



A Descriptive Qualitative Research on Figurative Language on Adele's Album: *30* and Avril Lavigne's Album: *The Best Damn Thing*

I Wayan Kertayasa^{1*}, Ni Made Verayanti Utami², Ida Ayu Mela Tustiwati³

^{1,2,3} Fakultas Bahasa Asing, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Denpasar Utara, Bali 80233, Indonesia
Email: balitirtastone@gmail.com, verayanti.utami@unmas.ac.id, mela.tustiwati@unmas.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 10 December 2024	This study analyzes the use of figurative language in Adele's album <i>30</i> and Avril Lavigne's album <i>The Best Damn Thing</i> . The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the types of figurative language found in each song of both albums, and (2) to analyze the most dominantly used figurative language in each album and interpret its meaning. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, using all songs from the two albums as data sources. The findings reveal that Adele's <i>30</i> features eight types of figurative language: simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, and understatement. In contrast, Avril Lavigne's <i>The Best Damn Thing</i> contains four types: simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole. Hyperbole emerges as the most dominantly used figurative language in both albums. These findings suggest that hyperbolic expressions play a central role in conveying emotional intensity and artistic expression in contemporary pop music.
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1. Introduction

Language is a symbolic system used by humans to communicate, whether through written signs, spoken words, or body movements. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007), language enables people to convey thoughts and emotions. Beyond its communicative role, language serves as a tool to express ideas, knowledge, and feelings (Oswald, 2023). In social contexts, it also functions as a medium for transmitting cultural values and preserving a society's collective identity across generations (Kramsch, 1998; Hall, 2011).

*Corresponding Author
E-mail: balitirtastone@gmail.com
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In English studies, linguistics is the central discipline that explores the structure, function, and meaning of language (Baker & Hengeveld, 2012; Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2018). A key branch within linguistics is semantics, which focuses on how meaning is constructed and interpreted in various contexts (Saeed, 2014; Allan, 2001). One particularly rich source for semantic analysis is song lyrics, as they often blend literal and non-literal meanings to evoke emotional and symbolic resonance (Dewi & Widiastuti, 2020; Muskitta & Maruanaya, 2021; Tagg, 2012).

Songs, as described by Munday (2001), are crafted to convey feelings, thoughts, and experiences through artistic language. Figurative language such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and personification is often used to deliver these messages more powerfully. Kennedy and Gioia (2007) argue that figurative language deviates from literal meaning and requires interpretive engagement to uncover deeper implications. These rhetorical devices allow songwriters to communicate abstract emotions in a vivid and relatable way (Lyons, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010).

Prior studies have demonstrated that figurative language in songs serves as a strategic communicative tool. For example, Hidayatullah (2022) found that Maher Zain's lyrics rely heavily on metaphor and personification to convey spiritual themes. Such findings support the idea that figurative expressions not only enrich the poetic quality of songs but also strengthen emotional connections between the artist and audience. Figurative language is often perceived subjectively, enabling listeners to interpret meaning based on their personal and cultural backgrounds (Kardana et al., 2022; Mazzaggio & Moussaid, 2023; Gibbs, 1994).

Furthermore, figurative language in lyrics has pragmatic functions, it facilitates a negotiation of meaning between the songwriter and the audience. This dynamic makes song lyrics a fertile ground for semantic and pragmatic exploration, particularly given their interpretative richness and cultural relevance (Kroeger, 2018; Yule, 2020; Mey, 2001).

Although previous studies have examined figurative language in selected songs or albums, a comparative semantic analysis of entire albums by contrasting artists such as Adele and Avril Lavigne remains scarce. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how figurative devices are employed differently across musical genres and artistic personas. Adele's introspective ballads and Avril Lavigne's rebellious pop-punk anthems provide a compelling contrast in stylistic and emotional expression (Negus, 2012; Moore, 2012).

To address this gap, the present study sets out to:

1. Identify the types of figurative language found in each song of both albums
2. Analyze the most dominantly used figurative language in each album and interpret its meaning

By conducting this comparative semantic analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how figurative language shapes emotional and cultural expression in contemporary English-language music. As Gibbs (2017) notes in his work

Metaphor Wars, metaphors and related devices are not mere stylistic flourishes but foundational to how humans conceptualize experience and emotion

2. Literature Review

Research on figurative language has long been a focus in semantics and stylistics, particularly in analyzing creative texts like song lyrics. Figurative language refers to expressions that depart from literal meaning to achieve rhetorical or poetic effects, often aiming to evoke emotion, emphasize ideas, or convey complex concepts in accessible ways (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2004).

In cognitive semantics, metaphor is viewed not merely as a literary device but as a fundamental part of human thought. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors structure the way we understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences, such as in the metaphor “love is a journey.” Steen (2011) further elaborated on the contemporary theory of metaphor, distinguishing between linguistic, conceptual, and communicative dimensions of figurative language. These perspectives are vital in understanding how listeners cognitively process and emotionally respond to figurative elements in song lyrics.

