

## From lyrics to meaning: Student reflections on pragmatic meaning in French song lyrics

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### ABSTRACT

Pragmatics plays a prominent role in French language teaching, since it serves as the foundation for authentic communication that allows for interpretation beyond the literal meaning. This role is especially important in French language education, where different forms of language use often signal various levels of politeness. While songs have been generally used with children or school students, due to their characteristics that help with retention and rich use of mnemonics, there is a paucity of research investigating how songs can be used to teach French pragmatics at the university level. To address this gap, this study explored French Literature students' reflections on pragmatic elements, such as speech acts, the cooperative principle, and deixis in songs. It draws on established theories by Austin and Warnock (1962), Searle (1969, 1975), and Grice (1975) to analyze how language used in lyrics serves communicative functions, not just artistic expression. Sixty French Literature undergraduate students enrolled in La Pragmatique (Pragmatics) classrooms in Indonesia participated in this inquiry. Data were obtained from students' group reports on pragmatic analysis, interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals. This 15-week study employed thematic analysis across multiple data sources to investigate how French Literature students identified and interpreted pragmatic features in songs. The findings highlight that students analyzed songs not only at the level of lyrics but also by drawing on contextual cues such as emotion, cultural background, social situation, and personal experience in meaning-making. The findings further show that songs are favored among French Literature students, as they create a stress-free learning environment for A2-level French students. The implications and recommendations for the effective integration of songs into pragmatic instruction for French Literature students are also provided in this article.

**Keywords:** French language learning; French song; pragmatic analysis; student reflection

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### INTRODUCTION

In natural communication, the recall of a statement is influenced not only by its syntactic and semantic properties but also by pragmatic information, such as the speaker's intention, interpersonal stance, and social context (de Oliveira-Fernandes & Oswald;

Keenan et al., 1977). This perspective highlights the pragmatic aspects of language, which constitute a crucial part of communication. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to recognize, produce, and articulate accurate and appropriate narratives in social and cultural contexts (Savignon,

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2017). This is an important aspect of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

Since pragmatic competence involves the ability to control and use a complex interplay of language, its users, and its interaction context, the best way to teach it in premeditated settings is a persistent issue that requires attention and research. The teachability of pragmatics has been debated for some time (Viatova, 2023). This debate has also motivated scholars to explore whether formal instruction could represent sociocultural and sociolinguistic abilities (Alkawaz et al., 2023). Pragmatics learning often focuses on theory, making it difficult for students to apply it to real communication (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). Hence, it is necessary to use media that offer a natural communicative context in learning pragmatics, especially in French Literature.

More targeted pedagogical approaches and research are needed to help students become successful intercultural speakers in multicultural and multilingual societies (Bardovi-Harlig, 2020). Many researchers have been interested in analyzing song lyrics for language learning purposes (Albacete-Maza et al., 2023). Despite being considered a traditional method of teaching language, song analysis is a promising teaching method (Kumar et al., 2022) because it provides opportunities for students to identify and understand the pragmatic aspects of authentic communication (Reid, 2015). Songs represent a contextualized presentation of the target language (Tegge, 2015). When songs start to include lyrics, their value as objects of study increases exponentially (Albacete-Maza et al., 2023). By listening to chunks of lyrics from native speakers, students internalized language patterns in contexts that helped them understand pragmatic information (Albacete-Maza et al., 2023). Song lyrics reflect the singer's use of language and the message conveyed, while the style of the lyrics and music influence the listener's interpretation (Bsharat et al., 2021). In natural settings, songs serve as authentic media rich in pragmatic contexts (Clark, 2023). The lyrics convey the message and language, while the style of the lyrics and music play an important role in helping listeners interpret their meanings (Albacete-Maza et al., 2023).

Teaching pragmatics to French Literature students, this study focused on three specific aspects of pragmatics: speech acts (Austin & Warnock, 1962; Searle, 1979), cooperative principles (Grice, 1975), and deixis (Cruse, 2000; Levinson, 1983). Speech acts constitute the outside-of-language dimension of communication. The proper use of speech acts acquired through experience within a culture is crucial for the embodiment of social relationships. The well-known taxonomy of speech acts—assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations (Searle, 1976, 1979)—is used in this study. Searle (2000) argued that

speech acts are presented in real language-use situations. Thus, pedagogical models for teaching speech acts in a second or foreign language use an awareness approach by exposing students to various language inputs and enhancing their pragmatological and sociopragmatic understanding (Sanchez-Hernandez & Martinez-Flor, 2022). In this context, songs help students learn speech acts by understanding implicature, implied meaning, and communication context, which are important aspects of pragmatics.

Cooperative principle analysis in French songs helps French Literature students understand how language is used creatively to convey deeper meaning. The cooperative principle proposed by Grice (1975) is the basis of effective communication, wherein speakers and listeners contribute rationally to achieve mutual understanding (Hasan et al., 2024). The principle consists of four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and communication manners. Maxim violations and flouting can result in implicit meanings that allow for richer and more contextualized communication (Alsmari, 2024). By understanding how lyrics adhere to or flout these maxims, students can explore deeper interpretations and understand the emotional and social messages conveyed by songs.

