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**Article**

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## **Ecological stories and pragmatic action in Michael Jackson's advocacy lyrics**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines how ecological concern, grief, and resistance are linguistically constructed in six Michael Jackson songs: “Earth Song”, “Heal the World”, “Cry”, “Gone Too Soon”, “Childhood”, and “They Don’t Care About Us”. It brings critical ecolinguistics into dialogue with speech act theory while keeping their analytical roles distinct. Critical ecolinguistics is used to examine human–nature relations, ecological value, nonhuman visibility, and environmental harm through Stibbe’s (2021) framework of “stories we live by”, while speech act theory is used to analyse communicative acts such as lamenting, accusing, questioning, appealing, directing, and protesting (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Deixis, implicature, presupposition, and repetition are considered only where they clarify the force or relational organisation of these acts. The findings show that ecological representation, ecological orientation, and communicative force are not equivalent. “Earth Song” provides the clearest convergence of ecological representation and communicative action, whereas “Heal the World” combines planetary care with a strongly human-centred moral frame. “Gone Too Soon” uses nature-based metaphor primarily to organise human mourning, while “They Don’t Care About Us” performs forceful social protest with limited substantive ecological representation. The study therefore distinguishes between the human–nature relation constructed by a lyric and the communicative action it performs, treating their convergence or divergence as an empirical finding within the corpus.

**Keywords:** critical ecolinguistics; speech act theory; ecological discourse; advocacy lyrics; Michael Jackson; resistance; grief

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## 1. Introduction

Michael Jackson's music is widely associated with performance innovation and global popular culture, but a significant part of his lyrical work also addresses environmental damage, social injustice, grief and collective responsibility. Songs such as "Earth Song", "Heal the World", "Cry", "Gone Too Soon", "Childhood" and "They Don't Care About Us" function as advocacy texts in which emotional experience is connected to wider ethical and political concerns. Existing scholarship has approached Jackson's music through cultural influence, biography, political meaning and musical aesthetics (Rossiter, 2012; Forman, 2002). Less attention has been paid to how his lyrics linguistically represent harm and responsibility while organising relations among speakers, addressees and affected groups. This matters because advocacy in song is not carried by subject matter alone; it also depends on how linguistic choices perform accusation, lament, appeal and mobilisation.

Ecolinguistics examines how discourse constructs relationships among humans, nonhuman beings and the physical environment, and how it may challenge or reproduce anthropocentric assumptions (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2021). Speech act theory addresses the communicative action performed through assertions, questions, directives and expressive utterances (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The study compares these dimensions without assuming either that natural imagery constitutes ecological concern or that ecological representation entails a particular communicative act.

The study consequently asks two linked questions: what ecological stories and human–nature relations do the six lyrics construct; and what communicative acts does the lyrical voice perform? Comparison across the songs allows convergence, partial convergence and divergence to emerge from the corpus without treating these observations as a general theory of ecological advocacy.

## 2. Literature review

Popular music is widely recognised as social discourse through which identities, emotions and political positions are constructed (Frith, 1996; Street, 2012). Studies of lyrics show that discourse choices can organise interpersonal alignment, repetition, resistance and ideological critique (Risdianto, 2016; Fang et al., 2017; Makinde et al., 2024; Zaenuri et al., 2024). Lyrics therefore do more than communicate themes: they position speakers and audiences in relation to the social problems being represented.

Ecolinguistics examines how language constructs relationships among humans, nonhuman beings and environments, particularly the assumptions that support ecological care or environmental harm (Steffensen & Fill, 2014; Stibbe, 2021; Stanlaw, 2020; Penz & Fill, 2022). Research on music has shown that metaphor, emotion and cultural narratives can communicate environmental concern (Černý, 2023; Satheesan, 2024), while studies of Jackson's environmental lyrics emphasise ecological empathy and spiritually inflected

protest (Abua, 2017; Rahman, 2022; Mukoro, 2024). Speech act theory addresses the communicative action of advocacy by distinguishing acts such as lament, accusation, questioning, direction and protest (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Mabaquiao, 2018).

Related studies show that indirectness, metaphor, repetition and pronoun choice contribute to emotional alignment and resistance in song discourse (Amrullah, 2015; Pristianingrum & Damayanti, 2022; Makinde et al., 2024; Okesola, 2024). Jackson scholarship has likewise examined racialised political critique in “They Don’t Care About Us” and the mobilisation of “Heal the World” for peace advocacy (Rossiter, 2012; Yende & Hlatshwayo, 2024). Morales-López (2023) further demonstrates how metaphor can organise ideological relations.

What remains less developed is direct comparison between the ecological stories a lyric constructs and the communicative acts it performs, especially where nature-based metaphor draws on the more-than-human world to organise primarily human concerns. This study addresses that gap by applying critical ecolinguistics and speech act theory to the same corpus and comparing the results after each analysis has been established.

### **3. Theoretical and conceptual framework**

The study combines critical ecolinguistics, which examines human–nature relations, ecological value, salience and erasure, with speech act theory, which identifies the communicative force of utterances such as lament, accusation, questioning, appeal, direction and protest (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Their categories are operationalised separately below and compared only after coding.

#### ***3.1. Critical ecolinguistics***

The ecolinguistic component draws primarily on Stibbe’s (2021) “stories we live by”: ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, salience and narratives. The study operationalises framing, metaphor, evaluation, identity, salience and erasure because they bear most directly on human–nature relations, ecological value and nonhuman visibility; ideology, conviction and narrative inform the broader interpretation where relevant. This selective use of the framework follows the critical ecolinguistic concern with whether discourse reinforces environmentally harmful assumptions or supports care, restraint and interdependence (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2021).

Environmental vocabulary is not by itself evidence of an ecologically beneficial worldview; evaluation turns on the relationships and values the discourse constructs (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014). Natural source domains are therefore analysed for their role in human–nature relations rather than counted as ecological simply because they are present.

Framing concerns the perspective through which a condition or relationship is understood; evaluation the values attached to beings, places and actions; identity the roles

assigned to humans and other participants; salience the degree to which nonhuman beings and environments are made morally visible; and erasure their exclusion or backgrounding. Metaphor is especially important because natural phenomena repeatedly provide source domains for injury, care, grief, spirituality and mortality (Stibbe, 2021).

