

## THE HIDDEN MEANING OF MANIPULATIVE LANGUAGE IN *LOVE BOMBING*: A STUDY OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN NARCISSISTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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### ABSTRACT

Love bombing is a dangerous phenomenon in relationships, where a narcissistic perpetrator uses language to manipulate their victim. This study aims to uncover the hidden meanings behind Jake's love bombing language, revealing the manipulative intent behind his words. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed to analyze the language of love bombing within a narcissistic relationship. The data consists of 50 utterances from the short movie *Love Bomb*, spoken by Jake, the narcissistic character, towards Skye as his victim. Data were collected through observation, selecting utterances with significant manipulative intent from the official YouTube channel *@integratebristol*. In the analysis, Jake's utterances are categorized into two stages of narcissistic abuse based on Grossi: idealization (18 utterances) and devaluation (32 utterances). In the idealization stage, he uses flattering language to create an illusion of love and emotional connection with Skye. As the relationship shifts to devaluation, his language becomes manipulative, controlling, and aggressive, aimed at diminishing Skye's self-esteem and asserting dominance. Using Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, Jake's utterances are classified into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The findings show that during the idealization stage, Jake's utterances consist of assertives (38.89%), directives (16.67%), commissives (0%), expressives (44.44%), and declarations (0%). In the devaluation stage, the distribution shifts to assertives (31.25%), directives (43.75%), commissives (18.75%), expressives (6.25%), and declarations (0%). Further analysis using Austin's speech act theory reveals that Jake's locutionary acts often differ from his literal meaning, while his perlocutionary effects shape Skye's emotions and decisions. The study concludes that love bombing conceals strategic manipulation through exaggerated praise, conditional affection, and guilt-inducing phrases. This demonstrates how manipulative language in love bombing enables the perpetrator to maintain power and control in relationships.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In modern times, manipulation strategies in narcissistic relationships, commonly known as *love bombing*, have gained significant attention. Love bombing is a manipulation tactic used to seduce and maintain control over someone in a relationship by overwhelming them with excessive attention, praise, and grand gestures (Beri, 2024). This strategy typically emerges

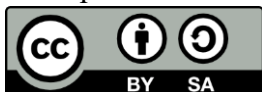


early in a relationship, fostering emotional dependence and enhancing the narcissist's self-image (Strutzenberg et al., 2017). Love bombers frequently use sweet and romantic words to create the illusion of deep affection, making their partners emotionally entangled and unaware that the true intention is to exploit their emotions, insecurities, and vulnerabilities for personal gain, rather than genuine adoration (Ganesan, 2024). Praise from narcissists may feel pleasant at first, but it can quickly become excessive and exhausting (Strutzenberget al., 2017). eventually fading away (Campbell & Foster, 2002). This phenomenon underscores that love bombing is not an expression of affection but a calculated form of manipulation.

Manipulation in love bombing is orchestrated by narcissistic individuals through deceptive expressions of affection and false assurances. As Asti, R.D. (2023) notes, narcissists are key perpetrators of love bombing, using it to instill emotional dependence in their victims. In romantic relationships, narcissistic perpetrators prioritize self-gratification over genuine care, employing subtle deception through excessive flattery, persuasive speech, and calculated charm (King, 2011; Azureen & Kamaluddin, 2021). Through idealization and calculated verbal tactics, love bombing strengthens the manipulator's control while diminishing the victim's autonomy. This control is reinforced through distinct patterns of manipulative language, including exaggerated praise to deepen dependency, conditional affection to impose implicit expectations, and guilt-inducing phrases to shift responsibility onto the victim. These speech patterns are not incidental but deliberately structured to blur boundaries, regulate emotions, and reinforce power imbalances in the relationship. Given that language plays a fundamental role in shaping perceptions, recognizing these linguistic strategies is essential to understanding how love bombing operates as a tool of coercion.

Language, in essence, is the most effective tool for communicating thoughts and feelings to others (Apriyanto, 2020; Fedorenko et al., 2024; Rabiah, 2012). In love bombing, narcissists exploit language as a means of manipulation to disguise their hidden intentions. Manipulation, as a linguistic strategy, involves deceptive intent and subtle influence, making it difficult to distinguish from genuine communication (Asya, 2013). This is evident in love bombing, where the listener remains unaware of the speaker's underlying motives, mistaking calculated expressions for authentic affection. For instance, a love bomber might say, "*I love you so much. I've never loved anyone this deeply before. I want to marry you and make you completely mine.*". Such statements create an emotional bond, making the victim feel valued and secure, without realizing the victims are being drawn into the manipulator's control. Consequently, victims struggle to differentiate between manipulation and genuine love, making it crucial to analyze how language functions in this context.

