



# Figurative Expressions of Romantic Infatuation in Sabrina Carpenter's Songs

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## Abstract

This study investigates the use of figurative language expressing romantic infatuation in three songs by Sabrina Carpenter, namely "Bet U Wanna" (from *Singular: Act II*, 2019), "Nonsense" (from *emails I can't send*, 2022), and "Fast Times" (from *emails I can't send fwd.*, 2023). It employs a descriptive qualitative method and applies Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) theoretical framework to examine six types of figurative language: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, irony, and symbol. The study aims to analyze how these figurative elements function semantically to convey emotional depth and thematic meaning, particularly in relation to romantic infatuation. The data were obtained from purposively selected song lyrics based on their emotional relevance. The findings reveal 25 figurative expressions in total, with metaphor being the most frequently used, followed by hyperbole, simile, symbol, personification, and irony. Functionally, these expressions are primarily used to depict emotional pain, intensify feelings, express longing, and evoke personal memories. These results indicate that Sabrina Carpenter's lyrics utilize figurative language as an effective semantic device for conveying complex emotional experiences, especially those connected to romantic feelings and vulnerability.

**Keywords:** *Figurative Language, Romantic Infatuation, Song Lyrics*

## Introduction

Human beings rely on language as a fundamental tool for interaction and communication. According to Swarniti (2019), language holds a vital role in human life as the primary medium for conveying messages and engaging in interactions. However, not all languages share the same conceptual structure or serve identical communicative purposes (Santika & Sudiana, 2021). This shows that language is not only a means of expressing meaning but also reflects the cultural and cognitive diversity of its speakers.

Semantics, as a branch of linguistics, studies the meanings of words, sentences, and symbols (Leech, 1981). According to Wibisono & Widodo (2019), semantics provides insight into how meaning is constructed in communication. Furthermore, Löbner (2013) emphasizes that semantics explains how meaning interacts with context and interpretation, which is essential in understanding complex forms of expression. en (1949) stated that lyrics blend artistic structure with emotional depth, making them a distinctive type of poetic expression. According to Murphy (1996), songs often rely on figurative language to intensify imagery, deepen emotional impact, and enhance the aesthetic experience, especially when dealing with themes such as love, loss, and identity.

Figurative language extends beyond literal meaning to express abstract ideas, employing simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, and symbolism (Knickerbocker and Reninger, 1974). Romantic infatuation refers to a psychological and emotional condition marked by intense feelings of attraction, admiration, and idealization toward someone (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). This theme frequently appears in popular music, where the emotional intensity of love is portrayed through expressive and figurative language. Sabrina Carpenter is chosen as the subject because her lyrics consistently portray vulnerability and emotional intensity, making them relevant for semantic and cultural analysis. Her work has not yet been analyzed in prior studies, which creates a research gap this study aims to address.

Previous studies on figurative language in music show diverse emphases. Some studies focused on figurative language in pop albums. Blent (2024) examined Hozier's "Wasteland, Baby!" and found metaphor as the dominant device, while Atiya (2023) studied Philip David Wickham's "The Ascension" and discovered hyperbole to be more prevalent. Other research emphasized emotional expression through figurative language. Swarniti (2022) analyzed Adele's "Easy On Me" and highlighted metaphorical expressions of personal struggle, while Ramadhani & Hayati (2022) studied Coldplay's album and revealed figurative language as a medium for emotional depth. In addition, Eklesia (2023) applied a semantic framework to Niall Horan's "The Show", emphasizing symbolism as a key device.

These studies collectively demonstrate the importance of figurative language in shaping emotional meaning in popular music. However, none of them focused on Sabrina Carpenter's discography, even though her lyrics are rich with themes of romantic infatuation and vulnerability. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing figurative language in selected songs by Sabrina Carpenter.

To make the review clearer, the previous studies can also be grouped thematically: those that highlight metaphor as the dominant device (Blent, 2024; Santika & Sudiana, 2021), those focusing on symbolism (Eklesia, 2023), and those

emphasizing hyperbole and other figures (Swarniti, 2022; Ramandani & Hayati, 2024). This thematic grouping helps position the present study within broader research on figurative language in music.

Research Questions:

1. What types of figurative language appear in Sabrina Carpenter's songs?
2. What are their semantic functions in expressing romantic infatuation?

## **Method**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method guided by Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) theoretical framework. The data consisted of three songs by Sabrina Carpenter: "Bet U Wanna" (Singular: Act II, 2019), "Nonsense" (emails I can't send, 2022), and "Fast Times" (emails I can't send fwd:, 2023). These songs were purposively selected because they prominently feature themes of romantic infatuation. The lyrics were obtained from official platforms (Genius, AZLyrics) and cross-checked for accuracy.

