

# Speech Act Analysis of the Song Lyric *Don't Smile*

by Sabrina Carpenter

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the lyrics of *Don't Smile* by Sabrina Carpenter using John Searle's speech act theory to uncover the emotional and communicative layers within the lyrics. This theory classifies utterances into five types: assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. The findings of the study reveal that expressive speech acts dominate the lyrics, followed by assertive and directive acts. Commissive speech acts appear less frequently, and no declarative acts were identified. The song reflects the speaker's emotional struggle, emphasizing raw emotional expression and the process of healing through art. This research highlights how speech act theory can provide deeper insights into the use of language in song lyrics, transforming music from mere entertainment into a powerful medium for emotional expression that resonates deeply with its listeners.

**Keyword:** *Searle's Theory; Speech Acts; Song Lyrics; Don't Smile*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of language has always intrigued scholars to view from various perspectives, including from the lens of speech act theory. This framework provides valuable insight into how language functions as beyond the tool for communication. When applied to song lyrics, it reveals how artistic expression can intertwine with linguistic purpose. This paper focuses on analyzing Sabrina Carpenter's song *Don't Smile* by utilizing John Searle's classification of speech acts. Through this analysis, the communicative intentions embedded within the lyrics are uncovered, showing how music transcends mere entertainment to become a medium for emotional expression and connection.

John Searle's speech act theory, developed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, categorizes utterances into five distinct types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Each category represents a specific function of language, such as stating facts, expressing emotions, or influencing others. As noted by Huang (2017), this framework enhances our understanding of how language operates within its context and purpose. In the context of song lyrics, these speech acts often go beyond aesthetic appeal to convey deeper messages and evoke emotional responses, allowing listeners to connect with the lyrics on a personal level (see Yusuf & Amelia, 2018; Luthfiana et al, 2020; Azizah & Arifin, 2024).

Recent studies have demonstrated the applicability of speech act theory in analyzing song lyrics, for instance; Aulia et al (2023) examined the existence of expressive speech acts in *Cerita Cintaku* Youtube Video. Samsudin et al (2023) explored the speech acts within Jeong Dong-Wons song lyrics 'White Space'. Similarly, Putri & Suryadi (2021) examined Taylor Swift's songs, revealing how assertive and directive acts create a narrative dynamic that engages listeners. In a study by Chen et al. (2022), the authors analyzed K-pop lyrics and found that commissive acts often reflect cultural values and societal commitments. Meanwhile, Alam et al (2019) investigated Indonesian pop songs, focusing on how commissives speech acts used in Adele's song. Finally, Dewi & Hartati (2023) identified a blend of speech act types in Adele's

lyrics, emphasizing their role in fostering emotional resonance and authenticity. These studies underscore the versatility of speech act theory as a tool for understanding the interplay between language and music.

Carpenter's *Don't Smile* serves as a rich example of how lyrics can encapsulate multiple layers of meaning. The song operates not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a communicative dialogue with its audience (see Lestari et al, 2021; Astuti & Setyanto, 2023; Wulandari et al, 2024). Further, song lyrics is written in such a way and display a unique relationship between music and language, where lyrics serves as both poetic and aesthetic tools (see Kennedy & Torres-Santos, 2016; Denac, 2022; Huang, 2023). This dual function allows listeners to interpret the song through their own experiences, creating a dynamic interaction between the artist's message and the audience's perception. As a result, *Don't Smile* becomes more than just a song—it transforms into a shared emotional experience.

One of the most prominent speech acts in the song is assertives, which reflect personal truths and observations. These acts form the backbone of the song's narrative, giving listeners insight into the speaker's mindset and the circumstances surrounding the lyrics. Smith & Jones (2020) argue that assertives are crucial in songwriting because they ground the emotional context of a song, making it relatable and impactful. In *Don't Smile*, assertive acts establish a connection between the speaker and the audience, drawing listeners into the song's world.

Directive acts in the song play a significant role in engaging the audience, as they encourage reflection and emotional involvement. These acts reflect the speaker's intent to influence the listener's thoughts or reactions, demonstrating the persuasive power of music. Taylor (2021) suggests that directives in song lyrics often enhance emotional engagement by prompting listeners to actively participate in the narrative. In *Don't Smile*, these acts invite the audience to empathize with the speaker's emotions and reconsider their own perspectives, deepening the impact of the song.

