



# Figurative language in Tame Impala's Song Lyrics

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## Abstract

This study is aimed to identify phrases and clauses containing figurative language in Tame Impala's song lyrics. The theory of figurative language used in this study is the one proposed by Mezo (metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, and litotes). A qualitative method through a document analysis strategy was applied to this research. The object of this analysis is based on the lyrics of Tame Impala's songs on the four albums, including *Innerspeaker* (2010), *Lonerism* (2012), *Currents* (2015), and *The Slow Rush* (2020). The result shows that the most common figurative language found in Tame Impala's song lyrics is Metaphor (38%), Simile (21%), and Personification (19%). It indicates that most of the song lyrics of Tame Impala visualize comparisons and deepen understanding so that it makes readers increase their critical thinking as well as see old things in new ways.

**Keywords:** *figurative language, tame impala, song lyrics*

## Introduction

Communication is a process of delivering information, ideas, emotions, skills, and others by using symbols, words, pictures, numbers, or graphics (Mulyana, 2015). It is also defined as a process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson and Nelson: 2000). In language, meaning is divided into two, literal meaning and figurative meaning. The literal meaning is the one that contains actual information. For example, Zayn says, "Open the window, please." The sentence gives actual meaning, Zayn tells someone to open the window because the window is closed. Meanwhile, figurative meaning is a meaning that has another meaning from the actual one and is intended to make emotional connections between the writer or speaker and the readers or listeners. For example, "Took you like a shot" from the lyric *Back to You* by Selena Gomez. The sentence is a type of figurative language, namely simile because it uses the word comparison "like" and the word "shot" refers to alcohol, although it could also refer to a vaccination. Another example, is "a tornado flew around my room before you came" from the lyric *Thinking Bout You* by Frank Ocean. The sentence is a metaphor because it uses a word comparison of two different things. The sentence "a tornado flew around his room," means that someone's life was crazy, like a tornado, before a partner came into their life.

Understanding figurative language is challenging since it is rarely used in daily communication, yet it can sometimes be found in literature such as song lyrics. The song lyrics are written as an expression of the songwriters' ideas, emotions, intentions, meanings, and feelings. Sometimes, they use figurative language to make the song sound poetic and to create a strong expression in the song lyrics themselves (Widianti, 2016). In addition, it can attract the audience's attention and drag their imagination into what is explained by the figurative language in the song lyrics.

One of the musical groups that use figurative language in the song lyrics is Tame Impala. It is a talented musical group from Australia where Kevin Parker, the initiator of this musical group,

independently creates songs starting from the lyrics to the music arrangement. This group has four albums and more than forty songs, mostly about love, social life, and Kevin Parker's personal life. Moreover, Tame Impala's singer, Kevin Parker is a great songwriter who genuinely makes beautiful lyrics. Mostly, the lyrics from the songs of Tame Impala contain meaningful lyrics presented in figurative language to convey the messages to the listeners.

Even though the use of figurative language can attract the listeners' attention and make a stronger expression in the song lyrics, it becomes an interesting and challenging issue to discuss as figurative language contained in the song lyrics is difficult to understand. Some previous studies on the use of figurative language in songs have been conducted by Bhisma (2017), Verdinda (2019), Purwatiningsih (2020), and Hunayah (2021). However, figurative language studies focusing on Tame Impala's song lyrics have not been found. Considering that condition, it is essential to conduct a study entitled "An Analysis of Figurative Language in Tame Impala's Song Lyrics".

This study aims to identify the types and to identify the most common type of figurative language found in Tame Impala's song lyrics. To reach the aim of the study, two research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What types of figurative language are found in Tame Impala's song lyrics?
2. What is the most common type of figurative language found in Tame Impala's song lyrics?

## Theoretical Framework

Figurative language is a way to express a message that does not use realistic meaning (Ellis: 2021). It is a language that uses words or expressions that meanings are different from their literal interpretations. Betts (2022) adds that figurative language could be more impactful than literal writing. It can expand readers' interpretations and broaden their imaginings.

According to Mezo (1999), the types of figurative language has been divided into three group or classes: figurative comparison (simile, metaphor, personification), figurative substitution (metonymy, synecdoche), and figurative exaggeration (hyperbole, litotes).

