

CLAUSE STRUCTURE IN INDONESIAN POP SONG LYRICS: A SYNTACTIC STUDY

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji struktur klausa dalam lirik lagu pop Indonesia dari perspektif sintaksis melalui pendekatan tinjauan literatur. Penelitian ini tidak melakukan analisis data primer, melainkan mensintesis temuan dari artikel jurnal, skripsi, dan studi empiris yang membahas pola sintaksis dalam lirik lagu. Lirik lagu pop sebagai bentuk wacana artistik memiliki karakteristik kebahasaan yang cenderung fleksibel dan sering menyimpang dari kaidah sintaksis kanonik guna memenuhi tuntutan estetika, ekspresif, dan ritmis. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa lirik lagu pop Indonesia secara dominan menggunakan struktur klausa sederhana, ellipsis subjek dan objek, inversi, serta konstruksi fragmentaris. Pola-pola sintaksis tersebut berfungsi untuk memperkuat ekspresi emosional, menjaga keselarasan dengan struktur melodi, serta meningkatkan daya ingat dan keterlibatan pendengar. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa realisasi sintaksis dalam lirik lagu menempati posisi antara bahasa lisan dan bahasa tulis, dengan penekanan pada fungsi komunikatif dan kontekstual. Artikel ini memberikan gambaran komprehensif mengenai karakteristik struktur klausa dalam lirik lagu pop Indonesia serta implikasinya bagi kajian sintaksis, interpretasi lirik, dan studi kebahasaan dalam media musik populer.

Kata Kunci: *Struktur Kalimat, Sintaksis, Lirik Lagu Pop Indonesia*

ABSTRACT

This article examines clause structure in Indonesian pop song lyrics from a syntactic perspective using a literature review approach. Rather than conducting primary data analysis, the study synthesizes findings from journal articles, undergraduate theses, and empirical studies that focus on syntactic patterns in song lyrics. As a form of artistic discourse, pop song lyrics exhibit flexible linguistic characteristics and frequently diverge from canonical syntactic rules to accommodate aesthetic, expressive, and rhythmic demands. The synthesis reveals that Indonesian pop song lyrics predominantly employ simple clause structures, subject and object ellipsis, inversion, and fragmentary constructions. These syntactic patterns function to enhance emotional expression, maintain alignment with melodic structure, and increase memorability and listener engagement. The findings further indicate that syntactic realization in song lyrics occupies an intermediate position between spoken and written language, emphasizing functional and contextual meaning over formal grammatical completeness. This article provides a comprehensive overview of dominant clause structure characteristics in Indonesian pop song lyrics and discusses their implications for syntactic analysis, lyrical interpretation, and linguistic studies in popular music media.

Keywords: *Clause Structure, Syntax, Indonesian Pop Song Lyrics*

INTRODUCTION

Pop song lyrics constitute a distinctive linguistic genre in which syntactic structures are frequently reshaped to meet artistic, rhythmic, and expressive demands. Unlike formal written discourse, song lyrics often employ simplified clause patterns, fragments, and non-canonical constructions that allow lyricists to align language with melody and emotional expression. Linguistic studies on song lyrics consistently demonstrate that such syntactic deviations are not random, but function strategically to enhance musicality, emotional intensity, and meaning construction (Al Bahy & Darmawan, 2025; Purnomoadjie & Mulyadi, 2019). As a result, pop song lyrics provide valuable linguistic data for examining how syntactic rules operate within creative and performative contexts.

From a linguistic perspective, syntax plays a central role in explaining how clauses are structured and how grammatical relations contribute to meaning. Indonesian syntactic theory traditionally discusses clause types, subject-predicate relations, and syntactic phenomena such as ellipsis, inversion, and fragmentation, which are commonly described in grammatical studies and applied linguistic research (Chaer, 2015; Nabihila et al., 2025). When these syntactic principles are applied to song lyrics, they reveal how grammatical structures are adapted to accommodate rhythm, repetition, and expressive purposes. In a broader linguistic tradition, song lyrics are often viewed as a form of poetic or artistic discourse that operates under different grammatical expectations from formal prose. Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that grammatical structures in artistic texts are shaped by contextual meaning and interpersonal function rather than strict syntactic completeness. Consequently, clause structures in song lyrics reflect functional adaptations of grammar, where meaning is constructed through rhythm, repetition, and thematic emphasis.

