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How Fly Me to the Moon expresses meaning: A Pragmastylistic View

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates how "Fly Me to the Moon," written by Bart Howard and popularized by Frank Sinatra, constructs meaning through a pragmastylistic lens. While often discussed for its historical and cultural significance, the song's linguistic features—especially its use of speech acts, implicature, metaphor, repetition, and parallelism—remain underexplored. By integrating insights from pragmatics and stylistics, this research examines how these elements interact to enhance the song's emotional resonance and poetic expression. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how language and style work together to create meaning in song lyrics, demonstrating the artistic potential of everyday linguistic tools.

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INTRODUCTION

"Fly Me to the Moon," written by Bart Howard in 1954 and later popularized by Frank Sinatra's 1964 rendition, has become one of the most iconic jazz standards of the twentieth century. Originally titled In Other Words, the song was retitled after its memorable opening line and gained widespread recognition for its lyrical elegance and romantic appeal. Sinatra's version, arranged by Quincy Jones, amplified its emotional impact through vocal delivery and orchestration, and it soon became associated with the cultural optimism of the 1960s and the Apollo space missions (Garber, 2014). As Garber (2014) notes, the song "became the unofficial anthem of lunar ambition," highlighting its symbolic role in linking romance with space exploration. This intermingling of personal longing and cosmic imagery helped secure the song's status as a timeless classic, resonating with audiences across decades.

While Fly Me to the Moon has received considerable attention in discussions of American cultural history, especially for its symbolic connection to outer space and national identity, its linguistic and stylistic features have received far less scholarly focus. This study addresses that gap by examining the song's lyrics through a pragmastylistic lens, an approach that combines the analytical strengths of pragmatics and stylistics to explore how meaning is constructed through both context and form. As Leech and Short (2007) explain, "stylistics draws upon linguistic analysis to explain how literary effects are achieved," while pragmatics "investigates how utterances function in context to convey more than what is literally said." By merging these perspectives, pragmastylistics enables a nuanced analysis of how language operates artistically and communicatively.

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Pragmatics focuses on how meaning is shaped by speaker intention, context, and the inferences made by listeners. According to Levinson (1983), "pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language." It includes the analysis of speech acts—how utterances function as actions—and implicature, where meaning is suggested but not explicitly stated. For example, the line "Fly me to the moon" can be interpreted not as a literal request for space travel, but as an indirect speech act expressing a romantic desire to transcend earthly limitations. The metaphorical nature of the phrase encourages inferential interpretation, allowing the listener to uncover emotional depth beneath the surface.

Stylistics, meanwhile, emphasizes the form and artistic structure of language. As Simpson (2004) states, stylistics is "a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language." It considers how features such as metaphor, parallelism, and repetition shape a text's aesthetic and rhetorical qualities. In Fly Me to the Moon, for instance, the repetition of parallel clauses—"Let me see what spring is like / On Jupiter and Mars"—creates a rhythmic and thematic cohesion that contributes to the song's romantic tone. The use of celestial metaphor transforms a love song into a poetic exploration of longing, imagination, and emotional flight.

Combining pragmatics and stylistics allows for a more complete understanding of how the song achieves its expressive power. As Jakobson (1960) proposed in his model of language functions, the poetic function of language foregrounds the message for its own sake, often realized through parallelism and metaphor. In Fly Me to the Moon, this poetic function is intricately tied to the pragmatic intentions behind the lyrics, as the speaker's indirect expressions of desire are stylized through carefully crafted language. By adopting a pragmastylistic approach, this study reveals how these linguistic strategies work together to produce meaning that is at once implicit, emotive, and aesthetically resonant.

Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how language functions not just to communicate but to evoke, imply, and move. The findings highlight how Fly Me to the Moon exemplifies the creative potential of everyday language when shaped by poetic and communicative intentions—demonstrating that even within a short jazz lyric, language can carry vast emotional and interpretive weight.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the lyrics of "Fly Me to the Moon" through a pragmastylistic lens. By integrating principles from pragmatics and stylistics, the research aims to uncover how the lyrics construct meaning that goes beyond their literal interpretation. The analysis focuses on three key dimensions: (1) speech acts and implicatures, (2) metaphor and imagery, and (3) repetition and parallelism.

