

Constructing Love, Loss, and Hope through Figurative Language: A Discourse Analysis of Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga's Die With A Smile

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Abstract

Song lyrics represent a unique form of discourse through which figurative language conveys emotional, cultural, and symbolic meanings beyond literal interpretation. *Die With A Smile* by Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga has attracted considerable public attention due to its emotionally expressive lyrics that portray themes of love, loss, and hope. This study aims to examine how figurative language constructs these meanings through a discourse analysis of the song lyrics. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research uses the official lyrics of *Die With A Smile* as the primary data source, supported by relevant literature on discourse analysis and figurative language. Data were collected through close reading, lyric documentation, and textual identification, and were analyzed using thematic interpretation within a discourse analytical framework. The findings reveal that metaphor is the most dominant figurative language, accounting for 50% of the identified expressions, followed by hyperbole (25%), personification (12.5%), and simile (12.5%). These figurative expressions function collectively to portray unwavering love, emotional commitment, the awareness of mortality, and hope in the face of uncertainty. Rather than serving merely as stylistic ornamentation, figurative language constructs a coherent emotional discourse that encourages listeners to appreciate meaningful relationships and the fragility of life. This study contributes to discourse analysis by demonstrating how figurative language operates as a meaning-making resource in contemporary popular music and offers pedagogical implications for the teaching of discourse analysis, figurative language, and literary interpretation in English language education.

Keywords discourse analysis; figurative language; song lyrics; meaning construction; love; hope...

Introduction

Language is more than a means of communication; it is a resource through which people construct meanings, express emotions, and represent social experiences (Purba et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2026). Within discourse, linguistic choices enable speakers and writers to communicate ideas that often extend beyond literal meanings. As Brown and Yule (1983) argue, discourse analysis examines how language functions in context, revealing how meaning is produced through interaction between linguistic forms and communicative situations. Song lyrics represent a distinctive form of discourse because they combine language, rhythm, and emotion to communicate complex human experiences that listeners interpret in multiple ways.

Among the linguistic features that enrich song lyrics, figurative language plays a central role in shaping emotional expression and symbolic meaning. Rather than conveying ideas directly, figurative expressions such as metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and personification allow songwriters to represent abstract emotions and experiences in imaginative forms (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). These expressions encourage audiences to move beyond literal interpretation and engage with deeper layers of meaning, making figurative language one of the defining characteristics of literary and musical discourse.

Popular songs have increasingly become valuable objects of linguistic and discourse studies because they reflect personal emotions, cultural values, and social experiences. Through carefully selected linguistic expressions, songwriters construct narratives of love, hope, separation, fear, and identity that resonate with diverse audiences. Murphey (1992) further explains that songs are not only artistic products but also meaningful linguistic resources that facilitate emotional engagement and language learning. Consequently, examining figurative language in song lyrics contributes to a broader understanding of how language functions in contemporary communication.

Several previous studies have investigated figurative language in songs and other spoken or written discourses. Gunawan et al. (2021), for example, analyzed figurative language in Blackpink and Selena Gomez's *Ice Cream* and demonstrated that metaphorical and hyperbolic expressions enhance emotional communication. Similarly, Amna (2019) examined figurative language from a discourse perspective and concluded that figurative expressions contribute significantly to meaning construction within communicative texts. Meanwhile, Sudarsono et al. (2018) found that figurative language in political speeches functions not only as a stylistic device but also as a persuasive discourse strategy. These studies confirm the importance of figurative language in communication; however, they primarily emphasize the identification of figurative expressions rather than explaining how such expressions construct broader thematic meanings.

The song *Die With A Smile* by Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga presents an interesting case for discourse analysis because its lyrics combine emotionally charged figurative expressions with themes of love, mortality, commitment, and hope. Although many listeners perceive the song as a romantic composition, its lyrics reveal deeper symbolic meanings concerning the fragility of life and the value of meaningful relationships. These themes are communicated through carefully selected figurative expressions that encourage multiple interpretations, making the song an appropriate object for discourse-oriented linguistic analysis.

