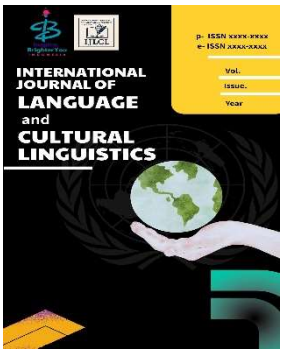
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The Impoliteness Strategies Of The Weekend's Songs: A Pragmatic Analysis Based On Culpeper's Theory

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Abstract:
This study analyzes the impoliteness strategies found in The Weeknd's song lyrics by applying Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness. Song lyrics are viewed as a form of communicative discourse that often contains face-threatening acts to represent emotional conflict, social relationships, and power dynamics. The study aims to identify the types of impoliteness strategies used in the lyrics and to explain their pragmatic functions. This research employs a qualitative method with data collected from purposively selected song lyrics. The analysis is based on Culpeper's five impoliteness strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. The findings reveal that all five impoliteness strategies are present in The Weeknd's lyrics. The most dominant strategies are positive impoliteness and sarcasm or mock politeness, which are mainly used to express emotional indifference, relational aggression, and social criticism. Meanwhile, bald on record impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and withhold politeness appear in expressions of direct confrontation, rejection, neglect, and the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. The study concludes that impoliteness in The Weeknd's song lyrics functions as a pragmatic device to convey emotions, dominance, conflict, and psychological vulnerability. The findings also demonstrate that impoliteness theory is applicable to the analysis of song lyrics beyond conventional conversational discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language serves not only as a medium of information exchange but also as a powerful social instrument through which individuals negotiate power, construct relationships, and express emotional experiences. One of the most pragmatically significant dimensions of language use is impoliteness, defined by Culpeper (1996) as communicative behavior deliberately designed to attack the hearer's face and cause social disharmony. While politeness has long dominated pragmatic research, the systematic study of impoliteness as an independent theoretical phenomenon has gained substantial scholarly attention only in recent decades,

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largely following Culpeper's foundational contribution to the field. Song lyrics constitute a culturally significant and linguistically rich form of discourse that reaches diverse audiences across social and generational boundaries. Unlike spontaneous conversation, song lyrics are deliberately crafted texts in which every linguistic choice carries intentional communicative and artistic weight, making them a particularly productive site for pragmatic analysis. The Weeknd, one of the most critically acclaimed R&B artists of his generation, produces lyrics that are widely recognized for their unflinching engagement with toxic relationships, emotional detachment, and interpersonal power dynamics. Songs such as Call Out My Name, Save Your Tears, Die For You, Out of Time, and Heartless contain a rich concentration of face-threatening acts that span the full range of Culpeper's impoliteness framework, making his lyrical corpus an ideal object of pragmatic inquiry.

Despite the growing body of research on impoliteness in musical discourse, no prior study has systematically examined The Weeknd's lyrics through the lens of Culpeper's framework. This study therefore addresses that gap.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of impoliteness strategies based on Culpeper's (1996) framework are found in The Weeknd's song lyrics?
2. What are the most dominant impoliteness strategies employed across the selected lyrical corpus?
3. What pragmatic functions do these impoliteness strategies serve within the lyrical context?

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and classify the impoliteness strategies present in the selected lyrics according to Culpeper's (1996) five-category framework.
2. To determine the dominant impoliteness strategies and analyze their distribution across the corpus.
3. To examine the pragmatic functions served by each strategy within its specific lyrical context.

Significance of the Study

At the theoretical level, this study extends the application of Culpeper's framework to an underexplored discourse context and contributes to the growing literature on the pragmatics of song lyrics as a legitimate and analytically productive discourse type. At the practical level, the findings provide a detailed account of how impoliteness functions as a pragmatic instrument in The Weeknd's lyrical practice, offering insights relevant to future research on the relationship between impoliteness, emotional expression, and artistic identity in contemporary musical discourse.