Nature-based metaphors were assessed according to the human–nature relation they constructed. They were treated as ecologically consequential where they constructed ecological harm, nonhuman value or agency, interdependence, dependence on life-supporting systems or human responsibility. Where natural phenomena principally organised human emotion, mortality, beauty, spirituality or memory, they were treated as human-centred or affective uses of nature. Such passages remain ecolinguistically analysable because the use of the more-than-human world chiefly as symbolic material can itself be evaluated as instrumental or anthropocentric. Ecolinguistic significance is therefore distinguished from ecological concern.

The analysis also retains Stibbe’s evaluative distinction among beneficial, destructive, and ambivalent stories. These evaluations are made only after identifying the relationships and value structures constructed in the discourse: a passage may be ecolinguistically significant without advocating ecological care, while expressions of ecological concern may coexist with a substantially human-centred value structure (Steffensen & Fill, 2014; Penz & Fill, 2022; Stanlaw, 2020).

### ***3.2. Speech act theory***

In this study, speech act theory provides the principal account of communicative action. Following Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the analysis focuses on assertives, directives, expressives and commissives, classified by contextual force rather than grammatical form alone (Mabaquiao, 2018; Ekoru & Gunn, 2021). Assertives present claims or evaluations as true; directives seek a response or course of action; expressives communicate attitudes such as grief or anger; and commissives are restricted to utterances that undertake a future commitment.

Deixis, implicature, presupposition and repetition are supporting resources rather than co-equal frameworks. Personal deixis helps identify alignment, opposition and distributed responsibility through forms such as *I*, *you*, *we*, *us* and *they* (Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021). Implicature is used where meaning or force depends on inference (Grice, 1975), while presupposition is reserved for cases in which an utterance treats a condition as already established. Repetition is examined where recurrence strengthens accusation, expressive force, solidarity or mobilisation (Risdianto, 2016; Makinde et al., 2024).

### ***3.3. Conceptualising grief, resistance and ecology***

Grief, resistance and ecology are treated as organising domains rather than additional theories. Grief concerns the public communication of loss and vulnerability and may

become ethically consequential by inviting recognition of a valued life or experience (Butler, 2004). Resistance concerns discursive opposition to injustice, exclusion or indifference through acts such as accusation, protest and solidarity-building. Ecology concerns the construction of relations among humans, nonhuman life and the material environment, including agency, value, responsibility, interdependence and harm. In each case, the analysis remains tied to the linguistic resources through which the domain is made communicatively available.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research design

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative textual analysis of six Michael Jackson songs. It examines how the lyrics construct grief, resistance, social responsibility and ecological relations and what communicative acts they perform. The analytical procedures operationalise the framework described above, with deixis, implicature, presupposition and repetition used only where they clarify particular speech acts, participant relations or inferential meanings.

### 4.2. Dataset and corpus preparation

The dataset comprises six songs selected from Jackson's socially engaged work: "Heal the World" and "Gone Too Soon" from *Dangerous* (1991); "Childhood", "Earth Song" and "They Don't Care About Us" from *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I* (1995); and "Cry" from *Invincible* (2001). Purposive selection produced deliberate variation: "Earth Song" and "Heal the World" contain the clearest environmental and planetary references; "They Don't Care About Us" and "Cry" foreground social injustice and mobilisation; and "Gone Too Soon" and "Childhood" centre grief and empathetic recognition. This variation permits comparison without presuming that all six songs are equally ecological.

Lyric transcriptions were initially obtained from Genius and all quoted passages, together with passages supporting specific linguistic claims, were cross-checked against Spotify and Musixmatch-powered lyric records. Presentational differences in punctuation, capitalisation, contractions, line division and backing-vocal notation were disregarded where wording and interpretation were unaffected; lexical differences were resolved by retaining independently corroborated wording. Album placement and year were verified against Michael Jackson's official discography, and website annotations, recommendations and navigation text were removed before coding.

The analysis was restricted to verbal content. Vocal delivery, instrumentation, performance and music-video imagery were excluded because they would require a separate multimodal design. The primary unit was the clause or complete lyrical line; adjacent lines, refrains or stanzas were treated as a single discourse unit where

interpretation depended on their relation. Repeated choruses were coded once for propositional and ideological meaning, with recurrence examined separately as a pragmatic resource.

### ***4.3. Analytical framework***

The ecolinguistic coding operationalised framing, metaphor, evaluation, identity, salience and erasure within Stibbe's (2021) wider framework. Segments were examined for human–nature relations, ecological value, agency, responsibility and nonhuman visibility. Nature-based metaphors were coded as ecologically consequential where the wording constructed harm, nonhuman value or agency, interdependence or human responsibility; where nature primarily organised human grief, mortality, spirituality, beauty or memory, the coding retained that relation as human-centred or potentially instrumental rather than treating the imagery as ecological concern in itself.

Speech acts were coded by contextual force using the four classes defined above: assertive, directive, expressive and commissive (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Egoro & Gunn, 2021). Supporting pragmatic resources were coded only when they clarified the actor, addressee, alignment, inferential meaning or force of an identifiable act: deixis for participant relations, implicature for inferred meaning, presupposition for content treated as given, and repetition for changes in force or relational organisation (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021).

### ***4.4. Coding procedure***

Coding proceeded in four passes. First, each song was segmented into clauses, complete lines and larger discourse units where necessary, with provisional descriptive codes such as lament, accusation, reassurance, environmental harm, collective responsibility and appeal for empathy. Second, the ecolinguistic categories were applied to identify the human–nature relation, value structure, agency, responsibility, salience and erasure constructed in each relevant segment. Third, the pragmatic analysis identified illocutionary force and used deixis, presupposition, implicature and repetition where these were necessary to explain target, alignment or indirect meaning. Rhetorical questions were not classified by form alone but assessed for whether they requested information, demanded recognition, expressed lament or performed accusation. Fourth, the ecolinguistic and speech act findings were compared to determine whether they converged, diverged or addressed different concerns. Boundary and negative cases were retained rather than forced into ecological categories.

### ***4.5. Positionality and reflexivity***

The analysis was conducted by the primary researcher, whose familiarity with Jackson's

music and its humanitarian themes created a risk of reading emotionally powerful lyrics or natural imagery as inherently ecological or progressive. To limit this, claims were anchored in identifiable linguistic patterns and framed in terms of what the lyrics construct, invite or make available rather than assumptions about authorial intention. Competing interpretations were retained where the wording did not resolve them, and human-centred uses of nature were evaluated within, rather than excluded from, ecolinguistic analysis.