The primary data for this study consist of the official lyrics of "Fly Me to the Moon" as performed by Frank Sinatra in his 1964 studio recording, arranged by Quincy Jones and featured on the album It Might as Well Be Swing (Howard, 1964). The lyrics were sourced from the official sheet music published by Hal Leonard Corporation and cross-verified with the album liner notes to ensure textual accuracy and fidelity to the recorded performance.

A speech act analysis was used to identify how specific expressions in the lyrics function pragmatically—whether as directives, expressives, or representatives (Searle, 1976). In addition, the study investigates implicatures, focusing on how meaning is conveyed indirectly and relies on listener inference (Grice, 1975). From a stylistic perspective, the analysis examines the use of metaphor and imagery, particularly the integration of celestial and romantic language, and how these elements contribute to the song's emotional texture. The analysis also considers repetition and parallelism as structural devices that reinforce cohesion, rhythm, and emotional emphasis in the lyrics.

This research does not involve human participants and therefore includes no survey instruments or respondent data. Instead, it applies close textual analysis, emphasizing interpretation and detailed examination over quantification.

Procedures

The lyrics were collected from the official sheet music publication (Fly Me to the Moon, Hal Leonard, 1964) and reviewed alongside the album It Might as Well Be Swing to ensure fidelity to Sinatra's performance. The analysis was conducted through repeated close readings of the text, marking relevant features and categorizing them according to the pragmastylistic framework. Each lyric line was examined for pragmatic function (e.g., indirect speech act, implicature) and stylistic form (e.g., metaphorical imagery, parallel structure).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively through interpretative methods. The analysis drew upon theories of speech act (Searle, 1976), implicature (Grice, 1975), and poetic stylistics (Simpson, 2004), with findings discussed in light of the interplay between linguistic form and communicative function. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of how the lyrics evoke emotional and poetic resonance through layered meaning and stylistic artistry.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When we look at Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon" through a pragmastylistic lens, we find that it's not just a love song it's a personal, emotional conversation. The way Sinatra sings the lyrics makes it feel like he's talking directly to someone he deeply cares about. His words are simple, but the way he uses them carries layers of meaning.

> **Full lyrics of Fly me to the moon By frank sina**
> *Fly me to the moon*
> *Let me play among the stars*
> *Let me see what spring is like*
> *On a, Jupiter and Mars*
> *In other words, hold my hand*
> *In other words, baby, kiss me*
>
> *Fill my heart with song*
> *And let me sing for ever more*
> *You are all I long for*
> *All I worship and adore*
> *In other words, please be true*
> *In other words, I love you*
>
> *Fill my heart with song*
> *Let me sing for ever more*
> *You are all I long for*
> *All I worship and adore*
> *In other words, please be true*
> *In other words, in other words*
> *I love you.*

Take the opening line, "Fly me to the moon." On the surface, it's a dreamy request, but in pragmastylistics, it's seen as a directive speech act he's not just wishing, he's asking for something bold and meaningful. It's as if he's saying, "Take me away with you, show me how far our love can go." This sets the tone for the whole song romantic, hopeful, and a little daring.

But then we also hear lines like "You are all I long for, all I worship and adore." That's an expressive speech act a way of showing emotion openly and honestly. Here, the speaker isn't commanding anymore; he's confessing. This shift creates a balance: Sinatra is both confident and vulnerable. He's someone who knows what he wants, but he's also not afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve. This back-and-forth between giving commands and expressing feelings

builds a special kind of relationship between the speaker and the listener. The listener (presumably the lover) is invited to join the emotional journey. It doesn't feel like a performance, but more like an intimate moment being shared.

In the end, it's this mix of affection, longing, and directness that makes the song so powerful. Sinatra's voice and the language of the lyrics work together to make the song feel real not just as a piece of music, but as a genuine expression of love.This pragmastylistic analysis of Fly Me to the Moon focuses on three key aspects: speech acts and implicature, metaphor and imagery, and repetition and parallelism. These linguistic and stylistic elements work together to construct meaning in the lyrics, revealing both explicit and Implicit messages that contribute to the song's emotional and artistic depth.

Speech Acts and Implicature

One of the most significant linguistic features in the song is its use of speech acts and implicature, which shape how the lyrics convey meaning beyond their literal interpretation and establish an intimate connection between singer and listener.

