

An Analysis of Figurative Languages in the Niki Zefanya's Song Lyrics

Salma Talita Zahria^{1*}, Hanafi Wibowo²

Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah, Bekasi, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

Submitted: 17 Sep 2024

Revised : 29 Nov 2024

Accepted : 30 Nov 2024

Abstract

Language and music are deeply interconnected, enabling artists to express emotions and abstract ideas creatively. While figurative language is a key element in literary and musical compositions, limited research has examined how emerging contemporary musicians employ it to enhance lyrical expression. This study investigates the use of figurative language in three selected songs by Niki Zefanya. Using a qualitative approach with textual analysis, this research identifies and categorizes figurative devices present in the lyrics. The findings reveal five types of figurative language: metaphors and hyperboles as the most dominant, followed by irony, synecdoche, and repetition, each contributing to the emotional and thematic depth of the songs. These results highlight the role of figurative language in shaping meaning, enhancing artistic expression, and deepening listeners' engagement with song lyrics. This study contributes to the fields of stylistics and discourse analysis by offering insights into the intersection of language and music, demonstrating how figurative language functions as a communicative tool in contemporary songwriting.

Corresponding e-mail:

^{*)}salma.talita.zahria@gmail.com

Keywords: *Figurative languages; Semantic meaning; Song lyric analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Figurative language, including metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole, plays a significant role in both real life and artistic expression, particularly in song lyrics. It enables speakers and writers to convey complex ideas, emotions, and experiences in ways that literal language cannot. In real life, figurative language serves as a tool for effective communication, enriching conversations, presentations, and written texts by adding nuance and depth. This helps provide vivid images or simplify complex or abstract concepts, for instance when explaining complicated ideas in a business context (Amirulloh et al, 2023) or when expressing an opinion on social media (Koçak & Atalık 2024). In artistry, such as narrative pieces of writing, songs/poetry, and drama/film, figurative language is frequently utilized to creatively and distinctively portray a range of a message, experiences (memories), and emotion, like love, grief, power, or struggle (Kusumahwati et al., 2023;

Banaruee et al., 2019). Thus, this kind of expression fosters empathy, making songs more engaging and relatable to the listeners.

Figurative language often displays exaggeration and comparison of two different things or ideas so that their similarities are shown to be interesting, unique, or surprising (Ilham & Akhiruddin, 2022). It is commonly used in song lyrics, which are easy to access, highlight, and refer to for educational context. Figurative language is prevalent across various literary forms, including poetry, novels, films, and song lyrics. In music, it serves as a crucial device for artists to express their emotions and perspectives on societal themes, personal experiences, and abstract ideas (Jati, 2020). Though researching different types of songs, Nurwahida, & Mustikawati (2022), Fadilla et al (2023), and Aras et al (2024) shared generally similar results where they found that metaphors, hyperbole, paradox, personification, and simile were the top five most used figurative language in popular song lyrics. Some other types of figurative language, such as irony, metonymy, synecdoche, symbolism, and others, were also found in lower frequency. The classifications are in line with the work of Perrine (1969).

A **metaphor** is a phrase or expression that applies one type of item to another without using the terms like or as, to show that the two objects share similar traits (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). Metaphor is the use of words or other expressions for objects or other concepts based on figures of speech or similarities (Wibowo & Ramadhani, 2024). For example, the line “*Shot me out of the sky. You're my kryptonite*” in *One Thing* song lyrics by *One Direction* highlighted the comparisons between “*you*” and “*kryptonite*”. The term “*kryptonite*” refers to someone or something capable of significantly weakening another person or object (Fitria, 2018). In linguistics, morphology is the understanding, analysis, and description of the structure of morphemes and other units of meaning in language such as words, affixes, and parts of speech and intonation/stress, implied context (words in the lexicon are the subject of lexicology (Wibowo & Handayani, 2023). A **simile** is defined as a figure of speech that describes a situation by comparing one thing with another thing that is essentially different but is intentionally made to look the same (Nafinuddin, 2020). Despite its similar basic functions as metaphor, simile makes the comparison obvious using some typical words or phrases, among which are *like*, *as*, *than*, and *seems like* (Perrine, 1969), for example, the line “*I smiled like Mona Lisa*” in a song titled “*Our Last Summer*” by ABBA which highlights the similarities between the person’s smile with the woman character in a famous painting *Mona Lisa*.