Expressive acts in the song further highlight its emotional depth, revealing feelings of vulnerability, frustration, and longing. These acts resonate deeply with universal human experiences, allowing the audience to connect with the artist on an emotional level. van der Schyff (2014) highlighted the importance of expressive acts in music, noting their role in fostering emotional catharsis and connection. By combining assertive, directive, and expressive acts, *Don't Smile* exemplifies how song lyrics serve as a complex form of communication, bridging the gap between linguistic theory and artistic expression while creating powerful human connections.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on the analysis of Sabrina Carpenter's song *Don't Smile* using John Searle's speech act theory. The lyrics were examined to identify and categorize speech acts into Searle's five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The analysis involved a close reading of the lyrics, with each utterance contextualized to determine its pragmatic function. Assertives were identified as statements of belief or truth, directives as attempts to influence the listener, expressives as reflections of emotional states, commissives as commitments to future actions, and declarations as enactments of social or institutional changes.

The classification process was supported by referencing existing research on speech acts in song lyrics, ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of the data. Comparative insights from prior studies, such as Samsudin et al. (2023) and Dewi & Hartati (2023), enriched the analysis, highlighting common trends in the use of speech acts in music. The findings were then quantified and organized into a table, illustrating the frequency and function of each speech act type in the song. This method demonstrates the applicability of speech act theory in uncovering the multifaceted communicative strategies in song lyrics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The analysis of the song *Don't Smile* by Sabrina Carpenter reveals the use of various speech acts based on John Searle's classification. The lyrics encapsulate emotional depth and communicative intent, employing multiple speech act types to convey the speaker's feelings and engage the audience. It is in line with previous studies that analyzing the speech act within the song lyrics by employing Searle's theory, such as Rusdiansyah (2021), Cahyono & Handayani, 2024; Setyawati et al, 2024). Each line of the song was carefully examined and categorized according to its pragmatic function, resulting in the identification of four speech act types. The data findings are presented in the table below, showing the frequency of each type of speech act found in the lyrics.

Table 1: The findings of speech act in *Don't Smile* song lyric

No.	Type of Speech Act	Frequency
1	Assertive	5
2	Directive	4
3	Expressive	6
4	Commissive	2
5	Declarative	0

The findings highlight that expressive acts are the most dominant type of speech act in the song, followed by assertive and directive acts. Commissive acts appear less frequently, and no declarative acts were identified. These results indicate that the song predominantly reflects the speaker's emotional state and personal truths, with some attempts to engage the audience and express commitment through specific lines.

### Discussion

The analysis of Sabrina Carpenter's song *Don't Smile* reveals the intricate interplay of speech acts that contribute to the emotional and communicative depth of the lyrics. The song employs assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive speech acts. Each serving a distinct function in shaping the narrative and engaging the audience. The categorization of these speech acts is grounded in John Searle's theoretical framework, with linguistic indicators providing evidence for their classification and interpretation.

#### Assertives

The assertive speech acts in the song anchor the narrative by expressing the speaker's observations and personal truths, each rich with emotional depth. The line *My heart is heavy now, it's like a hundred pounds* vividly conveys the speaker's burden of sorrow through metaphorical imagery, making her grief palpable to listeners. Similarly, the lyric *It's falling faster than the way you love to shut me down* describes the rapid deterioration of the relationship, capturing the speaker's perception of emotional rejection with a sharp, accusatory tone.

Another example, *You're supposed to think about me every time you hold her*, reflects the speaker's belief in her lingering emotional significance, suggesting unresolved attachment and a desire for connection even after the relationship has ended. The line *My friends are taking shots, you think it's happy hour, for me, it's not* contrasts the speaker's loneliness with the external world's celebrations, highlighting her isolation and detachment. *Pour my feelings in the microphone* further asserts her commitment to expressing her pain through music, illustrating her resilience and the therapeutic role of creativity.

Finally, *I stay in, and when the girls come home, I want one of them to take my phone* reveals her recognition of vulnerability and her deliberate effort to avoid reaching out to her ex-partner, reflecting both her self-awareness and her struggle with temptation. These assertives collectively paint a vivid picture of the speaker's emotional landscape, grounding the song in relatable and deeply personal truths.

### **Directives**

Directive speech acts in the song serve to influence the emotions or actions of others, often addressing the listener or the ex-partner directly. The phrase *Cry because it's over* encourages the audience to confront the finality of the relationship and share in the speaker's sense of loss. By employing an imperative tone, this phrase creates a sense of urgency, guiding the listener toward emotional introspection. Similarly, the statement *You're supposed to think about me every time you hold her* is directed at the ex-partner, placing emotional responsibility on them to remember the speaker. This lyric combines the force of a directive with a tone of emotional vulnerability, which amplifies the audience's empathy for the speaker's pain.

