

IMPLICATURE TYPES IN ED SHEERAN'S SELECTED SONG LYRICS

JENIS IMPLIKATUR DALAM LIRIK LAGU PILIHAN ED SHEERAN

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Abstract

Pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, examines how context influences meaning in communication. This study applies H.P. Grice's theory of implicature to explore how Ed Sheeran's lyrics convey implicit meanings that deepen emotional impact and engage listeners. While modern music often carries rich emotional undertones, the subtle, implied meanings in lyrics are frequently overlooked. Recognizing these layers is key to understanding how language in music communicates complex feelings and experiences. The research aimed to identify and categorize conventional and conversational implicatures in five selected songs: The A Team, Bloodstream, Castle on the Hill, Photograph, and Salt Water. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzed lyrical content in both auditory and visual formats, focusing on how context and shared knowledge influence interpretation. A total of 32 implicatures were identified 15 conventional and 17 conversational each contributing uniquely to the listener's emotional and interpretive experience. These findings highlight Sheeran's ability to encode meaning through culturally familiar expressions and subtle narrative cues, enhancing the depth and relatability of his music. his study contributes to both linguistic and music discourse by addressing a research gap: although implicature has been widely examined in spoken conversations, literary works, and advertisements, its application in the analysis of popular song lyrics remains limited. By focusing on this underexplored area, the study underscores the importance of pragmatic analysis in understanding artistic language and offers insights into how implicit communication shapes listener engagement and emotional connection.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Implicature, Song Lyrics, Ed Sheeran, Emotional Expression

Abstrak

Pragmatik, cabang ilmu linguistik, meneliti bagaimana konteks memengaruhi makna dalam komunikasi. Studi ini menerapkan teori implikatur H.P. Grice untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana lirik Ed Sheeran menyampaikan makna implisit yang memperdalam dampak emosional dan melibatkan pendengar. Sementara musik modern sering kali membawa nada emosional yang kaya, makna tersirat yang halus dalam lirik sering kali diabaikan. Mengenali lapisan-lapisan ini adalah kunci untuk memahami bagaimana bahasa dalam musik mengomunikasikan perasaan dan pengalaman yang kompleks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengkategorikan implikatur konvensional dan percakapan dalam lima lagu terpilih: The A Team, Bloodstream, Castle on the Hill, Photograph, dan Salt Water. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis konten lirik dalam format auditori

dan visual, dengan fokus pada bagaimana konteks dan pengetahuan bersama memengaruhi interpretasi. Sebanyak 32 implikatur diidentifikasi, 15 konvensional dan 17 percakapan, masing-masing berkontribusi secara unik pada pengalaman emosional dan interpretatif pendengar. Temuan-temuan ini menyoroti kemampuan Sheeran untuk mengodekan makna melalui ekspresi-ekspresi yang familiar secara budaya dan isyarat-isyarat naratif yang halus, yang meningkatkan kedalaman dan keterkaitan musiknya. Studinya berkontribusi pada wacana linguistik dan musik dengan mengatasi kesenjangan penelitian: meskipun implikatur telah banyak diteliti dalam percakapan lisan, karya sastra, dan iklan, penerapannya dalam analisis lirik lagu populer masih terbatas. Dengan berfokus pada area yang kurang dieksplorasi ini, studi ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya analisis pragmatis dalam memahami bahasa artistik dan menawarkan wawasan tentang bagaimana komunikasi implisit membentuk keterlibatan pendengar dan hubungan emosional.

Kata kunci: Pragmatik, Implikatur, Lirik Lagu, Ed Sheeran, Ekspresi Emosional

Introduction

In linguistics, pragmatics is the study of how context affects the meaning of language. Pragmatics goes beyond the literal meaning of words and phrases, focusing on how speakers and listeners use language in specific situations to convey meaning and achieve communicative goals (Dey, 2023). Basically, pragmatics examines the "meaning in use" of language. The scope of pragmatic includes the study of implicature, deixis, speech acts, presumption, discourse/conversation analysis, and nonverbal communication.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that provides a study of the meaning of language influenced by context. Speakers and listeners become more competent in using language for specific situations to provide information about the meaning conveyed for smooth communication (Al Ghafri et al., 2021). In general, pragmatics

provides an understanding of the meaning used of language. Pragmatics was first introduced by Charles Morris in the 1930s, who was a psychologist and philosopher stating that context plays a role in meaning.

In daily life, conversations with interlocutors are sometimes not always explicitly communicated in conversation. Explicit delivery is increasingly used in communication today, but without a clear understanding and context, it will lead to misunderstandings so that communicative goals are not channelled properly (Pfeiffer, 1998). To understand the meaning conveyed implicitly in a conversation can be seen based on the theory of implicature first developed by Grice, a famous philosopher in 1975. Grice argues that the principle of cooperation between the speaker and the listener or responder becomes the basis of cooperation in conversation (Grice, 1991).

In today's digital era, individuals have greater freedom to express themselves in conversations both in person and online (Razmetaeva et al., 2022). In communication, sometimes the information conveyed by the speaker is misinterpreted by the receiver or listener due to lack of prior knowledge or not in accordance with the context of the conversation.

Today's digital age provides a plethora of tools for expressing human emotions. Mostly listening to songs is a common choice in expressing one's emotions, whether in a state of sadness, happiness, heartbreak, falling in love and other forms of emotional feelings (Sedikides et al., 2022). Songs are not just about arrangements and lyrics that have no meaning, instead songs contain a myriad of meanings that can represent a person's feelings or conditions so, most people prefer to express emotions according to personal emotional needs.

Famous musicians often convey deeper meanings through their lyrics. Without extensive knowledge, season lovers may only assume that what is written or heard is the meaning. Even though there is a deep meaning in the song through the lyrics written. This deeper meaning can be the most commonly used implicature is also divided into two parts, namely conventional

implicature and conversational implicature. Conventional implicature is an implied meaning that is generally understood based on the rules of language conventions.

Conventional implicatures are not based on cooperative principles or maxims. This type of implicature is not required to be present in a conversation and does not rely on a specific context to understand it (Widdowson, 1996). While conversational implicature depends on context to understand the implied meaning of the message conveyed followed by the principle of cooperation. Conversational implicature is a statement of meaning in a conversation that is not stated directly, but both the speaker and the listener can understand the meaning in the conversation (Liliyan et al., 2023). Conversational implicature is also divided into several parts referred to as general conversational implicature, specific conversational implicature, and scaled conversational implicature.

Implicature is applied in various contexts such as conversations, discussions, literary works, speech texts, song lyrics, and so on. In this analysis the author applies implicature in song lyrics. For example, Rizki (2023) analyzed the song lyrics of several Brandi Carlile songs with the title Conversational Implicature in Selected Songs

Lyrics by Brandi Carlile. Their analysis concluded that special, scalar, and general conversational implicatures were found in Carlile's song lyrics. Special conversational implicatures dominate in Brandi Carlile's song lyrics. Since no analysis of implicature in Ed Sheeran's songs had been conducted previously, the author chose to apply implicature theory to several of his songs. Furthermore, student's conversation of the pragmatics class was analyzed by Liliyan et al. (2023), their article *Conversational Implicature Found in Students' Conversations of Pragmatic Class*, they pointed out that sometimes different meanings are found in conversational implicature in each context. In humorous dialogues, implicature is often used to create humorous effects or trigger laughter.

