

## A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF “WILLOW” MUSIC VIDEO BY TAYLOR SWIFT

Ni Made Dwi Utari Pusparini  
Universitas Dwijendra  
*myutari18@gmail.com*

### ABSTRACT

There are many social platform that used as a place for funneling a music video, one of the biggest media platform is Youtube. Youtube supports attractive visualization through music video, song, and even text. *Willow* music video by Taylor Swift is one of music video that has unique multimodality aspect. The researcher used qualitative method and the multimodal discourse as an approach of this study. The researcher used multimodal discourse analysis as the analysis method which examine textual communication, include images, symbols, as well as nonverbal communication like body language. To collected the data by multiple processes such as, observation, note-taking, and documentation. Primary and secondary data are the two categories of sources used in this study. Music video with entitled by “Willow” is considered as primary data and “Willow” lyric song as the secondary data. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed it by some stages of the data, such as, analyzing the visual, audio, gesture and linguistic to make a note of the finding and concluding the results. The results of this research Willow music video clip shows various multimodality aspects that are interrelated each other. The Willow song by Taylor Swift conveys a message of love life.

**Keywords:** audio; gestural; linguistics; multimodality; visual; willow music video

### INTRODUCTION

There are many social platforms that used as a place for funneling a music video, one of the biggest media platform is Youtube. Youtube itself is being the best platform for uploading and funneling musicians’ music video. This also supported by ideoworks.id that put Youtube as the second place of the best music video platform in 2023. Youtube supports attractive visualization through music video, song, and even text. Music video is an artistic creation video which become representative of humans’ feeling and it is including language as well. It is included gesture, visual, sound, that represent lyric itself (Moller in Asfar, 2022).

One of the most popular music videos in 2021 that is being hype again in 2024 is *willow* music video by taylor swift. *Willow* is being one of songs in *Evermore* album. This music video is the main song in that album which has 141 million views in the past three years in Youtube. *Willow* is coincident release on easter day. It has being an eyecatching and mysterious

video because it tooks place on a forest and most of the visualization is on nighttime. Moreover, some of scenes shows an unusual things that is being rare and mysterious. Based on that perspective, many viewers of this song argued that *willow* song contains a sensitive issue.

In linguistics, multimodal discourse analysis has been a useful study that help linguists to explain particular linguistics research. As we know, multimodal discourse is a study of many various methods used by humans to communicate the discourse, it is including using voice, writing, and body language (Chan, 2013:70). O’Halloran in Khanifa (2011) also stated that multimodal is a study that intergrates language study with the use of visuals, music, gestures, action, and sound. Moreover, multimodal analysis are includes all types of communication which have integration also text interactions of two or more semiotic sources to achieve the communication function of the text (O’Halloran, 2011). Multimodal Critical

Discourse Analysis is a concept that researchers can use to evaluate texts found in visual media. The term "multimodal critical discourse analysis" refers to the concept in English. Critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis are the two discourse studies that are combined in the AMWK study (Van Leeuwen, 2013: 1598). The two ideas can be combined to create research objects that use audiovisuals.

Some researches about multimodal discourse in music videos, videos, song and advertisement videos have been conducted previously. The first one is from Ayuni, A. Q., & Darmayanti, N. (2022) entitled *Analisis Multimodal Wacana Kritis Iklan Layanan Masyarakat Bertema Vaksinasi COVID-19 oleh Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Indonesia*. The second is SINDA, & Ali, A. J. K. N. (2022) entitled A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Lathi Song. The third is Hadriyan, F., Mujiyanto, J. M., & Rukmini, D. (2022) entitled The Use of Multimodal Discourse Analysis to Study the Relationship Between Visual, Lingual, and Written Text of Artificial Intelligence in TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) Talks YouTube Channel. To contrary this research with the previous research, this research is implementing the multimodal theory from O’Haloran and Van Leeuwen. The researcher used this theory for giving a depth explanation about songs’ multimodality.

As reviewed above, the object of this research is Willow music video by Taylor Swift because this music video has many multimodal elements which delivers a sign and different meaning. For example, the golden thread that always come up in this music video, the literal meaning of this is a thread which has golden color, however in this video golden thread has different meaning that symbolizes as a relationships between two person. For that, this research aims to give a depth explanation and description of the multimodality of *willow* music video. Moreover, the researcher is focused on analyzing the music video, written text (lyrics) and spoken.

