



دراسة براغماتية لأغاني نيكى ميناغ: منهج قائم على المتن
A Pragmatic Study of Nicki Minaj's Songs: A Corpus-based Approach

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Abstract

Songs are considered one of the essentials of human life nowadays because they have occupied social media. It can be seen by surfing social apps such Instagram, Facebook, or by listening to them directly on YouTube or other apps such as Spotify and others. It is aimed to fill a gap in empirical studies by conducting pragmatic analyses of Nicki Minaj's songs, focusing on the lack of such studies to the best of the researchers' knowledge. Therefore, Nicki Minaj's tops albums songs are analyzed pragmatically through the years 2015-2024. To do so, Searle's speech act classification (1986) and Salager's (1997) classification of hedges are applied to know which are the most frequently used speech acts and hedges type and why. However, a corpus software Antconc is used in order not to be biased and to have reliable results. The results show that the female rapper Nicki Minaj utilizes directive speech most frequently and commissives. For hedges the study shows the modal auxiliary verbs and if clauses as the most used types of hedges. It is shown that the rapper employs specific terms such as "wanna, gotta" terms ending with "in" instead of "ing" to convey the idea that female rappers have the power to alter the public's perception of them. Rappers that are women can perform just like men and have their tracks ranked at the top of the Billboard charts. In addition, the use of hedges in their songs helps female rappers to establish their individuality, which is consistent with Lakoff's (1975) theory of female speech.

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المخلص

تُعتبر الأغاني من أساسيات الحياة البشرية في الوقت الحاضر، إذ شغلت مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي. ويتجلى ذلك في تصفح تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي مثل إنستغرام وفيسبوك، أو الاستماع إليها مباشرةً على يوتيوب أو تطبيقات أخرى مثل تطبيق الأغاني سبوتيفاي وغيرها. تهدف الدراسة إلى سد النقص في الدراسات التجريبية من خلال إجراء تحليلات براغماتية لأغاني نيكي ميناج، مع التركيز على نقص هذه الدراسات في حدود علم الباحثين. لذلك، تناول الدراسة أغاني البومات نيكي ميناج الرائدة براغماتياً خلال الفترة 2015-2024. ولتحقيق ذلك، تستخدم نظرية أفعال الكلام لسريال (1986) وتصنيف سلاجر (1997) تحولات لمعرفة أفعال الكلام الأكثر استخداماً وأنواع التحولات وأسبابها. استخدمت أداة Antconc لضمان دقة النتائج وعدم تحيزها. وتُظهر الدراسة أن مغنية الراب نيكي ميناج تستخدم الكلام التوجيهي في أغلب الأحيان (70%) والكلام التكليلي (12%). بالنسبة التحولات، أظهرت الدراسة أن الأفعال المساعدة النمطية (59%) وجمل الشرط (12%) هما أكثر أنواع التحولات استخداماً. ووفقاً للدراسة، تستخدم المغنيات مصطلحات محددة مثل "wanna, gotta" (أريد، يجب) ومصطلحات تنتهي بـ "in" بدلاً من "ing" لإيصال فكرة أن مغنيات الراب لديهن القدرة على تغيير نظرة الجمهور إليهن. يمكن لمغنيات الراب، مثل الرجال، أن يؤدين أغانيهن في صدارة قوائم بيلبورد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يساعد استخدام التحولات في أغانيهن مغنيات الراب على ترسيخ شخصيتهن، وهو ما يتوافق مع نظرية لأكوف (1975) حول الخطاب الأنثوي

1. Introduction

Songs are a common form of language used in society, serving as a communication tool for singers or songwriters to convey messages. Like any other texts, song lyrics have messages. To get that message, a pragmatic analysis of speech acts and hedges is applied by the researchers. Furthermore, a corpus Software Antconc is being used to make the results more reliable and to avoid being biased.