Beyond real-life cases, love bombing has also been represented in various media, influencing public perception. One notable example is the short film *Love Bomb - drama on coercive control and toxic relationships* (2022). The film, which has a runtime of 11:30 minutes, was uploaded on YouTube two years ago and has garnered 634K views. The storyline follows



a young woman named Skye, played by Priya Kaur, who aspires to study in Brighton. However, she encounters Jake, a narcissist portrayed by Harry Wales, who exerts control and dominance over their relationship. This film was selected for analysis due to its explicit portrayal of love bombing, particularly through dialogue that reflects manipulative speech patterns commonly found in real-life narcissistic relationships. Unlike other fictional representations that may romanticize or misrepresent toxic dynamics, *Love Bomb* presents a realistic depiction of coercive control, making it a valuable resource for linguistic analysis. Due to its relevance to real-life experiences, the film serves as a suitable data source for linguistic analysis.

Several studies have examined love bombing, particularly its link to narcissistic tendencies. Strutzenberg et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and narcissism in connection to love-bombing behaviors. Beri (2024a) explored love bombing and its role in emotional abuse within narcissistic relationships among young adults. Batool et al. (2022) analyzed love bombing as a tactic used to control female partners in manipulative romantic relationships, while Ganesan (2024) examined the relationship between love bombing, the dark triad, and adult attachment styles among dating app users. However, these studies primarily focus on participants' experiences rather than the specific linguistic strategies used in love bombing. While previous research on manipulative language exists, such as Mialkovska et al. (2023) on media discourse and Brown & Molette (2024) on political group pages, no study has specifically analyzed how manipulative language operates in love bombing within romantic relationships. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the linguistic features of love bombing utterances to reveal how language is strategically used to manipulate emotions and power dynamics in narcissistic relationships. This research offers novelty by uncovering the hidden meanings behind love bombing language, helping individuals distinguish genuine from deceptive expressions in relationships, and raising awareness of its harmful impact.

This research examines the manipulative language in *Love Bomb*, focusing on three main objectives: (1) to examine the changes in the stages of love bombing based on Jake's utterances to Skye, (2) to classify Jake's manipulative utterances using illocutionary acts, and (3) to analyze the difference between the hidden meaning of these utterances and their locutionary act, as well as how this distinction, along with the resulting perlocutionary act, affects interaction dynamics. To achieve the first objective, Richard Grossi's (2021) theory on love bombing stages in the narcissistic abuse cycle is used to track shifts in manipulative language. The second objective applies John Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts to categorize Jake's utterances. The third objective incorporates Austin's (1962) speech act theory to analyze locutionary and perlocutionary acts, identifying how manipulation operates beyond explicit meanings. Searle's taxonomy is particularly relevant as it offers a structured framework for analyzing manipulative speech that contains implicit meaning, making it more suitable than Austin's broader classification of illocutionary acts. By integrating these theoretical



frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how language is strategically used in narcissistic relationships, highlighting the significance of speech acts in emotional manipulation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

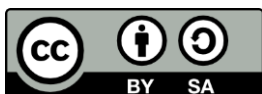
### 2.1 Love Bombing

According to Richard Grossi (2021) on his personal website, [www.oio24.com](http://www.oio24.com), love bombing consists of four stages in what is known as The Narcissist Abuse Cycle. The first stage is idealization, where the perpetrator creates an illusion of perfection by overwhelming the victim with narcissistic supply, such as love, empathy, attention, and admiration (Grossi, 2021, pp. 5-6). Warning signs in this stage include (1) grooming, where the perpetrator studies the victim's mindset, (2) mirroring, where the perpetrator aligns with the victim's preferences, (3) sharing past experiences, (4) presenting the current relationship as a remedy for past failures, (5) making the victim the center of attention, (6) expressing "*I love you*", and (7) discussing a future together to secure the victim's trust (Grossi, 2021, p. 7). The second stage is devaluation, where the situation takes a harmful turn. At this stage, the perpetrator engages in manipulation and gaslighting to weaken the victim's mental and emotional state (Grossi, 2021, pp. 9-10). Previous expressions of love and admiration are replaced with demeaning tactics such as criticism, insults, rejection, or the silent treatment. The perpetrator also displays narcissistic rage, gradually eroding the victim's self-esteem while constantly pointing out their flaws to make them submit (Grossi, 2021, pp. 5-9). The third stage is discarding, in which the perpetrator abruptly ends the relationship or emotionally withdraws from the victim (Grossi, 2021, p. 13). Common signs include emotional detachment, complete indifference to the victim's needs, and a refusal to provide closure (Grossi, 2021, p. 5). The final stage is hoovering, where the perpetrator attempts to re-establish contact after a period of separation (Grossi, 2021, p. 15). This often draws the victim back into the cycle of abuse, restarting the pattern of love bombing and devaluation (Grossi, 2021, p. 15).