The phrase "Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars" functions as a directive speech act—commanding and requesting at once. Sinatra's persona is commanding, asking to be taken on an extraordinary journey, yet this command carries vulnerability. The celestial imagery reflects a longing for emotional and romantic transcendence, inviting the listener into a shared dreamlike space. This combination of authority and openness creates a powerful interpersonal dynamic.

The line "Fill my heart with song and let me sing forevermore" expresses deep emotional yearning through an expressive speech act. Here, Sinatra's persona reveals vulnerability and a desire for emotional fulfillment. The metaphor of music filling the heart connects love to creativity and joy, strengthening the emotional bond with the listener.

As the song progresses, the lyrics transition from poetic expressions to more direct Speech acts. The line "In other words, hold my hand. In other words, darling, kiss me" Shifts from abstract imagery to explicit declarations of affection. The phrase "in other Words" signals a clarification, implying that all the celestial metaphors were simply Poetic ways of saying "I love you."

Finally, the statement "You are all I long for, all I worship and adore" functions as a Representative speech act, making a factual claim about the speaker's feelings. The Words "worship" and "adore" elevate love to a sacred level, reinforcing the idea that Love is not only emotional but also deeply reverent.

Metaphor and Imagery

The song's lyrics employ metaphor and imagery to create a poetic and romantic atmosphere.

The most prominent metaphor appears in "Fly me to the moon, let me play among the Stars." Here, the journey to the moon represents a grand, limitless, and almost fantastical Version of love. This celestial imagery turns romance into something adventurous and Boundless.

Another significant metaphor is found in "Fill my heart with song and let me sing Forevermore." In this line, music serves as a metaphor for love and emotional Fulfillment. The idea that love can "fill the heart" suggests that affection is as vital as Music, while the phrase "sing forevermore" implies lasting joy and devotion.

Later in the song, love is depicted with religious and devotional imagery. The phrase "You are all I worship and adore" elevates love to a near-spiritual level. By using words Associated with reverence, the lyric

Repetition and Parallelism

The song also relies on repetition and parallelism, which enhance its lyrical rhythm and Emotional intensity.

The repeated structure of "Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars" creates a Flowing and musical rhythm. This parallel structure strengthens the song's dreamlike Quality and makes the longing in the lyrics feel more urgent.

The phrase "In other words" is repeated twice, serving as a stylistic marker that Transitions from metaphorical expressions to direct declarations of love. This repetition Highlights the importance of the following phrases and ensures that the emotional Message is clear and powerful.
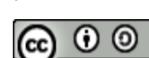
The structure of "You are all I long for, all I worship and adore" demonstrates anaphora, Where the phrase "all I" is repeated to intensify the speaker's devotion. This balanced repetition makes the declaration of love more poetic and heartfelt.

Table 1. Pragmastylistics Analysis

Lyric Excerpt	Speech Act / Function	Stylistic Device	Implied Meaning / Effect
"Fly me to the moon"	Directive (but softened)	Metaphor	Requesting an extraordinary emotional experience through poetic imagery
"Let me play among the stars"	Expressive/Directive	Hyperbole / Metaphor	Implies joy and the desire to explore love's heights
"Let me see what spring is like…"	Indirect Speech Act	Metaphor	Imaginative curiosity about love in unfamiliar places
"In other words, hold my hand"	Commissive / Clarification	Repetition / Restatement	Emotional intimacy, grounding space fantasy into real affection
"In other words, baby, kiss me"	Expressive / Directive	Deixis ("baby")	Personal touch, emotional directness
"Fill my heart with song"	Expressive	Poetic imperative	Desire for emotional fulfillment through connection
"You are all I long for…"	Assertive / Declaration	Hyperbolic Expression	Complete devotion, elevates the object of love
Repetition of structure and rhythm	Cohesion Tool	Anaphora, parallelism	Builds musicality and emotional emphasis
Tone throughout the song	Politeness Strategy	Soothing, respectful language	Romantic and sincere, not forceful

This table takes a closer look at the lyrics of "Fly Me to the Moon" and breaks down what's really going on beneath the surface. At first listen, the song feels dreamy and romantic, but when we look at the lyrics through the lens of language and style, we see that every line is doing something meaningful. For example, when he says "Fly me to the moon," he's obviously not talking about going to space. It's a poetic way of saying, "Take me somewhere magical through love." A lot of the lines in this song are similar to that which they sound like requests or commands, but really, they are gentle ways of showing affection and desire. The song also plays with poetic tools like metaphor and repetition, which make it flow beautifully while adding emotion. Words like "baby" and phrases like "in other words" create a more personal and sincere vibe, almost like a conversation with someone you deeply care about. In short, this table helps us see that the song isn't just pretty words, it's full of emotional messages hidden in poetic language. And that's what makes it so timeless.

