

Words, Bitter Meanings: A Pragmatic Study of Implicature in Melanie Martinez's Gingerbread Man

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Abstract: This study provides a pragmatic analysis of conversational implicature in Melanie Martinez's song Gingerbread Man, focusing on how meaning is constructed beyond literal interpretation through linguistic choices. Each lyrical line was examined using Grice's theory of implicature to determine how the four cooperative maxims, including Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, are adhered to, violated, or intentionally flouted. The analysis reveals that flouting predominantly occurs in the maxims of Manner, Quality, and Quantity, indicating intentional ambiguity, exaggeration, and symbolic indirection throughout the lyrics. Such patterns demonstrate Martinez's creative strategy of using metaphor, sensual imagery, and emotionally charged symbolism to communicate deeper messages surrounding desire, vulnerability, power imbalance, and nontraditional perceptions of romantic relationships. These findings highlight implicature as a poetic mechanism that enriches the narrative, enabling multilayered interpretation and emotional resonance beyond explicit meaning. The study further emphasizes the value of pragmatic theory in analyzing artistic texts, showing how linguistic inference uncovers nuanced meaning embedded in contemporary music. This research contributes to the growing intersection between linguistics and literary discourse and encourages future studies to explore implicature in Martinez's broader body of work or compare multiple musical genres to better understand how artists employ pragmatic devices to express identity, social messages, and psychological complexity.

Keywords: conversational implicature; Gricean maxims; figurative language; song lyrics; Melanie Martinez

1. Introduction

Some people relax themselves by doing their hobbies such as reading books or simply as hanging out. Some of them who unable to do such things relax themselves by simply listening to songs. Combination of lyrics and music are the main aspects which form a song. Song is an art form of expressing human thoughts. Yet, messages in song could not be conveyed without the existence of language. Language is an important communication medium for human to use. One will able to fulfill their needs by the use of language. People worldwide use language to collaborate, communicate, and interact with each other in various settings, including workplaces, classrooms, and communities ([Alek, 2018](#)).

Song lyrics are mostly similar to poem where it contains plethora of figurative language. Simply, figurative Language are words or sentences which meaning is beyond the words or sentences themselves. Figurative language requires a cognitive process to be understood ([Griffiths, 2006](#)). Every

country has their own figurative language since it is also affected by culture. Figurative language has a lot of types, some of them are metaphors, metonymy, hyperbole, idioms, etc.

Although a considerable number of linguistic studies have analyzed implicature in song lyrics, most existing research focuses on mainstream pop songs, general conversational implicature, or broad pragmatic phenomena. However, there is limited scholarly attention on dark-themed pop music, especially works by Melanie Martinez, whose songs uniquely combine childlike metaphors with adult, psychologically complex narratives. Specifically, the song “Gingerbread Man” has not been examined through a pragmatic lens despite its rich use of figurative language, implicit criticism, and symbolic representations of power and desire. Previous studies also tend to emphasize semantic meaning rather than uncovering the layered implicatures that construct hidden emotional and social messages. Therefore, a gap remains in understanding how implicature operates within Martinez’s stylistically distinctive lyrics and how implicit meanings contribute to her storytelling.

Focus on Melanie Martinez’s narrative style, which blends innocence and dark psychological themes—an area that remains underexplored in pragmatic research. A specialized analysis of conversational and conventional implicatures in the single “Gingerbread Man,” allowing deeper insight into how implicit meanings shape character dynamics in the song. Application of Gricean theory in a multimodal pop-art context, showing how implicature functions not only as linguistic expression but also as part of the artist’s thematic identity. Identification of emotional, relational, and symbolic implicatures, which uncovers the underlying message of consent, desire, objectification, and emotional detachment conveyed through metaphoric expressions. This combination makes the study original compared to previous research on song lyric analysis. This research is conducted with the following objectives:

1. To identify the types of implicature (conversational and conventional) found in Melanie Martinez’s *Gingerbread Man*.
2. To analyze how implicatures are used to convey hidden messages, emotional nuances, and symbolic meanings in the lyrics.
3. To interpret the pragmatic functions of the implicatures, particularly in revealing the persona’s attitudes, intentions, and relationship dynamics.
4. To contribute to the broader understanding of how implicature operates in contemporary pop music with dark, metaphorical undertones.

