

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS ON MELANIE MARTINEZ'S STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE: A LINGUISTIC EXPLORATION OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT. Music is often used to voice social issues, one of which is the objectification of women, the treatment of women who are only being seen from their physical appearance rather than from who they really are. Through a pragmatic approach, this study explores how the lyrics of Melanie Martinez's song 'Strawberry Shortcake' voice criticism of social expectations that stick to women. The focus is on pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, implicature, irony, and pragmatic acts to show how this song raises the issue of objectification and its psychological impacts, especially about how these issues shape women's self-perception which lead to self-blame. The findings reveal how these pragmatic strategies are used to show the internalized effects of women objectification, while also exposing the societal expectations and norms that support it. Furthermore, this study shows that language strategies in music not only tell stories about reality, but can also be a form of subtle but very sharp resistance to oppressive norms.

Keywords: Women objectification; pragmatic; societal expectations; song lyrics

ABSTRAK. Musik kerap kali digunakan untuk menyuarakan isu-isu sosial, salah satunya objektifikasi terhadap perempuan, yakni perlakuan yang mengabaikan identitas asli mereka lebih dari penampilan fisiknya. Melalui pendekatan pragmatik, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana lirik lagu 'Strawberry Shortcake' karya Melanie Martinez menyuarakan kritik terhadap ekspektasi sosial yang melekat pada perempuan. Fokus dari studi ini adalah pada strategi pragmatik seperti presuposisi, implikatur, ironi, dan tindak pragmatik untuk menunjukkan bagaimana lagu ini mengangkat isu objektifikasi terhadap perempuan beserta dengan dampak psikologisnya, terutama tentang bagaimana isu-isu ini mempengaruhi persepsi diri para perempuan yang berujung pada tindakan menyalahkan diri sendiri. Hasil dari penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana strategi pragmatik tersebut digunakan untuk menunjukkan dampak internal dari objektifikasi terhadap perempuan, sekaligus mengungkap ekspektasi dan norma-norma sosial yang memungkinkan hal tersebut terjadi. Lebih jauh, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi bahasa dalam music tidak hanya menceritakan realitas, tetapi juga dapat berfungsi sebagai cara yang halus tapi tajam untuk menentang norma-norma yang menindas.

Kata kunci: Objektifikasi perempuan; pragmatik; ekspektasi sosial; lirik lagu

INTRODUCTION

Gender objectification is still a very serious issue, as it spreads negative stereotypes and makes women even more marginalized, including through media such as music (Whiteman, 2024). Many studies have shown that language can reflect and strengthen dominant ideologies that sometimes degrade women (Bretthauer, et al., 2007). In popular music, lyrics often contribute to the normalization of gender stereotypes and the objectification of women, so it is very important to analyze them from a linguistic perspective (Omolabi & Soliu, 2024). A pragmatic approach allows researchers to explore this issue by examining how artists use language strategically to address or challenge gender norms.

Without a doubt, pop music has a huge influence on today's culture. This genre reaches listeners from various circles and often reflects social attitudes, including gender roles (Bretthauer et al., 2007). Many studies have shown that pop song lyrics often depict women from a male perspective and

use objectifying language (Aprilia & Neysa, 2022; Omolabi & Soliu, 2024). But now more and more musicians are using their songs to counter such narratives and support gender equality (Caroline, Zahrani, Sitompul, & Rangkuti, 2023). Because of its broad influence, pop music is a very fitting medium for analyzing how language can actually be used to criticize or even perpetuate gender objectification.

Melanie Martinez is arguably one of the pop singers who is distinct from the others. She often uses her music to discuss heavy issues, such as mental health, societal pressure, and gender norms, making her work suitable for linguistic analysis. Unlike many other pop singers, Martinez prefers to use a storytelling style full of metaphors, irony, and strong visualizations, in her music. Her album titled *K-12* (2019), for example, satirizes the education system and social control over young people, while *Portals* (2023) focuses more on the theme of rebirth and transformation as a metaphor of overcoming past-life regression.