In This study set out to understand what's really going on beneath the romantic lyrics of "Fly Me to the Moon" using a pragmastylistic approach. Rather than just admiring how beautiful the words sound, we looked at how language is used to communicate feelings how metaphors, speech acts, repetition, and tone work together to deliver not just lyrics, but a

deep emotional message. From the results, it becomes clear that the song isn't just full of poetic lines it's full of meaningful communication. Lines like "Fly me to the moon" might sound like a fantasy, but they actually express a desire for love that feels limitless. This supports earlier theories from experts like Leech (1983), who explained how language can be used indirectly or politely to show emotion especially in romantic or poetic contexts. The lyrics might sound like commands, but in reality, they come across more like heartfelt requests.

What makes this study stand out a bit more than others is how it connects both the style of the lyrics and the function of the language. Previous research, like Rahardjo's study on metaphors in love songs, also talked about how figurative language builds emotional connection. But here, we go further by asking: What is the singer actually doing with these words? That's where pragmastylistics comes in it helps us see how the lyrics act like a conversation, even if there's no one actually responding in the song. Interestingly, this perspective differs from other studies that focused more on literal meaning or word choice, like Nasution & Alatas (2020), who emphasized how the content of the words triggered emotion. This study shows that how the words are used through indirect speech, repetition, and metaphor may be just as important, if not more. Take the line "In other words, baby, kiss me" it doesn't just ask for affection. It carefully shifts the mood from dreamy metaphors to something real and intimate. It's as if the speaker is pulling the listener gently back down to earth from outer space, reminding them that love, at its core, is about connection. That said, this analysis mainly focused on the language of the lyrics. It doesn't dive into how Sinatra's tone, the music, or the cultural moment might influence how we hear the song. That could be a great direction for future research maybe blending this type of analysis with music studies or emotional psychology. In the end, what's new here is the way we've used pragmastylistics to unpack the lyrics not just to say what the song means, but how it means it. This kind of approach helps us appreciate lyrics not just as art, but as carefully crafted messages, full of love, longing, and human connection. It shows that a simple love song can actually be a powerful act of communication something that touches people because of both the words and the way those words are delivered

CONCLUSIONS

In looking closely at the lyrics of "Fly Me to the Moon," this study found that there's a lot more going on than just sweet-sounding words. Using a pragmastylistic approach, we've seen how Frank Sinatra's lyrics express love and longing in ways that are subtle, emotional, and carefully crafted. He's not just singing—he's communicating, using metaphors, soft requests, and repetition to make his feelings come alive. What stands out most is how the song gently plays with language. Lines like "Fly me to the moon" sound dreamy, but they're really deep emotional expressions, wrapped in poetic style. Instead of saying "I love you" directly, the lyrics take us on a journey, using space and stars as a way to talk about the power of love. That's what makes this song timeless—it feels personal, even universal, and still hits home after all these years. This kind of analysis helps us understand songs like this on a deeper level—not just as entertainment, but as real communication between the artist and the listener. It shows how language can be both beautiful and meaningful at the same time. If there's one thing we can take away from this study, it's that great lyrics speak to the heart because they say more than what's on the surface. And even in a simple love song, there's a world of feeling, meaning, and artistry waiting to be uncovered. For future research, it would be valuable to conduct comparative studies across different renditions of the song—such as Frank Sinatra's iconic 1964 version, Tony Bennett's emotive jazz interpretation, and Diana Krall's intimate, contemporary style—to explore how vocal delivery, musical arrangement, and performance choices interact with the lyrics' pragmatic and stylistic meanings. Such research could reveal how these elements work together to shape the listener's emotional experience and deepen our understanding of how meaning is

constructed in music. But as it stands, "Fly Me to the Moon" is a perfect example of how love can be expressed not just with words—but with words that truly connect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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