In song lyrics, deixis plays an important role in shaping the meaning and connection between the singer, listener, and context. Deixis denotes people, things, places, or times (Levinson, 1983). Cruse (2000) suggests that there are five varieties of deixis: person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social. Therefore, the interpretation of utterances depends on the context of the analysis. Deixis also deals with the relation between discourse and the situation where it is used. It is about indexical expressions in language and can be regarded as a special type of grammatical property instantiated in the familiar categories of person, time, and place (Levinson, 2004). In song analysis, deixis helps students understand how lyrics refer to people, places, or times that can change depending on context.

Songs as authentic media in French learning offer natural communication methods. In teaching French, it is important to emphasize the meaning of various pragmatic markers so that students do not only rely on cognates but also understand their use in a more natural context (Buysse, 2020). Pragmatics teaching not only refers to the norms prevailing in one narrow speaking community but also introduces variations in socio-pragmatic norms (Blyth & Sykes, 2020). Music shapes thoughts through song lyrics that function as a communication discourse with diverse contextual meanings (Aryawan et al., 2022). The linguistic and musical fusion in songs creates a unique synergy that strengthens the communicative power of

language through emotional resonance (Diko, 2023). Students can connect emotionally with listeners because some songs contain a wealth of cultural and historical information and ideas for intellectual discussion, including philosophical reflections on composers' lives (Kumar et al., 2022; Loeis et al., 2025). Thus, songs accommodate students' understanding of French in social contexts. They reflect real communication contexts and help French Literature students understand messages through reliable content analysis.

Although pragmatics has garnered attention from scholars, its importance in foreign language classrooms such as French remains a critical area of discussion. Similarly, while songs have been used to teach French in several studies, such as those by Lazareva (2017) and Pégram (2024), there has been relatively limited integration of pragmatic learning features in Français Langue Etrangère (French as a Foreign Language) and La pragmatique (Pragmatics) classrooms. Researching pragmatic learning through songs—a feasible and familiar learning medium—contributes to authentic, motivational, and contextual pragmatic teaching. Moreover, this learning can be integrated into curriculum design on a broader scale, such as the CEFR, which recognizes pragmatic competence as one of the key competencies, not only in a local context. This study was conducted to address this gap. In addition, the effectiveness of the songs used in the pragmatics course was also investigated. Therefore, this study addressed the following questions: 1) How does the use of songs support French Literature students' understanding of pragmatic aspects such as speech acts, cooperative principles, and deixis? 2) What are students' perceptions of using songs as a tool for learning pragmatics in French language classes? It is expected that the study would result in some recommendations for designing effective song-based pragmatics learning to enhance the communication skills of French Literature students.

## **METHOD**

This study explored French Literature students' reflections on the pragmatic meaning derived from French songs. A case study was selected as the method as it enables an in-depth exploration of pragmatic phenomena in French songs through an approach that facilitates the identification of linguistic and pedagogical patterns in the data (Abrate, 1983; Günes, 2017). In this study, French Literature students identified pragmatic aspects such as speech acts, cooperative principles, and deixis in the songs they selected. The results of the students' pragmatic analysis and their perceptions obtained from interviews and reflective journals revealed how French songs helped them learn pragmatics.

## **Respondents**

This study involved 60 French Literature students in *La Pragmatique* (Pragmatics) units at a state university in Indonesia. The students in this study were at the A2 level of French proficiency. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the A2 level in French refers to the elementary stage. A2 students have a typical total learning hours of 180-200 with instructor guidance. These hours are cumulative, encompassing all instructions from the beginner level up to A2. At this level, students can communicate in everyday situations using simple sentence structures. They understand common expressions for simple interactions on familiar topics.

This study adhered to research ethics by ensuring the voluntary principle for research participation. Before data collection, all participants were given clear instructions on what to do, informed that their identities would be kept confidential, and asked for their written consent.

## **Data collection**

The data for this study were collected from student group reports, interviews, observations, and reflective journals. This study was conducted over a semester (15 weeks). The lesson began with a presentation by the lecturer. Explicit teaching of the concept and application of pragmatics was always done before the discussion process to equip students with the knowledge they needed to analyze pragmatics in French songs. After the presentation by the lecturer, students in groups of 4-5 students were assigned to identify pragmatic speech data in French songs. There were a total of 12 reports made by the students containing pragmatic analyses of the songs they analyzed. The students were free to choose the songs they wished to analyze. The songs chosen by the students for the analysis are listed in Table 1.

After the songs were selected, the students translated and interpreted the messages in the lyrics. This process focused not only on the literal meaning but also on the contextual meaning involving pragmatic aspects such as the speaker's intention, the communication situation, and how the listener interprets the message in the song.

The students continued their analysis at home. Out-of-class discussions were conducted in various forms, such as face-to-face, through WhatsApp groups, Google Docs, and Zoom Meetings. These extended activities were not monitored as part of research data. The following weeks were spent presenting the pragmatics found in the songs. This process was conducted for each discussion topic: (1) speech acts, (2) the cooperative principle, and (3) deictic expressions. The presentations were conducted after the lecture sessions were completed in groups of 4 to 5. The lecturer provided input on data miscategorization and discussed it with students.

