

Metaphor in Billie Eilish's Song "Happier Than Ever": A Semantic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze the use of metaphors in the song Happier Than Ever by Billie Eilish through a semantic approach. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Chanty, Nurhapitadin, and Huznatul (2025), discussed the lexical and metaphorical meanings in Wildflower songs, while Theodora and Setiawan (2024) analyzed various types of figurative language in songs such as Lunch, TV, and Bird of a Feather. However, these studies focus on different songs and have not examined in depth the metaphors in the song Happier Than Ever. This research fills that void by highlighting one song in particular to see how metaphors function and influence meaning in the lyrics. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study found seven metaphorical expressions. The analysis shows that these metaphors emphasize the themes that represent emotional pain, disappointment, and efforts to understand meaning in the dynamics of personal relationships. The use of metaphors not only embellishes the lyrics, but also allows Billie Eilish to express complex emotions with more depth and meaning.

Keywords: Metaphor, figurative language, semantics, Billie Eilish, Happier Than Ever.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the main way of conveying messages, whether through speech, writing, or pictures, and plays an important role in social life to convey thoughts, feelings, and build relationships with others (Bora & Agung, 2023). In the realm of art, especially music, language acts not only as a means of communication, but also as a medium to express deep and complex emotions and personal experiences.

To build depth of meaning in song lyrics, songwriters often use figurative language as a way to convey messages subtly and indirectly. A song is a form of poetry equipped with musical elements to strengthen its meaning and beauty. The use of figurative language in lyrics makes songs more interesting, easy to understand, and provides entertainment for listeners (Ardhyanti & Supriyatiningsih, 2020).

Figurative language is language that is not used with its actual meaning, but to convey a deeper meaning (Hutauruk, 2019). This language makes people need to think and imagine in order to understand the meaning. Metaphor is one of the most common types of figurative language and is considered the most effective in song lyrics. This language style works by equating two different things directly, without using connecting words such as "like" or "like" (Baru, Yanti, & Hardiyanti, 2022). Because they are conveyed indirectly, the meanings in metaphors often require deeper understanding. This style of language allows the writer or singer to express feelings that are difficult to explain explicitly through a more creative and emotionally touching way.

This research investigates the semantics aspects of metaphor in Billie Eilish's song "Happier Than Ever." Semantics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the meaning of language, specifically how words and sentences convey meaning and how that meaning can shift according to context or situation (N, Nurhapitudin, & Huznatul, 2025).

Billie Eilish is known as a young singer who has caught the world's attention for her unique music and emotional lyrics. Songs are often created to touch the listener's feelings deeply, so it is interesting to study them in order to understand different types of complex emotions (Theodora & Setiawan, 2024).

One song that features significant use of metaphors is "Happier Than Ever." "Happier Than Ever" is Billie Eilish's second studio album released on July 30, 2021 through the Darkroom and Interscope Records labels. This song contains metaphors that represent emotional pain, disappointment, and efforts to understand meaning in the dynamics of personal relationships. This article aims to identify and analyze the form and function of metaphors in the lyrics of the song, in order to reveal the role of metaphors in conveying complex emotions and the implicit meanings contained therein.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Metaphor as an element of figurative language plays an important role in deepening the emotional and aesthetic meaning of song lyrics. Through metaphor, abstract ideas can be conveyed in a more tangible and understandable way because it functions as a means of thinking and feeling (Listiwati, Sudiatmi, & Muryati, 2025). Metaphors in poetry and songs are used to connect two unrelated things so that the writer can convey feelings that are difficult to explain (Lakoff & Johnson, 2006). Semantic studies in music have been widely conducted, but discussions that specifically highlight the role of metaphors in the song "Happier Than Ever" by Billie Eilish are still limited.

Chanty, Nurhapitudin and Huznatul (2025) found that the use of metaphors in the song "Wildflower" strengthens the meaning of the words and represents themes such as tenderness and growth. This finding shows that metaphors can give a deeper meaning to each word chosen.

Ngailo, Suastini, and Pratiwi (2022) identified several types of language styles in Billie Eilish songs, such as metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. They used Leech's theory of meaning and Knickerbocker & Reninger's theory of language style, and concluded that these language styles carry connotative and emotional meanings, although they have not examined the role of metaphor on lexical meaning specifically.