Pragmatics, a term coined by philosopher Charles Morris (1938), is a branch of semiotics that studies the relationship between signs and interpreters. Morris (1938) divided semiotics into three branches: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. He defined pragmatics as a part of his semiotics theory, alongside syntax and semantics. Hedges are defined as words that intentionally make the meaning of others' words unclear, as proposed by Lakoff in his 1975 thesis, Hedges refer to a study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts (Liu J., 2020). However, corpus linguistics is a systematic study of language examples, focusing on their classification, data collection, construction, and annotation, and is a crucial aspect of linguistics (Corpus Linguistics, 2006).

The study aims to provide an answer to the following questions:

1. Which speech acts are the most frequently used in the selected songs?
2. To what extent does the rapper use hedges in her songs? And why?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pragmatics

In the 1970s, pragmatics emerged as a branch of linguistics (as cited in Ibrahim & Abbas, 2015). Pragmatics, according to some academics like Carnap (1939), is "the field of all those investigations which take into consideration... the action, state, and environment of a man who speaks or hears a linguistic sign" (as cited in Ibrahim & Abbas, 2015). Chapman and Clark, for example, describe it as "an aspect of the study of language in use." It focuses on verb forms, linguistic behavior, and the interactions between language users (as cited in Mohammad & Abbas, 2021). Moreover, pragmatics is "the way humans use language in everyday interactions," according to Mey (2001) (as cited in Nashmi & Mehdi, 2022). Nonetheless, pragmatics "is the study of language in use," according to Baker (2018). Abbas et al. (2024) state that pragmatics is the study of meaning as it is expressed and shaped by people in a communication context, rather than as it is produced by the language system. Additionally, according to Majeed (2021, as cited in Ibrahim & Hussein, 2021), it "investigates speakers' hidden meanings even when it's not stated". Stalnaker states that pragmatics is the study of the real-world circumstances in which a sentence may be employed as an utterance and the purposes for which sentences are utilized (as cited in Abbas & Mohammed, 2015). Pragmatics has many branches among which are speech acts and hedges.

2.1.1 Speech Acts

From a pragmatic perspective, a language-based action can be categorized as a speech act (as cited in Makinde et al, 2024). There are five sorts of speech acts distinguished by Searle (1986) (as cited in Trosborg,1995) namely, declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives.

- Declaratives are speech acts that can change the world through their utterance. Examples of declaratives include approving, betting, blessing, christening, confirming, cursing, declaring, disapproving, dismissing, naming, and resigning. These illocutionary actions account for the fact that when something is said, something will definitely change. This concept is often prominent in marriages and courts, as well as in teaching sessions where a lecturer can influence students' behavior due to their higher social level. Declarative acts can also be performed by powerful entities in a particular place or context, making rules that can change the direction of things in a particular situation.
- Representatives are speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be true, such as arguing, asserting, boasting, claiming, complaining, criticizing, denying, describing, informing, insisting,

reporting, suggesting, or swearing. They are used when speakers have a firm understanding of conditions in a setting or a thing, aiming to make listeners agree with their ideas by enabling them to have the same idea in a particular context. Examples of representative speech include "I met your sister yesterday," where the speaker informs the listener about their meeting.

- Expressive are speech acts that express the speaker's feelings, such as apologizing, complimenting, condoling, congratulating, deploring, praising, regretting, and thanking. They allow speakers to express their appreciation for the listener's house and connect with them emotionally. These acts can create enthusiasm, confidence, and an atmosphere of conviviality and good relations, allowing the speaker to connect with their listeners.
- Directives are speech acts used by speakers to order, command, request, or suggest actions. They can be used in classrooms, where a lecturer can ask students to perform a task, eliciting good rapport and inspiring extracurricular activities. This can lead to life-changing experiences beyond the classroom, as students are expected to follow the lecturer's instructions. Directive acts can also improve social standing, as directives given collectively can yield more complementary results, exuding confidence among students in the classroom. For example, "Would you like to come to my tea party?" can be used to ask students to attend their party.
- commissive are speech acts used by speakers to commit themselves to future actions. They can include committing, guaranteeing, offering, promising, refusing, threatening, volunteering, and vowing. These acts encourage planning and commitment, while also allowing listeners to understand the speaker's perspective on the subject matter. Examples of commissive include "I will be there at 5 o'clock."

