

A TIKTOK-REVIVED CLASSIC: FOREGROUNDING IN BONNIE TYLER'S TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

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Abstract

Driven by its viral TikTok revival, Bonnie Tyler's 1983 power ballad "Total Eclipse of the Heart" has captivated a new generation of listeners, yet its verbal text remains underexplored within formal literary frameworks. This qualitative study utilizes Leech's (1969) framework of foregrounding to analyze the song's intrinsic linguistic structures, examining how they systematically construct thematic meaning and evoke intense emotional resonance. A rigorous, line-by-line stylistic analysis reveals that the lyrics rely on a sophisticated interplay of linguistic deviations and structural parallelisms. Deviations at morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discourse levels such as cosmic metaphors and grammatical ellipses mirror the narrator's progressive emotional unraveling and powerlessness. Concurrently, phonological, lexical, syntactic, and antithetical parallelisms, particularly cyclic repetition, structurally trap the speaker in an inescapable loop of grief and rising panic. Ultimately, this study validates pop culture lyrics as rich sites of literary inquiry, translating subjective musical impressions into concrete linguistic data that explains the enduring aesthetic gravity of vintage tracks.

Keywords: foregrounding theory, stylistic analysis, "*Total Eclipse of the Heart*", pop culture lyrics, TikTok revival

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Music is an integral part of everyday human life due to its universal ability to appeal to people. In today's world, it has become a global form of media that reaches across cultures and geographical boundaries. Even those who do not actively listen to music frequently encounter it through radio broadcasts, television shows, and advertisements that use memorable tunes to attract attention and promote products or services. As a result, music is present in nearly every aspect of daily life and continues to serve as an important foundation of human society (Rivera & Bernardo, 2018).

The digital landscape has fundamentally transformed how classic music is preserved, discovered, and integrated into contemporary youth culture. A prime example of this phenomenon is the massive viral resurgence of Bonnie Tyler's 1983 iconic power ballad, "*Total Eclipse of the Heart*," on TikTok. Driven by a widely shared trend featuring a clip from

the 2010 film *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, where a character passionately belts the ballad during a school audition, the song swept across millions of engagements. This digital revival has introduced Tyler's classic to a completely new generation of listeners far too young to remember its initial chart-topping run, illustrating how algorithmic soundscapes can breathe new life into vintage media. While the track has historically experienced spikes during astronomical events like solar eclipses, its TikTok-driven revitalization underscores its enduring emotional appeal and dramatic magnitude, an aesthetic power that can be systematically uncovered through the linguistic lens of stylistics.

In stylistics, foregrounding originates from visual art, where foreground elements are drawn to the viewer's attention. Introduced by Prague School linguist Jan Mukařovský as *aktualisace* in "*Standard Language and Poetic Language*," the concept was later translated into English by Paul L. Garvin, popularizing it across linguistic and literary studies (Xie & Zhang, 2025). Generally, the interaction between a reader's background knowledge, personal experience, and particular linguistic features has contributed greatly to the growth and development of stylistic studies. Nevertheless, stylisticians do not depend solely on subjective impressions when analyzing texts. Instead, they focus on the objective organization and patterns of language within a text, avoiding assumptions about its artistic merit. Widdowson (1975) emphasized that by examining the language used in a text, it can be identified that the linguistic structures and patterns form the basis for a reader's perception of artistic value. Through the analysis of different stylistic devices, scholars can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the artistic choices made by an author and the overall impact these choices have on the text. In addition, Samandarov, Ortiqov, and Achilov (2022) described foregrounding as a literary technique through which writers intentionally draw readers' attention to sections of a text. By making certain elements stand out from the surrounding discourse, authors enhance their prominence and produce a specific intended effect on the audience.

