

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

The integration of poetic devices into contemporary songwriting reflects a broader phenomenon in which artists draw on literary techniques traditionally associated with formal poetry to strengthen the aesthetic and expressive quality of their lyrics Mattison & Suarez (2021). Figurative language in song lyrics has been shown to intensify emotional engagement, allowing complex feelings to be expressed creatively and enabling listeners to form a relatable connection with the artist Obenza & Steven Jay (2024). This growing accessibility of lyrical texts has encouraged scholars to increasingly treat popular music as a legitimate object of linguistic and literary analysis, particularly in terms of how figurative language constructs meaning, conveys ideology, and bridges cultural gaps between artist and audience Aras et al. (2024).

One systematic way of analyzing figurative language in song lyrics is through stylistics. Stylistics is defined as a method of textual interpretation that assigns primacy of place to language, emphasizing the scientific examination of linguistic features in order to understand how a text achieves its communicative and artistic purposes Simpson (2025). Figurative language and stylistics are fundamentally interconnected, since stylistics provides the analytical bridge between linguistic structure and aesthetic effect. By examining these patterns of meaning-making, researchers can identify how artistic expression triggers emotional and sensory responses in the reader, moving beyond simple description toward a deeper understanding of how style generates communicative power Burke (2023).

Through stylistic analysis, researchers can systematically investigate how metaphor, symbol, and other figurative devices operate at the semantic level to produce coherent aesthetic and communicative effects. Linguistic choices are therefore not merely ornamental; they are fundamental to the affective power of a text, allowing the reader to map complex conceptual meanings onto the physical structure of language. Stylistics encompasses a range of figures of speech, including irony, metaphor, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, imagery, and simile,

among others. Applying a stylistic framework to song lyrics can reveal the linguistic sophistication underlying popular music and demonstrate how specific language choices shape a song's emotional impact and interpretive richness Burke (2023).

Billie Eilish is a particularly productive case for this kind of analysis, as her songwriting is widely noted for its consistent use of innovative figurative devices to convey darkness, anxiety, and emotional maturity. According to Setiawan and Theodora (2024), figurative language in literary and lyrical texts plays a crucial role in the exploration of identity and interpersonal relationships, both of which are recurring concerns in Eilish's discography. Her three songs selected for this study each foreground a distinct thematic concern that has not yet been examined comparatively: desire and self-exploration in "Lunch," emotional exhaustion in "The Greatest," and interpersonal rejection in "Wish You Were Gay." This thematic diversity, combined with the density of figurative devices across the three lyrics, makes them a productive site for investigating how figurative language is mobilized differently depending on the emotional and thematic demands of a text. A linguistic question that is the central concern of this research, rather than the songs' commercial reception.

Scholarly investigation of figurative language in song lyrics through stylistic frameworks has developed substantially over recent decades, establishing a foundation upon which this study builds. With respect to Billie Eilish specifically, a small number of preliminary studies have emerged. Ngailo et al (2022) conducted a general stylistic analysis of selected Billie Eilish songs, identifying hyperbole and metaphor as her most prevalent figurative devices. Theodora & Setiawan (2024) subsequently analyzed figurative language in tracks such as "Lunch" and "TV," offering insight into how Eilish employs symbolism and metaphor for emotional expression. Together, these studies establish that Eilish's lyrics constitute a legitimate object of serious linguistic and literary analysis, and that close examination of her figurative devices can reveal how her songs achieve their artistic and communicative effects.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, existing studies on Billie Eilish's lyrics (e.g., Ngailo et al., 2022; Theodora & Setiawan, 2024; Wulandari & Khumairo Ma'shumah, 2025) remain largely

descriptive and present three critical limitations. First, previous research tends to construct a static catalogue or checklist of figurative devices without explaining why specific devices recur in specific emotional contexts. Second, these studies analyze lyrics either as isolated single texts or within a single album, lacking a comparative design capable of observing how figurative choices shift across contrasting themes. Third, they fail to account for how a single artist intentionally varies her stylistic devices in response to differing thematic demands.

To address these limitations, the novelty of this study lies in its systematic, comparative examination of figurative language patterns across thematically distinct songs within the same artist's discography. Unlike prior literature that treats figurative language as mere ornamental decoration or arbitrary wordplay, this study argues that figurative choices in song lyrics represent a deliberate stylistic strategy (deliberate choice) designed to serve specific thematic and emotional functions. By comparing 'Lunch' (desire and physical exploration), 'The Greatest' (emotional exhaustion and unappreciated sacrifice), and 'Wish You Were Gay' (interpersonal rejection and ego-defense), this research demonstrates that the variation in figurative patterns is not random, but directly dictated by the thematic demands of each song. Consequently, this study contributes a more dynamic, explanatory model of stylistic variation in contemporary popular music.

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic, comparative examination of figurative language patterns across thematically diverse songs by the same artist, rather than a general survey of a single text or album. In this context, 'thematically diverse' refers to the distinct emotional and conceptual domains represented in Eilish's lyrics, specifically physical desire and identity in 'Lunch,' emotional exhaustion and sacrifice in 'The Greatest,' and interpersonal rejection and ego-defense in 'Wish You Were Gay.' By comparing these contrasting thematic contexts, this research demonstrates how specific figurative choices (such as metaphor, irony, and hyperbole) are strategically mobilized to serve particular emotional and thematic demands, thereby advancing the stylistic understanding of popular songwriting as a deliberate literary-linguistic practice. Because Eilish co-writes her lyrics with her brother and producer, Finneas O'Connell, her songs are the product of a deliberate compositional process that rewards close stylistic

reading. Examining these songs therefore matters not only because of their popularity, but because they exemplify how contemporary popular music can function as a sophisticated literary-linguistic artifact, employing figurative language with a precision comparable to traditional poetic forms and thus warranting serious scholarly attention within stylistics and applied linguistics.