## METHOD

The researcher used a qualitative method that means the data are classified and it analyzes

qualitatively. Based on Sugiyono (2017:9), qualitative method is a method that used to examine the condition of the natural object, where the researcher is the main instrument, the data was collected by triangulation, to analyze the data used inductive and the results of the qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalizations. The researcher used multimodal discourse analysis as the analysis method which examine textual communication, include images, symbols, as well as nonverbal communication like body language. Discourse analysis is a study of how language is used in the text and context to convey a message (Ranabhat, 2022).

Primary and secondary data are the two categories of sources used in this study. The information gathered from Taylor Swift’s YouTube channel specifically her music video with entitled by “Willow” is considered as primary data. Beside that, the researcher used “Willow” lyric song as the secondary data. The data is collected by researcher in multiple processes such as, observation, note-taking, and documentation. In order to analyze the data, the researcher carried out it by some stages of the data, such as, analyzing the visual, audio, gesture and linguistic to make a note of the finding and concluding the results.

## DISCUSSION

The researcher found the data analyst from Willow music video in Taylor Swift YouTube Channel. This song is telling about complexity of wanting and starting to falling in love to someone. This section explains the descriptive analysis based on the study results or even more the previous literature. It should be described in logical sequence and focused on the finding first. It also should be relevant to the finding in the context of existing literature.

### 1. Visual Analysis

This video clip is 4 minutes and 12 seconds long. In term of color, this video dominate warm, golds, and browns color tone which represent a comfort, nostalgic and quite reflection vibes.



Figure 1. Girl holding

The first begin in 5 sec, it shows that Taylor is holding a glowing golden thread, this golden thread is represent a strong connection to something important. This scene used a soft lighting with most of background color are combination of gold and getting darker, this color combination is symbolizing nostalgic and intimate atmosphere.



Figure 2. Willow tree

In 21 sec, it showed that the girl appeared from the big tree called willow tree. It also choosen as the title of the song “willow”. Based on Cambridge dictionary Willow tree itself is tree that usually grows near water and has long, thin branches that hang down. Whereas, based on WikiHow.com willow tree is a tree that symbolize adaptability and the ability to withstand difficult situations, and it also often a sign of good luck, hope, and protection. By reffered of these two statements, it can be concluded that the existing of this tree on the video represented a pure hope, for passing the difficult situation of their relationship.



Figure 3. Follow the golden thread

In 22 sec it can be seen that, she follows the lines to the dark place that surround by willow tree and fog, tt contributes a mystical. The glowing golden line contrast starkly with the surrounding darkness, contributes hope and clarity within a rough environment. The tone of this scene is dominated by dark greens, blues and shadow, contributes melancholic mood. All of them conveys a mood of loneliness and reflection.



Figure 4. Seeing her self with his bf



Figure 5. Seeing only her boyfriend

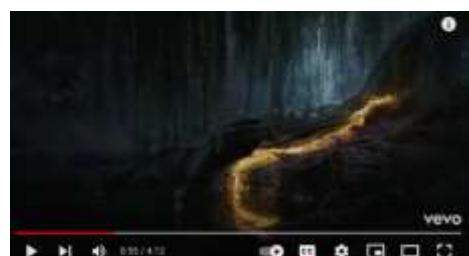


Figure 6. Jump to the river

The scene is a memory or vision, the surrounding cool, dark blue tones contrast

dramatically to create a dreamy or sorrowful atmosphere. In picture 4, it can be seen that she reflects her self to the river surface. The first time she found is her self and her boyfriend. It brings her to old memories when they were together, but then she realized in picture 5. It was just her imagination. And things that can be seen is only her boyfriend with his sad face, and she tried to begging him to come back to her, but he can't and just leave her. It also supported by the lyrics “I'm begging for you to take my hand, wreck my plans, that's my man”. Both of picture 4 and 5 are represent of unfinished feeling, perplexity of finding her love places. In picture 6, she jump to the rivers, still following the golden thread to find her man, but she just back to her childhood. This represent that the continuous love, it begun in childhood and still continuously come to them.