Besides, Wahyudi et al. (2025) analyzed *Syi'ir Tanpa Waton* using Grice's and Searle's theories to explore conventional implicatures in persuasive speech acts. They found that the song conveys moral and spiritual messages through indirect forms like prohibitions, exhortations, and advice, marked by Javanese linguistic features such as *aja* and *ayo*. Their study also highlights the song's relevance in high school Javanese language instruction, showing its potential to enhance students' interpretative and cultural

understanding. Also, Mursalina et al. (2021), analyzed implicatures in five Omar and Hana songs and found that the cartoon conveys moral values such as gratitude, kindness, and respect through implicit language aligned with Islamic and Malay cultural norms. Using Relevance Theory, the study showed that these values are taught indirectly, making the cartoon an effective medium for character education in children. Moreover, Samson et al. (2024) examined how Radio Kogi news bulletins use implicature to convey indirect meanings. Applying Grice's theory, they found that many utterances flouted conversational maxims, requiring listeners to infer meaning especially in political and social contexts. The study highlights how such implicatures can impact audience understanding and emphasizes the need for clearer language in news media.

This analysis aims to reveal the meaning and implicature contained in Ed Sheeran's song lyrics, to contribute to an in-depth understanding of meaning and the types of meaning that are often encountered. Although many studies have examined implicatures in various forms of discourse, there appears to be no research focusing on implicatures in Ed Sheeran's song lyrics. Although significant research has been done, the focus on contemporary music,

especially the lyrics of popular artists such as Ed Sheeran's is very rare or even unheard of. Most researchers only focus on discussing deixis in Ed Sheeran's songs. For example, Ilma & Sabat (2023) conducted a study titled "*Deixis Analysis of the Song Lyrics 'Shape of You' by Ed Sheeran*", in which they identified and categorized person, spatial, and temporal deixis using Widdowson & George (1996) theory. Their analysis centered on how these deixis types construct narrative perspective and reference meaning within the song. To date, no published research has applied Grice's implicature theory either conversational or conventional to Ed Sheeran's lyrics, marking a gap this study seeks to address. Given this gap, the present study aims to answer the question: *What types of implicature conventional and conversational are found in selected Ed Sheeran song lyrics?* This question guides the analysis toward identifying how implied meanings are constructed and how they contribute to the interpretive depth of his music.

Ed Sheeran often uses various shades of implicature in his song lyrics that are rich in emotional content and graded themes. Since there has been no discussion on how implicature contributes to the overall meaning and emotional vibe of his music, the

researcher fills this gap realizing the cultural diversity of music as a medium to express emotional struggles, personal experiences, and social realities.

While implicature has been extensively studied in spoken and written discourse, its application in the analysis of popular song lyrics remains limited. As in the analysis conducted by Musa & Mohammed (2022) Exploring conversational implicatures in everyday spoken interactions, with a focus on how meaning is derived from context and violations of Grice's maxims. Such analyses are generally limited to spoken discourse. Besides that, there is also research presented by Wedananta, et all (2020) Explaining how implicatures are used strategically in commercial advertisements to deal with taboo content, such as condom marketing, this focus remains rooted in business-oriented persuasive discourse.

However, there is still a lack of research that applies Gricean implicature theory to artistic texts like song lyrics, especially within the domain of contemporary popular music, where implied meaning plays a crucial role in lyrical interpretation and listener engagement. This study addresses that gap by applying Gricean theory to Ed Sheeran's music, offering insights into how implicit meanings shape

listener interpretation and emotional engagement. Through this, the analysis will emphasize that even in the realm of popular music, there are many implicit meanings that need to be understood in order to achieve more effective communication.

Method

This research used a qualitative approach to explore the meaning and implicature behind the lyrics of selected Ed Sheeran songs. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this type of analysis because they allow for rich interpretation and deeper understanding of themes embedded in narrative forms (Ugwu & Val, 2023). Common methods within qualitative research such as interviews, documentation, surveys, focus group discussions, observations, participatory compilation, and qualitative audio-visual analysis enable researchers to address “why” and “how” questions (Dewi, 2021). his research uses a qualitative approach to explore the meaning and implicature behind the lyrics of Ed Sheeran's songs. The focus is to understand how the implicature contributes to the overall theme and message conveyed in the lyrics. By using qualitative methods, this research aims to provide a deeper insight

into the emotional and thematic layers present in music.

The data consisted of lyrics from five songs selected by Ed Sheeran: "The A Team," "Bloodstream," "Castle on the Hill," "Photograph," and "Salt Water". These songs were chosen for their rich lyrical content and the variety of themes explored, making them ideal candidates for analyzing implicature and its role in conveying deeper meaning. Data were collected from internet platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Google. Spotify was used as the first access to listen to the song as audio content, youtube as visualization, and google for correction.

The data for this study was collected through a systematic process, which involved carefully selecting a set of Ed Sheeran's songs based on popularity and thematic relevance, followed by repeated auditory listening and visual analysis of the lyrics to identify instances of implicature. This process included transcribing the lyrics (when necessary), identifying conversational and conventional implicatures based on Grice's maxims, and categorizing them according to their pragmatic functions within each song. Initially, I listened to the selected songs on Ed Sheeran's official YouTube channel, where a reliable source for the audio and visual elements of the music

was available. While listening, I followed the lyrics featured in the videos to ensure an accurate transcription. Subsequently, the transcriptions were carefully recorded with the words as they were sung, paying attention to nuances in phrasing and delivery. After completing the initial transcription, I cross-checked the lyrics with the source of the raw lyrics found through a Google search to verify their accuracy. The examination involved both the literal meaning of the lyrics and the implied meaning that can be derived from them. This focus aimed to uncover the emotional layers present in Ed Sheeran's music, ultimately contributing to a full understanding of the implicature used in his songs. No participants were involved in this research. The data were entirely sourced from publicly available content, and all analysis was conducted by the researcher.

This analysis involved identifying the types of implicatures (conventional and conversational) in the lyrics, as outlined by Grice. Each lyric was examined for its implied meaning and context, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the themes present in the songs. The author then divides into tables which are conventional and which are conversational implicatures. This study applies a discourse analysis approach, as

outlined by Paul (2014) which focuses on how language functions in context to create meaning and convey identity, emotion, and relationships. Discourse analysis is particularly useful for examining song lyrics because it considers not just what is said, but how it is said and in what context. By using this approach, the research highlights how Ed Sheeran's use of implicature both conventional and conversational enhances the emotional depth and relatability of his music. The analysis pays close attention to linguistic elements such as repetition, ellipsis, modality, and informal expressions, as well as how these contribute to implied meanings beyond literal interpretation. Through this lens, the study reveals how Sheeran's lyrics resonate with listeners on multiple pragmatic and emotional levels, fostering a sense of personal connection through subtle language use.

This research focused on analyzing symbols based on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics Theory in the Disney television series *Moon Knight* episode 5 titled *Asylum*. In analyzing symbols in this episode, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method. According to Sugiyono (2014), the qualitative method is a research approach used to examine natural phenomena, where the researcher serves as the primary

instrument that combines data collection techniques. Qualitative research methods are also used to produce descriptive data in the form of speech, writing, and behavior of the object being observed, and to gain an understanding of something through an inductive thinking process.

