

The Analysis of Allusion in Selective Songs of Matty Healy: in Pragmatic Context

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative research that aims to; (1) Find what types of allusions are contained in Matty Healy's songs; (2) How do these allusions function pragmatically to convey deeper layers of meaning in Matty Healy's lyrics. The data used in the study came from several collections of songs from the songs of the band The1975 written by Matty Healy and more specifically in the album entitled "The1975" from The1975. The data is in the form of words phrases or clauses that contain other meanings, or allusions pragmatically. The instrument of this research contains textual analysis, pragmatic theory as an analysis tool, reference and cross-referencing. The data analysis technique uses several methods, namely; (1) Identifying allusios, namely recognizing references in lyrics; (2) Contextual analysis, namely examining how meaning is shaped by the audience's backgroud knowledge; (3) Interpreting Meaning, namely exploring implied messages within the lyrics; (4) Cross-referencing, which is comparing Matty Healy's interviews, cultural context, and music reviews. As for the sample findings in this study, one of them is that it was found that Matty Healy wrote a song from the band The1975 on the album The1975 quite a lot of allusions.

Kata Kunci: *song, allusion, pragmatic, Matty Healy*

Introduction

Music is a universal form of artistic expression that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, resonating with diverse audiences worldwide. Among the many elements that make music compelling, song lyrics stand out as powerful tools for conveying intricate emotions, cultural narratives, and philosophical ideas. One of the most effective literary devices employed in song lyrics is allusion, which involves indirect references to well-known people, historical events, literary works, myths, or cultural symbols. According to M.H. Abrams (1999), allusions connect literary works to broader themes and historical contexts, enriching interpretation through implicit associations.

In the field of linguistics, pragmatics plays a vital role in analyzing how meaning is constructed in communication. Pragmatics examines how context influences the interpretation of language, focusing on speaker intentions, assumptions, and the relationship between language and its environment (Leech, 1983; Yule, 1996). Applying pragmatic analysis to song lyrics helps uncover the layers of meaning that go beyond the literal words, revealing how artists use language to evoke emotions, reflect societal issues, and create cultural commentary.

The analysis of allusions in song lyrics provides an opportunity to explore how intertextual references contribute to the richness and depth of lyrical content. Allusions can evoke emotional responses, create connections with historical or cultural events, and offer listeners multiple layers of meaning to interpret. For example, allusions to classical literature, mythology, or historical events can deepen the audience's

understanding of a song's message, while references to contemporary pop culture can create immediacy and relatability.

This research delves into the analysis of allusions found in the lyrics of Matty Healy's, the vocalist of The 1975. Healy is renowned for his introspective and socially aware songwriting, characterized by rich intertextual references drawn from literature, visual arts, pop culture, and personal experiences. These allusions serve as a medium for articulating complex ideas related to identity, mental health, relationships, and societal challenges. By examining these lyrical elements, the study aims to provide insights into how allusions enhance the depth and resonance of contemporary music.

Moreover, Matty Healy's songwriting often blurs the boundaries between personal reflection and broader cultural commentary. His lyrics are not only autobiographical but also serve as a mirror to societal issues, touching on themes such as political unrest, existential anxiety, addiction, and the impact of technology on human relationships. The interplay between personal and collective experiences in his songs highlights the power of allusion as a tool for connecting individual narratives to universal themes.

Pragmatically, allusions function by relying on the listener's background knowledge and cultural literacy. The effectiveness of an allusion depends on the audience's ability to recognize and interpret the reference, which can vary based on their experiences and familiarity with the source material. This dynamic nature of meaning-making emphasizes the active role of the audience in constructing interpretations, making the study of allusions not only a linguistic inquiry but also a cultural exploration.

Through this research, the intricate connections between language, context, and meaning in Matty Healy's lyrics will be explored. By analyzing the pragmatic aspects of allusions, the study aims to shed light on how contemporary songwriters use intertextual references to engage listeners, provoke thought, and foster a deeper emotional connection with their music.