Unlike previous studies that mainly classify figurative language according to its types, the present study seeks to explain how figurative language constructs meanings of love, loss, and hope within the discourse of the song. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies not merely in identifying metaphors, hyperboles, similes, and personification, but in interpreting how these linguistic choices collectively shape emotional meaning and represent human experiences. This perspective extends the application of discourse analysis in popular music by demonstrating that figurative language functions as a meaning-making resource rather than simply as a stylistic ornament. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how figurative language constructs meanings of love, loss, and hope in Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga's *Die With A Smile* through a discourse analytical perspective. The findings are expected to contribute to discourse analysis, figurative language studies, and English language education by providing a deeper understanding of how linguistic choices communicate emotional and symbolic meanings in contemporary song lyrics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines language beyond the sentence level by investigating how meaning is created within particular communicative contexts. Rather than focusing solely on grammatical structures, discourse analysis explores the relationships between linguistic forms, speakers, audiences, and social situations in which communication occurs. Gee (2014) argues that discourse is a socially situated use of language through which individuals construct identities, relationships, and shared meanings. Similarly, McCarthy (1991) explains that discourse analysis seeks to understand how texts achieve coherence and communicative purposes through the interaction of linguistic choices and contextual factors (Setiawati et al., 2024; Jahrir et al., 2025; Sutikno et al., 2025; Herman et al., 2026).

Within literary and musical texts, discourse analysis enables researchers to interpret how lexical selection, figurative expressions, and textual organization contribute to the construction of meaning. Song lyrics therefore represent a meaningful discourse because they combine artistic creativity with communicative intention, allowing listeners to interpret emotional and symbolic messages beyond literal language. Consequently, discourse analysis provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining how songwriters communicate complex human experiences through linguistic choices.

2. Figurative Language

Figurative language refers to the use of expressions whose meanings differ from their literal interpretations in order to create emphasis, imagery, emotional impact, or symbolic representation. According to Perrine (1992), figurative language enables writers to communicate abstract ideas more effectively by encouraging readers or listeners to interpret implied meanings. Likewise, Kennedy and Gioia (2010) state that figurative language enriches literary texts by transforming ordinary language into imaginative expressions capable of producing deeper emotional responses.

Among the most frequently used types of figurative language are metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole. Metaphor establishes implicit comparisons between two different entities, simile expresses comparison explicitly

through comparative markers, personification attributes human characteristics to non-human entities, whereas hyperbole deliberately exaggerates ideas or emotions to strengthen communicative effects. These figurative devices are not merely decorative elements but function as linguistic resources that shape readers' or listeners' interpretation of a text.

3. Figurative Language in Song Lyrics

Song lyrics constitute a literary discourse in which figurative language serves both aesthetic and communicative purposes. Unlike everyday conversation, song lyrics frequently employ symbolic and metaphorical expressions to communicate emotional experiences that cannot always be conveyed through literal language. Simpson (2004) explains that stylistic analysis demonstrates how linguistic choices influence readers' interpretation of literary discourse, including poetry and song lyrics.

Previous linguistic studies indicate that figurative language contributes significantly to emotional engagement in popular music. Pratiwi and Wulandari (2022) found that metaphors and personification dominate contemporary English songs because they allow songwriters to represent affection, sadness, and hope more effectively than literal expressions. Likewise, Kurniawati and Lestari (2021) reported that figurative language strengthens listeners' emotional involvement by creating vivid mental imagery and symbolic associations. These findings suggest that figurative language performs communicative functions beyond stylistic ornamentation. Instead, figurative expressions organize discourse by connecting linguistic forms with emotional meaning, allowing audiences to interpret themes embedded within song lyrics from multiple perspectives.

4. Conceptual Framework

The present study is based on the assumption that figurative language functions as a discourse strategy for constructing meaning rather than merely as a stylistic feature. Through discourse analysis, linguistic expressions found in *Die With A Smile* are interpreted to understand how they collectively represent the interconnected themes of love, loss, and hope. Consequently, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and simile are examined not only according to their classifications but also according to their communicative functions in shaping emotional discourse throughout the song.

