

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND ITS MEANING ON ED SHEERAN'S SONG LYRICS

I Made Darwin Fajar Perkasa
Udayana University
darwinfajar23@gmail.com

I Made Netra
Udayana University
imadenetra@unud.ac.id

Ni Luh Sutjiati Beratha
Udayana University
sutjiati59@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to identify the figurative language and to analyze the meaning found on Ed Sheeran's Song Lyrics. The data sources were four Ed Sheeran's songs namely Photograph, Thinking Out Loud, Afire Love, and Dive taken from YouTube for the audios and a website called genius.com for the lyrics. The data were collected through documentation method and note-taking technique. Descriptive-qualitative method was applied to analyze the data using theory of figurative language by Knickerbocker and Reninger and theory of meaning by Leech. The result of the study shows that there are 6 kinds of figurative language found, namely simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, hyperbole, and irony. The lyrics containing figurative expression show implied meanings that can be classified into connotative and affective. The meanings found are about love, sadness, and awareness of each other.

Keywords: Ed Sheeran; figurative language; meaning; song lyrics

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an art. According to Leech, G. (1974) Semantic is central to the study of communication; and as communication becomes more and more a crucial factor in social organization, the need to understand it becomes more and more pressing. It is regarded so because communication is not a mere activity of exchanging information through language symbols, such as signs and words. There is an element of creativity involved during conducting communication. According to Lyon, J. (1997) Language serves as an instrument of communication is to utter a truism. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any satisfactory definition of the term 'language' that did not incorporate some reference to the notion of communication. Different communication situation means different

communication style. A speech commonly owns a formal ambience, particularly the one delivered by political figures. The language used when delivering the speech is usually concise and precise, which means the words constructed each sentence are compact to produce one particular meaning. However, contrasting style of language is found in song lyrics. As a song is a part of literary work, it is common to find unique sequence of words that does not contribute much to the song as a whole based on their lexical or dictionary meanings. Although they seem to be bizarre, they do shape the message of the song because the unique words used bring a contributory message that should be understood not through lexical approach. These unordinary words in song lyrics are called as figurative language.

Figurative language in a form of communication, such as a song, aims not only to provide meaning, but to a greater extent, it also adds a distinct effect to its ordinary and lexical counterpart. When a person says someone's voice is a bomb, it can raise both positive and negative connotations. The positive one shall perceive the sentence above as someone's voice is cool and attracts attention. Whereas, the negative connotation is that one's voice can be very loud and unpleasant. The example above is an example of figurative language, specifically a metaphor as it uses an object to understand another object. According to the example, there are possibilities that can be encountered when trying to understand such style. Therefore, understanding one's statement is crucially important.

As a member of literature, song is an art of arranging melodies and lyrics into one artistic unity. It is a piece of music with words sung to express stories, thoughts, and feelings. Songs are not similar to conversations where people can communicate messages clearly in the form of sentences that are grammatically understood. Due to the artistic purpose, songs contain lyrics that are not always syntactically and grammatically correct. The words are arranged in certain structure for aesthetic goal. Moreover, songs can insert certain words that are unique. These words are used to deliver meanings. The choice of words can depend on the mood of the song. Therefore, songs can be difficult to interpret when no sufficient knowledge regarding meanings is comprehended.

Researches about figurative language in songs have been conducted previously. First one is from Hariyanto (2017) entitled the Analysis of Figurative Language used in the Lyrics of Firework by Katy Perry. He analyzed the figures of speech and the contextual meaning of Katy Perry's Firework song. Second one is from Nainggolan et al., (2021) entitled Analysis of Figurative Language on Joe Biden's Victory Speech. The third one is from Kadek Bagus Rusmana, I Nyoman Kardana, & I Gusti Ngurah Adi Rajistha. (2021) entitled Figurative Meaning Found In QUEEN'S Album. The last one is from Agung Yustina, I. G. N., Suardhana, I. W., & Lirishati Soethama, P. (2018). Entitled Figurative Language Used by

Characters in the Sherlock Holmes 1 Movie Script "The Study in Pink.". In contrast with the current study, the first mentioned past study analyzed not just one song, but several songs from different artist. Furthermore, the ambience of the songs is different, therefore, the figures of speech are varied. The second past study used political object as the source which have different patterns of style compared to the current study. The third past study used full album from Queen's. Furthermore, the ambience of the songs is different, therefore, the figures of speech are varied. The last study used film as an object as the source which have different patterns of style compared to the current study, the current study brings a new information.

