

Investigating the Social Change of Bob Dylan on a Song “The Times They are a Changing” : A Case on Discourse Analysis

Anggi Maria Nainggolan

*Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar,
Pematang Siantar, Indonesia*

Sri Rahayu Lubis

*Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar,
Pematang Siantar, Indonesia*

Ezra Aurelia Putri Tumanggor

*Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar,
Pematang Siantar, Indonesia*

Herman Herman

*Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar,
Pematang Siantar, Indonesia*

Arwin Tannuary*

*Department of D-3 Computer Engineering, Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia,
Pematang Siantar, Indonesia*

**Corresponding Email: arwintannuary18@gmail.com*

Junita Batubara

Department of Music, Universitas HKBP Nommensen, Medan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This research employs discourse analysis to investigate the social change depicted in Bob Dylan's song, "The Times They Are a-Changin'." Language, as a powerful tool reflecting and influencing societal shifts, is explored through the lens of discourse analysis. The study delves into the meaning construction, reproduction and resistance, identity construction, power and ideology, and media and public opinion within the lyrics, uncovering nuanced perspectives on unity, resistance, political identity, generational power shifts, and media influence. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how song lyrics, particularly Dylan's, articulate the challenges and opportunities embedded in the ever-changing social landscape.

KEYWORDS: *Bob Dylan, Discourse Analysis, Social Change, Song lyrics.*

INTRODUCTION

Language has several ways namely reflects and influences social change. For example, language can be used to support or oppose social norms, to challenge or uphold existing power systems, and to

<https://cejsr.academicjournal.io>

create or destroy social identities (Fairclough, 2013). One research technique that can be used to examine how language use both reflects and influences societal change is discourse analysis. Therefore, it can be concluded that through discourse analysis we can find out the content or value of an utterance or expression, and the purpose of the expression

Discourse analysis is focused on the ways in which language is employed to create connections, social identities, and knowledge. The term "social change" describes how societies evolve throughout time, encompassing modifications to cultural practices, institutions, and social structures. Discourse analysis frequently studies societal change by looking at how language use both causes and reflects these changes. A research technique for examining spoken or written language in connection to its social environment is discourse analysis. It seeks to comprehend language use in everyday contexts, including how it shapes relationships, social identities, and knowledge. In several humanities and social science fields, such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies, discourse analysis is a popular qualitative research technique (Gee, 2014)

A social change tends to reflect changes that occur in values, culture, structures and institutions in society. Social change has an impact on ways of thinking which then have an impact on the way of life, behaviour and social relationships of individuals with individuals and also groups.

We could begin utilizing discourse analysis to analyse social change by deciding which particular social issue we want to investigate. Then, we could gather information related to our study subject using spoken or written language collection. This could be in the form of speeches, interviews, news stories, posts on social media, or other conversations.

Lyrics are poems that represent several arrangements of words from a song written by someone which contains ideas or the contents of someone's feelings, therefore song lyrics are also called a painting of the feelings of the person who wrote them (Sudjiman, 1986; Tambunan et al, 2023). Literary works tend to have the word song, which interprets that lyrics are the product of a literary work, because they contain an arrangement of words that have meaning based on a person's feelings. A song can be used as an arrangement of music by adding lyrics or text that expresses the author's feelings and ideas in a general way (Sylado, 1983; Batubara et al., 2023; Hutajulu et al., 2023).

Song lyrics are an outpouring of the creator's personal feelings and ideas, as are the lyrics of -The Times They are A Changing created by Bob Dylan. This song was written by Dylan as a response to the social and political changes that occurred during the 60s. With strong and progressive lyrics, the song functions as a kind of hymn to the ongoing movement for change, demonstrating a passion for change and a desire for improvement. The lyrics to Bob Dylan's song "The Times They Are a-Changing" are in English. The language is simple and direct, but very effective in conveying the social and political messages of the time. Dylan uses powerful words and creates images that can stick with the audience.

It is intended that this study will inspire other scholars to examine song lyrics. It is the duty of literary and linguistic scholars, as previously stated, to examine or investigate song lyrics. Conducting study on song lyrics is an act of gratitude on the part of the researcher towards musicians, as it aims to communicate the meaning and intent that the songwriter intends to share with his audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction gives an in-depth look at the complex interplay between language, social change, and discourse analysis. The talk begins by emphasizing language's varied role in shaping and reflecting society dynamics. The introduction, drawing on Fairclough (2013), shows that language may be used to both support and oppose social norms, buttress or challenge existing power systems, and construct or demolish social identities.