Over the years, numerous studies have utilized foregrounding theory to analyze diverse literary texts and song lyrics. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2024) investigated the foregrounding features in Dylan Thomas's "*Before I Knocked*," demonstrating how the poet's deliberate organization of linguistic elements and stylistic techniques directly reinforces the poem's thematic depth. Similarly, Xie and Zhang (2025) applied a foregrounding-based stylistic approach to E. E. Cummings's "*in Just-*." By examining lexical, grammatical, semantic, and

graphological deviations, their analysis highlighted how these parallelisms and deviations culminate in Cummings's distinctive stylistic impact. Extending this framework to contemporary music, Saragih et al. (2026) explored how Lana Del Rey's song lyrics express melancholy and nostalgia through foregrounding. Their findings reveal that while semantic deviation, primarily realized through dominant figurative expressions, is used to construct melancholy, structural parallelism, achieved through repetition, serves to evoke nostalgia. Furthermore, foregrounding theory has been applied to broader literary mediums and translations. Liu (2025) conducted a study on the foregrounding language in the English translation of *Happy Dreams*, revealing how domestication strategies balance literary integrity and readability. Lastly, Lang and Liu (2023) analyzed Katherine Mansfield's "*Miss Brill*" from the perspective of functional stylistics, examining parallelism and deflection across phonological, graphological, lexical-grammatical, and semantic levels to illustrate how these features highlight ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions.

While these prior studies demonstrate how foregrounding operates in traditional poetry, prose, and contemporary indie-pop lyrics, a distinct research gap exists regarding how foregrounding functions within the extreme stylistic conditions of the 1980s theatrical power ballad. Unlike understated poetry (e.g., Cummings) or introspective pop (e.g., Del Rey), power ballads like "*Total Eclipse of the Heart*" rely on heightened dramatic tension, extreme semantic hyperboles, and dense, repetitive structural parallelisms designed to sustain maximum emotional arousal across a multi-tiered narrative. Current literary commentaries on the song (Morris, 2023; Unterberger, 2026) remain largely impressionistic, failing to isolate the exact linguistic mechanisms that yield its theatrical gravity. Applying Foregrounding Theory to "*Total Eclipse of the Heart*" provides more than just an analysis of an unstudied text; it offers crucial insight into how specific syntactic deviations and layered parallelisms build an architecture of emotional extremity explaining why the text retains such a powerful aesthetic impact across both its original release and modern digital re-contextualizations.

To address this gap, the present study utilizes Leech's (1969) framework of foregrounding to analyze the song's inherent stylistic devices, illustrating how it systematically constructs thematic meaning and evokes intense emotional resonance. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

2. What forms of linguistic deviation and patterns of parallelism are present in the lyrics of *"Total Eclipse of the Heart"*?
3. How do these foregrounding elements function in the lyrics to construct thematic meaning and evoke intense emotional resonance?

METHOD

This qualitative study employed a stylistic textual analysis to examine the intrinsic literary properties of Bonnie Tyler's iconic 1983 power ballad, *"Total Eclipse of the Heart"*. The analysis was built upon the dual pillars of foregrounding theory: as cited in Sahin (2023), linguistic deviation is defined as an *"unexpected irregularity in language"* that generates perceptual prominence across lexical, syntactic, semantic, phonological, and graphological dimensions (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010; Short, 1996) and parallelism, which utilizes structural equivalence, syntactic symmetry, and lexical reiteration to establish aesthetic gravity (Cuddon, 1998; Wales, 2011). Because of its rich lyrical complexity and enduring intergenerational appeal, the song served as an ideal candidate for deep stylistic dissection (Morris, 2023). To address the research questions, the study implemented a rigorous, three-step analytical process. First, the complete lyrics were retrieved from YouTube and cross-verified against reliable digital transcripts which is the Genius (<https://genius.com/Bonnie-tyler-total-eclipse-of-the-heart-lyrics>) to ensure absolute textual integrity. Second, a line-by-line analysis traced the narrative's emotional impact. Third, guided by Leech's (1969) framework, the analysis systematically categorized internal linguistic deviations (across phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discourse levels) and mapped corresponding parallelisms, while deliberately bracketing out external variables such as biographical context or authorial intent. By deliberately bracketing out external variables such as biographical context or authorial intent, this methodological choice aligns with formalist principles and avoids the *'intentional fallacy'* (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), ensuring the analysis remains strictly anchored in the autonomy of the text itself. Synthesizing these foregrounded elements ultimately reveals how micro-level linguistic choices function to construct the song's thematic meaning and evoke intense emotional resonance. Also, as noted by Coyoca (2026), while musical features like rhythm and melody are fundamental to the listening experience, isolating the verbal text

through a strict stylistic framework yields a much deeper, more concentrated understanding of the song's literary craft and thematic landscape.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Linguistic deviations in the lyrics of Total Eclipse of the Heart and its functions