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Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on five purposively selected songs from The Weeknd's discography, namely Call Out My Name, Save Your Tears, Die For You, Out of Time, and Heartless. The analysis is confined to the written text of the lyrics and does not extend to musical, performative, or prosodic dimensions of his work. Interpretations offered represent analytically grounded readings informed by Culpeper's (1996) framework rather than claims about the artist's personal intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics and Language

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies how context influences meaning in communication. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meaning of words and sentences, pragmatics examines how speakers convey intended meanings and how hearers interpret those meanings in particular situations. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning, while Levinson (1983) emphasizes the relationship between language and context in understanding communication.

Several important concepts in pragmatics include speech acts, implicature, and face. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) argue that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions such as requesting, promising, or criticizing. Grice (1975) further explains how speakers often communicate meanings indirectly through conversational implicatures. These concepts provide the foundation for the study of politeness and impoliteness in language use.

Face Theory

The concept of face was first introduced by Goffman (1967), who defined it as the positive social value that individuals claim during social interaction. Face is not a fixed attribute but is constantly negotiated and maintained through communication. Therefore, speakers often engage in face-work to protect both their own face and that of others.

Brown and Levinson (1987) expanded this concept by distinguishing between positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire to be appreciated and accepted by others, while negative face refers to the desire for freedom and autonomy. Their theory suggests that many communicative acts have the potential to threaten face, which is why speakers often use politeness strategies to reduce conflict and maintain social harmony. This theory later became the basis for Culpeper's impoliteness framework.

Culpeper's Impoliteness Framework

Culpeper (1996) developed the theory of impoliteness to explain communicative behavior intended to attack face and create social conflict. He argued that previous theories focused mainly on politeness and neglected the study of offensive or face-threatening

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communication. Impoliteness is therefore understood as language use that damages the hearer's face and disrupts social harmony.

Culpeper proposed five impoliteness strategies. Bald on record impoliteness involves direct and unmitigated face attacks. Positive impoliteness damages the hearer's need for approval and acceptance through actions such as ignoring, excluding, or belittling them. Negative impoliteness threatens the hearer's freedom and autonomy through intimidation, criticism, or coercion. Sarcasm or mock politeness uses apparently polite expressions to convey criticism or ridicule indirectly. Finally, withhold politeness occurs when a speaker deliberately fails to provide politeness that is socially expected.

Culpeper later refined this framework by emphasizing the importance of context, intention, and emotional response in determining whether an utterance is perceived as impolite (Culpeper, 2011). The present study adopts this framework to analyze impoliteness strategies in The Weeknd's song lyrics.

Previous Studies on Impoliteness in Discourse

Research on impoliteness has been conducted in various discourse settings. Culpeper (2005) analyzed impoliteness in the television quiz show The Weakest Link and found that face attacks can serve entertainment purposes. Similarly, Bousfield (2008) examined impoliteness in naturally occurring interactions and highlighted the role of power and conflict in shaping impolite exchanges.

Recent studies have expanded impoliteness research to online communication, political discourse, and literary texts. These studies demonstrate that impoliteness is a strategic communicative resource used to express disagreement, establish power, and construct social identities in different contexts.

Previous Studies on Impoliteness in Song Lyrics

The application of impoliteness theory to song lyrics has gained increasing attention in recent years. Wulansari (2023) analyzed Ice Cube's songs and found that bald on record and positive impoliteness were the most dominant strategies used to express social criticism and resistance. Another study on Blackpink's lyrics (2025) identified several impoliteness strategies that contributed to identity construction and emotional expression.

Research on Falz's song "This Is Nigeria" also showed that impoliteness functions as an effective tool for social and political criticism. These studies demonstrate that song lyrics provide a valuable source of data for impoliteness analysis. However, studies focusing specifically on The Weeknd's lyrics remain Song Lyrics as Discourse

Song lyrics can be regarded as a form of discourse because they communicate ideas, emotions, and social meanings through language. Although lyrics are artistic in nature, they also function as communicative acts that reflect relationships between speakers and hearers. As a result, lyrics can be analyzed using pragmatic theories in the same way as other forms of discourse.

