

A Syntactic Analysis of Interrogatives Sentences in Taylor Swift's 1989 Album

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study contains an analysis of the structure and role of interrogative sentences in Taylor Swift's 1989 album (2014). The interrogative sentences in her song lyrics express emotions such as doubt and heartbreak, creating personal and interesting meanings. Although pop lyrics are often analysed based on theme, grammatical aspects, especially interrogative sentences, are still under-explored. **Objective:** To address this gap, the present study analyses interrogative sentences in eight songs from 1989 using a qualitative descriptive approach. **Method:** In this album, only eight of the 21 songs contain interrogative sentences. The study adopts the classification of English interrogative sentence types proposed by Quirk et al. to identify yes/no questions, WH-questions, and tag questions. The data consist of 24 interrogative sentences identified from the official song lyrics. Data were collected through documentation, classified according to their syntactic forms, and interpreted based on their contextual meanings. **Results:** The findings reveal that yes/no questions dominate the corpus with 19 occurrences (79%), followed by five WH-questions (21%), whereas tag questions are absent. Yes/no questions, such as 'Is it over now?', use inversion to convey surprise or regret. WH questions, such as 'What was shiny?', build drama by asking for specific details. This study shows that interrogative sentences create tension and connection with listeners, especially in the chorus. **Conclusion:** By combining syntax and pragmatics, this study reveals how Swift's questions mimic everyday conversation. This research contributes to linguistics by highlighting the importance of grammar in music.

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INTRODUCTION

Popular music lyrics are increasingly recognized as valuable data for syntactic and discourse analysis, as they reflect both informal speech patterns and creative linguistic variation (Eggins, 2015: 27). Scholars argue that lyrics often utilize question structures not just for grammatical completeness, but as tools for emotional engagement and narrative cohesion (Moore, 2016: 58). Interrogatives, in particular, invite listeners into a dialogic exchange, bridging singer and audience through syntax. Despite this, syntactic analysis of interrogatives in lyrics remains relatively under-explored compared to declarative and imperative forms (Bennett, 2017: 90). Thus, a focused study on interrogative structures in a major pop lyric corpus promises both theoretical and practical insights.

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Functional linguistics emphasizes that interrogative mood functions beyond seeking information—it constructs stance, cues expectation, and shapes interpersonal involvement (Herbert, 2018: 48). In song lyrics, questions often are performative, crafting intimacy or drama rather than soliciting answers. Such pragmatic use underscores the need to analyze interrogatives both syntactically and functionally. Research on media discourse has shown that question forms mediate emotional and ideational shifts (Hawkins, 2020: 82). Therefore, interrogatives are vital syntactic tools in lyrical storytelling and public communication. Recent corpus studies illustrate that interrogatives occur with meaningful frequency in pop lyrics, though they have seldom been isolated in analytic discussions (Fung, 2021: 60). Moreover, variations such as tag questions and rising intonation forms add layers of nuance to lyrical expression (Smith & Lee, 2022: 13). However, these forms have not yet been systematically examined in the context of a single artist's album to reveal their structural and functional roles. This gap presents an opportunity: interrogatives in a cohesive work like Taylor Swift's 1989 can be analyzed for patterns and discourse effects across multiple tracks. Doing so would significantly enrich the field of lyric syntax research.

Taylor Swift's album 1989 (2014) shows a clear change in style toward popular music, with song words that sound like everyday talk and include questions about personal feelings (Taylor, 2022: 34). Choosing 1989 to study comes from its big cultural effect. It won several Grammy awards and sold more than 10 million copies, showing how words in modern songs can attract people around the world. Swift's writing style feels like everyday talk, full of questions that create a close feeling by copying real-life doubts and strong emotions. This makes the lyrics a great example for studying style in language. Also, writing in pop music is not studied much in language research, and questions help show practical uses like building empathy and making listeners think about their own lives. This work points out Swift's great skill in songwriting and shows how language powers the emotional stories in popular culture.

The album has 21 tracks in total, but just 8 of them include question sentences: "Is It Over Now?", "Bad Blood," "Wonderland," "How You Get the Girl?", "Blank Space," "Out of the Woods," "All You Had to Do Was Stay," and "Shake It Off." This number indicates that question sentences are used carefully to express emotions and build the narrative. For example, the line 'Are we out of the woods yet?' from one of the songs helps drive the storyline and adds strong emotion. However, most research on this album focuses on its statements and central themes, rather than the grammatical or functional use of interrogative forms in the lyrics (Bagasbas, Cuadro, & Luare, 2025, p. 52).