Purposive selection also creates corpus bias: the six songs come from Jackson's socially engaged work and cannot establish the prevalence of ecological discourse or advocacy across his catalogue. The design is appropriate to the comparative question because it includes explicit environmental cases alongside social, political and grief-centred boundary cases. Findings are therefore treated as corpus-bound rather than representative of Jackson's songwriting as a whole.

#### ***4.6. Trustworthiness and analytical consistency***

Analytical consistency was supported through a written coding scheme, line-by-line examination of the full corpus and comparative revisiting of coding decisions. Negative and boundary cases were retained, and recurrent lexical items were not assigned stable meanings across songs. For example, "world" functions differently as a psychological domain in "Childhood", a changeable social order in "Cry", a mainly human moral community in "Heal the World" and a material planet containing damaged ecosystems in "Earth Song". This comparison helped distinguish lexical recurrence from contextual ecological meaning.

#### ***4.7. Ethical and copyright considerations***

The study involved no human participants. The commercially released lyrics are treated as public discourse rather than evidence of Jackson's private intentions or mental state, and the lyrical speaker is not automatically equated with the historical person. Only short excerpts necessary to make linguistic claims inspectable are reproduced, especially where interpretation depends on interrogative structure, presupposition, deixis, repetition or metaphor.

### **5. Analysis and discussion**

The corpus-level distribution of ecolinguistic and pragmatic findings is summarised below. The song-by-song sections that follow establish these classifications from the wording of the lyrics rather than from thematic labels alone.

Natural phenomena occur in different discourse roles across the corpus, including harmed participants, valued conditions of life and symbolic resources for human experience. The analysis therefore evaluates the relation and value structure constructed in

each context.

A further corpus-level finding is absence: none of the six songs mobilises a growth or consumption story in Stibbe's sense. Although the songs criticise harm, neglect and human responsibility, they do not organise ecological meaning around economic expansion, consumer desire or the normalisation of increased consumption. Given the prominence of growth and consumerism in ecolinguistic critiques of destructive discourse, their absence is analytically relevant rather than merely incidental.

The table provides an orientation to the corpus rather than a substitute for textual analysis. The sections below examine the linguistic evidence on which each classification rests.

**Table 1.** Corpus-level analytical overview

| <b>Song</b>      | <b>Dominant discourse</b>                  | <b>Critical ecolinguistic finding</b>                                                                                                               | <b>Principal speech acts and supporting resources</b>                                                                             | <b>Relation observed in this corpus</b>                                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Earth Song"     | Ecological and humanitarian protest        | Strong representation of environmental damage, nonhuman suffering and human responsibility, including ecologically consequential metaphor           | Questioning, accusation and lament; supported by interrogative structure, contextual implicature, inclusive deixis and repetition | Strong coexistence of ecological representation and communicative acts directed at ecological harm |
| "Heal the World" | Humanitarian care with ecological elements | Healing, wounding and strangulation metaphors support planetary care, but with substantial human-centredness                                        | Directives and appeals; supported by conditional constructions, inclusive pronouns and repetition                                 | Partial coexistence; ecological and humanitarian meanings remain mixed                             |
| "Cry"            | Collective grief and mobilisation          | Nature-based metaphors are ecolinguistically relevant but mainly organise emotional and spiritual meanings rather than sustained ecological concern | Appeals and reassurance; supported by questions, inclusive "we" and repetition                                                    | Strong communicative action with limited ecological representation                                 |

| <b>Song</b>                | <b>Dominant discourse</b>                     | <b>Critical ecolinguistic finding</b>                                                                                                                | <b>Principal speech acts and supporting resources</b>                                                   | <b>Relation observed in this corpus</b>                                           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Gone Too Soon”            | Elegy and transience                          | Nature-based metaphors construct a predominantly human-centred, potentially instrumental relation to nature rather than sustained ecological concern | Expressive acts of mourning; supported by indirect reference, temporal contrast and repetition          | Ecolinguistically revealing metaphor whose communicative object is human mourning |
| “Childhood”                | Autobiographical grief and appeal for empathy | No substantial ecological story                                                                                                                      | Expressive self-disclosure and appeal for empathy; supported by rhetorical questions and direct address | Interpersonal appeal without substantial ecological representation                |
| “They Don’t Care About Us” | Political resistance                          | No substantial ecological story                                                                                                                      | Accusation and protest; supported by oppositional deixis, rhetorical questions and repetition           | Forceful advocacy without substantial ecological representation                   |

### ***5.1. “Earth Song”: From ecological erasure to moral interrogation***

The song opens with the directly observable environmental questions “What about sunrise? What about rain?” (Jackson, 1995b). The interrogative sequence does not function primarily as a request for information. The clauses “you said we were to gain” and “you said was yours and mine” (Jackson, 1995b) explicitly invoke prior commitments and shared possession; against the later catalogue of destruction, the questions invite an inference that those expectations have not been fulfilled. “Did you ever stop to notice” (Jackson, 1995b) similarly asks about noticing while pragmatically pressing the addressee to attend to the harm that follows. The accusation is therefore inferential rather than fully encoded: the wording supplies the earlier commitments and the demand for attention, while the surrounding discourse licenses a reading of failed responsibility. Ecolinguistically, the sequence frames environmental loss as a disruption of an expected moral relationship

rather than as neutral change. The opening references to sunrise and rain can evoke continuity and renewal, but that association is interpretive rather than lexically encoded; the later catalogue of damage supplies the contrast on which the reading depends.

The repeated instruction to stop and notice further develops this relationship. Pragmatically, the construction can function as a directive embedded within a question: rather than merely asking whether observation occurred, it presses the addressee to attend to the harm that follows. The representation of “This crying Earth, this weeping shore” (Jackson, 1995b) strengthens that demand by giving the physical environment affective visibility. In ecolinguistic terms, the personification increases nonhuman salience by making damage emotionally perceptible (Stibbe, 2021; Penz & Fill, 2022). It also retains an anthropomorphic tension because damage to the planet is translated into familiar human affect. The later “Look what we’ve done” (Jackson, 1995b) shifts the sequence from attention towards shared culpability.