### 2.2 Speech Acts

Speech acts are actions performed through language, where their success depends on the speaker's intention and the listener's recognition of that intention within a specific context (Sadock in Horn & Ward, 2006). Speech act theory, a branch of pragmatics, was first developed by J. L. Austin in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin argued that every utterance carries both descriptive and performative aspects, meaning that saying something also means doing something (Sadock in Horn & Ward, 2006, p. 54). In the Speech Act theory by Austin (1962), he distinguishes speech acts into three main categories:

- a. Locutionary acts, which refer to the actual utterances or literal meaning.
- b. Illocutionary acts, which focus on the intended purpose behind those utterances.



- c. Perlocutionary acts, which pertain to the effects those utterances have on the listener's thoughts, feelings, or actions.

In this study, Austin's (1962) speech act theory serves as a supporting framework for analyzing the illocutionary acts in Jake's utterances. This theory is essential because every illocutionary act involves a locutionary act, and some illocutionary acts, which serve a performative function, also produce perlocutionary effects. As Mabaquiao (2018) explains, illocutionary acts cannot be performed without first executing locutionary acts. Furthermore, since illocutionary acts often carry implicit meanings, perlocutionary acts reveal how these utterances affect the listener. However, this study specifically focuses on analyzing the illocutionary acts in Jake's utterances as a form of manipulative language within the relationship, emphasizing the implicit meanings embedded in his words.

### **2.3 Illocutionary Acts**

The theory of Illocutionary Acts proposed by Searle in 1979, known as the taxonomy of illocutionary acts, developed from the theory introduced by Austin in 1962, which is outlined in his book *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Searle, 1979). Illocutionary acts are speech acts that reflect a speaker's intentions and the function of their utterance. Searle refined Austin's classification, which included verdictive, expletive, exertive, behavitive, and commissive, into five main categories: assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations. The classification of illocutionary acts is based on 12 significant dimensions that differentiate them that include differences in illocutionary point, direction of fit, psychological state, force, speaker and hearer status, interest relation, discourse relation, propositional content, required speech acts, extra-linguistic institutions, performative use, and style of performance, all of which help distinguish and categorize various types of speech acts (Searle, 1979, pp. 2-8). The three main dimensions are illocutionary point, direction of fit, and sincerity condition, which form the core of the taxonomy, while other dimensions also require attention (Searle, 1979, p. 5)

The following are the definitions and key points to consider in Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts (1979):

- a. Assertives, commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, with a direction of fit from words-to-world and a psychological state of belief. Examples include stating, boasting, and complaining, all of which can be assessed as true or false.
- b. Directives, attempt to get the hearer to perform an action or to do something, with a direction of fit from world-to-words and a sincerity condition of desire. Examples range from requesting and ordering to advising and inviting.
- c. Commissives, commit the speaker to a future action, also with a world-to-words direction of fit and an intention-based sincerity condition; examples include promising, vowing, and offering.





- d. Expressives, convey the speaker's psychological state about a situation, requiring no direction of fit since the truth is presupposed. Examples include thanking, congratulating, and apologizing.
- e. Declarations, bring about a change in the state of affairs through the act of speaking itself, combining both words-to-world and world-to-words directions of fit. Examples include declaring war, appointing, firing, and naming, which rely on institutional authority.

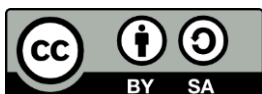
Identifying illocutionary acts can be challenging, as their interpretation depends on the speaker, the hearer, and the context in which they occur (Juwita & Inayah, 2021). Based on Searle's classifications, the speech patterns exhibited by Jake in the short movie align with the characteristics of illocutionary acts. This study aims to categorize Jake's utterances according to these five types to identify manipulative communication patterns that reflect his narcissistic tendencies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the language of love bombing as depicted in the manipulative dialogues of the short movie *Love Bomb - drama on coercive control and toxic relationships*. The data consists of 50 manipulative utterances delivered by Jake, the narcissistic perpetrator, which impact Skye, his victim. Jake's utterances were selected based on their linguistic features that indicate emotional manipulation, such as exaggerated praise, conditional affection, and guilt-inducing expressions. Data collection was carried out through systematic observation, guided by predefined linguistic criteria associated with manipulative speech, including speech act functions and implicit meaning structures. The data source is the short movie uploaded by the official YouTube account @integratebristol.