Out of all her songs, *Strawberry Shortcake* is the song that most clearly shows criticism of the objectification of women and society's expectations of

women's bodies. The lyrics address how girls have been taught since childhood to think about men's judgments, to the point that they blame themselves if they get unwanted attention. Martinez uses subtle but strong diction, to show how women are often forced to feel responsible for the treatment of others. Furthermore, the song uses childlike imagery mixed with adult themes to show how society sexualizes young girls while at the same time telling them to remain "innocent." As the song has a strong theme and Martinez herself is known for raising social issues, Strawberry Shortcake becomes an interesting object to be used as an analysis of how pop music can be a medium to counter harmful gender narratives.

While there have been many studies on Melanie Martinez's songs (Darmawan & Widyaningrum, 2024; Rahmah et al., 2024; Wahyu & Syaputri, 2023) and gender representation in song lyrics, such as gender stereotypes in pop music lyrics (Bretthauer et al., 2007; Flynn et al., 2016; Omolabi & Soliu, 2024), critical discourse on female representation (Aprilia & Neysa, 2022), feminist-stylistic analysis (Caroline et al., 2023; Tarigan et al., 2023), and critical-pragmatic study of gender representation (Omolabi & Soliu, 2024). However, it is still very rare to see research that specifically looks at Western pop songs that openly oppose the objectification of women through pragmatic analysis, and that is the gap that this research aims to fill. By analyzing Strawberry Shortcake by Melanie Martinez, this study aims to explore the song to uncover the pragmatic strategies used to raise and oppose unrealistic beauty standards and objectification of women.

This study aims to analyze how presuppositions show implicit views on the objectification of women, explore the role of implicature in strengthening or opposing society's views on women's bodies, and analyze how the irony in the lyrics of this song is used as a weapon of social criticism. In addition, this study also wants to add insight into how the language in the song Strawberry Shortcake forms a discourse on gender representation and the psychological impact of gender objectification on women through pragmatic acts analysis. Through these pragmatic strategies analysis, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding about the relationship between language, music, and the issue of women

METHOD

The data for this research were collected from the official lyrics of the song Strawberry Shortcake by Melanie Martinez, which was released in 2019 as part of her album K-12. The song lyrics were col-

lected directly from the official release available on verified music platforms, namely Spotify. This song was purposely chosen due to its explicit thematic content that addresses the issues of gender objectification and societal expectations placed upon women by the society which led to internalized blame. The data collection process involved close reading and transcription of the song lyrics to capture both literal and implied meanings, which are then organized for further analysis.

The analysis focused on four pragmatic strategies: implicature, presupposition, irony, and pragmatic acts. Grice's (1975) Theory of Conventional Implicature was used to delve into meanings that are implied rather than directly stated. For presupposition—those background assumptions hidden in language, Yule's (1996) framework was applied. To understand the use of irony and subtle criticism, the study drew on Leech's (1983) Principles of Politeness and Irony. Levinson's (1983) Pragmatic Theory helped strengthen the analysis by showing how social context influences meaning, and Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory was used to show how the lyrics do not only just say something, but they also do something socially, like criticizing beauty standards or calling out societal pressure. Altogether, these theories were used to give a full picture of how the song works linguistically to push back against gender norms.

The findings were presented in a descriptive format. Each pragmatic strategy was broken down and applied to specific parts of the lyrics. For every lyric analyzed, the study explained what it implies, how it connects to the theme of gender objectification, and what kind of social criticism it delivers. This structured approach helped show how language in Strawberry Shortcake does not just tell a story, but also delivers a powerful message. The goal was to clearly show how these pragmatic strategies help shape the song's resistance to harmful gender expectations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implicature and Presupposition Analysis

Introduced by Grice (1975) and further developed by Levinson (1983), implicature is the implicit meaning conveyed outside of what is expressly stated. Melanie Martinez uses implicature in Strawberry Shortcake to gently condemn how society frequently blames women for their own objectification.

