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"Message in A Bottle": Discovering Fanilect within Taylor Swift's Fandom

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Abstract

This study delves into the use and impact of fanilect, a specialized form of language, within Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok. By employing discourse analysis, it examines the various forms and functions of fanilect in this digital community. The findings reveal four key types of fanilect: jargon, which consists of specific terms and phrases used only within the fan group; intertextual references, where fans incorporate Taylor Swift's lyrics or cultural references into their interactions; routine interactions, such as repeated behaviors or phrases during events or online discussions; and multimodal communication where fans express themselves through a combination of text, images, and videos. Furthermore, the study identifies fanilect's roles in shaping the dynamics within the Swiftie fandom. First, it contributes to identity formation, helping fans identify themselves as part of the community. Second, it establishes power structures, where knowledge of fanilect signifies status within the fandom. Third, fanilect fosters community building by encouraging emotional connections and shared experiences. Lastly, it enhances creative expression, allowing fans to engage with the fandom in varied and artistic ways. This research provides critical insights into how fanilect influences community interactions and identity within Taylor Swift's fanbase, offering broader implications for understanding linguistic practices in digital fan cultures.

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Introduction

In fandoms, where individuals unite around shared interests, the notion of exclusivity is paramount. Within the community, this shared understanding extends to fans' passion and devotion for their chosen subject matter. As Forslund (2023) suggests, these communities often share a common understanding and knowledge base. Forslund's observations highlight how these communities function not just as places of entertainment but also as centers of intellectual interchange and innovation. This communal synergy not only enhances the fan experience, but it also promotes the formation of different subcultural phenomena within the larger landscape of popular culture. One example is the emergence of distinctive language codes known as

fanilects, which capture the essence of fan culture in its most expressive form.

Communication and engagement among fans rely on establishing a shared comprehension of linguistic symbols (Zhang & Dong, 2023). This phenomenon is called fanilect, which refers to a variety of languages shared by members of a fan community (Gordon, 2023). The term fanilect itself first appeared publicly in an online news article about the language of Taylor Swift fans (Ceres, 2023). According to Gordon (2023), Georgetown University Linguistics Professor, fanilect captures the idea that fan communities have their private language that marks insiders from outsiders. This specialized language generates a feeling of camaraderie and inclusion among members by establishing a distinct division between those who are very involved and those who are not. The use of fanilect not only facilitates the identification among different fans but also enhances the connection within the community through the use of shared linguistic symbols and references.

On platforms such as TikTok, where fans often communicate and engage with one other, fanilect serves as an effective form of self-expression and fosters a sense of community, therefore reinforcing the collective identity of the group. Essentially, it may be considered the most recent version of a recurring trend on social media that has led to the widespread use of video production and sharing through live-streaming and short looping videos (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). The platform's short-form video format allows fans to creatively express their shared language through memes, edits, and other visual content, reinforcing community bonds. TikTok's user experience is exclusively influenced by the "For You" algorithm, which sets it apart from other platforms (Xu et al., 2019). TikTok's algorithm further enhances this by curating content that resonates with fans, making it easier for them to connect and interact with others who share the same interests. This combination strengthens fan communities and fosters a deeper sense of belonging.

Every fandom has its fanilect that serves as a sort of message in a bottle that fans share, in which it becomes a medium for the exchange of hidden knowledge, insider information, and shared experiences among them. For instance, in the international Kpop fandom community, they often use Konglish terms–the English terms that Koreans use with different meanings–like "bias" to denote their favorite member or "comeback" to describe a new release (Touhami & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2017). Conversely, fans of *The Hunger Games*–a movie adaptation that depicts a dystopian society's brutal annual event where adolescents fight to the death, igniting a rebellion against oppression and injustice–like to recreate the infamous hand gesture "the three-finger salute" in which the usage develops from a sign of respect and painful departure to one of rebellion against the fictitious world's centralized authority, with the touch to the lips dropped (Freestone et al., 2023). In addition, in the sports world, "the hog call" is a pretty well-known chant amongst fans of the Arkansas Razorbacks, the athletic teams representing the University of Arkansas. With hands cupped around their mouths, supporters stand tall and project their voices with gusto. The chant begins with a drawn-out "Woooooo," followed by a sharp "Pig" and an enthusiastic "Sooie!". It's a symbol of tradition and pride, echoing the rich sports culture of the Razorbacks and resonating beyond the borders of Arkansas (*Serving Arkansas and Beyond*, n.d.). The act of sending and receiving messages in this exclusive manner fosters a sense of belonging and exclusivity to a fandom community. They reinforce the bond within the fandom, and mark those who do not recognize the reference as outsiders.