**Table 1**  
*French Songs Analyzed by the French Literature Students*

| No. | Song Title                                    | Singer                    |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1   | <i>Pardonne Moi</i>                           | Louane                    |
| 2   | <i>Il N' Y a Que Toi</i>                      | Pirouettes                |
| 3   | <i>L'Enfer</i>                                | Stromae                   |
| 4   | <i>Nuit d'Été</i>                             | Oscar Anton<br>Clementine |
| 5   | <i>Facile</i>                                 | Camélia Jordana           |
| 6   | <i>Paro</i>                                   | Nej                       |
| 7   | <i>L'amour, Les Baguettes, Paris</i>          | Stella Jang               |
| 8   | <i>Mon Amour</i>                              | Stormae                   |
| 9   | <i>Libre</i>                                  | Angèle                    |
| 10  | <i>Fous</i>                                   | Emma Peters               |
| 11  | <i>La Chanson de Delphine</i>                 | Clara Luciani             |
| 12  | <i>Croire</i>                                 | Djaja et Dinaz            |
| 13  | <i>L'Enfer</i>                                | Stormae                   |
| 14  | <i>A Quoi Tu Penses</i>                       | Louane                    |
| 15  | <i>Médicament</i>                             | Niska ft. Booba           |
| 16  | <i>Vérité</i>                                 | Claire Laffut             |
| 17  | <i>Bonjour</i>                                | Creep Paroles             |
| 18  | <i>Ça Va Ça Vient</i>                         | Slimane et Vita           |
| 19  | <i>La Meilleure</i>                           | Wejdene                   |
| 20  | <i>Ne Me Quitte Pas</i>                       | Jacques Brel              |
| 21  | <i>Paroles De La Chanson Suivre Le Soleil</i> | Vanille                   |
| 22  | <i>Derniere Danse</i>                         | Indila                    |
| 23  | <i>Dernière fois</i>                          | Alonzo et Imene Es        |

Classroom observations were conducted during the pragmatic lectures. In this study, observations were made during lecture sessions to determine how students learned pragmatics through the song analysis, particularly their identification of pragmatic elements in the lyrics, such as speech acts, implicatures, and deixis. A co-researcher carried out the observations at every meeting by taking field notes on student responses during learning and discussion, as well as important and interesting points that could be used to interpret the data. In qualitative research, observations can be conducted in the form of naturalistic observation, which aims not only to count the frequency of behavior but also to understand the dynamics of

interaction and the meaning that emerges in the interaction (Angrosino, 2016; Schostak, 2023). For example, student confusion, as seen from nonverbal expressions, cannot be fully captured by written self-report data. Observation provides access to real situations that are sometimes difficult to describe but provide an interpretive layer that complements the data.

Students also wrote reflective journals to reflect on their understanding of pragmatic concepts such as speech acts, implicatures, and deixis and how these concepts are applied in song lyrics. Students were given guiding questions before reflecting. These questions relate to positive experiences and problems they encounter in learning each pragmatic aspect. Guiding questions help students understand which areas to focus on. The reflective journals were collected at the end of each lesson on each aspect of pragmatics (speech acts, the cooperative principle, and deixis), totalling up to three reflections per student. Students created reflections by filling out Google Forms.

At the end of the unit, interviews were conducted to gather information on how French Literature students learn pragmatics from the songs they analyze. Interviews were conducted with students who were willing to participate in the study based on their reflections, which they indicated on Google Forms. Almost all students were willing to be interviewed, but the researchers only selected a few whose reflections needed more clarification. The principle of data saturation was followed, where interviews were conducted up to the point where additional interviews no longer yielded significant new information. In total, there were eight interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted 45-60 minutes, and were conducted face-to-face at the end of the semester. The interview questions focused on pragmatic understanding through songs to clarify what the participants had written in their reflections or analyses. Examples of the interview questions derived from the students' reflections are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Sample Interview Questions*

| Students' Reflection/ Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Examples of follow-up questions in the Interview                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jacques Brel's song <i>Ne me quitte pas</i> , features singer pleading "I will give you pearls of rain from countries where it doesn't rain" expressing intense affection to prevent abandonment by his lover. – Student analysis | You mentioned " <i>Ne me quitte pas</i> " exposes singer's fear of abandonment. What specifically about the lyrics got you thinking about that interpretation?                                |
| "... maxim flouting and principle violation adds beauty to the meaning of a song" – Student reflection                                                                                                                            | You mentioned that maxim flouting and principle violation adds beauty to the meaning of a song. How can violating principles enrich meaning and provide room for interpretation by listeners? |

### Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis, which consists of several phases, including data familiarization, initial code generation, theme searching, theme

review, theme naming, and report production (Braun & Clark, 2006). The researchers employed theory- and data-driven thematic analysis. Findings were categorized based on three specific aspects of

pragmatics: speech acts (Austin & Warnock, 1962; Searle, 1979), cooperative principles (Grice, 1975), and deixis (Cruse, 2000; Levinson, 1983). To facilitate findings outside of the deductive themes, a data-driven thematic analysis was also done, particularly to uncover students' perceptions and recommendations for learning. To facilitate categorization, the results of the thematic analysis are presented in tables of themes and subthemes.