Lines/Texts	Deviation	Stylistic Function
"A total eclipse of the heart" (<i>Post-chorus 1, Lines 4 & 8; Post-chorus 2, Lines 4, 8, 9, & 10</i>)	Semantic	It uses cosmic metaphor to equate emotional despair with a rare, terrifying celestial event where light is entirely blocked out. This conveys a total loss of joy, hope, and warmth, evoking a sense of absolute darkness and devastation.
"Your love is like a shadow on me all of the time" (<i>Chorus 1, Line 8; Chorus 2, Line 8</i>)	Semantic	This simile subverts the traditionally comforting concept of love, transforming it into something heavy, dark, and suffocating. It evokes a feeling of claustrophobia and inescapable presence, showing how a past or toxic love can haunt a person continuously.
"We're living in a powder keg and giving off sparks" (<i>Chorus 1, Line 10; Chorus 2, Line 10</i>)	Semantic	This metaphor shifts the imagery to extreme danger. It captures the explosive and high-stakes nature of the relationship, creating intense anxiety and suspense because an emotional blowout could happen at any second.
"no one in the universe" (<i>Verse 3, Line 8</i>)	Semantic	This isolated hyperbolic phrase reinforces the speaker's total isolation and singular focus. It establishes that, to the speaker, the outside world ceases to matter, heightening the emotional

		stakes by framing the partner as completely irreplaceable.
'round (Verse 1, Line 3)	Morphological	The clipping of " <i>around</i> " breaks formal linguistic rules to mimic natural and casual speech. It introduces a conversational urgency, making the lyrics sound less like a rehearsed performance and more like an authentic and spontaneous internal monologue.
'Cause (Chorus 1, Line 6; Chorus 2, Line 6)	Morphological	Truncating " <i>because</i> " strips away formal structure to signal that the narrator's emotional state is too frantic and desperate for proper grammar. It fast-tracks the explanation, enhancing the raw and unedited vulnerability of the confession.
"Nothing I can do" (Post-chorus 2, Line 3)	Syntactic	By omitting the standard introductory subject and verb (" <i>There is...</i> "), the sentence structurally starts with an absolute negative: " <i>Nothing.</i> " This syntactic fragmentation mirrors the narrator's sudden, gasping realization of complete powerlessness.
"Nothing I can say" (Post-chorus 1, Line 7; Post-chorus 2, Line 7)	Syntactic	Parallel to the previous line, this ellipsis emphasizes the breakdown of communication. The broken grammar reflects a broken spirit; the language itself feels depleted of energy which shows deep empathy for someone who has entirely run out of options.

"Once upon a time, I was falling in love" (<i>Post-chorus 1, Line 1; Post-chorus 2, Line 1</i>)	Discourse	It appropriates the classic discourse marker of fairy tales to establish a psychological expectation of innocence, magic, and a guaranteed happy ending. It anchors the listener in a nostalgic and beautiful memory of romance.
"But now I'm only falling apart" (<i>Post-chorus 1, Line 2; Post-chorus 2, Line 2</i>)	Discourse	Placed immediately after the fairy tale opening, this line acts as a brutal structural subversion. It flips the word play of " <i>falling</i> " from a beautiful descent into romance into a tragic and psychological collapse. The contrast between the past and present ruin triggers a profound sense of grief and heartbreak.