2.2 Hedges

Hedging is defined differently by many linguists. Hedging can be used to express doubt and "to avoid giving a promise or a direct answer" (Webster's Dictionary, 2015). Hedge and hedging are terms used in linguistics to describe barriers, limits, or defense methods. Despite their popularity over the past three decades, there is no adequate definition of these concepts in literature. Hyland (1998) states that straightforward definitions are rare, as evidenced by the various terms used by scholars to describe hedging, indicating a lack of clear understanding of these concepts and nature of hedging (as cited in Abbas, 2023). However, Yu identifies them as follows:

epistemic verbs, approximators, modal auxiliaries, epistemic adverbs, adjectives, and nouns (Yu, 2009, p.77). Nevertheless, Salager (1997) declares that hedges consist of several types:

Modal Auxiliary Verbs: These verbs include may, might, can, could, would, should, and they are the most tentative.

1. **Modal Lexical Verbs:** These are seem, appear, believe, assume, suggest, estimate, tend, think, argue, indicate, propose, lastly speculate which are used to perform acts such as doubting and evaluating.
2. **Adjectival, Adverbial, and Nominal Modal Probability** adjectives, nouns, adverbs, introductory phrases, if clauses, and approximations of degree, quantity, frequency, and duration are examples of phrases.
3. Additionally, there are instances of "Compound Hedges," which are phrases composed of many hedges, such as a lexical verb followed by a hedging adverb or adjective or a modal auxiliary joined with a lexical verb with a hedging content. These compound hedges can be used to convey different levels of certainty or uncertainty and can be doubled or quadrupled. Compound hedges also include opening statements like "I believe," "to our knowledge," and "we feel." (Unola & Mardijono, 2013).

2.3 Corpus-based studies

Corpus-based studies examine specific criteria-gathered collections of texts, typically analyzed automatically. A corpus is essentially a methodical computerized compilation of real-world written and spoken materials that represent how native or non-native speakers of a certain language actually use it (IGI Global, 2024). Several definitions of the term "corpus" have been proposed; some of these will be discussed in this section. A corpus, for instance, is "a machine readable collection of (spoken or written) texts that were produced in natural communication settings," according to Grice (2017). In other words, every text in the corpus is created in authentic contexts and environments, free from length constraints or extensive editions (as cited in Sulaiman, 2022). However, Corpus linguistics is a systematic study of language examples, focusing on their classification, data collection, construction, and annotation, and is a crucial aspect of linguistic (Brown, K., 2006).

2.4 Previous studies

Nicki Minaj has been studied by different scholars among them Josephine et al. (2021) who conducted a study titled "Nicki Minaj's Linking Sound Patterns Analysis Through The Song Lyric "Super Bass", to examine the phonological processes in English rap song "Super Bass" using Mc Mahon, Collin, and Mees' main theories and the International Phonetics Alphabet. It is aimed to identify and describe these processes through a descriptive

qualitative method. It has found 31 examples on the application of linking sound patterns and their phonological processes. The findings were expected to provide a guideline for understanding the differences between native speakers' sounds and the phonological processes resulting from these patterns.

TuaHutabarat and Sinaga (2016) study on "Taboo Words in Nicki Minaj Songs" aimed to identify the types of taboo words used in her songs, determine the dominant type of taboo words, and describe uncategorized types. A descriptive qualitative research is being used and analyzed 130 nursery rhyme lyrics. It has shown that sexual activity was the most common type of taboo word used in Minaj's songs, followed by numerals on body parts, religion or belief, and lavatory or excretion. The dominant type of taboo word used in Minaj's songs was sexual activity, with 55 words. This indicates that the lyrics contain information about activities, actions, or events that occur outside human beings. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing taboo words in Minaj's lyrics to promote inclusivity and understanding.

Makinde et al (2024) study "A Critical Pragmatic Analysis of some Selected Songs of Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba (MohBad)" examined the pragmatic analysis of selected songs by the rapper and their expression of speech acts. The study is focused on the representation of speech acts in Mohbad's songs and their extent to these acts. Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Act theory is being used. They selected songs including 'Ask About Me', 'Feel Good', and 'Peace', to reflect the songwriter's life and struggles. The study found that Aloba's lyrics display various speech acts, such as assertions, declarations, interrogatives, expressive utterances, and commissions. These revealed the songwriter's journey from hardship to fame, his resilience, defiance, self-assurance, and boldness in engaging listeners.