The conceptual relationship underlying this study is illustrated as follows:

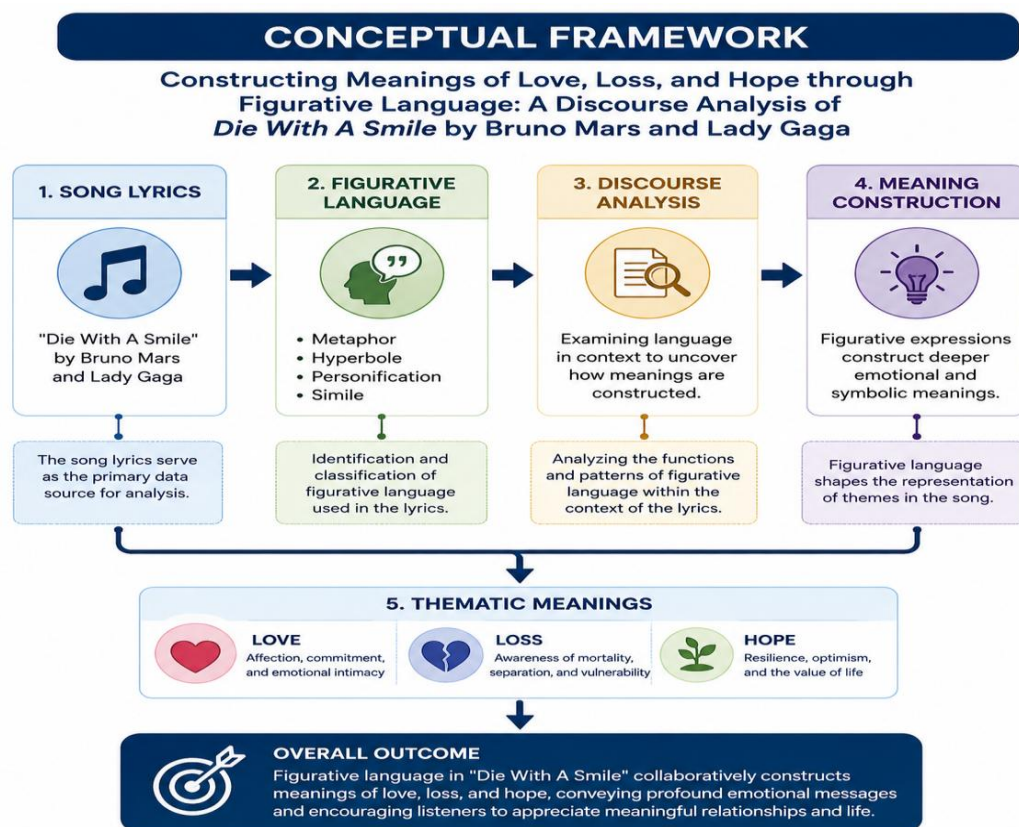


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a discourse analytical approach to investigate how figurative language constructs meanings of love, loss, and hope in Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga's *Die With A Smile*. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting meanings embedded in linguistic expressions rather than measuring numerical variables. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore how language represents human experiences, emotions, and symbolic meanings within a particular communicative context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Discourse analysis was adopted because song lyrics constitute a form of naturally occurring discourse in which linguistic choices are closely related to context and meaning. Rather than merely identifying types of figurative language, this study interprets how figurative expressions function collectively to construct thematic meanings throughout the song. Therefore, discourse analysis provides an appropriate framework for examining the relationship between language use, figurative expression, and meaning construction.

2. Data Source

The primary data consisted of the official lyrics of *Die With A Smile*, performed by Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga. The lyrics were selected because they contain abundant figurative expressions representing emotional experiences associated with love, loss, commitment, and hope. In addition, the song has attracted widespread public attention, making it an appropriate object for discourse-oriented linguistic investigation. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles discussing discourse analysis, figurative language, stylistics, and song lyric analysis. These sources provided the theoretical foundation for interpreting the figurative expressions identified in the lyrics.

3. Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the primary research instrument responsible for collecting, organizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To improve analytical consistency, a coding sheet was developed to classify each figurative expression according to its linguistic category, contextual meaning, communicative function, and thematic representation.