From the perspective of functional grammar, clause simplification in song lyrics can be understood as a strategy to foreground experiential and interpersonal meanings. Halliday (1985) emphasizes that clauses function as representations of experience and interaction. Therefore, the frequent use of simple, elliptical, or fragmentary clauses in pop song lyrics serves to intensify emotional resonance and strengthen listener engagement rather than to convey syntactic complexity. Research on syntactic structures in song lyrics has been conducted across various languages and musical genres. Studies analyzing international pop songs indicate that simple clauses, imperatives, and fragmentary constructions frequently dominate lyrical texts, reflecting the need for brevity, memorability, and rhythmic compatibility (Nasution et al., 2024; Zahrotuhayaty, 2024). These findings suggest that syntactic economy plays a crucial role in lyrical composition, allowing listeners to process meaning efficiently while maintaining emotional engagement with the song.

Stylistic studies further support the prominence of syntactic repetition and reduced grammatical variation in popular music. Crystal (2003) notes that repetition and structural simplicity are characteristic features of song lyrics, contributing to memorability and audience participation. Similarly, stylistic deviations from standard grammar in artistic texts are not signs of linguistic deficiency, but deliberate strategies to achieve foregrounding and emotional emphasis (Leech, 2014). In song lyrics, such deviations enhance aesthetic value while remaining interpretable within the musical context (Simpson, 2004). Within the Indonesian context, syntactic analysis of pop song lyrics has revealed similar tendencies while also highlighting language-specific characteristics. Comparative studies between English and Indonesian pop lyrics show that cultural and linguistic backgrounds significantly influence clause structure and stylistic choices, resulting in different syntactic realizations across languages (Putra & Hamzah, 2022). Indonesian pop lyrics, in particular, tend to favor simple

declarative clauses, flexible word order, and reduced syntactic complexity, reflecting the interaction between grammatical norms and artistic expression.

This tendency is closely related to the characteristics of Indonesian informal discourse. Sneddon et al. (2010) observe that Indonesian allows subject omission and flexible word order when meanings are recoverable from context, features that are also prominent in Indonesian pop song lyrics. Thus, lyrical syntax in Indonesian songs can be seen as drawing heavily from spoken and informal language use. Several studies have focused on specific syntactic phenomena in Indonesian pop lyrics, particularly subject omission and inversion. Research on the song "Lantas" by Juicy Lucy demonstrates that subjects are frequently omitted or implicitly understood, creating intimacy and shared contextual meaning between singer and listener (Tresnawati et al., 2025). Similarly, analyses of declarative inversion in songs by Indonesian artists, including Mahalini Raharja, reveal that inversion is employed to foreground particular lexical elements and to align syntactic emphasis with melodic stress (Alfiana & Suhartono, 2024). Comparable findings are reported in studies of "Roman Picisan", which document the presence of both canonical and inverted clause structures in Indonesian pop lyrics (Yamjirin et al., 2024).

In addition to ellipsis and inversion, fragmentary constructions are frequently employed in Indonesian pop lyrics. Fragmented clauses often lacking complete subject–predicate structures serve expressive and pragmatic functions, particularly in chorus and refrain sections where emotional emphasis is prioritized over grammatical completeness (Nabhila et al., 2025). These constructions remain interpretable within their musical and contextual framework, illustrating the flexibility of syntactic realization in lyrical discourse. Despite the growing body of research on syntactic features in song lyrics, existing studies largely focus on individual songs or isolated syntactic phenomena. There remains a lack of a comprehensive synthesis that integrates findings from multiple studies to identify dominant clause structure patterns in Indonesian pop song lyrics. Therefore, this article aims to synthesize previous empirical research to provide an overarching description of clause structure characteristics in Indonesian pop lyrics and to discuss their implications for syntactic analysis, lyrical interpretation, and language use in musical media.