Kurniawan and Sari (2024) discussed the meaning relationships in song lyrics in the album "Happier Than Ever" using Saeed's theory. They found elements such as polysemy, synonymy, and antonymy, but metaphor was not the main focus.

Based on these three studies, it can be concluded that the semantic approach contributes greatly to the analysis of song lyrics. However, there is no research that directly highlights the function of metaphors in shaping and enriching the lexical meaning in the song "Happier Than Ever". Therefore, this research was conducted to fill the void by analyzing metaphors from a semantic point of view.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to identify and explain the meaning of metaphors contained in the lyrics of Happier Than Ever by Billie Eilish. Qualitative research is a descriptive and analytical approach, allowing researchers to explore the meaning in literary texts in depth through interpretation, not through calculation or statistical analysis (Waruwu, 2023). The main focus of this research is to find phrases or sentences in the lyrics that contain metaphors and analyze the meaning behind the use of the language.

The main object of this research is the lyrics of the song Happier Than Ever, which was released in 2021. This song was chosen because the lyrics contain various forms of metaphors that describe hidden feelings, deep disappointment, anger, and the struggle to get out of a painful relationship. In addition to the main source in the form of song texts, this research is also supported by secondary sources such as theoretical books, scientific articles, and academic journals related to the theory of metaphor and figurative language, in order to strengthen the conceptual basis in the analysis process.

The first step in this research was done by reading and understanding the entire song lyrics in order to get a comprehensive picture of the context. After that, researchers traced and marked the parts of the lyrics that contained metaphorical elements, namely phrases or sentences that did not have a literal meaning, but kept a deeper figurative meaning. This identification is done through observation of word choice, delivery style, and the use of indirect comparisons that are characteristic of metaphors. To understand the meaning of metaphors contained in song lyrics, this study uses the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This theory plays a role in identifying types of metaphors and explaining how metaphors are used to express emotions and build themes in songs.

This research focuses only on one object, the song "Happier Than Ever," without comparing it with other songs. This approach was chosen in order to analyze the meaning of metaphors in the song in more detail and thoroughly. Through this research, the author wants to show how metaphors are used to express complex feelings, as well as how figurative language in lyrics helps convey messages emotionally and touchingly to listeners.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals that metaphors in Billie Eilish's song "Happier Than Ever." The function is more than just a stylistic device, but rather as a medium to express complex emotional and psychological conditions. The lyrics contain metaphors that describe feelings of heartache, the desire to be free from a painful relationship, and self-discovery. By using a semantic approach, the hidden meanings in the lyrics can be analyzed more deeply, so that the emotional message of this song is more easily understood by listeners. Seven metaphors were identified and analyzed to see how each one reinforces the message and emotional meaning Billie Eilish wants to convey.

Data 1

"When I'm away from you, I'm happier than ever"

In the sentence "When I'm away from you, I'm happier than ever", there is a subtle but emotionally powerful use of metaphor. The phrase "happier than ever" sounds like an ordinary happy expression, but it actually has a deeper, non-literal meaning. Here, the word "happy" is used not to describe the actual feeling of pleasure, but as a symbol of relief, calmness, and freedom from emotional distress.

This metaphor arises because "happy" is used to represent something different from its basic meaning. Instead of being happy for getting something nice, the speaker feels better for being away from someone she supposedly loves. This suggests that the relationship is no longer healthy and could be filled with conflict, disrespect, or emotional wounds that keep piling up. When together, she may feel trapped and unable to be herself. It's when they're away that they feel the peace they've been missing.

Therefore, the phrase "happier than ever" becomes a metaphor for inner relief. It describes a feeling that is difficult to say directly-that sometimes getting away from loved ones is the only way to feel yourself again. So, through this metaphor, the song conveys a deep emotional message about painful love, and the relief of finally being able to let go.

Data 2

"To write myself a letter / To tell me what to do"

The line "To write myself a letter / To tell me what to do" shows that the woman in this song is feeling very confused and lost. She doesn't know what to do, to the point where she imagines writing a letter to herself, as if hoping that someone will give her direction when she's actually talking to herself. This action is not actually something she would do, but rather a metaphor to describe how complicated and chaotic her feelings are. She felt unable to think clearly, and there was no one she could turn to for help. Even he himself was a stranger. This metaphor shows that she was at a point of emotional exhaustion. She feels alone, trapped, and doesn't know where to go. The lyrics symbolize a deep inner crisis - of someone trying to hold on despite feeling completely lost.

