

Figurative Language in Billie Eilish's Songs

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Abstrak – Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan Bahasa figuratif (figurative language) dalam lirik lagu-lagu Billie Eilish dalam bentuk ekspresi emosi dan narasi personal. Latar belakang penelitian ini berdasarkan pada fenomena global popularitas Billie Eilish sebagai icon generasi muda yang tidak hanya dikenal karena musiknya yang inovatif, tetapi juga karena lirik-liriknya yang bermakna. Objek penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi, menganalisis, dan mengeksplorasi lima bahasa figurative -metafora, simile, simbolisme, hiperbola, dan personifikasi- dalam lagu-lagu Billie Eilish seperti LUNCH, TV, Birds of a Feather. Metodologi penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis wacana kritis dan berdesain untuk menjelaskan dan mengeksplorasi penggunaan Bahasa figuratif secara mendalam. Ada 16 bahasa kiasan dalam lagu-lagu Billie Eilish yang dibagi menjadi lima tipe. Rincian dari kelima tipe tersebut adalah: lima metafora, tiga perumpamaan, tiga simbolisme, tiga hiperbola, dan dua personifikasi. Dari hasil penelitian dapat disimpulkan bahwa bahasa kiasan mempunyai peranan penting dalam lagu Billie Eilish.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa figurative, Billie Eilish, Budaya, Lagu, Lirik

Abstract – This research aims to analyze figurative language in song lyrics as a form of emotional expression and personal narrative. The background of this study is based on the global phenomenon of Billie Eilish's popularity as an icon of the younger generation, recognized not only for her innovative music but also for her meaningful lyrics. This research aims to identify, analyze, and explore five figurative languages -metaphors, similes, symbolisms, hyperboles, and personifications- in Billie Eilish's songs, such as LUNCH, TV, and Birds of a Feather. The methodology of this study employs a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis designed to explain and explore the use of figurative language in depth. There are 16 figurative languages in Billie Eilish's songs divided into five types. The details of those five types are five metaphors, three similes, three symbolisms, three hyperboles, and two personifications. From the result of the research, it can be concluded that figurative language has an important role in Billie Eilish's song.

Keywords: Figurative language, Billie Eilish, Culture, Songs, Lyrics

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a complex communication system that enables humans to convey thoughts, emotions, ideas, and intentions through spoken, written, or signed symbols. It includes components like phonetics, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, each governing different aspects of communication. Linguists study how languages vary, evolve, and are acquired and how they influence human cognition and cultural identity (Chomsky, 2015; Pinker, 2021). Language enables us to create abstract ideas, record history, and maintain social bonds, and it varies widely across cultures while also exhibiting universal patterns (Fromkin et al., 2018). Linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structure. It focuses on the rules and patterns governing sounds (phonetics and phonology), word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and meaning (semantics). It also examines language acquisition, variation, and evolution across social and cultural contexts, providing insights into human cognition and communication (Fasold & Linton, 2014). Figurative language uses words or expressions with meanings different from their literal interpretation to create vivid, impactful descriptions, emphasize ideas, or add depth to language. It includes techniques like metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole. Metaphors and similes are compared, unlike things that draw unique associations, while personification attributes human qualities to non-human elements. Hyperbole involves exaggerated statements to emphasize emotion or make a point (Glucksberg, 2021; Gibbs, 2017).

Popular music has increasingly become a critical medium for expressing emotions and addressing contemporary social issues (Shuker, 2001). Among the rising stars in the global music scene, Billie Eilish stands out for her unique music and the depth and emotional resonance of her lyrics. Songs are often created to elicit complex



emotional responses from listeners and thus are an interesting area of study to understand nuanced emotions (Edmonds & Sedoc, 2021). Her songs often explore themes such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and self-identity issues that are particularly relevant to younger audiences in today's fast-paced digital age. As Billie's popularity continues to soar, her lyrics have sparked academic interest, particularly in how figurative language is employed to communicate these intense personal and societal emotions. While research has been conducted on the psychological impact of music and its role in emotional expression, there is a notable gap in the literature when it comes to examining the use of figurative language in contemporary popular music; few studies have investigated strategies that may acutely maintain or promote attention in typically aging older adults (Dovorany et al., 2023), particularly of Billie Eilish. Despite the increasing popularity of analyzing song lyrics, few students focus on how metaphors, similes, symbolisms, and personification depict complex mental states and emotions in Billie's songs. Metaphors are effective literary elements that let authors express difficult concepts and feelings clearly and vividly (Zarina et al., 20 C.E.). By making connections between ideas that don't seem to be related, they assist readers in comprehending and interpreting the world around them. This gap points to a need for further exploration of how such figurative elements contribute to her work's thematic richness and emotional impact and how they resonate with listeners, especially those grappling with the same issues.

