

A Pragmatic Analysis of Audioslave's Rock Lyrics: Conversational Implicature and Flouted Maxims

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how conversational implicature and the flouting of Grice's cooperative maxims are embedded in the lyrics of the American rock band Audioslave. Drawing on pragmatic theory, the research aims to identify how implicit meanings are constructed through non-literal expressions in song lyrics. A qualitative descriptive method was applied to twenty-five lyric lines selected from five songs which are Like a Stone, I Am the Highway, Show Me How to Live, Shadow on the Sun, and Be Yourself. The analysis shows that the Maxim of Quality is most frequently flouted, followed by the Maxims of Manner, Quantity, and Relation. These floutings manifest through metaphor, ambiguity, and symbolic imagery that require listeners to interpret meanings inferentially. Interpreting maxim violations in lyrics demonstrates that even non-dialogic texts operate according to pragmatic principles, revealing how musicians strategically use figurative language to communicate emotional, existential, and philosophical themes. By applying Gricean theory to musical discourse, this study expands the scope of pragmatics beyond spoken interaction and demonstrates how song lyrics function as intentional communicative acts that convey layered meaning through implicature. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how listeners derive interpretation from artistic language and highlight the value of pragmatic analysis in music studies.

Key words: Pragmatics; Grice's Cooperative Principle; Implicature; Maxim Flouting; Rock Lyrics.

INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a vehicle for literal meaning but also as a medium for conveying implicit intentions, emotions, and ideologies (Grundy, 2019). Pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by context, enabling listeners to understand messages beyond what is explicitly stated (Yule, 1996). Grice's Cooperative Principle and its four conversational maxims quantity, quality, relation, and manner provide a foundational framework for explaining how speakers maintain coherence and cooperation in communication (Davies, 2000). When these maxims are intentionally flouted, listeners derive additional meanings

known as conversational implicatures (Levinson, 1983; Cutting, 2005). As Yudith et al., (2021) note, implicature is inherently inferential, requiring the hearer to uncover hidden or indirect meanings. In artistic discourse, this inferential process becomes central to interpretation, as figurative language challenges literal understanding. Thomas (2014) and Horn (2009) highlight that implicature allows both speakers and lyricists to express attitudes, emotions, and social positions implicitly.

Rhamadani et al., (2022) stated that implicature can also be found in song, although lyrics are not conversational in structure, they still operate as communicative acts that invite listeners to make contextual inferences (Simpson, 2004; Wales, 2014). Recent studies affirm the relevance of pragmatics in musical texts: Nahak & Bram (2021) found that Gricean maxim violations are prevalent in Javanese song lyrics, illustrating the universality of implicature across musical traditions. Wahyudi et al., (2025) demonstrate how conventional implicature emerges in religious and persuasive song discourse, while Putri (2023) identifies conversational implicatures in Western pop-folk lyrics. Mukminin (2024) shows that even contemporary Indonesian pop songs contain rich pragmatic elements such as illocutionary acts. Collectively, these studies indicate a growing scholarly interest in applying pragmatic theories to lyrical language and highlight the expressive potential of implicature within musical communication.

This research focuses on the American rock band Audioslave, whose lyrics are characterized by emotional depth, existential reflection, and dense metaphorical imagery. Chris Cornell's songwriting often explores themes of identity, spiritual longing, alienation, and personal struggle topics that naturally rely on non-literal and inferential meaning-making. Rock music as a genre tends to employ symbolic ambiguity and philosophical metaphor more heavily than mainstream pop, making it particularly suitable for pragmatic analysis. Audioslave's lyrics, which blend introspective poetry with socio-emotional commentary, offer fertile ground for examining how conversational implicature functions within artistic discourse.

Although previous research has investigated maxim flouting in conversational media such as television dialogue Cristina & Afriana (2021) and in pop or indie songs by Cantika & Fadhillah (2023), fewer studies have addressed rock lyrics, which often rely on more abstract, emotionally charged, and metaphor-heavy language. This gap is both empirical and theoretical: rock lyrics frequently communicate meaning through symbolic compression rather than linear narrative or conversational logic, creating different patterns of implicature not typically observed in spoken interaction. Examining Audioslave's lyrics therefore provides insight into how pragmatic principles operate within a genre shaped by figurative complexity.