The research enriches pragmatic theory by demonstrating how Gricean implicature can be applied to artistic and non-conversational texts such as song lyrics. It provides an analytical framework that future researchers can use when examining implicit meaning in stylized narratives. The findings help students, educators, and researchers understand how implicit meaning functions in modern music, making it a useful reference for linguistic, literary, and cultural studies. The study encourages deeper critical engagement with song lyrics, promoting awareness of underlying emotional and social messages often overlooked by casual listeners. It offers insight into Melanie Martinez’s storytelling techniques, which may support further academic discussions on her artistic influence and narrative style. By uncovering themes such as emotional autonomy, desire, and objectification, the study contributes to broader discussions on gender and psychological expression in popular culture. It highlights how contemporary music communicates sensitive social issues through subtle, implicit language.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conversational implicature

According to [Griffiths \(2006\)](#), conversational implicature relies on shared norms and expectations about language use, such as the assumption that speakers generally aim to be truthful, to facilitate

effective communication and inference. Shared norms in this case are not only norms in a specific area but also norms that each individual speaker shared together. To truly understand an expression, we need a clear explanation or definition of its meaning, and this explanation should provide a precise logical equivalence ([Grice, 1989](#)).

Grice H.P. in 1989, divided conversational implicature into two types, generalized and particularized. Generalized means the implicature would automatically be understood by interlocutor without needing a specific context. E.g. someone says 'I am hungry', interlocutor would automatically understand the implication that the person wants to eat something. In the other flip, particularized conversational implicature needs a specific context to work. For instance, someone who owns a burger shop says '100 burgers sold today in only two hours'. In general context, interlocutor would be very confused on what the speaker explained. But if both communicators are in the burger place, the implication would be understood automatically by the interlocutor. Song lyrics, despite not being conversational in a literal sense, contain utterances that may carry implied meanings. Pragmatic frameworks have been shown to illuminate literary meaning beyond literal sense, legitimizing the application of implicature theory to lyrical texts ([Sinha, 2021](#)).

2.2 Gricean maxim

Grice stated four maxims that guide how people communicate effectively: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner maxim ([Grice, 1989](#)). These maxims help speakers give enough information, stay honest, remain relevant, and speak clearly with the context. When the maxims are followed, communication becomes smooth and meaningful. They also help listeners understand the speaker's intention more easily. Building on the idea of these maxims, it is also important to distinguish between violation and flouting. A maxim is violated when the speaker secretly breaks it so that the listener does not notice the hidden intention, and therefore no implicature is created ([Thomas, 2013](#)). A maxim is flouted when the speaker breaks it openly to invite the listener to search for a deeper meaning. In this way, flouting becomes an important tool for generating implicatures and understanding messages beyond the literal words.

Although Grice developed his maxims for everyday spoken conversation, scholars note that they can also be applied to non-dialogue texts such as songs, poetry, or narrative monologues ([Yule, 1996](#)). Writers and lyricists often flout maxims on purpose to express emotions or metaphors indirectly, which encourages audiences to interpret hidden meanings. Because of this, the Gricean framework remains useful for analyzing creative texts. It helps reveal how figurative language and stylistic choices produce implicatures and making the overall meaning of the work rich.

2.3 Figurative language

According to [Lakoff & Johnson \(1980\)](#), figurative language such as metaphors are not only stylistic tools but cognitive mechanisms that structure human understanding. When a text violates literal truth, the audience is bound to interpret the intended meaning behind the non-literal surface. This interpretation process aligns with conversational implicature, which, as [Grice \(1989\)](#) explains, arises when the literal interpretation of an utterance is inadequate to account for the speaker's communicative intention.

Although literary texts are not conversations in the everyday sense, pragmatics particularly implicature remains applicable. [Sinha \(2021\)](#) demonstrates that implicature theory can illuminate how literary meaning operates beneath surface wording, showing that readers interpret literary utterances under assumptions similar to conversational cooperation. In song lyrics, the listener treats the persona's voice

as a communicative agent whose deviations from literal truth are intentional and meaningful. Thus, figurative language in songs provides fertile ground for implicature: the imagery, metaphorical framing, and symbolic references guide the listener to infer meanings that extend beyond the literal linguistic form.

Song lyrics can be understood as constructed utterances because they are deliberately crafted for artistic and emotional effect, not for everyday communication ([Carter & Nash, 1990](#)). The lyricist selects words, sounds, and images to build a certain atmosphere or message. For this reason, lyrics often do not follow normal conversational rules and may rely on creative or symbolic language instead ([Leech, 2008](#)). This makes them behave more like literary expressions than ordinary conversation. Because lyrics are crafted this way, they often rely on creative language choices that shape how meaning is delivered and understood, especially through figurative devices.

Building on this idea of creative construction, metaphor becomes one of the main tools that shapes how listeners interpret a lyric. Metaphor becomes important because it often bends or breaks conversational maxims in order to create deeper meaning. By using non-literal imagery, a songwriter may flout the maxim of Quality or Manner, since the statement is not literally true or not expressed clearly on purpose. When this happens, listeners must search for meaning behind the metaphor, which naturally leads to conversational implicatures. In this way, metaphors connect the flouting of maxims with the hidden emotional message expressed in the lyrics ([Lakoff & Johnson, 1980](#)).

