

Implicature in “You Belong with Me” by Taylor Swift

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the implicature found in the lyrics of *You Belong with Me* by Taylor Swift, using H.P. Grice’s theory of conversational implicature. The research aims to identify the types of implicature used, determine which conversational maxims are flouted, and explore how these implicatures contribute to the emotional meaning of the song. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the researchers analyzed each line of the lyrics and categorized the utterances based on Grice’s four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner. The findings reveal a total of eleven implicatures, consisting of eight conversational and three conventional implicatures. The most frequently flouted maxims are Quantity and Quality, each appearing four times, followed by Relevance (3 times) and Manner (1 time). The study concludes that implicature plays a crucial role in conveying hidden emotional messages in the lyrics, allowing the songwriter to express longing, jealousy, and connection indirectly. This research supports the idea that song lyrics function as a form of discourse rich in pragmatic features and affirms the relevance of applying Gricean pragmatics in analyzing musical texts.

Keywords: *Implicature; Pragmatics; Grice; Conversational maxims; Song lyrics.*

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary tool for human communication not only to convey information clearly but also to construct meaning that relies heavily on context. In the field of pragmatics, meaning is often not stated outright; instead, it must be interpreted based on the situation, the relationship between speakers, and their cultural backgrounds. Recent research highlights that pragmatics plays a crucial role in cross cultural communication, where understanding depends greatly on adapting to social norms and contextual cues (Harahap et al., 2024).

One of the key concepts in the study of pragmatics is implicature, which was first introduced by H.P. Grice through the Cooperative Principle. According to Grice, for communication to be effective, speakers and listeners must cooperate by following four maxims: the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. However, in practice, speakers do not always adhere to these rules strictly. Instead, they often deliberately violate these maxims to convey hidden or implied meanings. Recent research shows that implicature and presupposition in song lyrics can be analyzed to reveal messages that are not explicitly expressed by the songwriter (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Building on this theory, analyzing song lyrics gives us a special chance to

uncover meanings that go deeper than just the literal words. Song lyrics are often used as a means to convey emotions, personal experiences, and social messages implicitly. Through the use of figurative language, metaphors, and strong narrative flow, songwriters are able to convey deeper meanings than what is directly visible. A study of deixis and reference in Taylor Swift's songs shows that a pragmatic approach is essential to understanding how song lyrics create emotional closeness between singers and listeners and convey messages more effectively (Sahusilawane et al., 2023).

Taylor Swift is one of today's artists who's especially known for weaving subtle, meaningful language into her lyrics. Taylor Swift is known as a singer-songwriter who is adept at combining her personal experiences with literary elements in every lyric she creates. In "You Belong with Me," she conveys the theme of unrequited love and longing to be cared for by someone she loves. A recent study analyzing the lyrics in the album *Fearless (Taylor's Version)* shows that Taylor Swift uses various linguistic techniques to construct interpersonal meaning, including the use of mood expressions and modalities that reflect the emotions and attitudes of the characters in the song (Maulida & Imperiani, 2023).

These techniques reflect pragmatic tools like implicature, helping her express ideas in subtle yet impactful ways. Analyzing implicature in song lyrics helps us understand how songwriters convey complex messages without having to express them directly. In the song "You Belong with Me," for example, a study of implicature can show how Taylor Swift implies feelings of frustration, hope, and love through violations of Grice's cooperative principle. Recent research has shown that understanding the implicature in song lyrics can provide a deeper understanding of the songwriter's communicative intent, as well as explain how listeners respond emotionally to the implied messages (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Based on the previous description, this study aims to examine the types of implicatures that appear in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's "You Belong with Me" and how they enrich the overall meaning of the song. In addition, this study will also explore the maxims in Grice's Cooperative Principle that are violated in the lyrics. By applying the pragmatics approach, especially Grice's theory of implicature, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into the way hidden meanings are shaped and communicated through the lyrics of popular songs.

This study explores the use of conversational implicature in the lyrics of the song "You Belong with Me," guided by Grice's Theory of Implicature. This theory is used because it helps uncover the hidden or implied meanings behind what is said, offering insights beyond the literal words. The analysis aims to identify the types of implicature found in the lyrics, understand how these implied meanings contribute to the overall message of the song, and examine which of Grice's

Cooperative Principle maxims are intentionally flouted to create those effects.