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Nahajec (2019) argues that song lyrics often contain implied meanings, irony, and contextual interpretations that make them suitable for pragmatic analysis. Therefore, studying song lyrics provides valuable insights into how language is used creatively to convey meanings and social messages. limited, creating a gap that this research seeks to address.

The Weeknd as a Lyrical Subject

The Weeknd is a Canadian singer, songwriter, and producer whose music frequently explores themes of toxic relationships, emotional detachment, desire, fame, and loneliness. His lyrics often portray complex interpersonal relationships characterized by power imbalance, manipulation, and emotional conflict.

From a pragmatic perspective, The Weeknd's lyrics are particularly interesting because they frequently contain expressions of dominance, rejection, criticism, and emotional withdrawal. These characteristics make his songs suitable for analysis using Culpeper's impoliteness framework. Although his work has been widely studied from cultural and sociological perspectives, research examining his lyrics through a pragmatic lens remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of impoliteness in musical discourse by analyzing impoliteness strategies in The Weeknd's song lyrics.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the impoliteness strategies found in The Weeknd's song lyrics. This design is considered appropriate because the study aims to describe and interpret linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur rather than to measure them statistically. According to Nassaji (2015), qualitative descriptive research focuses on providing a systematic description of a phenomenon without manipulation or experimental intervention. The study is situated within the field of pragmatics, particularly impoliteness research, and uses Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework as its primary analytical tool. The analysis is descriptive in identifying and categorizing impoliteness strategies and interpretive in examining their pragmatic functions within the lyrics.

Data Source

The data of this study are taken from the song lyrics of The Weeknd, a Canadian singer and songwriter known for themes related to toxic relationships, emotional detachment, and interpersonal power dynamics. Five songs were selected as the primary data source, namely Call Out My Name, Save Your Tears, Die For You, Out of Time, and Heartless. These songs were chosen because they contain themes of interpersonal conflict and emotional confrontation, provide rich pragmatic data, and represent The Weeknd's lyrical style across different stages of his career. The lyrics were obtained from officially licensed lyric platforms to ensure their authenticity and accuracy.

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Data Collection

The data were collected using purposive sampling. This technique allows the researcher to select data that are most relevant to the research objectives. The selection of lyrical excerpts was based on the following criteria:

1. Lyrics containing interpersonal conflict, emotional confrontation, or relational tension.
2. Lyrics containing utterances that indicate impoliteness strategies.
3. Lyrics taken from different albums to ensure broader representation of The Weeknd's work.

The researcher first collected the lyrics, read them repeatedly, and then identified utterances that potentially contained impoliteness strategies.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through the following steps:

Step 1: Reading and Familiarization

The researcher read the selected lyrics several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of their themes, meanings, and contexts.

Step 2: Identification of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Utterances that potentially threatened the hearer's positive face or negative face were identified based on Goffman's (1967) concept of face and Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness.

Step 3: Classification of Impoliteness Strategies

The identified utterances were classified according to Culpeper's (1996) five impoliteness strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness.

Step 4: Pragmatic Function Analysis

Each instance of impoliteness was analyzed to determine its communicative purpose and its role in constructing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer in the lyrics.

Step 5: Interpretation and Discussion

The findings were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework in order to identify patterns of impoliteness and explain their significance within The Weeknd's lyrical discourse.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, several measures were applied. First, theoretical triangulation was used by grounding the analysis in Culpeper's (1996) established framework. Second, contextual analysis was conducted so that each utterance was interpreted

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within its full lyrical context rather than in isolation. Finally, consistency was maintained by applying the same analytical procedures and classification criteria throughout the entire dataset.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument of this study is the researcher, as is common in qualitative research. The researcher was responsible for identifying, classifying, and interpreting the data. Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness served as the analytical framework guiding the entire research process. No additional quantitative instruments or software were used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The analysis of the selected lyrics from The Weeknd's songs reveals that all five of Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies are present across the lyrical corpus. The findings indicate that impoliteness in The Weeknd's lyrics is not a random linguistic phenomenon but a deliberate pragmatic to convey specific communicative purposes. The identified strategies include bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness.