The coding framework consisted of four analytical categories:

Table 1. Coding framework

Code	Description
FL	Type of figurative language
CM	Contextual meaning
DF	Discourse function
TM	Thematic meaning (Love, Loss, Hope)

This coding system facilitated systematic interpretation throughout the analysis process.

4. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through four sequential stages. First, the researcher obtained the official lyrics of *Die With A Smile* from the officially released version and repeatedly listened to the song while reading the lyrics to gain a comprehensive understanding of its emotional and thematic context. Second, all figurative expressions appearing in the lyrics were identified and highlighted. These expressions included metaphor, hyperbole, simile, personification, and other relevant figurative devices.

Third, each figurative expression was coded according to its linguistic category and contextual meaning. During this stage, field notes were prepared to document preliminary interpretations and emerging thematic patterns. Finally, all coded data were organized into analytical categories that served as the basis for discourse interpretation.

5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis procedure adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analytical process consisted of four stages.

Data condensation involved selecting and organizing figurative expressions that were relevant to the research objectives.

Data display involved presenting the identified figurative expressions in tables according to their categories, contextual meanings, and discourse functions.

Interpretation focused on explaining how figurative language constructs meanings of love, loss, and hope throughout the discourse of the song.

Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted by reviewing the consistency of the interpretations with the theoretical framework and research objectives.

Rather than counting the frequency of figurative language alone, the analysis emphasized how linguistic choices collectively create emotional and symbolic meanings within the song lyrics.

6. Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study applied several trustworthiness strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, prolonged engagement with the data was achieved by repeatedly reading the lyrics and listening to the song to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the discourse. Second, theoretical triangulation was employed by interpreting the findings using perspectives from discourse analysis, figurative language, and stylistic analysis. Third, peer debriefing was conducted through discussion among the researchers during the coding and interpretation processes to reduce subjective bias and improve analytical consistency. Finally, an audit trail consisting of coding notes, analytical memos, and interpretation records was maintained throughout the research process to enhance the transparency and dependability of the study.

RESULTS

The discourse analysis identified eight figurative expressions that contribute to the construction of meanings throughout *Die With A Smile*. These expressions were categorized into four types of figurative language: metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and simile. Metaphor emerged as the most dominant category, indicating that the song primarily communicates its emotional messages through indirect and symbolic expressions rather than literal language. Rather than functioning as isolated stylistic devices, the figurative expressions collectively construct three interconnected themes: love, loss, and hope. Therefore, the findings are presented according to thematic meanings instead of merely listing individual lyric lines.

1. Constructing the Meaning of Love

Love is the dominant discourse represented throughout the song. The analysis demonstrates that the song portrays love as an enduring emotional commitment that remains meaningful despite uncertainty and mortality. Table 2 presents the figurative expressions that construct the meaning of love.

Table 2. Figurative Language Constructing Love

Lyric	Figurative Language	Constructed Meaning
"Our love's the only one worth fighting for."	Metaphor	Love as the highest life priority
"So I'ma love you every night like it's the last night."	Metaphor / Simile	Love should be expressed wholeheartedly in every moment
"If the party was over."	Metaphor	Love survives beyond temporary happiness

The metaphorical expressions represent love not merely as affection but as an enduring commitment requiring sacrifice, appreciation, and perseverance. Rather than describing romantic feelings literally, the lyrics construct love as a resilient force capable of transcending life's temporary experiences.

2. Constructing the Meaning of Loss

The second dominant theme concerns the awareness of human mortality and the possibility of separation.

Table 3. Figurative Language Constructing Loss

Lyric	Figurative Language	Constructed Meaning
"Die with a smile."	Metaphor	Acceptance of mortality through fulfilled love
"If the world was ending."	Hyperbole	Extreme awareness of possible separation
"Last night."	Hyperbole	Fear of losing meaningful moments

The repeated references to death, endings, and final moments should not be interpreted literally. Instead, these figurative expressions symbolize the fragility of human existence and emphasize the importance of valuing every shared experience. Hyperbolic expressions intensify emotional urgency, encouraging listeners to recognize that time with loved ones is limited.

3. Constructing the Meaning of Hope

Although the lyrics repeatedly mention death and endings, the overall discourse is optimistic rather than pessimistic.

