

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF IMPLICATURE AND SPEECH ACTS IN BILLIE EILISH'S WILDFLOWER LYRICS

Aroon Fritz Ogest Malau¹, Agnesia Yohana M Purba², Yuni Maria Manullang³,
Eriana Crista Br Tambunan⁴, Rina Octavia Simarmata⁵

English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
HKBP Nommensen University, Medan, North Sumatera

Email : aroon.fritzogestmalau@students.uhn.ac.id¹ agnesia.purba@student.uhn.ac.id²
yuni.mariamanullang@student.uhn.ac.id³ eriana.cristabrtambunan@student.uhn.ac.id⁴
rinasimarmata@uhn.ac.id⁵

ABSTRACT

This study explores the lyrics of "Wildflower" by Billie Eilish through a pragmatic lens, employing a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected from the official lyrics on sonora.id and analyzed using Grice's theory of implicature and Searle's theory of speech acts. The objective is to identify the dominant types of speech acts assertive, expressive, directive, commissive, and declarative and to uncover the implicit meanings within the lyrics, including generalized and particularized implicatures. The findings reveal that assertive speech acts dominate, highlighting the speaker's intention to present facts, emotional reflections, and personal experiences. Expressive acts add emotional depth by conveying feelings such as pain, regret, and longing. Particularized implicatures occur more frequently than generalized ones, indicating a reliance on contextual interpretation. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that "Wildflower" employs language as both a medium of emotional expression and a communicative act, contributing to broader discussions in pragmatics, particularly in the context of popular music discourse.

Keywords: pragmatics, speech acts, implicature, Billie Eilish, song lyrics

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the meaning of utterances in context. Unlike semantics, which studies meaning in a more abstract or literal sense, pragmatics pays attention to how meaning is constructed in real communicative situations. Two core concepts in this field are speech acts and implicature, which together offer valuable insights into how language functions not only to inform but also to express, persuade, and imply. These pragmatic tools have been widely applied to various forms of discourse, including political speeches, advertisements, daily conversations, and most recently, song lyrics.

The theory of speech acts, introduced by John Searle (1969), argues that language is not just used to describe reality but also to perform actions. Searle categorized speech acts into five types: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. Each of these types reflects a different kind of communicative intention. For instance, assertives aim to state facts or beliefs; directives attempt to get the listener to do something; expressives reveal the speaker's psychological state; commissives commit the speaker to future actions; and declaratives bring about changes in the world by their utterance. These acts can be found in various forms of communication, including the emotionally loaded world of songwriting.

In parallel, implicature is another pragmatic tool introduced by philosopher H. P. Grice (1975), which explains how listeners can understand meanings that are not explicitly stated. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle and four conversational maxims quantity, quality, relation, and manner which guide how participants in a conversation typically behave to ensure effective communication. When these maxims are deliberately flouted, they give rise to implicatures, or hidden meanings. Implicatures are further divided into generalized (interpreted without much context) and particularized (requiring specific contextual knowledge). In song lyrics, implicatures allow artists to express ideas indirectly, creating layers of meaning that invite interpretation and emotional engagement from listeners.

In the contemporary music industry, lyrics have evolved beyond their poetic and aesthetic value. They serve as vehicles for emotional expression, social critique, and narrative storytelling. Among the many influential figures in this landscape, Billie Eilish has emerged as a powerful voice, known for her introspective and emotionally intense songwriting. Her song “Wildflower”, released in 2024, offers a complex interplay of subtle emotions such as longing, jealousy, regret, and vulnerability many of which are not explicitly stated but implied through thoughtful word choices and indirect expressions.

“Wildflower” stands out not only for its haunting melody and minimalist production but also for the way its lyrics communicate emotional depth using pragmatic strategies. Lines such as “Do you see her in the back of your mind?” and “You showed her the world” are loaded with implicatures that suggest inner conflict, comparisons, and lingering jealousy. At the same time, utterances like “I wasn’t there but I know” or “You don’t need to remind me” carry expressive and assertive speech acts, revealing the speaker’s emotional state and personal stance. These features make “Wildflower” a compelling subject for pragmatic analysis.