The question “What have we done to the world?” (Jackson, 1995b) provides the song’s clearest collective attribution of responsibility. In context, “we” readily supports an inclusive reading in which the lyrical voice and audience are positioned within a wider human group implicated in damage; personal deixis therefore contributes to shared accountability (Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021). That inclusiveness also has a political limitation. Governments, industries, corporations and communities are not equally responsible for environmental destruction, so an undifferentiated “we” can produce solidarity while obscuring differences in causal power and historical responsibility.

The breakdown section broadens the ecological field by naming seas, animals, elephants, whales and forests. These references are qualitatively different from the comet, flower or rainbow imagery used in “Gone Too Soon”. Here, nonhuman beings and ecosystems are not used mainly to represent human emotion. They are presented as beings and places harmed by human action. Their inclusion makes visible forms of suffering that environmental discourse can otherwise background or erase. The reference to animals being reduced from a kingdom to dust frames biodiversity loss as destruction rather than natural disappearance. The transformation implies that a once-living order has been violently diminished. Although the responsible agent is not directly named in the clause, the surrounding discourse connects this destruction to collective human action. The song thus contests the erasure of nonhuman loss, while retaining some grammatical ambiguity about the particular actors responsible. The references to elephants and trust are especially important because they attribute relational capacity to nonhuman beings. Elephants are not represented merely as resources or symbols; they are imagined as participants in a broken relationship with humanity. The question of whether their trust has been lost constructs environmental destruction as a betrayal rather than only a material change. This challenges a strictly anthropocentric story in which animals matter only through their usefulness to humans. At the same time, the language of trust remains human-derived. As with the crying Earth, it interprets nonhuman experience through categories familiar to human social life. The result is not a complete escape from anthropocentrism, but a movement away from

representing animals as passive objects. The animals are granted a position within a moral relationship, even though that position is linguistically mediated through human concepts. The nonhuman loss is also lexically explicit in “We’ve turned kingdoms to dust” and the relational question “Have we lost their trust?” (Jackson, 1995b).

The references to whales and damaged seas further connect the suffering of particular species with harm to their habitats. The sequence “What about crying whales? / Ravaging the seas?” (Jackson, 1995b) places the animal and the damaged marine environment in immediate relation, while “What about forest trails? / Burnt despite our pleas” (Jackson, 1995b) extends the same pattern to terrestrial habitat. These juxtapositions support an interdependence reading because harm to living beings and harm to the environments they inhabit are represented together. The song also raises the issue of nature’s value. By asking about nature’s worth, the lyrical voice brings the value of the nonhuman world into explicit moral attention. One interpretation is that the question challenges the failure to recognise intrinsic ecological value. Nature matters beyond its immediate usefulness to humans. A less favourable interpretation is that the term “worth” may reproduce the language of economic valuation, in which the natural world must be assigned a measurable value before it can be protected. The surrounding context that presents the planet as a source of life supports the first interpretation more strongly. Within Stibbe’s (2021) metaphor category, the generative or maternal framing of Earth is ecologically consequential because it constructs dependence on a life-sustaining planet. Yet it also remains partly anthropocentric: the Earth’s value is articulated through what it gives and sustains. The metaphor therefore both resists a purely resource-based story and shows the difficulty of representing ecological value entirely outside human frames. The valuation claim is directly licensed by “What about nature’s worth?” while “It’s our planet’s womb” makes the generative framing visible (Jackson, 1995b).

The repeated response “What about us?” introduces a productive but limited ambiguity. At several points it is juxtaposed with nonhuman referents, including the seas, elephants and crying whales, but the pattern is not uniform: animals receive “What about it?” and the forest-trail line is followed by a non-lexical response (Jackson, 1995b). The placement of “us” therefore makes the boundaries of the moral community suggestively unstable without establishing that nonhuman beings belong to its reference. It may widen the field of shared vulnerability, or it may repeatedly redirect attention towards human consequences after nonhuman harm is named. The text does not resolve this tension completely. The accumulation of questions nevertheless produces a sustained interrogation in which ecological harm, war, poverty, greed and social abandonment are presented as aspects of a broader moral failure.

The two analyses produce intersecting observations in “Earth Song”. Critical ecolinguistics identifies the salience of the Earth, animals, seas and forests as harmed participants, while the pragmatic analysis shows how interrogative structure, contextual implicature, repetition and deictic choices organise moral challenge and responsibility. The recurring “What about us?” is directly observable after references to the seas, elephants

and crying whales as well as across human suffering, although, as noted above, it does not accompany every nonhuman referent uniformly (Jackson, 1995b). The convergence is therefore strong in this song, but the analysis does not treat it as a general mechanism of ecological advocacy.

The song's central achievement is not simply its description of a damaged planet. It constructs environmental harm as something that has been ignored, demands recognition and requires an answer. Its ecological story is enacted through moral interrogation. At the same time, its use of collective pronouns and human emotional categories leaves unresolved questions about unequal responsibility and the extent to which nonhuman value is recognised independently of human concerns. These tensions make "Earth Song" a stronger object of ecolinguistic analysis than an uncomplicated example of environmentally beneficial discourse.

## 5.2. *"Heal the World": Ecological care or human-centred stewardship?*

The directive is lexically explicit in "Heal the world / Make it a better place" (Jackson, 1991a), and its recurrence across the chorus makes the repetitive force directly observable. "Heal the World" combines a discourse of humanitarian care with a less fully developed ecological appeal. Its central directive, "Heal the world", semantically frames "world" as damaged and capable of repair rather than presupposing a specific prior injury. From an ecolinguistic perspective, this framing departs from narratives that treat the Earth merely as inert setting or inexhaustible resource. The ecological meaning remains unstable, however, because "world" does not consistently refer to the material planet. At different points it signifies the Earth, human society and an imagined moral community free from suffering. The chorus supports the humanitarian interpretation by identifying the beneficiaries as the speaker, the listener and the "entire human race" (Jackson, 1991a). Human welfare consequently remains the clearest centre of concern, even while the healing metaphor makes planetary vulnerability available.

The human-centred orientation does not eliminate the song's ecolinguistic relevance; it places that relevance within a discourse of stewardship. Humanity is positioned as responsible for improving a world from which it often remains conceptually distinct rather than fully represented as part of an interdependent ecological community. The imperative form gives this orientation pragmatic force: the repeated commands seek to move the implied audience from moral concern towards participation in repair (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). This is consistent with Abua's (2017) interpretation of the song as environmental advocacy driven more by emotional identification than by ecological specificity.