The purpose of this study is to identify the types of conversational implicature present in Audioslave's lyrics and to analyze how flouting Grice's maxims contributes to the construction of deeper meaning. By applying Gricean theory to

musical discourse, this research aims to broaden the scope of pragmatics and demonstrate how song lyrics function as intentional communicative acts that rely on inferential interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews previous research and theoretical foundations relevant to conversational implicature and the flouting of Gricean maxims in artistic and communicative contexts. It is organized into two parts which are previous related studies and theoretical foundations of pragmatics, the Cooperative Principle, and conversational implicature.

Previous Related Study

Research on conversational implicature and maxim flouting has been widely conducted in different communication settings, showing that non-literal meaning is central to human interaction. Elmahady Musa et al., (2022) demonstrated that speakers in both digital and educational environments frequently rely on implicature when meaning cannot be conveyed directly, emphasizing that context strongly shapes interpretation. Similarly, Mappaita (2022) found that indirect expressions in classroom communication serve as strategic tools for expressing emotion, maintaining politeness, and achieving communicative goals.

Other studies highlight how maxims operate in mediated or artistic discourse. Ahmadi (2024), for example, showed that speakers in film dialogue intentionally flout maxims to create humor, tension, or irony, revealing how entertainment texts manipulate expectations to produce pragmatic effects. Cantika & Fadhilah (2023) extended this discussion to song lyrics, finding that indie-pop music often conveys meaning implicitly through metaphorical and ambiguous expressions, which require listeners to engage in inferential interpretation.

In addition, more recent studies by Rosalina et al., (2024) and Tracy et al., (2021) confirm that figurative language remains central to modern song writing, with many lyrics relying on symbolic or metaphorical imagery that naturally triggers implicature. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on conversational contexts, film dialogue, or pop/indie music. Only a few have explored maxim flouting in rock lyrics, despite the genre's heavy use of metaphor, existential themes, and ambiguity. This gap makes the present study important, as it explores how Gricean theory functions within the rich, metaphorical, and introspective lyrical style of Audioslave.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by context, allowing speakers to communicate ideas beyond the literal meaning of their words (Levinson, 1983). Within this field, Grice's Cooperative Principle remains foundational. The principle

proposes that communication relies on shared cooperation, guided by four conversational maxims which are quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1991). These maxims function as expectations for informative, truthful, relevant, and clear communication.

When speakers intentionally violate a maxim, they create conversational implicature, prompting the listener to infer additional meaning. Green (2012) emphasizes that maxims operate as flexible guidelines rather than strict rules, enabling speakers to bend or break them for artistic or expressive purposes. Leech (2016) further expands this framework by incorporating politeness as a factor influencing why speakers choose indirectness instead of explicit statements.

Conversational implicature itself is understood as meaning that is implied rather than stated directly. Allott (2018) argues that implicature depends on shared assumptions and contextual cues, requiring the hearer to interpret what is meant rather than what is said. In poetic and artistic texts, this indirectness becomes even more pronounced. Fraser (1996) notes that figurative language, including metaphor, symbolism, and hyperbole often operates through flouting the Maxims of Quality or Manner, compelling audiences to derive deeper or abstract meanings.

Recent works by Elmahady Musa et al., (2022) and Mappaita (2022) confirm that modern discourse continues to rely heavily on such figurative strategies, demonstrating that implicature remains central to expressive and creative communication. These theoretical ideas guide this research, which examines how Audioslave's lyrics rely on maxim flouting to convey layered emotional and philosophical messages that go beyond what is said on the surface.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, which is appropriate for analyzing implicit meaning and non-literal expressions in song lyrics. The focus of the research is not to test hypotheses but to describe how conversational implicatures appear in artistic discourse. The sample consisted of five songs by Audioslave which are *Like a Stone*, *I Am the Highway*, *Show Me How to Live*, *Shadow on the Sun*, and *Be Yourself*. These songs were selected purposively because they contain dense figurative language, existential themes, and stylistic complexity that reflect the band's lyrical identity. From these songs, twenty-five lyric lines were selected as the data. These lines were chosen because they contain metaphorical, ambiguous, or symbolic expressions that show potential flouting of Grice's conversational maxims.

