

# COUNTERPROPAGANDA IN SELECTED ALTERNATIVE ROCK AND METAL MUSIC

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This article attempts to determine whether we can identify any linguistic differences between songs that are typically considered as propaganda and those considered as counterpropaganda. We analyse a World War I propaganda song (“Over There” by George M. Cohan) and compare it to two rock/metal (counterpropaganda) songs: Muse’s “Uprising” and Gojira’s “Amazonia.” The analysis is done using a finite speech act typology. The findings indicate that propaganda songs utilise a higher percentage of Requests, as the aim of propaganda is often to promote joining some movement or cause. Propaganda typically aims to be familiar, and repetition is used for this purpose: counterpropaganda songs in our analysis are less repetitive compared to propaganda songs. Propaganda and counterpropaganda songs feature the same kinds of Requests, yet the Requests in propaganda songs are unambiguous, concrete and specific, whereas in counterpropaganda songs, they are vague and abstract. Finally, Opines are utilised to a higher degree in counterpropaganda, which could be explained by the fact that Opines are inherently subjective, making them unsuitable for delivering the clear and factual messages required by propaganda.

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## 1 Introduction

In this article, we attempt to answer the following question: are there any linguistic differences between songs that we usually refer to as propaganda songs and songs that are considered counterpropaganda (or antipropaganda)? Specifically, we compare traditional and noncontroversial examples of propaganda music to rock and metal songs. Since both contemporary genres are often connected to the counterculture, they can serve as good examples of counterpropaganda songs. The motivation behind this endeavour arises from the following scenario: a relativist or cynic would be quick to claim that whether some piece of music is propaganda or counterpropaganda simply depends on the point of view and would end the discussion there, yet this does not seem like a sufficient answer – surely there must exist some differences in substance or form between propaganda and counterpropaganda? John Lennon’s “Imagine” serves to illustrate this point: Texas Senator Lee Tiraldo said that “The lines, Imagine there’s no countries, would incite unnecessary tension in the already volatile Israel–Palestine zone” and “the opening lines ‘Imagine there’s no heaven,’ are outrightly, impudently blasphemous” (Chakravarti 2013, as cited in Lim and Lemanski 2017), yet others describe it as “22 lines of graceful, plain-spoken faith in the power of a world, united in purpose, to repair and change itself” (Rolling Stone 2003), hailing it as the third best song of all time. We do not agree with the relativists that John Lennon’s “Imagine” is just as much propaganda as various war songs, so we conducted a linguistic analysis of three selected songs (one propaganda example and two counterpropaganda examples from rock and metal) using speech acts to find out whether we could articulate any substantive linguistic differences between propaganda and counterpropaganda.

## 2 Review of literature

Propaganda in music has been studied from various angles and fields, such as sociology and psychology (Denisoff 1966, 1968; Lim 2017); however, little research has been conducted on the linguistic characteristics of propaganda music, especially in the context of demarcating propaganda and counterpropaganda music.

In “European anti-propaganda policies” (Robin 2023), propaganda is defined as “a process which deliberately attempts, through persuasive techniques, to obtain from an audience (propagandee), before it can deliberate freely, the responses desired by the propagandists” (Henderson 1943, 83). The definition is, as it stands, broad and

can be applied, in the context of music, to various kinds of songs. Music is often emotional: e.g., it can manipulate how our brain processes information by tapping into our emotions (Whitcombe 2013); it can be used to affect our mood (Hennessy et al. 2021), and nostalgic music can serve to buffer individuals against sadness (Sedikides, Leunissen, and Wildschut 2022). It is no secret that songs can thus be used as propaganda for various goals. Propaganda songs, or “songs of persuasion”, as Denisoff calls them, can be understood as songs “designed to communicate social, political, economic, ideological concepts, or a total ideology, to the listener” (Denisoff 1966, 582).

On the other hand, the function of counterpropaganda is supposedly the opposite: to prepare answers to false propaganda in order to refute the disinformation of propaganda (Romerstein 2009, 137). The hard part is to formalise the difference between the two. Rock, alternative rock, and metal music are often associated with counterculture (Macan 1997; Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and Levine 2012; Karbownik 2022), opposing mainstream views and norms, so (relativistically) characterising such music as propaganda, but from the other side of the aisle, seems unfair at the very least. Whereas the differences in propaganda and counterpropaganda songs can be analysed from various perspectives, such as psychological or sociological, the main aim and motivation of this article is to determine whether we can articulate any meaningful differences between the two in terms of language.