The primary data source for this research is *the Moon Knight* episode 5, titled "Asylum." *Moon Knight* is an American television miniseries created by Jeremy Slater for the streaming service Disney+ Hotstar, produced by Marvel Studios. Released in March 2022, this series consists of six episodes. The researchers focused on the *Asylum* episode (50 minutes in duration) to analyze the scenes and script that contain symbols based on Pierce's Theory of sign. The data units include scenes, dialogues, visual elements, characters' actions, symbols, and cinematic elements that carry semiotic significance.

The researchers took several steps to collect the data. The researcher started by watching *Moon Knight* Episode 5: "Asylum" several times and reading the script to understand the story better. The researcher took screenshots and wrote down important parts of the scenes and dialogues. Signs were then selected based on their relevance to the episode's main themes: identity, trauma, and

reality. The researcher focused on the main character's actions and conversations to find symbols with deeper meaning. These signs were studied using Peirce's theory, which breaks each sign into three parts: the form we see or hear (representamen), what it refers to (object), and the meaning we understand from it (interpretant). Each sign was explained in its narrative context to show how it helps express ideas about mental struggles and identity. In the end, the researcher grouped the signs by theme and used them to build a clear conclusion.

Result and Discussion

This study shows the results of the types of implicature used in the lyrics of five selected songs by Ed Sheeran based on Grice's theory, which is divided into conventional implicature and conversational implicature. The findings reveal that conventional implicature and conversational implicature are found in the five selected songs by Ed Sheeran with a total of 32 implicatures, conventional implicature 15, while conversational implicature 17. In the song "The A Team" there are 3 conventional and 2 conversational implicatures, in the song "bloodstream" there are 2 conventional and 3 conversational implicatures, "Castle on the Hill" there are 4 conventional and 5

conversational implicatures, “Photograph” conventional and 3 conversational there are 3 conventional and 4 implicatures. The detailed division results are conversational, and “Salt Water” there are 3 attached as shown in Table 1.

Result

Table 1
Implicatures in Ed Sheeran’s Selected Songs

No	Song Title	Selected Lyrics	Type of Implicature (Conventional / Conversational)	Song Context
1	The A Team	“White lips, pale face Breathing in the snowflakes Burnt lungs, sour taste”	Conversational	A song about a young woman struggling with addiction and homelessness
		“She’s in the Class A Team Stuck in her daydream Been this way since eighteen”	Conventional	
		“And in a pipe she flies to the Motherland Or sells love to another man”	Conversational	
		“The worst things in life come free to us”	Conventional	
2	Bloodstream	“An angel will die, covered in white”	Conventional	A song about the effects of substance use, regret, and emotional turmoil
		“I’ve been spinning now for time Couple women by my side I got sinning on my mind”	Conversational	
		“How’d I get so faded?”	Conversational	
		“This is how it ends, I feel the chemicals burn in my bloodstream”	Conventional	
3	Castle on the Hill	“I’ve been looking for a lover Thought I’d find her in a bottle”	Conversational	A nostalgic song about youth, personal growth, and longing for home
		“All the voices in my mind Calling out across the line”	Conventional	
		“When I was six years old, I broke my leg When I was running from my brother and his friends”	Conversational	
		“And tasted the sweet perfume of the mountain grass I rolled down”	Conversational	
		“I found my heart and broke it here Made friends and lost them through the years”	Conventional	
		“Driving at 90 down those country lanes Singing to ‘Tiny Dancer’”	Conversational	
		“15 years old and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes Running from the law through the backfields And getting drunk with my friends”	Conversational	
“Had my first kiss on a Friday night I don’t reckon that I did it right”	Conversational			
“One friend left to sell clothes, one works down by the coast One had two kids but lives alone, one’s brother overdosed”	Conventional			
“These people raised me and I can’t wait to go home”	Conventional			
“I still remember these old country lanes When we did not know the answers”	Conventional			

4	Photograph	"Loving can hurt, loving can hurt sometimes But it's the only thing that I know"	Conventional	A song about love, memory, and emotional attachment, emphasizing the power of photographs in preserving feelings and moments
		"We keep this love in a photograph We made these memories for ourselves"	Conversational	
		"Where our eyes are never closing Hearts are never broken And time's forever frozen still"	Conventional	
		"So you can keep me inside the pocket of your ripped jeans"	Conversational	
		"And if you hurt me That's okay, baby, only words bleed"	Conversational	
		"Oh, you can fit me inside the necklace you got when you were sixteen Next to your heartbeat where I should be"	Conversational	
5	Salt Water	"When I'm away, I will remember how you kissed me Under the lamppost back on Sixth Street"	Conventional	A song exploring deep emotional pain, introspection, and a sense of release, possibly referencing themes of letting go or even contemplating life and death
		"There's still so far to go and I can't feel my toes When the rain soaks through the heels and slips to the sole"	Conversational	
		"Saying, 'It's alright to run from all this pain'"	Conventional	
		"Come and kiss me, salt water Oh, finally, I feel, at three or four degrees"	Conversational	
		"Embrace the deep and leave everything"	Conventional	
		"Now I'm standing on the edge, gazing into Hell Or is it somethin' else? I just can't tell"	Conversational	
"When there's nothin' left, I'll close my eyes and take one step"	Conventional			

Discussion

Unlike much exciting research on implicature in literature or everyday conversation, this study brings attention to how musical artists like Ed Sheeran use implicature to communicate emotional complexity. When compared to studies on artists like Brandi Carlile whose songwriting similarity leans on implication and metaphor to explore identity and trauma Sheeran's work distinguishes itself in two ways.

First, his conversational implicatures often involve subtle emotional shifts, using everyday phrases with layered meaning ("only words bleed," find her in a bottle").

Carlile's lyrics tend to be more narratively explicit, while Sheeran relies more heavily on listener inference. Second, Sheeran integrates British cultural idioms, as in "Class A team which may not be immediately understood globally but conveys strong local social commentary. This highlights a unique intersection between implicature and cultural specificity, giving his lyrics depth and realism.

From a pragmatic perspective, this research affirms that musical lyrics function similarly to spoken discourse. The implicatures in Sheeran's songs reflect *Gricean principles* particularly how conversational maxims are deliberately

flouted to generate layered meaning. The listener is expected to infer emotional states, social commentary, or psychological conditions based on phrasing, metaphor, and context. This validates the application of discourse analysis to music as a productive linguistic practice (Jordhus-Lier, 2021).

The findings also align with those of Rizki Putri (2023), who examined conversational implicatures in Brandi Carlile's lyrics and found that they often express emotional trauma. However, while Carlile's lyrics emphasize personal narratives, Sheeran's songs display a more balanced distribution of conventional and conversational implicatures—indicating his stylistic preference for subtle emotional layering rather than direct storytelling.

In a similar vein, Mursalina et al. (2021) explored implicature in *Omar and Hana* children's songs, showing how indirect language conveys moral values. While the context differs, both studies reinforce the idea that implicature plays a central role in communication beyond literal meaning.

In the field of music studies, the findings illustrate how Sheeran's songwriting contributes to the emotional narrative of

popular music by encoding implicit meaning. His ability to blend clear narratives with subtle emotional cues supports listener empathy and engagement. Additionally, these implicatures serve as a key component in audience connection. When listeners "decode" hidden meanings or recognize implied emotional shifts, they often feel a stronger personal connection to the artist. This supports findings Shen, Mire, Park, Breazeal, & Sap (2024), which show that vivid emotional storytelling fosters greater emotional identification with the speaker, and by Piccirilli and Schulte im Walde (2022), who demonstrate that emotionally rich, metaphorical language enhances listeners' affective engagement more than literal expressions.