<https://cejsr.academicjournal.io>

Discourse analysis is offered as a critical research approach for investigating the relationship between language and societal transformation (Saragih et al., 2023). The text underscores the fact that discourse analysis allows for the investigation of the content, values, and purpose encoded in expressions and utterances.

The phrase "social change" is defined as changes in cultural practices, institutions, and social structures across time. Discourse analysis is regarded as a valuable qualitative research technique used in linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies to examine language in its everyday surroundings.

It emphasizes the impact of social transformation on values, culture, structures, institutions, and individual behaviours and relationships. The paper supports for the use of discourse analysis to analyse social change by focusing on a specific social issue and gathering relevant linguistic data from a variety of sources, such as speeches, interviews, news articles, and social media.

The discussion extends to the realm of song lyrics, positioned as literary works expressing the creator's feelings and ideas. Using Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changing" as an illustrative example, the introduction delves into how song lyrics can serve as poignant reflections of social and political changes. The language of Dylan's lyrics is described as simple yet powerful, effectively conveying the sentiments of the era. The introduction concludes by advocating for scholarly engagement with song lyrics, considering it a duty of literary and linguistic scholars to explore and interpret the meaning and intent embedded in these musical expressions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a focus on discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is utilized to explore the language used in the song lyrics and uncover the meanings and representations related to social change. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the nuances and complexities embedded in the lyrics (Keo et al., 2023)..

Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the song lyrics of "The Times They Are a-Changin'" by Bob Dylan. The lyrics provide a rich and expressive text that reflects the artist's response to the social and political changes of the 1960s.

Instrument of Data Collection

The main instrument for collecting data is the song lyrics themselves. Textual analysis is conducted to dissect and interpret the language, metaphors, and expressions used by Bob Dylan in conveying messages related to social change. No additional instruments, such as surveys or interviews, are used as the focus is on the textual content of the song.

Data Collection Method

The data collection method involves a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the song lyrics. The researcher reads and re-reads the lyrics, identifying key themes, linguistic choices, and rhetorical devices used by the artist. The analysis is guided by the principles of discourse analysis, aiming to uncover how language constructs meanings related to social change.

Data Analysis Method

Discourse analysis is the main method employed for analysing the data. This involves a detailed examination of language use, including patterns of meaning construction, representations of power dynamics, and the articulation of social identities. The analysis is both deductive and inductive, drawing on existing frameworks of discourse analysis while remaining open to emergent themes and

<https://cejsr.academicjournal.io>

insights from the data.

The lyrics are systematically analysed based on different aspects, such as meaning construction, reproduction and resistance, identity construction, power and ideology, and media and public opinion. Each aspect provides a lens through which the researcher explores how the language used in the song contributes to the discourse on social change.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

This research analyses song lyrics regarding social change. The song analyzed is Bob Dylan's song entitled "*Times They Are a Changing*", below are the song lyrics.

Come gather 'round people wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone
For the times, they are a-changing

Come writers and critics who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide, the chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon for the wheel's still in spin
And there's no telling who that it's naming
For the loser now will be later to win
'Cause the times, they are a-changing

Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled
'Cause the battle outside raging
Will soon shake your windows and rattle your walls
For the times, they are a-changing

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land
And don't criticize what you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly aging
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
'Cause the times, they are a-changing

The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast
The slowest now will later be fast
As the present now will later be past
The order is rapidly fading
And the first one now will later be last
'Cause the times, they are a-changing

Based on discourse analysis, these lyrics are analysed from the perspective of social change, with several aspects:

Lyrics	Analysis on Meaning
Meaning Construction	
<p style="text-align: center;">(First lyric)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Come gather 'round people wherever you roam And admit that the waters around you have grown And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone If your time to you is worth savin' Then you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone For the times, they are a-changing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Gather around the people” (Call to gather)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Showing how important it is to work together and unite in facing social change. This calling can show how important it is to be one community.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“And acknowledge that the water around you has grown.” (Growing water)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: The growing water metaphor can be used to describe changes or difficulties that are developing in society.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“And accept it soon, you'll be soaked to the bone.” (Accept change)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Emphasizing the importance of accepting change quickly, with the caveat that resisting change can have major consequences.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“If your time is worth saving, you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone.” (Change as a challenge)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Describing change as a challenge that requires an active response. Swimming can symbolize the struggle and change necessary to overcome change.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Because times keep changing” (Changing times)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Indicating that change is part of the ongoing flow of time and that understanding change is important for survival and progress.</p>