The data analysis was conducted in several systematic stages to ensure a thorough examination of the manipulative language in the short movie. First, the entire short movie was watched multiple times to observe all utterances in every scene and create a transcript aligned with the movie's timeline. Second, the transcript was categorized based on the stages of love bombing as outlined by Grossi (2021). Third, Jake's utterances directed toward Skye were analyzed and classified using Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts. Fourth, additional analysis was conducted by applying Austin's (1962) concepts of locutionary and perlocutionary acts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the utterances and their manipulative intent. Finally, the findings were interpreted within the broader context of narcissistic relationship dynamics, connecting the stages of love bombing to the specific linguistic strategies employed by Jake to reinforce emotional manipulation.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

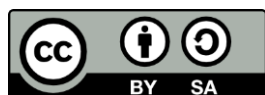


The analysis reveals that Jake's utterances contain hidden meanings that have a significant impact on Skye, demonstrating a pattern of manipulative communication that aligns with narcissistic tendencies. These utterances are classified into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, based on their illocutionary act types. This classification highlights the implicit purposes behind Jake's language, illustrating his manipulative intent. The analysis also incorporates the stages of narcissistic abuse as outlined by Grossi (2021), revealing Jake's utterances fall into two stages of idealization and devaluation. The idealization stage consists of 18 utterances, found in the scenes of the first meeting, first chat, and first date. Meanwhile, the devaluation stage consists of 32 utterances, occurring in scenes that involve a debate about the phone, a conflict over a photo upload on social media, a confrontation about another man's gaze, and an argument about Skye's departure to Brighton. Throughout these stages, the utterances exhibit a shift in tone and intent, from emotionally charged expressions aimed at gaining trust in the idealization phase, to coercive and controlling language in the devaluation phase. The results show how Jake uses manipulative language to maintain power and control, subtly manipulating Skye's emotions and perceptions to serve his agenda. The results of this classification analysis are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Illocutionary Acts of Manipulative Utterances in Different Stages

Stages	Classification of Illocutionary Acts (1979)	Number of Utterances	Percentage
Idealization	Assertives	7	38.89%
	Directives	3	16.67%
	Commissives	0	0%
	Expressives	8	44.44%
	Declarations	0	0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>
Devaluation	Assertives	10	31.25%
	Directives	14	43.75%
	Commissives	6	18.75%
	Expressives	2	6.25%
	Declarations	0	0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>

The classification of Jake's utterances based on Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts reveals distinct patterns across the idealization and devaluation stages,



reflecting his manipulative strategies throughout the relationship. In the idealization stage, 38.89% of his utterances are assertives, shaping Skye's perceptions by presenting selective truths or exaggerated claims to build trust. The proportion decreases to 31.25% in the devaluation stage, suggesting that once trust is established, Jake relies less on persuasion and more on direct control. Directives are relatively low in idealization (16.67%) but rise sharply in devaluation (43.75%), indicating that in the early stage, Jake does not exert much direct influence over Skye's actions but later escalates to issuing demands and controlling behaviors. Commissive, absent in idealization (0%), appear only in devaluation (18.75%), reflecting Jake's pattern of making promises after conflicts, often as empty reassurances following emotional outbursts. This aligns with the deceptive nature of narcissistic manipulation, where commitments emerge only when control is threatened. Expressives, which make up 44.44% of utterances in the idealization stage, significantly drop to just 6.25% in devaluation. This sharp decline highlights the typical love bombing pattern, where the abuser initially showers the victim with excessive affection before withdrawing emotional warmth as a means of control. Declarations are entirely absent (0% in both stages), signifying that Jake never makes definitive statements that transform the nature of the relationship, further emphasizing the instability and unpredictability of his manipulation. These findings highlight how Jake's speech acts align with the broader patterns of narcissistic abuse, demonstrating that his manipulative language evolves over time to sustain dominance and emotional control. The stark contrast between the stages underscores the dangerous nature of narcissistic individuals in relationships, whose behaviors can deeply impact their partners' emotional well-being and sense of reality.

#### 4.1 Assertives

In the classification of assertives, Jake's utterances can be divided into two distinct phases: the idealization or love bombing stage, and the subsequent devaluation stage. In the idealization phase, Jake uses assertive statements to express his views about Skye in a sweet and flattering manner. These utterances carry a hidden motive which to capture Skye's attention and garner a positive impression, effectively masking his manipulative tactics. In the devaluation phase, however, Jake shifts to more assertive yet harsh language, boldly expressing critical or confrontational views. This is often followed by softer, sweeter statements immediately after moments of anger. The hidden intent in this pattern is to regulate Skye's emotions, ensuring she remains emotionally invested and under Jake's control. This strategic use of assertives enables him to subtly influence Skye's emotions and actions, as seen in the following dialogue:

Table 2. Jake's assertives utterances

	Utterances	Contexts	Times
Skye:	Making plans, we're going uni in Brighton	<b>[Stage 1]</b> The first meeting between Jake and Skye, where they discuss Skye's plans to go to	6:57
Jake:	<b>Brighton, nice.</b> Can I come too?		
Skye:	Do you like the sea?		
Jake:	...yeah, why?		