As detailed in Table 1, the affective resonance of the text is produced through a deliberate interplay of multi-level linguistic deviations that work systematically to externalize emotional trauma. Rather than operating as isolated poetic flourishes, these deviations work together, with semantic deviation serving as the dominant thematic driver, underpinned by syntactic, morphological, and discourse shifts.

The semantic landscape subverts classic pop-romance tropes by re-framing love not as a refuge, but as a volatile, claustrophobic, and catastrophic phenomenon. This dominant reliance on high-stakes figurative language aligns with broader stylistic literature. Xie and Zhang (2025) note that semantic deviation is the primary mechanism for poetic foregrounding; just as their analysis of E.E. Cummings demonstrates how semantic juxtaposition shifts conceptual distance, the target text uses cosmic scales and physical volatility to elevate personal heartbreak into an existential crisis. Similar semantic foregrounding strategies have been documented across genres, where abstract emotional states are rendered through active physical domain transfers (Ahmad et al., 2024). The heavy reliance on conceptual metaphors within the text echoes quantitative findings in commercial songwriting, where figurative

imagery serves as the core vehicle for communicating complex psychological distress (Amalia, 2024; Malik, 2019).

This overarching semantic scale is physically realized and validated through lower-level structural deviations. Where the semantic choices establish the *magnitude* of the grief, the morphological clippings and syntactic ellipses project the speaker's physical and psychological exhaustion. Truncated forms and omitted grammatical subjects simulate a state of affective collapse, signaling that the narrator lacks the emotional stamina to maintain formal linguistic conventions. Lastly, discourse-level deviations act as the narrative framework, setting up psychological expectations of an idealized romance only to shatter them through immediate structural subversions. Together, these cross-level deviations transform conventional language into a fluid representation of psychological panic.

Table 2. Patterns of Parallelism in the lyrics of Total Eclipse of the Heart and its functions

Lines/Texts	Parallelism	Stylistic Function
"need... now" (<i>Chorus 1, Line 1; Chorus 2, Line 1</i>)	Phonological	The heavy repetition of the nasal 'n' sound gives a vibrating hum that sounds remarkably like a deep sigh. By giving the vocals this raw and physical quality, the song bypasses standard listening and forces us to feel the speaker's immediate desperation in a deeply personal way.
"love is like" (<i>Chorus 1, Line 8; Chorus 2, Line 8</i>)	Phonological	The gentle repetition of the liquid 'l' sound softens the delivery of the line, mimicking the beauty of a failing romance. This shift to a lighter tone offers the listener a quiet breath of peace just before the entire relationship falls apart.
"Every now and then..." (<i>Verse 1, Lines 2, 5, 8, & 11; Verse 2, Lines 2, 5, 8, & 11; Verse 3, Lines 2, 5, 8, & 10</i>)	Lexical	Repeating this phrase makes the speaker's grief feel like a cycle they cannot break. This steady and hypnotic rhythm

		forces us to feel the suffocating weight of someone trapped inside their own painful thoughts.
"I get a little bit + <i>adjective</i> " (Verse 1, Lines 2, 5, 8, & 11; Verse 2, Lines 2, 5, 8, & 11)	Syntactic	Using the same grammatical frame to list different adjectives acts like a pile-up of pain. It stacks the speaker's vulnerabilities one by one, building a suffocating pressure that makes the listeners feel their absolute exhaustion.
"And I need you now tonight" / "And I need you more than ever" (Chorus 1, Lines 1 & 2; Chorus 2, Lines 1 & 2)	Syntactic	Keeping the same structure but making the final words stronger builds a theme of desperate survival. This steady escalation triggers a wave of rising panic, making the listeners feel the absolute urgency of the speaker's heartbreak.
"Once upon a time, I was falling in love" / "But now I'm only falling apart" (Post-chorus 1, Lines 1 & 2; Post-chorus 2, Lines 1 & 2)	Antithetical	By pairing two matching lines with the word ' <i>falling</i> ,' the song creates a harsh and ironic contrast. It flips a beautiful memory of falling in love into the painful reality of falling apart, forcing the listener to feel the bittersweet ache of a shattered dream.