The study is intended with the aim to fill a gap in empirical studies by conducting a pragmatic analysis of Nicki Minaj's songs, due to the lack of such studies to the best of the researchers' knowledge using a corpus-based software.

3. Methodology

The present study is about analyzing Nicki Minaj's songs using pragmatic aspects supported by the Corpus Software Antconc. The study is a quantitative one. Quantitative research is a method of collecting and analyzing data in a systematic and quantitative manner (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). Searle's speech act classification (1986) and Salager's (1997) classification of hedges are used to examine the songs pragmatically. To handle the analysis, the study follows certain procedures and as follows:

- Searching for the top billboard songs of Nicki Minaj through 2015-2024.
- Collecting the song lyrics in a PDF file.
- Entering them to the corpus tool.
- Applying the pragmatic theory of speech acts then hedges.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The song's lyrics are analyzed according to the two research questions:

1. Which speech acts are the most frequently used in the selected songs?

Table (1) shows the frequency of speech acts and their percentage. Starting with the Representative, it is repeated (5) times with a percentage of (10.4%). The second category is Directives which is repeated (34) times with a percentage of (70.8%). The third category is Commissive which is repeated (6) times with a percentage of (12.5%). Moving to the next category which is Expressive, it is repeated (3) times with a percentage of (6.25%). The last category is Declarative which is not used throughout the songs. The result shows that Nicki Minaj, a female rapper, uses directive speech acts in her ten songs to provoke action and emphasize women's power and equality. She uses language like commanding orders and swearing words to change public thoughts. She also uses the Commissive to reflect her beliefs and intentions. Speech acts are essential for communication, allowing speakers to convey physical actions and instructions.

Table (1)

Frequency of Speech Acts

Speech Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Representatives	5	10.4%
Directives	34	70.8%
commissive	6	12.5%
Expressive	3	6.25%
Declaratives	0	0%
Total summation	48	100%

2. To what extent does the rapper use hedges in her songs? And why?

Table (2) shows the frequency of the types of hedges in Nicki Minaj's songs. The most frequent type is the use of modal auxiliary verbs. It has employed (42) times with percentage (59.15%) by using modal auxiliaries like can,

could, may, might. The reason behind using modal auxiliaries is to distinguish between realistic and unrealistic conditions and to describe a habitual action that the rapper uses more frequently. The use of modal auxiliaries means that there is a degree of uncertainty about what the rapper is talking about. The second type is the use of modal lexical verbs (8) times with percentage of (11.26%). The use of lexical verbs differs from auxiliary verbs in that lexical verbs convey predicate meaning, while auxiliary verbs convey grammatical meaning. The verb phrase in a sentence is typically a lexical verb. The third type is adjectival and nominal modal phrases which are repeated (7) times with a percentage of (9.85%). They are used to give more information about the noun in the sentence. The fourth type is the use of approximation, it is repeated (4) times with a percentage (5.63%). Rappers often avoid being too exact or factual, resulting in the use of expressions to make their words more approximate or vague, making their communication more direct. The last type is 'if clauses' which are repeated (10) times with a percentage of (12.6%). However, 'if clauses' is applied to suggest a slight change from the previous statement, indicating that a need must be fulfilled before any action can be taken. The result shows that all hedges are utilized in the songs, except compound hedges and introductory phrases, to express uncertainty and femininity. Modal auxiliaries, lexical verbs, approximations, and 'if clauses' are applied to create harmony and rhythm. She sees herself credible in using hedges, aligning with Lakoff's 1975 suggestion that female communication behavior is characterized by hedges. Hedges are also used to express interpersonal warmth, as Holmes (2008) suggests, rather than expressing uncertainty during a speech.

