

Figurative Language in Billie Eilish's Guitar Songs: 'TV' and 'The 30th'

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ABSTRACT

History Article:

Received 07 20, 2025
Accepted 07 25, 2025
Published 07 27, 2025

This study analyzes the use of figurative language in two songs from the EP. Guitar Songs Billie Eilish, namely 'TV' and 'The 30th'. Language is an essential communication tool, but understanding non-literal meanings is often a challenge, especially in works of art such as songs. This study aims to identify and classify the types of figurative language used, analyze its contextual meaning in relation to emotional and thematic content, and explain its role as a medium for psychological reflection and social commentary in contemporary songwriting. Using a qualitative descriptive research design and textual analysis approach, this study applies Geoffrey Leech's (1969) taxonomy to categorize figurative expressions. The findings show diverse types of figurative language such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, personification, allusion, idiom, repetition, and imagery, which collectively convey complex emotional states and critique contemporary social issues. This research contributes to the understanding of song lyrics as meaningful texts that reflect the reality of the postmodern generation.

Keywords: Figurative language, Billie Eilish, Song lyrics, Psychological reflection, Social commentary.

How to Cite:

Tsalis Lutfi Sa'diyah, & Otong Setiawan Djuharie. (2025). Figurative Language in Billie Eilish's Guitar Songs: 'TV' and 'The 30th'. Jejak Digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin, 1(4b), 2521-2529. <https://doi.org/10.63822/0fmpyk33>

INTRODUCTION

The introduction section contains: background, a brief literature review of previous research on the topic (there must be a reference to a journal published within the last 10 years), differences from previous research, problem formulation and hypotheses (if any), and research objectives.

Language is a human's tool use for communication. As a result, humans will never be able to communicate with each other without it. Language is used to share, help, find, and provide useful information and ideas to others. Bonvillain (2019) argues that people take language use for granted in daily conversation. Despite the ability to have daily conversations, some people still have difficulty expressing and understanding feelings, thoughts, ideas, and experiences. One problem people have with language is understanding figurative language (Saboe, 2018). This is because people sometimes say something without saying its literal meaning. Instead, they use language that requires interpretation. The receiver must interpret it to understand what the speaker meant.

Language is not only used to convey literal information, but also to express emotions, embellish speech, and create a certain impression on the reader or listener. In the context of art such as poetry and songs, this function becomes even more dominant. One way to convey these meanings is through figurative language. Figurative language is used when a writer or speaker conveys something in a non-literal way, aiming to create an imaginative impression, convey complex feelings, or construct a symbolic representation of reality (Leech, 1969).

Figurative language is common in all forms of communication, including everyday conversation, advertisements, poems, and books. However, it is rarely found in everyday conversation or articles. It is mostly found in poems and novels that transcend common meanings. The purpose is to encourage readers to use their imagination to understand the author's meaning. Perrine (1982:10) mentions four reasons to use figurative language. First, it supplies pleasure to the reader's imagination of literary works. Second, it is one way to add illustration to verse, make the abstract concrete, and make literary works more sensuous. Third, figurative language add emotional intensity to otherwise merely informative statements, conveying attitudes alongside information. Lastly, it allows one to express a lot in a short amount of space. In this study, the researcher intends to analyze the figurative language in a nonfiction book. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, nonfiction is writing about real events and facts rather than invented stories. Thus, a nonfiction book conveys the author's perception of real-life events without embellishment. Although nonfiction books rarely contain figurative language, the researcher is challenged to identify the most common figures of speech in this type of book and their contextual meaning.

In general, figurative language is a rhetorical and semantic device used to enrich meaning, both in spoken and written contexts. According to Leech (1969), figurative language style is a form of deviation from literal language use which is divided into seven categories, namely:

Simile, simile is a direct comparison between two different things using the words 'as' or 'like'. The use of similes is used to evoke certain emotions and paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind, making abstract concepts easier to understand. Similes serve to create visual imagery, helping the reader to visualize the emotions and situations described. They also serve to heighten the emotional impact of the poem, by linking emotional feelings with concrete images.