"It's my fault, it's my fault, cause I put icing on top"

By the use of sarcasm and contextual framing, the opening phrase of the song's chorus generates a strong implicature. At first glance, the speaker seems to accept blame—implying that the way she dresses (described figuratively as “icing”) incites unacceptable conduct from males. “Icing” conjures images of adornment or enrichment, therefore comparing her body to a dessert emphasizes how femininity is usually presented as something decorative and edible.

Still, this remark is hardly a real admission of guilt. It willfully violates the Maxim of Quality, which advises avoiding stating something one thinks to be untrue. The speaker's claim that she is responsible for other people's conduct is unlikely to be serious. Rather, the repeated, strong wording emphasizes the ridiculousness of such an assertion by use of a rhetorical tactic.

The lyrics create a verbal implicature by breaking this conversational maxim. The audience is invited to see the speaker's statements not as acceptance of guilt but as a scathing criticism of the cultural logic assigning responsibility to women for being objectified within the larger framework of society gender standards and the discussion around victim-blaming. The underlying message, or implicature, is that this guilt is misplaced, moving attention from those who objectify to those who are objectified.

“Now, the boys want a taste of the strawberry shortcake”

Though the implicature is sexually provocative, on the surface this sentence seems harmless, referring to dessert. The term “taste of the strawberry shortcake” does not literally allude to food but rather to the objectification and sexual yearning focused at Martinez's body.

Grice's thesis holds that the sentence breaks the relevance principle as it causes the listener to read “taste” as a metaphor for sexual desire rather than literally. “Strawberry shortcake” evokes femininity and objectification of women, which adds to the implicature by reinforcing societal perceptions of food as a sign of pleasure and consumption. This metaphor avoids explicit references to exploitation or harassment, which pushes the listener to read the concealed meaning using cultural knowledge of sexual metaphors, hence generating conversational implicature.

“Got boys acting like they ain't seen skin before”

Though this line does not outright charge the males with improper conduct, this statement clearly implies that their objectifying gaze is justified and normalized by their overreactions. The speaker im-

plies that their astonishment is false by saying the guys are “acting like they ain't seen skin before,” a performative justification that conceals a chronic, socially accepted practice of objectification. This wording suggests how society sometimes tolerates such conduct by presenting it as a natural or reasonable response to women's looks.

Viewed via Grice's theory, this phrase obviously violates the Maxim of Quality, which calls on speakers to only state what they think to be true. The exaggerated claim that guys are really startled by the sight of flesh is not meant to be taken seriously. Rather, it is a humorous overstatement that reveals the fabricated character of their conduct. The statement ridicules the notion that such responses are innocent or spontaneous, suggesting instead that they are taught these actions are meant to justify and sustain daily sexism. Thus encouraging the listener to doubt not just the genuineness of these masculine sentiments but also the cultural scripts enabling such uncontested persistence. In the end, the implicature exposes a larger commentary: that objectification is frequently masked as instinctual action while, in reality, it is a result of normative societal views that merit examination and opposition.

“Just teach him to keep it in his pants and tell him to stop”

Grice's hypothesis suggests this statement runs on implicature instead of direct charge. Though it does not directly say society should deal with male entitlement, it suggests that society should be the emphasis of social transformation. The remark reveals the gendered character of societal expectations by suggesting that the duty for self-control is so fundamental that it should not need to be explicitly taught, thereby implicitly violating the Maxim of Quantity. The idea that this basic lesson is in some way “radical” draws attention to how natural and deep-seated gendered power relations are.

The expression “keep it in his pants” also employs a vernacular metaphor to subtly highlight male sexual entitlement and objectification, stressing not on regulating women's behavior but on educating men to respect limits. The basic assumption here, that males are not usually taught respect or self-control, emphasizes how society often justifies male behavior while loading the responsibility of prevention on women. This criticism emphasizes the gendered double standard in how harassment is handled, hence supporting the notion that the problem is not about women's looks but about confronting toxic masculinity and entitlement.

