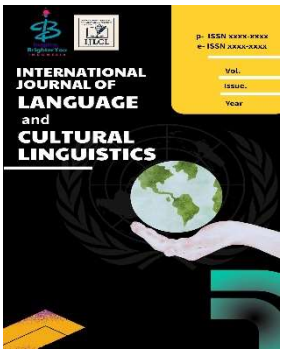
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A Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts in Selected Songs from Joji's "Smithereens" Album

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Abstract:
This study investigates the pragmatic use of language in music, specifically focusing on the classification and functions of speech acts in the lyrics of Joji's album, Smithereens (2022). Utilizing John R. Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, this research aims to identify the types of speech acts employed in the lyrics and to uncover the underlying illocutionary forces that convey the speaker's emotional state. A descriptive qualitative method was adopted to analyze the data, which consisted of textual lyrics from the album's four selected tracks. The data were collected through documentary techniques, closely read, and categorized based on contextual interpretation. The findings reveal that Expressive and Assertive speech acts are the most dominant categories used throughout the album. Joji heavily utilizes expressive acts to externalize deep psychological states such as grief, longing, and resignation, while assertive acts serve to state painful realities regarding broken relationships. Conversely, Directives and Commissives appear less frequently, reflecting the speaker's passive and helpless stance. This study concludes that the deliberate choice of speech acts in Smithereens successfully constructs an atmosphere of alienation and vulnerability, showing how indirect communication in songwriting can powerfully resonate with the listeners' emotions.

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INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary tool for human communication, enabling individuals not only to convey factual information but also to project complex psychological states, intentions, and emotions. While communication is traditionally observed in everyday spoken discourse, it also manifests profoundly in artistic mediums, such as music. Song lyrics are a unique form of communication where songwriters use structured, often metaphorical language to deliver underlying messages to their audience (Yule, 1996). However, the meaning within song lyrics is rarely straightforward; it heavily relies on the context in which the words are uttered. To uncover these implicit layers of meaning, an approach through Pragmatics—specifically the study of speaker meaning and contextual interpretation—becomes highly essential.

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Within the framework of pragmatics, Speech Act theory, initially proposed by John L. Austin (1962) and later refined by John R. Searle (1979), posits that when individuals utter words, they are not merely saying something, but they are actively performing actions. Searle categorized these actions into five distinct illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. In the context of songwriting, these speech acts are strategically employed to establish a connection with the listener. Rather than stating emotions directly, songwriters use varied illocutionary forces to mask or heighten their true intent, forcing the listener to rely on contextual clues to grasp the authentic emotional weight of the song.

While previous pragmatic studies have extensively analyzed speech acts in political speeches, movies, and mainstream pop music, there remains a critical gap in examining modern alternative R&B and lo-fi melancholic music genres. A prime embodiment of this musical landscape is Joji, an artist renowned for his minimalist production and intensely vulnerable lyricism. His third studio album, Smithereens (2022), captured global attention, spearheaded by the chart-topping single "Glimpse of Us." The album is distinctively characterized by themes of unrequited love, coping mechanisms, emotional detachment, and profound resignation. What makes Smithereens a compelling subject for a pragmatic inquiry is Joji's heavy reliance on indirect, passive, and fragmented language to articulate deeply painful emotional states.

Consequently, understanding the lyrical impact of Smithereens requires looking past the surface literal meanings and analyzing the functional actions behind his words. Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing literature gap by conducting a comprehensive pragmatic analysis on the speech acts embedded within Joji's album. Specifically, this research seeks to address two primary questions:

1. What types of illocutionary speech acts are employed in the lyrics of Joji's Smithereens album?
2. How do the speech acts in Joji's song lyrics reflect the speaker's emotional expression and communicative intention?

By answering these questions, this study hopes to provide deeper insights into how linguistic choices construct the emotional atmosphere of contemporary melancholic music

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that studies how context influences the transmission and interpretation of meaning. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It analyzes not just the literal meaning of words, but what speakers mean by their utterances in specific situational contexts. In analyzing song lyrics, a pragmatic

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approach is vital because songwriters frequently use indirect language, metaphors, and emotional nuances that cannot be fully decoded through semantic or literal definitions alone.

Speech Act Theory

The concept of speech acts was originally introduced by philosopher J.L. Austin in his book How to Do Things with Words (1962). Austin argued that when people produce utterances, they are not merely stating facts, but are performing distinct actions. He distinguished three simultaneous layers of action within any speech act:

1. Locutionary Act: The literal, physical act of producing a meaningful linguistic utterance.
2. Illocutionary Act: The intentional action performed by saying something (e.g., promising, apologizing, stating, requesting). This is often referred to as the illocutionary force.
3. Perlocutionary Act: The psychological or behavioral effect or consequence that the utterance has on the listener (e.g., persuading, scaring, or comforting someone).