Metaphor, A metaphor is a figure of speech that implicitly compares two unlike things by stating that one is the other, a metaphor expresses direct equivalence. one of the main functions of a metaphor is to create vivid imagery that engages the reader's senses, and it also serves to convey complex emotions and abstract concepts in a way that is easier to understand. for example, in William Shakespeare's "All the

world's a stage," this metaphor compares life to a play in a theater, suggesting that everyone plays a different role in life.

Personification , personification is a device that attributes human characteristics, emotions, or actions to non-human entities, such as animals, inanimate objects, or others. its function is to enhance imagery by giving nature or objects human qualities, in william wordsworth's poem "i wandered lonely as a cloud" the bamboo flowers are described as dancing in the wind, this personification not only paints a vivid picture but shows a sense of joy, and vitality, so that readers can feel the beauty of nature clearly.

Symbol , A symbol in poetry refers to a word, image, or object that represents broader ideas or concepts beyond its literal meaning. Symbols can be tangible, such as a rose or a dove, or abstract, such as love or freedom. Through symbolism, poets are able to convey complex themes and emotions in a concise and impactful manner, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels. One of the main functions of symbolism is to deepen meaning, evoke emotion, and create interpretive richness. For example, in Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*, the diverging paths symbolize life choices and their consequences. Likewise, William Blake's *The Lamb* uses the lamb as a symbol of innocence and purity, drawing emotional associations with childhood and divinity. Symbolism thus serves not only as a literary device, but also as a bridge between poetic language and the human experience, enriching the narrative and emotional depth of the poem.

Allegory , Allegory is a literary device in which characters, objects, or events represent broader moral, philosophical, or political meanings. In poetry, an allegory often unfolds as an extended metaphor where each element of the narrative corresponds to a deeper concept. Unlike simple symbolism, allegory presents a structured, coherent set of ideas conveyed through figurative language. For instance, in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, characters personify virtues and vices, making the poem a moral exploration of human behavior. Allegory allows poets to communicate complex ideologies in an accessible narrative form, inviting readers to interpret layers of meaning while engaging with both literal and abstract dimensions of the text.

Hyperbole, Hyperbole is a figure of speech that involves deliberate exaggeration for emphasis or dramatic effect. It is not meant to be taken literally but is used to express strong emotions, highlight the intensity of a situation, or create a humorous or dramatic impact. For instance, the phrase "I've told you a million times" exaggerates the frequency to emphasize frustration or urgency. Hyperbole serves to intensify the emotional tone and draw the reader's attention to a specific idea or feeling in a vivid, often memorable way.

Irony, Irony refers to a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is opposite to the literal meaning, often used to express sarcasm, emphasize contradictions, or highlight unexpected outcomes. In poetry, irony can create tension, humor, or critical commentary on a subject. For example, saying "What a beautiful day" during a storm illustrates verbal irony. Irony allows poets to challenge the reader's expectations, question social norms, or underline hidden truths within the poem's message.

Allusion, Allusion is an indirect reference to a person, place, event, or work of literature, art, or history. It relies on the reader's familiarity with the referenced subject to convey deeper meaning with minimal explanation. Allusions enrich poetry by drawing on shared cultural knowledge to evoke associations and emotions. For example, a poem that mentions "Pandora's box" alludes to Greek mythology, implying the unleashing of unforeseen problems. This device enhances the thematic depth and intertextual resonance of a poem.

Imagery, Imagery is the use of descriptive language that appeals to the senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind. Through imagery, poets evoke emotions and atmosphere, making abstract ideas more tangible and enhancing the overall sensory experience of the poem. For instance, describing “the scent of rain on dry earth” appeals to the sense of smell and evokes a specific emotional memory. Imagery is essential in poetry to bring scenes and feelings to life

This study emerges as an appreciation of the richness of meaning found in popular song lyrics and offers a scholarly approach to analyzing the figurative elements embedded within them. The analysis of figurative language in *TV* and *The 30th* not only provides insight into lyrical expression techniques in music but also demonstrates how lyrics can reflect the psychological and social conditions of today's youth.

Several previous studies have examined the use of figurative language in song lyrics. Santika & Syafryadin (2023) analyzed the album *Midnights* by Taylor Swift and found eight types of figurative language-including personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, lithotes, metonymy, and oxymoron-with metaphor as the most dominant type, highlighting its role in conveying the aesthetic and emotional meaning of the song. Meanwhile, (Milana & Ardi, 2021) examined Saif Adam's song lyrics and also found eight similar figurative types, with metaphors occupying the largest proportion (~25%), which strengthens the argument that this language style is effective in deepening the listener's emotional engagement.