Instruments and Procedures

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, who acted as the interpreter of the data. Following Sudaryanto (1993) observation and note-taking techniques, the researcher carefully read and re-read the official lyrics of the selected songs. During this process, lines that showed non-literal meaning, metaphor, symbolism, or unusual linguistic structure were identified and recorded. Each selected lyric was labeled with a data number (Data 1, Data 2, etc.) and with its line location in the song (e.g., L1, L2). This numbering system ensured clarity, consistency, and traceability throughout the analysis. No external tools or coding software were used; instead, the identification of implicature relied on repeated examination of the lyrics and the researcher's understanding of pragmatic theory.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a pragmatic approach based on Grice's Cooperative Principle. Each lyric line was examined to determine whether it flouted one of the conversational maxims and what implicature emerged as a result. The analysis focused on the linguistic features that contributed to implicature, such as metaphor, hyperbole, ambiguity, or shifts in relevance. After each maxim violation was identified, the researcher interpreted the implied meaning by relating it to the context of the lyric, the thematic elements of the song, and principles of inferential communication. To maintain consistency, all interpretations were cross-checked with the theoretical framework and with patterns identified in previous studies, ensuring that the analysis aligned with established pragmatic concepts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of twenty-five lyric excerpts from five Audioslave songs, the researcher found that the band frequently flouts Grice's maxims to imply deeper meanings. The flouted maxims include quality (10), manner (7), quantity (5), and relation (4).

Flouting the Maxim of Quality

The Maxim of Quality requires speakers to say only what they believe to be true and adequately supported by evidence (Grice, 1991).

Data 2

L9: "I'll wait for you there like a stone" (Like a Stone)

This line flouts maxim of quality, because it asserts an impossible condition. Through metaphor, the persona compares themselves to a stone, an inanimate object incapable of waiting. The figurative meaning evokes patience, stillness, and steadfast devotion. This non-literal statement creates an implicature of spiritual

endurance and faithfulness in waiting, possibly for divine reunion or personal redemption. Such a violation exemplifies (Grice, 1991).

Data 7

L9: “I am not your rolling wheels, I am the highway” (I am the Highway)

This lyric flouts the Maxim of Quality by asserting an impossible identity. The metaphorical contrast between rolling wheels and the highway creates a pragmatic implicature of freedom and autonomy. While the first image represents dependency and control, the second suggests vastness and self-direction. This figurative opposition allows the speaker to redefine their identity through negation, aligning with Horn (2009) and Elmahady Musa et al. (2022) insights that metaphorical language functions as a vehicle for emotional and ideological stance.

Data 8

L11: “I am not your carpet ride — I am the sky” (I am the Highway)

This line violates the Maxim of Quality, as it asserts figurative rather than literal truth. The contrast between carpet ride and sky functions metaphorically to elevate the speaker’s sense of independence and spiritual breadth. The implicature suggests that the persona refuses limitation or possession, seeking boundless self-expression instead. This intentional untruth reflects (Grice, 1991). view that flouting the truth condition can lead to meaningful inference, showing that non-literal expression can reinforce, rather than obscure, communication.

Data 10

L15: “I am not your autumn moon, I am the night” (I am the Highway)

The line flouts the Maxim of Quality because it conveys a statement that is not literally true. The lyric employs a biblical metaphor, associating the persona’s suffering with the crucifixion of Christ. Rather than describing an actual physical event, the expression represents emotional or spiritual pain, implying guilt or the weight of human imperfection. This deliberate violation invites inferential interpretation: the speaker experiences an internal struggle between divine creation and personal anguish. The figurative flouting supports Grice (1991) concept that speakers may violate truthfulness to convey deeper meanings and corresponds with Mappaita (2022) finding that non-literal statements often express psychological or spiritual states through implicature.