Among the many fandoms, one of the biggest and most passionate fan communities on the planet belongs to Taylor Swift, an American singer-songwriter. According to Blancaflor & Briggs (2023), a slight majority of adults in the United States (53%) self-identified as Taylor Swift fans. Additionally, 16% of respondents described themselves as "avid" fans of the singer known for her "Anti-Hero" persona (Blancaflor & Briggs, 2023). Taylor Swift's influence on people has led them to create a devoted fanbase called "Swifties". Fandom names serve as an essential way for fans to articulate their preferences, establish connections with things and groups of people, and distinguish themselves from other

audiences, consequently creating subcultures within contemporary popular culture (Peyron, 2018). Not only do they feel connected with her music, but they also establish a sense of connection with one another. Throughout Swift's career, we can see how her fans can communicate with each other by reciting her lyrics, making references, using insider terminology, etc.

Language use among Taylor Swift's fan base can be described as a sociolect, or a 'fanilect', derived from a blend of the word 'fan' and 'dialect'. A special fanilect is characterized by the use of popular quotations from Taylor Swift's songs in many contexts, including social media and even politics (Driessen, 2022). In this way, fans have performed intertextuality, a technique of integrating certain quotations into novel events to create shared meanings and experiences among fans (Ceres, 2023). Research has also looked at how Swift's deliberate language usage embeds hidden or subtle messages in her songs, therefore fostering more involvement and interaction among the fans to strengthen their feeling of community (Gordon, 2023). These communication and linguistic practices improve group cohesiveness as well as help to create a unique fan culture (Zhang & Dong, 2023).

Although these studies provide insightful analysis, they focus on general linguistic phenomena within fan cultures or limited aspects of fandom-specific communication. There remains a significant gap in research that categorizes the detailed features of fanilect and its role in shaping community interactions. Particularly, no current research fully investigate how fanilect functions as a language system on digital platforms like TikTok, where dynamic and highly multimodal communication is present. This study addresses this gap by focusing on two research questions: (1) what are the varieties of fanilect used by Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok? (2) how does fanilect influence community interactions and identity formation within Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok?

By analyzing fanilect in this context, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how language practices shape and define the dynamics of online fan communities.

Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, this study employed a qualitative research method as the primary approach. Qualitative methods are effective for exploring and understanding phenomena through the perspectives of individuals or groups, focusing on meaning and construction (Noble & Smith, 2014).

The data were collected from the TikTok platform in January 2024 and consisted of 56 tokens, including videos and their associated comments. The selection criteria for these data included:

1. Posts and comments containing hashtags relevant to Taylor Swift's fandom, such as #swiftie and #swiftok.
2. Content that included or demonstrated specific linguistic features, such as slang, jargon, or other fan-specific terms.
3. A focus on the top searches displayed in the first posts, ensuring that the data represented the most relevant and popular content within the fandom.

This systematic selection process aimed to gather representative data that captured the linguistic practices of Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok. The collected data were analyzed using discourse analysis, a method that examines how language is used in social contexts to convey meaning and construct social identities (Gee, 2014). The analysis involved the following steps:

1. Categorization of Linguistic Features: the data were classified based on the characteristics of the linguistic elements identified, resulting in the following categories:

a. Jargon, that is specialized terms unique to the fandom
b. Intertextual References, which includes references to Taylor Swift's lyrics, cultural symbols, or shared knowledge within the fandom.
c. Routine Interaction is defined as common and repeated patterns of communication, such as fan chants or phrases used during events or discussions.

d. Multimodal Communication is the combination of text, images, videos, and other modes of communication to convey meaning.
2. Exploration of Roles:
a. To address the second research question regarding the roles of fanilect in shaping community interactions and identity, the study:
b. Identified discursive patterns within the data, examining how fanilect contributed to identity formation, power dynamics, emotional connections, and creative expression.
c. Interpreted the findings by comparing them to insights from previous studies to validate and contextualize the results.