Thus, this research aims to fill that gap by analyzing the figurative language in Billie Eilish's songs that tackle mental health issues and emotional complexities. Through a discourse analysis of three selected songs, this research will explore how Billie uses figurative language to articulate feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and identity struggles, as well as the broader societal relevance of these themes. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of figurative language in contemporary music and its impact on audiences, especially in relation to mental health awareness. Figurative language plays a vital role in enhancing the emotional depth and artistic expression in modern music, and this is especially true in Billie Eilish's songs. Eilish, known for her introspective lyrics and eerie sound, often uses various forms of figurative language to express complex emotions and ideas that are difficult to capture with literal language. Devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, and vivid imagery are not just stylistic choices in her music but essential tools that help convey meaning. These literary techniques allow her to explore intricate themes like mental health, isolation, love, and existential concerns in a way that deeply resonates with her audience. In her songs, metaphors often provide insight into her personal struggles, turning abstract feelings like anxiety or fear into more concrete experiences (Kaiser, 2024). Personification helps give life to emotions, transforming them into figures interacting with listeners. On the other hand, imagery creates powerful mental pictures that draw listeners into the dark, surreal atmosphere that characterizes much of her music.

By examining specific songs from her discography, we will analyze how her use of metaphors, similes, and other figurative devices adds layers of meaning, helping listeners engage more deeply with her themes. The analysis will show that, for Eilish, figurative language is not merely ornamental but is central to her artistic expression, turning personal experiences into relatable, universal messages. Through a detailed look at songs like "Lunch," "TV," and "Birds of a Feather," this paper will highlight the richness of Eilish's figurative language. Whether through the metaphor of drowning to symbolize emotional overwhelm or the personification of fear as a living entity, Eilish's lyrics demonstrate how figurative language can elevate personal struggles into profound themes that connect with her audience. The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth discourse analysis of Billie Eilish's use of figurative language—such as metaphors, similes, symbolism, and personification—to convey complex emotional experiences like anxiety, depression, and struggles with identity. By exploring how these literary devices enhance her songs' emotional and thematic richness, the study highlights how popular music can be an effective medium for addressing mental health issues.

Moreover, this research takes an interdisciplinary approach, blending literary analysis with psychological and sociological insights. It emphasizes how Eilish's lyrics resonate with young listeners facing similar challenges, demonstrating that music can significantly promote mental health awareness and empathy. Unlike existing studies that mainly focus on the psychological effects of music, this work offers a fresh perspective by analyzing the linguistic mechanisms that produce these effects and their wider social relevance. In doing so, the study not only fills a gap in the academic discourse on Billie Eilish's lyrical content but also expands the scope of how we understand the function of figurative language in modern music. It underlines the vital role of lyricism in shaping cultural discussions around mental health, providing new insights for educators, mental health advocates, and cultural commentators alike.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research explores how Billie Eilish uses literary methods to convey complicated emotions, especially in relation to mental health concerns, utilizing a qualitative design and figurative language analysis methodology. Data selection, figurative language identification, thematic analysis, and findings interpretation are all done chronologically in this study. The following steps outline the techniques, testing, and data collection methods utilized in the study process. While quantitative research seeks to explain, generalize, and predict patterns through the analysis of variables, qualitative research questions are more interested in understanding and interpreting the socially constructed world around us (Bryman, 2016). This means that data are collected through documents, observation, and interviews, and the latter are often recorded to analyze these as documents (McMullin, 2023). In qualitative research on figurative language, the goal is to explore how figurative expressions—such as metaphors, similes, and idioms—convey meaning, evoke emotions, and reflect cultural and individual perspectives. This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to interpret and categorize instances of figurative language within selected texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on language as a means of expression, qualitative methods allow for a nuanced analysis of the subtle, layered meanings behind figurative speech, facilitating an understanding of both literal and symbolic meanings (Saldana, 2021). The data sources included song lyrics, poetry, and narratives, chosen for their rich use of figurative language and relevance to the research questions.

