



Concrete-Abstract Metaphor: Critical Investigation on Figurative Language in Ariana Grande Song Lyrics

Ni Kadek Abel Apriliyanti Dewi¹, Ni Nyoman Deni Ariyaningsih²

^{1,2}Sastra Inggis, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar

Corresponding E-Mail: abelapriyantidewi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Metaphor provides emotions as an important role in literary works. Especially for personal emotional experiences in a modern song lyric. This research highlights the use of concrete-to-abstract metaphor to represent emotional experiences in a song lyric. While most previous studies only focus on classifying the types of metaphor. This study fills the void by analyzing how concrete-to-abstract metaphors are used in a modern song lyric to express personal emotion. This study aims to learn deep understanding about figurative language by analyzing the concrete-to-abstract metaphors that are found in Ariana Grande song lyrics. This study used descriptive-qualitative methods to analyze the data based on theory that was used in semantics. The data were collected from three songs in Ariana Grande's album entitled *Eternal Sunshine*. Data analysis utilized Knickerbocker and Renninger (1963) figurative language theory for the metaphor analysis and Stephen Ullman (1964) for the metaphor types analysis. The study shows lyrics using concrete-to-abstract metaphor. In addition, these findings can expand the understanding of the song writer's characteristics. It is hoped that this study can be referenced in the study of music, language, literature, and enrich further understanding and appreciation about figurative language and metaphor in various modern music.

Keywords: Concrete-Abstract Metaphor, Ariana Grande, Song Lyrics.

Introduction

One of the communication equipment that has its own meaning is known as Language. In the deeper understanding about language, like how words, phrases, and sentences deliver a meaning, it is interpreted as a semantic meaning. Kempson (1997) states that semantic is a bridge discipline between linguistics and philosophy; but linguistics students are rarely able to reach that bridge, let alone

cross it to inspect and assess the activity on the other side. Figurative Language taking part in semantics that study the meaning of words other than the literal meaning. Figurative language is the use of words or expressions whose meaning is different from the literal interpretation, often involving metaphor and other figures of speech (McArthur, 1992; Lazar 2003). Moreover, figurative language is a study of a word that has different degrees with the literality, depending on how people interpret the meaning. Figurative language is commonly implemented in literary works, specifically in song lyrics. In the perspective of (Ullmann, 1957; Richards 1936), metaphor is defined as the transference of a name from one object to another on the basis of a resemblance or analogy between them. Song lyrics are a set of words or sentences played with a brief music to convey a meaning from the writer to listeners. Lyrics are a form of literary expression in poetry that expresses the personal emotions or thoughts of the writer, often sung with musical accompaniment (Perrine, 1988). People can enjoy the musical notes and gain knowledge by interpreting the lyrics. accompaniment (Perrine, 1988). People can enjoy the musical notes and gain knowledge by interpreting the lyrics.

According to Ullmann (1964) there are 4 types of metaphor types, such as anthropomorphic metaphor, animal metaphor, synesthetic metaphor, and concrete-to-abstract. In this study the research focused on the type of metaphor known as concrete-to-abstract. This is one of the basic tendencies in metaphor is to translate abstract experiences into concrete terms. In many cases, the transfer of concrete-to-abstract metaphor transfer is still transparent, but in some etymological problems, it will be necessary to recapture the concrete image underlying an abstract word. As songs often express emotion and mental states, concrete-to-abstract metaphor is important to analyze. The song writer makes abstract feelings more relatable and vivid for listeners through the use of concrete objects or imagery. Unlike the other types, concrete-to-abstract is a powerful tool for communication of a deep meaning and artistic expressions.

As modern songs serve as a form of contemporary poetry and personal expression, this research contributes to the deeper understanding of how abstract human feelings are communicated through concrete objects with artistic language. Analyzing this type of metaphor can reveal the pattern of how language evolves, reflects, and shapes emotional communication. This research provides valuable insights for further linguistic and literary analysis, especially in exploring how meaning is interpreted by diverse audiences. In addition, this research opens opportunities for future researchers to explore the comparison of metaphor and investigate how it affects perception, identity, and emotional response.