This detailed methodological approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how fanilect is used within Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok and its broader implications for community dynamics and identity formation.

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Results and Discussion

1. The Variety of Fanilect Employed by Taylor Swift's Fandom on TikTok

Understanding the complexities of fan communication means stepping into a world where fans express themselves using a distinctive language. This particular type of communication, referred to as fanilect, has a number of features that let fans interact and express themselves. These features include insider jargon, intertextual references, routinized interactions, and the use of various communication modes such as memes and gestures, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variety of Fanilect

No	Characteristics	Variety of Fanilect
1.	a. Fannish abbreviation b. Name Shipping c. Fan Slangs	Jargon
2.	a. Lyrics b. Symbols	Intertextual References
3.	a. Fan chants b. Fan theories	Routine Interaction
4.	a. Gestures b. Memes	Multimodal of Communication

a. Jargon

The intricacy of fandoms is partly attributed to the linguistic expressions used by its audience. Given its intricate nature, systematic structure, and relevance within a certain realm of human involvement, fandom language can be classified as a form of jargon (Jurida & Hadžibeganović, 2020). Jargon is a type of language used for the purpose of communicating and distinguishing a certain group of people (Burgarski, 2003). It allows the development and establishment of relationships among individuals who identify themselves as "insiders" in certain contexts, while simultaneously excluding others who are considered "outsiders" (Yule, 2017). In this study, the researcher found three kinds of jargon: fannish abbreviations, name shipping, and fan slang.

Table 2. Swifties Fannish Abbreviations

No	Fannish abbreviation	Description	References
1.	LWYMMD	Look What You Made Me Do	the sixth track of the Reputation album
2.	YOYOK	You're On Your Own Kid	the fifth track of Midnights album
3.	MMwM	Midnight Mayhem with Me	a series of videos that Taylor Swift created on TikTok as a way of announcing the tracklist to her 10th album, Midnights.
4.	ATWTMVTVFtV	All Too Well Ten Minutes Version Taylor's Version from the Vault	the thirtieth track of Red (Taylor's Version) album

i. Fannish abbreviations

As depicted in Table 2, fans of Taylor Swift often shortened the title of every song, album, and thing related to Taylor Swift. In accordance with Yang (2019), members of the group authenticate one another instantly via the internet and employ abbreviations to verify their group identification. An abbreviation is a concise version of a written word or phrase (Soyer, 2018). Abbreviations are used to save space and time, prevent the redundancy of lengthy words and phrases, or adhere to established norms (Definition of ABBREVIATION, 2024). With the amount of songs and albums that Swift has made throughout her career in almost two decades, fans have made up a set of vocabulary full of abbreviations of her works. Typically, in the process of making the abbreviation, they will take each letter at the beginning of the word and combine them into one.

Figure (1)



For instance, as can be seen in Figure (1), fans refer to one of Swift's songs, *You're on Your Own Kid* as YOYOK. For context, in the figure above, Taylor Swift sings YOYOK as a surprise song on the *Eras Tour* at So-Fi stadium. They expressed their disappointment for missing the opportunity to see the performance of YOYOK song as a surprise song on the *Eras Tour*.

ii. Name Shipping

Shipping, which originates from the word relationship, refers to the yearning of fans for two or more individuals, be they fictional or

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actual (in literature, film, television, etc.), to be in a romantic or other type of relationship (Parry, 2019). Taylor Swift has had a lot of relationships that have been widely shared in public, be it with her friends, colleagues, or romantic partners. They would creatively make up the names for the relationship, and usually, in the process of creating it, they would mix up the names of Taylor Swift and her partner by taking the first or last half of the name and combining them. In linguistics, this phenomenon of word formation is called blending—a word made by joining two or more forms but omitting the last part of one (Fang, 2021).