### **3 Data and methodology**

For the purposes of this analysis, we have chosen one song that can be (uncontroversially) classified as a propaganda song and two (counterpropaganda) rock/metal songs that feature at least some mobilization or persuasion of the listener to do something, that call for general dissent, or aim to make the listener angry, indignant, etc. This is in line with Denisoff’s (1968) definition of two categories of propaganda/protest songs: “magnetic” protest songs, the aim of which is for the listener to join some movement or reinforce some commitment, and “rhetorical” protest songs, which focus on making the listener indignant or call for dissent.

For our paradigmatic example of a propaganda song, we have selected Cohan’s “Over There”, which has been described as the “greatest song of the First World War” (Morehouse 1943, 17) and is a great example of “pro-American music during the First World War, and how such themes as patriotism worked into the realms of

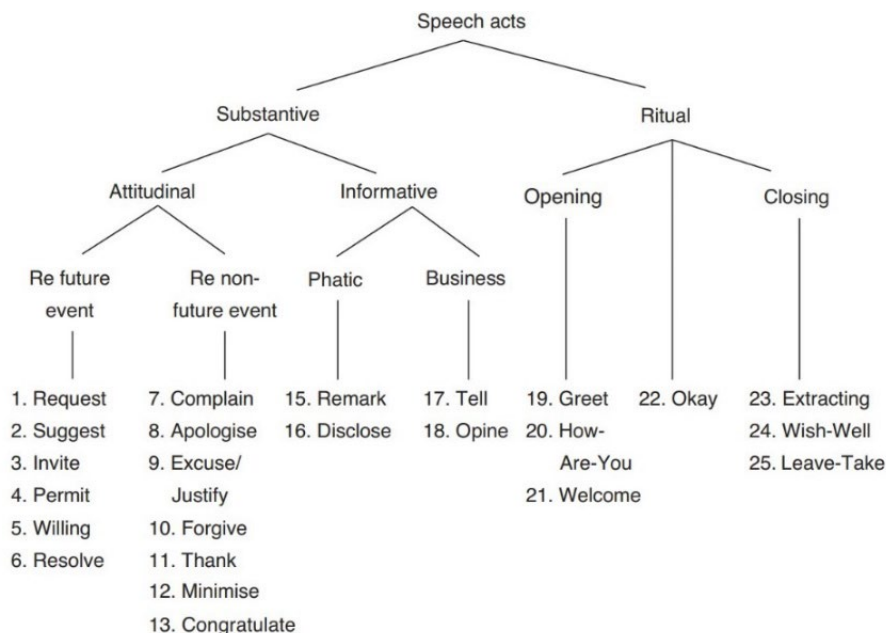
the everyday American life” (Goodwin 2015). The main message of the song is to convince the American public to join the war, heavily appealing to the patriotism of the American people in doing so.

For the first counterpropaganda song, we selected “Uprising” by the English rock band Muse, which was described by Matt Bellamy (writer and lead singer of the band) as a protest song against banks, expressing mistrust of bankers, politicians, and global corporations. The overall message of the song is straightforward: calling for people to “rise up and take the power back” from the corporations and put people back into control.

The second counterpropaganda song, titled “Amazonia”, comes from the French heavy/death/progressive metal band Gojira, and was written as a “vehicle for environmental activism” (Hartmann 2021), warning against the dangers of burning down the Amazon forest, as evident from the chorus line “The greatest miracle is burning to the ground”.

These songs were selected because they unequivocally deliver a specific message (pro-war, anti-corporation, and pro-environmental). At the same time, the length of all three songs is similar, which is convenient for our analysis. Naturally, the data cannot be considered representative; nevertheless, we believe this case study analysis does identify clear and interesting linguistic trends that distinguish propaganda from and counterpropaganda songs and which could be further explored/investigated by future research on a larger sample.