The study of figurative language can be beneficial for people because it helps people to understand certain expression found in a song in order to understand the song better. Furthermore, the expressions found can also be used in their daily life, either spoken or written based on the situation, for particular purposes, such as to beautify their speech or their writing. Therefore, the study of figurative language is important to be conducted.

Based on the foregoing introduction, this study attempts to answer two research problems, namely 1) What kinds of figurative languages are found in Ed Sheeran's song lyrics? And 2) What are the meanings of the figurative language found in Ed Sheeran's song lyrics?

METHOD

The data sources of this study were the lyrics of the four songs chosen from Ed Sheeran. Ed Sheeran, a stage name for Edward Christopher Sheeran is an English singer-songwriter. The songs were Photograph, Thinking Out Loud, Dive, and Afire Love. The lyrics were collected from a website named Genius in genius.com (internet). The lyrics were also matched with the audios from YouTube in order to seek for perfect accuracy.

The reason of choosing the songs from Ed Sheeran was because he produced songs, which are considered as literary arts. A literary art has an artistic purpose and effect that influence the beauty in its form. As Ed Sheeran mainly produced love songs, there were several lyrics

that must have figures of speech. Furthermore, these four songs were especially chosen because they were his most popular songs that people kept listening to. Therefore, in order to provide a more comprehensive knowledge concerning the meaning of the songs, Ed Sheeran and the four songs were chosen.

Documentation method was applied to collect the data in this study. The method was performed as the data were in the forms of written lyrics. Note-taking technique was applied in selecting the data to be analyzed.

Qualitative method was applied in analyzing the data. As the data found were not numerical, but descriptive, and the analysis were provided in the forms of description, therefore, this data used qualitative method. This study also applied descriptive technique in analyzing the data because the analysis was in the forms of written explanation.

This study applied the theory of figurative language by Knickerbocker & Reninger, (1963) in order to answer the first problem of the study concerning the kinds. In order to answer the second problem of the study, theory of meaning proposed by Leech (1981) was applied.

Informal method was applied in this study in order to present the analysis. Informal method is a method that applies descriptive form of analysis through paragraphs.

DISCUSSION

There are six kinds of figurative languages found in the four songs of Ed Sheeran, namely hyperbole, personification, simile, metaphor, irony, and synecdoche. Each kind of figurative languages is provided by an analysis of one data. The analysis consists of the explanation of the figurative language and the meaning.

Hyperbole

[1] Where our eyes are never closing

Hearts are never broken

And time's forever frozen, still

(Photograph)

The data for this kind of figurative language is taken from the pre-chorus verse of the song Photograph. The verse consists of three lines in which all of them belongs to hyperbole expressions. The reason causing them to be part of hyperbole is the impossible condition experienced by familiar objects that already

possess certain characteristics that cannot perform what is written in the lyrics. The analysis of the hyperbole expression is found below.

The first line of the verse above is considered as a hyperbole due to impossible condition being expressed in the line. Human's eyes are automatically set to blink under certain circumstances such as dry air, bright light, and so on. Blinking is a normal reflex that protects the eye from harmful objects. Furthermore, every human needs to sleep as it is important to maintain the health. When a human sleeps, his eyes are closed for approximately seven to eight hours. Humans, similar to any living objects in this world, will pass away. One thing that always happens when a human dies is that his eyes are closed. Even in extreme situations where the eyes are still opened, they will be closed with the help of other humans. These basic conditions are natural for humans and these show that humans' eyes will close eventually when encountering particular condition.

The second line in the pre-chorus verse above denotes an expression of hyperbole. A heart is a human organ that can be stopped functioning if it is contaminated with a disease. Furthermore, a heart will eventually stop beating when a human dies. If the broken lyric means stop beating, then a heart will stop beating one day in an unknown time. However, if the broken part equals to being in a crushed or deformed condition, then a heart can also be deteriorated or rotten after it stops working, such as after a human dies for example. Either any meaning of being broken is applied in this lyric, this lyric can never happen in real life as a human is never immortal.

The third and last line of this data is considered as a hyperbole because it expresses a condition that is not possible to happen. Time is cannot be stopped. Time is ticking, second after second, minute after minute, and hour after hour. This line tells that time is frozen or stopped, therefore days cannot be changed. This means humans live in same period of time forever. If this happened, humans would never age. Such situation is never likely to happen because by the law of nature, everything in this world ages as time goes by. Furthermore, time is not made of a liquid. The term frozen is

applicable to liquid object or hard object covered with liquid. Time is an abstract object that does not fulfil the criteria of a frozen object.

