

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical basis for the current study is organized into five sections: (1) Stylistics, (2) Figurative Language, (3) Types of Figurative Language, (4) the Function of Figurative Language in Song Lyrics, (5) Previous Studies and (6) the Gap of the Study.

2.1 Stylistics

Stylistics is a branch of linguistics that examines style in language, particularly in literary and creative texts, using systematic linguistic tools to explain how language choices produce aesthetic, emotional, and rhetorical effects. Several complementary perspectives inform how this study understands and applies the concept. Simpson (2025) defines stylistics as a method of textual interpretation that emphasizes the role of language and is particularly attentive to the most creative or foregrounded uses of language, a definition that foregrounds the *linguistic form* of a text as the primary object of analysis. Burke (2023), by contrast, argues that stylistic meaning does not reside in linguistic form alone but emerges through the interaction between formal textual properties and the broader interpretive context in which a text is read, connecting linguistic description to literary interpretation rather than treating them as separate tasks.

These two perspectives are complementary rather than competing: Simpson's emphasis on foregrounding provides the analytical tools for identifying *which* linguistic choices are stylistically significant, while Burke's contextual approach explains *why* those choices produce the meanings and effects that they do. This study integrates both frameworks, using Simpson (2025) attention to foregrounded language to identify figurative instances in Eilish's lyrics, and Burke (2023) contextual approach to interpret their function within each song's thematic and emotional context. Leech & Short (2007) further support this integration, arguing that style is not a cosmetic addition to content but is inherently constitutive of meaning, implying that every figurative choice in Eilish's songs contributes directly to its emotional and thematic

composition, rather than merely decorating meaning that exists independently of its wording.

Theoretical Framework in order to keep the analytical framework focused and internally consistent, this study limits its core theoretical foundation to three complementary sources: Leech & Short (2007) taxonomy of figurative devices and stylistic categories, which provides the classificatory tool used to identify and label figurative language in the data; Simpson (2025) stylistic method, which guides the identification of foregrounded linguistic choices; and Burke (2023) contextual approach to stylistic interpretation, which guides the functional analysis of *why* each device is used. Together, these three frameworks provide sufficient theoretical coverage for both the classificatory and interpretive stages of the analysis, without introducing the redundancy that would result from combining additional overlapping frameworks.

2.2 Figurative Language

All nonliteral verbal expressions including metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, irony, symbolism, and imagery — that use imaginative connections and inventive distortions to convey meaning beyond the semantic bounds of individual words are collectively referred to as figurative language. According to Dancygier (2017), figurative language is not a departure from ordinary language but rather a reflection of the basic cognitive mechanisms through which humans conceptualize and communicate abstract experience — a view that is particularly relevant to Eilish’s songwriting, which consistently transforms complex psychological and emotional states into vivid figurative expression.

Leech (1969) provides a comprehensive taxonomy of figurative devices, noting that each operates through a distinct mechanism: metaphor maps meaning across conceptual domains, simile draws explicit comparisons, personification attributes animate qualities to inanimate things, and hyperbole uses exaggeration for emotional emphasis, all of which appear throughout Eilish’s three selected songs. Lambrou (2021) adds that figurative language condenses complex experience into compact, vivid expression, a function that is especially important in song

lyrics, where structural constraints require economy of meaning. In an analysis of Eilish's Hit Me Hard and Soft album, Wulandari & Khumairo Ma'shumah (2025) find that metaphor is the predominant figurative device in her work, followed by personification and hyperbole, which serves as a useful comparative benchmark for the present study. Similarly, Ngailo et al. (2022) identify a wide range of figurative techniques in Eilish's songs, including symbolism and allusion, showing that figurative language functions as a structural foundation of meaning rather than mere decoration in her lyrics.

2.3 Types of Figurative Language

Drawing on the stylistic categories established by Leech (1969) and Leech & Short (2007), figurative language can be understood as falling into two broad functions: semantic deviation, in which words are used outside their literal meaning to produce a new interpretive effect, and aesthetic decoration, in which language is patterned to exploit or manipulate normal usage for expressive, emotional, or rhetorical purposes. Based on a preliminary review of the selected lyrics, five types of figurative language recur most prominently across the three songs: metaphor, hyperbole, irony, symbolism, simile, and personification. Each is defined operationally as follows.

1. **Metaphor:** A form of figurative language that transfers meaning from one object or concept to another based on an underlying similarity between them, producing a non-literal meaning distinct from the term's original referent Leech (1969).
2. **Hyperbole:** A figure of speech that deliberately states something in an exaggerated or excessive manner, in order to create a dramatic effect and draw the listener's attention to the intensity of the meaning being conveyed.
3. **Irony.** A figure of speech that expresses a meaning contrary to its literal or expected sense, typically used to create a sarcastic or humorous effect, or to emphasize a point subtly by requiring the listener to infer the intended meaning.

4. **Symbolism.** The use of a word, image, or object to represent an idea or emotional meaning beyond its literal referent, enriching the emotional resonance of a text.
5. **Simile.** A figure of speech that explicitly compares two essentially different things using a comparative marker such as “like” or “as,” highlighting a shared quality between them.
6. **Personification.** The attribution of human qualities, actions, or emotions to non-human or inanimate entities, used to create a vivid and relatable image for the reader or listener.