Previous study on metaphor analysis have been conducted, there are 3 articles such as in an article written by Bernadetta et al. (2023) entitled *Metaphors in selected Blackpink's song lyrics*, this study also explored metaphor types in a song lyric. But this study doesn't identify the metaphor characteristic used in Blackpink's

songs. This creates the research gap; the previous study generalizes metaphor analysis without closely how specific the song writer's metaphor characteristic. The second article written by Listinawati et al. (2023) Entitled Metaphor in Lany's Song Lyrics. Previous study focuses on identifying metaphor types based on Ullman (2009) theory and surface meaning found in Lany's songs. Meanwhile, this study not only explores the metaphor types but also analyzes the song writer's metaphor characteristic. Therefore, it creates a research gap by combining dual theoretical frameworks in understanding metaphor characteristics. The third study is an article written by Maulana et al. (2025) entitled The Analysis of The Metaphor in Selective Song Lyrics, previous study showing how metaphors express love and sadness in a song lyric. focused on the analysis of conceptual classification and how metaphor contributes to the emotion of a song. In contrast, this study goes further to emphasize the dominance of concrete-to-abstract metaphors as the song writer's metaphor characteristics.

The data were chosen regarding the unique figurative language that is found in Ariana Grande songs. Her songs combine earth, animal, celestial elements into a love and life story. The result of this study is expected to help the readers, especially in the field of literature, to understand how to identify types of metaphors and indicate deep understanding in concrete-to-abstract metaphor. By focusing an analysis of concrete-to-abstract metaphor in a song lyric, this study intends to not only highlight the metaphorical expressions themselves. This study also intended to find out the lyrical tendencies and the song writer's characteristics through the metaphors they choose to use. In addition, to help the readers struggle to understand the lyrics. Because, the findings of this study deliver knowledge for the readers that are interested in acknowledging the types of figurative language.

Method

The data sources in this study were taken from Ariana Grande's Album entitled *Eternal Sunshine*. The album was released on March 28, 2025 consisting of 38 songs. Three songs that were selected from the album are "Warm", "Hampstead", and "Past life". The data were collected by several steps. First, listen to the selected song from the music platform. Second, read the lyrics and underline the necessary data. Third, classify the data based on the theory. Data analysis in this study using the theory proposed by Knickerbocker and Renninger (1963) that consists of 10 types of figurative language, this theory is used to identify the lyrics can be considered as a metaphor. This method conducted by reading the lyric from music platform. The second step is to take a note of the lyrics and underlining the line that can be interpreted based on metaphor theory. Ullmann (1964) theory that consists of 4 types of metaphor used to indicate the line of lyrics can be categorized as concrete-to-abstract metaphor. This theory is implemented by collecting the lyrics that are already considered as metaphors. Second, Underline the concrete object and the abstract feeling of the line. The last step is relating the data based on Ullmann's idea of the theory. Those steps help the writer to indicate concrete-to-

abstract metaphor easier. In addition, in classifying the metaphor characteristic, the writer conducted the analysis based on metaphor characteristics theory by Ullmann (1964).

The data in this research were using descriptive-qualitative methods to identify concrete-to-abstract metaphors in song lyrics and uncover how abstract concepts are expressed through concrete imagery. Finding presentation in this study using formal and informal methods that was proposed by Suraryanto (1993). The formal method is for presenting the data by a table that reveals the concrete-to-abstract metaphors and the metaphor characteristics that represents the lyrics that are found in Ariana Grande’s song lyrics. Meanwhile, the informal method used for the discussion is to elaborate the concrete-to-abstract metaphors that are found in Ariana Grande song lyrics. Specifically on how the lyric can be categorized as concrete-to-abstract metaphor, examining the metaphor characteristic in each lyric, and how it influences the song.

Results

Finding Result

This analysis was conducted by underlining each line of the song lyric that contains concrete-to-abstract metaphor. The theory of figurative language by Knickerbocker and Renninger (1963) and the theory of metaphor types by Ullmann (1964) was used to support this analysis process. There are 10 lines of concrete-to-abstract metaphor that are used in Ariana Grande’s song lyrics. Table 1 shows the classification of lyrics that contain concrete-to-abstract metaphor. And how the metaphors influence the characteristics of each line.

Table 1. Lyrics and types of metaphor

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Warm	<i>Never thought I'd find another could fly here at my pace</i>	Reflective
	<i>Am I just on your to-do list?</i>	Emotional
Hampstead	<i>Rather be swimming with you than drowning in a crowded room.</i>	Symbolic
	<i>Threw away my reputation but saved us more heartache</i>	Reflective

	<i>What's wrong with a little bit of poison? tell me</i>	Symbolic
	<i>Kissed by the passing of time</i>	Reflective
	<i>A moth to a flame, I didn't think, I just flew</i>	Symbolic
	<i>Rhythms of the night consume my body</i>	Sensory
	<i>Let the music confiscate my soul</i>	Sensory
Past life	<i>You were just code blue</i>	Symbolic
	<i>Leave you in a past life</i>	Reflective
	<i>Maybe I'm the stranger after all</i>	Emotional
Total	12	4

After conducting the analysis, there are 12 lyrics found in Ariana Grande's song Lyrics that contain concrete-to-abstract metaphor. Each line is characterized by four main traits: emotional, reflective, symbolic, and sensory. Those characteristics reflect a specific nuance, such as emotional vulnerability, thoughtful introspection, symbolic comparison, or sensory immersion. As the result of the analysis, Ariana Grande uses Concrete-to-abstract as her characteristic in expressing her emotional experiences.