These directive acts do more than simply convey emotion; they shape the relational dynamics between the speaker, the ex-partner, and the audience. By urging the listener or the ex-partner to adopt specific emotional responses or behaviors, the speaker establishes a framework for processing the relationship's end. For instance, the imperative *Cry because it's over* not only legitimizes the speaker's grief but also invites others to align with that perspective, creating a shared emotional experience. Furthermore, the directive *You're supposed to think about me every time you hold her* blends command with confession, exposing the speaker's longing for validation. This interplay of power and vulnerability engages the audience on a personal level, fostering empathy and reflection on the complexities of heartbreak.

### **Expressives**

Expressive speech acts dominate the song, revealing the speaker's raw emotions and creating an intimate connection with the audience. The repeated line *I want you to miss me, I want you to miss me* encapsulates the speaker's longing and need for validation. The repetition intensifies the emotional resonance, underscoring the depth of her desire to remain significant in her ex-partner's life. Another example, *Pour my feelings in the microphone*, not only reflects her emotional pain but also highlights her resilience and agency in using music as a coping mechanism. These expressives are rich in emotional language, drawing listeners into the speaker's vulnerable state and fostering a cathartic experience. The prominence of expressives underscores the song's focus on emotional expression and its capacity to resonate with universal experiences of heartbreak and longing.

Furthermore, the use of expressive speech acts provides insight into the psychological processes underlying the speaker's grief. By verbalizing emotions such as longing, pain, and vulnerability, the speaker externalizes her inner struggles, creating a narrative that others who have experienced similar heartbreaks can identify with. This externalization functions as both an emotional release for the speaker and a medium for building empathy within the audience. For instance, the repetition of *I want you to miss me* serves as a plea for emotional acknowledgment, reflecting an intrinsic human need to feel remembered and valued, even in the wake of relational dissolution.

Additionally, expressive speech acts in the song serve a dual function of personal and artistic transformation. While they provide a raw account of the speaker's emotional turmoil, they also transform this pain into art, showcasing music as a therapeutic outlet. The phrase *Pour my feelings in the microphone* symbolizes a shift from passivity to agency, emphasizing the speaker's ability to reclaim her narrative through creative expression. This act of transforming emotional vulnerability into resilience through music not only enhances the song's emotional depth but also reinforces its appeal as a relatable and cathartic work for listeners. By prioritizing emotional transparency, the song bridges the gap between personal experiences and universal themes of love, loss, and healing.

### *Commissives*

Commissive speech acts, though infrequent, reflect the speaker's determination to navigate her emotional struggles. For instance, the line *Take my phone and lose your number, I don't want to be tempted* illustrates the speaker's resolve to protect herself by severing potential connections that could lead to emotional regression. This lyric highlights the speaker's awareness of her vulnerability and her commitment to maintaining her emotional well-being. Similarly, the line *Pour my feelings in the microphone* functions as a commissive act, where the speaker promises to channel her pain through creative expression. Both examples demonstrate the speaker's active effort to transform her sorrow into a form of agency, offering a sense of hope and progress despite the overarching theme of loss.

These commissive acts not only show the speaker's attempt to assert control over her emotional experiences but also signal her intention to reclaim power in the face of adversity. By making such commitments, the speaker affirms her agency in navigating her emotional journey, negotiating between holding on to past attachments and moving toward healing and self-expression. This process highlights an internal struggle, where the speaker shifts from experiencing pain as something passive to transforming it into an active force for personal growth. Ultimately, these lyrics portray a journey of emotional resilience, where the speaker not only accepts her sorrow but also shapes it into a source of strength that redefines her identity.

Notably, the absence of declarative speech acts reflects the introspective nature of the song. Declaratives, which enact change through their utterance, are absent, emphasizing that the lyrics focus on internal reflection rather than external societal or institutional action. This lack aligns with the song's deeply personal tone, where the speaker's emotions and internal struggles take precedence over outward declarations.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Sabrina Carpenter's song *Don't Smile* using John Searle's speech act theory provides a deep understanding of the emotional and communicative layers within the lyrics. The song predominantly utilizes expressive speech acts, highlighting the speaker's raw emotions and creating an intimate connection with the audience. Assertive and directive acts further enhance the emotional depth of the song, grounding it in personal truths and encouraging listeners to reflect on their own experiences. These speech acts allow the song to transcend its artistic form, making it an emotionally resonant piece that fosters empathy and connection.

The findings of this study align with the purpose of investigating the application of speech act theory to song lyrics. By categorizing the speech acts, it becomes evident that the song functions not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a powerful tool for emotional communication. The dominance of expressive and assertive acts showcases the song's focus on conveying personal emotions, while the inclusion of directive and commissive acts encourages audience engagement and reflection. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how speech act theory can reveal the deeper meanings behind song lyrics, enriching our understanding of music as a medium for emotional and linguistic expression.

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