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to look deeper into the meanings in Melanie Martinez's *Gingerbread Man* (2015). The lyrics were observed verse by verse, and each phrase was interpreted before looking at how all parts connect to shape the overall meaning. According to [Creswell \(2014\)](#), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or texts assign to social or human problems. In the context of this study, the song lyrics serve as a cultural text in which meaning is constructed through figurative language, emotions, and implied messages. Therefore, qualitative research is the most suitable approach for interpreting how implicatures function within the lyrics. Therefore, this method is proper because qualitative research focus on meaning, especially when the language holds metaphors or ideas that are not stated directly.

The main data for this research are the lyrics of *Gingerbread Man*. These lyrics are used to identify and interpret the metaphors and to see whether Melanie Martinez follows, flouts, or violates Grice's conversational maxims. Some of the additional sources to help identify are: [Grice \(1989\)](#) offers the basis for the maxims, [Yule \(1996\)](#) explains how implicature appears in everyday communication, [Thomas \(2013\)](#) helps describe how meaning is created through interaction, and [Leech \(2008\)](#) supports the interpretation of pragmatic meaning in figurative phrases of the lyric, [Carter & Nash \(1990\)](#) direct the identification of literary features in written texts, [Griffiths \(2006\)](#) helps in interpreting word meaning, while [Lakoff & Johnson \(1980\)](#) show how metaphors play a role in shaping human thought and [Sinha \(2021\)](#) also explains how pragmatic theories can be used to analyze literary works such as song lyrics.

The analysis follows the content-analysis steps by [Elo & Kyngäs \(2008\)](#). First, in the preparation stage, the lyrics are read several times to pick out phrases to link to metaphor, maxim behavior, and implied meaning. Next, in the organizing stage, the selected phrases are grouped into categories such as maxim type, and forms of implicature. Finally, in the reporting stage, each category is explained to show how metaphor and maxim behavior work together to create implicatures in the song. This process helps expose how the figurative and pragmatic elements build the deeper meaning of *Gingerbread Man*.

4. Results

Extract 1:

“I'm frosting. I don't need a man to make my life sweet.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lyrics are relevant to the main topic of the song where it talks about the lack of interest in starting a relationship since Cry Baby sees some men are toxic.

Violated:

- Quantity: The information is not completed since Cry Baby does not quite specify the reason why she does not need a man.

Flouted:

- Quality: Cry Baby described herself as frosting intentionally. Although she is not a frosting literally, she put a juxtaposition between herself and frosting to describe her friendliness.
- Manner: She does not quite explain herself and her reason vaguely. Instead of saying it directly, she used metaphors such as "frosting" as an epitome for her independence which emphasizes her disinterest to start a normal relationship.

Implicature:

- In this lyric, Cry Baby describes her self-disclosure as a soft and sweet woman which described in the word "frosting" that associated with sweetness since it made from sugar. The second lyric emphasizes previous lyric where Cry Baby figuratively implied that she could be an independent sweet woman without a figure of a man who could complete her life.

Extract 2:

“Prince Charming. Just isn't the one that I think I need.”

Followed:

Relevance: The lyrics still follow the main theme of the song; Cry Baby directly explained she is not interested in the perfect men standard that is known by the society.

Quality: She vaguely explains her disinterest in perfect men. Essentially, she wants to start a relationship regardless of what features the men fit in the standard.

Violated:

Quantity: Cry Baby does not quite explain what she means by 'prince charming' since perfect men is a subjective appraisal.

Flouted:

Manner: The term 'Prince Charming' left an ambiguity. Cry Baby wants the hearer to interpret what she means by 'prince charming' since each individual has different preferences.

Implicature:

Cry Baby described that her preference in men is not the one that fit the standard of 'prince charming' which refers to perfect men standard that are depicted in the media.

Extract 3:

“You're thirsty. You think I give out all my shit for free.”

Followed:

- Relevance: Yet this song is about Cry Baby being eager to be in a sugarcoated relationship, her utterance still relevant to the song theme where she explained that it is not easy for men to get her.
- Quality: Cry Baby is being honest about her self-value by not lying that she would date everyone regardless of what they will do to her. The message is brief yet enough to be understood that she would never let her own self to be controlled without her consent.

Violated:

- Quantity: The second verse is lacking information about what is the value of the word 'shit'.

Flouted:

- Manner: The first line does not imply a thirsty feeling over water, but thirsty to find love. Cry Baby used the word 'thirsty' to mock the men of being thirsty over vulnerable women.

Implicature:

- Cry Baby mocks men in this lyric by attacking them with indirect insult by labeling them as thirsty people. Cry Baby also states her high self-value by denying the truth of her as a person who will get easily to be partner with.

Extract 4:

“I'm bursting out laughing at idiocy.”