METHODS

This article employs a qualitative literature review approach to synthesize empirical research on the syntax of song lyrics, including published case studies and journal articles. A literature review approach is appropriate because it enables the identification of patterns, trends, and dominant findings across previous studies without generating new primary data (Snyder, 2019). The data sources consist of scholarly articles that are openly accessible and indexed in academic repositories, particularly Google Scholar. Sources were selected based on their relevance to syntactic analysis and the credibility of the publishing journals, ensuring the academic reliability of the synthesized findings. Data analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis, in which key findings from each study were extracted, compared, and grouped according to shared syntactic focuses. Following the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the findings were categorized into four main themes: (a) clause types, (b) ellipsis, (c) inversion and fragmentary constructions, and (d) semantic–pragmatic implications. This approach allows for systematic comparison across studies while preserving the linguistic context of each finding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

This section presents the main syntactic findings reported across previous empirical studies on Indonesian pop song lyrics. The results are derived from a synthesis of published research focusing on clause structure and its recurrent patterns in lyrical discourse. Rather than analyzing primary lyrical data, this study summarizes and categorizes dominant syntactic features consistently identified in earlier studies. Table 1 summarizes recurring clause structure patterns reported across previous studies on Indonesian pop song lyrics.

Table 1. Summary of Syntactic Findings in Indonesian Pop Song Lyrics

| No. | Clause Structure Feature | Description of Findings |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Dominant Clause Types | The reviewed studies consistently report that simple declarative clauses are the most frequent clause type in Indonesian pop song lyrics, supporting rhythmic alignment and memorability. |
| 2 | Subject and Object Ellipsis | Several studies document frequent omission of subjects or objects when their reference is contextually recoverable, resulting in syntactically reduced yet pragmatically complete clauses. |
| 3 | Inversion | Non-canonical word order, particularly predicate–subject or object–subject inversion, is reported as a stylistic strategy to foreground specific elements in musically emphasized lines. |
| 4 | Fragmentary Constructions | Fragmentary clauses lacking complete subject–predicate structures frequently occur in chorus or refrain sections and are treated as functional syntactic reductions rather than grammatical errors. |

Dominant Clause Types

Previous studies consistently indicate that Indonesian pop song lyrics predominantly employ simple clause structures. The reviewed literature reports that simple declarative clauses occur more frequently than complex or compound clauses, as they allow lyricists to maintain rhythmic alignment and enhance memorability within musical composition. Several studies highlight that the use of simple clauses enables efficient meaning delivery while remaining compatible with melodic and repetitive song structures (Shonia et al., 2025; Dachi, 2022).

Subject and Object Ellipsis

Findings reported across the reviewed studies reveal that subject and object ellipsis frequently occurs in Indonesian pop song lyrics. Many researchers document that subjects are often omitted when their reference can be easily inferred from the surrounding linguistic or musical context. This form of ellipsis results in syntactically reduced yet pragmatically complete clauses and is consistently described as a strategy to achieve rhythmic economy and emotional immediacy in song lyrics (Tresnawati et al., 2025; Shonia et al., 2025).

Inversion

The reviewed studies document the presence of non-canonical word order, particularly inversion, in Indonesian pop song lyrics. Inversion commonly involves the placement of predicates or objects before subjects and is reported to occur in musically emphasized or emotionally salient lines. The literature describes this syntactic pattern as a stylistic strategy used to foreground specific lexical elements and align syntactic emphasis with melodic stress (Alfiana & Suhartono, 2024; Yamjirin et al., 2022).

Fragmentary Constructions

Several studies also report the frequent use of fragmentary constructions in Indonesian pop song lyrics. These fragmentary clauses, which often lack complete subject–predicate structures, are predominantly found in chorus or refrain sections. The reviewed literature consistently treats such constructions as functional syntactic reductions rather than grammatical errors, as they remain interpretable within the broader musical and contextual framework (Nabhila et al., 2025).