Figure 7. Taylor in a showcase



Figure 8. Met with the boyfriend

Both of figure 7 and 8 show that, Taylor is entering a wooden frame with spotlight falls on her. The spotlight is highlighting her isolation against the shadowy background. Both scene shows a soft lighting which enhances the sense of intimacy and vulnerability. The wooden frame is represent ‘stuck’ or confined- physically or emotionally. It represents a feeling trapped within relationships or deep longing. The theatrical setting and vintage enhance the nostalgic tone.



Figure 9. Magical fire

In picture 9, Taylor was successfully entered a mysterious place where she found a group of people that doing some magical fire dance and started to follow it. From viewers it can be seen a group of silhouetted people are seen gathered around a firing, shining object. The sharp contrast between the flames and the humans draws the viewer's attention to the main fire. The lyric shown on this part is “Now this is an open/shut case” which represents of relationship are likely a case that can be open and shut, it can be a happiness or a sadness. It also represents a resolution or the finality of waiting someone. It also supported by the next figure on figure 10. which shows taylor find out and follow the golden line again that lead her to someone.



Figure 10. Follow golden thread



Figure 11. Boyfriend saw Taylor

In the next 3.01 minutes, the scene is split into a boy who look to the girl curiously, and follow the gold line too. Zooming in on a character can immediately attract respect for

what it conveys through the facial expression. The warm golden hues of the fire contrast the eerily dark background and draw attention to the face of the character, as well as to the fire in that background. It represents the boy's emotional climaxes that he finally find way to get back to his girlfriend after surviving to all the darkness of relationship.

## 2. Gestural Analysis

This song has many gestural modes in delivering its message. Gestural mode here are included facial expression, hand gestures, body language and interaction between people. Most of the lyrics tell us about the hope for passing the difficult situation of a relationship by always put a full effort for each others.



Figure 12. Taylor saw her reflection



Figure 13. Woman saw her memories on the water

In figure 12 Taylor gaze surprisingly to the water. She attracts to something that reflect on the water. Her wide-eyes gaze are indicated an unexpected realization. It also add emotional intensity which make the moment implied surprised. In the next figure 13, the couple in the background sit near with each other as they hug, showing signs of affection or satisfaction. There are a body gesture such as, leaning head and resting position. Leaning heads together is a gesture of intimacy, care and emotional attachment. The resting position shows trust and comfort in the presence of each other. Thus,

it symbolize an emotional bonding between taylor with her man.



Figure 14. Woman in a glass box

In 1:19 minutes, the main character, a woman is in focus and is looking out with a thoughtful, serious expression. Her calm yet poised stance conveys reflection, desire, or emotional resolution. Together with the lyrics “Wherever you stray I follow”, this figure communicates everlasting loyalty and emotional uncertain. She confused on her relationship that still in hesitancy. She looks around to find the answer which is her boyfriend.



Figure 15. The couple separated by glass

In 1:48 minutes, in this next scene the emotional tone in the image scanning the background portrays a sense of both yearning and distance. Her look, slightly opened mouth and looking up, reveals a sense of weakness with an urge to reach across the gap. Her leaning body posture, which is forward, intensifies her urge to reach out. His expression however is composed but sad, and he casts a single eye at her, indicating understanding or some other feeling toward what is happening. He does stand straight, but this is restrained, meaning his emotions are controlled. The general mood of the scene, as that of the wall separating them, the warm lighting, and the powerful composition, suggests ideas of emotional connection that is not easily

attainable due to conditions present, making the mood rather sad and tender moments.



Figure 16. Taylor finally met someone



Figure 17. Intertwined hands

The emotional tone in this image appears to communicate a certain degree of psychological determination, and at the same time, one deeply felt. The way she looks straight into the camera makes it her firm belief. Her lip corner quivers upward like a “smile” but not quite, and her expression on her face is soft, bemused, and sincere, which goes hand in hand with the song’s “That’s my man” which suggests a sense of pride and love having a strong personal connotation. The warm, dimly lit background with candles adds an intimate and nostalgic atmosphere, emphasizing themes of affection, loyalty, or a cherished memory. In the next figure someone who met with Taylor is her man. They gaze each other and signifying attention to share emotional moment. Their gaze conveys emotional depth and love. The woman’s head is gently downward whereas the man focused on their intertwined hands. This intertwined hands symbolize unity and commitment, it also reinforced by the lyric “Hey, that’s my man,” it put possessiveness in loving someone.