### 1. Simile

A comparison between two different things using the word "like" or "as".

Example: He's blind as a bat without his glasses.

### 2. Metaphor

A comparison between two different things that must have some features in common.

Example: She is a rat.

### 3. Personification

A comparison of something not human to a human being.

Example: My car decided not to start this morning.

### 4. Metonymy

The use of a word closely related to or associated with the thing meant.

Example: That guy's an old salt. ("salt" is associated with "sailor")

### 5. Synecdoche

The use of the part for the whole (or vice versa).

Example: Look at that redhead! (part = redhead; whole = person)

## 6. Hyperbole

An overstatement.

Example: I was so angry; I could have killed him!

## 7. Litotes

An understatement.

Example: Say, that's not bad at all. (Meaning it's very good)

## Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative. It is used to explore and understand the meaning that some individuals or groups of people think comes from social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). In addition, this study applies the document analysis strategy to collect the data. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic. The documents used were ten song lyrics of Tame Impala taken from <https://genius.com/>. The data of this study are clauses or sentences from Tame Impala's song lyrics containing figurative language. To obtain the data, all song lyrics are scanned to find the sentences or lyrics that contain figurative language. After all data were collected, they were categorized based on the characteristics of each type of figurative language by Mezo (1999).

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The result of this study reveals that there are only six out of seven types of figurative language proposed by Mezo. The detailed result of this study is presented in the following table.

**Table 1 Types of Figurative Language Found in Tame Impala's Song Lyrics**

No.	Types of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Metaphor	18	38%
2.	Simile	10	21%
3.	Personification	9	19%
4.	Metonymy	6	14%
5.	Synecdoche	3	2%
6.	Hyperbole	1	0.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on the table above, the most common type of figurative language found is Metaphor with a percentage of 38%, followed by Simile with a percentage of 21%, and Personification with a percentage of 19%.

## Discussion

### a. Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that expresses something directly in the form of an analogical comparison by eliminating words such as like, as, and so on. In this study, several sentences can be categorized into metaphors.

The first example is in the line of the lyrics in the song *New Person, Same Old Mistake* which contains "Not thinking in black and white". The sentence, "Not thinking in black and white" is a metaphor because it contains a comparative sentence by using implicit words "black and white". Black and white can be interpreted as a person who cannot think clearly between right and wrong. The meaning of the lyrics can be interpreted that a good realization can be realized based on the opportunities of positive things that we expect.

The second example can be seen from the lyric in the song *One More Year*, lines "But now I worry our horizon's been nothing new". The word "Horizon" in the sentence can be interpreted as the edge of something in a figurative sense. When you are thinking about your life, it can be difficult to get very far beyond where you are.

The next example, in the lyric *Reality in Motion*, "Trying to stay in motion" is a metaphor because it uses the implicit words "stay in motion". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as life must go on or trying to keep moving for a living.

Another example can be found in the lyric *Yes, I'm Changing*. The sentence, "So don't be blue" is a metaphor because it uses the implicit word "blue". Blue or feeling blue is an idiom that can be interpreted as a feeling of sadness or depression.

The last example from the lyric *Elephant*, in the sentence, "Shaking his big grey trunk for the hell of it" is a metaphor because it uses implicit words "his big grey trunk". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as a flexing of something.

### b. Simile

A simile is a type of figurative language that expresses something indirectly with an explicit comparison expressed by prepositions and conjunctions, such as, "like" or "as". Several sentences are found containing simile.

For example the lyric "Elephant" that is found in the sentence, "Well, he feels like an elephant" is a simile because it uses the comparative words "like". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as someone who is arrogant and feels they are bigger than the people around them.

The next example can be found in the lyrics "It feels like I only go backward, baby" in the song titled "Feels Like We Only Go Backwards". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as about a person who wants to move forward but finds an obstacle, so he has to move back again.

Another example in the lyric from the song *New Person, Same Old Mistakes*, in the line "A realization is as good as a guess" is a simile because it contains a comparative sentence that uses the word "as" as a comparison. The meaning of the lyrics can be interpreted that a good realization can be realized based on the opportunities of positive things that we expect.