2.4 Function of Figurative Language in Song Lyrics

Figurative language in song lyrics serves a range of purposes that distinguish lyrical discourse from everyday communicative language. Instead of presenting these functions generally, they can be categorized into several distinct functions based on linguistic and literary frameworks:

2.4.1 Aesthetic Function

The primary purpose of using figurative language is to enhance the artistic value of a text. According to Werner & Schubert (2023), song lyrics function like cultural artifacts, producing linguistic deviations that create strong thematic and emotional connotations. Using metaphorical or symbolic devices can prevent a song from becoming mundane, let alone boring, and thus create a unique writing style for the lyrics, enhancing the song's aesthetic beauty and cultural relevance.

2.4.2 Emotional Intensification Function

One reason, also identified by Law (2021), for the use of figurative language in popular songs is to amplify emotional impacts (such as grief, longing, physical desire, and psychological exhaustion), which are often too complex to be described literally. In this case, figurative language acts as a mechanism that translates emotional states

into concrete imagery, allowing listeners to feel the message conveyed by the musician.

2.4.3 Identity Construction Function

Song lyrics also often function as social connections. Scholes & Baudinette (2025) also emphasize that audiences and fans often interact with figurative expressions in music to affirm, direct, and demonstrate something like personal identity. This function is significant when lyrics address sensitive interpersonal dynamics, such as facing romantic rejection, thus transforming personal narratives into a cultural experience of language.

2.4.4 Communication enhancement function

Figurative devices enhance the quality of linguistic communication on a broader level, as a whole, across various discourses, Sihite (2016). Figurative language is capable of condensing complex experiences into concise yet impactful expressions. This allows songwriters to clearly communicate deep psychological realities or hidden conflicts without having to rely on elaborate explanations.

2.4.5 Pedagogical Function

In addition to its artistic and social dimensions, figurative language in contemporary music also has strong educational value. Aras et al. (2024) noted that modern lyrics can serve as very interesting material for vocabulary acquisition and cultural literacy in language learning, because popular music is closely integrated into the culture of today's youth generation. Figurative analysis also greatly helps language learners understand non-literal meanings as well as authentic and relevant conceptual mapping.

2.5 Previous Study

This study builds on several previous studies examining figurative language and stylistic elements in song lyrics. The table below summarizes these studies in terms of their methods, findings, and

limitations, to clarify exactly how this study expands on and differs from existing work

Table 2.1 Previous Study

Author	Method/Focus	Key Findings	Limitation	Relation to the Present study
Ngailo et al. (2022)	Descriptive qualitative analysis of figurative language in a selection of Billie Eilish's songs	Identifies symbolism and allusion, among other devices, as recurring elements that build thematic coherence across Eilish's songs	Analyzes songs as a general, undifferentiated set; does not compare how figurative patterns shift according to a song's specific theme	Provides the categorical foundation for figurative-device identification, which this study extends through a theme-based comparative design
Wulandari & Khumairo Ma'shumah (2025)	Descriptive qualitative analysis of figurative language within a single album (<i>Hit Me</i> <i>Hard and Soft</i>)	Identifies metaphor as Eilish's most dominant figurative device, followed by personification and hyperbole	Limited to one album and does not compare songs from different creative periods or thematic categories	Provides a quantitative benchmark for device frequency that this study compares against songs spanning

				two albums and three distinct themes
Theodora & Setiawan (2024)	Qualitative analysis of figurative language in selected Eilish tracks, including “ <i>Lunch</i> ”	Shows that Eilish employs symbolism and metaphor for emotional expression	Touches on emotional expression but does not systematically compare figurative patterns across songs with different thematic focuses	This study directly addresses this gap by comparing figurative patterns across three thematically distinct songs
Farida Nur Afifah et al. (2025)	Discourse analysis of interpersonal meaning in an Eilish interview	Establishes a connection between Eilish’s biographical discourse and her figurative expression in lyrics	Focused on interview discourse rather than the lyrics themselves	Provides contextual and biographical grounding used to support the interpretive stage of this study’s analysis

Taken together, these studies establish that Eilish’s lyrics are a legitimate and productive object of stylistic analysis, and that metaphor and hyperbole are recurring devices in her songwriting. However, none of them systematically compares how figurative language patterns shift across songs addressing distinct thematic concerns within Eilish’s own catalogue. This is the specific gap that the present study addresses.

2.6 Gap of the Study

After reviewing these studies, three aspects remain insufficiently addressed in the existing literature. Theoretically, previous studies (Ngailo et al. 2022; Wulandari & Khumairo Ma'shumah 2025) catalogue figurative devices without systematically explaining why particular devices recur in particular thematic contexts. Methodologically, existing studies analyze songs individually or within a single album, without a comparative design capable of isolating how figurative patterns shift according to theme. Empirically, no prior study has directly compared songs addressing markedly different emotional registers (desire, exhaustion, and rejection) within Eilish's own catalogue, despite the analytical value such a contrast offers.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating not only *which* types of figurative language appear in “*Lunch*,” “*The Greatest*,” and “*Wish You Were Gay*,” but also *why* Billie Eilish selects particular figurative patterns to construct the specific emotional and thematic content of each song, the strong desire evoked in “*Lunch*,” the emotional exhaustion in “*The Greatest*,” and the interpersonal rejection and shame in “*Wish You Were Gay*.” The central contribution of this research is therefore to classify the figurative language used in these three songs and to explain figurative language as a deliberate tool for constructing distinct emotional meanings across thematically contrasting lyrics.