Skye:	well, we're gonna' be on the beach all day	college in Brighton, and Jake	
Jake:	<b>That's where I wanna be then</b> (2)	wants to join her.	
Jake:	<b>Brighton was a stupid idea</b> (3)	<b>[Stage 2]</b> This scene delves further into the discussion about Skye's plans to go to Brighton for college.	9:26

In the context of Jake's utterances (1) and (2), these lines exemplify the idealization stage. Jake uses the mirroring strategy to align his preferences with Skye's, a tactic often employed by narcissists to attract attention, as explained by Grossi (2021, p.7). His carefully crafted responses reveal an intention to make Skye feel understood and appreciated during their initial interaction. In the first utterance, the locutionary act is to convey a simple remark that Brighton is a pleasant place, followed by a question about joining Skye. Meanwhile, the second statement explicitly communicates his desire to be at the beach. The illocutionary act is assertive, as Jake not only describes Brighton positively but also aims to leave a favorable impression by affirming the attractiveness of Skye's chosen university city. The illocutionary act is classified as assertive because Jake is not merely describing Brighton but is also attempting to make a positive impression on Skye by affirming the attractiveness of her chosen university city. The illocutionary point is to validate Brighton as an appealing destination, which serves as a bridge to his later request to join her. The direction of fit is word-to-world, as Jake's statement aligns with the reality Skye envisions for herself, positioning Brighton as a desirable location. His sincerity condition suggests that while he genuinely acknowledges Brighton's appeal. The second utterance is also assertive, with the illocutionary point being to affirm Skye's plans and reinforce shared enthusiasm for Brighton, portraying Jake as someone aligned with her interests. Jake's direction of fit is word-to-world, with his words aligning with the reality he believes Skye envisions, which is a mutual affection for Brighton and the beach. The sincerity condition suggests that while Jake's desire to be at the beach may be genuine, it also serves a broader purpose of establishing rapport and emotionally engaging Skye. The perlocutionary effect of these statements is evident in Skye's reaction in the film. She smiles, feeling validated and flattered that her choice of Brighton is admired by Jake. Her response even leads her to initiate further conversation, suggesting that Jake's remarks have successfully captivated her attention. These utterances are not simply reflections of Jake's personal preferences but are deliberate attempts to attract Skye's interest.

The discussion of Skye's plan to study in Brighton at the end of the scene shifts, leading to statement (3), which is categorized into the devaluation phase, marked by a significant change from Jake's earlier positive remarks about Brighton. This statement clearly illustrates devaluation as explained in Grossi (2021), where Jake actively undermines Skye's decision by criticizing her choice as something foolish. Even worse, at this stage, the victim will adapt to the narcissist's crazy demands (Grossi, 2021, p. 13). The locutionary act is a statement of



negativity, where Jake labels Skye's plan as "*stupid*." The illocutionary act is assertive, with the purpose of invalidating Skye's decision and replace it with his own judgment. Jake's direction of fit aligns with word-to-world, presenting his belief that Brighton is a "*stupid*" choice as the truth, implicitly attempting to influence Skye's perspective. As for the sincerity condition, it suggests Jake genuinely believes his judgment, although his real intention appears to be controlling Skye's decisions rather than offering a sincere critique. The utterance creates a perlocutionary effect on Skye, likely evoking feelings of doubt, confusion, or self-questioning regarding her choice. In fact, the severity of this effect can be seen in the movie, where Jake's remark successfully influences Skye to abandon her plan to study in Brighton, instead opting to accompany her friend. The hidden meaning behind this statement is that Jake is using criticism as a means of asserting dominance. This manipulation tactic contrasts sharply with his earlier behavior, when he mirrored Skye's interests and expressed enthusiasm for her plans. The shift from positive reinforcement to harsh criticism illustrates the narcissistic tactic of using affection to build trust, then diminishing and controlling when power is threatened, highlighting the manipulative nature of the devaluation stage.

#### 4.2 Directives

Jake's use of directives evolves through two phases: idealization and devaluation. In the idealization phase, his requests are subtle and gentle, making it hard to recognize his true intent to control Skye's actions. However, in the devaluation phase, his directives become harsh and domineering, imposing restrictions on Skye's life, including isolating her socially and controlling her choices. Despite the change in tone, Jake's ultimate goal remains the same: to dominate and ensure Skye's submission to his will. Directives consistently appear throughout the story, from Jake and Skye's first interaction to the conclusion, as shown in the following dialogue:

Table 3. Jake's directives utterances

Utterances		Contexts	Times
Skye:	Making plans, we're going uni in Brighton	<b>[Stage 1]</b> The first meeting between Jake and Skye, where they discuss Skye's plans to go to college in Brighton, and Jake wants to join her.	1:28
Jake:	Brighton, nice. <b>Can I come too?</b> (4)		
Jake:	<b>So, when were you gonna' tell me?</b> (5)	<b>[Stage 2]</b> After dropping Skye off and as she had already gotten out of the car, Jake suddenly gets angry and approaches Skye to yell at her, thinking she was flirting with another man.	8:12
Skye:	about what?		
Jake:	Brighton.		
Skye:	I thought you knew.		
Jake:	Answer the question.		