The analysis involved identifying and classifying figurative language instances (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, irony, and symbol), followed by interpreting their semantic functions, such as expressing pain, longing, or excitement. Two researchers independently coded the data to ensure reliability and resolved any discrepancies through discussion. Although inter-rater reliability was not statistically calculated, coding consistency was maintained through repeated discussions until agreement was reached between the researchers. The limitations of this study include the small sample size and its restriction to only three selected songs, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the chosen songs are considered sufficient to represent Sabrina Carpenter's lyrical style in expressing romantic infatuation and provide meaningful insight into how figurative language conveys emotional intensity in contemporary pop music.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

After analyzing the lyrics using Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) theory of figurative language, six types were identified in the selected songs by Sabrina Carpenter: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, irony, and symbol. In addition to identifying the types, this study also categorized the functions of each figurative expression based on their role in conveying emotional and thematic meanings within the lyrics. The results are presented in three tables: Table 1 shows the types of figurative language found, Table 2 shows their corresponding functions, and Table 3 shows the distribution of figurative

language. Each entry is supported by selected lyric excerpts in the following sections to illustrate all the type and its communicative purpose, as shown below.

Table 1. Types of Figurative Language in Selected Songs by Sabrina Carpenter

Types of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
Simile	3	11,53%
Metaphor	10	38,46%
Personification	2	7,69%
Hyperbole	5	19,23%
Irony	2	7,69%
Symbol	3	11,53%
Total	25	100.00%

Table 2. Function of Figurative Language in Selected Songs by Sabrina Carpenter

Types of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
To express pain	6	24%
To emphasize loss	3	12%
To show excitement	3	12%
To exaggerate	4	16%
To reflect loneliness	2	8%
To illustrate discovery	1	4%
To express regret	2	8%
To show belonging	1	4%
To represent memory	3	12%
Total	25	100%

In addition to these findings, the distribution of figurative language across the three selected songs is presented in table below.

Table 3. Distribution of Figurative Language Types in Three Selected Songs by Sabrina Carpenter

Song Title	Simile	Metaphor	Personification	Hyperbole	Irony	Symbol	Total
Bet U Wanna	0	4	1	2	1	1	9
Nonsense	2	2	0	3	0	0	7
Fast Times	1	4	1	0	1	2	9
Total	3	10	2	5	2	3	25

As can be seen in Table 1, the most frequent type of figurative language is metaphor. This is likely because the songs tend to describe romantic emotions through indirect and imaginative comparisons that evoke vivid imagery, allowing listeners to deeply connect with the emotional intensity expressed.

Table 2 shows that figurative language in the lyrics mainly functions to express emotional experiences such as pain, loss, and longing. These emotional functions highlight how figurative expressions enrich the depth of meaning and reflect the intensity of romantic infatuation in the songs.

Table 3 indicates that "Bet U Wanna" and "Fast Times" contain the highest number of figurative expressions (9 each), while "Nonsense" contains 7. Metaphor appears consistently across all songs, while simile and hyperbole are more unevenly distributed. These distributions highlight the variation in how Sabrina Carpenter employs figurative language to convey romantic infatuation in different lyrical contexts. Metaphor was found consistently across all three songs, suggesting it is a central stylistic feature in Carpenter's writing. In contrast, simile and hyperbole appeared unevenly, reflecting how different songs highlight different emotional intensities and narrative effects.

## Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis, most of the songs analyzed revolve around themes of romantic infatuation, focusing on emotional vulnerability, heartbreak, longing, and intense admiration. These emotional experiences are conveyed using various types of figurative language that enrich the lyrical expression. Several examples of these figurative language types and their emotional functions will be discussed below.

### 1. Simile

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974), simile is a clear comparison made between two distinct things using connecting words such as like or as. This figure of speech is used to emphasize or clarify meaning by pointing out resemblances between unrelated elements.

**Data 1:** *"Baby, my tongue goes numb, sounds like bleh, blah, blee"*

In data 1, the phrase "sounds like bleh, blah, blee" is a clear example of simile, using the word like to compare the speaker's inability to speak with jumbled, nonsensical sounds. The line depicts how overwhelming infatuation with someone can cause physical and verbal reactions beyond control. The comparison is vivid and humorous, painting a picture of someone so emotionally shaken that even forming coherent words becomes impossible. While it functions primarily as a simile, the phrase also carries onomatopoeic qualities, since the repeated sounds imitate the natural effect of babbling or scrambled speech. The function of this simile is to show excitement, where

nervousness caused by attraction turns into an endearing loss of composure. The imagery here is lighthearted yet emotionally resonant, capturing the thrill of being affected so deeply by someone's presence that it scrambles the speaker's voice and thoughts.