Data 13

L5: “Nail in my hand from my creator” (Show me How to Live)

This line clearly violates the Maxim of Quality, since it describes a physically impossible condition. The line uses hyperbole to dramatize emotional suffering and exhaustion. This exaggeration conveys intense vulnerability, transforming bodily imagery into a metaphor for psychological release. The implicature suggests an

overwhelming sense of pain, regret, or spiritual purification. In pragmatic terms, the false literal meaning is replaced by an expressive truth that amplifies emotion, illustrating Horn (2009) and Elmahady Musa et al. (2022) argument that hyperbole functions as a pragmatic device for affective emphasis rather than factual reporting.

Data 15

L9: "Through every pore I'm bleeding out" (Show me How to Live)

This line flouts the Maxim of Quality by asserting an existential impossibility. The line employs metaphor to express emotional emptiness and alienation. The hole symbolizes the absence of purpose or identity, while without a soul intensifies the image of detachment from humanity. Pragmatically, the listener infers an implicature of loss and disconnection rather than literal meaning. This figurative flouting supports Grice (1991) theory that falsehoods can generate cooperative meaning.

Data 18

L5: "Nothing but a hole to live without a soul" (Shadow on the Sun)

The line "Nothing but a hole to live without a soul" flouts the Maxim of Quality because it asserts an impossible condition. No one can live without a soul, and this impossibility highlights the figurative nature of the lyric. The line uses metaphor to express emotional emptiness and alienation, with "hole" symbolizing inner void and "without a soul" intensifying the sense of spiritual detachment. The figurative language encourages listeners to infer meaning beyond its literal sense, implying a deep loss of identity and psychological despair. This kind of deliberate untruth reflects Grice (1991) idea that violating the truth condition can still serve cooperative meaning through implicature.

Data 20

L9: "And even on a cloudy day, I'll keep my eyes fixed on the sun" (Shadow on the Sun)

The lyric "And even on a cloudy day, I'll keep my eyes fixed on the sun" violates the Maxim of Quality because it describes an impossible act. The line uses metaphorical exaggeration to express persistence and optimism in adversity. While it is unrealistic to see the sun on a cloudy day, the imagery conveys hope and resilience, showing determination to maintain positivity despite hardship. The implicature suggests emotional strength, though it may also imply blind optimism or denial. This deliberate untruth exemplifies Grice (1991) principle that false statements can generate interpretive meaning.

Data 23

L9: "Someone finds salvation in everyone, another only pain" (Be Yourself)

This line flouts the Maxim of Quality through overgeneralization and lack of evidence. The statement makes a sweeping claim about human experience without factual support, which challenges the expectation of truthfulness. Linguistically, the lyric uses parallel structure to contrast two opposing experiences, suggesting that perception shapes emotional outcomes. The implicature highlights human subjectivity and the difference in how people experience relationships and life itself. By deliberately overstating truth, the lyric encourages reflection on how personal perspective defines meaning. This finding aligns with Grice (1991) concept that apparent falsehood can guide the listener toward deeper inference.

Data 25

L17: "Don't lose any sleep tonight, I'm sure everything will end up alright" (Be Yourself)

This line flouts the Maxim of Quality because it provides reassurance without evidence. The speaker expresses certainty about an outcome that cannot be proven, turning the statement into a form of emotional comfort rather than factual truth. The implicature suggests care, optimism, and encouragement to remain calm despite uncertainty. This kind of pragmatic flouting demonstrates how unverified statements can perform a supportive function within communication, aligning with Grice (1991) theory that apparent untruths can still uphold cooperation

Flouting Maxim of Manner

The Maxim of Manner requires speakers to communicate clearly and avoid ambiguity (Grice, 1991).