A. Conventional Implicature

Conventional implicatures are certain words or phrases that contain implied meanings without regard to context and are general in nature. In contrast to conversational implicature, which is heavily influenced by context and the speaker's purpose, conventional implicature is directly related to the meaning of the words used.

Data 1

"She's in the Class A Team Stuck in her daydream Been this way since eighteen" (The A Team)

In the lyrics, the term “class A Team” refers to the UK's legal classification of “Class A” drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, which is a play on words. While Sheeran does not explicitly mention drug use, the term invokes a common social understanding of addiction and substance abuse. This association is not generated by violating any of Grice's principles, such as vague (manner) or unrelated (relation), but arises naturally from the conventional meaning of the phrase in the British cultural context.

In addition, the lyrics that follow, “Stuck in her daydream” and “Been this way since eighteen,” affirm the image of a young woman whose life is hindered by her situation. Although metaphorical, these phrases do not require deep understanding from the listener. They reinforce the theme of addiction and loss by using easy-to-understand imagery. In this way, the implicature conveyed here remains stable, culture-bound and independent of the context of the conversation.

Data 2

“The worst things in life come free to us” (The A Team)

This line works by inverting the common phrase, “the best things in life are free,” which usually refers to non-material gifts such as love, friendship, or natural beauty. Alternatively, Sheeran's lyric breaks this optimistic view by stating that “the worst things in life come free to us.” This implies that suffering such as poverty, addiction, or emotional pain comes without demand or choice, and that it is not experienced through effort, but rather as something imposed. This view does not derive from the broader context of the conversation or from a violation of Grice's principles of communication, but from the audience's prior familiarity with the

structure of the expression and the social reality being expressed.

There is no ambiguity in this line, nor does it rely on inference or allusion. The statement is clear in its delivery yet powerful in its meaning, which is traditionally embedded in language and culture. It provides a broader social commentary on how hardship, unlike happiness or success, often comes on its own without being wanted. This message is easily understood by listeners who share the same cultural and linguistic background to understand changes to common expressions. As a result, this meaning does not arise from communication

tactics, irony, or violations of principles (such as Manner or Relationship), but rather from

language conventions and interwoven social knowledge.

Data 3

“An angel will die, covered in white” (The A Team)

In these lyrics, the term “angel” generally represents cleanliness, purity, and spiritual beauty, often describing someone who is benevolent or experiencing tragedy. In literature and religious discussions, referring to someone as an “angel” after they die is a polite way of describing their sanctity or the belief that they find rest in the afterlife. Similarly, the expression “plated in white” signifies a symbolic tradition where the color white symbolizes purity, death, and official respect, especially in the context of funerals, hospital images, or shrouds.

It is important to note, these symbols do not require inference from the context of the conversation or a violation of Grice's principle. There is no violation of the Principle of Manner (clarity) or Principle of

Relation (relevance) by the speaker; rather, the meaning is directly accessible from common cultural knowledge. Once listeners hear this phrase, they automatically understand it to be a poetic way of describing death, specifically the tragic death of someone who is seen as holy or innocent, such as the young woman depicted in the broader story of the song.

As such, the meaning contained in these lyrics is conventional, depending on the listener's prior knowledge of the symbolic meaning rather than conversational method or ambiguity. The imagery of “angels” and the colour white is part of a stable metaphorical system, **consistently** conveying similar ideas in various cultural and artistic contexts.

Data 4

“This is how it ends, I feel the chemicals burn in my bloodstream” (bloodstream)

In the lyrics, the phrase “chemicals burn in my bloodstream” is used as a metaphorical way common in the culture to describe the physiological and emotional

effects of drug or alcohol use. The term “chemicals” in everyday speech usually refers to substances such as drugs or alcohol, especially when discussing their physical

effects on the body. The concept of chemicals “burning” in the bloodstream also serves as a well-established metaphor, implying physical discomfort as well as emotional distress. It is clear and unambiguous, and does not require additional interpretation from the context of the conversation. Rather, it is a stable metaphor that is familiar in many discussions of addiction, withdrawal symptoms, or overdose.

Furthermore, the phrase “This is how it ends” serves as a common cultural expression that signifies an end or acceptance of the situation. It often appears in literature, movies, and songs to indicate that a situation has reached an irreversible or tragic end. Listeners do not need to analyze the context to understand the meaning of

this phrase. Instead, the implication of emotional or physical collapse is already contained in the phrase itself.

Thus, the overall meaning of the lyrics emerges from the conventional meanings of language usage and cultural terms such as “chemicals,” “burn,” and “this is how it ends.” There is no indication of any violation of Grammatical communication principles. There are no indications of violations of Grice's principles of communication, and there are no metaphorically confusing passages that require further interpretation. The lyrics should therefore be understood as an example of conventional implicature, where the intended meaning is attributed to linguistic and cultural conventions shared by the artist and the audience.

Data 5

“All the voices in my mind Calling out across the line” (Bloodstream)

The lyrics of the song “All the voices in my mind Calling across the line” from Ed Sheeran's album Bloodstream can be understood as an example of conventional implicature. This is because the meaning is conveyed through the use of culturally recognized metaphorical expressions, not just from indirect conversational inference. According to H. P. Grice, conventional implicature refers to meanings that are already codified in the language itself-that is,

listeners can understand them based on similar linguistic and cultural norms, rather than through contextual reasoning or violation of conversational principles.

The phrase “All the voices in my mind” is a metaphor that often appears in literary works, songs, and everyday conversation. It describes internal conflict, mental stress, or intrusive thoughts. It is not literally meant as a hallucination, but rather as a figurative way to express inner turmoil and emotional

instability in the speaker. Listeners, especially those who are familiar with such metaphorical language, should not infer its meaning solely from the context of the song, but instead, recognize the phrase as a symbol of an established mental struggle.

Similarly, the phrase “calling across the line” refers to a line whether it be psychological, emotional, or even moral that is being crossed or tested by the speaker. While this part of the lyric may feel more abstract, it still fits into the prevalent metaphorical framework. The concept of “boundary” as a line that symbolizes transition (between sanity and instability, or between self-control and loss of control) is a widely used metaphor in the English language. As with the phrase “All the voices in my mind,” it also does not ignore Grice's

conversational principles, such as Appropriateness or Relevance. The sentence is coherent, organized, and easy to understand in a cultural context that often uses metaphors to describe emotional or psychological conflicts.

As such, the implicature contained in these lyrics is not based on conversational manipulation or listener inference, but rather on the stable meaning of culturally rooted metaphorical language. Given that the terms “All the voices in my mind” and “Calling across the line” are commonly understood expressions, their use here reflects conventional implicature, that is, meanings that arise not from the context in which they are uttered, but from the semantic and cultural conventions attached to the words themselves.

Data 6

“I found my heart and broke it here Made friends and lost them through the years” (Castle on the Hill)

The phrase “I found my heart and broke it here” uses figurative language, but it is conventional. In literary and emotional contexts, “finding one's heart” is commonly understood as the discovery of emotional depth, vulnerability, or feelings of love. Similarly, “breaking one's heart” is a common metaphor to describe emotional

pain or heartbreak, especially in relation to lost love or youthful disappointment. These allusions are so integrated in English usage that they do not require the listener to draw unique conclusions from the context of the song. The implicature that the speaker experienced a significant and painful emotional moment in a particular location is

conventionally contained in the figurative expression itself.

