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Metaphor, Simile, Personification, and Hyperbole in Expressing Emotions Used in Songs Lyrics in Album 25 by Adele

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ABSTRACT

This research analyses the use of metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole in expressing emotions in the lyrics of Adele's album 25. The research is motivated by the role of figure of speech in conveying complex emotions vividly and poetically, particularly in song lyrics as a form of literary expression. Using a qualitative description approach, the researcher selected six songs. "Hello," "Send My Love (To Your New Lover)," "When We Were Young," "Water Under the Bridge," "Remedy," and "All I Ask". Data were collected through document analysis and categorized based on the types of figure of speech used. The findings reveal that metaphor is the most dominantly used figure of speech, followed by simile, personification, and hyperbole. Each type contributes significantly to enhancing emotional depth and lyrical meaning. The study concludes that use of figure of speech in Album "25" not only strengthens the emotional impact of Adele's music but also affirms song lyrics as a form of modern poetry. This research is expected to contribute to literary and linguistic studies, as well as to English language teaching through the use of authentic materials.

Keywords: Figure of speech, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, emotions

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in human life as a medium for communication, cultural transmission, and artistic expression. It allows people to articulate complex thoughts, emotions, and experiences that often go beyond literal meaning. As stated by Muhammad, Hidayat, and Alek (2021), language is dynamic and adaptable, often used in literature to express the human condition through both spoken and written forms. In this regard, figurative language plays a crucial role in enriching the depth, beauty, and emotional power of expression. Figurative language such as metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole serve as one of the most powerful tools in this process, adding emotional depth and aesthetic value to communication.

The use of figurative language is especially prominent in literary text and song lyrics, which frequently rely on symbolic expressions to convey emotional and conceptual meaning. According to Puspitorini and Hamdani (2021), stylistic features like figures of speech add aesthetic value and clarity, enhancing how a message is delivered. However, many students particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings often find it difficult to recognize and interpret these non-literal elements. Salwa and Liskinasih (2016) emphasize that figurative language is considered a challenging topic by university students because it demands interpretation beyond the surface meaning.

In EFL classrooms, the difficulty can hinder student's interpretive and productive language skills. As a response, contextual and engaging learning media become necessary. One effective medium is music, particularly song lyrics, which combine poetic language with emotionally rich narratives and relatable themes. Song function as authentic texts that support vocabulary development, cultural understanding, and the interpretation of figurative expressions. Hariyanto (2017) highlights that figures of speech in song lyrics enhance not only the aesthetic quality but also the emotional depth of the message, making them valuable for both enjoyment and pedagogical purposes.

Music serves as a powerful art form where language becomes a tool for storytelling and emotional expression. Songwriters frequently use figurative language to describe experiences of love, loss, hope, and reflection in a way that resonates with a wide audience. One notable artist who demonstrates this skill is Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, popularly known as Adele. Her album *25*, released in 2015, is rich in lyrical content and explores personal themes emotionally powerful and symbolic expressions. Songs such as *Hello*, *All I Ask*, and *When We Were Young* incorporate various figurative devices to convey feelings of nostalgia, regret, and peace.

Analyzing figurative language in Adele's album *25* not only enhances the appreciation of her songwriting but also provides valuable insights for language learning. By examining how figures of speech are used in her lyrics, this study highlights how music can serve as an effective learning tool in EFL context, supporting students' critical reading, interpretive skills, and creative engagement with English texts. The findings of Salwa and Liskinasih (2016) support this approach, showing that learning through songs helps students identify and understanding figurative styles while increasing their motivation to learn English.

Thus, this study aims to identify the most dominant types of figures of speech found in Adele album *25*, to explain how these figures of speech represent emotional expression

- in the lyrics, and to describe the contribution of such analysis to the field of literature. By analyzing the emotional and literary depth in Adele's songwriting, this research emphasizes the importance of figurative language in contemporary music as a rich and meaningful form of modern literature.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the use of figures of speech in selected song lyrics from Adele's album 25. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it focuses on exploring and interpreting non-numerical data in a natural context. As Creswell (2007) explains, qualitative research aims to understand human experiences and expressions through naturalistic and interpretive methods, allowing the researcher to examine how meaning is constructed through language. In this study, the descriptive design is used to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole in the lyrics, offering insight into how these expressions convey emotional depth.

The object of this study consists of six selected songs from the album 25 by Adele. These songs "Hello," "When We Were Young," "Send My Love (To Your New Lover)," "Water Under the Bridge," "Remedy," and "All I Ask" were chosen based on the richness and frequency of figurative language present in their lyrics. Each song offers emotionally charged content and provides ample examples of the figure of speech relevant to this research.

A classification table was used as a primary research instrument to assist in identifying and organizing the types of figurative language found in the lyrics. The table was systematically arranged to facilitate the documentation of each instance of metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole along with its context and emotional significance. This instrument allowed the researcher to clearly map out the distribution and function of figurative language expressions throughout the songs.

The data for this research were collected through document analysis, a common technique in qualitative studies for examining textual materials. The official lyrics were obtained from Adele's website and trusted online platforms such as Genius and AZLyrics. To ensure accuracy, the researcher also consulted official music videos on YouTube and audio tracks from streaming like Spotify. The process of data collection involved several steps: selecting the songs, reading and examining the lyrics in detail, highlighting all figurative expressions, and classifying them according to type. This systematic approach ensured consistency and thoroughness in capturing relevant data.