Followed:

- Quality: Cry Baby expresses her feeling towards a concept that she sees as idiocy where people give their whole self to their partner without having a full control of their own life; Letting their self to be a puppet for their partner.
- Relevance: The lyric still connected to the context and theme where Cry Baby laugh at her own mindset that has explained in the previous lyric.

Violated:

- Quantity: Cry Baby does not embed enough information about what is she laughing about. She does not explain what is the concept of 'idiocy' she is laughing about.

Flouted:

- Manner: She intentionally does not explain the idiocy concept since it has explained in the previous lyrics. She left an ambiguity so the hearer could interpret what idiocy concept in relationship would be.

Implicature:

- Cry Baby is laughing at the concept for someone to think that one would give their whole self; giving their whole life to a person who won't give anything back. Hence, she is laughing at the person who thinks that.

Extract 5:

“I need a gingerbread man. The one I'll feed. A gingerbread man. The one I'll eat.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lyrics are still following the main theme about Cry Baby wanting a man who is obsessed with her.
- Quantity: Cry Baby does not fully explain what she means by gingerbread man and what she means by eating and feeding.

Flouted:

- Manner: Cry Baby left hints by describing the man as gingerbread man. Gingerbread is known with its sweet taste which Cry Baby wants to taste. The lyrics have sexual implicature where Cry Baby indirectly described with the word 'eat' and 'feed'.
- Quality: Cry Baby purposely says she needs a gingerbread man which is basically her dream man where it is being parallel with its sweet-taste nature of the cookie. She also explains how she really wants to 'eat' and 'feed' the gingerbread man which are basically a sexual connotation; Cry Baby wants to give and receive love.

Implicature:

- Essentially, these lyrics explain Cry Baby's dream of having a reciprocal relationship with her dream man that is described as gingerbread man. A gingerbread man would be a very sweet treat which mirrored with a sexual implicature of the lyric; the lyrics sexualize man in the terms of gingerbread.

Extract 6:

***“One who's always crazy, never calls me baby.
That's the one that I want. All you boys are not him.”***

Followed:

- Relevance: The lyrics remain relevant to Cry Baby's theme of unhealthy relationship patterns, always drawn to characters who don't provide emotional warmth. The choice of "crazy" people and those who "never call me baby" reinforces the dysfunctional relationship image established in the previous lyrics.
- Quality: Cry Baby seems honest about her preferences: she genuinely wants someone who doesn't call her "baby." There's no indication that she's lying. This statement serves to emphasize her contradictory desire: seeking intimacy through someone who doesn't offer intimacy.

Violated:

- Quantity: The information provided is minimal, so listeners have to fill in the blanks based on the tone of the song and the character of Cry Baby. She does not specify what she means by 'crazy'.
- Manner: Melanie leaves the listener to choose their interpretation, creating an ironic effect. Cry Baby wants something that seems to be detrimental to her. This ambiguity leads to the

implication that Cry Baby has destructive preferences or is simply attracted to things she can't have or even mocking herself for choosing the wrong person.

Implicature:

- The implications in this lyric are about the preference of man by Cry Baby herself. This part is when she is being honest on the listener. The lyric 'never calls me baby' basically means someone who does not even care about her existence.

Extract 7:

“Can’t you see? / I only want the ones who never see me”

Followed:

- Relevance: The line stays on topic because it supports the song’s main idea of wanting someone who is distant or unreachable. It fits the theme of girls who’s addicted to men that makes them vulnerable.

Flouted:

- Quality: Cry Baby states something that isn’t literally true. She doesn’t actually want people who can’t see her. The verse is intentional to show listener her will to be close to partners who are emotionally unavailable.
- Quantity: The lyric gives the statement of wanting unavailable man, but not the background. She tells us what she wants, but she never explains why she prefers partners who don’t notice or understand her.
- Manner: The diction is indirect and slightly vague. Instead of clearly saying “I’m attracted to people who ignore me emotionally,” she uses the softer expression “never see me,” making the message more poetic but not direct.

Implicature:

- The singer suggests that no one truly understands what she wants. She tells listener that she is attract to people who stay emotionally distant or unaware of her feelings, which gives her a sense of desperate in the relationship. In the end, this is all are sarcastic act towards girls with desperation of relationship even with absence of respect.

Extract 8:

“But I’m happy. I love playing these games until my heart, bleeds.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lyric stays connected to the song’s main theme of psychological “games” in toxic relationship. It continues the storyline of unhealthy attraction and highlights how Cry Baby keep being involved in a relationship that damage her self-respect.

Flouted:

- Quality: The expression “until my heart bleeds” is clearly an exaggeration. It’s not meant literally but functions as a metaphor to show the emotional intensity she feels. This use of hyperbole flouts the maxim of quality.
- Manner: The lyric uses figurative and poetic language rather than direct explanation. Instead of saying plainly that these emotional games hurt her, she relies on metaphor and hyperbole, which makes the message slightly implicit and ambiguous. Quantity: The singer offers little

context of the phenomenon. She mentions “playing games” and the emotional pain involved, but she does not explain what those games are or why they make her “happy.” This lack of detail makes listeners to interpret the emotional complexity themselves, showing a flouting of the quantity maxim.