Figure (2)



For example, in Figure (2), we can see how Swift fans refer to Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's relationship as "Tayvis", taken from the combination of Taylor and Travis' first names. By using the heart face emoji, supporters express their joy and approval for their romantic connection.

iii. Fan Slangs

As times evolve, there are new terms and vocabulary that are invented and used by a specific group of people called slang. It is predominantly utilized by a specific community or media outlet as a form of informal language (Habtay, 2017). Fans employ terms and sentiments that are incomprehensible to anyone outside of the fandom (Bugarski, 2003). Undeniably swifties also have their slang that they use to communicate with each other, some of them are exemplified below.

First, the term 'swiftie(s)' refers to fans of the singer Taylor Swift. Etymologically, the word 'swiftie' is formed from the singer's surname 'Swift', combined with the suffix 'ie' (or 'y'), which is often used to form diminutives or pet names with an implication of affection (Oxford Word of the Year 2023 | Oxford Languages, 2023). Fandom names play a crucial role in expressing preferences, fostering connections, and shaping subcultures within pop culture (Peyron, 2018).

As shown in Figure (3), the woman uses the term swiftie in the context of reminding other people who know anyone who is a fan of Taylor Swift to behave nicely to them on the 28th. 28th is a reference to Taylor Swift's song, "September". It is believed to be the day Taylor Swift and Joe Alwyn started their relationship. Joe and Taylor broke up after 6 years of being together. The recent event mentioned in the figure refers to the new relationship Taylor has with Travis Kelce.

Figure (3)



The second slang is a clipping: 'Tay Tay'. Clipping represents a fundamental method of word shortening whereby sections of the original word, be it the front, back, or middle, are removed, leaving the remaining portion to be utilized in its place (Fang, 2021). In this case, "Taylor" is clipped to "Tay," and then repeated to form "Tay Tay." It is a common linguistic process used to create informal or colloquial terms, especially in nicknaming or when referring to celebrities or public figures in a friendly manner.

Third, the word 'mother' is usually used to describe a female parent or a woman who has given birth. However, among Swift's fans, this term is mostly used as a term of endearment for famous women with avid devotees

(Kesslen, 2023), claiming the admiration they have for Swift.

The fourth fan slang is 'era'. The word in a normal dictionary is referred to as an initial point—a label for chronological notations that claim to be memorable (Banta, 2011). In the context of Taylor Swift's fandom, the term "eras" often corresponds with the release of new albums and represents important transformations in Swift's creative approach and public presence. With the release of the many albums that she has had, she has marked different eras in each of them. For instance, the reputation era is characterized by the darker and rougher side, as seen in the album *Reputation*. The music itself delves into issues such as popularity, media scrutiny, and personal development, all while maintaining a more rebellious image and sound.

b. Intertextual References

It is a common thing for fans to refer to their favorite thing about someone or something they adore. As stated by Ceres (2023), intertextuality is the process of putting certain phrases into new contexts to generate shared meanings and experiences among supporters. This makes one fandom different from the others, in the way they are able to recognize the references that are mentioned. In this study, the researcher found two types of intertextual references, in the form of lyrics and symbols.

i. Lyrics

When the writers of media pieces introduce intertextual fragments into their texts, their evident purpose is to add color or expression to their writings while also expecting the audience to quickly grasp the reference and conclude with the intended meaning of the utterance (Velykoroda & Moroz, 2021). Citing is a way to communicate in a community context (Garfield, 1996). Citing things, such as lyrics–whether it would be in a conversation, printed shirt, or any other platforms–is a way for fans to be able to communicate, identify, and share their feelings.

As shown in Figure (4), we can see @ave's statement in the comment, "coming back here because she may have moved on but I'm still at the restaurant." She was referencing Taylor Swift's song "Right Where You Left Me." @vanessa responded to @ave's message by saying, "HELP me too." "Help" appears in the lyrics of the previously stated song. The statement was likewise agreed upon by the others. They are yet to grasp the reality that Joe Alywn has broken up with Taylor Swift. This shows how fans are able to pick up the references and collectively share their feelings.