The analysis of the data followed a qualitative content analysis method. According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), qualitative analysis involves the organization and interpretation of data to reveal themes and patterns. In this study, the researcher began by identifying all occurrences of metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole within the lyrics. These figures of speech were then categorized, and their emotional functions and meaning were interpreted in context. This analysis aimed to explore how Adele's use of figurative language contributes to the emotional impact of her songwriting and reflects deeper themes related to love, regret, healing, and personal growth.

Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the use of figures of speech in Adele’s album 25, with a focus on identifying the most dominant types and exploring their emotional functions. Based on the findings presented in Table 1, metaphor is the most frequently used figure of speech, appearing 19 times in six selected songs. Simile 8 times, personification 10 times, and hyperbole 9 times, bringing the total to 46 figures of speech identified across the album. These results demonstrate that metaphor plays a central role in Adele’s lyrical expression, particularly in articulating emotions such as heartbreak, nostalgia, longing, and self-reflection.

Table 1. Summary of the Total Figures of Speech Found in Adele’s Album “25”

No	Figures of Speech	Total
1.	Metaphor	19
2.	Simile	8
3.	Personification	10
4.	Hyperbole	9
Total		46

The predominance of metaphor aligns with Perrine’s (1977) concept of metaphor as a powerful linguistic tool that enables songwriters to convey complex emotional ideas through symbolic comparison (as cited in Sandy, Natsir, & Asanti, 2021, p.849). Adele’s lyrics are rich in metaphorical expressions that intensify emotional impact. For example, the line “*I will leave my heart at the door*” in All I Ask, this metaphor compares “heart” to something that can be left behind, while “door” represents an emotional boundary, metaphorically conveys emotional vulnerability and the act of self-protection. Another example appears in the line “*Let me photograph you in this light in case it is the last time*” in When We Were Young, here “photograph” and “light” symbolize capturing a memory before it’s lost. The metaphor expresses the need to preserve a precious memory before it fades. Through such metaphorical choices, Adele transforms deeply personal experiences into universally relatable messages.

Although used less frequently, simile, personification, and hyperbole also contribute uniquely to Adele’s lyrical expression. Similes, such as “*You look like a movie*” in When We Were Young, this simile compares someone’s presence to beautiful and memorable art like movie, this expresses deep longing and appreciation for unforgettable memories. Personification in “*Time’s supposed to heal ya*” from Hello, time is treated as if it can heal like a person, it turns an abstract concept into something relatable and emotionally charged. Hyperboles, such as “*I must’ve called a thousand times*” in Hello, exaggerate how often she tried to reach out. This expression highlights her desperation and strong desire to fix things, emphasizing the intensity of her emotional distress. Each figure of speech supports the narrative and emotional tone of the songs, offering listeners layered and meaningful experiences

These findings show that Adele’s lyrics can be read as literary texts. Her songwriting does not merely aim for aesthetic appeal but also functions as a medium for expressing and interpreting human emotions. In this sense, figurative language serves not only as a

- rhetorical device but also as a cognitive and emotional tool, supporting Lakoff and Johnson's (1988) theory that metaphors are fundamental to human thought and communication.

The study contributes to the growing body of research that treats popular music lyrics as modern literary works. As Zahria and Wibowo (2024) and Apriliyadi and Sarmi (2022) have argued, song lyrics like those by Niki Zefanya and Coldplay contain poetic expressions that can be analyzed for their emotional, aesthetic, and educational value. This view is further supported by Sutrisno and Lestari (2021), who found that figures of speech in Roar by Katy Perry carried strong emotional and moral messages.

By applying literary analysis to Adele's 25, this study emphasizes the relevance of music in the classroom and beyond. It offers educators and students a fresh and relatable approach to exploring themes, language, and literary devices. More importantly, it encourages the recognition of contemporary music as a valid form of literature—one that speaks to the emotional complexities of the modern world and provides meaningful opportunities for interpretation and critical reflection.

Conclusion

This study has shown that metaphor is the most dominant figure of speech used in Adele's 25 album, appearing 19 times across the six selected songs, while simile 8 times, personification 10 times, and hyperbole 9 times. The prevalence of metaphor highlights its central role in enhancing the expressive and poetic dimensions of Adele's songwriting, particularly in articulating emotional experiences such as heartbreak, regret, and longing. These findings demonstrate that metaphors serve not only as stylistic devices but also as vehicles for conveying vulnerability and complex emotional states in symbolic ways.

Each type of figurative expression found in the lyrics serves a specific function in shaping the emotional atmosphere and thematic direction of the songs. Hyperbole is used to amplify intensity and emotional desperation, simile offers familiarity and nostalgic imagery, and personification brings abstract concepts like time and memory into a more relatable human context. Together, these figurative devices allow Adele to communicate deeply personal emotions in a way that resonates universally with her audience, fostering empathy and emotional engagement.

The results of this study emphasize the literary value of contemporary song lyrics, showing that they are not only forms of musical entertainment but also meaningful texts that can be critically analyzed through a literary lens. Figurative language in song lyrics bridges the gap between modern music and traditional literary studies, making it possible to explore how popular culture engages with literary devices to express human emotion. As demonstrated in Adele's 25, the use of figures of speech enriches our understanding of how language functions both artistically and emotionally, positioning song lyrics as powerful mediums for literary and linguistic exploration.

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