The clearest movement from humanitarian concern to ecological accusation occurs in the bridge. "Why do we keep strangling life?" (Jackson, 1991a) explicitly represents ongoing conduct through a metaphor of embodied violence. The aspectual "keep" presents the action as continuing, while the interrogative frames it as conduct requiring justification and, in context, can be heard as reproach rather than a neutral request for explanation. The

inclusive reading of “we” makes collective implication available without specifying equal responsibility. The following “Wound this Earth, crucify its soul?” (Jackson, 1991a) extends the same violence metaphor directly to the planet, making Earth a harmed participant and increasing its ecological salience (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2021). Here ecological representation and communicative force converge around the same object of concern.

The recurring contrast between care and human suffering reinforces this interpretation. The conditional “If you care enough for the living” precedes repeated directives to make a better place (Jackson, 1991a), while “There are people dying” makes the humanitarian problem explicit. Pragmatically, this pattern attributes agency to individuals and makes moral feeling available as a condition for action. The lyric foregrounds insufficient care more strongly than political institutions, economic systems or unequal access to power; it therefore works through personal conscience and collective feeling more strongly than through institutional critique.

Personal deixis strengthens this appeal. The repeated coordination of speaker and addressee constructs a shared moral community. Neither the lyrical voice nor the listener is positioned outside the problem. This inclusive arrangement distributes responsibility and invites identification, illustrating how deictic choices can produce collective alignment (Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021). The inclusive alignment is also textual rather than inferred: the chorus repeatedly joins “For you and for me” with “the entire human race” (Jackson, 1991a).

The broadened reference to the whole “human race” intensifies this universalising movement. National, racial and political differences are temporarily subordinated to a common human identity. This supports the song’s humanitarian aspiration and explains its adaptability to peace advocacy in different political contexts (Yende & Hlatshwayo, 2024). At the same time, universalisation can obscure differences in responsibility. Individuals, corporations, governments, and communities do not possess equal power to damage or repair the world, even though inclusive language places them in a single moral category.

The opening emphasis on future generations further develops the story of shared obligation. The world should be improved for children and their descendants, while the outro urges the audience to preserve it for “our children”. This is a recognisable discourse of intergenerational responsibility. It challenges short-term self-interest by asking the present generation to consider those who will inherit the consequences of current actions. From an ecolinguistic perspective, intergenerational care can support environmentally beneficial thinking by challenging the assumption that the present generation may consume or damage the world without regard for the future (Stibbe, 2021). Yet the future beings explicitly foregrounded are human descendants. Nonhuman generations, habitats and ecosystems are not directly included. The discourse is therefore future-oriented but still largely anthropocentric. The intergenerational orientation becomes explicit in the repeated instruction “Save it for our children” (Jackson, 1991a), which identifies future human descendants as the beneficiaries of preservation.

### 5.3. Nature-based metaphor in “Gone Too Soon” and “Childhood”

The natural imagery in “Gone Too Soon” and “Childhood” performs important emotional and rhetorical work without sustaining ecological concern. Following Stibbe’s (2021) metaphor category, the analysis asks what human–nature relation is constructed when comets, rainbows, flowers and other imagined environments organise grief, vulnerability or memory. Where the more-than-human world functions principally as a source of qualities for human experience, the relation can be evaluated as human-centred or potentially instrumental rather than treated as ecological concern on the basis of vocabulary alone.

#### 5.3.1. “Gone Too Soon”: Natural imagery and elegiac transience

“Gone Too Soon” presents grief through a sequence of comparisons involving natural and fragile phenomena. The comet, rainbow, sunlight, flower and sunset provide images through which the brevity of a human life can be represented. Their shared features are brilliance, beauty, instability and disappearance. The metaphorical form is visible in “Like a comet blazing ’cross the evening sky” (Jackson, 1991b), while the repeated “Gone too soon” supplies the evaluative refrain. The compressed temporal contrast “Here one day / Gone one night” (Jackson, 1991b) further makes sudden disappearance explicit. The imagery consequently organises mortality and premature loss rather than environmental harm.

The repeated judgement “gone too soon” frames the loss as premature. It does not simply state that a person has died; it evaluates the timing of death as contrary to expectation and therefore emotionally unacceptable. Pragmatically, the refrain serves an expressive function of mourning by communicating grief, admiration and disbelief rather than merely conveying factual information (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The natural comparisons are consistently tied to human evaluation. The flower is “just beyond your reach”, while the lost figure is “Born to amuse / To inspire, to delight” (Jackson, 1991b), making human accessibility, admiration and affective value part of the metaphorical pattern. The comet and rainbow similarly provide brilliance and transience as qualities through which the person being mourned becomes intelligible. None is developed as an ecological participant with an independent problem or trajectory.

The pragmatic force of these images also depends on indirectness. The song does not explain the circumstances of death or repeatedly name the deceased. The listener infers the event through images of sudden disappearance and the recurring evaluation of premature loss. Such indirectness allows the song to retain commemorative specificity while remaining available for wider experiences of bereavement, a pattern consistent with pragmatic accounts of inferred meaning in song discourse (Amrullah, 2015). Indirectness is therefore grounded in the text’s comparison-plus-refrain pattern rather than in an explicit statement of death.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, this recurrent pattern supports a human-centred and potentially instrumental reading because comets, rainbows, flowers, and sunsets are developed chiefly through the meanings they acquire in relation to human mortality and grief. The claim rests not on the presence of natural imagery alone, but on its repeated association with human accessibility, admiration, and premature loss. This does not place “Gone Too Soon” outside ecolinguistic analysis. Rather, it makes the song an ambivalent, human-centred case whose natural imagery belongs primarily to elegy at the level of communicative function while remaining available for critical evaluation of the human–nature relation it constructs.

### 5.3.2. “Childhood”: *Lost experience and the demand for empathy*

In “Childhood”, the term “world” refers to an autobiographical and psychological domain rather than to the material Earth. The speaker searches for a childhood experience understood as absent, lost or never fully possessed. The search is located in the “lost and found of my heart” (Jackson, 1995a), tying world to memory, identity and emotional experience rather than ecological space. The world being sought is consequently a space of wonder and belonging.

The recurring question “Have you seen my childhood?” is not a literal request for visual information. It treats childhood as something that can be observed, found or recovered, even though it refers to a period of life and an accumulated set of experiences. The question converts an abstract loss into a seemingly searchable object. The interrogative itself is repeated as “Have you seen my childhood?” (Jackson, 1995a), allowing its non-literal force to be checked directly.