Previous studies have applied pragmatic theories to explore meaning in songs. Ginting et al. (2024) analyzed speech acts and implicature in Tulus’ “Gajah”, uncovering how indirect language reflected themes of self-acceptance. Mukminin (2024) studied illocutionary acts in Tiara Andini’s “Kupu-Kupu”, finding expressive acts to be dominant. Meanwhile, Setyawati et al. (2023) focused on commissive speech acts in Ed Sheeran’s “Perfect”. These studies demonstrate the relevance and applicability of pragmatic theories in analyzing music lyrics. However, there is still limited research on Billie Eilish’s “Wildflower”, especially regarding the interaction between speech acts and implicatures in expressing hidden emotional messages.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the lyrics of “Wildflower” using a descriptive qualitative method based on Searle’s (1969) speech act theory and Grice’s (1975) implicature theory. The focus lies on identifying the types of speech acts present in the lyrics particularly which type dominates as well as distinguishing between generalized and particularized implicatures. Moreover, this study seeks to understand how these pragmatic elements contribute to conveying implicit meanings and emotional narratives within the song.

The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to the field of applied linguistics, especially in the area of pragmatics in pop culture discourse. Analyzing how artists like Billie Eilish construct meanings through indirectness and emotional implication enriches our understanding of how language functions in artistic contexts. It also helps listeners and readers engage more deeply with the text, recognizing that behind simple words may lie complex messages shaped by context, intention, and emotion.

In essence, this study not only aims to categorize speech acts and implicatures found in “Wildflower” but also to interpret how these linguistic features mirror personal experiences, relationship dynamics, and emotional depth. Through this pragmatic lens, “Wildflower” becomes more than a song it becomes a rich communicative event that invites us to explore the subtleties of human connection through language.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the lyrics of Billie Eilish's "Wildflower" using a pragmatic approach. The data were obtained through documentation of the official lyrics from sonora.id. The analysis involved dividing the lyrics into stanzas and examining each line through the frameworks of Grice's theory of implicature (1975) and Searle's theory of speech acts (1969).

The focus of the analysis is twofold: (1) to classify the types of speech acts assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative and determine which type is dominant; and (2) to identify the presence and dominance of generalized and particularized implicatures. Each utterance in the lyrics was analyzed based on its pragmatic function and implicit meaning.

As a non-empirical study (non-test), this research does not involve human subjects or experiments but relies solely on textual analysis of the song. The goal is to show how language in the song is strategically employed to communicate emotions, personal reflections, and nuanced meanings through pragmatically rich expressions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the pragmatic analysis of Billie Eilish's Wildflower lyrics is presented through a detailed examination of implicature and speech acts. Each selected lyric segment is analyzed to uncover the implied meanings beyond the literal text (implicature) general and specific as well as the communicative intentions expressed through various speech acts, based on John Searle's classification. This approach allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and interpersonal messages embedded in the song, highlighting how Billie Eilish uses language to convey complex feelings such as love, jealousy, doubt, and reconciliation. The table below summarizes the analysis by dividing the lyrics into meaningful segments, categorizing the speech acts, and identifying the implicatures involved.

DATA

Things fall apart
And time breaks your heart
I wasn't there but I know
She was your girl
You showed her the world
But fell out of love and you both let go
She was crying on my shoulder
All I could do was hold her
Only made us closer
Until July
Now, I know that you love me
You don't need to remind me
I should put it all behind me
Shouldn't I?
But I see her in the back of my mind
All the time
Like a fever
Like I'm burning alive
Like a sign
Did I cross the line?
Well, good things don't last (Good things don't last)
And life moves so fast (Life moves so fast)
I'd never ask
Who was better

'Cause she couldn't be
More different from me
Happy and free in leather
And I know that you love me (You love me)
You don't need to remind me (Remind me)
Wanna put it all behind me
But, baby
I see her in the back of my mind (Back of my mind)
All the time (All the time)
Feels like a fever (Like a fever)
Like I'm burning alive (Burning alive)
Like a sign
Did I cross the line? (Cross the line)
You say no one knows you so well
But every time you touch me, I just wonder how she felt
Valentine's Day crying in the hotel
I know you didn't mean to hurt me, so I kept it to myself
And I wonder
Do you see her in the back of your mind?
In my eyes?
You say no one knows you so well
But every time you touch me, I just wonder how she felt
Valentine's Day crying in the hotel
I know you didn't mean to hurt me, so I kept it to myself

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This section explores the results of a pragmatic analysis of Billie Eilish's song "Wildflower," focusing on how the lyrics reflect both speech acts and implicatures, following the frameworks of Searle (1976) and Grice (1975). The goal is to understand how Eilish communicates emotion, inner conflict, and unspoken thoughts through carefully chosen words. The table below outlines key excerpts from the lyrics and categorizes them according to these two pragmatic theories.

