meet the K-pop beauty standard (not all of them are good looking); they are supportive of LGBTQ movement, another issue considered taboo in Korea; they make and write many of their songs, and some of them address the Korean social issues, including

mental health, as one of the members openly admitted he had depression. These facts make them get stigmatized and prejudiced from media and non-fans, especially in the beginning years of their career. However, hard work, team work and self-entitled identity have brought to where they are now.

Their song, ON, is a bold statement to challenge the hegemony of K-pop industry that they must true to themselves by loving their good and bad selves, are willing to embrace all of the darkness (represented in the metaphors) together with bright side of being in fame, and rely on themselves to face the challenge in the future. According to BTS leader about this song, it is through the admittance of the past and present, the acceptance of the bright as well as the mistakes and the shadows that they can carry on, or move on their path (Herman, 2020). The mood types used in the song suggests that BTS refuse to be in the inferior position in relation to the K-pop industry; instead, they want to take control and show their individualism and win no matter what.

This powerful message is relatable to their fans and many other people who struggle with finding who they really are. As many of the fans are youth who are seeking their true identity, trying to fulfill society and family expectation on many aspects of their lives, including the physical appearance and academic achievement, loving and accepting their true selves is primary before they can love others, and be proud to speak for themselves, as also implied in another BTS song, Love Myself (Nuryati & Maharani, 2019) and BTS speech before the United Nations General Assembly (Hasanah, Alek, Hidayat, 2019). As the Unicef Ambassador for Generation Unlimited program and the awardee of the Order Cultural Merit from South Korean government, BTS have position and power to spread positive influence over young generation. Upon the reflection to their own journey, BTS, who are also youth themselves, chose to take advantages of their current position to embrace the life as it is and to share the positivity with world.

5. CONCLUSION

Song as a text functions not only for entertainment purpose, but it also functions as an artist's voice which carries ideology or message to deliver to the audience. Song also represents the social practice in the society where it is produced. Reflecting on their musical journey through the past seven years, BTS created the song ON as commentary of the importance of acceptance, self-love and perseverance as their experiential meaning, while they also take their current superior position to address and challenge prejudice and hatred from others as their interpersonal meaning. The song itself is also relevant to what South Korean society and K-pop industry face, that is mental health, especially depression. The song suggests that it is through acceptance of the good and the bad sides of oneself, that people can love themselves before they can love others, and persevere to face the future challenge no matter what happens in the future. BTS takes advantages of their current position to spread positivity to the world through this song.

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IJOTL-TL (2022, September), 7(3): 256-270. DOI [10.30957/ijotl.v7i3.618](https://doi.org/10.30957/ijotl.v7i3.618).

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Appendix: The lyrics of the song ON

ON
by **Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS)**

Verse 1

I can't understand what people are sayin'
Who and what I need to follow
With each step then again grows the shadow
Where is this place I open my eyes to
Maybe Seoul or New York or Paris
I get up, unsteady on my feet

Verse 2

Look at my feet, look down
The shadow resembles me
Is it the shadow that's shaking
Or is it my feet that are trembling
Of course I'm not unafraid
Of course it's not all okay
But I know I awkwardly I flow
I fly together with that black wind

Pre-chorus

Hey na na na
Gotta go insane to stay sane
Hey na na na
Throw myself whole into both worlds
Hey na na na
Can't hold me down cuz you know I'm a fighter
Carried myself into this beautiful prison
Find me and I'm gonna live with you

Chorus

Eh oh bring it, bring the pain oh yeah
Eh oh come on up, bring the pain oh yeah
Rain be pourin, sky keep fallin everyday oh na na na
Eh oh bring the pain oh yeah

Verse 3

Bring the pain
It'll become my blood and flesh
Bring the pain

No fear, now that I know the way
Breathe on the small things
My air and my light in the dark
The power of the things that make me, 'me'
Even if I fall, I come right up, scream

Verse 4

Even if I fall, I come right up, scream
That's how we've always been
Even if my knees drop to the ground
As long as they don't get buried
It won't matter
Win no matter what
Win no matter what
Win no matter what
Whatever you say whatever they say
I don't give a ugh
I don't give a ugh
I don't give a ugh

Pre-chorus

Hey na na na
Gotta go insane to stay sane
Hey na na na
Throw myself whole into both worlds
Hey na na na
Can't hold me down cuz you know I'm a fighter
Carried myself into this beautiful prison
Find me and I'm gonna live with you

Chorus

Eh oh bring it, bring the pain oh yeah
Eh oh come on up, bring the pain oh yeah
Rain be pourin, sky keep fallin everyday oh na na na
Eh oh bring the pain oh yeah

Bridge

Where my pain lies
Let me take a breath
My everything, my blood and tears
Got no fears
I'm singin' ohh
Oh I'm takin' over

You should know yeah
Can't hold me down cuz you know I'm a fighter
Choosing the descend into the dark abyss
Find me and I'm gonna live with ya

Outro

Eh oh bring it, bring the pain oh yeah
Eh oh come on up, bring the pain oh yeah
Rain be pourin, sky keep fallin everyday oh na na na
Eh oh bring the pain oh yeah
All that I know is just goin on and on and on
Eh oh bring it, bring the pain oh yeah