Several previous studies have investigated interrogative sentence structures in different discourse contexts. Damayanti et al. (2021) examined interrogative sentences in the novel *After You* and found that yes/no questions and WH-questions were predominantly employed to establish interpersonal relationships and support character interaction. Similarly, Putri (2020) analyzed interrogative constructions in the *Aladdin* movie script and demonstrated that English interrogative sentences follow systematic syntactic patterns based on subject–auxiliary inversion and interrogative words, while also contributing to the development of dialogue and characterization. In the context of song lyrics, Christianto (2018) investigated sentence patterns in John Denver's songs and revealed that interrogative constructions function as important grammatical devices in organizing lyrical discourse, although the study primarily focused on sentence structures without exploring their interpersonal meanings or communicative functions. Furthermore, previous studies have not specifically explored how interrogative constructions contribute to emotional expression and narrative development in Taylor Swift's 1989 album.

From a structural perspective, English interrogative sentences have been comprehensively described by Quirk et al. (1985), who classify interrogatives into three principal types: yes/no questions, WH-questions, and tag questions. Yes/no questions typically involve subject–auxiliary inversion and are designed to elicit affirmative or negative responses. WH-questions are introduced by interrogative

words such as what, who, where, when, why, and how to request specific information, whereas tag questions consist of a declarative clause followed by a short interrogative tag that seeks confirmation or agreement. Although originally proposed as a structural description of English grammar, Quirk et al.'s typology continues to serve as a fundamental framework in contemporary syntactic studies because it provides systematic criteria for identifying and comparing interrogative constructions across different discourse contexts (Coffin et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2019).

Recent linguistic studies further demonstrate that interrogative constructions should not be understood solely as grammatical forms but also as discourse resources whose functions vary according to communicative context. In literary texts, film dialogues, and song lyrics, interrogative sentences frequently perform rhetorical and interpersonal functions rather than simply requesting information (Damayanti et al., 2021; Alyousef, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant to song lyrics, where interrogatives often express emotional uncertainty, self-reflection, intimacy, and interpersonal negotiation between the songwriter and listeners (Martin & Rose, 2021). Consequently, while Quirk et al.'s framework provides the structural basis for classifying interrogative sentence types, its integration with functional approaches enables a more comprehensive explanation of how grammatical choices contribute to meaning construction in contemporary popular music (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson et al., 2019).

This research looks at Taylor Swift's 1989 by focusing on the grammar of questions to show how they express feelings of weakness, a sense of hurry, and ways to connect with listeners. To do this, the study asks two main questions: (1) This study identifies the types of interrogative sentences found in Taylor Swift's album 1989. (2) This study also analyzes how these interrogative sentences are syntactically related among the songs in the album. To answer them, the study uses two main methods: classifying the structures of the questions and explaining their role in meaning and use.

This study combines syntactic and pragmatic analysis to demonstrate how interrogative sentence structures function as stylistic devices that shape narrative voice and emotion in Taylor Swift's 1989 album. Through the integration of these complementary theoretical perspectives, this study aims to enrich linguistic research on popular music by demonstrating the relationship between syntactic structure and communicative function in contemporary song lyrics. The research shows that question structures carry affective and interpersonal meanings, highlighting their role in creating lyrical depth and connection with listeners. Overall, this study bridges syntax, pragmatics, and cultural studies, revealing how language and music interact to express emotion and construct meaning.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. This is a common way in language research to describe and explain sentence structures in real-life data (Creswell, 2018: 185). The qualitative method fits well because the goal is to find and describe the types and forms of questions in the lyrics from Taylor Swift's 1989 album. Qualitative research looks at deep understanding instead of numbers, so it helps the researcher study a small but interesting set of language data closely.