Students' group reports were particularly examined to assess their understanding of pragmatic aspects. Students made data analysis reports in Bahasa Indonesia, which were then translated into English for data analysis and presentation purposes. Analysis results of student reports are included (see Tables 3, 5, and 6) to show the grammatical aspects that have been analyzed by students. The reports, along with the reflective journals, were also used as the basis for the interview questions because the findings from the students' analysis could open up the possibility of new perspectives that had not been considered before, allowing the interview to be directed to explore these ideas further..

Triangulation was conducted by validating the findings through various data sources, including student reports on the analysis of pragmatic elements in songs, interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations. The researchers used a single analytical framework from various data sources that was consistent with the thematic analysis procedure. The results of the interviews and reflections were combined into a single dataset to arrive at themes (see Tables 4, 7, 8, 9) that aimed to triangulate the data sources.

Observations provided an additional layer beyond what was said (interviews) and written (reflections) because they captured non-verbal

aspects such as facial expressions, intonation, and gestures. The researchers' interpretations did not arise solely from the results of the group reports, interviews, and reflective journals but also from the patterns and dynamics of the class that were captured during observations.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section answers the research questions by presenting the findings and comparing them with those of previous studies. The findings regarding how French Literature students learn pragmatics through songs are divided into three subsections, based on how students learned speech acts, the cooperative principle, and deixis through songs.

### Learning Pragmatics through Contextual Reinforcement in Songs

#### *Speech Acts: How Song Contexts Enhance Linguistic Expression*

In identifying speech acts from songs, the French Literature students in this study interpreted them using linguistic expressions. Linguistic expressions are dynamic tools that help students identify speech acts. The interaction between lyrics and cultural context provides opportunities for rich interpretation of the intent behind the words. Students identified speech acts in songs, whether they indicated requests, commands, apologies, gratitude, or other expressions. Songs embed emotions and situational settings to understand the speech acts, which in turn, provide the necessary cues to decode the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation. Table 3 presents examples of students' speech act analysis (from their reports) when analyzing French songs.

**Table 3**

*Examples of Speech Act Analysis from French Songs*

| Speech Acts            | Examples of Students' Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assertive speech acts  | Assertive speech acts were obtained from the song <i>Pardonne Moi</i> by Louane. Lyrics <i>Il est huit heures du soir</i> (translated as 'It is eight in the evening') indicate that the dialogue occurs when a female speaker is informing her romantic partner about the current time, which is 8:00 PM.                           |
| Directive speech acts  | Directive speech acts were found in the same song. The lyric <i>Alors j'aimerais que tu me pardonnes</i> (I'd like you to forgive me) shows that a woman, expresses remorse and seeks forgiveness from her partner. This speech act conveys a wish that cannot be fully realized, characterized by its directive nature.             |
| Expressive speech acts | An example of an expressive speech act was observed in the phrase <i>T'as les yeux tristes même quand tu souris</i> (You have sad eyes even when you smile). In this scenario, a female speaker addresses her partner, noting that he conceals his sorrow in a manner similar to her own.                                            |
| Declarative speech act | In the sentence <i>Mais j'recommence encore</i> (But I start all over again), the declarative speech act functions as a new decision expressed by the singer. This demonstrates that the utterance falls within the category of declarative speech, as it represents a statement made by the speaker within the context of the song. |
| Commissive speech acts | In the utterance <i>Et je sais vraiment pas quoi faire de toi</i> (and I don't know what to do with you), a commissive speech act is present. The individual speaking anticipates that their conversation partner will assist them in taking some form of action.                                                                    |

During classroom observations, it was evident that the context in songs helped students identify

speech acts by understanding the singer's intentions, such as requests, statements, or expressions of

feelings. Students, for example, could be seen pausing and discussing specific lyrics to interpret the intentions.

In addition, reflective journals show that the vocabulary used in songs is often an important clue to identify the emotion or condition that is being portrayed. The words can be used as a key to understanding the message contained in the song more deeply. Students' perspectives on this are reflected in the following quotes:

The context of the song helps me recognize the writer's intention, whether they are requesting, stating, or expressing a certain feeling. (Reflective Journal, Student 16)

The context of a song can help me understand a certain intention by finding the meaning of the gestures conveyed by the songwriter. Every song contains speech acts. (Reflective Journal, Student 14)

Usually, there are some vocabularies that show a variety of feelings and can be used as a keyword to determine what kind of situation this song is describing. (Interview, Student 2)

The findings also show that emotion and situation are important for understanding speech

acts in song lyrics because they influence how the song's message is interpreted. The context of the song, including the situation, setting, or emotion behind it, helps clarify certain intentions, such as asking, stating, or expressing feelings. Thus, the message conveyed is more focused and easier to understand. Emotions and situations not only enrich the meaning of the lyrics but are also key to identifying the speech acts contained therein.

The feeling of regret is evident in sentences such as '*Depuis que t'es partie, la vie n'a plus la même saveur*' (Since you left, life no longer feels the same),' which shows how much she misses the presence of her partner after losing him through her own actions. (Reflective Journal, Student 4)

The context of the song helps to understand the meaning by explaining the situation, setting, or emotion behind the lyrics so that intentions such as asking, stating, or expressing feelings become clearer and more focused. (Reflective Journal, Student 3)

The main themes found from the findings of students' perceptions of analyzing speech acts from songs are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Thematic Analysis of Students' Speech Act Insights from French Songs*

| Theme                                                 | Sub-theme                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The role of song context in understanding speech acts | Context as a speech act identification tool<br>Emotion and situation as the basis for understanding speech acts |

The themes elaborate on how song lyrics function as a tool for identifying speech acts. They ground students' interpretation and situational cues. This helps students interpret the song lyrics meaningfully.