We will be using a speech act analysis for the purposes of this case study. Speech acts are verbal utterances, defined in “terms of content, the intention of the speaker, and the effect on the listener” (Colman 2015). The concept was first defined by Austin in the philosophy of language (Austin 1975) and further discussed and popularised by Searle (Searle 1969). Since then, the concept has served as a cornerstone for pragmatic analysis (Kádár et al. 2024; House and Kádár 2022), although with notable upgrades (Edmondson, House, and Kádár 2023). We will be using a finite speech act typology for our analysis (Edmondson and House 1981; Edmondson, House, and Kádár 2023), which contains 25 different categories of speech acts, as classified in the table below.



**Figure 1: Finite speech act typology, developed by Edmondson and House (1981)**

As we are analysing songs, we can expect that there will be very few examples of ritual speech acts, since there is no interlocutor present. Accordingly, we can instead expect a much higher number of speech acts such as Tell, Opine, Request, and Suggest. The data was annotated manually; however, given the specifics of the medium (lyrics), we could not annotate each line in the lyrics but had instead to identify the smallest meaningful unit – this means that sometimes a line could serve as a unit, whereas in other cases we had to combine 2 or 3 lines for a meaningful unit to emerge. For example, in the song “Amazonia”, we determined that the two lines, “The greatest miracle” and “Is burning to the ground”, constitute a single meaningful unit (The greatest miracle is burning to the ground).

## 4 Results and Discussion

The analysis consists of two segments: first we will present the speech act analysis of the selected songs, followed by findings regarding the overall differences and general trends between them. Afterwards, a more detailed analysis of individual speech act categories that appear in all datasets will be presented, namely Requests

and Opines, since these are the only two speech acts that appear in all songs in sufficient numbers for meaningful analysis.

### Speech act analysis of the three selected songs

**Table 1: George M. Cohan: “Over There” (1917)**

Lyrics	Speech Act
1. Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun	Request
2. Take it on the run, on the run, on the run	Request
3. Hear them calling you and me Every son of Liberty	Request
4. Hurry right away, no delay, go today	Request
5. Make your daddy glad to have had such a lad	Request
6. Tell your sweetheart not to pine	Request
7. To be proud her boy's in line	Request
8. Over there, over there Send the word, send the word over there That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming	Request
9. The drums rum-tumming everywhere	Tell
10. So prepare, say a prayer	Request
11. Send the word, send the word to beware	Request
12. We'll be over, we're coming over	Tell
13. And we won't come back till it's over, over there	Opine
14. Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun	Request
15. Johnny show the Hun you're a son of a gun	Request
16. Hoist the flag and let her fly	Request
17. Yankee doodle, do or die	Request
18. Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit	Request
19. Yankees to the ranks, from the towns and the tanks	Request
20. Make your mother proud of you	Request
21. And the old red, white and blue	Request
22. Over there, over there Send the word, send the word over That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming	Request
23. The drums rum-tumming everywhere	Tell
24. So prepare, say a prayer	Request
25. Send the word, send the word to beware	Request
26. We'll be over, we're coming over	Tell
27. And we won't come back till it's over, over there	Opine

**Table 2: Muse: “Uprising” (2009)**

Lyrics	Speech Act
1. Paranoia is in bloom	Opine
2. The PR transmissions will resume	Opine
3. They'll try to push drugs that keep us all dumbed down	Opine
4. And hope that we will never see the truth around	Opine
5. (So come on)	Request

Lyrics	Speech Act
6. Another promise, another scene	Tell
7. Another packaged lie to keep us trapped in greed	Opine
8. And all the green belts wrapped around our minds	Opine
9. And endless red tape to keep the truth confined	Opine
10. (So come on)	Request
11. They will not force us	Opine
12. They will stop degrading us	Opine
13. They will not control us	Opine
14. We will be victorious	Opine
15. (So come on)	Request
16. Interchanging mind control Come, let the revolution take its toll	Request
17. If you could flick the switch and open your third eye You'd see that we should never be afraid to die	Suggest
18. (So come on)	Request
19. Rise up and take the power back	Request
20. It's time the fat cats had a heart attack	Opine
21. You know that their time's coming to an end	Opine
22. We have to unify and watch our flag ascend	Request
23. (So come on)	Request
24. They will not force us	Opine
25. They will stop degrading us	Opine
26. They will not control us	Opine
27. We will be victorious	Opine
28. (So come on)	Request
29. They will not force us	Opine
30. They will stop degrading us	Opine
31. They will not control us	Opine
32. We will be victorious	Opine
33. (So come on)	Request