Personification occurs when animals, ideas, or objects are given human characteristics, in other terms, a notion or inanimate thing defined as having human-like traits (Perrine, 1969). There are four types of personification figures of speech found, namely the personification of nature, the personification of animals, the personification of plants, and the personification of objects (Purati et.al, 2022). For instance, “*You gotta listen to your heart, what does it say?*” This example is a type of personification in which inanimate things with human characteristics “*It*” refers to the heart. The heart cannot communicate while “*heart*” in that preceding line is stated as if it could speak. **Hyperbole** is a sort of exaggerated figurative language that may be employed to convey a variety of effects, including comedy, seriousness, fantasy or restraint, and persuasive or non-persuasiveness (Perrine, 1969). Hyperbole means to emphasize a statement or situation to intensify it, and increase its impression and influence (Salwia et.al, 2022). For example, “*We pray that He'll forgive us and tears forever fall*”. The statement “*tears forever fall*” is an example of hyperbole because tears cannot fall eternally and it is absurd to human logic. Next, a **paradox** is defined as a circumstance or statement that looks contradictory but is accurate (Perrine, 1969). The paradox's conditions and

circumstances may appear unreal, nevertheless, they make total sense and are not surprising. For example, "*We just need to move quickly but carefully.*" The statement indicates that they must act as soon as possible while staying careful. "*Quickly*" and "*carefully*" contradict one other and they appear difficult to conduct, yet, still make sense to do.

Another form of figurative language is **irony** which refers to the opposing connotation of what is uttered or from a fact. Irony is an expression that is satirical with the intention of making fun (Nurajizah, 2021). For example, "*What a smart move!*" in literal meaning means a good decision. However, if the speaker used irony, it means a bad decision. **Repetition** is a style of language that expresses the repetition of the same words, phrases, or clauses to emphasize the meaning of a sentence or discourse (Putri, 2023). Repetitions are often used in songs or poems to underline specific points, for example, the line "*We are never, ever, ever getting back together*" in Taylor Swift's song titled *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together*). **Synecdoche**, last but not least, is an expression that only mentions one part of a specific object to represent a whole object. In other words, using all parts to express part of it (*totum pro parte/ totem pro parte*). Simply put, one for all or all for one (Salwia et.al, 2022). For example, "*All hands are on deck!*". The term "*hands*" refers to an entire crew ship, as a whole, not partial.

Semantics, the study of meaning and its relationship with linguistic form plays a crucial role in interpreting figurative language, as meaning can vary based on context and cultural background (Kroeger, 2018). This is particularly relevant in song lyrics, where multiple layers of meaning shape listeners' interpretation and emotional response. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasized that figurative language, especially metaphors, not only enhances expression but also influences perception and comprehension. Misinterpretation can arise if a listener fails to grasp the intended meaning, as sentence structure and word choice affect interpretation. Semantics provides a structured approach to analyzing meaning, helping to distinguish between literal and metaphorical expressions (Cann, 1993). It also contributes to various linguistic applications, including text translation, summarization, knowledge extraction, and document classification (Maulud et al., 2021). Additionally, language-driven recognition is an expanding research area (Li et al., 2022). Given that texts can have multiple interpretations, semantic analysis helps uncover both explicit and implicit meanings. This is particularly valuable when examining figurative language, as semantic theory aids in identifying how words convey deeper connotations (Agustina & Mustikawati, 2023). By bridging linguistic form and meaning, semantics enhances our understanding of communication, particularly in artistic and literary contexts.