Similar to utterances (1) and (2), where the context is the beginning of their meeting, utterance (4) also falls under the idealization stage as a continuation of Jake's behavior in aligning his preferences with Skye's. The locution is a question asking whether Jake can join Skye, specifically inquiring if it is permissible for him to participate. Meanwhile, the illocutionary act is a directive, with the underlying illocutionary point of requesting permission to join Skye. In other word, Jake is seeking her approval to be part of her plans. The direction of fit is world-to-word, as Jake's statement aligns with the reality Skye desires for Brighton, intending to persuade her. This tactic makes Skye believe Jake is genuinely invested in her plans with polite words, meeting the sincerity condition, which enhances her perception of his dedication and reinforces her emotional attachment to him. The permission request creates a perlocutionary act where Skye does not directly answer but reacts excitedly and asks about Jake's interest in the beach as part of Brighton. Jake, as a manipulator, cleverly responds in utterances (1) and (2) deceive Skye into believing he shares her desires to gain her approval. Though Skye doesn't confirm his inclusion, Jake's responses build trust, drawing her emotionally closer as she believes they have common ground, as seen in her growing enthusiasm. The hidden meaning behind Jake's request for permission is that it is not merely about wanting to join, but rather a strategic move to make Skye feel that he is eager to participate in her plans. By asking for permission, Jake creates the illusion of making a significant effort to be part of Skye's experience.

Before Jake utters (3), he begins the discussion about Brighton with (5), which is also part of the devaluation stage. Similar to the devaluation phase in (3), Jake's utterance in (5) reflects a shift in Jake's behavior from initially attempting to mirror Skye's preferences to suddenly questioning her plans, as though the idea of Brighton had not already been discussed during their first meeting. The locutionary act in the utterance is a question regarding when Skye would tell Jake, without explicitly mentioning what she was supposed to tell him. The illocutionary act is directive, with the illocutionary point of requesting an explanation. Its hidden meaning lies in pressuring Skye to justify herself, subtly portraying her as neglectful or evasive. Jake's question follows a world-to-word direction of fit, attempting to reshape the situation by framing himself as deserving of an explanation and casting Skye as the one at fault. His sincerity condition seems to convey genuine frustration, driven by anger over feeling excluded, but it also serves as a calculated move to undermine Skye's confidence in her choices. Jake's sudden utterance creates a perlocutionary act where Skye is initially confused about what he is asking. When Jake clarifies that he is referring to Brighton, her confusion deepens, as she recalls having already told him about it during their first meeting. Following this exchange, Skye refrains from explaining anything further, feeling overwhelmed by Jake's anger and his confrontational tone. The hidden meaning behind Jake's question is not merely a request for clarification, but a subtle attempt to influence Skye's decision regarding Brighton. As a narcissistic figure, Jake believes he has gained control over Skye and now seeks to dominate all aspects of her life, including her



personal choices. His questioning is a manipulative tactic to undermine her decision and exert further control, reflecting his desire to shape her actions.

### 4.3 Commissives

Jake's use of commissive utterances evolves during the devaluation phase. Initially, his promises are sweet and charming, designed to influence Skye's emotions and build trust. These promises create an illusion of security, especially after anger. However, he soon shifts to subtle threats, reflecting Jake's manipulative intent. Similarly, the study conducted by Devi & Degaf (2021) found that promise and threat are examples of commissive speech acts that appear in the utterances of the main character. His behavior becomes unpredictable, alternating between emotional coercion and sweet assurances, a tactic to keep Skye emotionally tethered. Despite the change in tone, the underlying goal remains to ensure her dependency and maintain control. The changes in the promises within the utterances can be seen in the table below:

Table 4. Jake's commissives utterances

Utterances		Contexts	Times
Jake:	<b>I want to marry you one day, Skye</b> (6)	<b>[Stage 2]</b> A subtle promise slipped in while Jake was angrily ranting about Skye's social media post.	6:39
Jake:	You're my dream girl, you know you are		
Skye:	I thought you knew.	<b>[Stage 2]</b> Jake asks about Skye's departure to Brighton, but Skye doesn't explain and instead says that Jake already knows, he becomes angry and threatens her.	9:04
Jake:	<b>Do you think id still be with you if I thought you were going to dump me?</b> (7)		
Skye:	I-I'm not going to		
Jake:	<b>You know what I'm going to do?</b> (8)		
Skye:	You don't have to do anything		
Jake:	<b>DO YOU WANT ME TO HURT MYSELF?!</b> (9)		