The data come from the lyrics of all songs in Taylor Swift's 1989 album. The way to collect the data is through documentation. This means writing down the lyrics, reading them several times, and finding sentences that have question structures. The data consisted of interrogative sentences identified in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's 1989 album. Among the twenty-one songs included in the album, only eight songs contain interrogative constructions: *Is It Over Now?*, *Bad Blood*, *Wonderland*, *How You Get the Girl*, *Blank Space*, *Out of the Woods*, *All You Had to Do Was Stay*, and *Shake It Off*. From these songs, a total of twenty-four interrogative sentences were identified and used as the units of analysis. The

primary data source was the official lyrics published in the 1989 album booklet and verified with officially authorized online lyric sources to ensure textual consistency.

The data were studied using qualitative methods and the descriptive steps from Creswell (2018). The evaluation consisted of three key components: (1) arranging the data, in which all interrogative sentences were collected and systematically ordered; (2) outlining the data, where in each question was analyzed for its grammatical structure; and (3) interpreting the findings, which examined the function of these structures within sentences and occasionally their significance in context. This straightforward method allows the researcher to present a comprehensive and easily understandable report on the question trends in the lyrics.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, investigator triangulation was employed. The identification and classification of interrogative sentences were independently conducted by more than one researcher using the same coding framework. Any discrepancies in classification were discussed until consensus was achieved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a detailed look at the song lyrics from Taylor Swift's 1989 album, this research pinpointed 24 interrogative sentences at the complete sentence structure. The identification process produced 24 interrogative sentences from the official lyrics of Taylor Swift's 1989 album. These interrogative constructions were identified in eight of the twenty-one tracks, indicating that only 38.1% of the songs employ interrogative structures. The remaining thirteen songs consist predominantly of declarative and imperative constructions. This distribution suggests that interrogative sentences are not randomly dispersed throughout the album but are strategically employed in songs that portray emotional uncertainty, interpersonal conflict, self-reflection, and unresolved relationships. Consequently, interrogative constructions function as stylistic resources rather than as common grammatical patterns throughout the album.

Following the data reduction process, all interrogative sentences were coded according to their song titles and classified based on Quirk et al.'s (1985) typology of English interrogative sentences. This framework categorizes interrogatives into yes/no questions, WH-questions, and tag questions according to their grammatical structures, as outlined next:

Table 1. Frequently Of Interrogative Types

No	Interrogative Types	Frequently	%
1	Yes/No Questions	19	(79%)
2.	WH-Questions	5	(21%)
3.	Tag Questions	0	(0%)
		24	(100%)

The table above illustrates the distribution of interrogative sentence types identified in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's 1989 album. Drawing from standard syntactic classifications in linguistic analysis, three main categories were considered: yes/no questions, WH-questions, and tag questions. The examination uncovered a total of 24 interrogative sentences across the selected tracks. As indicated in the table, yes/no questions are the most prevalent type, comprising 19 instances (79%), which underscores their role in fostering direct emotional expression. In contrast, tag questions are entirely absent (0%), highlighting a stylistic choice to avoid confirmatory tags in favor of more open-ended

or accusatory inquiries. WH-questions, though less common at 5 instances (21%), offer precise probes into relational dynamics.

There are three types of interrogative sentence: Yes/No Questions, WH-Questions and Tag Questions. **Yes/no questions** are interrogatives that seek a simple affirmation or negation, typically answered with "yes" or "no." These questions usually involve subject–auxiliary inversion, as in "Is it over now?" or "Did you have to do this?" or by elliptical forms that retain yes/no interrogative functions (e.g., In the clear yet?). Such constructions typically require affirmative or negative responses and therefore create binary alternatives that reinforce emotional uncertainty and narrative tension.

Wh-questions, on the other hand, are formed using interrogative words such as *what, when, where, why, who, whom, whose, which*, and *how*. Unlike *yes/no* questions, they request specific information and cannot be answered merely with affirmation or denial. Within the album, WH-questions primarily function rhetorically to express curiosity, regret, confusion, and emotional vulnerability rather than to obtain factual answers.

Meanwhile, **tag questions** consist of a declarative statement followed by a short question tag, such as "isn't it?" or "don't you?", which functions to confirm information or invite agreement from the listener. Together, these types of interrogatives illustrate the syntactic diversity of English question forms and their various communicative purposes. Interestingly, no tag questions were identified in the corpus. According to Quirk et al. (1985), tag questions are commonly used to seek confirmation, negotiate agreement, or soften assertions through interpersonal interaction. Their complete absence suggests that Taylor Swift deliberately avoids conversational strategies aimed at obtaining validation from the listener or the interlocutor. Instead, the lyrics favor direct interrogative constructions that express unresolved emotions without inviting confirmation.