While extensive research on song lyrics has explored figurative language in popular songs by internationally recognized musicians (such as BTS (Agustina & Mustikawati, 2023), Charlie Puth (Pardede et al, 2023). and One Direction (Fitria, 2018)), studies on the same topic in contemporary songwriting, particularly by emerging artists like Niki Zefanya, remain limited. This leaves a gap in understanding how newer artists employ figurative language to shape meaning and listener engagement. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the figurative language used in Niki Zefanya's songs, examining how some selected song lyrics incorporated metaphors, similes, personification, and other stylistic devices to convey emotions and themes. This study offers valuable insights into the evolving role of figurative language in modern music and songwriting processes, demonstrating its impact on storytelling and emotional resonance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a textual analysis approach to investigate the use of figurative language in selected songs by Niki Zefanya. Textual analysis is well-suited for exploring linguistic and stylistic features in both literary and musical texts, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of various forms of figurative language. The data for this study consist of figurative expressions, including metaphors, similes, personification, and other stylistic devices, found in the lyrics of three selected songs: *High School in Jakarta*, *Anaheim*, and *Oceans and Engines*. These songs were chosen for their thematic complexity and frequent use of figurative language. The primary data source is the official lyrics of these songs, obtained from verified lyric databases and Niki Zefanya's official releases. After conducting a close reading and annotation of the lyrics, figurative expressions were identified based on their linguistic and conceptual features. Each figurative instance was documented, and a frequency analysis was performed to examine the distribution of various figurative devices across the songs. The identified expressions were then categorized according to their types and functions within the lyrics. The findings were analyzed in relation to the communicative and artistic roles that figurative language plays in songwriting. This methodological approach ensures a systematic and rigorous examination of how figurative language enhances meaning and emotional depth in Niki Zefanya's music, providing valuable insights into the relationship between language, emotion, and artistic expression in contemporary songwriting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the lyrics from the three selected songs revealed the presence of five distinct types of figurative language: irony, metaphor, synecdoche, repetition, and hyperbole. These figurative devices were strategically used by Niki Zefanya to enhance the emotional depth and thematic richness of her music. In the song "*High School in Jakarta*," the researchers identified one instance of irony, three metaphors, and two hyperboles. The irony used in this song was subtle but effective in conveying the contrast between expectations and reality, particularly regarding the narrator's experiences and feelings. The metaphors in this song enriched the narrative, adding layers of meaning that allow listeners to connect with the themes of nostalgia and self-discovery. The hyperboles, on the other hand, amplified the intensity of the emotions expressed in the lyrics, further emphasizing the song's emotional undercurrent.

In "*Anaheim*," the use of figurative language was more prominent, with three metaphors, one repetition, and five hyperboles. The metaphors in this song illustrated abstract concepts like love, distance, and longing, while the repetition helped reinforce key emotional moments, highlighting the narrator's inner turmoil. The five hyperboles in "*Anaheim*" intensified the expression of emotions, drawing attention to the exaggerated sense of longing and desire present in the song. Lastly, "*Oceans and Engines*" demonstrated the most extensive use of metaphors, with six instances identified. Additionally, one synecdoche and four hyperboles were found. The metaphors in this song played a crucial role in conveying the complexities of the narrator's emotional journey, using vivid imagery to express themes of separation, growth, and reflection. The synecdoche used in this song added another layer of meaning by representing a larger concept through a smaller part, while the hyperboles emphasized the emotional weight of the situations described in the lyrics.