Table 3: Gojira: "Amazonia" (2021)

Lyrics	Speech Act
1. Incite a riot, put yourself in a trance	Request
2. You rotate the frame in a world you rely on	Opine
3. A scar, a line has been drawn in the sand	Opine
4. Behold the life, the boundaries fools will crush	Request
5. The greatest miracle Is burning to the ground	Opine
6. On to the next stage of the plan Mourn the witness of the wind	Request
7. A hand, full of thunder Will rise one last time	Opine
8. There's fire in the sky	Tell
9. You're in the Amazon	Tell
10. The greatest miracle Is burning to the ground	Opine
11. Godly Amazonia	Opine
12. Bloody Amazonia	Opine
13. Mighty Amazonia	Opine
14. Killing Amazonia	Opine
15. Godly Amazonia	Opine
16. Bloody Amazonia	Opine

Lyrics	Speech Act
17. Mighty Amazonia	Opine
18. Killing Amazonia	Opine
19. Godly Amazonia	Opine
20. Bloody Amazonia	Opine
21. Burn the land	Request
22. Learn the end	Request
23. Burn	Request
24. Another gold mine is unveiled	Tell

The first element we can emphasise is the general structure of songs by quantifying the number of recurring speech acts. Starting with our propaganda example, “Over There”, we note that, out of 25 types of speech acts available in our typology, only 3 speech acts are used in the lyrics. Request is the most dominant with 21 instances out of the 27 units, followed by 4 instances of the speech act Tell, and 2 instances of the speech act Opine. In the counterpropaganda examples, we note some commonalities regarding the number of speech acts used: similar to “Over There”, it is on the lower side, with only 4 speech act types appearing in the lyrics of “Uprising” and 2 speech act types in “Amazonia”. However, the distribution of speech acts is substantially different. Out of 33 units in total, “Uprising” has 21 instances of Opines, only 10 instances of Requests, 1 Tell, and 1 instance of the speech act Suggest. Gojira’s “Amazonia” follows a similar trend: out of the 24 total speech acts, it contains 15 instances of the speech act Opine, 6 instances of the speech act Request, and 3 instances of the speech act Tell. The table below summarises the recurrent speech acts in all three songs.

**Table 4: Speech acts in Cohan’s “Over There”, Muse’s “Uprising”, and Gojira’s “Amazonia”**

	Cohan’s “Over There”	Muse’s “Uprising”	Gojira’s “Amazonia”
Requests	21	10	6
Suggests	/	1	/
Tells	4	1	3
Opines	2	21	15
Total number of speech acts	27	33	24

The overall composition of the songs in terms of speech acts is telling, especially if we consider the main functions of propaganda songs. Denisoff writes that the essential factor in propaganda songs is that the song “persuades, both emotionally and intellectually, individuals into supporting or joining movements or goals of the writer and of the organisation for which the song is written” (Denisoff 1968, 230). From a linguistic point of view, Requests are paramount for this task: after all, how



could we persuade someone of anything without requesting that they either do something or think about something? One would thus expect that propaganda songs would contain a higher percentage of Requests relative to the total number of speech acts compared to counterpropaganda songs. Our analysis supports this: 78% of all speech acts in “Over There” are Requests, whereas in our counterpropaganda examples, Requests amount to only 30% (in “Uprising”) and 25% (in “Amazonia”) of total speech acts.

A further structural difference that we must examine is repetition. An important characteristic of propaganda songs is familiarity and ease of communication: propaganda songs must have a simplistic musical scale that facilitates the attention and participation of the audience (Greenway 1953),<sup>1</sup> and repetition is the perfect vehicle for that. Research suggests that repetition is correlated with familiarity in music (Witvliet and Vrana 2007; Pereira et al. 2011; Margulis 2013a), a recent fMRI study, for example, suggests “that familiarity – achieved through repetition – is a critical component of emotional engagement with music” (Margulis 2013b).