These findings support the premise that figurative language in popular music does not merely serve as decoration, but has significant rhetorical and emotional effects-strengthening the lyrical message, shaping emotional identity, and directing the listener's interpretation of the song's theme.

Through these studies, it becomes evident that the focus on figurative language in song lyrics is gaining a significant place in applied linguistic research. However, few studies have specifically examined songs from Billie Eilish's mini album *Guitar Songs*, particularly *TV* and *The 30th*, as primary objects of analysis that simultaneously contain poetic and social dimensions. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the growing body of research on figurative language in the context of popular music, particularly in relation to psychological expression and the realities of the postmodern generation. This study aims to:

1. Identify and classify the types of figurative language found in Billie Eilish's *TV* and *The 30th*;
2. Analyze the contextual meaning of figurative expressions in relation to the emotional and thematic content of the lyrics;
3. Explain the role of figurative language as a medium for conveying psychological reflection and social commentary in contemporary songwriting.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of linguistic research in the field of popular music and open new avenues of interpretation for understanding song lyrics as meaningful texts within contemporary cultural discourse.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design using a textual analysis approach to examine the use of figurative language in two songs from Billie Eilish's *Guitar Songs* EP: *TV* and *The 30th*. Textual analysis is appropriate for this study because it enables the systematic interpretation of

linguistic and expressive elements embedded in written texts—particularly song lyrics—which often contain rich layers of emotional and metaphorical content. This method facilitates the exploration of how figurative language constructs meaning, mood, and psychological nuance in contemporary songwriting.

The primary data consist of figurative expressions such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, irony, and other non-literal devices, identified within the official lyrics of the two selected songs. These lyrics were sourced from Billie Eilish's official releases and verified lyric repositories, ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the textual data.

The analysis process began with a close reading of each song's lyrics, in which the researcher attentively annotated phrases that exhibited characteristics of figurative language. Each instance was documented and then categorized according to the taxonomy established by Geoffrey Leech (1969), which includes several main types of figurative expressions: *metaphor*, *simile*, *hyperbole*, *personification*, *irony* etc.,.

After identification, the figurative devices were analyzed for their semantic and emotional functions within the lyrics. This included investigating how each expression contributes to the overall tone, emotional narrative, and implied message of the song. Special attention was given to how the figurative language in *TV* reflects themes of social detachment and passive disillusionment, while in *The 30th*, it reflects personal trauma and existential contemplation.

Rather than focusing on a comparative analysis, this study aims to offer a song-by-song linguistic interpretation, grounded in the contexts and meanings generated by figurative forms. By doing so, the research contributes to a better understanding of the intersection between language, psychology, and expression in modern pop music. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive and structured analysis of figurative language, while remaining sensitive to the emotive and artistic dimensions that define Billie Eilish's songwriting style.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Metaphor

1. **"I'll stay in the pool and drown"** this line represents an emotional state of silence in situation that is comfortable and dangerous, it shows her despair at the pain, rather than seeing 'you' leave
2. **"I'll try not to starve my self, just because you're mad at me"** This line contains irony where the character reveals her fragile mental state, the word 'try' implies that she has to 'try' not to hurt herself because of other people's anger, indicating the character's emotional dependence on someone.
3. **"You pieced it all together on the drive"** "Pieced it all together" is a metaphor for reconstructing fragmented memories or understanding the sequence of events after a traumatic experience.
4. **"I pieced it all together late that night"** emphasizing the delayed and difficult process of understanding the trauma.
5. **"Sinking in the sofa while they all betray each other"** This illustrates the character's helplessness through withdrawal from reality, at the same time, the phrase 'while they're betraying each other' suggests that the world around him continues to operate in a dynamic filled with betrayal. This reinforces the meaning of the previous lyric 'I put on survivor on somebody suffer' which describes the consumption of other people's suffering as an escape.