Figure (4)



ii. Symbols

Symbols in visual communication share meanings using the characteristics of the page and its markings, including but not limited to likenesses, dots, lines, arrows, boxes, blobs, and symbols (Tversky, 2011). Symbols such as emojis and numbers have significant implications in the field of linguistics for communication, extending beyond traditional linguistic forms like words and phrases. It is possible to say that the symbols both hide and disclose the concealed (Bogdanović, 2013). It may function as a clue, obscuring some information while providing indications about what is concealed. They provide levels of significance that may not be apparent at first look. In this regard, Taylor Swift's fans often make references to particular symbols in their interactions with each other, such as the number 13 and the snake emoji.

The symbolism of numbers is not only a manifestation of amount but also of ideas, each with its unique features (Bogdanović, 2013). Taylor Swift's utilization of the number 13 as

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an Easter egg in her work exemplifies the multifaceted symbolism inherent in numbers. Despite the prevalent English cultural belief that associates 13 with misfortune, stemming from religious, literary, and societal influences (Dai-qion, 2015), Swift has reclaimed this number as her own. Born on December 13, 1989, Swift not only incorporates 13 into her music and performances but also fosters a community among her fans who enthusiastically embrace it as one of their own.

With regards to the emoji, people use the snake symbol to refer to Taylor. It is shown in a tweet made by Kim Kardashian saying, "Wait, it's legit National Snake Day?!?!? They have holidays for everybody, I mean everything these days!", followed by a lot of snake emojis. After a highly publicized dispute with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, the nickname "snake" came to be associated with Taylor Swift. In 2016, West released a song titled "Famous" that featured lyrics that alluded to the possibility that he and Swift engaged in sexual activity as a result of his role in Swift's fame. Swift publicly denounced the song, claiming she had not approved the lyrics. However, Kardashian released a video on Snapchat purportedly showing Swift giving her blessing to the lyrics during a phone call with West. This led to accusations that Swift was being deceitful or manipulative.

Following this event, Swift received an overwhelming amount of snake emojis and the hashtag #TaylorSwiftIsASnake on various social media platforms. The phrase "snake" was used to imply that Swift displayed cunning, deceitfulness, or insincerity in her public image. This depiction had a huge influence on Swift, especially given her meticulously constructed persona as a relatable and genuine artist. In Western culture, the snake stands for the bad and evil, which allure others to commit mistakes (Wagner et al., 2020). Then, a year later, Taylor Swift reclaimed the negative meaning of "snake" by using it in the marketing and music videos for her album *reputation*, transforming it into a symbol of power. This critical moment in her public image occurred when she directly confronted criticism, taking control of the narrative surrounding the scandal.

c. Routine Interaction

The interaction among fan communities is characterized by established patterns of involvement that are consistently followed. Whether online or offline, fans have ways to always connect, be it through fan chants during events or discussing certain theories online. These methods foster stronger connections among fans and enrich their collective experiences.

i. Fan Chants

Chants are an important means of communication and emotional expression for supporters (Ashmore, 2017). Fans often demonstrate their support for their favorite musicians or sports teams by chanting at concerts or sporting events. These chants, which range from brief phrases to complete song verses, help to unify supporters, create an exciting environment, and develop a feeling of solidarity among fans and shared destiny (Tamir, 2021).

The first chant from the song 'Don't Blame Me' is the sentence: '*Take me to church'.*

Figure (5)



"Lord, save me, my drug is baby/I'll be using for the rest of my life" are the lyrics Taylor sings after the fans scream the chant "take me to church" together during the bridge, as can be seen in Figure (5). Swift uses an elaborate drug metaphor to explain her relationship. She compares her partner to a potent drug, highlighting her infatuation and addiction. These lyrics imply that Taylor's relationship is the root of her sin, and she deliberately chooses to engage in it while pleading with God

to save her (Volkova & Aleksandrova, 2023). The use of this specific phrase as a chant by fans may be attributed to the sort of spiritual aspect of the song and the visually captivating and attention-grabbing lighting that adorns the stadium performance during the bridge, imbuing it with a sense of sacredness.