In textual analysis such as song lyrics, researchers primarily focus on the illocutionary act, as it reveals the songwriter's communicative intent.

Searle's Classification of Illocutionary Acts

John R. Searle (1979) refined Austin's work by organizing illocutionary acts into five mutually exclusive, highly functional categories based on their direction of fit between words and the world:

1. Assertives (or Representatives): Utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition. The direction of fit is words-to-world. Examples include stating, claiming, concluding, describing, and complaining.
2. Directives: Utterances aimed at getting the hearer to do something. The direction of fit is world-to-words (making the world match the words). Examples include requesting, commanding, begging, advising, and inviting.
3. Commissives: Utterances that commit the speaker to some future course of action. The direction of fit is world-to-words. Examples include promising, swearing, offering, threatening, and guaranteeing.
4. Expressives: Utterances that express a psychological state or emotional reaction of the speaker regarding a specific state of affairs. There is no direction of fit; rather, the words simply reflect an internal emotional reality. Examples include apologizing, thanking, congratulating, deploring, welcoming, hoping, and regretting.
5. Declarations: Utterances that change the institutional state or reality of the world immediately upon being spoken. The direction of fit is both words-to-world and world-to-words. Examples include declaring war, resigning, naming a child, or excommunicating.

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METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this study as it focuses on understanding social or human phenomena through the interpretation of textual data rather than numerical measurements (Creswell, 2014). This method allows the researcher to closely examine the linguistic context of the lyrics, identify the embedded speech acts, and describe their functional nuances interpretively.

Data and Data Source

The data source for this study is the third studio album by Japanese singer-songwriter Joji, titled Smithereens, released on November 4, 2022. The data analyzed consist of specific linguistic units—namely clauses, sentences, and utterances—extracted from four selected tracks comprising the core narrative of the album:

1. Glimpse of Us
2. Feeling Like The End
3. Die For You
4. 1AM FREESTYLE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting a pragmatic reduction and analysis of the lyrics across the four selected tracks from Joji's Smithereens album (Glimpse of Us, Feeling Like The End, Die For You, and 1AM Freestyle), a total of 55 distinct utterances containing illocutionary speech acts were identified. The comprehensive distribution of these speech acts based on John R. Searle's (1979) taxonomy is tabulated below:

Table 1. Glimpse of Us, Feeling Like The End, Die For You, and 1AM Freestyle

No	Type of Illocutionary Act	Frequency
1	Assertive	16
2	Directive	5
3	Expressive	32
4	Commisive	2
5	Declarative	0

Analysis of the 30 slogans reveals the dominance of the phrase level, with 14 slogans (46. The empirical data demonstrates that Expressives are overwhelmingly dominant, accounting for more than half of the total data 32. Assertives stand as the second most frequent speech act at 16. Meanwhile, Directives and Commissives occur minimally, and Declarations are entirely non-existent within the selected corpus.

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Discussion

The stark contrast in the frequencies of the speech acts reveals the underlying psychological framework of the album's narrative. The heavy concentration of Expressive and Assertive acts reflects a thematic preoccupation with internal emotional processing, nostalgia, and acceptance of trauma, rather than active external confrontation.

1. The Dominance of Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts fundamentally serve to externalize the speaker's internal psychological and emotional state. In these four selected tracks, Joji employs expressives to convey acute vulnerability, unresolved grief, and deep romantic longing.

Extract 1 (from Glimpse of Us): "'Cause sometimes I look in her eyes and that's where I find a glimpse of us."

- Context: The speaker is physically present with his current partner, who treats him well, yet he is mentally trapped by the memory of his past relationship.
- Pragmatic Analysis: This utterance functions as an Expressive of Longing and Regret. On the surface, it states a perceptual event. However, pragmatically, the illocutionary force relies heavily on an internal confession. The speaker uses this expressive act to reveal a painful emotional truth: his current relationship is merely a proxy for his past love. The words evoke a psychological state of guilt and incomplete mourning.

Extract 2 (from Die For You): "I heard that you're happy without me, and I hope it's true."

- Context: The speaker acknowledges that his former lover has successfully moved on and found peace in his absence.
- Pragmatic Analysis: The illocutionary force of the clause "I hope it's true" is classified as an Expressive of Wishing and Resignation. In a typical breakup narrative, a speaker might express anger or jealousy. Here, however, Joji utilizes an expressive act to signal absolute emotional surrender. The words serve as a pure, unselfish projection of goodwill, demonstrating that the speaker has chosen the ex-partner's peace over his own desires.