Lyrics	Analysis on Meaning
Reproduction and Resistance	
<p style="text-align: center;">(Second lyric)</p> <p>Come writers and critics who prophesize with your pen And keep your eyes wide, the chance won't come again And don't speak too soon for the wheel's still in spin And there's no telling who that it's naming For the loser now will be later to win 'Cause the times, they are a-changing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Come writers and critics. Who prophesize with your pen" (Reproduction)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Replicating the function of writers and critics as givers of advice or predictions through writing. This shows their function in creating perspectives and forecasting social change.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"And don't speak too soon, For the wheel's still in spin." (Resistance)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: This indicates a refusal to make decisions or take a position too quickly, indicating that the situation is still changing and complex. It's like a call to think for a moment before acting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"And there's no telling who. That is naming." (Reproduction)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Replicating the uncertainty and complexity of social change. It is impossible to know who will win or who will lose from these changes.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"For the loser now. Will be later to win." (Resistance)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Demonstrating resistance to direct judgment of those who lose in change. shows that current defeats can turn into future victories, respecting change.</p>
Identity Construction	
<p style="text-align: center;">(Third lyric)</p> <p>Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Come senators, congressmen"</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis: Placing responsibility for social change on legislative leaders, creating an identity related to responsibility towards society. Identifying senators and congressmen as</p>

<https://cejsr.academicjournal.io>

Lyrics	Analysis on Meaning
<p>For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled 'Cause the battle outside raging Will soon shake your windows and rattle your walls For the times, they are a-changing</p>	<p>subjects asked to respond to the call.</p> <p><i>"Please heed the call."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Affirming that they are people who have the ability and responsibility to respond to the call for social change.</p> <p><i>"For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled."</i></p> <p>Analysis: This means that people link their identities to the consequences of not acting or resisting social change, emphasizing how important action is.</p> <p><i>"The times they are a-changing."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Conveying identity as an individual or group that recognizes and is willing to adapt to change.</p>
Power and Ideology	
<p>(Fourth lyric)</p> <p>Come mothers and fathers throughout the land And don't criticize what you can't understand Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command Your old road is rapidly aging Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand 'Cause the times, they are a-changing</p>	<p><i>"Come mothers and fathers."</i></p> <p>Analysis: The ideology demonstrates that this call is the powerful role of parents as authority figures in society, and challenges them to understand the changes that are occurring.</p> <p><i>"And don't criticize what you can't understand"</i></p> <p>Analysis: The ideology reveals that there are limits to criticizing or understanding change, and this can be related to changes in power that may have been difficult for previous generations to understand.</p> <p><i>"Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command"</i></p>

Lyrics	Analysis on Meaning
	<p>Analysis: The ideology shows a shift in power from parental authority to the younger generation, emphasizing that children have autonomy and leadership in changing the world.</p> <p><i>"Your old road is rapidly aging."</i></p> <p>Analysis: The ideology advocates that old practices or old standards should be abandoned because change is occurring rapidly.</p> <p><i>"Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand."</i></p> <p>Analysis: The ideology encourages active participation in change and emphasizes that one must be willing to contribute to understanding the change.</p>
Media and Public Opinion	
<p>(Fifth lyric)</p> <p>The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast The slowest now will later be fast As the present now will later be past The order is rapidly fading And the first one now will later be last 'Cause the times, they are a-changing.</p>	<p><i>"And the first one now will later be last."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Media, including song lyrics, can be considered a tool for drawing lines or establishing fate, and plays a role in shaping perceptions of change through words and messages.</p> <p><i>"The slow one now will later be fast, as the present now will later be past."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Describing the dynamics of change over time and the fact that current conditions that are slow or unclear may change rapidly in the future.</p> <p><i>"The order is rapidly fading."</i></p> <p>Analysis: This refers to a change in a social or political order that is rapidly fading away, indicating uncertainty and transformation.</p>

<https://cejssr.academicjournal.io>

Lyrics	Analysis on Meaning
	<p><i>"And the first one now will later be last."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Describes a cycle of change where the status quo or current leader may change and change over time.</p> <p><i>"As time passes, they change."</i></p> <p>Analysis: Showing optimism that, although changes may be difficult, they will still change over time, and that change is a natural part of life.</p>