While the linguistic deviations outlined in Table 1 highlight the speaker's sudden emotional state, the systematic structural parallelisms in Table 2 establish a rigid and cyclical architecture that mirrors psychological entrapment, mounting tension, and persistent distress. At the macro-level, parallelism in the text operates through two distinct structural mechanisms: cyclical stagnation and climactic escalation. Lexical and syntactic repetitions establish an inescapable loop that captures the repetitive nature of intrusive thoughts. By maintaining fixed

grammatical frames while interchanging modifying elements, the text creates an additive and cumulative weight. This technique reflects the findings of Gu (2024), who asserts that strict structural equivalence across parts of speech generates an overarching matrix of inevitability. Rather than offering resolution, the repeated syntactic templates stack emotional states in a way that intensifies the listener's perception of claustrophobia.

As highlighted in Table 2, these parallel templates depend heavily on micro-variations to drive the narrative forward. This structural dynamic is well-documented in stylistic research; both Longxi (2021) and Xie and Zhang (2025) demonstrate that parallelism achieves its strongest dramatic pathos when minor lexical substitutions or antitheses are injected into a fixed matrix. In the target lyrics, this happens in two main ways. First, subtle changes at the end of repeating lines build emotional tension, turning a simple need into full-blown panic. Second, the song uses strict repetition to contrast opposite ideas like turning a romantic "*falling*" into a mental breakdown which makes a good balanced line feel intensely tragic.

Finally, this macro-structural rigidity is anchored by micro-phonological patterns. The alternating use of resonant nasals and soft liquids creates acoustic contrast, shifting between oppressive physical grief and fragile quietude. Ultimately, where deviation breaks the text open to signal raw vulnerability, parallelism builds the emotional prison that keeps the speaker and by extension, the listener was trapped within it.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the song lyrics of Bonnie Tyler's "*Total Eclipse of the Heart*" demonstrate a literary technique that effectively communicates the profound complexities of despair, vulnerability, and inescapable grief. Through a stylistic lens, the text reveals the anxious, casual questioning and fragmented speech of the initial verses and chorus, shifting toward the heavy and breathless realizations of complete powerlessness in the post-chorus, and culminating in the stark, devastating cosmic metaphors that define its emotional peak. This structural form directly mirrors the speaker's progressive emotional unraveling. Furthermore, the interplay of internal devices, including the structural parallelism of cyclical repetition, the conversational vulnerability of morphological clipping, and the tragic juxtaposition of fairy-tale discourse with brutal relational collapse, works cohesively to deepen the textual resonance of the song, allowing it to stand independently as a robust piece of literary art. Among these devices,

repetition emerges as the most dominant, intensifying the inescapable nature of the speaker's longing. In contrast to the dominance of standard figurative substitutions in contemporary music, the song's unique stylistic choices present emotional trauma as a suffocating, shadow-like force that resists simple resolution, instead recurring endlessly through desperate pleas and explosive imagery.

Beyond its immediate textual analysis, the findings also provide significant implications for stylistics and language studies by validating pop culture lyrics as rich sites of literary inquiry and demonstrating how formal tools transform subjective musical impressions into concrete and verifiable data. By using formal analysis to explain why vintage tracks resurrected by digital algorithms successfully captivate new generations, this study highlights how literary studies can dynamically adapt to the modern landscape. What uniquely distinguishes this study from past literature is its shift away from subjective, biographical commentary in favor of a rigorous, multi-level application of Foregrounding Theory; by isolating the verbal text, it proves that the lyrics possess a self-contained aesthetic gravity capable of generating a profound emotional impact on their own. To build upon this foundation, future research should adopt a multimodal framework to examine how the song's musical elements such as dramatic key shifts and Bonnie Tyler's distinctive vocal performance interact with and reinforce these linguistic structures. Additionally, scholars should explore how contemporary digital and visual performance formats on platforms like TikTok physically manifest these textual tensions, while conducting comparative stylistic analyses with other iconic 1980s power ballads to determine whether these specific patterns of deviation and parallelism serve as defining linguistic markers of the genre as a whole.