#### **Cooperative principles: Maxim Flouting Enhances the Artistic Appeal of Songs**

Some respondents argue that songwriters follow the cooperative principle in composing song lyrics, although violations and floutings can occur in certain aspects of the lyrics. Cooperative principle

violations and maxim flouting are often used as artistic strategies in lyrics. For instance, imprecision of information or omission of details in lyrics allows for ambiguity or metaphors that enrich their meaning. These ambiguous or open-to-interpretation lyrics invite the listener to ponder deeper and look for hidden meanings; thus, the beauty of the song comes not only from the melody but also from the complexity of the words that make it up. Through songs, the French Literature students could identify utterances that adhere to the cooperative principle (Table 5) or flouting maxims (Table 6).

**Table 5**  
*Examples of Cooperative Principle Analysis from French Songs*

| Song Lyric                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Examples of Students' Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>C'est pas toujours facile<br/>t'en as vu d'toutes les couleurs<br/>Réalise tes rêves<br/>ils effaceront tes douleurs<br/>Tous ceux qui parlaient mal<br/>plus tard, te jeteront des fleurs<br/>Ils t'ont souhaité le pire mais tu restes la meilleure</i> | The song <i>La Meilleure</i> by Wejdene shows someone in a state of distress. Discomfort can occur in various circumstances. Individuals are encouraged to pursue their aspirations, and the fulfillment of these aspirations is expected to alleviate their hardships. The song has an overall message of support for people experiencing bullying. |
| <i>Moi, je t'offrirai<br/>Des perles de pluie<br/>Venues de pays<br/>Où il ne pleut pas</i>                                                                                                                                                                  | Jacques Brel's song <i>Ne me quitte pas</i> , features singer pleading "I will give you pearls of rain from countries where it doesn't rain" expressing intense affection to prevent abandonment by his lover.                                                                                                                                       |

The violation of the cooperative principle in song lyrics enriches and enhances their depth of meaning. Some students expressed the following views:

Songwriters do not always follow the cooperative principle, and violations of this principle can add beauty to the meaning, which can increase emotional attachment and add uniqueness and appeal to songs. (Reflective Journal, Student 5)

Songwriters do not always follow the cooperative principle as described in Grice's theory, and the violation of this principle often enriches the beauty of the meaning of the lyrics. (Reflective Journal, Student 7)

Cooperative principle violations and maxim flouting create space for interpretation. Unpredictability in language structure, ambiguity, and deviation from communication norms create space for deeper interpretation and richer aesthetic experiences: Violations of this principle often add beauty to the meaning of the lyrics, as they create space for the listener's interpretation (Reflective Journal, Student 9). Violations and flouting build emotional attachment to the relationship. By transcending the boundaries

of literal communication, song lyrics evoke deeper emotions, imagination, and resonance of meaning for listeners. The omission or addition of indirect information often adds emotional beauty, making songs feel more personal and relatable for the listener. As shared by students:

... some songs sometimes (even often) feature violations of the cooperative principle, and the purpose of such violations is the beauty of meaning, such as creating ambiguity or deeper emotions. (Interview, Student 9)

In song lyrics, writers do not always follow the cooperative principle, such as providing sufficient and relevant information to their audiences. This is because song lyrics often prioritize emotion, aesthetics, and free interpretation over clear communication. (Reflective Journal, Student 11)

In conclusion, the students were aware of the deliberate intention of the songwriter to convey the violation of the cooperative principle and maxim flouting through the song. The thematic findings of compliance and maxim flouting are summarized in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**  
*Examples of Maxim Flouting Analysis from French Songs*

| Speech Acts                                                          | Examples of Students' Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Flouting maxim of quantity<br>(Song: <i>Dernière fois</i> by Alonzo) | <i>Et si j'ai cassé quelque chose, désolé, désolé, désolé</i> (and if I broke something, I'm sorry, sorry, sorry)<br>This utterance flouts the maxim of quantity because the speaker excessively apologizes. This speech violates the maxim of quantity because there is a repetition of the words <i>désolé, désolé, désolé</i> (sorry) three times in a row. This is considered excessive and does not provide additional useful information in the context.                               |
| Flouting maxim of quality                                            | <i>Le temps va me donner raison, c'était pas lui le bon, il t'aimait pas au final</i> (Time will prove me right, he wasn't the right one, he didn't love you in the end)<br>This speech violates the maxim of quality because the information conveyed is invalid. The speaker states " <i>Le temps va me donner raison</i> ," which means that the truth cannot be confirmed at that time, nor will time really prove it.                                                                   |
| Flouting maxim of relevance                                          | <i>Kassim, je t'en prie, j'hallucine, tu viens de me tuer</i> (Kassim, please, I'm hallucinating, you've just killed me!)<br>The utterance <i>j'hallucine, tu viens de me tuer</i> has no relevance because it is only a hallucination, not a real incident where the speaker was actually killed.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Flouting maxim of manner                                             | <i>J'ai pas le choix, J vais devoir partir, (I've got no choice, I have to leave)</i><br><i>J vais devoir vous quitter, (I have to part ways with you)</i><br><i>J vais devoir vous laisser, (I have to let you go)</i><br><i>J vais devoir vous oublier (I'll have to forget you)</i><br>The utterances are unclear and ambiguous, and the way they are conveyed is convoluted, indirect, or non-recurrent. The lyrics imply that the speaker must take various measures to forget someone. |