**Data 2:** *"Sun's up too soon like daylight savings"*

In data 2, the simile draws a parallel between the quick arrival of sunrise and the time shifts caused by daylight savings. This comparison subtly reflects how time seems to pass more rapidly during intimate or emotionally charged moments. The speaker suggests that nights spent with someone meaningful feel fleeting as if the universe itself is rushing forward. This simile works to show excitement, but with a bittersweet undertone: the heightened emotional experience makes time feel compressed. It illustrates the emotional velocity of romantic connection, where joy and closeness feel too brief, leaving the speaker wanting more.

## 2. Metaphor

As stated by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974), a metaphor is an indirect comparison that equates one thing with another without using like or as. It conveys the idea that two different things are essentially the same to create a stronger and more vivid image.

**Data 3:** *"Feel the way it feels when you don't have control of who I'm holdin'"*

In data 3, the metaphor expresses emotional pain through the image of physical control. "Who I'm holdin'" is not just about physical proximity, but symbolizes emotional intimacy and vulnerability. The speaker no longer grants someone else the power to determine her emotional state. The metaphor conveys a shift from dependence to self-assertion, but this shift is rooted in pain, pain that required her to reclaim agency. The line suggests that love once held her hostage, and now freedom comes with a bittersweet sting. The function of this metaphor is to express pain, as it channels heartache through the language of personal power and emotional withdrawal.

**Data 4:** *"Sky looks so purple; I can taste it"*

In data 4, this metaphor blending sight and taste to depict emotional intensity. The sky's color is so vivid, so emotionally charged, that it becomes physically palpable. It's not about the sky literally being edible it's about how deeply emotions saturate perception when someone is overwhelmed by feeling. This line dramatizes emotional immersion; the speaker is not merely observing the moment she is consumed by it. The metaphor functions to illustrate discovery, reflecting a newfound awareness of how infatuation heightens and distorts the senses. It suggests that love has awakened something new in her. Additionally, the blending of visual and gustatory senses highlights the

complexity of synesthetic perception, emphasizing how strong emotions can intensify and intertwine sensory experiences.

### 3. Personification

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974) define personification as attributing human traits to things that are not human, such as objects or abstract concepts. This device makes descriptions more engaging by animating non-human subjects in a human like way.

**Data 5:** *"Lies you sold me all saw the light of day"*

In data 5, the abstract concept of lies is personified as if they can see and emerge into the light. This moment represents the speaker's realization what was once hidden or denied has now been exposed. The emotional effect is one of betrayal: trust has been broken, and the truth, though painful, now shines unavoidably. The personification gives agency to the lies, making them feel alive, invasive, and almost vindictive. The function is to emphasize loss, particularly the loss of innocence, clarity, or trust in the relationship.

**Data 6:** *"Mixed emotions are congregating"*

In data 6, emotions are personified as people coming together. This image conjures the feeling of being mentally crowded overwhelmed by many conflicting emotions at once. It's not just emotional chaos; it's emotional solitude masked as inner noise. The function is to reflect loneliness, as the speaker is surrounded not by others, but by the internal storm of her own feelings. The crowd is inside her, and that kind of congestion reflects a profound sense of disconnection from the outside world.

### 4. Hyperbole

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974) define personification as attributing human traits to things that are not human, such as objects or abstract concepts. This device makes descriptions more engaging by animating non-human subjects in a human like way.

**Data 7:** *"Bet you're reminiscing"*

In data 7, this line reflects exaggerated confidence the speaker insists that she is on her ex's mind. It may or may not be true, but the emotional need to believe it is what gives the hyperbole its power. It's a projection of pride, perhaps even denial, masking vulnerability beneath assertiveness. The function is to exaggerate, dramatizing the internal tug-of-war between self-worth and emotional insecurity. The imagery here expresses an inflated sense of importance that stems from unresolved feelings. This hyperbolic expression is justified by the speaker's psychological need to assert significance, which dramatizes emotional tension and amplifies the internal conflict, reinforcing the intensity of her feelings.

**Data 8:** *"I think I got an ex but I forgot him"*

In data 8, this hyperbolic line humorously overstates emotional detachment. The speaker claims to have forgotten someone who clearly once mattered. It is a bold declaration of freedom, but also a defense mechanism. The line functions to exaggerate emotional independence while subtly revealing the effort it takes to get there. The exaggeration underscores a transition from pain to indifference, real or pretended.