Data 1

L1: "On a cobweb afternoon, in a room full of emptiness" (Like a Stone)

This line flouts the Maxim of Manner because it presents an unclear and imaginative setting. The phrase "cobweb afternoon" does not refer to a literal time of day, but evokes stillness, stagnation, or decay. The vagueness of the image requires the listener to infer mood and context, possibly loneliness or depression. Pragmatically, this obscurity transforms the line into an emotional landscape rather than a descriptive one. This supports Grice (1991) view that unclear expression can still fulfil a cooperative function by encouraging interpretation.

Data 4

L7: "In your house I long to be, room by room patiently" (Like a Stone)

The line flouts the Maxim of Manner because of its figurative and open-ended phrasing. The "house" may represent a literal place, spiritual rest, or emotional intimacy, leaving meaning dependent on the listener's interpretation. The lyric's ambiguity allows different readings, such as longing for peace, death, or closeness with another being. This indeterminacy enriches the lyric's communicative depth,

exemplifying Grice (1991) claim that deliberate vagueness can direct listeners toward inferential understanding rather than explicit clarity.

Data 12

L3: “Built with stolen parts, a telephone in my heart” (Show me How to Live)

The maxim of manner is flouted because of its surreal and contradictory imagery. The speaker cannot literally be built from stolen parts or possess a telephone inside their heart. The line therefore employs metaphor to depict a fragmented or artificial identity and an intense desire for communication. The ambiguity conveys emotional dysfunction and the need for connection, while also reflecting themes of dehumanization. This poetic flouting aligns with Horn (2009) discussion of deliberate obscurity in figurative expression, where meaning arises through the listener’s interpretive effort.

Data 14

L7: “And in your waiting hands I will land and roll out of my skin” (Show me How to Live)

This line flouts the Maxim of Manner because it uses figurative and surreal imagery that resists literal explanation. The phrase “roll out of my skin” may symbolize transformation, surrender, or emotional release. The lyric’s ambiguity allows multiple emotional interpretations, including intimacy, anxiety, or rebirth. This use of poetic vagueness exemplifies Grice (1991) notion that manner violations can still support cooperation by leading listeners toward intended implicatures rather than direct meaning.

Data 16

L1: “Shapes of every size move behind my eyes” (Shadow on the Sun)

This line violates the Maxim of Manner due to its obscure and dreamlike quality. The image suggests hallucination or vivid imagination, yet provides no concrete referent. The lack of clarity allows interpretation as either a depiction of mental distress or creative introspection. The line illustrates how artistic discourse deliberately departs from ordinary clarity to convey inner states. As noted by Mappaita (2022) this form of figurative ambiguity invites affective engagement by transforming confusion into shared emotional understanding.

Data 19

L7: “Doors inside my head bolted from within” (Shadow on the Sun)

This line flouts the Maxim of Manner because it is metaphorical and ambiguous. The line portrays psychological closure or repression rather than physical doors, implying guarded emotions or unprocessed trauma. The metaphor invites the listener to infer that the speaker is unable or unwilling to confront hidden aspects of themselves. This intentional lack of clarity promotes interpretive participation

and emotional empathy, supporting Grice (1991) view that manner flouting can communicate indirectly through implicature.

Data 21

L1: "Someone falls to pieces, sleeping all alone" (Be Yourself)

This line flouts the Maxim of Manner through its idiomatic and non-literal phrasing. The expression "falls to pieces" does not refer to a physical event but an emotional collapse. The ambiguity allows different interpretations, such as loneliness, heartbreak, or mental distress. Pragmatically, the flouting creates an implicature of fragility and isolation, turning abstract emotion into tangible imagery. This kind of artistic indirection corresponds with Horn (2009) argument that figurative expressions depend on interpretive inference to convey meaning.

Flouting Maxim of Quantity

The Maxim of Quantity requires speakers to provide enough information without being overly detailed (Grice, 1991).