Method

This research focuses on selected song lyrics written by Matty Healy, particularly those that exhibit rich intertextual references and cultural allusions. The study employs a qualitative approach grounded in pragmatic theory, with an emphasis on examining how allusions are constructed, interpreted, and understood within specific cultural and social contexts. While the analysis centers on Healy's unique songwriting style, the findings aim to provide broader implications for understanding the role of allusions in contemporary music across different genres and cultural backgrounds.

The research time began in November 2020. For the research location, at the author's residence Jl. Borong Raya (Mitra Mas Indah) C3 and, Fajar University courtyard, and also in the English literature study program room. The data used are words or sentences containing allusion from several selected song lyrics from The1975 album entitled "The1975" and written by Matty Healy and converted into pragmatic context. The source of all data comes from selected songs from the band the 1975 which are disseminated on various platforms such as Youtube, Spotify. Secondary data sources, such as interviews with Matty Healy, critical reviews, and scholarly articles on The 1975's music, are also considered to support the interpretation of the allusions. These supplementary materials provide valuable insights into the songwriter's intentions, the cultural context of the lyrics, and critical interpretations that enhance the depth of the analysis.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive research design, focusing on the analysis of allusions in Matty Healy's song lyrics from a pragmatic perspective. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of language use, emphasizing the interpretation of meaning in context. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical data, qualitative research provides rich, detailed insights into linguistic phenomena, cultural references, and contextual meanings.

The main focus in this research is to find out how allusion can work in song lyrics and how listeners can interpret it in each person's interpretation based on the concept of pragmatics. Some of selected songs of The1975 band in album "The1975" are:

1. Sex
2. Girls
3. Robbers
4. Settle Down
5. Heart Out

This research uses human instruments. The author observes or analyzes pragmatic aspects in the form of allusion in five songs, especially in the lyrics from the album work of the band The195 entitled "The1975" and written by Matty Healy. The author uses a computer as hardware and software applications such as Microsoft Word, journal articles, data sheets as supporting instruments. The computer is used to record and collect observation data. The data is then realized in a data sheet that is distinguished based on pragmatic aspects.

The data collection procedure involves several systematic steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis. The data collection techniques applied by the author are as follows:

1. Song Selection: Identifying songs from The 1975's discography that meet the selection criteria for rich allusions and thematic relevance. This involves reviewing all albums and selecting tracks that prominently feature intertextual references.
2. Lyric Transcription: Obtaining accurate transcriptions of the selected song lyrics from official sources to maintain textual integrity. Any discrepancies in lyrics from different sources are cross-verified for accuracy.
3. Initial Reading: Conducting a thorough reading of the lyrics to familiarize with the content and identify potential allusions. This step includes making preliminary notes on observed references and thematic elements.
4. Annotation: Highlighting and annotating identified allusions, noting their potential sources and contextual significance. Annotations include brief explanations of the allusions, their origins, and their relevance to the song's meaning.
5. Supplementary Data Collection: Gathering secondary data, such as artist interviews, critical analyses, and scholarly articles, to support the interpretation of allusions. This step helps in understanding the broader cultural and social context in which the lyrics were written.

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze allusions in selected songs by Matty Healy, particularly focusing on their pragmatic functions. The analysis follows several established techniques in textual and discourse analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data. The selection of songs is conducted using purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), where tracks from The 1975's discography are

chosen based on their thematic relevance and rich use of allusions. This technique ensures that the selected songs contain meaningful intertextual references suitable for analysis. To examine the lyrics in depth, this study applies close reading (Leech & Short, 2007), which allows for the identification of linguistic and literary elements, particularly focusing on figurative language and allusions embedded within the text.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of selected lyrics from Matty Healy's songwriting in *The 1975* album reveals a dense and purposeful application of allusion as a communicative and aesthetic strategy. Throughout the five analyzed songs: *Sex*, *Girls*, *Settle Down*, *Robbers*, and *Heart Out* Healy constructs meaning not solely through direct narrative or emotional confession, but through a network of cultural, historical, literary, and cinematic references that require active interpretation from the audience. These allusions are intricately woven into the lyrical content, often appearing as fragments, metaphors, or symbolic phrases that resist literal interpretation. As such, the lyrics operate as multi-layered texts, where meaning emerges through the listener's recognition and contextual decoding of the embedded references.