In light of this, one would expect that if counterpropaganda songs differed from propaganda songs, we could observe differences in the degree of repetitiveness. Looking at the lyrics in our propaganda song, we note that they are simple and repetitive, which fits the model of propaganda (and protest) songs: “/.../ it is often the seemingly simplest songs that evoke the strongest emotions” (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 43). When it comes to repetition in “Over There”, we can identify 5 distinct segments that are repeated throughout the song: one Request that appears in lines 1 and 14 (“Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun”), another Request that is repeated in line 8 and 22 (“Over there, over there Send the word, send the word over there That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming”), a Tell repeated in line 9 and 23 (“The drums rum-tumming everywhere”), a pair of Requests repeated in lines 10 and 11 and 24 and 25 (“So prepare, say a prayer” and “Send the word, send the word to beware”), and a Tell and Opine pair repeated in line 12 and 13 and 26 and 27 (“We’ll be over, we’re coming over” and “And we won’t

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<sup>1</sup> The melody, rhythm, instrument variety, etc., also contribute to the perceived simplicity or complexity of the song. There are probably massive differences between the songs in question in these aspects that could also be considered as characteristics for differentiating between propaganda and counterpropaganda songs; however, this chapter focuses exclusively on the linguistic elements, so an in-depth analysis of these elements falls outside the scope of this chapter (and the author’s expertise).

come back till it's over, over there"). Overall, there are 4 repeated Requests, 2 Tells, and 1 Opine.

On the other hand, the selected counterpropaganda songs are much less repetitive. Muse's "Uprising" has only two segments that are repeated throughout the song, 1 Request ("So come on"), which is repeated in lines 5, 10, 15, 18, 23, 28, and 33, and a segment of Opines that is repeated in lines 11–14, 24–27, and 29–32 ("They will not force us They will stop degrading us They will not control us We will be victorious"). Overall, we have 1 repeated Request and 4 repeated Opines. Gojira's "Amazonia" follows a similar trend, as we can again only detect two segments that are repeated throughout the song, both of which consist of Opines: line 5 is repeated in line 10 ("The greatest miracle Is burning to the ground") and Opines from lines 11–14 ("Godly Amazonia Bloody Amazonia Mighty Amazonia Killing Amazonia") are repeated immediately in lines 15–18 and 19–20 (only the first 2 Opines). Overall, Gojira's "Amazonia" has 5 distinct repetitions, all of which are Opines.

The analysis thus shows that the selected counterpropaganda songs are less repetitive – both "Uprising" and "Amazonia" have only 2 repeated segments compared to 5 repeated elements in "Over There", but the examples also differ in terms of what is being repeated. In "Over There", there are 4 repeated Requests (so, 8 speech acts out of 27 in total are repetitions of Requests), whereas there is only one repeated Request in both counterpropaganda songs combined. Furthermore, the Requests in "Over There" are much more direct and unambiguous ("Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun") compared to a relatively ambiguous Request in "Uprising" ("So come on"). Considering that simplicity has been identified as a characteristic of propaganda music, even when it comes to the lyrics—"Simpler texts had an advantage over complicated lyrics, because they were easier to remember ..." (Oettinger 2017, 19), this substantiates the simple/complex dichotomy that seems to shape the language of propaganda and counterpropaganda in our analysis.

## Requests

This brings us to the most prevalent speech act in the analysis, Requests. In "Over There", 78%; in "Uprising", 30%; and in "Amazonia", 25% of total speech acts are Requests. This is not surprising since Requests are among the most common speech acts in general: after all, much of our communication serves to retrieve some kind of information or aims at requesting someone to do something. In the chosen

typology of speech acts, we differentiate between Requests for Non-verbal Goods and Services and Requests for Verbal Goods and Services. The latter are requests for time, location, or any other information (questions, colloquially), while the former are requests for the hearer to do something, e.g. making a cup of coffee, proofreading an article, etc. Unsurprisingly, considering that there are usually no verbal exchanges between the singer and the listener (in the direction of the listener to the singer), all Requests in all three songs are requests for Non-verbal Goods. From this point of view, there are no major differences between the songs.

