

Diving Into Emotions: An Illocutionary Acts Approach to Demi Lovato's "Heart Attack" Song Lyrics**Intan Ayu Destiani¹ ✉, Mohammad Ikhwan Rosyidi²**^{1,2} Faculty of Language and Arts, Semarang State University, Semarang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 20 June 2026 Approved 03 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026 Keywords: Emotion, Speech acts, Illocutionary, Song, Lyric	Language conveys not only explicit meaning but also speakers' underlying intentions, which are examined in pragmatics through speech act theory, particularly the concept of illocutionary acts. This study investigates the types of illocutionary acts in Demi Lovato's Heart Attack, a contemporary English pop song that has received little attention from a pragmatic perspective despite extensive research on speech acts in song lyrics. It also explains how these acts interact to construct the song's central theme of fear of emotional vulnerability, providing a contextual interpretation beyond the classification of speech act types. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach based on Searle's speech act theory. 25 utterances were identified and classified into four types of illocutionary acts: expressive (60%), assertive (24%), commissive (12%), and directive (4%), while no declarative acts were found. The predominance of expressive acts reflects the song's recurring emotions of fear, insecurity, and emotional restraint. These findings contribute to pragmatic research by demonstrating how illocutionary acts collectively shape meaning and emotional expression in contemporary popular music, extending existing scholarship on speech acts in song lyrics.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication tool used by everyone to convey meaning (Apriyanto, 2020). Effective communication occurs through two-way interaction, where each party conveys and understands the other's meaning (Sianturi & Megasari, 2023). To understand language deeply, one approach that can be used is linguistics. In linguistics, meaning is studied through the system of pragmatics, which emphasizes the importance of context and the interpretation given by the listener in the communication process (Nurfaiji & Aji, 2022). Moreover, according to (Jarassri & Phennapha, 2020), communication occurs when there is a sharing of information between the parties involved. When a person speaks, he or she

not only conveys a clear intention, but may also have certain desires or intentions that are not directly expressed (Hellbernd & Sammler, 2016). The listener's interpretation of the meaning conveyed in the language is very important; if the listener acts in accordance with what is said by the speaker, then this is closely related to the concept of speech act (Kamlasi et al., 2026). The function of language use in this context is the focus of speech act studies, especially illocutionary acts.

In relation to illocutionary acts, which serve as the main focus of this study, Searle (Letsoin & 'Ashr, 2024), speech acts can be broadly classified into 5 different levels of function. There are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Assertive serves to state the truth of a proposition, for example when someone asserts or

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reports something. Directive aims to encourage the listener to perform a certain action, for example by requesting or commanding. Commissives indicate a commitment to perform an action in the future, such as promising or swearing. Expressive reflects an attitude or feeling towards a situation, such as apologizing or congratulating. Finally, declarative is speech that states the condition or status of an object or situation, such as when someone resigns or baptizes. According to (Sari & Emelia, 2022) Illocutionary act can be used either in spoken or written language. In written language, it includes literary works such as plays, films, novels, short stories, and songs. Among these literary forms, songs have become an important medium for expressing emotions, experiences, and intentions through language.

Song is a poem that creates harmony by the use of tone, rhythm, timing, and melody in its pronunciation (Putra et al., 2024). A song's lyrics are composed of sentences that the author has prepared with a specific goal in mind (Wijaya et al., 2022). Based on (Setyawati et al., 2024) Songs can convey a range of emotions. Demi Lovato's song is one of those created with deep emotion. Demi Lovato's lyrics contain a message to encourage people to turn their biggest challenges into weapons and strengths, overcome fears, face anxiety, and finally become a strong person and accept themselves for who they are (Dainta Nenu & Balik, 2022). As both an actor and singer, she has experienced significant changes in her life due to addiction, trauma, and mental health struggles, which have inspired and impacted her fans (Andita et al., 2024).