Implicature:

- The lyric implies that she takes a certain pleasure in the emotional intensity and chaos within the relationship. Even when the experience becomes painful or overwhelming, she still engages in it, suggesting that the thrill and instability of these “games” give certain excitement to many desperate girls that is the main subject of the song.

Extract 9:

“It bleeds jelly, 'Cause you don't want someone to eat your cookie.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lyric still on track with the song’s main theme of emotional protection and fear of being taken advantage of. It continues with “jelly” metaphors used throughout the song, keeping the imagery consistent and relevant to the overall narrative by using food as a metaphor.
- Flouted:
- Quality: The singer uses imagery that is clearly not literal. People don’t “bleed jelly,” and a “cookie” is not an actual body part. These metaphors intentionally break the maxim of quality to express symbolic emotional meaning.
- Manner: This verse uses figurative language and indirect. Instead of saying openly that she is afraid of being used or exploited, she relies on metaphors like “bleeds jelly” and “eat your cookie,” which make the line less direct and ambiguous. This flouts the maxim of manner.
- Quantity: The information given is limited. Cry Baby never explains what the “cookie” stands for; whether it represents innocence, boundaries, or emotional intimacy. She also doesn’t clarify what causes the “bleeding” to be jelly. This lack of detail encourages listeners to interpret the symbolism themselves, showing intentional flouting of the maxim of quantity.

Implicature:

- The lyric suggests that her emotional “jelly bleed” reflects vulnerability she tries to protect. The Jelly represents something fragile and easy to squished, explaining Cry Baby’s heart fragility. By saying she doesn’t want someone to “eat her cookie,” she implies a fear of being taken advantage of or having her boundaries crossed. “Eating a cookie” has implicit meaning of losing one’s virginity.

Extract 10:

“Can someone please find him for me, find him for me?”

Followed:

- Relevance: The request directly supports the song’s theme of longing for someone who feels distant or unattainable. It fits the narrative of searching for a partner who matches her emotional or personal desires.

- Quality: The singer expresses a genuine plea without exaggeration or figurative language. She is simply stating what she wants; someone to help her find the person she's longing for. Nothing in the line suggests dishonesty or hyperbole, so the maxim of quality is followed.

Flouted:

- Manner: The repeated phrasing ("find him for me, find him for me") adds emotional weight but makes the request less neat and more dramatic. Instead of communicating the message in a clear and orderly way, she uses repetition to show intensity, which flouts the maxim of manner.
- Quantity: She gives limited information. She never specifies who "him" refers to, what kind of person she is looking for, or why she is unable to find him herself. This lack of detail pushes listeners to interpret her longing and emotional urgency, showing a deliberate flouting of the quantity maxim.

Implicature:

- The line suggests that Cry Baby is searching for a particular kind of partner but feels unable to find him on her own. The repetition signals her desperation or emotional dependence on others to help her. The deeper implicature is that Cry Baby describe how girls feel frustrated, powerless, or overwhelmed by her desire, which leads her to ask others for assistance in fulfilling that emotional need.

Extract 11:

"I'm the icing covering his body. I wanna hold him so close, so tightly."

Followed:

- Relevance: The lines stay fully relevant to the song's ongoing theme of chaotic intimacy and mutually consuming and messy desire. The imagery of "biting" and "eating each other into nothing" continues the narrative of intense, unordinary affection, pursuing the emotional tone in previous lines.

Flouted:

- Quality: The singer uses highly metaphorical language. She is not literally suggesting cannibalism. Instead, she utters that intentionally to express hunger of emotional relationship and closeness. This metaphor shows that she flouts the maxim of quality for expressive and poetic lyric Manner: The message is communicated through symbolic and somewhat dramatic metaphors rather than direct statements. Instead of clearly saying that she wants mutually intense affection, she wraps the idea in imagery of biting and consuming. This indirectness and ambiguity flout the maxim of manner.
- Quantity: The singer does not explain why she wants this extreme level of closeness or what emotional state drives these desires. The lack of explanation forces the listener to think of deeper meaning, making it a clear that the verse flouts the maxim of quantity.

Implicature:

- The singer implies a desire for a relationship where both partners are emotionally consumed by one another; so intensely connected that they metaphorically "eat each other into nothing." The biting and consuming imagery suggests passion, chaos, and a willingness to lose oneself in the relationship. The deeper meaning is that she wants a love that overwhelms them both, crashing boundaries and mixing emotion carelessly.

