

Research article

Figurative Forms Found in the Song Lyrics of "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" Album by Billie Eilish

M. Parren Tiarama Queenta^{1*}, I Nyoman Muliana², I Wayan Budiarta

Master of Linguistics, Universitas Warmadewa

ORCID

I Wayan Budiarta <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6892-7249>

Abstract.

This paper discussed the types of figurative forms and their meaning related to each type of figurative forms. The theories applied to support this paper were taken from the books proposed by John I. Saeed in his book entitled Semantics third edition published in 2009 as a main theory. The data of this paper were taken from the song lyrics of "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" album by Billie Eilish. The first method of research in this topic was finding out the source of data. The second method was collecting the data. The collected data were analyzed based on the theoretical concepts and the data was analyzed using the descriptive method. The last method was presenting the result of analysis. Based on the result of the analysis, it was found that there are nine types of figurative forms that are used in twelve songs from "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" album. The figurative forms that are used were metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, simile, hyperbole, symbol, paradox, idiom, and euphemism.

Keywords: figurative, semantics, song lyrics

Corresponding Author: M. Parren Tiarama Queenta; email: paren17@gmail.com

Dates Published 04 July 2022

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

© M. Parren Tiarama Queenta et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ISCL 2021 Conference Committee.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language interacts with every aspect of human life in society, and it can be understood only if it is considered in relation to society. We use language to inform what we feel, what we desire to people around us. The importance of language is essential to every aspect and interaction in our everyday lives. Language has developed and are constituted in their present forms in order to meet the needs of communication in all is aspects. It is because the needs of human communication are so various and so multifarious that the study of meaning is probably the most difficult part of the serious study of language. Literal meaning is its basic or original meaning. It is often used when we talk about facts or interesting information. Literal meaning contrasts with figurative forms. For example: the literal meaning of *the sky is blue* is the color of the sky is blue. In addition, literal


OPEN ACCESS

meaning is based on actual words, or the real meanings, they do not use figurative or symbolic language. When the speaker speaks literally, he or she does not have hidden meaning in his or her words.

Figurative (non-literal) meaning is language that uses words or expression to convey a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation (Knickerbocker, Kenneth L. and Reninger, 1963). Figurative language is a different word or phrase that contains hidden meaning behind it (Saeed, 2006). We can find figurative language in novel, film, and also in the song lyrics. The song lyrics are selected as the source of data because there are various song lyrics that can be found in our everyday life. In this time, people can speak with other through song. Currently a lot of songs could express our feelings, such as song with the theme of love, social, political, and others. A song is a single work of music that is typically intended to be sung by the human voice with distinct and fixed pitches and patterns using sound and silence and a variety of forms that often include the repetition of sections. Song is also short piece of music, usually with words (Abrams, 1999). Song has two elements, such as lyric and music. Most of songs that use non-literal lyrics or figurative forms are to make it more varied and interesting (Perrine, 1987). Understanding the meanings of song lyrics is not easy because of figurative forms. To know the meaning of a lyric is very important because we will know the purpose of the song.

Billie Eilish's song lyrics are selected as the object in this paper because of the following reasons. First, Billie Eilish's songs have a unique music, and they are enjoyable to be heard. Second, those song lyrics contain a lot of figurative forms. Third, these songs lyrics have never been analyzed by anyone else. Related to the background, there are several previous studies are used as references in this study. Habibi (2016) conducted a study entitled "*An Analysis of Figurative Language in Edensor Novel by Andrea Hirata*" demonstrate that there are 6 types of figurative language in the Edensor novel. There are 20 sentences of simile, 8 sentences of metaphor, 6 sentences of personification, 5 sentences of hyperbole, 1 sentence of synecdoche, and 4 sentences of symbol. Moreover, (Hasanah, 2018) also conducted a study which entitle "*An Analysis of Figurative Language Used in some Poems by Oscar Wilde*" and (Lakoff, George and Johnson, 1980) "*An Analysis of Figurative Language on the Lyrics of Raef's Selected Songs*" they found a similar results based on analysis the data about figurative form that explain before. Moreover, based on previous study above, this research is different from those previous study that has been explain before. This research analyze what types of figurative forms are found in Billie Eilish's songs and what are the real meanings of figurative forms found in Billie Eilish's songs. In addition, this research aim to find out

the types of figurative forms found in the Billie Eilish's song lyrics. This paper is also to explain the meaning of each type.