Students in this study identified that in song lyrics writing, the cooperative principle is not always strictly followed, especially when the main goal is to create artistic beauty and interpretation space for listeners to explore. They describe that the flouting of the maxim of quality in song lyrics often uses metaphors, similes, and other figurative language. In addition, some songs deliberately have ambiguous lyrics, full of metaphors and figurative words that can produce different interpretations

between listeners and songwriters. Students describe the vagueness of meaning not as a weakness, but rather as an artistic strategy that enriches the listening experience and gives listeners the freedom to find meanings that resonate most with them. This sentiment is echoed in the following student remarks.

... does not always follow the cooperative principle, as in the lyrics of '*le piège des fous* ' in the sentence

*'Vivre libre, je ne veux plus tomber, Dans le piège des fous, ils se mettent à genoux '* which is metaphorical and not directly explained. However, this violation actually strengthens the beauty of the song because it provides room for interpretation for the listener and makes the meaning of the lyrics feel more personal and emotional. (Reflective Journal, Student 16)

Sometimes, there is a violation of embellishing or exaggerating things. (Interview, Student 12)

The use of metaphors or the omission of details makes the lyrics feel more poetic and emotional, allowing listeners to interpret the song according to their personal experiences. (Reflective Journal, Student 9)

The cooperative principle is often violated because lyrics are often made ambiguous, metaphorical, or emotional to enhance artistic appeal. (Reflective Journal, Student 3)

Students understand utterances that flout the maxim of relevance because, although the lyrics may not be directly relevant to a particular situation, listeners can still relate them to their personal experiences. Writers do not always follow the cooperative principle, such as providing sufficient and relevant information to their readers. This is because song

lyrics often prioritize emotions, aesthetics, and free interpretation over grammatical accuracy. As noted by one of the students:

*"If a song's lyrics are too literal, they are less appealing and familiar. For the listener, if the songwriter uses implied expressions, this will make them find out more about the song and listen repeatedly"* (Reflective Journal, Student 6).

The use of metaphor and ambiguity as a form of the flouting of the maxim of manner is often a technique that enriches the lyrics. As in song lyrics that do not directly convey their intent, songwriters can add layers of meaning that can be personally interpreted by the listener, making the listening experience more profound and personal to the listener. Violations of the cooperative principle provide space for listeners to relate the songs to their own experiences. This gives the listener the freedom to find meaning based on their feelings and experiences. Table 7 presents a thematic analysis of how students identify different types of cooperative principle violations in songs and the impacts of these violations — including how they enhance the beauty of meaning, create space for interpretation, and build emotional attachment.

**Table 7**  
*Thematic Analysis of Cooperative Principle Identifications in Songs*

| Theme                                     | Sub-theme                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Impact of cooperative principle violation | Enhancing the Beauty of Meaning<br>Creates Space for Interpretation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Maxim flouting found by students          | Builds Emotional Attachment<br>Flouting the maxim of quantity: not providing enough information.<br>Flouting the maxim of quality: song lyrics often use metaphors, similes, or figurative words.<br>Flouting the maxim of relevance: song lyrics are irrelevant to the context.<br>Flouting the maxim of manner: songs are often ambiguous. |

The table also suggests that violation of the cooperative principle is influenced by a song's genre. In music genres such as pop, rock, or poetic, lyrics tend to be freer and do not always strictly follow the cooperative principle. This creates artistic freedom, giving songwriters the room to experiment with words and forms of expression. Many songs, especially those with poetic or symbolic elements, violate this principle to add meaning to their lyrics. Some respondents noted that understanding the songwriter's social context or personal experience is crucial to understanding why a violation of the cooperative principle occurs. Seemingly ambiguous lyrics can become clearer if understood in the context of the writer's life history or social conditions.

#### **Deixis: Weaving Context into the Meaning of Songs**

Students in this study expressed that deixis makes it easier for listeners to understand the context of a

song's lyrics. With persona deixis, listeners can more easily identify who is speaking and to whom the message is being conveyed. The context that accompanies deixis provides clearer information, making the song lyrics easier to understand. One student articulated this idea as follows: *"... with deixis, the listener or reader can be helped to understand the context of the speech more easily"* (Interview, Student 31). Deixis increases listeners' emotional engagement. It allows the listener to connect more emotionally to the song. By understanding deixis in an emotional context, the listener can feel more closely to the story. For example, pronouns such as *je* or *tu/ vous* (I or you) in songs create the impression that the singer is addressing the listener directly, reinforcing the song's emotional message. In a student's own words:

The use of deixis in songs becomes more meaningful when linked to an emotional or narrative context. Deixis helps listeners understand who is speaking, to

whom they are speaking, and the situation. (Reflective Journal, Student 36)