Frequency of Impoliteness Strategies

The findings show that withhold politeness is the most frequently used strategy, accounting for 30% of all identified instances. This is followed by bald on record impoliteness and sarcasm or mock politeness. each representing 20% of the data. Negative impoliteness accounts for 17%, while positive impoliteness appears least frequently with 13%.

Bald on Record Impoliteness

Bald on record impoliteness appears in six instances (20%) across the selected songs. This strategy is characterized by direct and unmitigated face-threatening acts delivered without any attempt to soften their impact.

One example is the lyric "You just wasted my time," which directly accuses the hearer and attacks their positive face without any hedging or politeness markers. The statement clearly expresses disappointment and contempt toward the hearer.

Another example is found in Heartless through the lyrics "'Cause I'm heartless" and "Tryna be a better man, but I'm heartless." These utterances present the speaker's emotional detachment as an unquestionable reality. Although directed toward the speaker himself, they also function as indirect face attacks toward the hearer by signaling the speaker's unwillingness to provide emotional commitment.

Overall, bald on record impoliteness functions to express dominance, emotional honesty, and confrontation without concern for maintaining social harmony. strategy used Positive Impoliteness

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Positive impoliteness is identified in four instances (13%) and mainly appears through utterances that damage the hearer's self-worth, dignity, and social value.

An example can be found in the lyric "Guess I was just another pit stop 'til you made up your mind." The metaphor "pit stop" reduces the speaker to a temporary object in the hearer's life and simultaneously portrays the hearer as selfish and emotionally exploitative.

Another example is "I almost cut a piece of myself for your life," where the speaker emphasizes his sacrifice to highlight the hearer's failure to appreciate it. This indirectly attacks the hearer's positive face by presenting them as undeserving of such devotion.

Positive impoliteness in the lyrics primarily functions to belittle the hearer, express disappointment, and create emotional distance between the speaker and the hearer.

Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness appears in five instances (17%). This strategy attacks the hearer's freedom, autonomy, and right to make independent choices.

One example is the lyric "Girl, why can't you wait till I fall out of love?" This utterance places pressure on the hearer by suggesting that they should adjust their actions according to the speaker's

Another example is "If he mess up just a little, baby, you know my line," where the speaker positions himself as an alternative romantic option. This statement creates indirect pressure on the hearer and influences their future decisions.

The findings suggest that negative impoliteness is used to establish control, maintain power, and influence the hearer's behavior within the relationship portrayed in the lyrics.

Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

Sarcasm or mock politeness occurs in six instances (20%), making it one of the most dominant strategies in the corpus. This strategy involves the use of apparently polite, affectionate, or positive language that actually conveys criticism, insincerity, or emotional manipulation.

The clearest examples are found in the lyrics "Just know that I would die for you" and "Baby, I would die for you, yeah." While these statements appear to express deep devotion, the broader context of the song reveals the speaker's inability to provide genuine commitment and emotional availability. Consequently, the declarations function as forms of mock sincerity.

Another example is "I made you think that I would always stay," where the speaker admits that previous expressions of commitment were misleading. This revelation transforms earlier acts of affection into instruments of emotional deception.

Sarcasm or mock politeness functions to create irony, expose relational contradictions, and intensify the emotional complexity of the lyrical narrative.

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Withhold Politeness

Withhold politeness is the most dominant strategy, appearing in nine instances (30%). This strategy occurs when the speaker deliberately withholds politeness, acknowledgment, gratitude, or emotional validation that would normally be expected in a relationship.