Lyrics	Speech Act Type	Explanation
Things fall apart	Assertive	indicates a situation or reality that suggests that a relationship will end. The speaker expresses their belief in a reality.
And time breaks your heart	Assertive	A statement describing the consequences of the sad passage of time. contains an opinion that is considered reasonable.
I wasn't there but I know	Assertive	Speakers show an attitude of trust in the information by conveying knowledge even though they have not experienced it themselves.
She was your girl / You showed her the world	Assertive	convey information or details about the previous relationship with the interlocutor.

But fell out of love and you both let go	Assertive	States the past state of a relationship that serves an informative function.
She was crying on my shoulder	Assertive	A statement of fact about an event that has happened before.
All I could do was hold her	Expressive	Express personal feelings; show empathy and helplessness.
Only made us closer	Assertive	Conveying the consequences of the situation that occurred in the form of a closer relationship.
Now I know that you love me	Assertive	A statement of new awareness; a type of affirmation of an ongoing relationship.
You don't need to remind me	Directive	The speaker gives instructions so that the interlocutor does not need to repeat what has been said.
I should put it all behind me, shouldn't I?	Commissive	implies a commitment to try to forget, even if it is difficult to forget.
But I see her in the back of my mind	Assertive	Expresses an internal psychological experience.
Like a fever / Like I'm burning alive	Expressive	The expression is used metaphorically to show the pain experienced by the speaker.
Did I cross the line?	Directive	Questions that indicate a request for clarification from the interlocutor and an instruction to make a comment.
You say no one knows you so well	Assertive	Quotes the listener's statement an indirect speech act.
But every time you touch me, I just wonder how she felt	Expressive	Overcoming conflict and jealousy; ways to communicate privately
Valentine's Day crying in the hotel	Assertive	recounting past events in the form of experiences or observations.
I know you didn't mean to hurt me, so I kept it to myself	Assertive	forms a judgment of the interlocutor's intentions; expresses knowledge and reasons for his/her stance.
And I wonder, do you see her in the back of your mind?	Directive	Rhetorical questions that touch or arouse the feelings of the interlocutor

The analysis of speech acts in Billie Eilish's "Wildflower" reveals a predominance of assertive and expressive acts, highlighting the singer's emphasis on emotional honesty and introspection. Assertive acts, such as "Things fall apart" and "She was your girl", serve to express factual or belief-based statements about past relationships and emotional experiences.

These lines position the speaker as an observer of relational collapse, affirming personal truth and psychological insight.

Expressive acts, including lines like “Like I’m burning alive” and “I just wonder how she felt”, are central to conveying Billie’s internal emotional landscape. These utterances reflect pain, jealousy, and emotional vulnerability. This finding aligns with Ginting et al. (2024), who studied the Indonesian song “Gajah” by Tulus and found that expressive and assertive acts dominate emotionally driven lyrics. While both songs utilize expressive forms, “Wildflower” differs in that it delves more deeply into inner conflict and self-questioning, whereas “Gajah” leans toward social commentary and acceptance of identity.

In addition, commissive speech acts, though fewer in number, appear meaningfully, such as in “I should put it all behind me, shouldn’t I?”. This line suggests a tentative commitment to move forward but with uncertainty. According to Setyawati et al. (2024), in their study on Ed Sheeran’s “Perfect”, commissives are used to portray romantic promises and future-oriented intentions. In contrast, Billie’s commissive statements are more conflicted and introspective, signaling hesitation rather than resolution Directive acts are also present in “Wildflower”, often in the form of rhetorical questions like “Do you see her in the back of your mind?” which invite emotional reflection rather than action. This is consistent with Hutasoit (2025) who, in a study of Batak songs, noted that indirect directives are often employed to elicit emotional responses rather than explicit behavior .