In short, the analysis showed that Niki Zefanya’s lyrics employ a variety of figurative devices to create a deeper emotional connection with the listener. Metaphors were the most commonly used figurative language across all three songs, followed by hyperboles, which added intensity to the expression of feelings. Irony, synecdoche, and repetition, though less frequent, were also essential in enhancing the emotional and thematic depth of the songs. The findings from this study align with previous research by Nurwahida & Mustikawati (2022), Fadilla et al. (2023), and Aras et al. (2024), who also identified metaphors and hyperboles as the most frequently used figurative devices in popular song lyrics. In the present study, metaphors were the most dominant figurative language across all three selected songs by Niki Zefanya, followed by hyperboles, which were also significant in intensifying the emotional expression. This is consistent with the patterns observed in previous studies, where metaphors and hyperboles were prevalent in popular music lyrics, serving to enhance the emotional and thematic resonance of the songs. Additionally, the use of less frequent figurative devices such as irony, synecdoche, and repetition in Niki's songs mirrors the findings of past research, which highlighted the occasional use of irony, metonymy, synecdoche, and symbolism in popular songs. While these devices were found in lower frequencies, they still played a crucial role in enriching the lyrics and adding complexity to the overall meaning, much like in the studies by Nurwahida & Mustikawati (2022) and Siagian & Englishtina (2022). This comparison reinforces the notion that figurative language, particularly metaphors and hyperboles, is a central tool in conveying complex emotions and themes in contemporary songwriting. See the table below for a more comprehensive picture of the figurative language distribution in the three selected songs.

Types of Figurative Language	Song Title			Total
	<i>High School in Jakarta</i>	<i>Anaheim</i>	<i>Ocean and Engines</i>	
Irony	1	0	0	1
Metaphor	3	3	6	12
Simile	0	0	0	0
Personification	0	0	0	0
Synecdoche	0	0	1	1
Apostrophe	0	0	0	0
Paradox	0	0	0	0
Allegory	0	0	0	0
Repetition	0	1	0	1
Hyperbole	2	5	4	11
Total				26

Table 1. Figurative Language Found in "High School in Jakarta", "Oceans and Engines", and "Anaheim" by Niki Zefanya

A more thorough analysis revealed that this section presents an analysis of figurative language in Niki Zefanya’s selected songs, focusing on irony, metaphor, hyperbole, synecdoche, and repetition. The findings reveal how these literary devices enhance the emotional depth and thematic complexity of her lyrics.

Irony

In *High School in Jakarta*, Niki employs irony in the line, "It was orange from three percent peroxide, thanks to you" (Line 6). The phrase "thanks to you" typically conveys gratitude; however, in this context, it carries a sarcastic undertone. Instead of expressing appreciation, the lyrics subtly critique the addressed person, implying an unintended consequence rather than a positive outcome.

This ironic expression reinforces the song's reflective and somewhat regretful tone, illustrating the complexities of past relationships.

Metaphor

Metaphors are prominently used in *Oceans and Engines*, as seen in the lines: "*But even with gin and surgin' adrenaline*" (Line 34) and "*I see you're all that can intoxicate*" (Line 35). Here, Niki compares the emotional impact of a person to the effects of alcohol, symbolizing an intoxicating and overwhelming love. The use of metaphor underscores her struggle to move on, suggesting that, despite efforts to forget, her emotions remain overpowering. This figurative expression deepens the listener's understanding of the song's theme of emotional attachment and longing.

Hyperbole

In *Anaheim*, hyperbole is evident in the lines: "*In a perfect world, I'd kill to love you the loudest*" (Line 5) and "*But all I do is live to hurt you soundless*" (Line 6). The phrase "*I'd kill to love you the loudest*" does not denote a literal intent to kill but rather emphasizes an extreme level of devotion. Similarly, "*Live to Hurt You Soundless*" highlights deep emotional pain and regret. By employing hyperbole, Niki amplifies the intensity of her feelings, allowing listeners to grasp the depth of love and suffering depicted in the lyrics.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche is observed in *Oceans and Engines*, particularly in the lines: "*Plungin' into all kinds of diversions*" (Line 32) and "*Like pink wine and sonorous soirées*" (Line 33). The term "*diversions*" serves as a broader representation of various activities, while "*pink wine*" symbolizes indulgence in alcohol as a means of distraction. This usage of synecdoche effectively conveys the protagonist's attempt to cope with heartbreak by engaging in different pastimes, highlighting the song's theme of escapism and emotional detachment.