b. Irony

1. **"I put on survivor on somebody suffer"** This seemingly trivial activity (watching survivor shows) shows the emotional state of the character watching seeing the suffering of others, not because he is sadistic, but because he is suffering, and seeing others also suffering makes him feel less 'alone' in suffering.
2. **"But I told you, even then you looked so pretty"** This sentence conveys praise in a situation that is actually sad (someone is lying on a bed). to show genuine affection that still sees beauty in the worst conditions, but it is bittersweet.
3. **"What's the point of anything?"** This sentence expresses despair and loss of meaning in life. Here, it takes the form of an open-ended question as if inviting discussion, but actually states that "there is no point to anything." This contrast between the structure of the question and the hidden meaning forms a distinctive irony, and reflects a psychological state trapped in depression and nihilism.
4. **"If you changed anything, would you not have survived?"** This line describes feelings of guilt, confusion, and deep reflection on a traumatic event. This question reverses the common logic of people usually asking how to survive, but in this lyric, it asks: "if you change something, will you not survive?" Emotionally, it means the opposite-an expression of despair and guilt at the possibility that even the slightest change could lead to death. Irony arises from the conflict between the linguistic structure and the emotional meaning that refers to trauma and helplessness.

c. Hyperbole

1. **"All of my friends are missing again"** This sentence expresses isolation and loneliness in an exaggerated way. The word "missing" does not refer to being literally lost, but to feeling abandoned or distanced from social connections, possibly due to personal emotional dynamics. This phrase describes intense social disconnection, as a result of changes in life or personal relationships.
2. **"I don't get along with anyone"** The lyrics literally mean that the character doesn't get along with anyone. But in the context of the song and the emotions it conveys, it's a form of hyperbole-an exaggerated expression to emphasize feelings of emotional isolation, loneliness, and disconnection. The character doesn't really not get along with everyone; but in any given moment, she feels a total disconnect from her social environment. This reflects the emotional isolation and self-alienation, which often appear in the lyrics.

d. Personification

1. **"The internet's gone wild watching movie stars on trial"** In this lyric, the "internet" is described as if it is capable of feeling, acting, and watching like a human being. In "Watching movie stars on trial", it is as if the internet is the subject watching, even though it is the internet users. This personification also strengthens the impression of social criticism, where the collective behavior of digital society is manipulated into a single figure that seems alive and wild.

e. Imagery

1. **"When I saw the ambulances on the shoulder"** This sentence creates a visual imagery. The word "ambulances" is not just a vehicle, but a symbol of danger, trauma, or a tragic event. "On the shoulder" denotes the location of an emergency, often in relation to traffic accidents. Connotatively, this phrase implies the emotional shock or disbelief of realizing that something bad has happened. This is not just a physical depiction, but a trigger for deeper feelings of anxiety,

sadness, and loss. It becomes an emotional turning point-a moment of realization that one's life can change instantly due to an incident.

2. **"What if it happened to you on a different day? On a bridge with no rails in the way? Or on a neighborhood street where small children play? Or on Angeles Crest in the snow or rain?"** This lyric contains a series of hypothetical questions that describe alternative possibilities of a tragic accident. Here, Eilish uses words like bridge, rail, neighborhood street, kids, Angeles Crest, snow, and rain to form a strong visual image. These images not only describe the physical location, but also create an emotional atmosphere of anxiety, trauma and sadness. The lyrics reflect how humans often get caught up in "if only" thoughts, trying to explore various possibilities to understand or even blame themselves for something that is actually out of control. The imagery used helps the listener envision the scene and channel feelings of loss imaginatively.
 3. **"What if you weren't alone? There were kids in the car"** This lyric expands the possibilities of tragedy to be even more horrifying. It conjures up visual and emotional images of an accident that affects not only one person, but also vulnerable children. According to Leech, imagery works by touching the listener's senses and emotions. The word kids in the car instantly creates a disturbing image adding layers of worry, tension, and moral responsibility. This lyric contains the potential for greater imaginary guilt: "what if there were kids too?" which visualizes tragedy not just as a singular event, but as the possibility of collective devastation. Imagery here becomes a means to convey the psychological burden of survivor guilt and post-accident trauma.
 4. **"What if you were remote? No one know where you are."** This sentence presents a sense of isolation and helplessness through the description of a distant location and a condition without social connection (no one knows where you are). Although the phrase does not explicitly mention a place, it evokes the image of someone stranded or lost without help. This visualization reinforces the sense of emotional and physical isolation, and becomes a metaphor for a psychological state in which one feels invisible or unreachable-both literally and emotionally. This is in line with the experience of many trauma survivors who feel "cut off" from the outside world after experiencing tragedy.
- f. Repetition
1. **"Maybe I'm the problem"** Eilish repeated this lyrics to describe the character's inner struggle and guilt. This repetititon signifies a deep self-doubt, as if she is beginning to believe that the alienation and emptiness she feels might be coming from herself.
 2. **"You're alive"** The repetition of this lyrics serves as a powerful expression of profound relief, gratitude, and a celebration of survival, bringing the anxious questioning to a resonant conclusion.
- g. Allusion
1. **"While they're overturning Roe v. Wade"** this lyric ia an allusion to the abortion rights abolition in united states. The author criticized how society focused on celebrity drama than important issues that affect the lives of many people. In the context of the song, this allusion reinforces the sense of alienation and emptiness she feels in an increasingly chaotic and uncaring world.
 2. **"In a stand still on the five"** "The Five" is an allusion to Interstate 5, a major highway in California, grounding the event in a recognizable geographical context. The "stand-still" symbolically represents the emotional paralysis or shock experienced by the narrator upon realizing the gravity of the situation.