The next line, “Made friends and lost them through the years,” reinforces this tone of personal reflection and emotional journey. The experience of building and losing friendships over time is part of the overall human narrative, and the expression here is literal and clear.

Data 7

“One friend left to sell clothes, one works down by the coast One had two kids but lives alone, one's brother overdosed” (Castle on the Hill)

The lyrics reflect a series of changes in the lives of people from the speaker's past, especially his childhood friends who have taken different paths in life. Each clause conveys the facts in a direct and clear way, without the use of figurative language or suggestions. For example, the phrase “A friend went to sell clothes” expresses a change in career or lifestyle clearly. Similarly, “Someone works on the beach,” provides information about occupation and location in a literal way. These explanations do not violate Grice's conversational principles; the information conveyed is relevant, informative, and easy to understand. These descriptions reflect common social life paths, so listeners can easily understand them without needing additional explanations.

Violations of Grice's conversational principles (such as Quantity or Manner) are absent, not even a reliance on unusual or obscure expressions. Instead, the lines convey a universal sentiment that is commonly understood without the need for further interpretation. Taken together, these two lines convey the theme of emotional growth, love, and compassion.

In the second part of the lyrics, “A man has two children but lives alone, his brother overdoses,” there is a more emotional element, but it is still conveyed in simple and clear language. The phrase “has two children but lives alone” subtly implies a sense of loss or separation (perhaps caused by divorce or a sense of alienation), but this meaning comes from the culturally recognized narrative of single parenthood, rather than figuratively or indirectly. Likewise, “someone's brother overdosed” is a tragic fact conveyed directly, without the need for figurative interpretation or inference. It is a real situation that is often experienced and understood, and the speaker does not use poetic devices to convey meaning indirectly.

Data 8

“These people raised me and I can't wait to go home” (Castle on the Hill)

In this lyric, the phrase “These people raised me” signifies the significant impact of the speaker's hometown community or close social circle, possibly friends, neighbors, or extended family who played a role in shaping her upbringing. The idea of being “raised” by one's environment is a generally accepted metaphor that goes beyond the literal involvement of parents, encompassing a broader concept of collective influence. This meaning is culturally embedded and does not require the listener to infer or deduce it from the surrounding context. It serves as a conventional expression of gratitude and emotional connection to one's roots.

Similarly, the line “I can't wait to go home” is a straightforward and emotionally charged statement that conveys the speaker's desire to return, feel comfortable and familiar. In this context, “home” is not simply a physical place, but a symbolic representation of belonging, identity and emotional security. This nuanced meaning of “home” is commonly understood in English, particularly in songs and poetry, where

“going home” often signifies more than just returning to a location, but also implies a reconnection with one's origins and personal history. The audience does not need to exert interpretive effort to understand this meaning, as it is already linguistically and culturally established.

Furthermore, the lyrics adhere to Grice's conversational principles (Quantity, Quality, Relation, or Manner). The lyrics are comprehensively relevant, clear, and informative, with the implicature arising naturally from the semantic content of the expression itself. The listener does not need to infer meaning from tone, indirectness, or situational clues; rather, the significance of the statement is immediately apparent due to its conventional usage.

Thus, the lyrics “These people raised me and I can't wait to go home” are categorized as conventional implied because their meaning is embedded in familiar language structures and cultural expressions that convey a sense of belonging and nostalgia without requiring conversational inference.

Data 9

“I still remember these old country lanes When we did not know the answers” (Castle on the Hill)

The second line, "When we don't know the answer," further reinforces the theme of memorable innocence. This phrase is conventionally used to describe the uncertainty and wonder of youth when individuals have fewer responsibilities and are unencumbered by adult problems. The meaning of the phrase can be readily understood and universally interpreted as a reference to the time before one gain life experience or adulthood. The phrase contains the conventional implication of longing for a simpler and innocent time that has passed but is remembered with affection.

Most importantly, these lyrics do not violate Grice's conversational principles of no ambiguity (Manner), irrelevance (Relation), lack of clarity (Quantity), or dishonesty

Data 10

"Loving can hurt, loving can hurt sometimes But it's the only thing that I know" (Photograph)

The repetition of the phrase "Loving can hurt" is direct and emotional, reflecting the general truth that love, despite its deep meaning, is often accompanied by emotional pain. This phrase contains an accepted conventional understanding in both spoken and literary language, where the risks and emotional consequences of romantic attachment are widely recognized. Listeners

(Quality). The speaker conveys something clear and familiar by using language that is in keeping with long-standing poetic and cultural traditions. The listener is not expected to make any special inferences; instead, the emotional meaning is already embedded in the use of common metaphors and tone.

Therefore, this lyric is categorized as conventional implicature because it uses culturally embedded phrases that contain pre-established meanings, allowing listeners to understand its emotional meaning without relying on context or indirect suggestions. These lyrics reflect a broader pattern in Ed Sheeran's songwriting, where universal experiences are conveyed through language that is easy to understand and emotionally resonant.

do not need to interpret this sentence through contextual clues or indirectness; they can immediately grasp its meaning as it is based on a universally accepted emotional experience.

Furthermore, the second clause "But it's the only thing I know" reinforces the idea that love is at the core of human existence. The implication is that, although love has a

painful side, it remains an important and irreplaceable part of the speaker's life. This expression stems from a shared belief system, where love is considered the core of identity and emotional meaning. Again, this sentiment is conventionally encoded in the language; there is no violation of Grice's conversational principle. The speaker conveys the message in a direct, honest, relevant and clear manner, so the listener can interpret the implicature not through inference, but through familiarity with the expression and its common use in emotional and artistic discourse.

Thus, the implied message of these lyrics that love is painful yet indispensable is

not only limited to the context of the conversation in the song. Rather, it reflects a general human truth that is culturally reinforced and widely recognizable. Its meaning does not emerge through conversational strategies such as irony or irreverence, but is built into the conventional use of emotionally expressive language.

Therefore, these lyrics are best understood as an example of conventional implicature, as their emotional weight and message are rooted in culturally recognized language patterns and universally understood metaphors, rather than in a specific speech context or delivery.

Data 11

"Where our eyes are never closing
Hearts are never broken and
time's forever frozen still" (Photograph)

The lyrics present an idealized, almost dreamlike image of a place or moment that transcends the limits of human experience. Each line uses conventional poetic metaphors to describe emotional permanence and romantic longing. The phrase "our eyes are never closing" symbolizes eternal presence and care, suggesting a place where there is no sleep, separation, or loss—an image that resonates with depictions of enduring love or memories. This metaphor is not vague or limited to a

particular context; rather, it is culturally and emotionally accessible, often found in expressions about enduring relationships.

The next line, "Hearts are never broken," contains similar conventional implications. The concept of a "broken heart" is a well-established metaphor for describing emotional pain, especially in the context of love and loss. By stating that "the heart never breaks," the lyric suggests a state of emotional security and perfection, where grief is absent. The phrase requires no special

inference or deep interpretation; its meaning can be readily understood by most listeners as it is often used in music, literature, and everyday conversation.

Finally, "And time's forever frozen still" summarizes the main theme of the song: preserving love and memories through photographs. The idea of time being "frozen" is a common metaphor used in discussions

about nostalgia and memories. In this context, it reinforces the emotional purpose of a photograph to capture a moment so that it remains unaffected by time. This use of figurative language does not violate Grice's conversational principles such as Quantity, Quality, Relation, or Manner. It is coherent, emotionally resonant, and universally understandable.