Figure (6)



Second, in the song 'Bad Blood (The Security Guard Version), fans used the following as the chant: '*Oh it's so sad to think about the good times you and I (She's fine). Cause baby now we got bad blood (she wasn't doing anything). You know it used to be mad love (Hey Stop!). So take a look what you've done. Cause baby now we got bad blood (Hey Stop!)'*

ii. Fan Theories

One of the key components of fan culture is fan discussion, which gives fans a forum to express their thoughts, ideas, and interpretations of the media they like. Fan theory, a phenomenon seen in many fandoms, is a creative and collaborative component of fan culture. These ideas come from fans' inventive imaginations as they methodically study and interpret the narratives of their favorite things. As Hoxter (2000) stated, central to the establishment of strong connections among fan community members is the act of collecting, exchanging, and spreading information related to their shared interests. It usually aims to solve narrative puzzles, decipher hidden meanings, or forecast upcoming events.

As depicted in Figure (7), fans are engaged in a discussion on the Easter egg featured in the "Bejeweled" music video. It shows Taylor Swift entering an elevator with buttons of various colors. Many fans interpret these buttons as symbolizing the chronological chronology of Taylor Swift's album releases and re-releases. The individual shown in this illustration made a prediction about the forthcoming re-release album, *Speak Now Taylor's Version*, by discerning the color of the button she was going to press, which happened to be purple. Additionally, her favorite number, 13, is referenced on the elevator buttons.

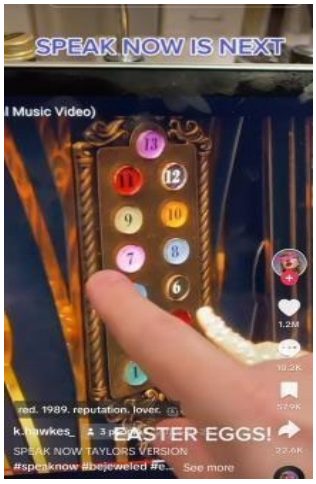
d. Multimodal Communications

Multimodal communication within fandoms on the TikTok platform has emerged as a significant area of study, reflecting the evolution of fan engagement in the digital age. Researchers studying multimodal communication also take into account additional modes, including posture, gaze, and other visuals or gestures (Norris, 2012). Most fans attempted to express their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and interpretations of the original material using different sorts of language, including words, photos, drawings, and videos (Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). In this study, the researcher found two forms of the use of multimodal communication, including gestures and memes.

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As illustrated in Figure (6), during Taylor's performance of her song "Bad Blood" in one of her Eras Tour concerts, she defended her fan from a security guard who was overly aggressive towards the fan. The legendary scene inspired her fans to use her unintentional speech as their fan chant of "Bad Blood" and label it "the security guard version" One of the gestures of Swift's fans is turning on flashlights during the performance of 'Marjorie'.

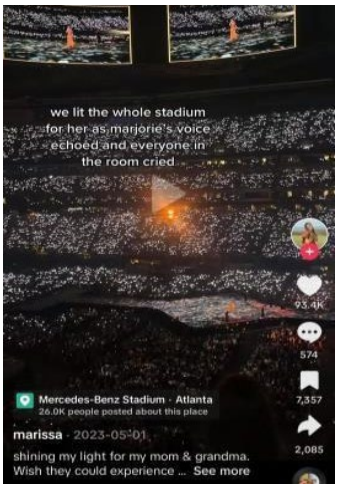
Figure (7)



i. Gestures

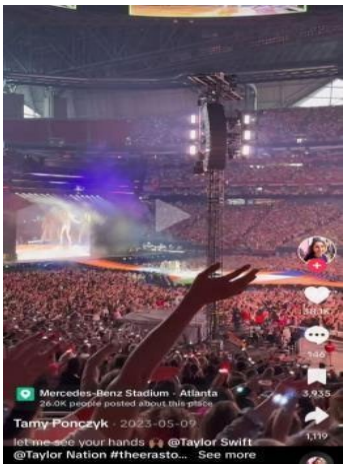
Fans' gestures during concerts are a strong display of connection and solidarity between musicians and their audiences. Waving hands, making heart signals, or clapping along to the rhythm all contribute to a shared experience that goes beyond the music. They represent a tangible reflection of the emotional relationship between musicians and fans, enhancing the intensity and excitement of concerts. These gestures not only enhance the performance experience but also reflect music's tremendous ability to bring people together, generating a feeling of belonging and community among varied individuals who are bonded by a love of the artist and their music.