Data 3

L5: "And on my deathbed I will pray to the gods and the angels" (Like a Stone)

This line flouts the Maxim of Quantity because it introduces powerful religious imagery without elaboration. The listener is left to infer what kind of prayer is being made or why it matters. The brevity creates a solemn and mysterious tone, suggesting guilt, redemption, or spiritual fear. Pragmatically, this ellipsis allows emotional intensity to arise from what remains unspoken. Such under-informativeness supports Grice (1991) principle that meaning can emerge from what is implied.

Data 5

L10: "I'll wait for you there alone" (Like a Stone)

This line violates the Maxim of Quantity because it provides minimal detail. The listener is not told who the speaker is waiting for or why, creating a sense of mystery and emotional isolation. The omission invites multiple interpretations, such as longing, mourning, or spiritual expectation. Pragmatically, this brevity draws focus to the act of waiting itself as a metaphor for faith or despair. This pattern exemplifies Grice (1991) theory of implicature.

Data 6

L11: "Alone I read, until the day was gone" (Like a Stone)

The line flouts the Maxim of Quantity through deliberate understatement. The speaker describes an ordinary activity without context or emotion, compelling the listener to infer inner states such as reflection, loneliness, or grief. The sparse

language turns simplicity into depth, suggesting that meaning lies in what remains unsaid. Pragmatically, the lyric demonstrates how economy of words can guide inference and emotion simultaneously. This supports Grice (1991) Cooperative Principle.

Flouting Maxim of Relation

The Maxim of Relation emphasizes relevance, requiring each contribution to connect meaningfully to the ongoing context (Grice, 1991).

Data 9

L13: "Friends and liars don't wait for me" (I am The Highway)

This line flouts the Maxim of Relation because it appears abrupt and only loosely connected to the preceding ideas. The speaker shifts focus from self-reflection to social detachment, creating a sense of alienation. This sudden change prompts listeners to infer emotional withdrawal or disillusionment with others. Pragmatically, the irrelevance invites interpretation rather than confusion, showing that indirectness can still maintain coherence through implicature. This pattern reflects Grice (1991) concept of cooperative inference.

Data 11

L17: "And your silence sounds no worse than bells" (Be Yourself)

This line violates the Maxim of Relation because the comparison between silence and bells appears unexpected and contextually unrelated. However, the juxtaposition transforms silence into an expressive sound, implying emotional adaptation or acceptance of solitude. The pragmatic implicature reveals that what seems irrelevant on the surface actually redefines meaning through contrast. This finding supports Grice (1991) argument that apparent irrelevance can be inferentially meaningful.

Data 17

L3: "I can tell you why people go insane, I can show you how you could do the same" (Shadow on the Sun)

This line flouts both the Maxims of Relation and Quantity because it introduces intense, unsettling information without context or connection to the surrounding lines. The abrupt tone provokes curiosity and discomfort, leading the listener to infer psychological distress or a warning. This dual flouting illustrates how shocking or contextually unanchored statements can guide deeper interpretation through implicature.

Data 22

L5: "Another lays a dozen white roses on a grave" (Be Yourself)

This line violates the Maxim of Relation because it introduces a contrasting image without explicit link to the preceding content. While seemingly unrelated, the scene symbolically continues the song's reflection on grief and acceptance. The image of white roses evokes purity and remembrance, allowing listeners to infer an emotional connection between life, death, and renewal. This figurative flouting exemplifies Grice (1991) idea that apparent irrelevance may carry hidden coherence.

Table 1
Frequency and Functions of Flouted Conversational Maxims.