The discourse analysis of Bob Dylan's song "The Times They Are a-Changin'" reveals intricate layers of meaning, encompassing various aspects related to social change. The analysis is structured into several thematic dimensions:

1. Meaning Construction

(First Lyric)

- Gather around the people (Call to gather): This line emphasizes the importance of unity and collaboration in facing social change. The call to gather signifies the need for a collective effort in addressing societal challenges.
- Growing water (Metaphor): The metaphor of growing water suggests emerging societal changes or difficulties. It portrays the idea that challenges in society are expanding and need acknowledgment.
- Accept change quickly: The lyric underscores the significance of embracing change promptly, warning against the consequences of resisting change. Change is depicted as inevitable and demanding active acceptance.
- Change as a challenge: Describing change as a challenge, the lyrics use swimming as a metaphor for the struggle required to overcome societal changes. It signifies the proactive effort needed to adapt to change.
- Changing times: This line suggests an acknowledgment that change is a continual part of the unfolding of time, emphasizing the importance of understanding change for progress.

2. Reproduction and Resistance

(Second Lyric)

- Reproduction (Writers and critics): The role of writers and critics is portrayed as one of reproducing perspectives and predicting social change through their written expressions.
- Resistance (Don't speak too soon): Lyrics advise against hasty decisions, resisting premature judgments, indicating that the situation is complex and still evolving.

<https://cejsr.academicjournal.io>

- **Reproduction (Uncertainty and complexity):** The lyrics replicate the uncertainty and complexity inherent in social change, emphasizing the challenge of predicting winners or losers.
- **Resistance (Current defeats turning into future victories):** Expresses resistance to immediate judgment, suggesting that current setbacks can transform into future successes, respecting the inevitability of change.

3. Identity Construction

(Third Lyric)

- **Placing responsibility on legislative leaders:** The lyrics assign responsibility for social change to senators and congressmen, creating an identity linked to societal responsibility.
- **Affirmation of ability to respond:** The call for senators and congressmen to heed the call affirms their capacity and responsibility to respond to the societal call for change.
- **Linking identities to consequences of inaction:** The lyrics suggest that individuals link their identities to the consequences of inaction or resistance to social change, emphasizing the importance of taking action.
- **Conveying identity as adaptable to change:** The lyrics convey an identity that recognizes and is willing to adapt to societal change, reflecting a proactive approach to transformation.

4. Power and Ideology

(Fourth Lyric)

- **Role of parents as authority figures:** The ideology highlights the powerful role of parents as authority figures in society, urging them to understand emerging societal changes.
- **Limits to criticizing or understanding change:** The ideology reveals that there are limits to criticizing or understanding change, acknowledging the challenges of comprehending shifts in power.
- **Shift in power to the younger generation:** The lyrics indicate a shift in power from parental authority to the younger generation, emphasizing the autonomy and leadership of the youth in societal change.
- **Advocacy for abandoning old practices:** The ideology advocates abandoning old practices or standards due to the rapid pace of societal change.
- **Encouragement for active participation:** The ideology encourages active participation in change, emphasizing the willingness to contribute to understanding and shaping societal transformations.

5. Media and Public Opinion

(Fifth Lyric)

- **Media as a tool for drawing lines or establishing fate:** The lyrics suggest that media, including song lyrics, plays a role in drawing lines or establishing fate, influencing perceptions of change through words and messages.
- **Dynamics of change over time:** Describes the dynamics of change over time, highlighting that current conditions may transform rapidly, emphasizing the fluid nature of societal transformations.
- **Change in social or political order:** Refers to a change in the social or political order that is rapidly fading, indicating uncertainty and transformation.

<https://cejssr.academicjournal.io>

- Cycle of change and optimism: Describes a cycle of change where the current status quo or leader may change, expressing optimism that change is a natural and inevitable part of life.
- Optimism about change over time: The lyrics convey optimism that, although changes may be challenging, they will evolve over time, representing a positive perspective on the transformative nature of societal shifts.

B. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that "The Times They Are a-Changin'" serves as a multifaceted commentary on social change. Through rich metaphors, the lyrics communicate the urgency of collective action, the challenges of predicting outcomes, and the necessity of adapting to the evolving societal landscape. The identification of key themes, such as unity, resistance, identity, power dynamics, and media influence, demonstrates the depth and complexity of the song's engagement with social change.