Data 12

"When I'm away, I will remember how you kissed me Under the lamppost back on Sixth Street" (Photograph)

The phrase "When I leave, I will remember" conveys a direct and familiar emotional expression of longing when parting. This type of statement often appears in romantic discourse, whether in poetry, songs, or colloquial language, and indicates emotional closeness and nostalgia. The listener easily understands that the speaker is referring to a meaningful moment that will provide emotional comfort at parting. The meaning is clear and does not depend on the violation of Grice's conversational principles such as Manner or Quantity; rather, the meaning is rooted in shared cultural associations regarding memory and absence in romantic relationships.

The second line "how you kissed me Under the lamppost back on Sixth Street" reinforces the conventional nature of the

implicature through its reliance on a very specific yet symbolically familiar image. The kiss under the lamppost creates a romantic image that has become a common motif in literary and cinematic traditions. The location detail "on Sixth Street" is not meant to create ambiguity, but to enhance the authenticity and emotional depth of the memory. The use of nostalgic images associated with a place is a conventional way of evoking intimacy and longing. The listener does not need to infer hidden meanings or symbolic subtexts; the emotional meaning is easily accessible and encoded in the universal language of love and memories.

Therefore, the implicature in these lyrics is conventional as the language used contains emotional meanings that are pre-established and common in romantic

narratives. Listeners understand the depth and emotional meaning of the memory not through context-specific inference, but through the recognition of standardized

emotional expressions. There is no manipulation of Gricean principles. Instead, the meaning of the lyrics is directly encoded in culturally recognized linguistic forms.

Data 13

“Saying, 'It's alright to run from all this pain” (Salt water)

The sentence “It's alright to run from all this pain” uses a common expression for expressing emotional reassurance, often found in therapeutic, empathetic, or comforting discourse. This phrase conveys the idea that withdrawing from or running away from emotional suffering is a legitimate human response, a widely accepted concept embedded in modern culture regarding mental health and emotional well-being. The listener does not need to search for hidden meanings based on the surrounding context, and the speaker does not use indirect communication or irony. Instead, the statement's reassuring tone and clear emotional permission are recognizable as reflecting a culturally normalized way of coping with pain.

Furthermore, these lyrics do not violate Grice's principles of conversation. They are relevant (Relationship), clear and direct (Manner), sufficiently informative (Quantity), and appear sincere (Quality). There is no ambiguity or need for the listener

to decipher the figurative language or implied meaning. The message that running away from emotional pain is acceptable is conventionally understood through the language used and does not rely on situational cues or interpretive effort.

Additionally, the use of the phrase “run from all this pain” is a common metaphor. The idea of “running away from the pain” is a metaphor frequently used in English to convey the act of avoiding, distancing oneself from, or emotionally detaching oneself from suffering. This metaphor has become so integrated into public discourse that it requires no further explanation or elaboration. Its implications are stable and culturally familiar, further supporting its classification as a conventional implicature.

Thus, the lyric “It's alright to run from all this pain” conveys a message that does not need to be inferred through conversational context, but is embedded in socially familiar language, making it a clear example of a conventional implicature.

Data 14

“Embrace the deep and leave everything” (Salt Water)

The phrase “Embrace the deep” refers to a conventional metaphor that associates the deep, especially the sea, with the unknown, the unconscious, or even death. In literary and poetic traditions, the sea or “the deep” often symbolizes surrender, emotional release, transformation, or separation from the material world. The verb “embrace” reinforces this symbolism by suggesting a deliberate acceptance and engagement, rather than a rejection. Thus, the listener can easily interpret the phrase not as a literal act, but as a figurative expression of letting go or entering a deep, irreversible state. This interpretation does not require contextual thought, since the symbolic associations between “the deep” and existential or emotional themes are well established in

English-speaking culture.

The second clause, “leave everything,” further reinforces this implication of surrender or separation. The phrase is linguistically straightforward, and its emotional meaning is clear: it implies a rejection of worldly attachments, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. The listener need not infer this meaning from the surrounding context, but can recognize it through cultural familiarity with the concept of “leaving everything” as a metaphor for release, transition, or even death. The use of the metaphors “embrace the deep” and “leave everything” carry pre-established connotations that are immediately accessible to the audience through shared cultural and poetic knowledge.

Data 15

“When there's nothin' left, I'll close my eyes and take one step” (Salt Water)

The lines “When there’s nothing left” consecutively describe a sense of emotional or existential exhaustion, reflecting the universal experience of feeling completely drained physically, emotionally, or spiritually. The phrase is widely known and requires no contextual interpretation, as it is commonly

used in poetic and everyday language to describe despair, resignation, or significant life changes. Its implication of reaching a point of no return is immediately clear to listeners.

The next line, “I’ll close my eyes and take one step,” continues this theme by using

familiar metaphors for trust and surrender. “Closing my eyes” represents relinquishing control, while “taking one step” represents moving into the unknown or embracing transformation. These metaphors are well-established in literature, music, and motivational contexts, allowing listeners to easily grasp their meaning without having to deduce subtle cues.

Most importantly, the lyrics adhere to Grice’s conversational principles of being clear (Manner), relevant (Relation), honest (Quality), and informative (Quantity). There is no ambiguity or irony; depth of emotion is conveyed through widely understood conventional language.

Thus, the line “When there’s nohin’ left, I’ll close my eyes and take one step” illustrates conventional implicature, because its emotional and existential meanings are rooted in culturally recognized expressions

rather than contextual inferences.

B. Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature is an idea in pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that studies how context affects the understanding of meaning in interactions. The term refers to the idea that speakers can convey messages that are not directly expressed through their words, by drawing on the shared knowledge, context, and assumptions of the participants in a conversation. The idea was developed by the philosopher H. P. Grice, who argued that successful communication often follows certain conversational principles, which guide the way information is exchanged. When we analyze song lyrics, conversational implicature plays a vital role in unearthing the deeper meaning and emotional nuances that the singer is trying to convey.

Data 16

“White lips, pale face Breathing in the snowflakes Burnt lungs, sour taste” (The A Team)

In the lyrics “White lips, pale face Breathing snowflakes Lungs burning, sour taste,” Ed Sheeran creates a powerful image of someone struggling with physical exhaustion or stress, perhaps due to cold

weather or emotional turmoil. This image reflects the individual’s suffering in harsh conditions, where breathing in cold air causes discomfort, as indicated by the phrases “burning lungs” and “sour taste.”

This can be considered a conversational implicature because it implies more than what is directly stated. Sheeran does not explicitly explain the cause of the person's suffering, but through rich description, he suggests a deeper emotional or physical hardship. The listener can infer that the subject is facing a difficult, perhaps dangerous situation, which could be related to addiction or heartbreak,

even though it is not directly stated. The context, tone, and accompanying melody also enrich the interpretation, encouraging the listener to fill in the gaps in meaning. This indirect meaning is in line with Grice's concept of conversational implicature, where the listener derives additional meaning from the speaker's word choices beyond the literal message.

Data 17

"And in a pipe she flies to the Motherland Or sells love to another man"
(The A Team)

In the lyrics "And in a pipe she flies to the Motherland Or sells love to another man," Ed Sheeran uses metaphor and euphemism to imply a deeper, unspoken reality. The phrase "flies to the Motherland in a pipe" metaphorically refers to drug use, specifically smoking crack cocaine, while "sells love to another man" euphemistically describes the practice of sex work.