The primary data collection involved an in-depth reading and coding of figurative expressions found within the texts, following guidelines for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were developed inductively from the data to capture recurring figurative language patterns and the contexts in which these forms appeared. This approach enabled the researcher to draw out themes around the emotional and cultural resonance of specific figurative expressions, such as how metaphors in song lyrics may convey complex emotional states or highlight relational dynamics. Through this interpretive approach, the researcher sought to illuminate how figurative language functions as a bridge between speakers and audiences, conveying layered meanings that may vary according to cultural and individual perspectives (Kövecses, 2010). Additionally, measures were taken to ensure methodological rigor, including triangulation through cross-referencing with literary analysis frameworks and peer debriefing to maintain objectivity and deepen interpretive insights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This qualitative design offers an in-depth examination of figurative language's role in shaping human expression and communication, providing insights that quantitative methods may not capture (Tracy, S. J. 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, figurative language such as metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole all contribute to a deep portrayal of love, devotion, and emotional vulnerability (Ammanamanchi, S. L., Meeran, J. A., Dharmapuri, K., & Sharma, N. 2023). The analysis of Billie Eilish's songs identified 16 instances of figurative language across three tracks: Lunch, TV, and Birds of a Feather. Among these, metaphors were the most frequently used, with five occurrences highlighting Billie's ability to create vivid and abstract comparisons. Similes were the second most used alongside symbolism and hyperbole, with three examples that provide relatable imagery by directly comparing two elements. Symbolism and hyperbole appeared three times each, demonstrating how her lyrics convey deeper meanings and emphasize emotions through exaggeration. Lastly, personification was identified twice, showcasing her skill in attributing human qualities to abstract concepts or inanimate objects. These findings illustrate the richness of figurative language in her work and its role in expressing complex emotions and ideas.

Table 1: Types and Quantities of Figurative Language

Figurative Language	Quantity
Metaphor	5
Simile	3
Symbolism	3
Hyperbole	3
Personification	2
Total	16

1. Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action as something other than what it is, implying a comparison without using "like" or "as." It suggests that one thing is another to highlight a shared

characteristic (Kövecses, 2002).

Example in *Lunch, TV, Birds of a Feather*:

a. **"I could eat that girl for lunch"** *Lunch*

This line conveys an intense and almost primal desire. The phrase likens the girl to something highly appetizing, like a meal, implying that she is not only irresistible but also a source of indulgence or satisfaction.

b. **"She dances on my tongue"** *Lunch*

This line evokes a vivid image of the girl being so captivating and exciting that even speaking about her feels alive and dynamic. The phrase suggests that talking or thinking about her brings a sense of pleasure, as though her essence performs a delicate and mesmerizing "dance" on the speaker's tongue. This metaphor also combines sensuality and liveliness, implying that the mere mention of her name or thoughts of her evokes a physical, almost tactile joy. It highlights her power over the speaker's emotions and language, as if she transforms words into an exhilarating experience, much like a graceful dancer captivates an audience.

c. **"She's the headlights, I'm the deer"** *Lunch*

The scene reflects the dynamic between the girl and the speaker as one of power and vulnerability. The headlights symbolize something intense, illuminating, and inescapable, while the deer represents someone frozen, captivated, and overwhelmed.

d. **"Maybe I'm the problem"** *TV*

This line serves as a self-reflective metaphor, where the speaker likens themselves to the root cause of their struggles. By framing themselves as "the problem," they adopt a perspective inviting introspection, acknowledging the possibility of their flaws, mistakes, or behaviors contributing to the issues at hand.

e. **"Birds of a feather, we should stick together"** *Birds of a Feather*

This line uses a familiar metaphor to express the idea of two people being naturally connected due to their similarities. The comparison to birds of the same feather—those who flock together—implies a sense of belonging and harmony, suggesting that the speaker and the other person share traits, values, or experiences that bind them.

2. Simile

Similes are the most straightforward form of figurative language, although some of that simplicity is curiously deceptive. At its most basic level, the simile indirectly compares two unlike things.

Example in *Lunch, TV, Birds of a Feather*

a. **"Tastes like she might be the one."** *Lunch*

This line uses the sensory experience of taste to convey the speaker's feelings about the girl, suggesting that she embodies an irresistible, ideal quality. Comparing her to something that "tastes" a certain way emphasizes the speaker's instinctual, almost visceral reaction to her as if her essence can be savored and appreciated in a deeply satisfying and personal way.

b. **"I don't get along with anyone; maybe I'm the problem."** *TV*

While not a direct simile, this phrase compares the speaker's inability to connect with others and the idea that their own issues may be the root cause of their conflicts.

c. **"I want you to see how you look to me"** *Birds of a Feather*

Expresses a desire for the other person to understand how they are perceived by the speaker, implying admiration, affection, or even love. While it is not a direct comparison like a simile, it carries the weight of one, suggesting that the speaker especially views the person—perhaps seeing them as beautiful,

important, or unique.

3. Symbolism

Symbolism in literature is a literary device that uses objects, people, situations, or actions to represent something more than their literal meaning.