This study explore the use of implicature in the lyrics of *You Belong with Me* by Taylor Swift through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following questions: What types of implicature are found in the lyrics of *You Belong with Me*? How do these implicatures contribute to the overall meaning of the song? And what maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle are flouted in the lyrics?

The significance of this research lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study enriches the field of pragmatics by providing insights into the analysis of implicatures in non-conventional texts, specifically song lyrics. It expands the scope of pragmatic studies by demonstrating how meaning is constructed and implied beyond everyday conversational contexts. Practically, the research offers valuable benefits for music enthusiasts and linguists by shedding light on the ways hidden meanings are conveyed in song lyrics. This understanding enhances their linguistic awareness and interpretative skills, allowing for a deeper appreciation and analysis of lyrical content.

Several previous studies have explored pragmatic elements in song lyrics, including implicature. A research on implicature in pop songs generally was carried out by Rahmawati in 2019. Although her study recognized implicature in lyrics, it was too general and too detailed to provide a targeted examination of a particular song or performer. In a similar vein, Wijayanti (2021) looked at expressive speech actions in English song lyrics, recognizing different kinds of emotional emotions while avoiding implicature as a main characteristic.

Smith (2018) highlighted the frequent violations of the Maxims of Quantity and Quality, especially in songs with love themes, and offered a genre-wide examination of conversational implicature in popular song lyrics. He did not, however, concentrate on a single song, which made it difficult to see how implicature evolved inside a whole poetic story. In contrast, Brown (2022) took a pragmatic approach to music discourse, examining metaphor and implicature in lyrics, but putting more emphasis on theoretical frameworks than on real-world implementation.

Few studies have carried out a thorough, lyric-by-lyric examination of a single song using Grice's theory as the primary analytical framework, despite the fact that these studies provide insightful information about the function of implicature in music. Furthermore, even though Taylor Swift's songs are full of narrative and oblique meaning, there isn't much study on implicature in her career.

Without offering a micro-level study, the majority of previous research has tended to concentrate on a few songs, speaking acts, or broad patterns. Using Grice's conversational maxims as the analytical framework, this research attempts to close

that gap by providing a targeted, line-by-line pragmatic analysis of implicature in Taylor Swift's "You Belong with Me" lyrics.

METHODS

Subjects of Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research design with a content analysis approach. This approach is considered appropriate to examine the implied meaning in song lyrics in detail and contextually. Through pragmatic discourse analysis, this research investigates how conversational implicatures emerge in the lyrics of the song "You Belong with Me" and how these implied meanings are shaped by violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle maxims. The analysis is conducted systematically to identify the types of implicatures present and to understand their role in conveying the overall message of the song.

This study uses the lyrics of the song "You Belong with Me" by Taylor Swift, which was released in 2008, as the main data. The lyrics are the main source in analyzing the forms of conversational implicature based on the theory developed by Grice. The unit of analysis in this study is sentences and phrases in the lyrics that contain implied meanings, especially those that show violations of the maxims in Grice's Cooperative Principle. Each relevant line will be analyzed to reveal the type of implicature that appears and how the meaning supports the overall message in the song.

This research focused on analyzing the lyrics of Taylor Swift's 2008 song "You Belong with Me", using them as the primary source of data. The analysis aimed to uncover implicit meanings within the lyrics, particularly those that reflect violations of the maxims in Grice's Cooperative Principle. These instances of implied meaning were treated as the main units of analysis to identify whether the implicatures were conventional or conversational, and to understand how they contributed to the song's overall message.

Because the study involved only textual data from the song lyrics, no human participants were included. The data collection process took place in two main stages. First, the official lyrics were obtained from a trusted source. Then, the lyrics were closely examined to identify lines that hinted at indirect or hidden meanings. These selected lines were later analyzed using pragmatic theory to explore the use of implicature.

Instruments

The analysis followed a structured qualitative approach. Initially, the lyrics were filtered to focus only on those lines relevant to the research specifically, those with potential implied meanings. These lines were then categorized based on the type of implicature, following Grice's framework of either conventional or conversational

implicature. Finally, each implicature was interpreted to determine which of Grice's maxims Quantity, Quality, Relevance, or Manner was being flouted. This interpretation also explored how the implied meanings shaped the emotional tone and deeper communicative intent of the song.