The pragmatic dimension of these allusions lies in their dependence on shared knowledge between speaker (songwriter) and listener. Each allusion functions as a communicative shortcut, evoking complex associations without the need for explicit explanation. In this way, Healy's lyrics perform a kind of cultural shorthand, trusting that his audience many of whom belong to a digitally literate, media-saturated generation will be equipped to "fill in the blanks" based on their own cultural literacy. This interpretive process aligns with the pragmatic principle that meaning is not fixed in the words themselves, but is shaped dynamically through contextual inference, social awareness, and intertextual familiarity.

In *Sex*, the recurring phrase "She's got a boyfriend anyway" reflects themes of forbidden attraction, impulsiveness, and youthful rebellion. The lyric subtly alludes to archetypal teenage drama found in works like *The Catcher in the Rye* or coming of age films such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, evoking the trope of the misunderstood outsider entangled in morally ambiguous relationships. Here, the allusion is literary in tone but grounded in pop culture narrative structures. The pragmatic impact is that the audience is not simply listening to a story they are reminded of familiar emotional and ethical dilemmas and are invited to judge or empathize based on personal values and prior experiences.

Girls, by contrast, takes on a more ironic and culturally self-aware tone. Lines like "They're just girls, breaking hearts" flirt with generalized assumptions about gender behavior but can also be interpreted as a critique of the shallow, performative dynamics present in modern relationships. The lyric draws on pop stereotypes perpetuated in movies, magazines, and social media, functioning as a cultural allusion to gender scripts and romantic tropes. Depending on the listener's perspective, the line may be read as sarcastic, resigned, or even empowering illustrating how pragmatic ambiguity allows multiple readings to coexist.

Settle Down presents a different use of allusion, leaning heavily into visual and cinematic language. Phrases such as "A street lamp flickers, it floods like a long exposure" transform the urban setting into a moody, stylized space that evokes noir film imagery. The reference to photographic technique not only suggests a frozen moment in time but also parallels themes of detachment and surveillance. These images act as visual metaphors for emotional stasis and disconnection, and listeners familiar with

photography, art film, or visual design will recognize the symbolic implications of exposure, light, and shadow.

In *Robbers*, the allusions are more overt, aligning directly with iconic romantic crime narratives. The lyric “She had a face straight out of a magazine” conjures the aestheticized image of the femme fatale, frequently depicted in noir films and fashion photography. The narrative arc of the song passion, danger, escape, and fatalism mirrors storylines found in films like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Pulp Fiction*, or *True Romance*. Healy recontextualizes these references into a modern musical form, allowing the listener to tap into a collective cinematic memory while emotionally engaging with the characters’ destructive love. The pragmatic richness of this allusion lies in its dual role as both narrative enhancer and cultural signal, invoking visual memory while deepening character development.

Finally, *Heart Out* explores themes of vulnerability, intimacy, and nostalgia. The lyric “It’s just you and I tonight, why don’t you figure my heart out?” is emblematic of the indirect emotional expression often found in adolescent literature and indie romance films. This line serves as a soft allusion to narratives of self discovery and emotional exposure, familiar to audiences who have consumed similar stories through books, films, and songs. The allusion here may not point to a specific source but rather to a genre convention, tapping into a collective emotional atmosphere shaped by cultural texts.

Intertextuality and Pragmatic Impact

Across all five songs, the role of intertextuality is clear: the lyrics function not in isolation but as part of a broader cultural dialogue. Listeners are not passive recipients of meaning they are co-creators, drawing from their own mental archives to decode, relate, and react. This dynamic is central to pragmatic theory, particularly in the realm of implicature and inferencing, where the speaker implies more than they explicitly state, and the listener must retrieve the full meaning based on contextual cues.

The researcher’s close reading and analysis of the lyrics were supplemented with secondary data, including interviews of Matty Healy, critical reviews, and academic commentary. These materials confirm that Healy’s use of allusion is intentional and reflective. In several interviews, Healy has discussed his interest in literature, film, and postmodern culture, citing authors like Bret Easton Ellis and filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino as influences. This confirms the hypothesis that the allusions in his lyrics are not coincidental but form part of a broader artistic strategy aimed at intellectual engagement and cultural resonance.