Discussion

This part of the study discusses concrete-to-abstract metaphors that are used in Ariana Grande's song lyrics. Concrete-to-abstract metaphor is the characteristic of Ariana Grande in writing lyrics that express emotional experiences. This discussion is supported by Ullmann (1964) theory of metaphor. This discussion shows how concrete-to-abstract metaphors influence the characteristics of Ariana Grande's song lyrics.

Data 1

"Never thought I'd find another could fly here at my pace" (Warm-Eternal Sunshine)

In the lyric ***"Never thought I'd find another could fly here at my pace"*** implements metaphor. Because it compares two different things without "like" or "as". The song writer is comparing someone with her flying pace. This line is

categorized as a concrete-to-abstract metaphor. Because it shows “fly” as a concrete action that is associated with birds or planes. In this line “fly” is used to describe something abstract, like emotional connection or the same shared rhythm. This lyric is categorized as a reflective characteristic because it represents the realization of a meaningful relationship with someone. The shift between the literal to the abstract idea allows the listener to feel freedom about the connection in a song without it being directly stated. The use of physical images to express something internal with metaphor makes it more relatable.

Data 2

“Am I just on your to-do list?” (Warm-Eternal Sunshine)

In the lyric ***“Am I just on your to-do list?”*** contains metaphor, as it shows a comparison of two different things without “like” and “as”. The song writer compares “I” or a person to “to-do list”. This line shows how a person “I” treated like “to-do list” as the concrete object. This was a clear case when “to-do list” is used to describe an abstract idea of being undervalued or just a task for someone. This example of metaphor intends to invite the listener to understand the emotional pain of being treated as a responsibility instead of the meaningful presence of a person. The shift from concrete (to-do list) to abstract emotion or detachment deepens the impact of the lyric. The listener can reflect on how relationships can lose warmth and become something done like a routine.

Data 3

“Rather be swimming with you than drowning in a crowded room” (Hampstead-Eternal Sunshine)

The line ***“Rather be swimming with you than drowning in a crowded room”*** uses metaphor by comparing two contrasting things. It shows by conducting the comparison of “swimming” and “drowning” in one sentence without using “like” or “as”. The two words “swimming” and “drowning” are concrete physical activity. These two words are used as a symbol to express internal emotional states. The phrase “swimming with you” represents an emotionally safe relationship. Meanwhile, “Drowning in a crowded room” represents an overwhelming feeling. The comparison of those two phrases highlights how Ariana Grande longs for genuine intimacy over superficial social interactions. This type of shift allows listeners to visualize and feel the weight of emotional disconnection versus true companionship.

Data 4

“Threw away my reputation but saved us more heartache” (Hampstead-Eternal Sunshine)

This line compares two phrases in one sentence, like “threw away my

reputation” means giving up on something important, compared with “saved us more heartache” means a painful but necessary choice. It’s clear that this line compares an action to something painful but necessary to do it. By projecting these phrases with the concrete-to-abstract theory, “throwing away my reputation” contains concrete action, an object to express the abstract idea of “saved us more heartache” that represents reflective realization of painful action. The comparison of tangible action and intangible emotional result, shows the emotional maturity of choosing what feels wrong on the surface but is the right decision for the long-term life. The use of metaphor in this line also invites the listener to feel the weight of losing something for the sake of emotional survival.

Data 5

“What’s wrong with a little bit of poison? tell me” (Hampstead-Eternal Sunshine)

The line ***“What’s wrong with a little bit of poison? Tell me”*** Contains the symbolic metaphor. The word “poison” is a symbol of something emotionally or morally harmful. According to concrete-to-abstract theory the word “poison” is a concrete object to represent emotional pain as an abstract idea in the “tell me” Phrase. The metaphor works in comparing a physical object (poison) to an abstract emotional experience, sometimes someone willing to accept pain, risk or even danger just because they have a strong connection and comfort to someone. This example of metaphor invites the listener to reflect on how complex emotions can be symbolized by bold or provocative language.