Table (2)

Frequency of Types of Hedges

Hedges Types	Frequency	Percentage
Modal Auxiliary Verbs	42	59.15%
Modal Lexical Verbs	8	11.26% %
Adjectival and Nominal Phrases	7	9.85%
Approximations	4	5.63%
If Clauses	10	12.6%
Introduction phrases	0	0%

Compound Hedges	0	0%
Total Summation	71	100%

5. Discussion of Results

Table (1) shows Nicki Minaj as a female rapper who frequently uses directive speech acts in her ten songs to provoke action from the listener. Language is used in a generally acceptable manner, commanding orders and swearing words to emphasize women's power and equality. A Directive speech act is utilized to change the thoughts of the public through those utterances. She wants to give the public stream that female rappers can affect and change the public thoughts about females as rap figures. A commissive speech act is being used like "wanna," to reflect her thoughts, beliefs, and ideologies, some examples are "Baby what's it gonna hurt if they don't know?" and "And I know it'll get me in trouble". A commissive speech act is applied to commit the rapper to something in the future as well as her intentions. As a result, speech acts are essential for communication as they allow speakers to convey physical actions through words and phrases, giving orders, instructions, and directions, and are common in everyday interactions and various contexts.

The results of the present study align with that of Sinaga (2016) who already conducted study on "Taboo Words in Nicki Minaj Songs" aiming to identify the types of taboo words used in her songs, determine the dominant type of taboo words, and describe uncategorized types. A descriptive qualitative research was used to analyze 130 nursery rhyme lyrics. The present study shows that sexual activity is the most common type of taboo word used in Minaj's songs, followed by numerals on body parts, religion or belief, and lavatory or excretion. The dominant type of taboo word used in Minaj's songs is the sexual activity, with 55 words. This indicates that the lyrics contain information about activities, actions, or events that occur outside human beings. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing taboo words in Minaj's lyrics to promote inclusivity and understanding.

Based on Salager's (1997) types of hedges, the songs' lyrics show that the rapper uses all the hedges types except compound hedges and introductory phrases. She uses modal auxiliaries as in "Say I should give you up" and "Man, we should sell that porn" to show her uncertainty about what she is trying to make, which means that she still has the feature of being a woman. Furthermore, she uses modal lexical verbs such as "Yeah, me and Mike WiLL pull up to AOD back to back" to express possibility, ability, to express her feelings through the lyrics by using the lexical type of hedges.

Approximations are utilized such as in “Sit so high in the nosebleeds”. Lastly, the ‘if clause’ is used in “Baby what's it gonna hurt if they don't know?”. It is shown that the rapper may apply them just to make the song sound more harmonious so as to create a rhythmical feeling. The rapper sees herself as credible to use hedges in her songs and that aligns with what Lakoff (1975) suggests that Female communication behavior is characterized by the use of hedges. In addition to that, hedges are operated to express interpersonal warmth. Holmes (2008) argues that women use hedges as a sign of politeness and solidarity with the interlocutor, rather than expressing uncertainty during a speech, unlike Lakoff and Preisler's statement (Azizah, 2021).

Unlike other studies, the present study shows that the rapper applies certain acts to hold a message that female rappers can change the public's thoughts towards them. Female rappers can do rapping equally like men rappers and get the billboard top rated songs. Furthermore, female rappers have the identity of being female by using hedges in their songs and that stands with Lakoff's (1975) suggestion about female speech.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study examines Nicki Minaj's top albums songs from 2015-2024 using Searle's speech act theory (1986) and Salager's (1997) hedges classification. It is intended to understand the pragmatic aspect of these songs, utilizing the corpus software Antconc to avoid bias and provide reliable results. Songs are increasingly popular on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The study reveals that female rappers can influence public perception by rapping equally as men and achieving top-rated songs on billboards. They also use hedges in their songs to assert their female identity, aligning with Lakoff's (1975) suggestion about female speech. Hedges are utilized to convey interpersonal warmth, as Holmes (2008) suggests, indicating politeness and solidarity with the interlocutor, rather than uncertainty during a speech, unlike Lakoff and Preisler's statement. The study can be used as a source for students of linguistics and researchers interested in analyzing female rap songs from a pragmatic perspective especially by using a corpus tool to end up with an objective result rather than a subjective opinion.

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