In this research, the instrument used is text analysis by referring to the Theory of Conversational Implicature proposed by Grice. Through this approach, the song lyrics are analyzed qualitatively descriptively to explore the hidden meanings that arise due to the violation of the maxims in the Cooperative Principle. This approach helps researchers understand indirect messages in song lyrics that can only be captured through context and pragmatic knowledge.

Data Collection

The data collection process in this research was conducted through two main stages. The first step was to obtain the official lyrics of the song "You Belong with Me" by Taylor Swift, which served as the main data source. Next, the researcher carefully analyzed the lyrics to find sentences or phrases that contain implicit meaning, especially those that reflect conversational implicature. These identified parts of the lyrics then became the focus of further analysis using pragmatic theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taylor Swift's song "You Belong With Me" features several lines that carry meanings beyond their literal wording. These lines were examined using Grice's theory of conversational implicature to reveal the indirect or implied messages within the lyrics. Throughout the song, themes such as emotional closeness, jealousy, longing, and subtle criticism are suggested without being directly expressed. From the analysis, a total of eleven lyric segments were identified as containing implicatures both conversational and conventional.

Table. 1 Classification and Frequency of Implicatures and Flouted Maxims in the Data

| Category | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Types of Implicature | |
| Conversational Implicature | 8 |
| Conventional Implicature | 3 |
| Flouted Maxims | |
| Maxim of Quantity | 4 |
| Maxim of Quality | 3 |
| Maxim of Relevance | 3 |
| Maxim of Manner | 1 |
| Total Implicature Identified | 11 |

This pattern of implicature use is consistent with findings from previous studies. For instance, Smith found that conversational implicatures in song lyrics

often involve the maxims of quantity and quality, especially in songs that explore emotions like longing and unspoken desire. Similarly, brown pointed out that implicature plays a key role in musical expression, helping listeners connect more deeply by evoking empathy and a sense of personal identification.

Table 2. Data Tabulation of Implicature Types and Flouted Maxims in the Analyzed Utterances

| No | Lyrics Segment | Type of Implicature | Flouted Maxim | Implied Meaning | f |
|----|---|---------------------|---------------|--|---|
| 1 | She wears short skirts, I wear T-shirts | Conversational | Quantity | She is more modest and down-to-earth | 4 |
| 2 | I'm in the room, it's a typical Tuesday night | Conversational | Relevance | She shares his daily life, unlike the girlfriend | 3 |
| 3 | You belong with me | Conventional | Quality | She believes he should be with her | 3 |
| 4 | She's cheer captain and I'm on the bleachers | Conversational | Quantity | She sees herself as the underdog | 4 |
| 5 | You say you're fine, I know you better than that | Conversational | Quality | She sees through his emotional front | 3 |
| 6 | I know your favourite songs and you tell me about your dreams | Conversational | Quantity | Their bond is emotionally close | 4 |
| 7 | Hey, what are you doing with a girl like that? | Conversational | Manner | She questions his choice indirectly | 1 |
| 8 | Have you ever thought, just maybe, you belong with me? | Conventional | Relevance | A rhetorical prompt for the realization | 3 |
| 9 | Laughing on a park bench, thinking to myself, "Hey, isn't this easy?" | Conversational | Relevance | Their moments together feel effortless | 3 |
| 10 | Standing by and waiting at your back door | Conventional | Quantity | She is always there, even unnoticed | 4 |
| 11 | Dreaming about the day when you wake up and find... | Conversational | Quality | He is looking for something already in front of him — here | 3 |

From the table, it is shown that most of the implicatures are conversational in nature, emerging from utterances that rely on context and flouting of maxims to express hidden emotions or contrasts. For instance, the line “*she wears short skirts, I wear t-shirts*” is categorized as conversational implicature and flouts the maxim of quantity because the speaker provides limited information to imply comparison and

personal values. Similarly, *"you say you're fine, I know you better than that"* is another example of implicature that flouts the maxim of quality to express emotional insight.

Among the four maxims, quantity and quality were the most frequently flouted each appearing in four different instances. This supports Grice's idea that speakers often bend these maxims to indirectly express personal thoughts, emotions, or criticisms. Additionally, there were three instances where the maxim of relevance was violated, reflecting how a speaker might include comments that seem off-topic but, in context, carry strong emotional weight. Finally, the maxim of manner was only flouted once, indicating that ambiguity or indirectness was used thoughtfully and not excessively throughout the lyrics.