### 3. Audio Analysis

This video clip has a rich sound of music instrument. It is a combination of acoustic guitar, percussion and synth element that make

a wonderful and soft harmony of music. There is a low note at the beginning of song that purposed to absorb the listener feel and absorb the message of the song. It is also mentioned in Kristiani (2023) According to Sujatmiko & Ishaq (2015) using slow tempos and gentle melodies creates a melancholy and melancholy atmosphere. This song emphasizes about falling in love and wanting someone from childhood. Taylor’s vocal offers a tender and thoughtful. She employs an intimate, soft and confessional feel toward the crush. Her phrasing choice supports the beautiful melody that make the listener feel the depth of love. The inflection also matches to the song’s fluidity.

In the next 39 seconds until 51 seconds there is a rising notes in the lyrics “The more that you say, the less I know, wherever you stray I follow, I’m begging for you to take my hand, wreck my plans, that’s my man” in this part the song supported by the sound of acoustic guitar and ethereal synth that brings the atmospheric quality to the folk. It delivers and emphasizes the meaning of this song. These lyrics show that Taylor misses her boyfriend badly. She wants to follow her man wherever her man goes. It also implied that she wants that her man know and understand her pure love and her hopes to meet again with her man soon. It is also supported by Anstey & Bull (2010) mention that Sound effects, music, rhythm, pitch, and volume are among the audio elements that can be examined while examining a multimodal system in a text.

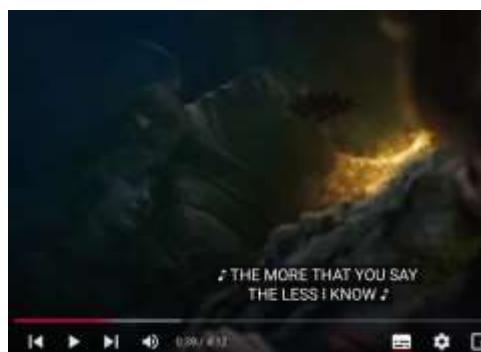


Figure 18. Reflection from the couple

### 4. Linguistics Analysis

The *willow* music video clips uses written and spoken language. The song’s lyrics use a formal and informal spoken. In the first verse there is simile in the lyrics “*I’m like the water*

*when your ship rolled in that night*” the word “like” is a signals of simile or comparing something. The word “water” means an taylor’s emotion that is unstable and being change. While “ship” is representing a person which is the man. The phrase “ship rolled in” is representing someone’s arrival. Thus, this lyric is express an unstable feeling as Taylor’s long wait finally ended, when she finally saw her man come back to her life. Next lyric, “*Rough on the surface but you cut through like a knife, And if it was an open-shut case, I never would've known from that look on your face, Lost in your current like a priceless wine*” from the lyric the researcher found a figurative language such as “*Rough on the surface but you cut through like a knife,*” which means someone who are really tough and hard to get but then there is someone that has an ability to break all the barriers with sharpness of feeling and deep love. The phrase “*open-shut case,*” is implicate to an uncertainty of situation that they had through. Thus, the sentence “*I never would've known from that look on your face*” supported that phrase which means she got a closure from her man that make her clueless to her relationship. “*Lost in your current like a priceless win*” means an overwhelming feeling in relationship which illustrated by the phrase “lost in your current” while the phrase “*priceless wine*” means that she is drawn into a complexity of situation. So, these two phrase are related to Taylor feels overwhelm with the presence of feeling that make her drawn deep to the complexity of love and situation.

In the chorus, “*The more that you say, the less I know. Wherever you stray, I follow.*” This sentences conveys a metaphor of someone feeling’s lost in a sea of information, the more he said, the more emotional distance they feel. There is a figurative meaning from the word “stray”, this word means attachment of each other. So, this verse refers to an emotional distance that they had because of the the lost sea of information. But Taylor always willing to try to fix her relationship by following her emotional bonding that make them attach each other. Furthermore the lyrics “*I'm begging for you to take my hands, wreck my plans, that's my man*” This part there are metaphor from the phrase “*take my hand*” and “*wreck my plans*”. “*Take my hand*” is a metaphor for emotional or

romantic commitment. Then, “*wreck my plans*” implies a readiness of embracing something. So these two metaphors implies the desire of taylor to her man to keep their romantic commitment and walking through everything together. She ready to face anything or even the chaos as long as her man always be there for her.