Several applied studies have examined figurative language in popular music, often using a descriptive qualitative approach. For example, Dewi (2020) explored figurative expressions in Maher Zain’s songs, identifying eight types: simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, contradiction, exaggeration, understatement, and irony. Hyperbole emerged as the most dominant form. Dewi’s research underscores how spiritual and emotional messages are conveyed through rich figurative devices.

Safira (2020) analyzed figurative language in selected Shawn Mendes song lyrics. Her study revealed five dominant types: metaphor, exaggeration, personification, simile, and repetition, with hyperbole again the most frequently used. She emphasized how these devices enhance the lyrical message and emotional appeal. Similarly, Rahmani (2019) investigated Taylor Swift’s song “Red,” focusing on types and communicative purposes of figurative expressions. Her findings showed simile and exaggeration were most prevalent, demonstrating how vivid imagery reinforces emotional expression in romantic themes.

While these studies contribute to the understanding of figurative language in songs, they share certain limitations. Most of them are undergraduate theses or local studies, relying on limited datasets, some analyzing only one song or a few selected tracks from an album. Furthermore, the theoretical engagement in many of these studies remains surface-level, lacking integration with broader semantic or cognitive linguistic theories.

This current study aims to address those gaps by (1) applying a more comprehensive semantic framework, including the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and cognitive-pragmatic approaches (Gibbs, 1994; Steen, 2011); (2) conducting a comparative analysis across entire albums by two internationally recognized artists Adele and Avril Lavigne; and (3) offering critical insights into how different musical personas and genres deploy figurative language to construct meaning. Charteris-Black’s

(2004) work on metaphor in discourse further informs the study's focus on how figurative expressions reflect identity, emotion, and sociocultural context in music.

By expanding both the theoretical and empirical scope, this study not only builds on existing literature but also contributes a comparative cross-genre perspective, which is still underrepresented in figurative language research within music studies.

3. Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the types and functions of figurative language in song lyrics. The researchers adopt the framework proposed by Perrine and Arp (1988), which categorizes various types of figurative language such as simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, paradox, and others. The qualitative approach is suitable for this study because it allows for detailed interpretation of meaning, style, and rhetorical function within the context of the lyrics.

The primary data sources are the complete song lyrics from:

- Adele's album *30* (2021), and
- Avril Lavigne's album *The Best Damn Thing* (2007).

The data were obtained through library research, which involves collecting documented texts such as song lyrics from official sources (e.g., verified artist websites, streaming platforms, and published lyric databases). According to Krug and Schlüter (2013), library research facilitates the collection of rich textual data from written documents including transcripts, books, and articles.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within data. In this study, the analysis focused on patterns of figurative language use across songs and between the two artists.

The following steps were undertaken to collect and analyze the data:

1. Reading the full lyrics of all songs from both albums to become familiar with the content and style.
2. Identifying and annotating lines that contain figurative language based on Perrine and Arp's classification.
3. Organizing the data into a database for coding and thematic categorization.
4. Categorizing the figurative language into types (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole).
5. Comparing the usage of each type across both albums to determine dominant forms and stylistic differences.

This method allows for a nuanced understanding of how Adele and Avril Lavigne utilize figurative expressions to convey emotional, cultural, or symbolic meanings in their music.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 *Types and Meaning of Figurative Language Found in each Song of Adele's Album: 30 and Avril Lavigne's Album: The Best Damn Thing*

Figurative language expresses one thing in a different way than usual to achieve distinctive meaning (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007). It indicates that people or writers utilize figurative language to convey their intentions indirectly. Because this figurative language cannot be translated into its literal meaning, the writer must first determine what the author intends to convey. Based on the song's lyrics of Adele's album: 30 and Avril Lavigne: The Best Damn Thing, the researchers found several types of figurative language, namely simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, and understatement.

1. Simile

Simile, a comparison using "like" or "as," allows artists to externalize internal feelings by referencing concrete imagery (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007). Adele's lyrics often use simile to describe emotional disorientation and relational instability:

- *"I see your eyes widening like an ocean"* – The vastness of the ocean conveys overwhelming emotions or deep realization.
- *"I feel like a ghost"* – Suggests emotional invisibility or disconnection from her environment.

In Adele's ballads, similes often signal emotional vulnerability and self-reflection, aligning with her identity as a confessional artist.

In contrast, Avril Lavigne's similes project boldness and attitude, as seen in:

- *"I'm a hell of a scandal, I'm a scene"* – This intensifies her rebellious persona and plays into the punk-pop ethos of her music (Moore, 2012).

Thus, while both artists use similes, Adele employs them for introspection, whereas Avril leverages them for identity assertion.

2. Metaphor

Metaphor allows for more implicit meaning-making by equating two dissimilar ideas without direct comparison (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Adele's metaphors reflect complex emotional states:

- *"Love is a game for fools to play"* – This aligns with conceptual metaphors like "LOVE IS A GAME," highlighting risk and irrationality in romantic relationships (Kövecses, 2002).
- *"Consistency is the gift to give for free"* – Frames reliability as a rare and precious commodity, reflecting themes of abandonment or disappointment.

These metaphors underscore themes of emotional sacrifice and loss, consistent with Adele's autobiographical lyrical style.