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APPENDIX 1. Song Lyrics

TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

Bonnie Tyler

[Verse 1]

1. (Turn around)
2. Every now and then, I get a little bit lonely
3. And you're never coming 'round
4. (Turn around)
5. Every now and then, I get a little bit tired
6. Of listening to the sound of my tears
7. (Turn around)
8. Every now and then, I get a little bit nervous
9. That the best of all the years have gone by
10. (Turn around)
11. Every now and then, I get a little bit terrified
12. And then I see the look in your eyes

[Refrain]

1. (Turn around, bright eyes)
2. Every now and then, I fall apart
3. (Turn around, bright eyes)
4. Every now and then, I fall apart

[Verse 2]

1. (Turn around)
2. Every now and then, I get a little bit restless
3. And I dream of something wild
4. (Turn around)
5. Every now and then, I get a little bit helpless
6. And I'm lying like a child in your arms
7. (Turn around)
8. Every now and then, I get a little bit angry
9. And I know I've got to get out and cry
10. (Turn around)
11. Every now and then, I get a little bit terrified



12. But then I see the look in your eyes

[Refrain]

1. (Turn around, bright eyes)
2. Every now and then, I fall apart
3. (Turn around, bright eyes)
4. Every now and then, I fall apart

[Chorus 1]

1. And I need you now tonight
2. And I need you more than ever
3. And if you only hold me tight
4. We'll be holding on forever
5. And we'll only be making it right
6. 'Cause we'll never be wrong
7. Together, we can take it to the end of the line
8. Your love is like a shadow on me all of the time (All of the time)
9. I don't know what to do and I'm always in the dark
10. We're living in a powder keg and giving off sparks
11. I really need you tonight
12. Forever's gonna start tonight
13. Forever's gonna start tonight

[Post-Chorus 1]

1. Once upon a time, I was falling in love
2. But now I'm only falling apart
3. There's nothing I can do
4. A total eclipse of the heart
5. Once upon a time, there was light in my life
6. But now there's only love in the dark
7. Nothing I can say
8. A total eclipse of the heart

[Interlude]

(Turn around, bright eyes)

(Turn around, bright eyes)

[Verse 3]

1. (Turn around)
2. Every now and then, I know you'll never be the boy
3. You always wanted to be
4. (Turn around)
5. But every now and then, I know you'll always be the only boy
6. Who wanted me the way that I am
7. (Turn around)
8. Every now and then, I know there's no one in the universe
9. As magical and wondrous as you
10. (Every now and then, I know there's nothing any better
11. There's nothing that I just wouldn't do

[Refrain]

1. (Turn around, bright eyes)
2. Every now and then, I fall apart
3. (Turn around, bright eyes)
4. Every now and then, I fall apart

[Chorus 2]

1. And I need you now tonight (And I need you)
2. And I need you more than ever
3. And if you only hold me tight (If you love me)
4. We'll be holding on forever
5. And we'll only be making it right (And we'll never)
6. 'Cause we'll never be wrong
7. Together, we can take it to the end of the line
8. Your love is like a shadow on me all of the time (All of the time)
9. I don't know what to do, I'm always in the dark
10. We're living in a powder keg and giving off sparks
11. I really need you tonight
12. Forever's gonna start tonight
13. (Forever's gonna start tonight)

[Post-Chorus 2]

1. Once upon a time, I was falling in love
2. But now I'm only falling apart



3. Nothing I can do
4. A total eclipse of the heart
5. Once upon a time, there was light in my life
6. But now there's only love in the dark
7. Nothing I can say
8. A total eclipse of the heart
9. A total eclipse of the heart
10. A total eclipse of the heart

[Outro]

1. (Turn around, bright eyes)
2. (Turn around, bright eyes)
3. (Turn around)
4. (Ooh-ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh)
5. (Ah-ha, ah-ha)
6. (Ah-ha, ah-ha)
7. (Ooh, ooh-ooh)