Another aspect of Requests that can be analysed is the degree of directness or indirectness. The examples of Requests in all songs are either direct or leaning toward direct Requests – they are hearer-oriented and explicit, e.g.: “Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit” (“Over There”, line 18), “So prepare, say a prayer” (“Over There”, line 24), “Interchanging mind control Come, let the revolution take its toll” (“Uprising”, line 16), and “Incite a riot, put yourself in a trance” (“Amazonia”, line 1). However, the songs differ in the degree of ambiguity of Requests.

Most of the Requests in “Over There” request specific, simple, and concrete actions: “Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun” – get a gun; “Tell your sweetheart not to pine” – tell your partner not to dwell in sadness; “Over there, over there Send the word, send the word over there That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming” – tell everyone that the Yanks are coming, etc. On the other hand, the Requests in “Uprising” and “Amazonia” are often ambiguous and much more abstract. In “Uprising”, the most *unambiguous* Request is “We have to unify and watch our flag ascend”, which still remains fairly abstract: How do we unify? What specific action should we take? Which flag? Compared to grabbing a gun, telling your partner not to be sad, praying, packing, and joining the army, the Request in “Uprising” requires at least some further deliberation. The same can be said for the most repeated Request in “Uprising”, “So come on”, which, again, is fairly abstract: “come on” and do what? The final Request in “Uprising”, “Interchanging mind control Come, let the revolution take its toll”, is also passive – *let* the revolution do its thing – compared to exclusively active Requests in “Over There”.

The Requests in “Amazonia” are even less straightforward and require a further degree of interpretation. The first Request, “Incite a riot, put yourself in a trance”, might be the most straightforward: the listener should enter a trance-like state and

start/join some sort of riot/rebellion, while the second Request, “Behold the life, the boundaries fools will crush,” functions more as an appeal to recognise the life that humans (fools) are destroying (boundaries they are crushing): again, a much more passive Request that encourages reflection on the listener’s part, something that is completely absent in the case of “Over There”. The third Request, “On to the next stage of the plan Mourn the witness of the wind”, is probably the most ambiguous and the least straightforward: it could be interpreted as inviting the listener to mourn the damage done to the Amazon, while at the same time inviting them to the next stage – rebellion/riot mentioned in the first Request. The final three Requests in “Amazonia” (“Burn the land”, “Learn the end”, “Burn”) are also noteworthy, as they are heavily ironic and do not address the immediate listener, but (the rest of) humanity: keep on burning the forests (in the name of profit, as evidenced by line 24, “Another gold mine is unveiled”) and you will meet the consequences (of which the listener and singer are already aware).

To sum up, both propaganda and counterpropaganda examples feature the same kinds of Requests, namely, Requests for Non-verbal Goods and Services, which reflects the fact that musical works usually do not request verbal responses from the listeners. Furthermore, both use fairly direct forms of Request, since they are hearer-oriented and explicit. However, we can identify some linguistic differences between the two. The first is ambiguity: in our dataset, Requests in the propaganda song example are extremely unambiguous, whereas counterpropaganda Requests are not. The second potential difference is the aspect of concreteness/abstraction: Requests in our propaganda example are concrete and specific, whereas Requests in these counterpropaganda examples are much more abstract and open to interpretation (in the sense that there is no specific action the hearer is supposed to perform, and they must first interpret the Request). We could also claim that counterpropaganda Requests invite hearers both to contemplation and interpretation of the Requests, which are cognitively more demanding tasks that are not present in propaganda Requests in our dataset. This again substantiates the idea that there could be a linguistic difference between propaganda and counterpropaganda music in terms of simplicity/complexity: listeners to counterpropaganda examples are expected to engage in complex cognitive tasks (contemplation, interpretation, recognising irony, etc.), whereas hearers of the propaganda example are only expected to follow simple, concrete, and specific Requests.

## Opines

Opines are the only other category of speech acts that was heavily prevalent in our dataset: 64% of total speech acts in “Uprising” and 63% of total speech acts in “Amazonia” are Opines, whereas in “Over There”, only 7% of all speech acts are Opines, as evident in Table 5.