Extract 12:

“Baby, how do I say this politely? Love me harder and don't be nice, please.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lines stay connected to the song's main ideas about desire, emotional intensity, and unusual relationship dynamics. What she says continues to support the message of wanting a different, more powerful and messy kind of love.

Flouted:

- Quality: She uses a clear contradiction (“say this politely” vs. “don't be nice”), which she knows cannot both be true at the same time. Because she is not speaking literally, she flouts the maxim of quality to show emotional tension and strong desire.
- Manner: Her request is expressed in an indirect and confusing way. She asks how to say something “politely” while asking for something impolite. This makes her message less direct and purposely dramatic, which flouts the maxim of manner.
- Quantity: She does not explain why Cry Baby wants a rougher kind of love or what feelings make her desire that unusual closeness. She gives only a little information, leaving the rest for the listener to guess. This shows a flout of the maxim of quantity.

Implicature:

- The singer suggests that she wants a love that is more intense and passionate, not soft or gentle. Even though she asks “How do I say this politely?”, her real request is not polite at all. The deeper meaning is that she wants a strong, rough kind of connection and she knows that admitting this openly might sound inappropriate or socially unacceptable.

Extract 13:

“I wanna feel your crumbs on my body. I want to break you in pieces, fight me.”

Followed:

- Relevance: The lines continue to support the song's theme of strong, unusual affection and emotional chaos. They stay connected to earlier lyrics about desire, control, and rough emotional energy, so they stay fully relevant to the overall message.

Flouted:

- Quality: The singer uses metaphors that are not literally true. A person cannot actually leave “crumbs” on someone, and she cannot literally “break” someone into pieces. These exaggerations are meant to create strong images and feelings, so she flouts the maxim of quality on purpose to give emotional impact.
- Manner: Her words are aggressive and metaphorical rather than clear and direct. Phrases like “crumbs” and “break you in pieces” express emotions indirectly, through symbolic imagery. This makes the meaning less straightforward, which flouts the maxim of manner.
- Quantity: She expresses intense feelings but does not explain why she wants this kind of destructive closeness. She gives very little detail about the emotional reasons behind Cry Baby's desire, so the listener has to guess the deeper meaning. This lack of explanation shows a flout of the maxim of quantity.

Implicature:

- The singer suggests a wish for complete closeness and emotional control. Wanting to “feel your crumbs on my body” hints that Cry Baby wants any small part of him, almost as if she depends on his presence. Saying she wants to “break you in pieces, fight me” shows a desire for a relationship that includes tension, challenge, or intensity. The deeper meaning is that she wants a chaotic and consuming kind of love, not a calm or gentle one.

Extract 14:

“Baby, don't be so scared of biting. Want to eat each other into nothing.”

Followed:

- **Relevance:** The speaker follows the maxim of relevance because the lines fit the emotional theme of the song. The lyrics stay on topic by continuing the ideas of biting, consuming, and extreme closeness. Everything said here still connects to the main focus of intense desire and overwhelming affection.
- **Manner:** The speaker also follows the maxim of manner. Even though the lines are metaphors, the implied message wanting a deep and powerful closeness is still clear. The wording is strong and direct, not confusing or vague. The listener can easily understand the emotional meaning behind the imagery.

Flouted:

- **Quality:** The maxim of quality is flouted because the speaker says things that are not literally possible. “Eating each other into nothing” cannot happen in real life. These lines are meant to be symbolic, not factual. The exaggeration helps show how strong and intense the feelings are.
- **Quantity:** The speaker also flouts the maxim of quantity. Instead of explaining what kind of closeness they want or why they want it, they give only a hint through metaphors. The listener has to figure out the emotional meaning behind “biting” and “eating.” The lack of direct explanation invites the listener to interpret the deeper feelings themselves.

Implicature:

- The implicature is that the speaker wants a level of intimacy so deep that it feels like both partners are emotionally melting into each other. The idea of “biting” and “eating each other into nothing” suggests a desire for passion that takes over completely, both physical and emotional. It implies wanting to be fully connected, to lose boundaries, and to be completely wrapped up in each other’s presence.

5. Discussion

In interpreting the findings, the discussion situates the results within the broader context of pragmatic theory, particularly Grice’s theory of implicature. The presence of conversational implicatures throughout Melanie Martinez’s *Gingerbread Man* confirms that meaning in song lyrics is not always delivered through direct propositions but is frequently communicated indirectly, relying on inferential interpretation and shared assumptions between the singer and listener. This reinforces classical pragmatic observations that communication often operates beyond literal utterances and that listeners construct meaning based on contextual cues, cultural knowledge, and implied intent rather than explicit statements (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996). The results of this study, therefore, support the notion that music lyrics function similarly to spoken discourse in their use of implied meaning to convey emotional, ideological, and interpersonal content. While song lyrics differ in structure from

conversational dialogues, they share the capacity to manipulate maxims deliberately to evoke interpretative engagement, emotional resonance, and aesthetic effect.