According to the study of Taylor Swift's song "You Belong With Me," implicature is crucial in conveying the lyrics' unsaid emotional depth. The results indicate that while the remaining implicatures are conventional (3 out of 11), the bulk are conversational (8 out of 11). These findings provide credence to the use of Grice's theory in interpreting meaning that transcends literal interpretation.

Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature arises when a speaker deliberately bypasses one or more of Grice's maxims to subtly imply meaning. This mechanism is frequently employed within the song's lyrics to communicate contrast, unstated desire, emotional closeness, and nuanced critical remarks.

Flouting The Quantity Maxim

This maxim is flouted when the speaker provides less information than expected, requiring the listener to infer the intended meaning. In the line:

"she wears short skirts, I wear t-shirts,"

The speaker states two simple facts, yet the implication serves as a comparison—highlighting modesty and a sense of being more grounded than the rival. Similarly, the line:

"I know your favorite songs and you tell me about your dreams"

Suggests an emotional closeness and intimacy that does not require direct declaration. The flouting of this maxim reflects a narrative strategy that invites listeners to perceive the contrast between the speaker and the competing person without explicit articulation..

Flouting The Maxim Of Quality

The maxim of quality is violated when the speaker utters a statement that lacks objective truth or verifiability but is profoundly felt on an emotional level. For example:

"you belong with me". Is a personal conviction rather than a verifiable fact. Similarly:

"you say you're fine, I know you better than that"

Demonstrates the speaker's emotional awareness, implying that the addressee is concealing their true feelings. These examples illustrate how the lyrics utilize subjective assertions to convey emotional vulnerability and desire, which ultimately strengthens the song's emotional resonance.

Flouting The Maxim Of Relevance

This maxim is flouted when statements appear tangential to the primary conversation but are contextually relevant within an emotional or thematic framework. The line:

"Laughing on a park bench, thinking to myself, 'Hey, isn't this easy?'"

May initially seem like a general reflection, but it implicitly contrasts the ease of the narrator's connection with the boy against the perceived tension in his current relationship. Such floutings indicate emotional insight, nostalgia, and unspoken comparison, thereby supporting the use of implicature to deepen the narrative..

Flouting The Maxim Of Manner

This flouting was the least frequent, occurring only once: *"Hey, what you doing with a girl like that?"*

The indirect phrase *"a girl like that"* is vague and avoids explicitly criticizing the other person. This flouting allows the speaker to convey disapproval without direct confrontation, which is consistent with the song's emotional tone of quiet frustration and longing.

Conventional Implicature

Conventional implicature relies on the use of specific expressions that inherently carry implied meaning, irrespective of the particular context. In the lyrics:

"you belong with me"

This repeated assertion not only states the speaker's desire but conventionally implies that the boy is currently with someone with whom he does not belong. The line: *"standing by and waiting at your back door"*

Carries the conventional meaning of being consistently available and often unnoticed, evoking themes of loyalty and unreciprocated affection. Conventional implicatures in these lyrics function as fixed rhetorical strategies to frame the speaker's emotional position without requiring explicit elaboration.

The songwriter utilizes numerous pragmatic cues to convey complex emotional experiences, as evidenced by the high frequency of conversational implicature. Through tone, contrast, and emotional nuance, the audience is expected to deduce meaning from the song's highly contextualized narrative.

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Smith, 2018; Brown, 2022), emotional or romantic songs often contain implicatures based on concealing facts or proclaiming personal ideas. This is supported by the common disregard for the maxims of quantity and quality, which facilitates audience identification and

emotional involvement. Furthermore, the restrained use of the maxim of manner and the selective application of implicature suggest a conscious control over ambiguity. In keeping with a contemporary conversational aesthetic, the speaker maintains intelligibility while preserving room for audience interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that implicature plays a key role in revealing hidden meanings and emotional layers in Taylor Swift's "You Belong with Me." By examining how the song's lyrics flout Grice's conversational maxims particularly Quantity and Quality the research highlights how indirect language adds depth to both the story and the emotional tone. The findings show that implicature isn't just a feature of everyday conversation but also a powerful tool in artistic expression. This analysis adds to the field of pragmatics by showing how Grice's theory can be effectively applied to musical texts, offering fresh insight into how meaning is crafted in song lyrics as well as in literature and spoken language.

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