Figure (8)



Fans of Taylor Swift often turn on their flashlights during her performance of "Marjorie" as a show of solidarity and support, as shown in Figure (8). "Marjorie" is a song from her 2020 album *Evermore* that pays respect to her late grandma, Marjorie Finlay. The song is profoundly personal and emotional, and by lighting the arena with mobile phone flashlights, fans create a visually magnificent show that represents their love for Taylor Swift and appreciation for the song's meaningful message. It allows fans to connect with the artist and express support at the most vulnerable point in the performance.

Figure (9)



Next, they also wave hands during the performance of 'You Need To Calm Down'. As demonstrated in Figure (9), Taylor Swift fans often wave their hands during "You Need to Calm Down" performances to show their involvement and support for the message that the song conveys. "You Need to Calm Down" is a single from Taylor Swift's 2019 album, Lover. The song explores themes of equality, self-empowerment, and anti-discrimination, which includes LGBTQ+ rights.

After the bridge, when Swift sings lyrics like "And we see you over there on the internet / Comparing all the girls who are killing it/ But

we figured you out/We all know now, we all got crown/ You need to calm down," she then says “let me see you hand”, fans would wave their hands together as a visual representation of solidarity and acceptance. This gesture demonstrates sympathy with the song's theme of combating negativity and encouraging love and understanding. It allows fans to actively participate in the performance while also supporting Taylor Swift's social endeavors.

ii. Memes

One of the most significant methods for expressing feelings and ideas on social media these days is via internet memes (Wang et al., 2019). Internet memes are multimodal constructions that function by combining text and images to convey perspectives and promote communities of discourse (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). Throughout the internet, fan memes are a source of entertainment, inventiveness, and cultural expression. These funny, engaging photos, videos, and text snippets travel quickly among fan networks, becoming emblems of shared experiences and inside jokes.

Figure (10)



The first meme is ‘I’m not asleep, my mind is alive’. The viral sensation of Taylor Swift shedding tears over a banana after her lasik surgery, while proclaiming "I'm not asleep, my mind is alive," has enthralled a multitude of admirers. Many Swifties on TikTok have replicated this meme, including the individual shown in Figure (10). Within this illustration, the individual expresses that they have just had lasik surgery and their first desire is to replicate that particular moment associated with Taylor Swift. Those who post in the comment area share their agreement on how hilarious Taylor was during that situation. @qi refers to it as "lasik surgery (Taylor's Version)"

Figure (11)



The next meme is called ‘Karma is a cat’. Figure (11) presents a comparison between Taylor Swift's former romantic partner, Joe Alwyn, and her current one, Travis Kelce, with cat versions that have a striking resemblance to them. This can be considered as an inside joke inside the fan community. As background information, it is widely recognized that Taylor is fond of cats and owns three cats that those who follow her, are likely familiar with. Additionally, she frequently references cats in her songs, such as in "Karma," when she compares karma to a cat.

2. The Role of Fanilect in Shaping Community Interactions and Identity within Taylor Swift's Fandom on TikTok

The Taylor Swift fandom, known as "Swifties," is a vibrant and active community that thrives on platforms like TikTok. Within this community, fanilect plays a pivotal role in shaping how fans interact with one another and establish their identities. It not only facilitates deeper connections and a sense of belonging among fans but also delineates insider knowledge and expertise, thereby influencing social hierarchies within the fandom. Exploring the role of fanilect provides insight into how these linguistic elements

contribute to the cohesion and cultural identity of Swifties on TikTok. Below are the functions of fanilect that were found after analyzing the data.

a. Identity Formation and Group Membership

Fanilect can serve as a tool for constructing and expressing social identity within the fandom. Tajfel & Turner (2004) defined social identity as "an individual's cognition that he/she belongs to a specific social group, and that group membership has emotional and value significance for him/her. A feeling of membership is comprised of many elements, such as a sense of optimism, a feeling of shared solidarity, a feeling of inclusivity, social prospects, and the perception of community members who possess knowledge (Mastromartino et al., 2020). Using specific terms and things that are expressed in the shared values within the fan community, it helps to maintain the sense of belonging and group membership. It also evokes social categorization, which is the belief that people will automatically classify things, so when they classify others, they will automatically distinguish between inner groups and outer groups (Tajfel, 1982). For instance, in understanding certain symbols, such as the number 13 or snake emoji, circulating in Taylor Swift, people outside the fandom most likely will not be able to pick up the references, classifying them as outsiders. This shared language fosters a sense of exclusivity and community among those who understand it, helping to differentiate insiders from outsiders and reinforcing a collective identity.