One example is “I helped you out of a broken place.” The speaker emphasizes his own contribution while failing to acknowledge any reciprocal effort from the hearer. This omission functions as a form of face attack through the denial of recognition.

Another example is “I just can’t say I don’t love you ’cause I love you.” Although the speaker admits his feelings, he does so reluctantly and avoids offering the emotional reassurance that the hearer may expect. As a result, the utterance becomes a form of emotional withholding.

Similarly, the lyric “I regret I didn’t tell you” represents a delayed acknowledgment that arrives too late to repair the relationship. The speaker admits withholding important information only after meaningful reconciliation is no longer possible.

These examples demonstrate that withhold politeness serves as a powerful means of expressing emotional distance, indifference, and relational control.

Discussion

The findings provide several important insights into the pragmatic characteristics of The Weeknd’s lyrics. First, the dominance of withhold politeness indicates that emotional withdrawal and deliberate omission are central features of his lyrical style. Rather than relying solely on direct verbal aggression, the speaker often attacks the hearer through silence, indifference, and the absence of expected emotional responses.

Second, the high occurrence of sarcasm or mock politeness demonstrates the importance of irony and emotional contradiction in The Weeknd’s songs. Expressions of love, care, and devotion are frequently accompanied by evidence of emotional unavailability, creating complex and layered forms of impoliteness.

Third, the analysis shows that multiple impoliteness strategies often appear within the same song. This combination creates stronger face-threatening effects and contributes to the portrayal of toxic relationships, emotional conflict, and interpersonal power struggles.

Finally, the findings suggest that impoliteness in The Weeknd’s lyrics is a deliberate and systematic pragmatic resource rather than a result of uncontrolled emotion. Through the strategic use of impoliteness, the speaker constructs identities associated with dominance, emotional detachment, vulnerability, and relational complexity.

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No	Song Title	Lyric Excerpt	Impoliteness Strategy	Brief Explanation
1	Call Out My Name	Call out my name	Bald on Record	Directly demands attention from the hearer.
2	Heartless	I'm heartless	Bald on Record	Openly states an emotionally harsh identity.
3	Starboy	Look what you've done	Bald on Record	Direct accusation toward another person.
4	The Hills	I only call you...	Bald on Record	Bluntly reveals the nature of the relationship.
5	Lost in the Fire	You said...	Bald on Record	Straightforward confrontation.
6	Save Your Tears	You could've asked me why	Positive Impoliteness	Implies emotional neglect by the hearer.
7	Die For You	Even though we're going through it	Positive Impoliteness	Highlights relational conflict.
8	Out of Time	You were there	Positive Impoliteness	Suggests disappointment toward the addressee
9	Is There Someone Else?	Is there someone else?	Positive Impoliteness	Questions loyalty and damages solidarity.
10	Less Than Zero	I can't get it out of my head	Positive Impoliteness	Indicates unresolved emotional tension.
11	The Hills	When I'm fucked up	Negative Impoliteness	Creates discomfort and emotional pressure.
12	Heartless	Never need a bitch	Negative Impoliteness	Devalues and dismisses the addressee.
13	Ordinary Life	Heaven knows...	Negative Impoliteness	Shows indifference toward social expectations.
14	Alone Again	Take off my disguise	Negative Impoliteness	Invades emotional boundaries.
15	Faith	I lost my faith	Negative Impoliteness	Burdens the hearer with personal despair.
16	Save Your Tears	You deserve someone better	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Sounds polite but conveys rejection.
17	Call Out My Name	I almost cut a piece...	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Presents sacrifice with ironic undertones.
18	Out of Time	Don't you leave too late	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Appears caring while criticizing.
19	Nothing Compares	Nobody cares like I do	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Implies the hearer is ungrateful.
20	Try Me	You can meet me inside	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Suggests emotional challenge indirectly.
21	Echoes of Silence	Emotional appreciation omitted	Withhold Politeness	Expected affection is intentionally absent.
22	Until I Bleed Out	Lack of comforting expression	Withhold Politeness	Deliberately avoids emotional support.
23	Privilege	No gratitude expressed	Withhold Politeness	Omits expected appreciation.
24	Tears in the Rain	Absence of apology	Withhold Politeness	Refuses to repair the relationship.
25	Adaptation	Emotional distance maintained	Withhold Politeness	Avoids showing warmth.
26	Heartless	Cold response to intimacy	Withhold Politeness	Does not provide expected affection.
27	The Knowing	Distrust without reconciliation	Positive Impoliteness	Damages interpersonal closeness.
28	Wicked Games	Self-centered desire	Negative Impoliteness	Prioritizes self over the hearer.
29	Hurt You	Emotional manipulation	Sarcasm / Mock Politeness	Uses seemingly kind expressions ironically.
30	After Hours	Regret expressed too late	Withhold Politeness	Fails to provide timely emotional consideration.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study analyzed the impoliteness strategies used in The Weeknd's song lyrics based on Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework. The data consisted of 30 lyric excerpts taken from five songs: Call Out My Name, Save Your Tears, Die For You, Out of Time, and Heartless. The findings show that all five impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper appear in the selected lyrics.