Nevertheless, confusion in understanding deixis references also occurred among the students. Classroom observations revealed instances where students showed confusion in understanding deixis references such as *celui-là*, *ici*, or *maintenant* (here or now). During lyric analysis, students were often seen hesitating or asking questions about these terms, displaying uncertainty or incorrect interpretations when the contextual reference was unclear. Discussions and feedback indicated difficulty linking these deixis to specific moments or settings within the songs. Teachers frequently

stepped in to provide additional context or explanations, highlighting the crucial role that context plays in decoding deixis in song lyrics. One student captured this experience with the following reflection:

... without understanding the context of the song, certain deixis in the lyrics can be confusing to the audience. This is because deixis such as *il/ elle*, *ici*, *il*, and *maintenant* require explicit references to have clear meanings. (Reflective Journal, Student 36)

The results of thematic analysis from students' reflections and interviews related to this discussion are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
*Thematic Analysis of Deixis Identifications in Songs*

| Theme                                             | Sub-theme                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deixis as a determinant of meaning in song lyrics | Deixis as context marker<br>Providing clearer information, making the lyrics easier to understand.<br>Context as ambiguity clarifier                                  |
| Increasing listeners' emotional engagement        | Allowing the listener to connect more emotionally with the song<br>Making listeners immersed in the song story<br>Pronouns fostering intimacy through direct address. |

In conclusion, understanding deixis is crucial for interpreting song lyrics in depth, allowing listeners to capture the messages and emotions that the singer wishes to convey. The deployment of deixis not only functions as a contextual anchor; it also clarifies ambiguity and provides informative cues to the listener.

### Students' Perceptions of the Use of Songs for Learning Pragmatics

According to the students, songs offer a language that is both natural and contextualized. Songs use everyday language that is rich in meaning and emotions. Songs also contain social and emotional content. Songs reflect social situations and feelings, helping them understand how language is used in different contexts. Music and melodies reinforce emotional understanding and nuances of meaning in communication because they are enjoyable and memorable. The researchers' observations revealed that as students enjoy songs, learning a language through songs feels more natural and less tedious. This is evident from the students' responses.

I feel motivated when learning through songs because they have a strong emotional appeal and convey messages uniquely. Music can connect feelings and ideas in memorable ways. (Reflective Journal, Student 37)

Songs also facilitate learning as a material object because they are concise, easy to analyze, and highly suitable for pragmatic analysis, which delves deeper into the song's meaning. (Reflective Journal, Student 31)

Learning with songs feels more relaxed and fun for students than traditional methods. Unlike texts that tend to be monotonous or videos that sometimes require more visual attention, songs can be played repeatedly without becoming tedious. (Reflective Journal, Student 32)

... our learning process can be more flexible and relaxed than that of a human. We do not need to look at the lyrics; just listening is enough, and it can be done while eating or lying down. (Interview Student 34)

The results of thematic analysis describing students' perceptions of how they learn pragmatics through French songs, the genres they preferred, and their recommendation for future learning are provided in Table 9. The thematic analysis was derived from interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations.

The findings revealed that students prefer to be allowed to choose songs that suit their interests, such as popular and latest songs. Students tend to want a variety of song genres to understand different perceptions and expressions of the language. Pop and folk songs were most frequently selected possibly because they have simple lyrics and are easy to understand. In addition, love-themed songs with a slow tempo help in understanding emotional expression, according to the students. For deeper language learning, students chose classical songs with poetic lyrics. Students also stated that they avoided songs that were too complex or difficult, such as rock and roll or metal songs, which were more difficult to understand. Some students also wanted to analyze songs with educational value,

such as children's songs full of moral messages or songs with cultural themes and daily life. The theme songs that students thought were appropriate for language learning are those that match their language level (A2: elementary-level proficiency in

French). Students pointed out that songs with clear and repetitive lyrics helped them remember vocabulary and sentence structures.

**Table 9**  
*Students' Perceptions of the Use of Songs for Learning Pragmatics*

| Theme                                                                     | Sub-themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The way song enhances French Literature students' pragmatic understanding | <p>Songs can influence mood and enhance learning enthusiasm</p> <p>Songs reflect real communication contexts and help understand pragmatics through relatable messages</p> <p>Songs as objects that are easy to analyze pragmatically</p> <p>Songs make it easier to understand theory than other methods</p> <p>Songs are more relaxing and enjoyable than reading texts or watching videos</p> <p>Songs as a flexible learning tool that can be done anytime</p> |
| Students' recommendation for pragmatic learning through songs             | <p>Songs are an effective medium for language learning and pragmatism.</p> <p>Choosing the right song with lyrics that are rich in pragmatic elements such as deixis, speech acts, and implicature.</p> <p>Learning songs through collaborative learning, task-based learning, and presentation to improve understanding</p> <p>Reflection at the end of the session for learning evaluation.</p>                                                                  |
| Preferred song genres for French language learning                        | <p>Upbeat genre for energy and learning spirit</p> <p>Mellow songs for focus and relaxation</p> <p>Hip-hop and RnB for inspiration in learning</p> <p>Instrumental and movie soundtracks for maximum concentration</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## DISCUSSION

This study indicates that French Literature students successfully analyzed the pragmatic aspects of French song lyrics. Through the process of translation, interpretation of lyrics, and identification of speech acts, cooperative principles, and deixis, students understood how song lyrics conveyed meanings beyond the written words. Understanding speech acts, cooperative principles, and deixis helps students communicate more effectively by capturing the intent of utterances, cooperating in conversations, and interpreting meanings based on context. Awareness of and exposure to the use of natural language are important for learning to speak French (Buysse, 2020). Students were not limited to identifying the explicit use of language contained in the lyrics but were also able to interpret implicit meanings. They interpreted the hidden meaning of the song lyrics and how the singer conveys feelings through context and the violation of maxims.