Research related to illocutionary acts in song lyrics has been studied by several researchers. Kamlasi et al. (2026) examined illocutionary acts in the lyrics of Being Funny in a Foreign Language. Nasim and Mariana (2024) investigated illocutionary acts in the lyrics of Sia Furler's This Is Acting album. Mukminin (2024) analyzed illocutionary acts in the lyrics of Kupu-Kupu by Tiara Andini. Sari and Emelia (2022) studied illocutionary acts in the lyrics of Bruno Mars' Doo-Wops & Hooligans album. Kusmira (2026) analyzed illocutionary acts in the lyrics of Garam dan Madu by Tenxi. Meanwhile, research on Demi Lovato's Heart Attack has been conducted from different linguistic perspectives. Barroso

(2022) analyzed the translation of idiomatic expressions in song lyrics published on a TikTok page. Matoka (2024) explored students' translations of idiomatic expressions in Demi Lovato's Heart Attack song lyrics by examining the accuracy of the translated idiomatic expressions.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain. First, previous studies mainly examined albums, multiple songs, or songs from Indonesian and Middle Eastern contexts, while limited attention has been given to contemporary English pop songs that portray complex emotional experiences from a pragmatic perspective. Second, although the existing studies successfully classified illocutionary acts, they generally emphasized the identification of speech act categories rather than providing a contextual explanation of how these acts function within a single song as a coherent discourse. Furthermore, no previous study has specifically investigated Demi Lovato's Heart Attack, a song that vividly portrays fear of emotional vulnerability and resistance to romantic attachment through expressive and emotionally charged language.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of illocutionary acts found in Demi Lovato's Heart Attack by applying Searle's classification. The selection of this song is significant because its lyrics present rich communicative intentions expressed through emotional language, making it an appropriate source for examining how illocutionary acts operate within contemporary popular music. By focusing on one complete song, this study provides a detailed pragmatic analysis that complements previous research on speech acts in song lyrics and enriches the growing body of literature on pragmatic studies in musical discourse.

METHODS

This research applied a descriptive qualitative method with a content-analysis approach, following Creswell's (2014) approach to qualitative data analysis, in which language is treated as data to be read, coded, and interpreted for meaning. The unit of analysis in this study is the utterance, that is, each line or phrase in the lyrics of "Heart Attack" that conveys a single illocutionary act.

The researcher served as the main (human) instrument, responsible for determining the research focus, observing the song lyrics as the data source, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Additional online sources, including journal articles, were consulted to support the discussion. Data was collected through qualitative document analysis by retrieving the lyrics of Demi Lovato's song "Heart Attack" from Genius (accessed 12 June 2026). The lyrics were treated as textual documents, verified, read repeatedly, and analyzed using illocutionary act coding based on Searle's speech act theory. From the full lyrics, 25 utterances containing an illocutionary act were identified as the data of this study.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and data classification. In the reduction stage, the lyrics were read repeatedly to identify lines containing an illocutionary act, while irrelevant lines, such as repeated choruses, were excluded. In the display stage, the reduced data were organized into a table showing each utterance and its corresponding illocutionary act category. In the classification stage, each utterance was categorized into one of Searle's (1969) five types of illocutionary acts, and the frequency and percentage of each type were calculated to determine the dominant pattern.

The coding procedure involved segmenting the lyrics into individual utterances, each assigned a code representing its illocutionary act category (AS for assertive, DR for directive, CM for commissive, EX for expressive, and DC for declarative), which was then cross-checked against Searle's (1969) and Austin's (1962) theories as a form of theory triangulation to ensure the accuracy of classification.

The classification criteria were based on recurring patterns found in the data. Utterances were coded as assertive when they were declarative, past-tense statements reporting the speaker's own actions or beliefs as true (Uspayanti, 2022), typically marked by "never" followed by a verb, as in "never put my love out on the line." Utterances were coded as directive when they used an imperative verb form addressed to the listener or the speaker herself (R. T. Sari & Mubarak, 2020), as in "paint my nails and wear high heels."

Utterances were coded as commissive when they contained a first-person statement with a modal (R. T. Sari & Mubarak, 2020) such as "won't" or an active verb expressing a decision to act (Devi & Degaf, 2021), as in "I'm putting my defenses up." Utterances were coded as expressive when they named or evoked an internal emotional state without stating a fact, command, or promise (Bonotan et al., 2026), as in "I get paralyzed." No utterance exhibited the declarative pattern, in which the act of speaking itself changes a state of affairs (Alreza et al., 2019), so this category yielded no data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified a total of 25 illocutionary acts in Demi Lovato's Heart Attack based on Searle's classification. As presented in Table 1, four categories of illocutionary acts were identified: assertive (6 occurrences, 24%), directive (1 occurrence, 4%), commissive (3 occurrences, 12%), and expressive (15 occurrences, 60%). No declarative acts were found in the lyrics.