2. METHOD

The data source of this scientific paper was taken from the Billie Eilish's album that was released on March 29th, 2019 entitled *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* The lyrics were copied from AZLyrics.com. This research used the observation method. There are several steps were taken in observation the data. First step was listening to the Billie Eilish's songs from the album of "*When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*" repeatedly in order to identify figurative words. The second step was reading the lyric. Then, the third step was finding out the specific statement relating to the types of figurative forms used in Billie Eilish's songs. Moreover, after collecting all the data, the next step in this scientific paper was data analysis. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive method based on theoretical concepts. In this scientific paper, the data were analyzed through figurative forms theory by John I. Saeed. Then the analysis was supported with some examples. The last step was presenting the result of the analysis. The informal method was applied that was by using sentences to describe and explain the result of the analysis in order to make the analysis easily to understand.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this research, researcher discuss about the structure of simple sentence and thematic roles of sentences elements found in the data source. In this chapter, those problems are analyzed by using the theory of sentence structure proposed by Quirk and thematic roles proposed by Saeed. Based on the analysis, it was found that there are seven kinds of simple sentence structures and eleven kinds of thematic roles. The analysis of simple sentence structures and thematic roles for each kind is described in the following subchapters.

Types and Meanings of Figurative forms Found in "*When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*" Album by Billie Eilish

After reading the lyrics repeatedly and carefully, nine types of figurative forms are found in these song lyrics, they are metaphor, metonymy, simile, synecdoche, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, idiom, and euphemism.

1. Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated, but they share some common characteristics. In other words, a metaphor is a resemblance of two contradictory or different objects is made based on a single or some common characteristics.

In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison. The song lyrics that indicate the figurative forms of metaphor can be seen in the following examples.

I'm the powder, you're the fuse.

Just add some friction (My Strange Addiction – line 11-12).

Example above, "*I'm the powder, you're the fuse*" is one of song lyrics of Billie Eilish's song entitled "My Strange Addiction" found in line 11. In this lyric, the words 'I' and 'you' are the first idea as a topic and the second idea are the words 'powder' and 'fuse' as an image. The word 'powder' means gunpowder and the word 'fuse' refers to the part of a bomb or other explosive device that is lit with a flame and burns down until it ignites the explosion. Based on the song entitled "My Strange Addiction", the singer explains about her toxic relationship with boy. She is comparing herself as a powder and the boy as the fuse because if the gunpowder and the fuse are together, they would be explosive, and 'friction' between them sets off the spark. It may provide clarity or identify hidden similarities between four ideas which are 'I'm' with 'powder' and 'you're' with 'fuse'. The meaning of this lyric is explaining that their relationship cannot work in the long run.

1. Metonymy

Metonymy in traditional terms as identifying a referent by something associated with it. Metonymy is one entity that is used to refer to another (Larson, 1998). Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand. Some metonymy found in the data source are:

Ten fingers *tearing up* my hair (Wish You Were Gay – line 17).

In the example above, "ten fingers *tearing up* my hair" is one of song lyrics of Billie Eilish's song entitled "Wish You Were Gay" found in line 17. This lyric shows metonymy. The phrase 'tearing up my hair' refers to pulling her hair. In this song, the singer shows her depression. The phrase 'tearing up' explains about her emotional response to the behavior of the person she loves. It is clear that the lyric contains figurative forms of metonymy which an object or concept is referred to not by its own name, but instead by the name of something closely associated with it. The literal meaning of the lyrics is that she uses her ten fingers to pull her hair because she is in depression. She was

rejected by a boy. She is so addicted to this boy. Therefore, she addicted to pull her hair as the boy has not responded to her in the way she wants him to.

1. Simile

Metaphors and similes are common figures of speech found in many languages. These figures of speech are comparisons. In English simile always has the word *like* or *as*. Similes are grammatical which represent two propositions in the semantic structure. Here is the lyric belong to figurative forms of simile found in Billie Eilish's songs.