According to the three analysis of each lyrics constructing the pre-chorus verse above, the hyperbole expressions in this song are mainly based on portraying impossible conditions. The normal states of each object in each line, which are eyes, heart, and time, are deviated. Furthermore, the impossibility is supported by magnifying them through inserting adverbs of time, such as never and forever. These two words imply a strong level of the characteristics mentioned through the lyrics. The use of these adverbs is also based on the contrary condition of the objects in the lyrics. Moreover, there is an adjective of frozen that should have not been paired with the word time because time does not have a liquid material used to support the freezing process. Therefore, the expressions in this data should not be taken literally.

The lyrics above should not be taken literally because the literal meanings do not relate to the whole song. The verse above should be understood through a connotative perspective. Connotative is a type of meaning that is over and above its purely conceptual content (Leech, 1981:12). Therefore, the words constructing the verse have hidden meaning that should be uncovered to be able to understand. The word 'eyes' in the first line of the verse above is a sign of a human that still breathes and lives. The second line of the verse above has connotative meaning. The lyric implies that a situation where the couple never feel sad or betrayed by each other's mistake either with or without intention. The heart represents the love and relationship of the couple. Being broken represents the sadness and betrayal caused by each other's wrong doing. The third line also has connotative meaning. This line emphasizes the everlasting love and relationship of the couple. This lyric really strengthens the feeling of wanting to be together forever.

Personification

[2] Will your mouth still remember the taste of my love

Will your eyes still smile from your cheeks

(Thinking Out Loud)

The lyrics from Thinking Out Loud above are considered as personification as there are two non-living objects have human characteristics. The first personification is showed when a mouth can remember the taste of love. The second personification is showed when eyes can smile. The action of remembering can happen if oneself has a brain to record memories. What is seen, heard, tasted, touched, and smelled can be remembered by a brain because the memories of the objects are stored inside. To have a brain means to have a head as a medium for the brain to be placed. However, a mouth is only a part of a human body. Unlike a human body that has complete parts and organs including a brain to store memories, mouth has nothing to have similar access. Furthermore, a mouth is not alive, therefore, it can function like a human. Similar to eyes that are able to smile based on the lyrics above, impossibility is seen here as eyes cannot smile. Smiling is shown by a mouth that curves up. Smiling is also done by a human by pulling the face muscles from the mouth and the cheeks. Eyes do not have the ability to smile because they have no mouth, therefore the muscles stated previously are not present. The nature of eyes is only as organs to see. Naturally, they are not in a purpose to smile. Based on the foregoing explanation, this data is indeed a personification.

This data has connotative meaning. The lines above do not mean a mouth's ability to remember, a love to have flavour, or eyes that can smile. This data implies that as a person gets older, one may lose the ability to perform well in different activities like remembering and smiling. The true meaning is that whether or not the singer's partner can remember the affection the singer gives and be sincerely happy living the relationship.

Metaphor

[3] You're a mystery

(Dive)

The data above is considered as a metaphor due to the comparison exists there. As metaphor is a comparison that does not have comparing words 'like' or 'as', this data is suitable with the definition of a metaphor. Through this data, the singer compares 'you' with 'a mystery'. Usually, people use 'you' to refer to someone they talk to, which means to a person. In order

to describe a person, people normally go with \occupation, such as 'you are a doctor' for example. However, in this lyric, the singer describes someone as a mystery. A mystery is an abstract object of something that is unknown. The word is suitable for cases and investigations conducted by polices and detectives.

The word 'mystery' denotes an unsolved question. An object is called mystery when it is not yet understood and to understand it is considered to be difficult or impossible. As a metaphor, the characteristics of a mystery should be able to define the girl represented by the pronoun 'you'.

They word 'mystery' here refers to the different personality that the girl shows to the man compared to other typical girls he met. The other girls who have similar personalities, such as loving and obedient, make the man aware of the typical characters of girls. However, this one girl called as a mystery is different. The song has the lyric of 'do you have a tendency to lead some people on?', thus it can be understood that the girl exhibits a more dominant personality that makes the man interested. Therefore, the lyric should be understood as the girl makes the man interested because of the distinct character she has compared to other girls.

This data has affective meaning of showing emotion of curiosity from love. The lyric is raised from the feeling of attraction. Therefore, it can be known that the lyric is related to love. This can help people to appropriately understand the meaning of the song as a part of attraction, not as something related to crime or historical finding.