*“People all around me are watching closely
/ ‘Cause it’s how I look and not what I think”*

Grice’s theory holds that this sentence violates the Maxim of Relation by connecting public attention—“watching closely”—to the speaker’s physical look rather than her words or deeds. In this setting, the statement emphasizes a critical comment on the superficial manner in which women are typically appraised by suggesting that society pays more attention to their appearance than to their thoughts or words.

The statement “because it’s how I look and not what I think” suggests that society judges women on their appearance instead of their intellectual or personal worth. This use of implicature exposes a deeper meaning regarding how women are often judged on visual elements instead of their ideas, viewpoints, or agency. The line shows how societal standards give women’s exterior traits, such as beauty or fashion, priority over their voices or thoughts, a dynamic that usually results in women being objectified and underappreciated for their intellectual contributions.

On the other hand, Presupposition is the underlying assumptions a speaker takes for granted before uttering anything (Yule, 1996). Martinez challenges social standards around female beauty and responsibility inside apparently simple comments in Strawberry Shortcake, thereby compelling her audience to question the assumptions behind daily assessments of women’s bodies.

*“Feeling unsure of my naked body / Stand
back, watch it taking shape”*

This lyric assumes that the speaker’s body, in its natural form, elicits uneasiness or discomfort—a response not based on the body itself but rather on social expectations. The song does not say why the speaker feels insecure; rather, it depends on the audience to see that societal expectations, especially the depiction of the female form as slender, perfect, and “Barbie-like,” cause this unease. The reference to the “naked body” and “watch it taking shape” indirectly criticizes how deeply ingrained judgments are in daily thought, assuming an audience used to criticizing physical appearance based on arbitrary beauty standards.

The lyric questions the widespread body shaming society and unachievable goals placed on women by including this presumption. It suggests that outside influences determining how women should appear cause their body suffering to be unnatural. The song emphasizes how too frequently self-worth is assessed by adherence to idealized pictures, hence

stressing the psychological cost of these expectations and the pressing necessity to question them.

*“Got sent home to change ‘cause my skirt is
too short”*

This line assumes the issue is with the length of the skirt rather than the unsuitable responses of others. The presumed social rule here is: short skirts draw attention and are thus wrong, blaming the girl for being viewed as “improper” instead of challenging the woman’s objectification or the institution’s failure to handle it. This reflects the internalized cultural prejudice that girls are in charge of controlling male desire by changing their conduct or looks, hence reinforcing gender-based control and shame.

The use of presupposition in this line questions how cultural and institutional institutions promote victim-condemning by means of this presumption, thereby placing women as the ones who have to change to prevent objectification instead of blaming those who objectify them for their behavior. It emphasizes how the need to fit gendered expectations of modesty and propriety strengthens negative, patriarchal standards.

*“Now the boys want a taste of the strawberry
shortcake”*

This line assumes the female body is naturally an object of male’s desire, prepared to be “tasted” like a dessert. The metaphor of “strawberry shortcake” suggests that women are consumable, living for the enjoyment of others—especially males. This analogy depends on the listener’s knowledge of societal narratives that objectify women and lower them to their physical appearance, therefore it does not need a clear explanation. The lyric emphasizes how femininity is usually presented as something beautiful, enjoyable, and finally edible by comparing it to a delicious, attractive dessert.

The presumption derives from a larger social background in which women’s bodies are habitually depicted as objects for male consumption. It criticizes how mainstream and uncontested these representations have become by assuming the audience knows the usual usage of food-related metaphors, like “taste”, to describe sexual desire. The song reveals the latent sexism in such representations and gently highlights how society usually gives women’s physical attractiveness first priority above their intelligence, autonomy, or uniqueness.