Deadly fever, please don't ever break.

Be my reliever 'cause I don't self-medicate.

And it burns like a gin and I like it (My Strange Addiction – line 22-24).

In the example above, “and *it burns like a gin* and I like it” is one of song lyrics of Billie Eilish's song entitled “My Strange Addiction” found in line 24. The word ‘it’ leads to ‘fever’. ‘Fever’ and ‘gin’ are compared and they show similarities between two different things. These lyrics also use the word ‘like’ to compare the word ‘fever’ and ‘gin’, which it is clear as simile. Fever is an elevation in body temperature or a high body temperature. In this case, the word ‘fever’ refers to an addiction to the person. Gin is a distilled spirit that is made from grain and flavored with botanicals. The literal meaning of this lyric is, she addicts this person because her pain is slowly killing her with its ‘deadly fever’. Her attraction to him “burns like a gin” but she likes it. Therefore, the singer compares the fever with.

1. Synecdoche

Figurative senses based on part-whole relationships are also quite common in some languages and are called synecdoche. Synecdoche (the use of the part for the whole) and metonymy (the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant) are alike in that both substitute some significant detail or aspect of an experience of the experience itself. There are some synecdoches found at the data source:

You should see me in the *crown* (You Should See Me in the Crown – line 12).

In the example above, “you should see me in the *crown*” is the lyric from Billie Eilish's song entitled “You Should See Me in the Crown” found in line 12. The word ‘crown’ from the example above indicates of synecdoche that replaces a whole part. The meaning of word ‘crown’ refers to kingdom. The singer tells, that she is a subjugator woman who wants to take over the kingdom. The literal meaning of this song is that the singer is waiting her time to prove that she can take control the kingdom and she wants to be a queen.

1. Symbol

Symbol is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. The symbol is meaningless except as it stands for something else, and the connection between the sign and what it stands for is purely arbitrary. The lyric that indicates the figurative forms of symbol can be seen in the following examples.

Shoulda taken a break, not an *oxford comma* (My Strange Addiction – line 6).

In the example (1), “shoulda taken a break, not an *oxford comma*” is one lyric of Billie Eilish’s song entitled “My Strange Addiction”. This lyric is found in line 6. The phrase ‘oxford comma’ means that when you have a list of three or more things, and you put a comma before ‘and’. By using an oxford comma, you pause for a brief moment, then keep it at all. This likely refers to how the singer and this supposed person should have spent more time apart after having a negative experience with this person.

1. Paradox

Paradox is an apparent contradiction that is nevertheless somehow true. It may be either a situation or a statement. The value of paradox is its shock value. It seems impossible for the reader to get the fact of its apparent absurdity, underscores the truth of what is being said. There is a paradox in the data source:

Your *silence* is my favorite *sound* (You Should See Me in the Crown – line 13).

From the example above, the “your *silence* is my favorite *sound*” lyric shows a paradox. This lyric is one of the lyrics from Billie Eilish’s song entitled “You Should See Me in the Crown” found in line 13. It’s a seemingly absurd statement or proposition. As we know, silence is definitely no sound. In this song, the literal meaning of this lyric is that the singer is going to make everyone bow to her whims and make everyone silence with shock. That silence is her favorite because she has power and she can be a queen.

1. Overstatement

Overstatement/hyperbole is simply exaggeration out in the service of truth. A hyperbole is a metonymy or synecdoche with more said than the writer intended the reader to understand. The exaggeration is deliberately used for effect, and said it is not to be understood as if it were a literal description. The lyrics that indicate the figurative forms of hyperbole can be seen in the following examples.

It’s like, *one of the best movies I’ve ever seen in my life* (My Strange Addiction – line 21).

For the example (1), the lyric “it’s like, *one of the best movies I’ve ever seen in my life*” shows the figurative forms of overstatement/hyperbole. This lyric is part of Billie Eilish’s song entitled “My Strange Addiction” found in line 21. The sentence “I’ve ever seen in my life” is very clear that this includes overstatement/hyperbole that contains statements that deliberately exaggerate. The statement of this lyric show that the singer just wants to say that it is a good movie and she likes that.

1. Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech established by usage that has a meaning not necessarily deducible from those of the individual words. Idioms express a particular sentiment, but they do not literally mean what the individual words themselves mean. The lyrics that indicate the figurative forms of idioms can be seen in the following examples.

Leave me, *déjà vu* (Listen before I Go – line 16).

In the example (1), the lyric “leave me, *déjà vu*” is one of the lyrics from Billie Eilish’s album entitled “Listen Before I Go”. This lyric is found in line 16 that contains figurative forms of idiom. The words ‘*déjà vu*’ are the strange feeling you get when you’re in situation, and feel like you’ve been in the exact same situation before, but really have not. Most people think it means the same thing happening twice, which is wrong. In this song, the singer tells this person to leave her cause she is already used to be alone and it is a familiar feeling for her to experience abandonment, it has happened to her before or has felt like it.

1. Euphemism

A euphemism is a figurative expression which is in some ways like a metonymy. There is the substitution of one word for another or one expression for another. In contrast, a euphemism is used to avoid an offensive expression, or one that is socially unacceptable, or one that is unpleasant. The lyric that indicates the figurative forms of euphemism can be seen in the following examples.

I don’t need a *xanny* to feel better (Xanny – line 14).

For the example no (1), the lyric “I don’t need a *xanny* to feel better” is one of the lyrics from Billie Eilish’s song entitled “Xanny” found in line 14. This lyric contains figurative forms of euphemism. The word ‘*xanny*’ in this lyric refers to Xanax. Xanax is a medication that is used for conditions such as anxiety and depression. The word ‘*xanax*’ is too vulgar to say, that is why it is euphemistically used by saying it ‘*xanny*’. The literal meaning of this lyric is, when she is depressed, she will never try to consume this illegal drug to calm herself down. The singer doesn’t need a xanax to feel better. Furthermore, after

analyzing the data, the real meanings of figurative forms found in Billie Eilish's song lyrics are mostly about depression and obsession. It can be shown in most of the lyrics which tell about behavior of someone who is in depression and obsession such as suicide, drugs, and someone who wants to be a winner to rules the world. These songs were created in the singer's dark days

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the discussion, there are twelve songs of "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" album by Billie Eilish used as a data source. They are "Wish You Were Gay", "Xanny", "My Strange Addiction", "8", "When the Party's Over", "Listen Before I Go", "Ilomilo", "I Love You", "All the Good Girls Go to Hell", "Bury a Friend", "Bad Guy", "You Should See Me in the Crown". From the analysis, it can be concluded that there are some types of figurative forms that are found in the song lyrics. Moreover, in some songs, some lyrics that contain the same types of figurative forms are found. The types of figurative forms that are found in the song lyrics are metaphor, metonymy, simile, synecdoche, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, idiom, and euphemism. Based on the analysis, metaphor, symbol, and euphemism are the dominant type that appeared the most with each 5 data, following by metonymy with 4 data, following by simile with 3 data, following by hyperbole and idiom with each 2 and the last are synecdoche and paradox with each 1 data. Thus, the total of all the data are 28 of the figurative forms found in Billie Eilish's album entitled "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?". After analyzing the data, the real meanings of figurative forms found in Billie Eilish's song lyrics are mostly about depression and obsession. It can be shown in most of the lyrics which tell about behavior of someone who is in depression and obsession such as suicide, drugs, and someone who wants to be a winner to rules the world. These songs were created in the singer's dark days.

References

- [1] Abrams MH. A glossary of literary terms. 7th ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. 1999.
- [2] Hasanah DN. An analysis of figurative language used in some poems by Oscar Wilde. Thesis. Semarang: UIN Walisongo Semarang. 2018. <https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id>.
- [3] Knickerbocker KL, Reninger HW. Interpreting literature: Preliminaries to literary judgment. New York: Rinehart and Winston; 1963.

- [4] Lakoff G, Johnson M. Metaphor we live by. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1980.
- [5] Larson ML. Meaning-based translation, a guide to across-language equivalence. New York: University Press of America; 1998.
- [6] Perrine L. Sound and sense: An introduction of poetry. 7th ed. Texas; Southern Methodist University; 1987.
- [7] Saeed JI. Semantic. 3rd ed. London: British Library Cataloguing; 2006.