Jake's utterance (6) occurs within the phase of devaluation, following a sequence where he has already expressed anger and frustration over Skye's social media post. Although this utterance may sound very sweet, it occurs in the devaluation phase, where Jake shifts his behavior from being harsh to seemingly kind, creating a dynamic in their relationship. As Grossi (2021, p. 7) discusses, talking about a future together is a potential warning sign of love bombing, used by the perpetrator to build trust with the victim. In this instance, Jake's locutionary act is a direct statement of his desire to marry Skye, but it takes place after a moment of emotional turmoil. His illocutionary act is commissive, as he is making a future commitment, yet this statement is not meant to genuinely promise a future but to reassert control. The illocutionary point is to reinforce Jake's influence, positioning himself as someone who can control Skye's emotional state. The direction of fit is word-to-world, as Jake shapes the narrative to align with his manipulative goals. The sincerity condition, though indicating Jake's belief in his own intention, masks the underlying tactic of using emotional manipulation to regain control after having already devalued Skye. The perlocutionary act is that Skye, already in tears, feels



confused and emotionally distressed by Jake's sudden shift. Instead of reassurance, his words deepen her emotional vulnerability, leaving her trapped in his manipulation. From the shift in Jake's words, from anger to the promise of marriage, the hidden meaning indicates a manipulative tactic. By expressing his desire to marry Skye, he aims to regain control over her emotions after the conflict. This shift is designed to confuse Skye, making her feel emotionally indebted and reinforcing his power in the relationship.

In this scene, Jake's utterances reflect the devaluation phase, as indicated by the cruelty in his speech and the manipulative tactics he employs. The locutionary act in all three utterances is essentially the same, as Jake poses rhetorical questions that do not require answers. Jake's utterances (7), (8), and (9) serve as manipulative commissive acts aimed at controlling Skye. In utterance (7), the illocutionary point is to threaten leaving Skye if Jake feels deceived by her for not following his demand to answer the question in utterance (5). This is followed by utterances (8) and (9), where Jake escalates his threat by implying something worse, including the possibility of self-harm in the future, coercing Skye into compliance through fear. The direction of fit in these statements is world-to-word, with Jake's words manipulating the situation to force Skye into aligning her behavior with his emotional demands. His sincerity condition suggests a genuine sense of frustration and anger, but it is, in fact, a manipulative tactic designed to shift Skye's emotional state. The combination of cruelty and emotional manipulation in these utterances clearly exemplifies Jake's effort to devalue Skye, making her feel guilty and trapped, thus reinforcing his narcissistic tendencies. These commissive utterances, though distinct from utterance (6), both occur in the devaluation stage, where Jake manipulates his behavior to maintain control over Skye.

#### 4.4 Expressives

The analysis reveals that Jake's use of expressive utterances spans two phases: idealization and devaluation. In the idealization phase, his compliments and apologies foster an image of attentiveness, strengthening Skye's emotional attachment. However, in the devaluation phase, his expressives remain sweet but become manipulative, often following moments of anger or frustration. This alternating pattern of harshness and kindness masks his true intent which to maintain control over Skye by using emotional appeals and reinforcing her dependence. The expressive utterances used by Jake can be seen in the table below:

Table 5. Jake's expressives utterances

Utterances	Contexts	Times
Skye: well, we're gonna' be on the beach all day	<b>[Stage 1]</b> The first meeting between Jake and Skye, where they discuss Skye's plans to go to college in Brighton, and Jake wants to join her.	1:41
Jake: That's where I wanna' be then		
Jake: ...sorry (10)		
Jake: Uh th-that's awful (11)		
Jake: You're my dream girl, you know you are (12)	<b>[Stage 2]</b> A subtle promise slipped in while Jake was angrily	3:00





ranting about Skye's social media post.

In the idealization stage, as observed during their first meeting, Jake's utterances (10) and (11) serve as part of his strategy to build rapport with Skye by expressing emotional vulnerability. After initially requesting permission to join Skye's plans, Jake's subsequent apology is aimed at ensuring that his actions do not come off as intrusive or disrespectful. This tactic is often used in the early stages of a relationship to win trust and present oneself as caring and considerate. The locutionary act in Jake's utterances (10) and (11) involves him expressing an apology. Meanwhile, the illocutionary act of these utterances is expressive with illocutionary point of expressing remorse, aiming to present Jake as emotionally attuned and considerate. The sincerity condition reflects his apparent guilt, aimed at softening the impact of his earlier behavior and making it seem less intrusive. This feeling of guilt, which falls under the category of expressives (Widyawanti, 2024), serves a purpose, to make Skye feel respected through Jake's utterances. The word "awful" is classified as an expression of surprise or shock stemming from sorrowful feelings (Rahayu et al., 2018). With this apology, a perlocutionary effect on Skye may arise, leading her to feel sympathy or emotional relief. His expression of guilt might also make her more receptive to his presence and influence, reinforcing a sense of emotional attachment early in their relationship.