Example in *TV*, *Birds of a Feather*:

a. **"Taste like she might be the one."** *Lunch*

This line uses "taste" to represent intuition or a strong gut feeling. In this context, "taste" conveys an immediate, sensory response to the girl, suggesting that the speaker's connection with her feels right on an instinctual level. Just as a flavor can evoke immediate pleasure or recognition, "might be the one" implies that the speaker senses something special about their bond, even if they do not fully know or understand it yet.

b. **"While they're overturning Roe v. Wade"** *TV*

Billie Eilish uses the landmark legal case as a powerful symbol to reflect broader societal and political struggles. Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion in the United States, represents a significant legal and social battle over women's rights and autonomy. This symbolic reference connects the speaker's personal turmoil to the larger societal upheaval, implying a sense of powerlessness and confusion. Just as the overturning of Roe v. Wade signals a dramatic shift in legal protections, the speaker's emotional state may reflect a shift in their sense of control or agency. This line suggests a disconnection from reality or a feeling of helplessness in the face of forces beyond their control, whether those forces are political, personal, or emotional. The symbol of Roe v. Wade intensifies the speaker's internal struggle by associating it with a major societal crisis, amplifying the sense of instability and loss.

c. **"Till the day that I die"** *Birds of a Feather*

Symbolizes an enduring, unbreakable commitment to someone, with the speaker expressing a desire for their love to last eternally. By using "until the day I die," the speaker emphasizes the depth and permanence of their feelings, suggesting that they are willing to remain devoted and loyal no matter the circumstances or challenges that may arise throughout their lives.

4. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement or claim that is not meant to be taken literally but is used for emphasis or effect.

Example in *Lunch*, *TV*, *Birds of a Feather*:

a. **"I could buy her so much stuff"** *Lunch*

By saying "so much stuff," the speaker is not specifying exact gifts or items, which makes the exaggeration even more pronounced. It highlights that no material possessions are too much for the speaker to offer. This hyperbole suggests a desire to express love or admiration through wealth or abundance, symbolizing how the speaker views their feelings as boundless and willing to be shown through grand gestures.

b. **"All of my friends are missing again"** *TV*

This exaggeration underscores the depth of the speaker's loneliness or disconnection, suggesting that their emotional struggles are so consuming that they feel as though all their relationships have disappeared. The word "again" further amplifies the sense of recurring isolation, as if this pattern of losing or drifting away from friends has happened. It is a way of expressing how overwhelming the speaker's emotions are, to the point where even the presence of friends feels distant or non-existent.

c. **"I don't think I could love you more"** *Birds of a Feather*

A hyperbole that exaggerates the intensity of the speaker's love, implying that they have reached the peak

of emotional attachment or affection. By saying they “couldn't love you more,” the speaker emphasizes that their love feels so all-encompassing and profound that it seems impossible to deepen. This exaggeration also suggests a limitless love, surpassing all boundaries or expectations. It evokes the idea that the speaker's feelings are already at their fullest, and no greater expression of love is conceivable. It is a dramatic way of showing how complete and overwhelming their devotion feels.

5. Personification

Personification means giving human characteristics to nonhuman or abstract things. This can apply to physical attributes, emotional attributes, or human actions.

Example in *TV, Birds of a Feather*:

a. **"The internet's gone wild" TV**

The internet is personified by attributing the human-like ability to become "wild." This metaphor suggests that the online world, like a person, can lose control or behave unpredictably and chaotically. This personification emphasizes online interactions' chaotic, fast-paced nature, where information spreads rapidly, sometimes without control or reason, leading to a "wild" frenzy of opinions, reactions, and viral moments. It highlights how the digital world can feel like a chaotic space driven by the emotions and actions of its users.

b. **"Can't change the weather" *Birds of a Feather***

personifies the weather as a malleable entity that could be controlled or altered. In this case, it symbolizes the uncontrollable forces in life, such as external circumstances, emotions, or events beyond our influence. This personification highlights the theme of acceptance, urging the speaker and the listener to acknowledge that some things are simply outside our control, and the best response may be adapting to them.

CONCLUSION

The study's result emphasizes how Billie Eilish's songs effectively communicate complicated feelings and social issues through figurative language. It is clear from analyzing metaphors, similes, symbolism, exaggeration, and personification in songs like "Lunch," "TV," and "Birds of a Feather" that Eilish uses these literary devices to explore themes of mental health, identity struggles, and emotional vulnerability in addition to using them as artistic expressions. Her ability to explain personal and universal experiences through vivid imagery and symbolic depth resonates powerfully with audiences, particularly younger listeners confronting similar issues. Three of Billie Eilish's songs have five types of figurative language: metaphor, simile, symbolism, hyperbole, and personification. First, the “Lunch” song has three metaphors, one simile, one symbolism, and one hyperbole. Second, the “TV” song has one metaphor, simile, symbolism, hyperbole, and personification. Last, in the “Birds of a Feather” song, there is one metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and personification.

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