Table 4. Figurative Language Constructing Hope

Lyric	Figurative Language	Constructed Meaning
"If the world was ending, I wanna be next to you."	Personification Hyperbole	Hope through togetherness
"Die with a smile."	Metaphor	Peace through sincere love

Hope is represented through emotional resilience rather than certainty. Even under imagined catastrophic situations, the speaker continues to prioritize companionship and emotional connection. Consequently, hope is constructed as the ability to maintain love despite uncertainty.

4. Distribution of Figurative Language

The analysis identified four categories of figurative language.

Table 5. Distribution of Figurative Language

Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
Metaphor	4	50%
Hyperbole	2	25%
Personification	1	12.5%
Simile	1	12.5%
Total	8	100%

The predominance of metaphor indicates that symbolic comparison is the principal linguistic strategy employed in the song. Metaphorical expressions enable the songwriters to communicate emotional experiences that extend beyond literal language, allowing listeners to interpret multiple layers of meaning.

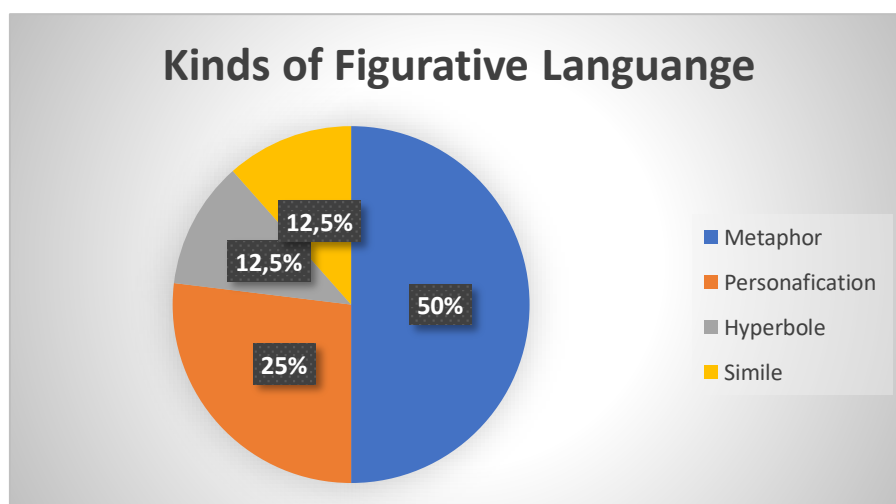


Figure 2. Distribution of Figurative Language in *Die With A Smile*

Figure 2 illustrates the proportional distribution of figurative language identified in the song. Metaphor constitutes half of all identified expressions, followed by hyperbole, while personification and simile occur less frequently. This distribution suggests that metaphor functions as the primary discourse strategy for constructing emotional meanings throughout the lyrics.

The findings indicate that figurative language in *Die With A Smile* performs functions that extend beyond stylistic ornamentation. Instead, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and simile work together to construct an integrated discourse of love, loss, and hope. Among these, metaphor serves as the dominant meaning-making resource, enabling the songwriters to communicate emotional commitment, human vulnerability, and resilience through indirect linguistic expressions. These findings provide the basis for the subsequent discussion, which examines how figurative language contributes to discourse construction and emotional interpretation within contemporary popular music.

DISCUSSION

1. Main Findings

The present study demonstrates that figurative language in *Die With A Smile* functions as a meaning-making resource rather than merely as a stylistic ornament. The analysis reveals that metaphor is the dominant figurative device, followed by hyperbole, personification, and simile. However, the significance of these findings lies not in the frequency of each figurative expression but in the way they collectively construct an integrated discourse of love, loss, and hope. Through symbolic language, the song communicates emotional experiences that extend beyond literal interpretation and encourages listeners to reflect on the value of human relationships in the face of mortality.

The predominance of metaphor indicates that the songwriters intentionally employ indirect linguistic representations to communicate complex emotional meanings. Rather than describing love explicitly, the lyrics portray affection as commitment, resilience, and emotional permanence. Likewise, references to death and endings function symbolically rather than literally, reinforcing the central discourse that meaningful relationships transcend the uncertainty of life. These findings suggest that figurative language serves as a discourse strategy through which emotional experiences are organized into a coherent thematic narrative.