Repetition

Repetition is evident in *Anaheim* with the lines: "*'Cause I am lost, but not in you*" (Line 20) and "*I'm lost, but not in you*" (Line 21). The repetition of "*lost, but not in you*" emphasizes a sense of confusion and detachment. Unlike typical romantic narratives where one finds oneself in another person, Niki subverts this idea, suggesting a disconnect between the emotions she experiences and the person she addresses. This repetition reinforces the song's melancholic tone and existential uncertainty.

The analysis reveals that Niki Zefanya's use of figurative language enriches her lyrics by adding layers of meaning and emotional nuance. Irony introduces subtle criticism, metaphors illustrate intense emotions, hyperboles amplify feelings, synecdoche creates symbolic depth, and repetition reinforces thematic messages. These findings highlight the intricate interplay between language and artistic expression in contemporary songwriting.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study analyzed the use of figurative language in Niki Zefanya's selected songs—*High School in Jakarta*, *Anaheim*, and *Oceans and Engines*—focusing on irony, metaphor, hyperbole, synecdoche, and repetition. The findings reveal that Niki employs these literary devices to convey deep emotions, enhance lyrical impact, and create a more immersive listening experience. Irony is used to express sarcasm and subtle critique, while metaphors illustrate intense emotions and complex ideas. Hyperboles exaggerate feelings to emphasize devotion and suffering, synecdoche symbolizes

broader concepts, and repetition reinforces thematic messages. These elements highlight how figurative language enriches songwriting, making lyrics more expressive and relatable. Given the significance of figurative language in music, educators and researchers should consider incorporating song lyrics as authentic materials in teaching literature and linguistics. Studying song lyrics can help students develop a deeper understanding of figurative language while enhancing their interpretative skills. Similarly, songwriters and musicians can benefit from recognizing the impact of literary devices in engaging audiences emotionally. For general listeners, this study encourages a more analytical approach to appreciating music by understanding how figurative elements contribute to meaning-making. Future research could extend this study by analyzing a wider range of Niki Zefanya's songs or comparing her use of figurative language with that of other contemporary artists. Further studies could also explore the cognitive and emotional effects of figurative language in music, examining how listeners process and respond to metaphorical expressions in lyrics. Additionally, investigating the cultural influences on figurative language use in multilingual artists like Niki could provide valuable insights into the intersection of language, identity, and musical storytelling. Expanding research in these areas can contribute to a broader understanding of how figurative language shapes musical narratives, listener engagement, and emotional connection in contemporary songwriting.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2012). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Agustina, A.E., & Mustikawati, Y. (2023). Analysis of figurative language in song lyrics "Make It Right" and "Permission to Dance" by BTS. *Eliterate: Journal of English Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 3(1), 23-31.
- Amirulloh, R. K., Suryanto, B., & Lestari, P. Y. (2023). Analysis on figurative language styles in business news of The Times website. *Proceedings of the International Virtual Conference on Language and Literature (IVICOLL)*, 3, 158–164.
- Aras, B., Bozkurt, S., & Önen, S. (2024). Exploring figurative language usage in contemporary music: Pedagogical implications for English language instruction. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 18(2), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13860646>
- Banaruee, H., Khoshsima, H., Zare-Behtash, E., Yarahmadzehi, N., & Zhang, L. J. (2019). Types of metaphors and mechanisms of comprehension. *Cogent Education*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2019.1617824>
- Cann, R. (1993). *Formal Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fadilla, D. A. N. N., Ariani, S., Max, J. I. S. D. (2023). A Stylistic analysis of figurative language in Ariana Grande's song lyrics. *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 7(4), 1301-1312.
- Fitria, E. (2018). Figurative language used in One Direction's album entitled Up All Night. [Unpublished master's thesis]. Universitas Negeri Semarang.
- Ilham, I., & Akhiruddin, A. (2022). Analisis gaya bahasa retorik dan gaya bahasa kiasan dalam pidato Nadiem Makariem. *Gurindam: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 2(1), 53-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/gjbs.v2i1.16556>
- Jati, L. J. W. (2020). Metaphors in Bring Me the Horizons selected song lyrics. *UC Journal: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal*, 1(1), 37–59. <https://doi.org/10.24071/uc.v1i1.2847>
- Koçak, C. B., & Atalık, Ö. (2024). Figurative language effect on consumer engagement: An empirical investigation for Turkish airline industry. *Aviation*, 28(2), 128–140. <https://doi.org/10.3846/aviation.2024.21676>
- Kroeger, P. R. (2018). *Semantics: A Coursebook* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Kusumahwati, L., Andriani, N., Degeng, P., & Hamamah, H. (2023). Analyzing figurative language
- Zahria, S. T., & Wibowo, H. (2024). An analysis of figurative languages in the Niki Zefanya's song lyrics. *STAIRS: English Language Education Journal*, 5(2), 98-105.