Speech acts in songs play an important role in helping students understand the song lyrics. With speech acts, the students identified the intention of the utterances (Hidayat, 2016; Setyawati et al., 2024). Song lyrics that contain implicatures help students use songs for interpersonal communication (Esdaille, 2020; Saed et al., 2025). Students demonstrated their ability to identify that songs carry not only lyrics, but also cultural background, music genre, emotion, tone, and the accompanying situation, which contributes to the interpretation of the speech acts.

The findings also show that speech acts in songs play an important role in helping students understand the song lyrics. With speech acts, the students identified the intention of the utterances (Rouki, 2023). Students demonstrated their ability to identify that songs carry not only lyrics, but also cultural background, music genre, emotion, tone, and the accompanying situation, which contributes to the interpretation of the speech acts. Indeed, research has shown that song lyrics that contain implicatures help students use songs for interpersonal communication (Yeh & Hung, 2022).

Another important finding of this study relates to students' understanding of the function of maxim flouting. Maxim flouting is a creative and aesthetic form of linguistic expression. Songs contain expressions that prioritize emotion, poetic imagery, and musicality, giving songwriters the freedom to violate the rules of language to create a deeper connection with listeners (Diko, 2023). Song lyrics reflect the singer's use of language and are connected to the message being conveyed, while the style of the lyrics and music influences the listener's interpretation (Bsharat et al., 2021). The students in this study described how maxim flouting in the song increased the beauty of its meaning. They also indicated that the use of indirect and ambiguous language can evoke feelings in listeners. Maxim flouting can also create room for the listener's interpretation. This interpretation is influenced by the listener's personal perspective and experience.

The finding regarding the use of deixis in songs demonstrates that this pragmatic feature contributes to increasing students' emotional

engagement with the song. With direct reference, songs allow listeners to connect emotionally, creating the feeling that they are experiencing the story conveyed in the lyrics. This is further reinforced by the way the song immerses the listener in the story, building a stronger emotional connection with the song (Lestari & Simatupang, 2023). In addition, the use of personal pronouns in the lyrics creates a sense of closeness through direct address, making the listener feel more cared for and connected to the song on a personal level. The use of deixis between the speaker and interlocutor or audience affects context-based communication, making the conveyed meaning easier to understand (Aryawan et al., 2022).

From the pedagogic aspect, the findings show that teaching French through songs encourages students to apply pragmatic theory directly, rather than receiving it passively in lectures. Songs proved to be engaging and fit easily into class schedules because they are short and memorable (Tsang, 2020). Students reported that songs improved their listening and speaking skills, helped them remember vocabulary and grammar, and made it easier to connect their prior knowledge with new concepts (Kumar et al., 2022). The repeated exposure to authentic lyrics allowed students to internalize language without pressure (Tegge, 2015).

Classroom observations in particular demonstrate that song-based activities created a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in class. The students could be seen to relax and were more willing to participate and express ideas, while music boosted motivation and enthusiasm for learning French (Baills et al., 2021; Yung, 2023). Students found pragmatic concepts—such as speech acts, cooperative principles, and deixis—easier to grasp by analyzing personally meaningful lyrics.

Student feedback highlighted the importance of choosing songs with relevant pragmatic elements and appropriate cultural content. Songs with clear, repetitive lyrics, or those carrying cultural or emotional significance, were preferred. Teachers played a key role in screening songs to ensure suitable content and complexity for learning (Bsharat et al., 2021). Overall, the findings show that integrating songs into pragmatic learning not only supports linguistic development, but also fosters greater cultural engagement and preparedness for real-world French communication (Albacete-Maza et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study reports French Literature students' reflections and perceptions of learning pragmatics through French songs. The findings show that songs offer an authentic communication context that is easy to analyze pragmatically, serving as a framework for understanding various speech acts

through their emotional and situational content. Maxim flouting in lyrics gives students interpretive space, fostering emotional attachment and allowing for personal meaning-making. Deictic references in songs also help students clarify ambiguity and situate meaning in context.

Song selection played an important role. The findings show that energetic pop, mellow songs for focus, hip-hop/RnB for inspiration, and instrumental or soundtrack genres for concentration were preferred as pragmatic learning materials, especially when the lyrics are rich in relevant elements. Learning pragmatics was not just about vocabulary and grammar, but included pragmatic awareness, implicature, and deixis. These positive responses suggest songs remain a promising medium in higher education for developing pragmatic sensitivity.

The study is limited by difficulty in distinguishing the effects of singing from speaking and separating the benefits of musicality from linguistic input. Future work should compare song listening with lyric recitation and explore AI, digital tools, or gamification to enhance learning. Digital and interactive contexts such as social media should also be considered. Despite these limitations, the findings show that songs continue to be an effective resource for cultivating pragmatic awareness among French Literature students.

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