



Tersedia online di jurnalsora.stba.ac.id - DOI :

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN BILLIE EILISH'S *HIT ME HARD AND SOFT* LYRICS

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Abstrak

Studi ini menganalisis penggunaan dan fungsi bahasa kiasan dalam lirik album Hit Me Hard and Soft karya Billie Eilish. Bahasa kiasan memungkinkan penulis lirik menyampaikan makna melampaui tingkat literal, sekaligus meningkatkan ekspresi emosional dan nilai estetika. Dengan mengacu pada teori (Leech, 1969) penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tujuh jenis bahasa kiasan: metafora, simile, personifikasi, hiperbola, ironi, metonimi, dan sinekdoke. Sementara itu, klasifikasi fungsi dari (Keraf, 2009) ekspresif, penekanan, dan estetika digunakan untuk mengkaji kontribusi perangkat ini terhadap kedalaman emosional dan tematik lirik. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode observasi dengan pembacaan cermat dan pencatatan pada seluruh sepuluh lagu dalam album. Lirik yang mengandung bahasa kiasan dianalisis secara deskriptif kualitatif untuk menafsirkan makna dalam konteks lirik, dengan fokus pada tema seperti kerentanan, identitas, patah hati, kerinduan, dan hasrat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metafora dan hiperbola merupakan jenis yang paling sering digunakan, menciptakan citraan hidup yang memperkuat intensitas emosi dan keterlibatan pendengar. Bahasa kiasan dalam album ini tidak hanya memperindah lirik, tetapi juga mengartikulasikan emosi kompleks dan pengalaman psikologis secara halus. Secara keseluruhan, studi ini menegaskan peran bahasa kiasan dalam memperkaya dimensi ekspresif dan estetika penulisan lagu Billie Eilish, serta memperkuat resonansi emosional dan kedalaman interpretasinya.

Kata kunci: *Billie Eilish, dampak emosional, bahasa kiasan, Keraf, Leech.*

Abstract

This study analyzes the use and function of figurative language in Billie Eilish's Hit Me Hard and Soft album. Figurative language allows lyricists to convey meaning beyond the literal, enhancing emotional expression and aesthetic quality. Using Leech's (1969) framework, the study identifies seven types of figurative language: metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, and synecdoche. Keraf's (2009) classification of expressive, emphatic, and aesthetic function is applied to examine how these devices contribute to the lyrics' emotional and thematic depth. Data were collected through observation, involving

close reading and note-taking across all ten tracks. Selected lyrics were analyzed qualitatively to interpret figurative expressions within their lyrical contexts, focusing on themes such as vulnerability, identity, heartbreak, longing, and desire. Findings reveal that metaphor and hyperbole appear most frequently, often creating vivid imagery that intensifies emotional impact and listener engagement. Figurative language in the album not only beautifies the lyrics but also articulates complex emotions and psychological experiences, subtly shaping the emotional tone and interpretive possibilities. Overall, the study underscores the importance of figurative language in enriching both expressive and aesthetic dimensions of Billie Eilish's songwriting, reinforcing its power to evoke emotional resonance and enhance the listener's interpretive experience.

Keywords: Billie Eilish, emotional impact, figurative language, Keraf, Leech.

1. Introduction

Leech (1969) said that figurative language involves a transfer of meaning and is often linked to poetic deviation, which makes certain parts of language stand out from ordinary usage. Through this process, writers and lyricists can express their feelings more clearly and give their work a stronger creative impact. In the same way, Wales (2011) explains that figurative language is central to the expressive function of texts, helping authors convey deeper messages that go beyond the surface. Figurative language involves expressions whose meanings extend beyond the literal interpretation, enriching emotional and thematic depth in literary texts and song lyrics alike.

While it emphasizes its ability to offer imaginative pleasure and layered meaning within a compact form, it also plays a crucial role in shaping how listeners engage with song lyrics. In song lyrics, figurative language plays a crucial role in shaping how listeners engage with music, allowing artists to express complex emotions and abstract ideas through metaphors, similes, hyperbole, personification, symbolism, and other devices (Perrine, 1982). Lee (2022) explains that figurative language enables abstract emotions to be expressed more vividly, allowing audiences to experience them more deeply. Therefore, it is very important to pay attention to the type of figurative language that will be used in a lyric along with its meaning because figurative language contains a very profound impact on a person's emotional condition.

There're so many studies on figurative language in music focus on mainstream pop artists like Taylor Swift, Billie Eilish remains underexamined despite her distinct lyrical style and critical acclaim. Her lyrics, especially in *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, are rich with poetic and

figurative elements that contribute to the emotional intensity and unique atmosphere of her songs. The way they highlight how lyrics function not in isolation, but in interaction with melody, rhythm, and performance, creating meaning that goes beyond words. Eilish's music exemplifies this interplay, with lyrics that explore themes of mental health, self-expression, love, vulnerability, and identity, all conveyed through figurative language that invites multiple interpretations (Simpson, 2004).