Data 3

"Do you skip my avenue?"

The line "Do you skip my avenue?" is used by the woman in the song to convey the feeling of being ignored. The word "avenue" here is not just a physical place, but a symbol of her own life, feelings, and existence in the relationship. By asking such a question, she wants to know if her partner is deliberately not passing or avoiding "her avenue", which means: whether she is being ignored, disregarded, or even forgotten. This sentence shows that she feels that she is no longer an important part of her loved one's life. This metaphor describes how she feels as if she is being avoided, as if her presence no longer matters. The woman feels disappointed that the person who was once close to her is now distant, as if she is reluctant to

see or greet him again. So, this sentence implies sadness and questions: Am I really not important to you anymore?

Data 4

"You made me hate this city"

In the song Happier Than Ever, the line, "You made me hate this city" isn't really about hating the city. It's not because the streets are bad or the place is bad, but because the city holds a lot of memories with someone who has hurt her. So, every corner of the city that might have been fun before is now painful because everything reminds you of that person. This sentence is a metaphor because "city" here doesn't just mean a place to live, but symbolizes all the bad feelings and experiences that have been experienced there. The city becomes a symbol of hurt, disappointment, and bitter memories that are hard to forget. Through this sentence, Billie shows that feelings of sadness or heartache can make someone hate the things they used to like. Even a neutral place can feel bad because there are too many painful memories in it. So, this sentence is not just about places, but about feelings that change because of other people.

Data 5

"You ruined everything good / Always said you were misunderstood / Made all my moments your own"

The lyrics "You ruined everything good" and "Made all my moments your own" use metaphors to convey feelings of hurt in a relationship. This sentence is not meant literally, because the partner didn't actually ruin all the good things or take someone's time for real. However, they are used to symbolize a sense of disappointment and loss. Since the meaning is not what it actually is, this expression falls under figurative language or metaphor.

The phrase "you ruined everything good" illustrates that all the things that used to feel good turned painful because of your partner's attitude. While "made all my moments your own" conveys that someone feels like their life is being controlled, as if they don't have room for themselves anymore. Overall, the lyrics show a feeling of sadness and fatigue in an unhealthy relationship. Someone feels unhappy, deprived of freedom, and unable to be oneself. The metaphor in this lyric is used to describe the hurt feelings in a subtle way, but still feels strong.

Data 6

"I could talk about every time that you showed up on time / But I'd have an empty line"

The lyrics "I could talk about every time that you showed up on time / But I'd have an empty line" contain a sense of disappointment conveyed through metaphor. The phrase "empty line" is not meant literally, but is used to illustrate that none of the moments in the relationship are worth remembering. This metaphor symbolizes the absence of attention and broken promises. A relationship that should be full of presence and care feels empty. By referring to "empty lines", the lyrics show that there is no real evidence of love or commitment in the relationship.

Data 7

"Always said you were misunderstood"

The lyrics "Always said you were misunderstood" describe someone who often says that they are never understood by others. But actually, this line is a subtle way of pointing out that he likes to think of himself as a victim, even though he himself often hurts or makes trouble. It's a metaphor, because "feeling misunderstood" isn't just about others not getting it, it's more about pretending to be the one who suffers the most, so that others feel sorry for them and they don't have to feel guilty. The meaning of this lyric shows an unhealthy relationship, where one person uses the excuse "I'm not understood" to avoid

responsibility and continue blaming the other person. This often happens in manipulative relationships, where one person always wants to look right when they are actually wrong.

CONCLUSIONS

The song Happier Than Ever by Billie Eilish conveys the story of a painful relationship using figurative language, namely metaphor. Symbols such as the city, the street, and the empty line not only describe the situation, but also represent deep emotions such as disappointment, loss, and indifference in the relationship.

The metaphors used do not simply embellish the lyrics, but also deepen the meaning and help convey emotions that are difficult to express directly. In this way, the song provides a deeper emotional experience for the listener.

Overall, this song demonstrates that music is not only entertainment, but also a means to express emotional issues in a poetic and touching way, through the use of figurative language such as metaphors.

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