The overall analysis of the album's lyrics, spanning 8 songs out of 21 that feature interrogatives, involved a detailed review of these structures to assess their syntactic patterns and pragmatic functions. The following sections present the specific examples and interpretations of these interrogative types within their song contexts.

DISCUSSION

In Taylor Swift's 1989 album, questions act as strong tools for storytelling. They create feelings of openness, challenge, and deep thought while exploring the good and bad sides of love. By closely examining the *yes/no* and *wh-* questions in songs such as "Is It Over Now?", "Bad Blood," and "Blank Space," we can see how these lyrics not only push the emotional story forward but also reflect the doubts and new understandings that come after a breakup. This draws listeners in, helping them connect with the singer's honest and intense experiences. The present findings are consistent with previous research while simultaneously extending existing knowledge.

1. Yes/No Question

Data 1: Is It Over Now?

The lyrics:

"Is it over now?"

The lyric "Is it over now?" is an interrogative sentence formed by the inversion of *is* and *it*, showing a clear question pattern. It is a *yes/no* question because it asks whether the statement "It is over now"

is true and expects only a simple answer. The line also has a rhetorical and emotional purpose, expressing doubt, longing, and a desire for closure at the end of a relationship. Here is the diagram:

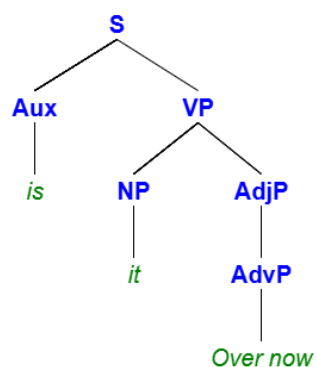


Figure. 1

The tree diagram above shows the basic structure of the question "Is it over now?" in English. It starts with the auxiliary "Is" moved to the front to form a question, followed by the subject "it" and the phrase "over now." The word "over" shows that something has ended, while "now" adds a sense of time. This structure is a typical yes/no question that asks directly if something has finished at the present moment.

"Did you think I didn't see you?"

This lyric is a yes/no question formed through inversion (Did + you + think), requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer. It adds a strong emotional tone, revealing feelings of betrayal and hidden awareness. Although it appears as a question, its function is rhetorical and expressive, showing surprise and disappointment toward someone who tried to hide something.

"Did you think I wouldn't notice?"

This lyric is also a yes/no interrogative because it begins with did followed by the subject you and the base verb think. It reflects the speaker's awareness and sensitivity, implying that something was intentionally concealed. The line functions emotionally rather than literally, expressing pain and betrayal through a rhetorical question.

Data 2: Bad Blood

"Did you have to do this?"

This is a yes/no question formed by the auxiliary did before the subject you. It expresses shock and disappointment, showing that the speaker feels hurt by someone's unnecessary action. The tone is emotional rather than truly asking for an answer.

"Did you think we'd be fine?"

A yes/no question using did + subject inversion, showing sarcasm and disbelief. It implies that things are clearly not fine, serving as a rhetorical question of disappointment.

"Now, did you think it's all through?"

Another yes/no question, using *did* to ask for reflection or confirmation. It carries a confrontational and regretful tone, questioning whether the other person truly considered the consequences of their actions.

Data 3: Wonderland

"Didn't they tell us, 'don't rush into things'?"

This lyric is a yes/no question created by the auxiliary *didn't* followed by the subject *they*. It conveys contemplation and remorse, as the speaker remembers a neglected warning. The rhetorical tone implies awareness and emotional reflection instead of pursuing a concrete solution.

"Haven't you heard what becomes of curious minds?"

This is a yes/no question beginning with the negative auxiliary *haven't*, expecting a confirmation (yes or no). It carries a warning and ironic tone, reminding the listener of the risks of curiosity. The question works rhetorically, showing awareness of consequences.

"Didn't you flash your green eyes at me?"