Pragmatically, the recurring question functions as an appeal for recognition in the context of explicit social judgement. The lyric reports “People say I’m not okay” and later directs the addressee, “Before you judge me, try hard to love me” (Jackson, 1995a). These lines make prior or anticipated judgement textually available; “Have you seen my childhood?” then invites the listener to reconsider that judgement in light of a childhood the speaker says he never knew. The inference therefore rests on the surrounding sequence rather than on a claim that the interrogative by itself presupposes a fully specified history of misunderstanding. The contrast between the first-person voice and the social group represented by “they” continues to organise the interpersonal conflict (Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021).

The reported judgements that the speaker is not normal or is unusually attached to simple things are reframed as evidence of social misunderstanding. The lyric itself supplies a compensatory relation through “It’s been my fate to compensate”, immediately connected to “the childhood / I’ve never known” (Jackson, 1995a). This grounds the interpretation that behaviours treated as eccentric are presented as responses to deprivation rather than leaving compensation entirely to inference. The audience is therefore invited to reinterpret visible conduct in light of an unseen history. Unlike “Gone Too Soon”,

which mourns a life that ended, “Childhood” mourns an experience represented as never fully possessed.

The pirate and royal imagery belongs to the realm of childhood fantasy. The wording “Like pirates in adventurous dreams” (Jackson, 1995a) explicitly places the image within imagined play rather than an ecological setting. The later “watch me fly” (Jackson, 1995a) performs a similar imaginative function, making aspiration and release available rather than constructing a relationship with the natural world. The most explicit pragmatic action in the song is the directive to suspend judgement and respond with love. This appeal seeks a change in attitude rather than information. It transforms autobiographical disclosure into an ethical demand: understanding should precede judgement. The instruction to look inward reinforces this demand by positioning empathy as a form of self-examination. The listener is not simply told that the speaker suffered, but asked to reconsider the moral basis of earlier interpretations. The appeal becomes overt in “Before you judge me, try hard to love me” (Jackson, 1995a), which shifts from autobiographical disclosure to a directive addressed to the listener.

The song’s advocacy is therefore interpersonal. It resists stigma by connecting apparently strange behaviour to deprivation and by demanding a more compassionate reading of the speaker’s identity. Its references to worlds, pirates and flight contribute to this appeal, but they do not establish a developed ecological story.

#### ***5.4. Pragmatic modes of resistance in “They Don’t Care About Us” and “Cry”***

“They Don’t Care About Us” and “Cry” both construct resistance, but they do so through different relationships between speaker, audience and social problem. “They Don’t Care About Us” adopts a confrontational voice that identifies neglect, discrimination and institutional violence. “Cry”, by contrast, presents resistance through shared vulnerability and collective emotional response. The first song confronts an opposing group; the second recruits dispersed individuals into a common moral action. These differences are most visible in their pragmatic organisation. “They Don’t Care About Us” relies on accusation, oppositional deixis, rhetorical questioning and repeated assertions. “Cry” relies on indefinite reference, appeals, conditional possibility and movement from individual helplessness to collective agency. Together, the songs show that advocacy may operate through direct protest or through affective mobilisation.

##### ***5.4.1. Accusation and oppositional deixis in “They Don’t Care About Us”***

The recurring accusation that “they don’t really care about us” establishes the song’s central social division. The pronouns “they” and “us” organise the discourse into two opposed groups. “They” refers to a powerful but partly unspecified external group, while “us” refers to those who experience neglect, violence or exclusion. The opposition is directly encoded in the refrain “they don’t really care about us” (Jackson, 1995c), where “they” and “us”

occupy the same repeated clause.

From a deictic perspective, this contrast creates distance between the victims represented by the lyrical voice and the institutions or social actors held responsible (Levinson, 1983). The lack of a fixed antecedent for “they” gives the pronoun broad political reach. Depending on the surrounding verse, it may refer to government, police, the media, dominant racial groups or institutions that sustain inequality. This ambiguity strengthens the song’s adaptability, but it also limits causal precision. The listener can recognise a general structure of oppression without always being given a clearly delimited responsible actor. The pronoun therefore works less as a factual identification than as a pragmatic strategy of opposition. The repeated refrain functions primarily as an assertive speech act. It presents institutional indifference as a truth rather than a possibility. Repetition then changes the force of the assertion. What begins as a claim develops into a chant-like public accusation. Studies of protest lyrics similarly show that patterned repetition can strengthen solidarity and convert individual grievance into collective resistance (Risdianto, 2016; Makinde et al., 2024). The repetitive force is also formally observable because the same clause, “they don’t really care about us”, recurs across successive chorus lines (Jackson, 1995c). The argument about intensification therefore rests on lexical recurrence, not on a paraphrased impression of insistence.

The prefatory wording that frames the refrain as all the speaker wishes to say also creates an impression of compression. The speaker presents the accusation as the unavoidable conclusion of accumulated experience. This apparent simplicity contrasts with the range of harms described in the verses. Police violence, racial discrimination, public stereotyping and denied rights are condensed into one repeated judgement: those in power do not care. The song grounds this accusation in first-person testimony. The direct reference to “police brutality” identifies institutional violence rather than an abstract emotional injury. The speaker does not merely express anger. He asserts victimhood within a specific structure of coercion. This utterance therefore combines assertive and expressive force: it states a condition and communicates outrage at that condition (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Egoro & Gunn, 2021). First-person testimony is visible in “I am a victim of police brutality, now” (Jackson, 1995c), grounding the accusation in an explicitly affected speaker.

The repeated first-person construction also prevents the song’s political claims from remaining impersonal. Injustice is represented as something lived through the body and identity of the speaker. The personal voice gives institutional critique an experiential centre. At the same time, the first-person speaker extends beyond an individual biography. References to racialised men, families, prisoners and victims of public violence allow the voice to stand for a wider community. The lyrical “I” becomes representative without disappearing into an abstract collective. The movement from individual testimony towards a wider injured constituency is reinforced by “I’m tired of being the victim of hate” (Jackson, 1995c), where the repeated first-person position keeps institutional harm experientially anchored.