Discussions

The analysis of clause structure in Indonesian pop song lyrics reveals that the use of language in musical texts has distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from other written genres, such as academic writing or narrative literary works. One of the most prominent findings is the strong tendency toward the use of simple clause patterns, which dominate the majority of the analyzed lyrics. This tendency aligns with previous syntactic studies that emphasize the role of simplicity in facilitating memorability, singability, and listener comprehension in song lyrics. Simple clauses allow for a smoother integration of linguistic form and musical rhythm while maintaining clarity of meaning.

Another significant finding concerns the frequent use of ellipsis, particularly subject ellipsis, in Indonesian pop song lyrics. Ellipsis functions as a syntactic strategy to reduce syllabic load and to adjust linguistic structure to rhythmic constraints. Previous studies have shown that subject omission in song lyrics often creates a sense of intimacy and shared contextual understanding between the singer and the listener (Khoironi, 2025). This finding supports the view that ellipsis is not a grammatical deficiency but a deliberate communicative strategy commonly found in spoken and semi-spoken discourse.

In addition to structural patterns such as simple clauses, ellipsis, and inversion, the functional role of syntactic choices in Indonesian pop song lyrics is closely related to expressive meaning construction. Studies focusing on lyrical interpretation demonstrate that pop song lyrics often prioritize emotional expression and personal voice over formal grammatical completeness. Gusnatul (2024), for instance, shows that Indonesian pop lyrics tend to foreground affective meaning and intimacy, which helps explain the frequent use of syntactically reduced or simplified clause structures reported in syntactic studies. Similarly, research on figurative language in song lyrics indicates that expressive devices such as personification are often supported by flexible syntactic realization rather than rigid clause completeness (Firdaus et al., 2025). These findings support the interpretation that non-canonical clause structures in Indonesian pop song lyrics function not as grammatical deviations, but as adaptive syntactic strategies that facilitate emotional resonance and lyrical expressiveness.

In addition to ellipsis, inversion emerges as another salient syntactic phenomenon in Indonesian pop lyrics. The reversal of standard word order is frequently employed to foreground specific lexical elements or to align syntactic emphasis with melodic stress. This observation is consistent with earlier research on Indonesian pop songs, which demonstrates that inversion serves expressive and aesthetic functions rather than strictly grammatical ones. In musical contexts, such inversions contribute to emotional intensity and stylistic variation, even though they are rarely used in formal standard language.

Fragmentary constructions also appear as a recurring feature in the analyzed lyrics. These fragments, which often lack complete subject–predicate structures, are typically used in chorus or refrain sections to intensify emotional expression. Similar findings have been reported

in previous syntactic analyses of pop lyrics, where fragmentation is interpreted as a poetic device that prioritizes affective impact over grammatical completeness. Despite their incomplete structure, such fragments remain meaningful within the broader lyrical and musical context.

Overall, the findings confirm that clause structure in Indonesian pop song lyrics reflects a dynamic interaction between linguistic rules and artistic creativity. The frequent use of simple clauses, ellipsis, inversion, and fragmentation supports previous claims that non-canonical syntactic patterns in song lyrics are intentional and functional rather than erroneous. Thus, the discussion reinforces the view that syntactic variation in musical texts plays a crucial role in shaping meaning, emotional resonance, and listener engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that clause structure in Indonesian pop song lyrics is strongly shaped by the interaction between linguistic principles and the artistic demands of musical composition. The frequent use of simple clauses, subject ellipsis, inversion, and fragmentary constructions indicates that lyrical syntax prioritizes rhythm, memorability, and emotional impact rather than strict conformity to formal grammatical norms. These patterns highlight the hybrid nature of lyrics, which operate between spoken and written language and allow broader flexibility in syntactic construction.

Furthermore, the consistent findings across previous studies confirm that ellipsis, inversion, and fragmentation are not random deviations but deliberate stylistic strategies that enhance expressiveness and support the song's aesthetic goals. Ellipsis creates intimacy and immediacy, inversion emphasizes key elements aligned with melodic stress, and fragmentary clauses convey mood or intensity despite incomplete structure. These observations reinforce the view that Indonesian pop lyrics are a productive site for syntactic inquiry, with future research benefiting from corpus-based analyses and listener-response approaches to deepen understanding of how non-standard structures contribute to meaning-making within musical discourse.

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