b. Power and Authority within the Fandom

Fanilect can reflect and reinforce power dynamics within the fandom. Those who are more adept at using fanilect might hold more authority and status within the community. This use of language can shape perceptions of authenticity and legitimacy, determining who is seen as a "true" fan. In fan communities, according to McCudden (2011), fans establish their social status inside and among their fandoms by making clear distinctions between fans and non-fans, as well as within fan communities based on authenticity. From mastering Swift-specific slang to participating in fan activities, fans navigate a complex hierarchy where linguistic skill can elevate one's standing and influence. In line with Hills (2002), the lack of degree of knowledge can make some fans feel reluctant to completely embrace their identity as a swiftie inside the fan hierarchy. The hesitation originates from a perceived hierarchy among fan groups, in which people with greater in-depth knowledge of the artist, such as recognizing fan abbreviations or complex references, are seen as more authentic or dedicated fans. As a result, people who believe they lack such knowledge may feel they are in a lesser place within the fan hierarchy, leading to feelings of insecurity about their fan status.

c. Community Building and Emotional Engagement

The use of fanilect may also be a way to build community and emotional connections among fans. Shared language and symbols can create a sense of intimacy and solidarity, enhancing the emotional experience of fandom. Forcier (2019) expands upon this viewpoint by demonstrating how the feeling of community and collective identity among fandoms goes beyond simply entertainment, promoting the formation of solid and lasting connections among its members. The ability to bring people together on an intimate level demonstrates the inherent worth of these communities in fostering connections and cooperative efforts (Forcier, 2019). This shared discourse allows fans to express their passion and enthusiasm, fostering a supportive and interactive community environment. For example, in the practice of fan theories, fans come together to decipher hidden information or predict upcoming developments related to their shared passion. This approach not only enhances their connection to the matter but also fortifies relationships within the group, creating a common identity and shared purpose.

d. Multimodal Communication and Creativity

Fanilect covers not just spoken language but also includes visual and multimodal

components, such as memes, gestures, etc. These modes of communication can improve the fan experience by offering extra levels of importance and creativity, enabling fans to interact with the fandom in varied and expressive ways. By engaging in various forms of communication, fans not only convey their understandings and feelings but also have a role in shaping the shared storyline of the fan community. This results in a dynamic and constantly evolving community that is both inclusive and participatory.

Conclusion

This study has categorized the features of fan language used on the TikTok platform, examined how particular linguistic elements are used, and also explored the influence of fanilect on community interactions and identity formation within the Swiftie fandom. The findings from this study provide insight into the use and impact of fanilect within Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok. The application of discourse analysis in this study was crucial for uncovering the nuanced ways fanilect operates within Taylor Swift's fandom on TikTok. By focusing on the language used by fans, discourse analysis allowed for a detailed examination of the various forms of communication, such as jargon, intertextual references, routine interaction, and multimodal communication. Furthermore, the second research question explored the influence of fanilect on community interactions and identity formation within the Swiftie fandom, by analyzing the discursive patterns, four roles of fanilect were identified: identity formation and group membership, power and authority within the fandom, community building, and emotional engagement, and multimodal communication and creativity. These findings highlight the multifaceted role of fanilect in shaping the dynamics of the Swiftie community and offer broader implications for understanding social interactions in online fan cultures.

This research still has its limitations, such as a narrow focus on a specific platform (TikTok) and a single fan community (Taylor Swift's fandom), which may have impacted the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis might have introduced biases in interpreting fanilect, potentially limiting the scope of insights into broader fan cultures. Thus, future studies could explore fanilect across diverse platforms and fandoms to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its role in digital communication. Investigating the intersection of fanilect with factors such as age, cultural background, or media consumption habits could offer deeper insights into its social implications. Furthermore, examining how fanilect influences group dynamics and identity formation in other online communities could enrich the discourse on digital sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

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