These meanings are not directly stated, but are implied, requiring the listener

to interpret the symbolic language and infer the desperate situation the woman finds herself in. This is a clear example of conversational implicature, where the speaker says something that, if taken literally, seems simple or poetic, but in context carries a much deeper, socially charged message. The actual meaning emerges from shared cultural knowledge and the listener's ability to "read between the lines," as Grice's theory explains.

Data 18

"I've been spinning now for time Couple women by my side I got sinning on my mind" (Bloodstream)

In the lyrics "I've been spinning now for time Couple women by my side I got sinning on my mind," Ed Sheeran expresses a state of emotional or moral conflict without directly stating it. "Spinning" reflects feelings

of being lost, confused, or depressed. "Some women by my side" suggests a temporary or casual relationship, while "sin on my mind" suggests guilt, attraction, or acting contrary to his principles.

This is an example of conversational implicature, as the lyrics do not explicitly state what he has done or the reasons behind his feelings. Instead, through subtle word choices and emotional tone, the listener is led to infer that he is struggling

with an inner problem, perhaps a result of his lifestyle choices or personal regrets. The true meaning is hidden beneath the surface, depending on the context and interpretation in relation to the key features of conversational implicature in Grice's theory.

Data 19

"How'd I get so faded?" (Bloodstream)

The lyrics "How'd I get so faded?" describe a state of being affected or lost, possibly due to alcohol or drugs. The term "faded" is common slang for someone who is under the influence of alcohol. However, the speaker does not explicitly state what caused him to be in this state or why.

This expression fits the conversational purpose because the question is not just about the physical state of being

"faded." It implies confusion, regret, or deeper emotional problems, perhaps related to pain, escape, or loss. The listener is expected to infer that there is something more complex going on than just being drunk. This meaning relies on a shared understanding of the language and emotional context rather than relying solely on direct statements that conform to Grice's concept of indirect meaning.

Data 20

"I've been looking for a lover Thought I'd find her in a bottle"
(Bloodstream)

The lyrics of the song "I've been looking for a lover Thought I'd find her in a bottle" convey a deeper emotional struggle hidden behind the poetic phrase. Literally, these lyrics describe someone who is looking for love and turns to alcohol "a bottle" as a substitute or escape. The speaker does not explicitly state that they are feeling lonely,

heartbroken, or self-medicating, but the meaning is clearly implied.

This is an example of strong conversation implicature because the emotional reality (loneliness, emotional pain, or disappointment) is not directly stated. Conversely, listeners infer this meaning through the metaphor, "find her in a bottle"

These lyrics rely on the cultural knowledge that “the bottle” often symbolizes alcohol and emotional escape, allowing the listener

to fill in the emotional context based on what is not said, which is an important feature of Grice’s theory.

Data 21

“When I was six years old, I broke my leg When I was running from my brother and his friends” (Castle on the Hill)

The lyrics in the song “When I was six years old, I broke my leg When I was running from my brother and his friends” are clear and direct, reminiscent of childhood. However, the lyrics also contain an implicit meaning, giving a deeper nuance than is directly expressed.

The story is not only about physical injury, but also subtly depicts themes of nostalgia, innocence, and youthful joy. The listener is invited to feel the emotions that underlie these memories: it could be a longing for a simpler past, a family bond, or

the twists and turns of time. These hidden meanings are not explicitly stated, but are conveyed through context, tone, and cultural connections to the story of the past.

Thus, despite the obvious meaning, the implications arise from what the speaker does not say, why he or she is reminiscing about this moment, and how the experience resonates emotionally within the overall narrative of the song. This is in line with Grice’s concept of conversational implicature, which suggests that meaning depends on understanding beyond what is directly said.

Data 22

“And tasted the sweet perfume of the mountain grass I rolled down”
(Castle on the Hill)

The lyrics of the song “And tasted the sweet fragrance of the mountain grass I rolled down” create a vivid sensory image of a fond childhood memory. The lyrics offer a seemingly simple and delightful portrayal of rolling down a hill and enjoying the scent of the grass.

However, the lyrics also contain conversational meaning through their emotional tone and nostalgic frame. Although not stated directly, the lyrics imply a longing for the innocence, freedom, and purity of youth.

The use of “sweet perfume” reflects a romantic reminiscence, inviting the listener

to feel the warmth and emotional depth behind the moment.

The lyrics are not just about the scent of grass, but also about remembering carefree, happy times. This implicit emotional subtext exemplifies conversational

implicature within Grice's theoretical framework. The speaker relies on the listener's ability to associate the imagery with broader feelings, so the lyrics have a deeper meaning than their literal expression.

Data 23

"Driving at 90 down those country lanes Singing to 'Tiny Dancer"
(Castle on the Hill)

Literally, the lyrics in question describe a fast ride while singing a favorite song. However, behind this aspect, the lyrics have a conversational meaning that implies deeper emotions and context. While the lyrics do not explicitly convey feelings of loss or rebellion to the listener, there are subtleties of nostalgia and emotional escape that can be felt by those who listen. The activity of driving fast and singing a soulful song together suggests an emotional moment that may be related to

love, memories, or longing for the past.

This is in line with Grice's principle of conversational implicature, where the speaker conveys more than just the spoken words. The emotional weight and meaning of the scene depend on shared cultural understandings (such as the familiarity of the song *Tiny Dancer*) as well as how the listener interprets it. The meaning lies not only in the lyrics, but also in what the listener can understand between the lines.

Data 24

"15 years old and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes Running from the law through the backfields and getting drunk with my friends" (Castle on the Hill)

The lyrics clearly reflect the spirit of rebellion and ignorance often exhibited by the younger generation. Superficially, the lyrics describe activities such as smoking at a young age, defying authority, and consuming alcohol. However, there is a deeper meaning

behind these behaviors.

This is an example of conversational implicature, where the speaker does not explicitly express their feelings or the meaning of the experience. Instead, the listener is invited to infer themes of loss of

innocence, desire for freedom, relationships with peers, and perhaps also a sense of regret or longing. The mention of “running away from the law” and “hand-rolled cigarettes” gently reflects the harsh, unethical, and possibly emotionally troubled phase of adolescence without explicit explanation.

Data 25

“Had my first kiss on a Friday night I don't reckon that I did it right”
(Castle on the Hill)

The lyrics of the song “Had my first kiss on a Friday night I don't reckon that I did it right” depict deep memories wrapped in vulnerability and self-awareness. At first glance, these lyrics appear to be a simple recollection of a first love experience. However, underneath, there are deeper layers of emotions, such as nervousness, inexperience, and perhaps also mixed reflections on youth.

The lyrics qualify as conversational implicature because the speaker does not

Based on Grice's theory, conversational implicature arises when the implied meaning exceeds what is said literally, as is the case in this context. The context and the unstated emotional message rely on the listener's cultural as well as emotional understanding to understand the meaning behind the teens' unruly behavior.

directly convey her feelings (for example embarrassed, awkward, happy), but the phrase “I'm not sure if I did it right” signals doubt or regret. The listener interprets the emotion based on tone and context, not on a clear explanation.

In accordance with Grice's theory, the true meaning is not fully expressed, but understood through implication. The lyrics invite the listener to experience the common awkwardness of growing up, making it more meaningful than it seems in direct words.