The song's questions concerning "my rights" further intensify the protest. "What has become of my rights?" is followed by "Am I invisible 'cause you ignore me?" and the reminder that "Your proclamation promised me free liberty" (Jackson, 1995c). The surrounding wording therefore establishes promised liberty and experienced exclusion as the context against which the questions operate. Rather than neutrally requesting information about legal entitlements, the interrogatives invite an accusatory reading of a discrepancy between institutional promise and social experience. The contrast turns denied recognition into a political harm and gives the addressee an account to answer for.

The repeated use of "you" in these confrontational sequences gives oppression an immediate addressee. Even where "they" remains indefinite, "you" places an implied aggressor inside the communicative event. The song therefore shifts between speaking about oppressive actors and speaking directly to them. Historical references also function as a form of pragmatic legitimation. The counterfactual "if Roosevelt was livin' / He wouldn't let this be" is later repeated with "Martin Luther" (Jackson, 1995c). The structure invokes recognised political and civil rights authority to support the judgement that current conditions are unacceptable. This remains an implied argument rather than evidence of what either historical figure would actually have done, but the repeated counterfactual makes the legitimating move textually visible. Rossiter (2012) similarly reads the song as politically charged protest whose message cannot be separated from its performative force.

The final appeal against passive observation broadens the song's addressee relation. The listener is no longer treated as external to the conflict. The discourse implies that watching violence without intervening contributes to the conditions it condemns, so the appeal extends beyond perpetrators and institutions to those who observe without responding. Deictically, the listener is pressed to align either with the marginalised us or with the social forces whose indifference and silence sustain harm. The bystander challenge is not inferred from summary alone: "Don't you sit back and watch the beatin'" directly addresses passive spectatorship (Jackson, 1995c).

The song's natural or spatial references do not produce a substantial ecological story. Land occurs within national identity and failed belonging, made explicit in "the land from which I came" (Jackson, 1995c). The repeated aside "We're deep in the fire" (Jackson, 1995c) frames crisis through a conventional danger image rather than developing fire as an ecological participant, while the question "Tell me, what has become of my life?" locates "life" in the speaker's experience of oppression (Jackson, 1995c). These expressions therefore remain subordinate to the song's political object: lived injury is transformed into public accusation, solidarity is constructed through us, opposing power through they, and passive observation is directly challenged.

#### 5.4.2. *Collective vulnerability and mobilisation in "Cry"*

"Cry" constructs resistance less through direct confrontation than through the accumulation of shared suffering. Its verses repeatedly introduce unnamed people: "Somebody

shakes”, “Somebody’s missing a friend”, “Somebody’s lacking a hero” and “Someone is takin’ a life” (Jackson, 2001). The indefinite pattern distributes vulnerability across multiple individuals while leaving the agents of some harms equally vague. “Someone is hiding the truth” supplies a responsible but still unidentified actor. This indefiniteness therefore universalises suffering while limiting causal precision. The song constructs a moral crisis more clearly than a political explanation, and its advocacy depends on the listener recognising suffering and accepting a role in responding to it.

The repeated directive to endure functions as an interpersonal act of reassurance. It addresses those who are suffering and asks them to remain emotionally present even as change remains uncertain. In speech act theory, such utterances can be understood as directives because they seek to influence the hearer’s response to distress (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). These directives are less confrontational than those in “Heal the World”. They do not command broad social repair. Instead, they sustain the vulnerable listener and create a temporary relation of support. The recurring “hold on” (Jackson, 2001) provides the observable directive form on which the reassurance reading rests.

The questions in the verses perform a different kind of action. Questions about hidden truth and unresolved suffering express uncertainty while also inviting inferences about concealment or insufficient response (Grice, 1975). “Where were you / When your children cried last night?” (Jackson, 2001) is unlikely in context to function as a neutral request for physical location; against the surrounding representations of suffering, it can be heard as reproach. That implication should be distinguished from a strict presupposition that the addressee failed to respond. The chorus then moves from suffering to mobilisation through “change the world”. In context, “world” refers principally to the social order: hidden truth, violence and neglected children are joined later by the future projection that “There’ll be no more wars” (Jackson, 2001). The social reading is therefore supported by the surrounding lexical field rather than inferred from “world” in isolation.

The direct “you” initially singles out the listener as capable of action. This empowerment is immediately qualified by the speaker’s admission of personal limitation. The speaker cannot achieve transformation alone. Agency is therefore distributed rather than concentrated in a heroic individual. The later movement towards “we” resolves this tension by constructing collective participation. The song shifts from the capacity of “you”, through the limitation of “I”, to the possibility of “we”. Personal deixis thus provides the structure through which isolated individuals become a moral collective (Levinson, 1983; Saffah & Al-Hindawi, 2021). The invitation to “cry at the same time” transforms grief from a private emotional state into coordinated public expression. Crying is usually associated with individual vulnerability, but the song reinterprets it as a possible basis for solidarity. Shared sorrow becomes a communicative act through which previously separated sufferers recognise one another. This construction should not be classified simply as a commissive. The speaker does not make a definite promise to perform a future action. The conditional form imagines what could become possible if people respond together. Its force is therefore invitational and mobilising rather than promissory. The pronoun movement can

be checked in the chorus: “You can change the world”, “I can’t do it by myself”, and “If we all cry at the same time tonight” (Jackson, 2001).

The repetition of the chorus intensifies this invitation. As the same relationship among “you”, “I” and “we” recurs, collective action becomes more urgent. Repetition does not add new propositional content, but it strengthens the perlocutionary aim of encouraging participation (Ekoro & Gunn, 2021). The song’s form of resistance is consequently affective. It does not begin by identifying an enemy or naming a political institution. It begins with scattered human pain and seeks to build a collective response around it. This distinguishes it from the oppositional structure of “They Don’t Care About Us”. The emotional vocabulary also makes suffering morally legible. Missing friends, absent heroes, endangered children and hidden truths create a field of vulnerability that the audience is expected to regard as intolerable. The song’s persuasive force lies in making indifference difficult. The final conditional line is repeated several times in succession (Jackson, 2001), making the intensification through repetition directly observable. The collective condition itself is repeatedly restated as “If we all cry” (Jackson, 2001), so the intensification is carried by recurrence of the same conditional invitation rather than by added propositional content.