This study addresses the identified gaps by providing a focused, systematic stylistic analysis of figurative language in three songs, examining how figurative devices function at both linguistic and conceptual levels to construct meaning, evoke emotion, and establish thematic coherence. The research is significant for several reasons. Theoretically, it contributes to an understanding of how figurative language operates in contemporary popular music as a complex artistic medium. Methodologically, it demonstrates the applicability of a stylistic framework to the comparative analysis of commercially successful popular songs. Pedagogically, it offers insight relevant to English language education, particularly in contexts where song lyrics can serve as engaging material for teaching figurative language. By examining an internationally influential artist whose work resonates strongly with younger audiences, this study also bridges academic linguistics and contemporary cultural production, illustrating the continued relevance of stylistic analysis for understanding how language creates meaning in texts that shape contemporary youth culture.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study described above, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What types of figurative language are employed in Billie Eilish's songs "Lunch," "The Greatest," and "Wish You Were Gay"?
2. How do different figurative language patterns contribute to constructing the themes of the selected songs?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. Identify the types of figurative language employed in Billie Eilish's songs "Lunch," "The Greatest," and "Wish You Were Gay."
2. Explain how different figurative language patterns contribute to constructing the themes of the three selected songs.

1.4 Significant of the Research

This Study is expected to provide theoretical and practical significance.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to the advancement of linguistics by providing further theoretical grounding for treating popular music lyrics as legitimate scholarly texts. Using the stylistic frameworks of Simpson (2025) and Burke (2023), the study examines figurative language as a combination of linguistic structure and aesthetic effect. It also offers theoretical insight into how linguistic patterning functions as a strategic device that is central to the affective process by which a text elicits an emotional response from its reader or listener. In line with Theodora & Setiawan (2024) findings, the study reinforces the view that figurative language plays a crucial role in the construction of identity and interpersonal relationships in song lyrics. Finally, the study contributes to an understanding of how popular music functions as a literary-linguistic artifact, drawing on Leech (1969) view of the significance of contextual meaning in an artist's creative expression.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for linguists and researchers investigating figurative and identity-related patterns in other popular texts. For songwriters and creative writers, the comparative findings offer a concrete illustration of how figurative language choices such as the shift between metaphor, hyperbole, and irony observed across Eilish's songs can be used deliberately to shape a lyric's emotional resonance and thematic coherence; this is consistent

with Law (2021) observation that figurative devices function as a primary mechanism of emotional intensification in popular song. In the field of education, this research offers material relevant to English language teaching. Song lyrics have been shown to increase learner motivation and engagement with figurative and literary concepts because they connect academic linguistic analysis to texts that are already familiar and personally meaningful to students (Rugaiyah et al. 2024; Aras et al. 2024), which supports the potential use of Eilish's lyrics, widely known among younger listeners, as accessible teaching material for figurative language instruction.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

1.5.1 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research is a stylistic analysis of figurative language in Billie Eilish's song lyrics, focusing on three selected songs: "Lunch," "The Greatest," and "Wish You Were Gay." The analysis examines the types of figurative language that emerge in each song and how these stylistic choices construct meaning related to the specific theme of each text, desire, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal rejection, respectively. Using a stylistic framework grounded in Leech (1969) and Leech and Short (2007), this research examines how figurative devices function as a bridge between the linguistic structure of the text and the aesthetic and affective impact they produce on the listener.

1.5.2 Limitation of the Study

This study limits its analysis to the written text of the song lyrics and does not examine musicological elements such as melody, chord progression, or audio production, all of which also contribute to a song's emotional effect. In addition, this study does not conduct empirical observation of audience or listener reception; it focuses instead on textual and conceptual interpretation grounded in stylistic theory. Finally, this study examines Billie Eilish's lyrics only as a published linguistic artifact and does not investigate the internal collaborative process between the artist and her producer during songwriting.

1.6 Definition of the Key Term

1.6.1 Stylistics.

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics that studies the style of language in literary and non-literary texts by applying linguistic tools to explain how language choices produce particular aesthetic and communicative effects Simpson (2025). In this study, the term is used operationally to refer to the systematic analysis of how Billie Eilish's lyrics employ specific linguistic patterns to construct a distinctive aesthetic and emotional effect.

1.6.2 Levels of Stylistics.

Stylistic analysis can be conducted at several linguistic levels, including phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels Leech & Short (2007). This study focuses primarily on the lexical, semantic, and pragmatic levels, since these are the levels at which figurative meaning, word choice, non-literal meaning, and context-dependent interpretation is most clearly constructed in Eilish's lyrics. Operationally, "levels of stylistics" in this study refers to the specific linguistic layers at which each identified figurative expression is analyzed: its lexical form, its semantic (non-literal) meaning, and its pragmatic function within the song.

1.6.3 Figurative Language.

Figurative language refers to language used to create images, associations, or effects in the mind of the listener or reader that go beyond the literal, dictionary meaning of the words used Leech (1969). In this study, figurative language is analyzed as the primary linguistic mechanism through which Eilish's lyrics construct meaning beyond their surface content.

1.6.4 Song Lyrics.

Song lyrics are the textual component of a song, serving as a medium through which artists express emotion, narrate experience, and convey meaning through poetic or prose-like language. In this study, song lyrics are treated as a written literary text that is analyzed independently of its musical accompaniment.