According to this analysis of constructing meaning, the first lyric can be considered a type of artistic expression that seeks to encourage people to come together, accept change, and participate actively in responding to the changes occurring in society.

Through the second lyric of reproduction and resistance, Bob Dylan creates a picture of reproducing the roles of writer and critic, while demonstrating a rejection of snap judgments and emphasizing the doubts and complexity of social change.

In the third lyrics of the identity construction analysis, the identity of a political leader is described as a person who has the authority and responsibility to accommodate and respond to social change. This identity can encourage them to act in accordance with the call for change facing society.

This lyric of power and ideology analysis describes the desire for change, the shift in power from generation to generation, and the importance of recognizing and supporting those changes. The ideology underlying these lyrics also emphasizes the importance of actively participating in social change.

The lyric creates a narrative of change through discourse analysis in media and public opinion aspect, which shows social dynamics and a message about adapting to changing times. Song lyrics and other media can play an important role in shaping public opinion about social change.

In short, Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'" stands as a powerful piece of social commentary, employing the artistry of language to articulate the challenges, uncertainties, and opportunities embedded in the ever-changing social landscape. The findings from this discourse analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of how language, as manifested in song lyrics, can shape and reflect societal perceptions of change.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Bob Dylan's song "The Times They Are a-Changin'" through the lens of discourse analysis reveals a rich tapestry of meanings related to social change. The lyrics serve as a call to unity, urging individuals to actively engage with and accept the evolving societal landscape. Through various lenses such as reproduction and resistance, identity construction, power and ideology, and media and public opinion, the song articulates the complexities and dynamics inherent in social transformation.

Dylan's lyrical craftsmanship illustrates the importance of understanding, adapting to, and participating in the ongoing changes within society. The discourse analysis highlights how the song not only reflects the challenges posed by social change but also encourages a proactive and open-minded approach to these transformations. Ultimately, "The Times They Are a-Changin'" stands as a timeless anthem that resonates with the inevitability and potential for positive transformation inherent in the ever-changing times.

REFERENCES

1. Batubara, J., Syarifudin, A., Syathroh, I. L., Herman, H., Yasaviyevna, D. S., & Al-Awawdeh, N. (2023). Challenges of Translating Slang Expressions in American Song Lyrics of the 21st Century into the Arabic Language. *International Journal of Membrane Science and Technology*, *10(2)*, 131-139. <https://doi.org/10.15379/ijmst.v10i2.1162>
2. Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Routledge.
3. Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge
4. Hutajulu, W. C., Butarbutar, O. P., Situmorang, J., Torong, S., Situmeang, V. S., and Herman, H. (2023). Examining the Discourse Analysis on the Song Lyric Entitled "Heal the World" by Michael Jackson. *Jurnal Scientia*, *12(01)*, 269-279. <https://doi.org/10.58471/scientia.v12i01.1093>
5. Keo, J. S. A., Simamora, A., Siahaan, M. B., Panjaitan, C., Manik, R., and Herman, H. (2023). A discourse analysis on deixis used in "night changes" song by one direction. *Journal of English Language and Education*, *8(1)*, 27-33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v8i1.331>
6. Saragih, P. T., Malau, F., Situngkir, A. Y. T., Munthe, E. R. O. G., Hulu, P. G. D., and Herman, H. (2023). A Discourse Analysis of Teacher's Speech in Teaching Activities at SMP Negeri 5 Pematangsiantar. *Journal on Teacher Education*, *4(3)*, 172-180. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/jote.v4i3.12224>
7. Sudjiman, P. (1986). *Istilah Sastra*. Pustaka Jaya: Universitas Sebelas Maret.
8. Sylado, R. (1983). *Menuju Apresiasi Musik*. Bandung: Angkasa
9. Tambunan, B. J., Tondang, J., Gurning, Y., Sinaga, C. S., Butar-Butar, S., and Herman, H. (2023). How to identify context on song lyrics? A case on discourse analysis on eminem's song entitled "when I'm gone". *Journal of English Language and Education*, *8(1)*, 34-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v8i1.333>
10. <https://americansongwriter.com/meaning-behind-bob-dylans-timeless-protest-song-the-times-they-are-a-changin/>
11. <https://genius.com/albums/Bob-dylan/The-times-they-are-a-changin>
12. <https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2020/11/12/183000566/lirik-dan-chord-lagu-the-times-they-are-a-changin-bob-dylan>
13. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change> (December, 20th 2023)
14. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-31506-9_8