The analysis revealed that withhold politeness is the most dominant strategy, accounting for 30% of the data. This is followed by bald on record impoliteness and sarcasm or mock politeness with 20% each, negative impoliteness with 17%, and positive impoliteness with 13%. These findings indicate that The Weeknd frequently expresses conflict, emotional distance, and relational tension through both direct and indirect face-threatening acts.

Furthermore, the results show that impoliteness in The Weeknd's lyrics is not accidental. Instead, it functions as a deliberate communicative strategy to express disappointment, emotional pain, dominance, detachment, and complex interpersonal relationships. The frequent use of emotional withdrawal and indirect attacks highlights the unique pragmatic style found in his lyrical discourse.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn:

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1. All five impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996) are present in The Weeknd's song lyrics.
2. Withhold politeness is the most frequently used strategy, indicating that emotional neglect, silence, and the withholding of affection or acknowledgment are central features of The Weeknd's lyrical expression.
3. The use of sarcasm, direct confrontation, and face-threatening language contributes to the construction of themes such as heartbreak, toxic relationships, emotional detachment, and personal conflict.
4. Impoliteness serves as an important pragmatic tool through which The Weeknd conveys emotions, establishes power relations, and develops his artistic identity.
5. Culpeper's framework proves effective for analyzing song lyrics and understanding the pragmatic meanings behind lyrical expressions.

Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly in the study of impoliteness in non-conversational discourse. The research demonstrates that song lyrics can be a valuable source for examining how language is used to express emotions, social relationships, and interpersonal conflict.

In addition, this study may help students and researchers better understand the application of pragmatic theories in popular culture. The findings also suggest that song lyrics can be used as authentic materials for teaching pragmatics and discourse analysis in language learning contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several suggestions can be offered for future studies:

1. Future researchers may analyze a larger number of The Weeknd's songs to obtain a broader understanding of his use of impoliteness strategies.
2. Comparative studies involving different singers, genres, or cultural backgrounds could provide further insights into the relationship between music and impoliteness.
3. Future research may examine other pragmatic aspects of song lyrics, such as politeness strategies, speech acts, or conversational implicatures.
4. Researchers may also investigate audience responses to impolite expressions in song lyrics to understand how listeners interpret and react to them.

Closing Remarks

This study has shown that The Weeknd's song lyrics contain various forms of impoliteness that reflect complex emotional and interpersonal experiences. Through the use of all five impoliteness strategies, he creates a lyrical style that expresses vulnerability, conflict, disappointment, and emotional distance. The findings support the view that song lyrics are a

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rich source of pragmatic analysis and demonstrate the usefulness of Culpeper's framework in understanding how impoliteness operates within contemporary musical discourse.

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