Maxim Flouted	Frequency	Linguistic Feature	Typical Function
Quality	10	Metaphor, hyperbole	Express existential or emotional states
Manner	7	Ambiguity, surreal imagery	Evoke mood, encourage inference
Quantity	4	Under- or over-specification	Create openness or dramatic effect
Relation	4	Sudden topic shift	Emphasize contrast or emotional distance

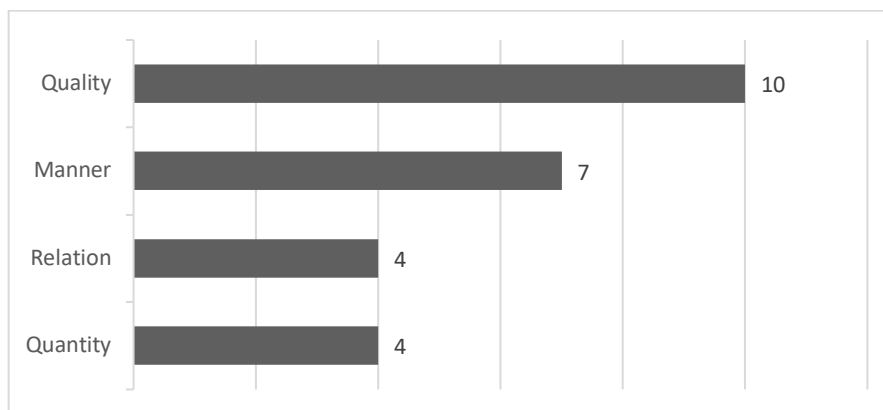


Figure 1. Distribution of Flouted Conversational Maxims in Audioslave's Lyrics

Beyond the numerical distribution of maxim flouting, the patterns in Audioslave's lyrics point to wider thematic and communicative functions. The frequent flouting of the Maxim of Quality shows the band's strong reliance on metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolic imagery to express emotional and philosophical ideas that cannot be stated literally. Unlike the implicatures commonly found in conversational data or pop lyrics, which often center on interpersonal or romantic themes, Audioslave's

figurative language engages with identity, spiritual searching, alienation, and inner conflict. Through symbolic self-descriptions such as becoming a “highway,” “sky,” or “night,” the lyrics frame personal struggle and transformation in abstract terms that invite listeners to infer deeper meaning. These patterns suggest that maxim violations in rock lyrics are not stylistic flourishes but deliberate strategies for communicating complex, introspective states.

As summarized in table 1, this thematic tendency helps explain why Quality flouting dominates the dataset and positions Audioslave’s style within broader rock conventions. Whereas pop and conversational texts often rely on relevance shifts or understatement, rock lyricists frequently use metaphorical distortion to convey emotional intensity. Audioslave’s preference for expressive figurative untruths therefore reflects the genre’s tradition of using symbolic imagery to address existential issues. In this way, maxim flouting becomes a core mechanism of meaning-making in rock music, enabling layered interpretation rather than straightforward narrative delivery.

CONCLUSION

This study examined conversational implicature and the flouting of Gricean maxims in the lyrics of five Audioslave songs. The analysis showed that the Maxim of Quality was flouted most frequently, followed by Manner, Quantity, and Relation, indicating a consistent reliance on metaphor, ambiguity, and symbolic expression to communicate meaning beyond the literal text. These findings demonstrate that maxim flouting in rock lyrics is not incidental but functions as a deliberate artistic strategy for conveying emotional, philosophical, and existential themes that cannot be expressed directly. By revealing how Audioslave constructs layered meanings through pragmatic mechanisms, this study expands the application of Gricean theory to musical discourse and highlights the value of pragmatics in interpreting artistic language.

Conceptually, the study contributes to pragmatic scholarship by showing that non-dialogic texts like song lyrics still operate cooperatively and depend on inferential reasoning. The patterns observed here suggest that different musical genres may privilege different types of implicature; in the case of Audioslave, frequent Quality flouting reflects a communicative style rooted in metaphorical distortion and existential expression. This adds nuance to existing discussions of implicature, which have traditionally focused on conversation, media dialogue, or pop-oriented lyrics.

However, the study is limited by its small dataset and focus on a single band within a specific rock subgenre. Cultural background, individual listener interpretation, and personal experience may also influence how implicatures are understood, suggesting that meaning-making in music is never entirely fixed. Future research could expand the corpus, compare multiple genres, or explore listener reception to

better understand how pragmatic strategies function across broader musical and cultural contexts.

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