**5. Irony**

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974), occurs when the intended meaning contrasts with the literal expression, often to produce humor or highlight a point. It emphasizes the difference between what is said and what is actually meant.

**Data 9:** *"Bet you wanna love me now"*

In data 9, this sarcastic line carries a double edge: the speaker implies that the ex now wants what they once rejected. On the surface, the speaker appears confident, even indifferent. But the irony is in the reversal what once hurt her now seems to vindicate her. The function is to express regret, as the speaker's sarcasm masks unresolved sadness. The regret isn't only about the lost relationship, but about the timing and emotional cost of the growth that followed.

**Data 10:** *"Give me a second to forget I ever really meant it"*

In data 10, this line is laced with emotional contradiction. The speaker pretends she never cared, but the very effort to dismiss the memory suggests it still hurts. The irony lies in trying to suppress something that obviously mattered. The function is also to express regret, portraying emotional denial as a shield against vulnerability. The speaker wants to appear unbothered, but the subtext says otherwise. The two examples of irony reveal a contrast between what is said and what is truly felt. These lines convey sarcasm and emotional denial, masking pain beneath a tone of indifference or confidence. The irony adds emotional depth by exposing hidden vulnerability, reflecting the complexity of heartbreak and regret in a subtle, indirect manner.

**6. Symbol**

As stated by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974), a symbol is something whether an object, person, or action that stands for more than its literal definition. It is used to represent abstract concepts through tangible forms.

**Data 11:** *"Closed eyes and closed blinds"*

In data 11, this symbolic image conveys the act of emotional withdrawal. Closing the eyes and blinds represents a shutting out of both external reality and internal vulnerability. The speaker retreats into herself, blocking the world to process grief or solitude. The function is to represent memory, as this withdrawal is not emptiness it is a space filled with emotional recollection and private pain. The imagery here is stillness tinged with sorrow.



**Data 12: "Outlines on bed sides"**

In data 12, this symbol captures absence through presence the outline left behind by someone who is no longer there. It reflects emotional residue, the kind that lingers long after the relationship ends. The speaker sees the trace, feels the void. The function is to show belonging, suggesting that even without physical presence, emotional attachment remains. The mark becomes sacred, a memory carved into the space itself.

The dominance of metaphor in Sabrina Carpenter lyrics is in line with Blent's (2024) study on Hozier, while Eklesia (2023) found that Niall Horan relied more on symbolism. This shows that artists use figurative language differently. Sabrina Carpenter frequent use of synesthetic metaphors reflects her choice to intensify emotions and create immersion. At the same time, her playful and light imagery matches Gen Z pop culture, where humor and exaggeration are common ways to express authenticity. These devices also reveal her artistic intent to make lyrics more relatable and immediate.

These findings show how pop music favors vivid and accessible imagery rather than abstract symbolism. The emotional themes of pain, longing, excitement, regret, and vulnerability connect with Hatfield and Sprecher's (1986) theory of infatuation, which highlights intense attraction and idealization. Overall, Sabrina Carpenter figurative language not only enriches the lyrics but also reflects cultural values of honesty and self-expression, offering insights for both semantic and music studies. These categories parallel Hatfield and Sprecher's framework of romantic infatuation, particularly the dimensions of idealization and heightened emotional intensity, thereby grounding the functional analysis in established psychological theory.

## **Conclusion**

This research explored how figurative language conveys themes of romantic infatuation in three of Sabrina Carpenter's songs. A total of 25 figurative expressions were identified, spanning six categories, with metaphor emerging as the most dominant. These expressions serve multiple purposes, including portraying pain, longing, excitement, regret, and emotional vulnerability. The findings emphasize that figurative language is a key stylistic feature in Carpenter's songwriting, transforming private emotions into vivid imagery that feels relatable to listeners.

Despite these insights, the study is not without limitations. Its scope was confined to only three songs, which restricts the breadth of analysis and limits the potential for generalization. The exclusive focus on one artist also prevents broader comparisons across the pop music landscape. Future investigations could extend this work by examining a larger portion of Carpenter's discography,

contrasting her lyrical style with other artists, or situating figurative language within diverse musical genres and cultural frameworks.

Beyond its immediate findings, this study also offers broader implications for the study of music and semantics. Analyzing figurative expressions in lyrics reveals how contemporary pop music communicates intimacy, self-expression, and emotional honesty in ways that transcend literal meaning. Such an approach not only enriches the understanding of popular music as a cultural product but also contributes to semantic inquiry by showing how figurative language gives shape to complex emotional experiences.

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