*“Wondering why I don’t look like Barbie /
They say boys like girls with a tiny waist”*

By invoking Barbie, this lyric quickly sets up a common cultural awareness of body image and the

unreasonable demands put on women—especially young girls—who are socialized to strive for this homogenized, perfect ideal. This assumption criticizes the unachievable and uniform criteria set on women. The lyric assumes that failing to achieve the conventional beauty ideal of appearing like Barbie is undesirable. It indicates that women are eventually pressured by societal expectations about how they look when they are incapable of fulfilling the beauty standard set by the society. Although Martinez does not directly attack this beauty standard, the assumption itself emphasizes how deep-seated and harmful these standards are on females, which could cause them to question themselves.

“Now, my mama’s preaching to make sure I’m pure / But I never really cared ‘bout that shit before”

Often linked to conventional and patriarchal perspectives of female sexuality, this phrase assumes a moral requirement for young women to preserve purity. The term “preaching” implies an almost religious or fanatical emphasis on the concept, underlining the cultural continuation of patriarchal control over women’s bodies and sexuality.

The lyric questions how the mother’s function in preaching purity transfers this load down, hence continuing the cycle of patriarchal demands. It subtly challenges why such profound societal control over women’s bodies and sexuality is so ingrained and why it is disproportionately applied on women. The discrepancy between the mother’s demand and the speaker’s own apathy, “But I never really cared ‘bout that shit before,” emphasizes the conflict between social norms and personal agency.

Irony and Pragmatic Acts Analysis

Leech (1983) claims that irony is a kind of breach of the politeness maxims, particularly the Approval Maxim (avoid dispraise of others) and the Agreement Maxim (minimize disagreement). Irony purposefully violates these standards to draw attention to criticism or reveal an unpleasant reality under apparently neutral or courteous language. Strawberry Shortcake uses irony to attack gendered objectification’s internal struggle and society’s victim-blaming as can be seen in these lyrics:

“It’s my fault, it’s my fault, ‘cause I put icing on top / Now the boys want a taste of the strawberry shortcake”

This may be the song’s strongest ironic effect. Martinez seems to accept blame for the attention she gets from the males, saying “It’s my fault,” on the

surface. The true ironic purpose of this remark, therefore, is that Martinez is not really admitting blame. Rather, she highlights the ridiculousness of expecting women to bear the blame for male behavior by means of this overblown acknowledgment of guilt. This ironic turn challenges the audience to consider the rationale underlying this cultural norm and offers a strong criticism of how not only normalized but also frequently blamed on the women for objectification and harassment.

“That’s my bad, that’s my bad / No one told them not to grab”

Similar to the previous lyric, there is also a lot of irony here. Martinez downplays her own worth and overstates the notion that unless specifically instructed how to act, guys cannot be faulted. Stating “No one told them not to grab,” she ironically suggests that the absence of clear instructions on appropriate conduct somehow frees the males from blame, hence stressing the ridiculousness of this logic. The irony is that while common sense, societal standards, and respect for personal boundaries should already guide suitable conduct, the victim or the environment is implicitly held responsible instead. Martinez gently questions these standards by means of her humorous acceptance of guilt, so exposing the unfairness of a society that lets harassment go undetected until expressly forbidden.

“Mikey’s eyes seem to be glued to her chest / So, I’m stuffing my bra so that mine look the best”

This lyric explicitly shows that the speaker ironically accepting the objectification rather than resisting the male gaze. It emphasizes that this kind of objectification could lead to the absurdity of competing for attention.

“Instead of making feel bad for the body I got / Just teach him to keep it in his pants and tell him to stop”

By opposing what society should do with what it really does, this lyric offers a more obvious kind of sarcasm. On the surface, the sentence “teach him to keep it in his pants” seems like straightforward, sensible advice. But under this kind language comes a strong criticism of the social inclination to transfer the blame for male conduct onto women. Society sometimes puts the load on women to prevent inciting such behavior rather than facing improper conduct head-on. Martinez points out the folly of blaming women for their own objectification by contrasting this with the irony of males not being held responsible.

Leech's Politeness Principle clarifies how this criticism is expressed using seeming polite or socially acceptable words. The speaker disarms the listener and exposes the deep-seated problems in society expectations by hiding a direct challenge to gendered double standards in polite language. The irony of the song serves as a kind of protest, gently pointing out how warped and accepted these standards have become and pushing the listeners to consider who is actually being taught and why.