**Table 5: Percentage of Opines in our dataset**

	Cohan’s “Over There”	Muse’s “Uprising”	Gojira’s “Amazonia”
Opines	2	21	15
Total number of speech acts	27	33	24
Percentage of Opines	7%	64%	63%

The difference in the usage of Opines in the dataset is telling, yet we believe it can be explained in the context of the relation between objectivity and propaganda. Opines are, by definition, subjective and cannot be used as vehicles for disseminating facts (which is the role of Tells). If propaganda aims at unequivocal delivery of the message, it would, therefore, make sense not to utilise Opines. Because Opines are subjective, they require interpretation and reflection: once we recognise that something is an Opine, we are invited to rationally deliberate whether the Opine in question is true or false. Propaganda often presents itself as objective when it is actually propagating subjective opinions: “If unbalanced opinions are presented as if they are facts, they act as propaganda or persuasion” (“Subjective vs. Objective,” n.d.). Considering that most speech acts in these counterpropaganda examples are Opines (64% and 63% in “Uprising” and “Amazonia, respectively), whereas only a few cases of Opines can be found in the propaganda example (7% in “Over There”), this fact could be considered as an additional linguistic difference between the two. The significant presence of Opines in the counterpropaganda examples could be considered an additional indicator that we are not dealing with propaganda: from a linguistic point of view, the songs mostly use Opines to express their message, which requires both interpretation and deliberation – cognitive tasks that propaganda does not typically encourage. This also explains why “Over There” does not employ Opines: as a propaganda piece, the delivered message should be presented as clear and unambiguous, which means that there is no place left for the subjectivity and ambiguity that Opines bring to the table.

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to identify linguistic differences between propaganda and counterpropaganda in music by analysing three songs: a World War I propaganda song (“Over There” by George M. Cohan), a rock song (“Uprising” by Muse), and a metal song focused on environmental activism (“Amazonia” by Gojira). The analysis was done using finite speech act typology as developed by Edmondson and House (1981) and W. J. Edmondson, House, and Kádár (2023).

The analysis revealed that the propaganda and counterpropaganda songs differ in several respects when it comes to language. Considering that the aim of propaganda is often to encourage joining of a movement or cause, one would expect there to be a high degree of Requests present in propaganda music, a phenomenon which was collaborated by our analysis: 78% of all speech acts in “Over There” are Requests, whereas in our counterpropaganda examples, Requests amount to only 30% (in “Uprising”) and 25% (in “Amazonia”) of total speech acts.

Furthermore, propaganda is usually designed to be familiar, which can be achieved by repetition: propaganda music would be expected to use repetition to a higher degree compared to counterpropaganda. Our analysis shows that not only are selected counterpropaganda songs much less repetitive, but the examples also differ in terms of what is being repeated – repetitions in the propaganda example are almost exclusively Requests, whereas repetitions in the counterpropaganda examples are mostly Opines.

The analysis revealed a further difference between propaganda and counterpropaganda songs in terms of Requests. Propaganda and counterpropaganda songs feature the same kinds of Requests, namely, Requests for Non-verbal Goods and Services, and (being hearer-oriented and explicit) use fairly direct forms of Request. However, the Requests in our propaganda song are unambiguous and specific, whereas counterpropaganda songs are much vaguer and more abstract. This further supports the notion that there may be linguistic differences between propaganda and counterpropaganda music in terms of simplicity and complexity. Listeners of counterpropaganda songs are required to engage in more complex cognitive processes, such as reflection and interpretation (and recognition of irony), while listeners of propaganda songs are primarily expected to respond to straightforward, clear, and specific requests.

Finally, the difference in the use of Opines highlights an additional distinction between propaganda and counterpropaganda. Opines are inherently subjective, making them unsuitable for delivering clear, factual messages, which is the purpose of propaganda. Since propaganda seeks to present its message as objective and unambiguous, it avoids using Opines, to prevent the need for reflection or deliberation. Our analysis supports this, as only 7% of all speech acts in “Over There” are Opines. In contrast, counterpropaganda frequently employs Opines to invite listeners to think critically and interpret the message, indicating a further linguistic difference between the two. This is corroborated by our analysis, as 64% of the total speech acts in “Uprising” and 63% of speech acts in “Amazonia” are Opines.

Future research should expand on this analysis by examining a larger dataset to confirm these linguistic trends and explore additional differences between propaganda and counterpropaganda music.

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