In the context following an argument or display of anger, Jake's utterance (12) serves as a classic example of love bombing within the devaluation phase. While the words themselves appear flattering and affectionate, they are strategically timed to occur after a confrontation, which is characteristic of manipulative behavior. The locutionary act involves a straightforward compliment, praising Skye. The illocutionary act is expressive, with the purpose of repairing the emotional damage caused by his previous outburst, using sweetness to emotionally disarm Skye and re-establish control over her. The sincerity condition in this case appears to reflect genuine admiration, though the hidden meaning behind the utterance is manipulative. Despite its seemingly sincere tone, the intent behind this compliment is not just to express admiration, but to influence Skye's emotions. By offering such praise immediately after an argument, Jake seeks to emotionally disarm Skye, steering her away from any negative feelings created by his earlier anger. This sudden shift to sweetness is a manipulative tactic meant to reinforce his emotional control over her, ensuring that Skye feels emotionally drawn back to him and does not question the manipulation. The hidden meaning lies in the timing and context, as the praise is not just about affection, but a calculated move to reassert dominance and ensure Skye's dependency on him.

#### 4.5 Declarations



In the analysis of Jake's utterances, no declarative act was identified. Its absence can be attributed to the nature of declaratives, which typically involve statements that bring about a change in the external world, such as making appointments, declaring ownership, or officiating events. Within the context of Jake and Skye's relationship, the dynamics are more focused on emotional manipulation and control rather than authoritative declarations. The absence of declarations suggests that Jake never explicitly establishes new realities or changes the official status of their relationship. Instead, his manipulative tactics rely on implicit control through other illocutionary acts, maintaining an unstable and unpredictable dynamic. Jake's communication revolves around assertives, directives, expressives, and commissives to influence Skye's thoughts and actions, leaving no space for declaratives, which require a performative authority that does not align with the relational and manipulative tone of the dialogue.

This study demonstrates how manipulative language in love bombing serves as a powerful tool for control in toxic relationships. Jake's speech in *Love Bomb* illustrates how assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives function to create emotional dependence, instill insecurity, and reinforce his dominance over Skye. While previous studies, such as Beri (2024), suggest a weak correlation between love bombing and emotional abuse, this research reveals that language itself is the mechanism through which manipulation occurs. Expressives, such as exaggerated praise, build trust and validation, while commissives shift from promises to threats, deepening the power imbalance. Although directives are used less frequently in the idealization stage, they still influence Skye's actions, further cementing Jake's control. These findings align with Strutzenberg et al. (2017), who argue that love bombing is strategically employed to gain power over a victim's life. The affectionate words and assertive grand statements often mask coercion, making it difficult for victims to recognize the underlying control. Jake's tactics such as guilt induction, conditional affection, and excessive validation, reflect common patterns found in individuals with insecure attachment, reinforcing the notion that love bombers seek external affirmation to maintain their sense of control (Strutzenberg et al., 2017).

Furthermore, these findings align with Batool et al. (2022), who emphasize that love bombing is often directed at women, a dynamic reflected in Skye's experience as the victim. The age group depicted in *Love Bomb* also corresponds with Beri's (2024a) research on love bombing among college students, while Ganesan (2024) identifies individuals aged 18–25 as the primary targets, matching Jake and Skye's demographic. Beyond romantic relationships, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how manipulative language shapes behavior in various contexts. Mialkovska et al. (2023) highlight how media discourse is crafted to shape public perception, while Brown and Molete (2024) reveal how political discourse on Facebook subtly influences ideological beliefs. Similarly, this study shows that love bombing manipulates emotions and decisions on a deeply personal level. In *Love Bomb*, Jake initially supports Skye's



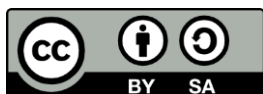
decision to study in Brighton, reinforcing the illusion of encouragement, but as his control intensifies, he persuades her to abandon her plans. Just as manipulative language in media and politics influences public opinion, in romantic relationships, it becomes a means of psychological control, gradually reshaping a person's autonomy and life choices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Jake's use of language in *Love Bomb* demonstrates a deliberate manipulation of Skye through two distinct stages of narcissistic abuse: idealization and devaluation. During the idealization stage, his affectionate utterances, such as compliments and promises, are sweet and supportive, creating the illusion of a caring partner and fostering emotional attachment. However, in the devaluation stage, his speech becomes more aggressive and controlling. Even after expressing anger, Jake strategically uses reassurances and apologies to maintain control over Skye. The analysis of illocutionary acts reveals that his utterances carry hidden intentions beyond his locutionary meanings. This manipulation extends to perlocutionary effects, where Jake's words influence Skye's behavior, ensuring her emotional dependency. Ultimately, this study highlights how language in love bombing is not merely a means of communication but a calculated tool for control. By embedding coercive tactics within seemingly affectionate speech acts, perpetrators manipulate their victims' perception of love, reinforcing toxic relational dynamics while disguising emotional abuse.

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