The overall findings suggest that allusion in Matty Healy’s songwriting is a central narrative device, used not just for stylistic flair but to embed meaning, create intertextual bridges, and provoke listener reflection. The interplay between textual subtlety and cultural familiarity gives the songs a dual-layered quality surface narratives laced with implicit meaning waiting to be unpacked.

Furthermore, from a pragmatic standpoint, the effectiveness of these allusions is deeply tied to audience interpretation. Without cultural familiarity, many of the allusions may go unnoticed or misunderstood. However, for listeners attuned to the same referential codes, these indirect references function as emotional triggers, cultural commentary, or identity markers creating a powerful bond between artist and audience.

This finding emphasizes the importance of analyzing song lyrics not only linguistically but contextually, as meaning is often built through complex interplays of personal experience, societal context, and shared cultural memory. The role of the

audience is not passive; interpretation becomes a dialogic process, one that reflects the deeply intersubjective nature of allusion in pragmatic communication.

This study states that Matty Healy's songwriting, particularly in the selected tracks from *The 1975* album, demonstrates a deliberate and sophisticated use of allusion as a central stylistic and communicative device. Far from being ornamental, these allusions play a pivotal role in the construction of meaning within his lyrics, allowing for multi-dimensional interpretation and engagement. Through indirect references to cultural artifacts, literature, history, media, and shared generational experiences, Healy crafts lyrics that invite the listener into a web of intertextuality one that is not passively consumed but actively interpreted.

By applying a pragmatic analytical framework, the research has uncovered the intricate ways in which allusions operate in the context of communication. These allusions rely heavily on the audience's background knowledge, cultural literacy, and inferential competence, aligning with the core tenets of pragmatics that emphasize context and cooperative meaning-making. The listener's role is not merely to decode the words at face value but to participate in the interpretation of implied meaning, guided by social, cultural, and personal cues. This makes the allusive lyrics highly effective in fostering emotional connection, intellectual stimulation, and even identity resonance among the audience.

The findings from the five songs analyzed *Sex, Girls, Settle Down, Robbers*, and *Heart Out* illustrate that each track utilizes different forms of allusion (literary, historical, cultural, or cinematic), adapted to fit the thematic concerns of the song. Whether referencing rebellious youth, gender dynamics, urban alienation, or romantic fatalism, these allusions enrich the textual landscape and allow the lyrics to function on multiple interpretive levels. Importantly, the study has shown that the pragmatic function of allusion is not universal or static; it shifts depending on who the listener is, what they know, and how they interact with the cultural references embedded in the song.

Moreover, the integration of cross referenced sources such as artist interviews, critical reviews, and scholarly insights strengthens the argument that these allusions are not incidental. Rather, they are part of a carefully constructed lyrical framework, informed by Healy's exposure to various artistic disciplines and his engagement with contemporary cultural discourse. His work reflects a postmodern sensibility, where boundaries between personal narrative, public commentary, and intertextual reference blur making the lyrics more than just expressions of emotion but also reflections of collective consciousness.

Conclusion

This conclusion further affirms the interdisciplinary nature of analyzing music lyrics. It is not enough to approach songs solely through a literary or linguistic lens. A pragmatic approach, particularly when combined with intertextual analysis, opens new pathways for understanding how meaning is encoded, transmitted, and received in modern music. The study demonstrates that allusions serve not only to deepen artistic expression but also to position the lyrics within wider social and cultural conversations, making them relevant to broader societal narratives.

Ultimately, the research confirms that the use of allusion in Matty Healy's songwriting is a powerful rhetorical and poetic tool. It enables the creation of songs that resonate differently with each listener, depending on their cultural familiarity and interpretive engagement. The study thus contributes to the growing academic

recognition of popular music as a legitimate site of literary and linguistic inquiry, where meaning is dynamic, layered, and socially constructed.

For future research, it is recommended to broaden the scope of analysis to include a larger corpus of The 1975's discography or to compare Healy's lyrical strategies with those of other contemporary artists who employ similarly rich intertextual devices. Additionally, incorporating listener-response methodologies or reception studies could offer valuable insight into how different demographic groups perceive and respond to the same allusions. This would deepen our understanding of the dialogical relationship between text, context, and audience in popular music.

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