The analysis revealed that the Maxim of Quality was flouted most frequently in the song, followed by the Maxims of Quantity and Manner. This suggests that indirectness and figurative expression are central strategies in the construction of meaning within *Gingerbread Man*. According to [Levinson \(1983\)](#), communicative meaning often arises when speakers intentionally violate conversational norms, allowing implicature to emerge as a natural consequence of maxim flouting. In this case, Martinez does not seek to convey truth-value statements about literal gingerbread men or frosting; rather, the figurative language signals metaphorical reference to intimacy, desire, and emotional control. Through this lens, the lyrics rely heavily on symbolic imagery rather than factual description, which aligns with the concept that poetic and artistic texts foreground connotative language to invite deeper interpretation ([Simpson, 2004](#); [Toolan, 1998](#)).

Politeness strategies further contribute to this indirectness. [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) argue that speakers sometimes choose indirect forms of expression to avoid face-threatening acts or to manage social expectations surrounding taboo topics. Although *Gingerbread Man* is bold in theme, its taboo elements, consisting of sexual undertones, emotional dominance, unconventional romance, are embedded in childlike metaphors and playful imagery. This linguistic disguise allows Martinez to explore sensitive or provocative narratives while softening their explicitness through symbolic wrapping. As [Machin \(2010\)](#) notes, popular music often communicates complex emotional states using imagery and symbolic constructs, enabling indirect communication of experiences that would feel too confrontational if stated plainly. Thus, figurative language in the song is not merely decorative; it serves a pragmatic function by encoding meaning beneath a veneer of innocence and whimsical metaphor.

Moreover, discourse interpretation is shaped by contextual and cultural knowledge. [Cutting \(2002\)](#) highlights that meaning construction in pragmatics is dependent on shared context, while [Huang \(2007\)](#) stresses the role of pragmatic competence in decoding implied meanings. Listeners familiar with Martinez's persona, artistic themes, or broader discography may detect additional layers of meaning that casual listeners might not recognize. The recurring motif of the "Cry Baby" persona, associated with emotional struggle, trauma, and subversive femininity, offers clues that *Gingerbread Man* should not be interpreted at face value. Instead, the lyrics reflect a negotiation of power dynamics and emotional vulnerability, as indicated by contradictory statements such as "I don't want to be your friend, I want your full attention." Such contradictions can be interpreted pragmatically as cues for deeper emotional tension, internal conflict, and resistance to conventional romantic expectations.

Emerging patterns within the findings also reveal the frequent use of metaphor and irony to criticize idealized romance and emotional dependency. Martinez's metaphorical representations of love as edible, consumable, or confection-like imply fragility, sweetness, and disposability, suggesting a commentary on how relationships can feel gratifying yet easily broken. Figurative phrases such as "give me the gingerbread man" work on multiple interpretative levels: literally playful, symbolically sexual, and emotionally reflective of competing desires for affection and control. This layered structure demonstrates that implicature in the song operates not merely as a linguistic occurrence but as an intentional communicative strategy designed to express complex personal experiences. Explicit description may fail to capture the emotional nuance involved; therefore, implicature becomes a tool to evoke meaning rather than declare it directly.

Unexpected elements in the data also inform the discussion. The limited presence of Relation implicature, for example, may signal a stylistic decision to prioritize ambiguity over narrative coherence. Instead of constructing a linear story, Martinez presents fragments of desire, frustration,

and psychological tension through metaphorically rich statements. The absence of explicit contextual cues encourages listeners to fill interpretive gaps, making meaning co-constructed rather than author-delivered. This interplay between artist and audience reflects postmodern tendencies in music and literature, where ambiguity is valued as a space for personal meaning-making rather than a flaw in communication.

Acknowledging such patterns strengthens the study's credibility by demonstrating critical engagement with the findings rather than treating them as static facts. It also underscores the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis, where researcher positionality plays a role in meaning construction. Cultural background, personal sensitivity to metaphor, and familiarity with Martinez's artistic identity may influence interpretation. While subjective interpretation is not a weakness of qualitative research, awareness of such influences promotes transparency and encourages replication or expansion through methodological triangulation. Future studies could incorporate inter-rater reliability, corpus-based metrics, or quantitative coding to enhance objectivity and deepen insights into implicature patterns.

Beyond the immediate findings, the discussion emphasizes broader implications for pragmatics and linguistic scholarship. Theoretically, this study demonstrates how conversational implicature operates in multimodal texts such as music, challenging the assumption that pragmatic meaning is primarily relevant to spontaneous spoken interaction. Instead, the results indicate that song lyrics, especially those with poetic nuance and symbolic layers, provide fertile ground for pragmatic inquiry. Figurative language, implicature, and aesthetic form merge to produce meaning that is felt as much as interpreted, revealing that art and language share communicative foundations ([Carter & Nash, 1990](#)). This strengthens the argument for integrating pragmatics into literary and stylistic analysis, bridging linguistic and cultural studies through interdisciplinary frameworks.