In summary, Billie Eilish’s “Wildflower” employs speech acts not only to describe external events but also to mirror internal psychological and emotional realities. The dominance of assertive and expressive acts reflects an introspective narrative style, differing from previous studies that examined speech acts in songs with more declarative or romantic themes. This supports the conclusion that speech acts in contemporary music serve a wide range of communicative functions informative, emotional, reflective, and interactive.

Table 3.1 Speech Acts analysis

Lyrics	Types of Implicature	Explanation
Things fall apart	Generalized Implicature	A general expression for a rift that can be understood without the added context that something stable has broken.
Time breaks your heart	Particularized Implicature	The knowledge that speakers have does not come from their own experience; instead, it comes from information told by others or seen from evidence.
You showed her the world	Particularized Implicature	symbolic meaning; not showing the world directly, but giving everything through love.
Only made us closer	Particularized Implicature	The fact that their emotional state brought them close, albeit unintentionally, had a significant impact.
You don't need to remind me	Particularized Implicature	indicates that the speaker is actually distracted or does not want to be reminded, despite actually saying otherwise.
Should put it all behind me	Generalized Implicature	Idioms that imply having to move on from the past, even though the

		speakers themselves have not fully been able to do so.
I just wonder how she felt	Particularized Implicature	indicates that the person speaking feels compared or unsure of their partner's feelings.
Valentine's Day crying in the hotel	Particularized Implicature	The speaker said that he endured the wound to maintain the relationship.
Do you see her in the back of your mind?	Particularized Implicature	This question shows that the speaker still feels overshadowed by the partner's ex-lover.

FINDINGS

This study aims to analyze the song lyrics of Billie Eilish's "Wildflower" by applying two major pragmatic approaches: Speech Acts Theory and Implicature Theory. The analysis focuses on identifying how each utterance in the lyrics functions pragmatically and how implicit meanings contribute to the interpretative richness of the text.

The analysis of speech acts in "Wildflower" reveals a rich tapestry of pragmatic functions embedded in emotional and poetic language. The dominant types of speech acts observed in the lyrics are expressive, assertive, commissive, and directive.

1. Findings Based on Speech Acts Theory

a. Expressive Acts

Expressive speech acts are significantly present in the lyrics. These acts reveal the speaker's inner emotions, feelings of loss, disappointment, jealousy, and sorrow. For instance, the lyric "You showed her the world" is a strong expressive utterance that conveys disappointment and envy. The speaker does not merely describe an action but expresses a deep emotional wound associated with betrayal or being replaced. Other expressive lines such as "I wasn't there but I know" show the speaker's lingering pain and her struggle to come to terms with the reality of the situation.

Moreover, "You don't need to remind me" functions as an expressive act rooted in emotional irritation or hurt. It implies that the speaker is already burdened with memory and guilt, and does not wish to relive the pain. Such expressions reflect the speaker's psychological state and convey more than the literal meanings of the words.

b. Assertive Acts

Assertive speech acts are also prominent, particularly in the parts of the lyrics where the speaker conveys belief or knowledge. In "I wasn't there but I know", the speaker asserts her emotional understanding of a situation she didn't witness directly. This utterance asserts emotional knowledge derived not from fact, but from intuition and emotional inference. Similarly, "Things fall apart" is an assertive utterance that states a general truth or observation about the impermanence of relationships. It is philosophical in tone and reinforces the theme of decay and detachment.

The line "Fell out of love" is another assertive act—it asserts a conclusion about an emotional journey that has reached its end. It positions the speaker not as a passive victim, but as someone who recognizes and declares a painful truth.

c. Commissive Acts

Although less frequent, commissive acts—where the speaker commits to a future action or emotion—are subtly embedded in the lyrics. For instance, the line "She was crying on my shoulder" might be interpreted as a commissive act in the sense that the speaker positions

herself as emotionally available, silently promising to support the person she addresses, even if the feelings are not reciprocated.

Additionally, the implication in “I stayed up for you” can also carry commissive overtones—it signifies past commitment that extends emotionally into the present, underscoring loyalty and sacrifice.

d. Directive Acts

Directive speech acts are minimal but notable. An example is the lyric “You don’t need to remind me”, which functions as an indirect directive—discouraging the hearer from repeating a painful truth. Though not a clear command, it subtly instructs the interlocutor to refrain from certain actions, which adds pragmatic tension and emotional subtlety to the conversation depicted in the song.