- in Niki's song lyrics to teach listening comprehension for EFL learners. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Language, Literature, Education, and Culture, ICOLLEC*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/Eai.11-11-2022.2329348>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Li, B., Weinberger, K. Q., Belongie, S., Koltun, V., & Ranftl, R. (2022). Language-driven semantic segmentation. *Arxiv Preprint Arxiv:2201.03546*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2201.03546>
- Maulud, D. H., Zeebaree, S. R., Jacksi, K., Sadeeq, M. A. M., & Sharif, K. H. (2021). State of art for semantic analysis of natural language processing. *Qubahan Academic Journal*, 1(2), 21-28. <https://journal.qubahan.com/index.php/qaj/article/view/44>
- Nafinuddin, S. (2020). *Majas (Majas Perbandingan, Majas Pertentangan, Majas Perulangan, Majas Pertautan)*.
- Nurajizah, S. (2021). Penggunaan majas dalam novel Satu Hari di 2018 karya Boy Candra. *Diksatrasia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 5(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.25157/Diksatrasia.V5i2.7244>
- Nurwahida & Mustikawati, Y. (2022). Figurative languages in BTS songs lyrics. *ELITERATE: Journal of English Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 2(3), 60–70.
- Pardede, M., Saragi, C. N., & Sidabutar, U. (2023). Metaphor analysis in songs lyrics of Charlie Puth: A case on semantics. *Jurnal Scientia*, 12(04), 471-478.
- Perrine, L. (1969). *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (4th ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Purati, S., Mulyono, T., & Khotimah, K. (2022). Penggunaan majas personifikasi pada novel Ratu Berlian dan implikasinya sebagai bahan ajar di SMP. *Perisai*, 1(1), 173-180. <https://semnas.upstegal.ac.id/index.php/perisai/article/download/459/203>
- Putri, S. A. (2023). Tilikan unsur citraan dan majas repetisi pada puisi "Lagu Gadis Italy" karya Sitor Situmorang. *Pustaka: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Pendidikan*, 3(1), 13-18. <https://doi.org/10.56910/Pustaka.V3i1.277>
- Salwia, F., Syahbuddin, S., & Efendi, M. (2022). Analisis majas dalam novel Pasung Jiwa karya Okky Madasari. *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan*, 7(4), 2228-2231. <https://doi.org/10.29303/Jipp.V7i4.937>
- Siagian, Y. E. B., & Englishtina, I. (2022). An analysis of figurative language used in the song lyrics in the Moana movie. *Inti Englishtina*, 3(1), <https://dx.doi.org/10.56444/lime.v3i01.2903>
- Wibowo, H., & Handayani, V. (2023). Morphological analysis in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs story. *Teaching English As Foreign Language, Literature And Linguistics*, 3(2), 37-44. <https://doi.org/10.33752/Teflics.V3i2.5282>
- Wibowo, H., & Ramadhani, N. L. (2024). An analysis of euphemism in the captions of folkative Instagram accounts. *Tamaddun*, 23(1), 78-97. <https://jurnal.fs.umi.ac.id/index.php/tamaddun-life/article/view/669>