Table 1. Data result of Illocutionary Acts in song lyrics Heart Attack

Illocutionary acts categories	Frequency	Percentage
Assertives	6	24%
Directives	1	4%
Commissive	3	12%
Expressive	15	60%
Total	25	100%

The findings indicate that expressive acts constitute the largest proportion of illocutionary acts, accounting for more than half of the total data. This distribution suggests that the primary communicative purpose of Heart Attack is to express the speaker's emotional and psychological experiences rather than to direct others, make commitments, or perform declarative functions. According to Searle's speech act theory, expressive acts reveal the speaker's psychological state. The recurring themes of fear, vulnerability, insecurity, and emotional conflict throughout the lyrics therefore explain why expressive acts appear more frequently than the other categories. The implications of this dominant pattern are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

1. Assertive Acts (AS)

Assertive acts constitute the second most frequent category identified in *Heart Attack*, with six occurrences (24%). According to Searle (1969), assertive acts commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition being expressed. In *Heart Attack*, these utterances are primarily used to express the speaker's beliefs, experiences, and personal perspectives regarding romantic relationships. Rather than attempting to influence the listener, the speaker uses assertive acts to describe how she perceives her past actions and emotional experiences.

One representative example is the lyric, "Never put my love out on the line." This utterance functions as an assertive act because the speaker describes her previous behavior of withholding her feelings in romantic relationships. The lyric presents the speaker's own perspective on how she has responded to love, indicating that emotional restraint has become part of her personal experience. Similar functions are found in the lyrics "Never said yes to the right guy" and "Never break a sweat for the other guys," which describe the speaker's past decisions and attitudes toward romantic relationships. These utterances consistently communicate the speaker's perspective on her own experiences rather than attempting to direct or persuade others.

A different function is illustrated in the lyric, "And there's no one else to blame." Unlike the previous examples, this utterance expresses the speaker's acknowledgment that she is responsible for her emotional situation. By accepting responsibility instead of attributing it to others, the speaker presents her own judgment regarding the circumstances she experiences. This makes the utterance consistent with Searle's concept of assertive acts, as it expresses the speaker's view of a situation she accepts as true.

Previous studies by Nasim and Mariana (2024), Sari and Emelia (2022), and Kusmira (2026) identified assertive acts as the most frequently occurring category in the song lyrics they analyzed. In contrast, the present study found that assertive acts constitute the second most frequent category in *Heart Attack*. Despite this difference, the findings consistently demonstrate that assertive acts play an important role in

communicating the speaker's beliefs and personal experience

2. Directive Act (DR)

Directive acts constitute the least frequent category identified in *Heart Attack*, with only one occurrence (4%). According to Searle (1969), directive acts are speech acts intended to get the hearer to perform a particular action. The limited occurrence of directive acts indicates that the lyrics are not primarily used to direct or influence others. Instead, the song mainly communicates the speaker's personal experiences and emotions, with only one utterance functioning as an attempt to express a directive intention.

The representative directive utterance is "Paint my nails and wear high heels." This lyric functions as a directive act because it is expressed in the imperative form through the verbs paint and wear, which linguistically indicate an instruction or request for an action to be performed. Within the context of the song, the utterance presents an instruction associated with the speaker's preparation before entering a romantic relationship. Therefore, the directive function lies in encouraging the performance of particular actions rather than expressing a statement, commitment, emotion, or declaration.

The presence of only one directive act suggests that directing actions is not the primary communicative purpose of *Heart Attack*. Unlike the other illocutionary categories identified in the song, the directive act plays a limited role because the lyrics predominantly focus on expressing the speaker's personal experiences and perspectives rather than attempting to influence the behavior of others.