In the second verse “*life was a willow and it bent right to your wind, head on the pillow, I could feel you sneakin' in, as if you were a mythical thing, like you were a trophy or a champion ring, and there was one prize I'd cheat to win*” there is metaphor from the word “*life*” means human characteristic, “*willow*” which means adaptability or flexibility and “*wind*” implied influence of another person. So these lyric means that taylor’s life is influenced by someone else which bring her to the flexibility of life. It is supported by the lyric “*I could feel you sneakin' in*” The word “*feel*” emphasizes taylor’s awareness to intimacy and vulnerability. So it means that she could feel a presence of someone else in her life and it almost imperceptibly. The phrase *as if you were a mythical thing* implies that she describe her man as an extraordinary thing which is rare and different, then, in the phrase *like you were a trophy or a champion ring* refers to something that worth striving for and *there was one prize I'd cheat to win* means she wants it badly. So these all implies that taylor see the man as a different and an extraordinary person who worth to her striving for as something that she really need and want.

The bridge part lyric said “*life was a willow and it bent right to your wind, but I come back stronger than a 90's trend*” this lyric implies that taylor’s life has influenced by other but she always come back stronger from bad day, she back as someone new and stronger than before.

Then in the third verse the lyrics are “*Wait for the signal and I'll meet you after the dark, show me the places where the others gave you scars, now this is an open-shut case, guess I should have known from the look on your face, every bait and switch was a work of art*” the word “*signal*” is interpreted as a readiness for doing action, while the phrase “*after the dark*” means intimacy or a hidden truth, the word “*places*” means a physical location and “*scars*” implies something that make in pain

and feeling vulnerability. The metaphor “*bait and switch*” means emotional manipulation within the relationship. So this lyric explain that taylor is always ready to do everything and protect her man from everythings that make her man hurt, in pain and feeling that manipulate him in that relationship.

Next chorus lyrics said “*you know that my train could take you home, anywhere else is hollow, I'm begging for you to take my hand, wreck my plans, that's my man*” the word train implies direction. So this part implies that everytime her man feel stuck or lost, there will be a direction to bring him back to taylor as his home, his comfort place for rest. Taylor always want her man to stay beside her and she ready to embrace all the struggles with her man.

## CONCLUSION

This research is conducted to figure out the multimodality meaning of Willow music video. From this music video clip can be investigate by studied the aspects of multimodality such as, visual, gestural, audio and linguistics. Each lyric on this video clip is support each other as a unity of lyrics and has many linguistic features. This song conveys the message of taylor's feeling in her relationship.

Based on taylor relationship is like willow tree, it should be adaptable and sometimes it can influenced by many factors, such as third parties, live in the different place or even unpredictable happen. But she chooses to always strive for it and never left her man alone. Everytime her man left her, there is direction that bring him back to taylor. The song writer which is Taylor Swift and Aaron Dessner implies an experience of longing someone in her life and the ups and downs journey to finding the perfect person as the partner.

The researcher hope this research can provide information about message and the interpretation in video segments by multimodal analysis. In order to produce better research, the

researcher also hope this research can be used as literature for future research with a related issue.

## REFERENCES

Ayuni, A. Q., & Darmayanti, N. (2022). Analisis Multimodal Wacana Kritis Iklan Layanan Masyarakat Bertema Vaksinasi COVID-19 oleh Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Indonesia. *Deiksis*, 14(3), 262-273.

Asfar, N. A., & Suriyanti, A. (2022). Texts, Images, And Music in Billie Eilish's Bad Guy Music Video on youtube. com. *International Journal of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 5(1), 1-8.

Hadriyan, F., Mujiyanto, J. M., & Rukmini, D. (2022). The Use of Multimodal Discourse Analysis to Study the Relationship Between Visual, Lingual, and Written Text of Artificial Intelligence in TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) Talks YouTube Channel. *English Education Journal*, 12(4), 638-654.

Kristiani, R. (2023). Analisis semiotika pesan sosial dalam video klip lagu " halu" feby putri. *The Commercium*, 7(3), 13-24.

Ranabhat, B. (2022). Critical insights: a perspective on discourse analysis. *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society*, (22),30-36. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jlls.22.30.36>

SINDA, S., & Ali, A. J. A. K. N. (2022). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of “Lathi” Song. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 5(1), 66-72.

Sugiyono. (2017). Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D. Bandung : Alfabeta, CV.