The significance of this study lies in its focus on how figurative language in Eilish's lyrics operates both stylistically and thematically. Leech's framework enables a systematic classification of figurative language types such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, and more while also examining their rhetorical and emotional functions. The figurative language is essential to the expressive function of texts, encoding deeper meanings that extend beyond surface-level interpretation. Through this lens, the study identifies not only the types of figurative language used in the album but also how these figures function to convey emotional depth, social commentary, or personal reflection (Wales, 2011)

Eilish's use of figurative language also serves as a form of self-representation, echoing Goodwin's (1992) idea that music lyrics reflect both personal and collective experiences. Her ability to merge poetic imagery with themes relevant to contemporary youth such as anxiety, alienation, and emotional complexity makes her lyrics an important site for stylistic analysis. Figurative expressions in her songs are not merely decorative; they shape narrative, evoke atmosphere, and engage listeners on a profound emotional level (Goodwin, 1992).

This study focuses on figurative language based on Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* albums. Ultimately, this study aims to identify the types and analyze the functions of figurative language used in the *Hit Me Hard and Soft* album by Billie Eilish. Also this study contributes to both stylistics and popular music studies by analyzing how Eilish's lyrics utilize figurative language to create meaning.

2. Methodology

Method

This study employed a qualitative method to describe the use of figurative language in Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* albums by observation, the researcher conducted close readings and note-taking of the lyrics. This study analyzes the lyrics of all ten tracks from Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* album (2024), known for its emotional and poetic language. Data were sourced from Genius.com, focusing on figurative language expressing themes of identity, vulnerability, love, and self-reflection.

Data Collection Technique

The data for this study is taken from the lyrics of all ten tracks in Billie Eilish's third studio album, *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, released on May 17, 2024

Data Analysis Technique

This method does not rely on numerical data but instead emphasizes descriptive interpretation, allowing for in-depth exploration of how figurative language contributes to the emotional and artistic aspects of the songs. Each expression was interpreted in relation to emotional tone and song themes, enabling a deeper understanding of lyrical meaning and artistic intent.

The informal method by Sudaryanto (1993) was used to present findings through clear verbal explanations. Figurative expressions are described in context, detailing their emotional and thematic impact within the lyrics, making the analysis accessible and grounded in qualitative interpretation without technical jargon or symbols.

3. Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study show that the song lyrics in the album *Hit Me Hard And Soft* by Billie Eilish contain various types of figurative language. The figurative expressions identified in the lyrics include metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, irony, and synecdoche.

Metaphor

Metaphors are figures of speech that describe something by referring to something else, without using words like as or like. This figurative technique adds richness to the lyrics and makes them more emotionally engaging. The metaphors identified in the album help

communicate themes of vulnerability, self-perception, and identity. Below are selected metaphorical expressions from the songs, along with an explanation of their meaning and function.

Am I acting my age now?

Am I already on the way out?

When I step off the stage, I'm a bird in a cage

I'm a dog in a dog pound

[Verse 2, SKINNY]

The lyrics "When I step off the stage, I'm a bird in a cage / I'm a dog in a dog pound" contain metaphors, as they directly compare the speaker to a bird and a dog without using "like" or "as," which fits Leech's classification of metaphor. The metaphor "a bird in a cage" evokes an image of beauty and fragility being trapped, while "a dog in a dog pound" implies helplessness and being held in a space of judgment or abandonment. These metaphors reflect how the speaker feels constrained and emotionally trapped after performing as if public identity brings isolation rather than freedom (Leech, 1969).

Simile

Similes are expressions that compare two things using connecting words such as like or as. This literary tool enables listeners to better visualize and emotionally connect with the experiences described in the lyrics.

I should put it all behind me, shouldn't I?

But I see her in the back of my mind all the time

Like a fever, like I'm burning alive, like a sign

Did I cross the line?

[Chorus, WILDFLOWER]

In this emotionally intense line, Billie Eilish uses three similes to express overwhelming emotional experience. A simile compares two things using *like* or *as* to give clearer meaning to abstract emotions. *Like a fever* implies something uncontrollable and internal, while *like I'm burning alive* shows intense emotional pain. The final part, *like a sign*, suggests that these strong feelings could have a deeper meaning or point to something significant. Billie uses physical and spiritual imagery to help the listener feel her inner

struggle, not just understand it. Each comparison adds more depth to the feeling, making it not just emotional, but also symbolic. The escalation shows that love or heartbreak can be more than a feeling it can be a powerful, burning, even spiritual force (Leech, 1969).

Hyperbole

Hyperboles are figures of speech that use intentional exaggeration to express strong emotions or emphasize a point. Instead of describing feelings in a literal or restrained way, the songwriter stretches reality to reveal how overwhelming or consuming certain emotions feel. This figurative technique enhances the lyrical impact and helps convey deep emotional states in a vivid, memorable way.

*Fell in love for the first time
With a friend, it's a good sign
Feeling off when I feel fine*

21 took a lifetime

[Verse 1, SKINNY]

In this line, Billie Eilish uses hyperbole to show how difficult her life has felt by the time she turned 21. Saying that age *21 took a lifetime* emphasizes how intense her experiences have been. The lyric expresses the feeling that she has gone through so much, it feels like she has already lived a full life. This exaggeration helps the listener understand the emotional pressure Billie has felt growing up under public attention. The use of hyperbole makes the listener feel the emotional weight of Billie's early adulthood. It highlights not just exhaustion, but the sense of being emotionally older than her age. The lyric also invites reflection on how fame can speed up emotional growth and make life feel more difficult.

Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which human qualities such as emotions, actions, or characteristics are given to non-human things like objects, animals, or abstract concepts.

*And you said I was your secret
And you didn't get to keep it
And the internet is hungry for the meanest kind of funny
And somebody's gotta feed it*

[Verse 2, SKINNY]

This line uses personification, attributing the human trait of hunger to the abstract concept of the internet. According to Leech (1969), personification assigns human qualities to non-human entities, and here the internet is depicted as craving negativity *hungry for the meanest kind of funny*. This transforms digital culture into a living force with appetites, suggesting that online spaces don't just exist they actively seek out and consume cruelty or mockery. By describing the internet as *hungry*, the songwriter intensifies the critique of modern online behavior, making the idea of a voracious digital audience more pointed and memorable. Instead of simply stating that people enjoy mean content, the figurative language forces listeners to consider the relentless and systemic nature of online cruelty.

Metonymy

Metonymy is a rhetorical device in which something is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it, rather than by its own name. In Billie Eilish's Hit Me Hard and Soft, metonymy appears when a concrete term like a number, object, or image is used to suggest a broader concept such as identity, communication, or emotional attachment. This device enables the artist to convey layered meanings in a concise way, adding subtlety to the lyrics.

You wanted to keep it
Like somethin' you found
'Til you didn't need it
But you should've seen it
[Verse, LUNCH]

This lyric features metonymy, a figure of speech in which something is referred to by an associated concept rather than being named directly. In this line, the repeated use of “it” stands in for something abstract most likely the emotional bond, the relationship, or even the speaker themselves treated metaphorically as a disposable object. The phrase *keep it like somethin' you found* likens the emotional connection to a found item, something temporary and easily discarded once its usefulness ends. By using *it* to represent something once cherished and then abandoned, the lyric expresses hurt and disillusionment. The figure allows the speaker to communicate a sense of being reduced to a thing kept only while wanted

highlighting feelings of disposability and betrayal. This expressive use helps the listener connect with the emotional vulnerability conveyed in the lyric.

Irony

Irony involves expressing a meaning that is opposite or significantly different from the literal interpretation of the words used. Billie Eilish often uses ironic phrasing to highlight the gap between how things appear and how they truly feel. This not only adds a layer of complexity to her storytelling but also invites the audience to read between the lines, recognizing tension beneath seemingly casual or affectionate statements.

But after I left, it was obvious why (Oh), mm

Because for you, you

I was the love of your life, mm

But you were not mine (But you were not mine)

[Chorus, L'AMOUR DE MA VIE]

This lyric features irony, where the emotional reality contrasts with the expected outcome. In this lyric, the speaker recognizes that they were deeply loved by someone, yet did not share the same feeling in return. The phrase *I was the love of your life* is traditionally associated with mutual, lasting love, but the immediate follow-up *but you were not mine* reverses that expectation, creating emotional contradiction and tension. The lyric does not merely describe heartbreak it reveals a complex emotional reality in which deep affection is not returned. This contradiction intensifies the listener's sense of the speaker's sadness and disillusionment, allowing the emotion to resonate more deeply through the use of irony.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, or vice versa. In Hit Me Hard and Soft, Billie Eilish uses synecdoche to highlight emotional or symbolic aspects of people and experiences by referencing a detail that implies the entirety.

*I memorized your **number**, now I call you when I please*

I tried to end it all, but now I'm back up on my feet

I saw you in the car with someone else and couldn't sleep

If somethin' happens to him, you can bet that it was me

[Bridge, THE DINER]

This lyric employs synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. In this case, the word *number* represents more than just digits, it stands in for the person themselves and the emotional connection the speaker still holds. By focusing on a single detail, the lyric expresses deeper meaning, as memorizing someone's phone number becomes a symbol of emotional attachment, obsession, or unresolved feelings. Rather than stating these feelings directly, the lyric lets a small but intimate act, knowing and using the number to convey a sense of longing and psychological preoccupation. The use of synecdoche adds subtlety and emotional depth, allowing listeners to understand the speaker's inner state without explicit explanation.

4. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study on the use of figurative language in Billie Eilish's album *Hit Me Hard and Soft*. The research identified various types of figurative language—metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—using Leech's (1969) theory and analyzed their functions through Keraf's (2009) framework. These expressions enriched the lyrics by adding emotional depth, poetic imagery, and thematic complexity. Metaphors conveyed abstract emotions like heartbreak and insecurity, while hyperbole and personification heightened the emotional tone. Metonymy and synecdoche simplified complex ideas, and irony added interpretive depth. Most figurative expressions served expressive functions, revealing internal emotions, while others emphasized meaning or enhanced aesthetic appeal. Overall, the study concludes that figurative language is central to Billie Eilish's songwriting, allowing her to communicate personal experiences with literary nuance. It demonstrates that such language in modern pop music is not merely decorative but serves as a meaningful vehicle for emotional and artistic expression.

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