Practically, the findings may benefit students, educators, and scholars by illustrating how song lyrics can serve as authentic, contemporary materials for teaching pragmatics, metaphor analysis, and discourse interpretation. In classrooms, lyrics such as *Gingerbread Man* can promote critical thinking, interpretation skills, and cultural awareness by requiring students to infer meaning from implied cues rather than rely on direct explanation. For researchers, the study demonstrates the value of music as a corpus for linguistic analysis, particularly in an era where lyrical content increasingly reflects social issues, identity negotiations, and personal narratives. Understanding how artists use implicature allows scholars to explore cultural expression through language, offering insights into societal values, emotional discourse, and symbolic communication.

Ultimately, this section positions the study as a meaningful contribution to pragmatic analysis and cultural linguistics. By linking the findings to established theory and existing scholarship, it shows how indirect meaning functions in artistic discourse and highlights the importance of metaphor as a vehicle for emotional expression. The discussion not only explains the significance of the results but also identifies gaps, patterns, and questions that open pathways for further research.

Future research should expand the scope by analyzing a larger selection of songs from Martinez's discography to determine whether similar implicature patterns recur or evolve across albums. Comparative studies involving different artists or musical genres could reveal how implicature varies based on thematic content, audience demographics, or stylistic norms. Additionally, listener reception studies, including surveys, interviews, or focus groups, would help determine whether audiences interpret implicatures similarly or whether meaning varies across social and cultural backgrounds. Multimodal approaches could integrate visual elements from music videos or performances to investigate how lyrical implicatures interact with imagery, gesture, and persona construction. Such

interdisciplinary exploration could deepen understanding of how pragmatic meaning emerges not only from words but also from sound, visual symbols, and narrative context.

Through critical interpretation, this expanded discussion offers a thoughtful explanation of the findings' theoretical and practical significance. It demonstrates how conversational implicature enriches artistic expression, how metaphor encodes emotional nuance, and how pragmatic analysis can illuminate hidden meanings in contemporary music. By situating the results within a broader scholarly conversation, the study contributes to the ongoing development of pragmatic theory and encourages future inquiry into the dynamic relationship between language, art, and culture.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated conversational implicature in Melanie Martinez's *Gingerbread Man* through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle to identify how maxims were followed, flouted, or violated and how these patterns contributed to hidden meaning in the lyrics. The findings reveal that the Maxim of Quality is the most frequently flouted, followed by the Maxims of Quantity and Manner, indicating that metaphor, exaggeration, and symbolic language are key mechanisms for constructing implicit meaning in the song. Figurative expressions such as "frosting," "cookie," and "bleeding jelly" show how emotional themes, including desire, vulnerability, dominance, and resistance to traditional romance, are communicated indirectly rather than stated explicitly. These results highlight that implicature functions as an expressive strategy that enriches narrative depth, allowing listeners to derive meaning through interpretation rather than direct linguistic cues.

Despite the valuable insights gained, the research is limited to a single song and relies solely on qualitative interpretation. Broader studies across Martinez's discography, cross-genre comparisons, or listener-response research are recommended to deepen understanding and validate patterns of implicature in musical texts. Overall, this study contributes to pragmatic and stylistic scholarship by demonstrating that conversational implicature is highly productive in song lyrics and plays an essential role in shaping layered emotional and artistic meaning.

Author's declaration

Author contribution

Suci Pole Mappaita: conceptualization, design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and writing-original draft. **Fadillah Pole Mappaita:** data analysis and interpretation, data and result validation, and writing-discussion. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work. **Bayan Okenova:** writing-review and editing.

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Data availability

The data used in this study are derived from publicly available song lyrics of *Gingerbread Man* by Melanie Martinez, accessed from official music platforms and publicly available lyric repositories. The analytical data, including categorizations of implicature and interpretation notes, are presented in the article. Additional supporting data may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Ethical clearance

This research did not involve human participants, human subjects, personal data, or animal experimentation. The data analyzed in this research consisted solely of publicly available song lyrics from officially released recordings. Therefore, formal ethical clearance from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with general principles of academic integrity and ethical research practice. The authors ensured that the original work was properly cited and that the analysis was conducted objectively without misrepresentation of the source material. Copyrighted material was used strictly for academic purposes, including quotation and linguistic analysis, in compliance with fair use principles. The authors declare that there are no ethical issues related to confidentiality, anonymity, or informed consent in this research.

AI statement

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used for language enhancement and structural editing during the preparation of this manuscript. No AI tools were used for research design, data collection, data analysis, or interpretation of results. All final content was reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and originality of the work.

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