Data 26

“We keep this love in a photograph We made these memories for ourselves” (Photograph)

The lyrics of the song “We keep this love in a photograph We make these memories for ourselves” use imagery and emotional

nuance to show the power of affection and memory. While it is literally about preserving a moment through a picture, the meaning is

much deeper. This situation reflects clear conversational implications, as the singer does not explicitly express longing, loss, or an attempt to preserve feelings, but the listener can infer from this. The phrase “keeping this love in a photograph” suggests that the love

is distant, in the past, or no longer physically present, and the picture serves as a way to keep those feelings alive. In the same way, “we make these memories for ourselves” indicates a deliberate emotional investment, perhaps to cope with a breakup or loss.

Data 27

“So you can keep me inside the pocket of your ripped jeans” (Photograph)

Using imagery to show closeness and emotional intimacy. The speaker is literally asking to be physically connected by being put in a pocket, which represents comfort and affection. This is an example of conversational implicature because the deeper meaning is hidden but not directly expressed. The “pocket” represents the

metaphorical space where the speaker feels safe, loved, and valued. This suggests that their relationship is very close and personal, while the “ripped jeans” may reflect vulnerability, youth, or imperfection. The listener is invited to understand the emotional meaning of this closeness and how it reflects the relationship between the individuals.

Data 28

“And if you hurt me That's okay, baby, only words bleed” (Photograph)

The song lyric “And if you hurt me That's okay, baby, only words bleed” is rich in emotional meaning and is a powerful example of implicature in conversation. On the surface, the speaker appears to trivialize inner pain, as if implying that “only words” have an impact. However, in truth, these lyrics reveal a greater depth of vulnerability. The phrase “only words

bleed” serves as a metaphor that suggests that words can't really bleed. Instead, it suggests that the speaker feels emotionally hurt by something said or done, but tends to downplay the pain, perhaps out of love, loyalty, or denial. The listener is expected to understand that the pain is very real and deep, despite the speaker's attempt to downplay it.

Data 29

“Oh, you can fit me inside the necklace you got when you were sixteen
Next to your heartbeat where I should be” (Photograph)

In the lyrics “Oh, you can fit me inside the necklace you got when you were sixteen Next to your heartbeat where I should be,” Ed Sheeran doesn't explicitly say “keep me close” or “don't forget me.” Instead, he weaves his wishes in subtle forms: a necklace of memories and the sound of a beating heart. This line functions like a gentle message embedded in memory, rather than a direct confession.

The mention of “the necklace you got when you were sixteen” is more than just jewellery-it is a reminder of personal history, childhood, and a sense of emotional attachment. The speaker wants to be symbolically placed near the heart, where love and memories reside, which highlights the

emotional closeness despite the distance. She is aware of her physical absence, so she imagines the togetherness that remains through memory.

Here, the hidden meaning operates quietly but profoundly. The lyrics do not express the speaker's feelings directly; rather, they rely on emotional images and inferences. We, as listeners, are invited to understand what is not overtly expressed: the longing to be remembered, to stay connected despite being far away, and the weight of precious objects. That is where the implied meaning lies-not in the words themselves, but in the emotional resonance they gently leave behind.

Data 30

“There's still so far to go and I can't feel my toes When the rain soaks through the heels and slips to the sole” (Salt Water)

There's still so far to go and I can't feel my toes When the rain soaks through the heels and slips to the sole of my feet describes fatigue, both physical and emotional, without stating it directly. On the surface, this lyric displays the discomfort of walking in the rain, but underneath, it tells a story of resilience in the face of adversity.

This lyric is an example of subtle conversational implicature. The speaker doesn't directly say, “I feel tired,” or “This

trip is painful,” but we can feel it. The wet shoes and numb toes serve as a metaphor for emotional exhaustion, perhaps reflecting loneliness or challenges, especially on an uncertain long journey, both literally and symbolically.

Grice's concept of conversational implicature is present here in the way meaning is conveyed, not just told. Suffering is not explicitly announced but implied through sensory details. The listener is left to

explore the meaning, realizing that the speaker is not just talking about wet shoes

but also about moving forward despite the discomfort and emotional burden.

Data 31

“Come and kiss me, salt water Oh, finally, I feel, at three or four degrees”
(Salt Water)

In the lyrics “Come and kiss me, salt water Oh, finally, I feel, at three or four degrees,” although the words seem simple, the emotions behind them are complex. On the surface, it sounds like someone is seducing the ocean, but it actually describes a moment of surrender, escape, or perhaps a quiet rebirth.

The phrase “kiss me, salt water” is not about love for the ocean. Rather, it suggests a deep longing to be filled, purified, or absorbed by the majesty of nature. Salt water, reminiscent of tears, cleansing, and silence, becomes a symbol for releasing emotions. Then, the statement “finally, I feel, at three or four degrees” signifies the experience of a strange sensation in the

freezing cold. It suggests that the numbness is being removed, perhaps through the pain experienced. He is not just talking about temperature; he is talking about feeling alive again, albeit through discomfort.

This is a clear example of implicature in conversation. The speaker never says “I am numb” or “I am cut off from emotion,” but the listener can infer that from what is implied by the cold water, the slow return of sensation, and the appeal to the ocean. According to Grice’s theory, this is where implicatures occur: between words, where the listener must interpret the unexpressed feelings by considering the context and the images at hand.

Data 32

“Now I'm standing on the edge, gazing into Hell Or is it somethin' else? I just can't tell” (Salt Water)

The lyrics describe a moment of deep inner conflict, a psychological tension between despair and confusion. The speaker is not really near the edge of the abyss or looking at the fire, they are caught in a moment of emotional crisis or uncertainty

about existence.

The phrase “gazing into Hell” evokes the idea of facing one's deepest fears, regrets, or emotional turmoil. Suddenly, however, the phrase switches: “Or is it something different? I'm not sure. “This

uncertainty shows a vulnerable side. The speaker is unsure if what they are facing can really be as devastating as they feel, or if their view is distorted by emotional overload.

The lyrics don't express "I'm depressed" or "I don't trust my emotions," but we can draw that conclusion. Vagueness, hesitation between two extremes, and uncertainty in the speaker allow the listener to fill in the emotional blanks. Grice's theory of implicature emphasizes that meaning often comes from what is implied, not what is said, and here, the suggestion is a plea for understanding, framed in uncertainty.

Conclusion

This study pioneers the application of H.P. Grice's implicature framework to the analysis of contemporary music lyrics, using Ed Sheeran's songwriting as a case study. By treating lyrics as a form of pragmatic discourse, the research demonstrates how implied meanings both conventional and conversational function not just as artistic devices, but as tools for emotional storytelling and audience connection.

The analysis reveals how Sheeran's lyrics operate on multiple levels: conventional implicatures draw on shared cultural metaphors and idioms, while

conversational implicatures invite the listener to interpret emotional undercurrents and unspoken truths. This layered approach to meaning-making challenges the assumption that popular music is linguistically simple and instead positions it as a rich site for pragmatic exploration.

By highlighting the presence and function of implicature in five of Sheeran's songs, this study contributes to broader discussions in linguistics, music studies, and cultural discourse. It invites further research into how artists across genres and cultures use implicit language to resonate with their audiences. Beyond linguistic theory, the findings also offer insight into how listeners build emotional connections through inference, memory, and shared experience.

Ultimately, this research opens a path for future interdisciplinary studies where language, music, and cultural meaning intersect reminding us that what is unsaid in a song is often just as powerful as what is spoken.

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