This lyric is another yes/no question, demonstrating inversion with *didn't + you + flash*. It suggests blame and emotional strain, as the speaker remembers a playful gesture that resulted in stronger emotions. The function is rhetorical, highlighting memory and remorse instead of seeking a response.

Data 4: How You Get The Girl

"Are you insane, -ane?"

The lyrics begin with the auxiliary word *'are'* followed by the subject *"you"*, forming a typical question structure. This sentence only requires a yes or no answer, but is used rhetorically to express surprise or disbelief. The repetition of *'-ane'* adds a musical and emotional effect, reinforcing the sense of frustration.

Data 5: Blank Space?

"Love's a game, wanna play?"

This is an elliptical yes/no question, shortened from *Do you want to play?*. By omitting the subject and auxiliary, the line sounds more casual and teasing, matching the song's seductive tone. It reflects the speaker's confidence and willingness to engage in a risky or playful relationship, emphasizing charm over formality.

"Ain't it funny?"

This lyric is a yes/no question in informal speech, equivalent to *Isn't it funny?*. The use of *ain't* adds a conversational, sarcastic tone. The question doesn't seek a real answer but instead comments ironically on how gossip spreads, expressing both amusement and criticism.

Data 6: Out Of The Woods

"Are we out of the woods yet?"

This lyric is a yes/no question starting with the auxiliary *are*, followed by the subject *we*. It inquires if a challenging or ambiguous situation has finally concluded, representing emotional turmoil in a partnership. The use of *yet* multiple times conveys a sense of urgency and a desire for safety and stability.

"Are we out the woods?"

This line is a shortened and more elliptical form of the previous question. It keeps the same yes/no structure but omits *the*, making it sound more rhythmic and natural for a song lyric. The question still expresses hope and anxiety, showing the desire to escape emotional chaos.

"In the clear yet?"

This is another elliptical yes/no question, shortened from *Are we in the clear yet?*. It maintains the same meaning—asking if things are finally safe or calm—but in a more compact, lyrical way. The structure emphasizes the feeling of anticipation and relief.

"Remember when you hit the brakes too soon?"

This line is a *wh*-question in disguise, using the word *when* but functioning more like a rhetorical yes/no question. It invites reflection on a past event rather than seeking a literal answer, highlighting regret and memory within the song's emotional storyline.

Data 7: Shake It Off

"Won't you come on over, baby?"

This lyric is a yes/no question formed with the negative auxiliary *won't* followed by the subject *you*, creating an inviting and persuasive tone. Rather than asking for information, it functions as a friendly invitation or request, encouraging someone to join in and have fun. The repetition "*shake, shake, shake*" adds rhythm and energy, reinforcing the playful and cheerful mood of the song.

Structurally, these questions are characterized by subject–auxiliary inversion and typically invite affirmative or negative responses (Quirk et al., 1985). However, within Taylor Swift's lyrics, they rarely function as genuine requests for information. Instead, they operate rhetorically to express uncertainty, disappointment, regret, longing, and confrontation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argue that interrogative mood is an interpersonal resource through which speakers negotiate relationships and attitudes rather than merely request information. This perspective explains why questions such as *Is it over now?*, *Did you think we'd be fine?*, and *Are we out of the woods yet?* are emotionally powerful despite not requiring literal answers. Their primary function is to invite listeners into the speaker's emotional experience and encourage empathetic interpretation rather than factual response.

The predominance of yes/no questions also reflects the narrative characteristics of 1989. Throughout the album, Taylor Swift portrays romantic relationships that remain emotionally unresolved. Binary interrogatives effectively represent this uncertainty because they position both the lyrical persona and the listener between two opposing possibilities, such as hope and disappointment, reconciliation and separation, or trust and betrayal. Rather than presenting definitive statements, the songwriter repeatedly frames emotional conflicts as unresolved questions. This strategy creates narrative tension and encourages listeners to participate cognitively and emotionally by imagining possible answers.

2. WH-Question

Data 1: Bad Blood

The lyric: *"What was shiny?"*

This is a wh-question starting with what, asking about something that used to be bright or perfect. It reflects loss and change, contrasting past happiness with present decay. The question is partly rhetorical, emphasizing regret.