Moving on to Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, it contends that meaning in communication is not just entrenched in the words themselves but rather built by means of the context in which the language is utilized, called *pragmeme*. While the particular manifestation in a context is considered an activity, a *pragmeme* is the generic, socially acknowledged communicative action. The whole collection of words in *Strawberry Shortcake* is a societal critique of gender objectification functioning as one protracted *pragmeme*, framed as both personal and social. Martinez's story shows how society creates normalized views of female bodies, hence highlighting their social rather than individual relevance.

"It's my fault, it's my fault 'cause I put icing on top / Now the boys want a taste of the strawberry shortcake"

Here, the act of self-blaming, saying "It's my fault", is not a literal confession but rather a pragmatic response shaped by society whereby women are expected to assume responsibility for the improper conduct of males toward their looks. Though seeming self-directed, this linguistic act is really a criticism of the established assumption that women must control their looks to prevent male attention instead of blaming men for objectification. This is part of the bigger *pragmeme* of victim-blaming discourse. The lyrics show how language creates cultural expectations that transfer the blame for harassment on women instead of holding offenders responsible. The song criticizes how, via parental counsel, societal clothing standards, and peer behaviors, this discourse is anchored in daily communication.

"Instead of making me feel bad for the body I got / Just teach him to keep it in his pants and tell him to stop"

This section offers a counter-pragmatic action: rejecting the usual narrative of feminine guilt. Martinez thus asserts control by stressing society's inability to teach males about respect and consent, so changing the load from the objectified to the one performing the objectifying. Though it employs

common terminology, this reversal action does a profound societal criticism and challenges listeners to consider established gender prejudices.

CONCLUSION

Based on the brief explanation above, after analyzing the lyrics of *Strawberry Shortcake* using pragmatic strategies, namely presupposition, implicature, irony, and pragmatic acts, it shows that the song lyrics provide an overview of women's social roles and gender norms as social criticism. There are several lyrics in this song that interpret women as victims of gender injustice, forced to feel guilty for the objectification that happens to them, and ignore that the main problem in objectification lies in the society. "It's my fault, it's my fault, cause I put icing on top" is one of the lines that shows this phenomenon.

The use of the words 'icing' and 'strawberry shortcake' illustrate that women are often symbolized as a beauty that is an object to be enjoyed and looked at, showing that femininity is seen merely as a sexual consumption for men and forgetting the fact that humanity should be held as a principle to see women. This indicates that the lyrics criticize the issue of women objectification done by the society that often signifies that women's bodies are meant to be enjoyed by men.

Women's doubts and insecurities are also depicted in the lyrics "feeling unsure of my naked body", "wondering why I don't look like Barbie", and "so I'm stuffing my bra so that mine look the best" where women feel inferior about their bodies due to irrational beauty standards, eventually making women trapped in toxic beauty standards that lead women to feel uncomfortable and doubtful about their bodies and how they look, when, in fact, there is nothing wrong with women's bodies. However, social constructs force women to feel guilty about certain body shapes. It shows that women are required to be perfect in a patriarchal system that is rooted in society, which led women to feel pressured by these toxic social values. This certainly has an impact on women's psychology, which results in women feeling they have no choice and must submit to the system. This is because the enemy of women is not only patriarchal men but also women who hold these patriarchal values.

This research has implications for the importance of introducing perspectives that support gender justice. This song invites listeners to jointly break down social constructions that imprison women so that women are unable to express themselves as human beings with rights. Also, to be sharper in breaking down this

system. Because, what is fought in this system is not only men who carry out these patriarchal values, but also women who become patriarchal police. Those who were originally victims, become perpetrators in oppressing fellow women. In a larger scope, there is a system that must be broken down, namely the patriarchal system itself. The implications of this research are very important in that there must be changes in educating future generations so that this system does not last so long and does not harm women even more.

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