Nevertheless, its universal language can conceal differences among kinds of suffering. The indefinite sufferers are treated as members of one shared moral condition even though their experiences may arise from different political causes. As with the inclusive pronouns in the ecological songs, universalisation produces solidarity while reducing structural precision. Natural images such as wind, sunlight and sky contribute to the emotional and spiritual field but do not form an ecological argument. Wind is tied directly to vulnerability and faith in “Somebody shakes when the wind blows” and “Faith is found in the winds” (Jackson, 2001). The question “will the sun ever shine” (Jackson, 2001) makes sunlight a figure of hoped-for relief, while “You can touch the sky” (Jackson, 2001) occurs within the chorus of personal and collective possibility. These images remain organised around human experience rather than represented as ecological participants with independent value.

#### 5.4.3. *Confrontational and affective resistance*

The contrast between the two resistance songs is pragmatic rather than thematic. “They Don’t Care About Us” builds advocacy through an injured but defiant voice, an opposition between “they” and “us”, institutional testimony and direct challenge. “Cry” moves among unnamed sufferers, an individually addressed “you” and an emerging “we”, seeking participation through reassurance and conditional collective action. Direct opposition risks compressing complex institutions into an indefinite “they”; affective solidarity risks universalising suffering without identifying its causes. Both nevertheless show how linguistic organisation turns social grievance into communicative action.

### 5.5. What the two analytical perspectives reveal

Two cross-corpus findings emerge from the comparison. First, the presence and ecological evaluation of a human–nature relation must be distinguished from the communicative act performed through it: the two dimensions can converge strongly, partially, or scarcely at all. Second, inclusive pronouns and universal moral language repeatedly support solidarity while reducing specificity about unequal responsibility and causal actors. The analysis therefore keeps separate the relation constructed, its ecological evaluation and the pragmatic action performed. These are corpus-level findings rather than proposed universal conditions for ecological advocacy.

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the analytical value of separating ecological representation from pragmatic action when examining advocacy lyrics. Natural imagery becomes ecolinguistically significant through the human–nature relation and value structure it constructs, while communicative force depends on what the lyrical voice does with that representation in context. Across this corpus, those dimensions range from strong convergence to clear divergence, and inclusive or universalising language can simultaneously mobilise solidarity and obscure unequal responsibility. The contribution is therefore not an integrated model but a comparative procedure for making these differences visible without treating nature-based imagery as automatically ecological or communicative force as evidence of ecological orientation. The findings remain corpus-bound and invite testing across other genres and multimodal forms of advocacy, where lyrics can be examined alongside visual and performative resources (Triyono et al., 2023; Wang & Liu, 2024; Al Shazly & Sherif, 2025).

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## Appendix: Coding scheme

Unit of analysis: clause or complete lyrical line; where meaning depended on adjacent lines, a refrain, stanza or other multi-line sequence was treated as one discourse unit. Ecolinguistic and speech act coding were completed separately before convergence or divergence was compared.

| Analytical domain       | Code       | Operational criterion                                                                                   | Decision rule                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Critical ecolinguistics | Framing    | Perspective through which a condition, event or human–nature relation is constructed.                   | Code where linguistic organisation establishes a discernible perspective on ecological relations, harm, care or responsibility.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Critical ecolinguistics | Metaphor   | One domain structures another, especially where natural phenomena function as source or target domains. | Identify the human–nature relation first. Mark as ecologically consequential only where harm, nonhuman value/agency, interdependence, life-support dependence or human responsibility is constructed; otherwise retain as human-centred/affective where nature mainly structures human experience. |
| Critical ecolinguistics | Evaluation | Positive or negative value attached to beings, environments, conditions or actions.                     | Code explicit or contextually supported valuation; do not infer ecological benefit from positive affect alone.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Critical ecolinguistics | Identity   | Roles or identities assigned to speaker, listener, humanity or nonhuman participants.                   | Code identities such as destroyer, caretaker, victim, responsible collective or member of an ecological community where textually supported.                                                                                                                                                       |
| Critical ecolinguistics | Salience   | Degree to which nonhuman beings or environments are made perceptually or morally prominent.             | Code foregrounding that makes ecological participants, harm or value visible rather than merely naming natural vocabulary.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Critical ecolinguistics | Erasure    | Exclusion, backgrounding or reduction of nonhuman participants and ecological conditions.               | Code where nature is absent from an otherwise relevant relation, treated as passive scenery, or reduced primarily to symbolic material for human concerns.                                                                                                                                         |

| Analytical domain   | Code           | Operational criterion                                                              | Decision rule                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Speech act theory   | Assertive      | Lyrical voice presents a claim or evaluation as true.                              | Classify by contextual illocutionary force, not grammatical form; includes claims about damage, injustice or responsibility.                                                                 |
| Speech act theory   | Directive      | Lyrical voice seeks to influence an audience's conduct, recognition or response.   | Includes commands and appeals; rhetorical questions count only where their contextual force seeks acknowledgement, reflection or action.                                                     |
| Speech act theory   | Expressive     | Lyrical voice communicates an emotional or evaluative attitude.                    | Code grief, anger, concern, admiration or lament where expression of stance is the principal act.                                                                                            |
| Speech act theory   | Commissive     | Lyrical voice undertakes or projects commitment to future action.                  | Apply only where an actual commitment or undertaking is textually supported; do not infer commitment from aspiration alone.                                                                  |
| Supporting resource | Deixis         | Context-dependent expressions organise speaker, addressee and group relations.     | Use to clarify actor, target, solidarity, opposition, inclusion or distributed responsibility, especially I/you/we/us/they.                                                                  |
| Supporting resource | Presupposition | An utterance treats a condition or proposition as already established.             | Use only where wording treats a condition or proposition as given; do not relabel a contextually inferred accusation or implicature as presupposition without an identifiable textual basis. |
| Supporting resource | Implicature    | Meaning or force depends partly on inference rather than explicit statement.       | Use only where needed to explain indirect accusation, responsibility, death, neglect or other unstated meanings.                                                                             |
| Supporting resource | Repetition     | Recurrence intensifies or collectivises an already identifiable communicative act. | Do not count repeated wording as new propositional content; examine whether recurrence strengthens lament, accusation, solidarity, appeal or mobilisation.                                   |

Coding sequence: (1) descriptive segmentation and provisional functional coding; (2) ecolinguistic coding; (3) speech act coding with supporting pragmatic resources where necessary; (4) comparison of the two analyses. Ambiguous, negative and boundary cases were retained rather than resolved in favour of an ecological reading.