h. Idiom

1. **"When you're staring into space"** This line describes the psychological state of someone who is alienated from reality and trapped in their own mind. This idiom not only implies the physical act of staring blankly, but also reflects emotional emptiness, confusion, and a feeling of disconnection from the world around. It often occurs when one is under mental stress or witnesses something traumatic. By choosing this idiom, Eilish conveys inner tension in a subtle yet powerful way, as if to suggest that the character in the song is "physically present but not mentally".

The findings of this study have significant implications for understanding the role of figurative language as a reflection of psychological states and a means of social commentary in contemporary songwriting. Figurative language in 'TV' and 'The 30th' serves as a powerful conduit for expressing complex and often raw psychological states. Metaphors of drowning and sinking, hyperbole of extreme isolation, and recurring self-doubt ("Maybe I'm the problem") articulate feelings of hopelessness, emotional dependency, and internal conflict. The extensive use of rhetorical questions in 'The 30th' clearly illustrates anxiety, guilt, and psychological processing of trauma. These lyrics consistently delve into the speaker's inner world, not just as descriptions, but as expressions of psychological states. For example, "staring into space" (idiom) is a manifestation of dissociation, and the question "what if" is a verbalization of rumination and trauma processing. This shows how Eilish's songwriting uses non-literal language to externalize internal psychological landscapes, making them relatable to listeners, especially to those who are part of the postmodern generation who often face mental health and existential challenges.

Beyond personal reflections, Eilish uses figurative language to criticize contemporary social realities. The personification of "the internet gone wild" and direct allusions to "overturning Roe v. Wade" highlight society's obsession with trivia and indifference to critical political issues. The theme of "betrayal" in the background of personal withdrawal ("sinking in the sofa while they all betray each other") can be interpreted as a broader commentary on the perceived breakdown of social trust. The presence of specific socio-political allusions and critiques of digital culture suggest that Eilish's lyrics transcend the personal. The contrast between personal suffering and global events, mediated through figurative language, creates a sharp critique of dissonance in contemporary society. This shows that the lyrics serve not only as artistic expression but also as a relevant form of social commentary, inviting listeners to reflect on collective priorities and values in the postmodern era.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified and analyzed in depth the use of figurative language in the songs 'the 30th' and 'TV' of Billie Eilish. It was found that these lyrics are rich in figurative language including metaphor, hyperbole, personification, allusion etc. The analysis shows that figurative language in Eilish's work serves as a powerful medium for psychological reflection, clearly depicting inner states (despair, self-isolation, self-doubt, and trauma processing).

The analysis shows that figurative language in Eilish's works serves as a powerful medium for psychological reflection, vividly depicting inner states (despair, self-isolation, self-doubt, and trauma processing). The study confirms that the songs sung by Billie Eilish are not only artistic expressions but also reflections of the psychological and social realities of the postmodern generation. The study

contributes to a richer understanding of how popular music can serve as a reflection and commentary on the conditions of contemporary society.

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