Simile

[4] I have travelled the world, there's no other girl like you

(Dive)

The simile in this data is found in the lyric 'there's no other girl like you'. Simile is a comparison that uses words 'like' or 'as'. Based on the definition, the lyric is suitable as a simile. The lyric compares 'other girl' with 'you'. The word 'you' here means a girl because the comparison refers to girls.

The lyric of simile data above is the continuation of metaphor data in 3a-3. Through this simile, the word 'you' is presented more

clearly as a girl as written in the analysis above. From this simile, it is known that the girl caught the attention of the man. However, the girl is not like any other girl he has met. Therefore, to understand the specific girl is characteristics exhibited by other ordinary girls should be known. The target of this simile is the girl in the pronoun 'you'. The source of the simile is other girls. According to this scheme, therefore, the girl in the pronoun 'you' does not possess the characters like other ordinary girls. It can be the physical features or the characters and behaviours.

This data has connotative meaning in terms of understanding the simile. The lyric means the man has been in many places, yet he has never seen a girl like this exclusive girl. This lyric also implies that the girl is fluttering in a unique way that other girls cannot imitate. Thus, no matter how many girls are in the world, the one that the man likes is always that girl. The connotative meaning should be understood that this simile does not talk about physical appearance. However, what makes the girl different from the other is the personality she has. This data is an emphasis on the metaphor data above as these two are next to each line in one verse.

This data also affective meaning because it has a touch of emotion. The emotion in this lyric is a positive one, particularly related to attraction. This emotion makes the song becomes a love song.

Irony

[5] I heard the doctors put your chest in pain

But that could've been the medicine

(Afire Love)

This data is considered to be an irony. Irony is an expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite. This data has two opposed concepts, which are doctors and pain. Doctors are medical practitioner whose purpose is to alleviate and even cure diseases. People see the doctors with an expectation to heal them from the sickness they have. However, this data tells that doctors put pain on one's chest. This is completely reversed to the true concept of a doctor. As the concept of doctors tells the opposite meaning, thus this lyric is an irony.

The irony in this song is raised by the presupposed concept brought naturally by the

word 'doctor'. A doctor is expected to restore human health through the practice of medicine as one is licensed as health professional. A doctor usually examines patients, reviews that health records, diagnoses illnesses, consults health conditions, and performs treatments. Through these activities, a doctor is expected to bring health.

The process of restoring a patient is assumed by people as a process that always escalates to reach a final point of being completely recovered. This means that any sickness that requires more than one time meeting with a doctor will get better each time. By this concept, treatment to a doctor should have been to alleviate pain, not to aggravate the illness. However, this irony lyric contradicts the expected concept of doctor by saying that a doctor makes the patient feels more pain.

This lyric also contradicts the concept of medicine. Medicine is chemical or compound used to cure, halt, or prevent disease. By the definition of medicine, a surface idea that occurs is that every time a person consumes one, that person must feel relieved because the pain is cured. Especially medicines that are prescribed by a doctor, they are given to patients according to their health records and current physical condition. Therefore, medicine is supposed to ease the pain. However, the lyric above creates a situation in which a pain is caused by medicine.

This data is perceived as having connotative meaning. The reason is that putting pain in someone's chest can be regarded as undergoing a surgery. As surgery involves cutting and sewing using many medical equipment, generally people perceive it as something that is painful. The pain that the doctors create to the patient's chest may be related to the medical procedures. Sophisticated methods are needed to be taken for special diseases, which may involve some equipment and medication that do not feel easy. This lyric means that, instead of alleviating the disease, the doctors give uneasy feeling to the singer's grandfather. There is an emotion put in this lyric. Negative emotion, such as sadness, occurs here which makes the song is a ballad. By acknowledging the emotion, it could be understood that the lyric and the whole song is

about grieving an important person who has illness and passes away at the end.

Synecdoche

[6] And the crowds don't remember my name

(Thinking Out Loud)

This data has a figure of speech of synecdoche. The part-whole relationship exists in this lyric. There are two parts that represent two whole concepts. The first one is the word 'crowds' that represent the general public. The second one is the phrase 'my name' to say a person.

The word 'crowds' is a plural form of 'crowd'. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a crowd means a large number of people gathered together in a public place. Through this definition, it can be understood that a crowd is only a group of people in one particular area. This word shows a part-whole relationship because this lyric imply that it is sung by a singer or a performer, therefore people around that particular area who always see him/her must have remembered him/her. However, this condition can happen when there are new people that can pass the area. Therefore, the word 'crowd' represents general public.