Overall, the speech acts in “Wildflower” demonstrate a nuanced dialogue—not between two people directly, but between the speaker and an imagined or remembered interlocutor. This inner dialogue becomes a vehicle for both expressing and processing complex emotions.

2. Findings Based on Implicature Theory

The implicature analysis of the song reveals a complex interplay between generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, which contribute significantly to the poetic ambiguity and emotional resonance of the lyrics.

a. Generalized Implicatures

Generalized implicatures are those that do not depend heavily on context to be understood. Lines such as “Things fall apart” and “Fell out of love” are instances of generalized implicature. These phrases imply relational decay, emotional distance, and detachment, all of which are universally understood without needing contextual elaboration.

For example, “Fell out of love” implies a process of emotional disconnection, not requiring the listener to know the specific details of the speaker’s relationship. The strength of generalized implicature lies in its accessibility—these lines speak to broad, relatable human experiences.

Similarly, “You showed her the world” implies generous acts of affection and dedication, suggesting emotional investment toward someone else. The implicature here allows the listener to infer romantic involvement and contrast it with the speaker’s own emotional exclusion.

b. Particularized Implicatures

In contrast, particularized implicatures rely heavily on context and emotional subtext. These require the listener to interpret hidden meanings based on knowledge of relational dynamics or emotional states.

The line “I wasn’t there but I know” implies that the speaker possesses knowledge derived from emotional cues or intuition rather than firsthand experience. The listener must infer that the speaker is deeply affected despite being physically absent, suggesting emotional attachment and possibly jealousy.

Likewise, “Do you see her in the back of your mind?” implies insecurity and suspicion. It suggests that the speaker feels overshadowed or replaced by another person. The implicature here relies on the listener understanding that memory and emotional attachment to an ex-lover may haunt the present.

Another rich example is “You don’t need to remind me”. This carries multiple layers of implicature: pain, resentment, defensiveness, and possibly suppressed guilt. The listener is invited to interpret the tone as emotionally charged and not merely informative.

In addition, “She was crying on my shoulder” carries an implicature that reveals the speaker’s proximity to the emotional suffering of another, possibly a love triangle or third-

party perspective. It implies betrayal, closeness, and emotional entanglement—all at once — without explicitly stating it.

These particularized implicatures elevate the lyrics beyond their literal meanings, encouraging deeper reflection and emotional engagement. The richness of interpretation suggests that the speaker is struggling with complex emotions: love, loss, jealousy, regret, and resignation.

The findings demonstrate that Billie Eilish's "Wildflower" is a pragmatically rich text, exhibiting a dense network of speech acts that convey emotional expression, personal assertions, and relational dynamics. At the same time, the use of implicature—both generalized and particularized—adds depth to the emotional and communicative intentions of the speaker.

While expressive and assertive acts dominate the speech act analysis, the implicature findings reveal that particularized implicatures are more prevalent and powerful in conveying unspoken tensions and emotional conflict. The speaker's indirect communication style contributes to the emotional complexity of the song and encourages multiple interpretations based on the listener's own experiences and sensitivities.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined Billie Eilish's song "Wildflower" through the dual lenses of Speech Acts Theory and Implicature Theory, revealing the pragmatic richness embedded in the lyrics. The findings show that the lyrics predominantly employ expressive and assertive speech acts to convey the speaker's complex emotions such as disappointment, jealousy, sorrow, and resignation. These speech acts not only articulate the speaker's feelings but also frame an internal dialogue that invites listeners into the emotional experience.

Furthermore, the analysis of implicatures demonstrates how both generalized and particularized implicatures enrich the communicative texture of the song. Generalized implicatures offer broad, relatable meanings about relational decay and emotional distance, while particularized implicatures expose nuanced, context-dependent layers of unspoken feelings, such as insecurity, betrayal, and suppressed resentment. This layered pragmatic complexity allows the song to resonate emotionally with a diverse audience, transcending the literal meanings of the words.

Overall, this pragmatic analysis affirms that "Wildflower" is more than a mere lyrical composition; it functions as a subtle discourse of emotional negotiation. The interplay between direct speech acts and indirect implicatures reflects the multifaceted nature of human communication, especially in expressing vulnerability and relational pain. This

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