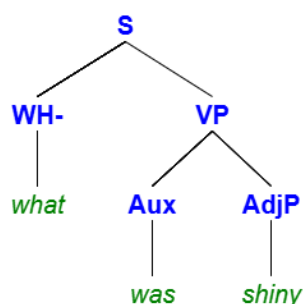


Figure 2.

At the top, S stands for the sentence. It is divided into two main parts: WH- and VP (Verb Phrase). The WH- part contains the word "what", which functions as the question word. The VP is made up of an auxiliary verb (was) and an adjective phrase (shiny). This structure shows that the question asks about the subject of the sentence specifically, which thing was shiny.

"Where I'm weak?"

This line shows an elliptical wh-question with where, expressing vulnerability and emotional pain. The incomplete structure adds a poetic tone, showing the singer's struggle to speak clearly through emotion.

Data 2: Blank Space?

"Nice to meet you, where you been?"

This lyric combines a greeting with a wh-question (*where you been?*), which is a casual form of *where have you been?*. The structure shows curiosity and a playful tone, as if the speaker is reuniting with someone unexpectedly. Pragmatically, it functions more as a flirty or lighthearted opening line than a genuine request for information, setting a lively mood in the song.

"Oh my God, who is she?"

This is a wh-question introduced by who, expressing shock, jealousy, or curiosity. The exclamation Oh my God intensifies the emotional reaction, making the line more dramatic. It functions rhetorically, reflecting a sudden and strong feeling rather than seeking an actual response.

Data 3: All You Had to Do Was Stay

"Then why'd you have to go and lock me out when I let you in?"

This lyrics begin with the word 'why', which asks the reason behind someone's actions. Grammatically, 'why'd' is short for 'why did', indicating an informal and emotional tone typical of spoken language or singing. This question expresses pain because the speaker feels betrayed after placing their trust in someone. Pragmatically, this question functions as a rhetorical question, expressing emotional pain rather than a sincere desire to seek an explanation.

Unlike *yes* or *no* questions, WH-interrogatives seek specific information by introducing interrogative elements such as *what*, *where*, *who*, and *why* (Quirk et al., 1985). Nevertheless, the present findings indicate that these questions also function rhetorically rather than informationally. Expressions such as *What was shiny?* and *Why'd you have to go and lock me out?* do not genuinely request explanations; instead, they foreground emotional reflection, disappointment, and self-questioning. From Halliday's interpersonal perspective, these interrogatives express the speaker's internal dialogue and emotional evaluation rather than initiating conversational exchange (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Alyousef, 2021). Consequently, WH-questions in the album contribute to introspection rather than information seeking.

One of the noteworthy findings is the complete absence of tag questions. According to Quirk et al. (1985), tag questions generally function to seek confirmation, negotiate agreement, or soften assertions by inviting listener participation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) similarly regard tag questions as interpersonal devices that reduce speaker authority while encouraging collaborative interaction. Their absence in 1989 therefore carries important pragmatic implications. Rather than negotiating agreement with an interlocutor, Taylor Swift's lyrics consistently present emotions as unresolved personal experiences. The speaker expresses doubt, frustration, jealousy, and longing directly without attempting to obtain validation from another participant.

Overall, the findings provide a comprehensive answer to the second research question. Beyond identifying interrogative sentence types, the study demonstrates that these grammatical constructions function as interpersonal strategies through which Taylor Swift constructs emotional intimacy, unresolved conflict, and narrative engagement. The integration of structural and functional perspectives confirms that interrogative sentences in 1989 are not merely syntactic forms but meaningful linguistic resources that shape listeners' interpretation of the album's emotional narratives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, syntactic analysis of interrogative sentences in Taylor Swift's 1989 album shows that interrogative sentences serve as a powerful linguistic tool for expressing emotional feelings and narrative engagement. The 24 interrogative sentences in Swift's eight dominant songs contain *yes/no* questions (79%) used to convey doubt, regret, and intimacy in the eight songs. By using subject-auxiliary inversions and WH-Question, these structures mimic everyday conversation, build tension, and strengthen listener connection, particularly in choruses and song bridges. The absence of tag questions underscores Swift's preference for unresolved drama over seeking affirmation. This study bridges syntax and pragmatics, enriching the study of popular lyrics and offering a replicable model to investigate the impact of grammar on music. This model can be applied to various artists and genres to explore the influence of language on cultural and emotional narratives.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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