2. Relationship with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are generally consistent with previous research demonstrating that figurative language enhances emotional communication in literary and musical discourse. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not simply a linguistic decoration but a conceptual mechanism through which people understand abstract experiences. The dominance of metaphor in the present study supports this perspective, as the metaphorical expressions found in *Die With A Smile* transform abstract concepts such as love, mortality, and hope into emotionally accessible experiences.

Furthermore, the findings complement Semino's (2008) explanation that metaphor functions as a discourse resource capable of shaping readers' and listeners' interpretation of a text. In the present study, metaphorical expressions do not operate independently; instead, they interact with hyperbole, personification, and simile to construct a coherent emotional discourse throughout the song. Unlike many previous studies that primarily identify and classify figurative language, this study extends existing scholarship by examining how figurative expressions function collectively to construct thematic meanings. Consequently, the analysis moves beyond linguistic categorization toward discourse interpretation, providing a deeper understanding of how song lyrics communicate emotional experiences.

3. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to discourse analysis by demonstrating that figurative language should be understood not only as a stylistic phenomenon but also as a discourse strategy for meaning construction. While traditional studies frequently classify metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and personification according to their linguistic characteristics, the present research illustrates how these expressions interact to produce a unified discourse representing love, loss, and hope.

The findings also reinforce the relationship between discourse analysis and figurative language studies by showing that meaning emerges through the interaction between linguistic choices and contextual interpretation. Accordingly, discourse analysis provides a broader analytical perspective that explains not only what figurative language is, but also how it functions to construct emotional and symbolic meanings within contemporary popular music.

4. Pedagogical Implications

The findings have important implications for English language education, particularly in literature, discourse analysis, and stylistics courses. Song lyrics may serve as authentic learning materials that enable students to explore figurative language within meaningful communicative contexts. Rather than memorizing definitions of metaphor or hyperbole, students can analyze how these linguistic expressions contribute to meaning construction and emotional representation. Furthermore, integrating contemporary popular songs into classroom instruction may increase students' engagement while simultaneously developing critical interpretation skills. Through

discourse-oriented learning activities, students are encouraged to connect linguistic forms with contextual meanings, thereby improving their analytical competence and appreciation of literary language.

5. Limitations and Future Research

Despite providing meaningful insights into figurative language and discourse construction, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses exclusively on a single song, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other musical genres or artists. Second, the study relies solely on textual analysis and does not incorporate listeners' interpretations or audience reception, which may offer additional perspectives on meaning construction. Future research may investigate figurative language across multiple songs, compare different musical genres, or integrate multimodal discourse analysis by examining the interaction between lyrics, music videos, vocal performance, and visual symbolism. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic and non-linguistic resources collectively shape emotional meaning in contemporary music discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that figurative language in Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga's *Die With A Smile* functions not merely as a stylistic feature but as a discourse resource for constructing meanings of love, loss, and hope. Through a qualitative discourse analysis, the study identified metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and simile as the principal figurative devices embedded in the lyrics, with metaphor emerging as the dominant form. These figurative expressions collectively shape an emotional discourse that represents enduring love, the awareness of mortality, emotional resilience, and optimism amid uncertainty. The findings therefore indicate that the communicative power of the song lies in its ability to transform abstract emotional experiences into meaningful symbolic representations through carefully selected linguistic choices.

The study contributes to discourse analysis and figurative language research by moving beyond the identification of figurative expressions toward explaining how they function as meaning-making resources within contemporary popular music. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between discourse, figurative language, and emotional representation while also offering practical implications for English language education, particularly in discourse analysis, stylistics, literary interpretation, and the use of authentic song lyrics as instructional materials.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited to the analysis of a single song and focuses exclusively on its textual discourse. Future studies are encouraged to investigate figurative language across multiple songs, artists, or musical genres and to incorporate multimodal perspectives by examining the interaction between lyrics, music, vocal performance, and visual elements. Such investigations would provide broader insights into how linguistic and non-linguistic resources jointly construct meaning in contemporary musical discourse.

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