2. The Use of Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition. In the melancholic context of Smithereens, assertives do not represent confident declarations; instead, they function as blunt, cold admissions of broken realities and personal limitations.

Extract 3 (from Feeling Like The End): "We look good on paper, but we called it off."

- Context: The speaker evaluates a relationship that possessed superficial compatibility but ultimately collapsed under personal differences.
- Pragmatic Analysis: This utterance is an Assertive of Stating/Admitting a Fact. The direction of fit is words-to-world, wherein the speaker forces his words to align with the unchangeable, grim reality that the relationship has concluded. By phrasing this

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terminal event as a detached statement of fact, the speaker strips away any dramatic sentimentality, using the assertive act to communicate emotional exhaustion and pragmatic numbness.

Extract 4 (from Feeling Like The End): "Too many grievances, twenty-four hours."

- Context: The speaker expresses the overwhelming nature of the conflicts that occurred within a single day.
- Pragmatic Analysis: This utterance operates as an Assertive of Complaining. The speaker presents the density of their romantic friction as an absolute truth. Pragmatically, this serves to justify the inevitable breakdown of the relationship, illustrating that the linguistic landscape of the song is heavily weighted by the reporting of negative situational realities.

3. The Interplay of Complex Emotional States in 1AM Freestyle

The final track of the selection highlights how Expressive and Assertive speech acts intertwine to deliver the resolution—or lack thereof—of the speaker's emotional arc.

Extract 5 (from 1AM Freestyle): "And I don't wanna be alone, but I'm better on my own."

- Context: The speaker sits in isolation during the late hours of the night, contemplating his dependency on love versus his need for self-preservation.
- Pragmatic Analysis: This compound sentence features two distinct illocutionary forces. The first clause, "I don't wanna be alone," is an Expressive of Fear and Vulnerability, articulating a raw human dread of isolation. Conversely, the second clause, "but I'm better on my own," shifts sharply into an Assertive of Stating a Conviction. The speaker states his independence as an empirical fact necessary for his survival. This pragmatic juxtaposition beautifully captures the internal paradox of the entire album: the desperate craving for connection versus the painful realization that isolation is safer.

4. The Scarcity of Directives and Commissives

Linguistically, the extreme scarcity of Directives and Commissives is highly telling of the persona Joji constructs across these four tracks.

- Directives require an attempt to alter the hearer's behavior (e.g., commanding, begging).
- Commissives require the speaker to pledge a future course of action (e.g., promising, guaranteeing).

Because the speaker rarely attempts to change his ex-partner's mind or make promises to fix himself, the pragmatic profile confirms that the persona is fundamentally passive and defeatist. He does not fight to salvage what is lost, nor does he promise a better tomorrow. He merely limits himself to describing his bleak reality (Assertives) and lamenting his broken emotional state (Expressives).

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CONCLUSION

Based on the pragmatic analysis of John R. Searle's speech acts in the four selected tracks from Joji's album Smithereens (Glimpse of Us, Feeling Like The End, Die For You, and 1AM Freestyle), several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, the study identified a total of 55 utterances containing illocutionary speech acts, with Expressives emerging as the overwhelmingly dominant category (32), followed by Assertives (16). In contrast, Directives (5) and Commissives (2) appeared minimally, while Declarations were completely absent. This distribution answers the first research question and outlines the linguistic profile of the selected songs.

Second, addressing the second research question regarding the underlying illocutionary forces, the dominance of these speech acts serves a specific narrative function. Joji heavily relies on Expressives to externalize deep-seated psychological states—such as acute longing, unresolved grief, and absolute resignation—allowing the listener to access the speaker's raw vulnerability. Meanwhile, Assertives are strategically deployed not as confident declarations, but as cold, detached admissions of broken realities and emotional exhaustion.

Furthermore, the extreme scarcity of action-oriented speech acts, such as Directives and Commissives, provides profound insight into the lyrical persona. The speaker does not attempt to control or alter the hearer's actions, nor does he commit to future promises of self-improvement. Instead, this pragmatic imbalance structurally constructs a fundamentally passive, defeatist, and isolated persona who is trapped in a loop of merely describing his grim reality and lamenting his emotional trauma.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that songwriting in modern alternative R&B and melancholic music heavily bypasses active, world-altering language in favor of internal, reflective speech acts. By prioritizing Expressives and Assertives, Joji successfully transforms Smithereens into a fragile psychological echo chamber. Ultimately, this research highlights how a pragmatic approach can uncover the deep layers of human emotion and indirect communication embedded within contemporary musical discourse.

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