The next example, in the lyric Reality in Motion, "Soon as I remember, baby, I surrender" is a simile because it contains the comparative word "as" as a comparison and uses two things between "remember" and "surrender" to compare. Both are verbal things to express an action.

Another example, in the sentence, "Watched it speedin' by like a train" from the song Borderline is a simile because it uses the comparison word "like". "It" refers to the time, the sentence is interpreted as that time flies so fast it's like watching a speeding train.

### c. Personification

Personification is the type of figurative language, which creates parables of inanimate objects with human-like characteristics. Several examples are found in this study.

The first example in the song "Reality in Motion", the sentence "It made my heart run in circles and overflow" is a personification because the sentence contains something "my heart" that has human characteristics "run". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as a restless feeling.

The second example can be seen from the line of the lyrics in the song Feels Like We Only Go Backwards, "When I realize I'm just holding on to the hope that maybe". The meaning of the sentence can be interpreted as the entire human body is said to be able to speak, but the only part of the human body that can speak is the mouth.

The next example in the lyric One More Year, in the sentence, "Our minds were racing, and time went slow" is a personification because it uses human characteristics from nonhuman things. The sentence can be interpreted as the thoughts of two people who cannot coincide or have different opinions so that one opinion must be won like a race.

Another example can be found in the song Solitude Is Bliss, in which the line "There's a party in my head" is a personification because it uses human characteristics from nonhuman things. The sentence can be interpreted as many thoughts making it difficult to focus.

### d. Metonymy

Metonymy is a type of figurative language that uses a word closely related to or associated with the thing meant.

For example, the sentence, "And it's not like Mister Shuck" in the song title "Elephant" is a metonymy because the word "it" that refers to the elephant substitutes the word "Mister Shuck". Mister Shuck in the lyrics are inspired by Art Garfunkel's (1977) song entitled "Mr. Shuck 'n' Jive".

The next example from the song Reality in Motion, in the line "Talked about in Hollywood" is a metonymy because it uses "Hollywood" as a substitution. Hollywood can be associated with a place where the writer is talking about.

Another example can be found in the line "R.I.P., here comes the sun" from the song Borderline. The sentence is a metonymy because it contains substitution words. "Here Comes the Sun" refers to the title song "Here Comes the Sun" by the rock band The Beatles.

### e. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a type of figurative language in which the term for a part of something is used to refer to the whole, or vice versa. There are several examples found in this study.

The first example from the song "Borderline", in the sentence, "I'm gonna have the strangest night on Sunday" is a synecdoche because it contains a substitution of the part for the whole. The word "Sunday" refers to the part of days.

Another example can be found in the song Elephant, in the sentence, "He pulled the mirrors off his Cadillac" which is a synecdoche because it uses the substitution word of the material thing "Cadillac". Cadillac refers to the part of a car company or car brand from the United States.

### f. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a type of figurative language that contains words, phrases, or sentences that are exaggerated in number, size, or nature. In this study, there is only one finding of hyperbole.

The sentence, "But I hear it inside my head all day" in the song "Feels Like We Only Go Backwards" is a hyperbole because it contains overstatement. The meaning of the sentences that can be interpreted as the sound is so annoying that it can be heard every day.

## Conclusion

Figurative language is a way to express a message that does not use realistic meaning. Understanding figurative language is not easy since it is rarely used in daily life communication, yet it sometimes can be found in literature such as song lyrics. The song lyrics are written as an expression of the songwriters' ideas, emotions, intentions, meanings, and feelings. However, figurative language creates confusion between the readers' and writers' perceptions of the message.

This study shows that there are six types of figurative language found in Tame Impala's song lyrics. The most common types found are metaphor with the highest percentage of 38%, followed by simile with a total percentage of 21%, personification with a total percentage of 19%, metonymy with a total percentage of 14%, synecdoche with a total percentage 2%, and the lowest is hyperbole with total percentage 0.1%.

Based on the results, the most common type of figurative language used in Tame Impala's song lyrics is metaphor. Metaphor adds more colors and emotions to the song lyrics. In addition, it visualizes comparisons to deepen understanding and allow readers to increase their critical thinking as well as see old things in new ways.

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