Avril's metaphors, although less frequent, emphasize self-definition and confrontation, such as:

- *"I'm damn precious and hell"* – a metaphor blending value and danger, emphasizing resistance to societal norms.

3. Personification

Personification attributes human traits to abstract ideas, intensifying the emotional landscape of lyrics. Adele often uses personification to convey emotional struggles as animate forces:

- *"Let pain be gracious"* and *"Let time be patient"* – These lines humanize abstract concepts, appealing for relief or forgiveness.

Such usage aligns with therapeutic discourse—Adele seems to “negotiate” healing with time and pain, reinforcing her identity as emotionally raw and sincere.

Avril's use of personification is more combative:

- *"I'm in a fight with the world but I'm winning"* – Her lyrics frame the world as an adversary, which enhances her anti-establishment image.

4. Metonymy

Metonymy substitutes an attribute or association for the thing itself (Perrine, 1987). Adele's *"There ain't no gold in this river"* uses “gold” to represent value, opportunity, or emotional richness. The metaphor also implies drought or emptiness, reinforcing the narrative of unfulfilled relationships.

5. Symbol

Symbols in song lyrics often encode personal or cultural values. Adele's use of:

- *"My skin's paper-thin"* or *"Hanging by a thread"* – express fragility and emotional exposure, conveying anxiety and vulnerability.

In Kövecses' (2002) terms, such expressions reflect embodied metaphors, linking physical sensation with psychological states.

Her symbolic imagery often blends bodily and environmental metaphors to build a portrait of inner conflict. Avril's songs, however, rarely employ deep symbolic layering, consistent with her more direct, confrontational lyrical style.

6. Paradox

Paradox creates rhetorical tension by combining seemingly contradictory ideas that reveal deeper truths (Steen, 2008):

- *"To be loved and love at the highest count means to lose all the things I can't live without"* – suggests that emotional fulfillment may require personal sacrifice.
- These paradoxes reflect Adele's inner conflict and complex understanding of love, enriching her introspective tone.

Such linguistic complexity is largely absent from Avril's lyrics, which favor clarity and assertiveness over ambiguity.

7. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is used extensively in both albums but serves different stylistic and emotional functions.

Adele's hyperboles often amplify despair or longing, e.g.:

- "*I'm dead in the eyes*" or "*Drowning in this silence*" – convey emotional paralysis and intensity.

Hyperbole in Adele's lyrics supports the cathartic function of ballads, helping listeners relate through shared extremes of feeling.

Avril's hyperboles, such as "*I wanna see you cry like I did a thousand times*", express vindication or sarcasm, consistent with teenage angst themes in pop-punk culture.

8. Understatement

Only one instance of understatement was found in Adele's album:

- "*How do I feel so mighty small*" – This juxtaposition of "mighty" and "small" adds ironic weight to feelings of insignificance, intensifying its emotional effect through minimization.

This rare use highlights Adele's linguistic restraint in moments of deep pain, offering contrast to the frequent hyperbole elsewhere.

The findings suggest that figurative language in Adele's lyrics is more diverse and semantically layered, often reflecting themes of regret, emotional healing, and introspection. This aligns with her musical identity as a soulful balladeer rooted in vulnerability and emotional realism (Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2002).

Meanwhile, Avril Lavigne's lyrics though less varied in figurative device use hyperbole, simile, and personification to express confidence, rebellion, and emotional outbursts, supporting her identity as a pop-punk icon (Moore, 2012; Negus, 2012).

By interpreting figurative language within both semantic and cultural contexts, this study demonstrates how Adele and Avril Lavigne employ figurative strategies not only to express emotion, but to construct lyrical identities that resonate with their respective audiences.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the use of figurative language in two contrasting musical albums: Adele's *30* and Avril Lavigne's *The Best Damn Thing*. By analyzing the lyrics from a semantic perspective, the research identified eight types of figurative language such as simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, and understatement and revealed significant differences in their usage between the two artists. Adele's lyrics demonstrated a wider and deeper application of figurative devices, reflecting emotional complexity and introspection, while Avril Lavigne employed fewer

types, focusing primarily on assertiveness and expressive rebellion. Hyperbole emerged as the most dominant type in both albums, though the emotional tone and context of its use varied. This study contributes to the field of linguistic stylistics by offering a comparative semantic analysis of complete albums, revealing how figurative language functions not only as a rhetorical tool but also as a means of constructing artistic identity and emotional resonance. The findings have several implications: in linguistics, they enhance our understanding of how figurative expressions like metaphor and hyperbole shape meaning in artistic discourse; in education, they highlight the value of using song lyrics to teach semantics and literary analysis in engaging and contextually rich ways; and in music studies, they underscore the importance of language in framing genre, persona, and listener engagement. For future research, it is recommended to explore figurative language across different genres, cultural backgrounds, or gender-based artist comparisons. Researchers could also adopt corpus linguistic methods to enable broader, data-driven analyses or investigate how audiences interpret figurative expressions in various socio-cultural contexts. Overall, this study affirms that figurative language in song lyrics is not merely decorative but central to the emotional and cultural power of music.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

Authors' contribution

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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