Furthermore, as this song seems to display the life of Ed Sheeran, the word 'crowd' clearly shows a part-whole relationship. He is a well-known singer in the world. With his popular songs and the power of social media, anyone hardly does not know him. As the definition of a crowd is limited to a group of people in one particular place, the people who know Ed Sheeran are spread all over the world. Thus, it can be seen that the word 'crowd' represents general worldwide public.

The phrase 'my name' here is a representative of someone's existence as an artist or a celebrity. The phrase is used because people usually acknowledge the name of a famous person. A name is also the easiest way to make people remember which person is discussed. However, a name is actually referring to the existence of a human as a whole. The expression of 'my name' can be replaced with 'me' to represent a whole human, yet the lyric chooses to use a small part of a whole human. The phrase is also used exclusively because name is the thing that does not change

when a person gets old or transformed in terms of physical appearance. Knowing the name of a person makes someone will not be mistaken as someone else. Physical appearance may change and people may not distinguish clearly each changes. Moreover, there are more than one person that can have similar physical appearance. Knowing someone's name is also the clear point of people acknowledging the presence of an individual. Therefore, when a person's name is forgotten, the existence of that person is ignored. By this explanation, this data is a synecdoche.

This data contains connotative meaning because the words that represent part of a bigger object have a larger meaning than their lexical one. The denotative meaning of this data is that a group of people do not remember one's name. They do not remember one can be because they barely know each other, they just met one time, or they do not part of a social group that intensely communicate like co-workers. However, this is not the lyric tries to tell. It is supposed to be understood as a man who is performer or singer does not see him as a big artist anymore and his hype decreases over time, thus, he is not popular anymore. The singer positions himself as a celebrity in this lyric. He tells that one day, people may not listen to his songs anymore, thus they will forget him as an artist and a celebrity.

There is an affective meaning of being aware of the future and emotion of love. As the lyric imagines a future situation where the man is not popular anymore and thus he cannot produce much money as he is doing now, he believes the girl will she still loves him. This can be known because the next lyric is 'I know you will still love me the same'. These feelings make the lyric does not only talk about the man's future situation, but also show the strong love between the couple. Therefore, the song tells about love.

CONCLUSION

Ed Sheeran applied several kinds of figurative language in his four songs chosen in this study. The figures of speech that he applied are simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, hyperbole, and irony. Simile and metaphor were used to provide comparisons. The personification was used to make non-

living objects alive. Synecdoche was used to represent a whole object by stating a part of an object. Hyperbole was used to exaggerate expression. Irony was used to provide opposite concept. These findings are based on the theory of Knickerbocker and Reninger (1963). The result of the findings shows that they were in accordance with the theory applied in this study.

The meanings of the figurative language expressions in the song are able to provide a support towards the meaning of the whole song. There are two kinds of meaning found, namely connotative and affective. The connotative meanings are different from the lexical meanings of the words in the lyric. Affective meaning was found as the lyrics represent the singer's personal attitude mostly towards love. The emotions represented in the figurative language expressions are varied from love, sadness, and awareness. These emotions help to understand how to perceive the lyric from certain perspective, thus they are in accordance with the meaning of the whole song.

REFERENCES

- Agung Yustina, I. G. N., Suardhana, I. W., & Lirishati Soethama, P. (2018). Figurative Language Used by Characters in the Sherlock Holmes 1 Movie Script "The Study in Pink." *Humanis*, 190. doi:10.24843/JH.2018.v22.i02.p27
- Hariyanto, H. (2017). The Analysis of Figurative Language Used in the Lyric of Firework by Katy Perry (a Study of Semantic). *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris IAIN Raden Intan*, 10(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ee-jtbi.v10i1.874>
- Kadek Bagus Rusmana, I Nyoman Kardana, & I Gusti Ngurah Adi Rajistha. (2021). FIGURATIVE MEANING FOUND IN QUEEN'S ALBUM. *KULTURISTIK: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Budaya*, 5(2), 21–28. doi:10.22225/kulturistik.5.2.3647
- Knickerbocker, K. L., & Reninger, H. W. (1963). *Interpreting Literature*. Holt, Richard & Winston.
- Leech, G. (1981). *Semantics*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Nainggolan, F., Siahaan, D. A., Sinurat, B., & Herman, H. (2021). An Analysis of

Figurative Language on Joe Biden's
Victory Speech. *International Journal on*

Integrated Education, 4(3), 364–375.