This finding differs from the results reported by Mukminin (2024), in which directive acts occurred more frequently than in the present study. In contrast, the directive act identified in *Heart Attack* appears only once, suggesting that the song primarily emphasizes the speaker's personal experiences rather than directing the actions of others.

3. Commissive Acts (CM)

Commissive acts account for three occurrences (12%) of the illocutionary acts identified in *Heart Attack*. According to Searle

(1969), commissive acts commit the speaker to a future course of action. In this study, the commissive utterances primarily express the speaker's intention to regulate her responses in romantic relationships. Through these utterances, the speaker communicates commitments regarding actions she intends to take when confronting emotionally challenging situations.

One representative example is the lyric, "But I cover up, won't let it show." This utterance functions as a commissive act because the speaker expresses her commitment to concealing her emotions. The phrase "won't let it show" indicates the speaker's intention not to reveal her feelings in future situations. Rather than merely describing her emotional condition, the utterance commits the speaker to a future action consistent with Searle's concept of commissive acts.

A similar function can be observed in the lyrics "So I'm putting my defenses up" and "So scared, I take off, and I run." Although expressed differently, both utterances communicate the speaker's commitment to particular actions in response to situations she anticipates. The speaker indicates her intention to protect herself by maintaining emotional distance or leaving situations that make her feel vulnerable. These utterances therefore function as commissive acts because they express commitments regarding the speaker's future behavior.

4. Expressive Acts (EX)

Expressive acts are the most dominant category identified in Heart Attack, accounting for 15 of the 25 illocutionary acts (60%). According to Searle (1969), expressive acts convey the speaker's psychological state toward a particular situation. The findings show that the lyrics predominantly express fear, anxiety, insecurity, and vulnerability in romantic relationships, suggesting that emotional expression is the song's primary communicative purpose.

One representative example is the lyric, "Cause I don't wanna fall in love." This utterance functions as an expressive act because it reveals the speaker's reluctance to become emotionally involved in a romantic relationship. The feeling is reinforced in the following lyric, "If I ever did that, I think I'd have a heart attack," where the metaphor "heart attack" emphasizes the overwhelming fear

associated with emotional intimacy. Rather than referring to a literal physical condition, the expression conveys the intensity of the speaker's emotional response. Together, these lyrics illustrate Searle's view that expressive acts reflect the speaker's psychological state.

A similar pattern appears in the lyrics "But when it comes to you, I'm never good enough," "When you come around, I get paralyzed," and "Yes, you make me so nervous that I just can't hold your hand." Although each utterance highlights a different feeling, they consistently portray insecurity, nervousness, and vulnerability when the speaker encounters romantic love. Together, these expressions reinforce the song's central concern with emotional struggle and demonstrate that expressing feelings is its dominant communicative function.

The predominance of expressive acts is closely related to the central theme of Heart Attack. Because the lyrics consistently portray fear of falling in love and anxiety toward emotional intimacy, expressive acts occur more frequently than the other illocutionary categories. This finding is consistent with Searle's classification, which explains that expressive acts reveal the speaker's feelings toward a particular situation.

This finding is consistent with Kamiasi et al. (2026), who also reported expressive acts as the dominant category in Being Funny in a Foreign Language. However, whereas the previous study primarily identified and classified illocutionary acts, the present study explains the predominance of expressive acts by relating it to the central theme of Heart Attack. This contextual interpretation complements previous research on illocutionary acts in song lyrics.

CONCLUSION

This study identified four types of illocutionary acts in Demi Lovato's Heart Attack based on Searle's classification, namely assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive acts, while declarative acts were not identified. Among these categories, expressive acts were the most dominant, indicating that the song primarily conveys fear, anxiety, insecurity, and emotional vulnerability in romantic relationships. These findings demonstrate that the communicative

purpose of the lyrics is centered on expressing the speaker's emotional experiences.

This study also provides a contextual explanation for the predominance of expressive acts by relating them to the song's central theme of emotional vulnerability. In doing so, it complements previous studies that mainly focused on identifying and classifying illocutionary acts in song lyrics. Therefore, this study contributes to pragmatic research by providing a deeper understanding of how illocutionary acts function to convey emotional meaning in contemporary popular music

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