Data 6

“Kissed by the passing of time” (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

The comparison between “kissed” and “time” without using the words “like” or “as” in the lyric of “Kissed by the passing of time” shows that the song writer implements the use of metaphor. Those two words directly connected two unrelated ideas, a human action and an abstract concept. Figurative expression in this line gives “time” the ability to gently affect or leave an emotional imprint on someone. If the line projected into concrete-to-abstract theory, physical action “kissed” used to describe an abstract idea of emotional impact of time. Reflective characteristics in this line expresses a realization of how time has affected someone’s life. The song writer uses this metaphor to convey a sense of nostalgia and introspection of the meaningful impact time has had and how time influences someone on a personal level.

Data 7

“A moth to a flame, I didn’t think, I just flew” (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

The phrase “A moth to a flame” qualities compared with the line “I didn’t think I just flew” which is the song writer’s impulsive action making it a direct metaphor without using “like” or “as”. The song writer conducted the use of concrete-to-abstract metaphor by using the image of “moth” flying towards a flame as the

concrete behavior of nature to describe an abstract idea of being drawn to something harmful by an emotion rather than logic. Symbolic characteristics show how moths symbolize the same behavior of the song writer's, which is reckless and impulsive. The metaphor in this song lyric helps the listener to understand the emotional risk involved in the relationship or decision, which is relatable to anyone, especially who has ever been pulled toward something they knew might hurt them.

Data 8

"Rhythms of the night consume my body" (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

The comparison of two unlike things "rhythm" as a musical force and "night" by giving the idea of the night moves or flows with a certain energy similar to music. The line projecting the concrete-to-abstract metaphor by using concrete sensory being physically consumed by the "rhythms of the night" to express an abstract feeling of being overwhelmed or overtaken by passion or the energy of the night. Strong sensory in this line influence both production and emotional tone of the song. Metaphor in this line communicates the feeling of being surrendered and encouraging the music to reflect a mesmerizing or intense vibe. In addition, the lyric aligns the listener's response with the emotional state of the song writer's feeling through sound.

Data 9

"Let the music confiscate my soul" (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

The word "music" is compared to a force that can "confiscate" something, in this line is the "soul". Without using the word "like" and "as" making it a direct metaphor line. Here is the concrete-to-abstract metaphor breakdown, concrete action of word "confiscate" as a forceful action and "soul" as the abstract idea that represents the speaker's inner being. Sensory characteristic evokes physical and immersive experience, engaging the listener's sense of sound and bodily sensation. The feeling of music can overwhelm or possess the entire self, created by using the intense sensory imagery. Music is described as a force powerful enough to confiscate a soul, as a result the song writer allows the listener to feel the emotional surrender in a tangible way.

Data 10

"You were just code blue" (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

Metaphor in this line is shown by comparing "you" or a person with the "code blue" term without using "like" or "as". Code blue is a medical term that refers to a life-threatening emergency, which is to describe toxicity of a person in the lyrics. The word "code blue" as a concrete, real-world term is used as an abstract idea of psychological danger. As the writer stated before this lyric uses the symbolic characteristic because it uses "code blue" or a medical term to symbolize an

emotionally harmful and dangerous person. As a result of using medical terms into a symbol of emotional danger, the song is reflected by her style of blending real-world references with intimate emotional themes. It influences her song writing characteristic to be universally relatable, using symbolism to make the line more vivid and impactful.

Data 11

“Leave you in a past life” (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

This lyric contains metaphor, as it shows the comparison of the act of emotionally moving on to leaving them in a “past life”. Commonly, “past life” describes a spirit of reincarnation beliefs. Meanwhile, in this case it is used to represent an emotional chapter or identity. Based on the theory this line is identified as a concrete-to-abstract metaphor. By using the phrase “past life” as the concrete concept that represents temporal and spiritual image to express the abstract idea of letting go of someone. Those explanations show that the line expresses the moment of introspection and emotional closure by its reflective characteristic. In addition, the song writer is trying to connect with the listener regarding making a conscious decision to let go after thoughtfully looking back on a past relationship.

Data 12

“Maybe I’m the stranger after all” (Past life-Eternal Sunshine)

Metaphor in this lyric can be analyzed by the comparison of the song writer “I’m” to a “stranger” without using “like” or “as”. In this case, the song writer is not truly a stranger. However, this metaphor represents a self-alienation. The concrete image of “stranger” describes an unfamiliar person to represent an abstract idea of feeling disconnected with someone. As it conveys a deep sense of identity crisis, it makes this line have emotional characteristics that express the feeling of loneliness, confusion, and emotionally disconnected with someone. That explanation shapes the style of her song writing, which explains that a relationship is not only about love, but also learns about losing something.

Conclusion

This research has revealed that 12 lines of concrete-to-abstract metaphor found metaphor in Ariana Grande’s selected song lyrics, particularly in songs from her Eternal Sunshine album. Each line of the metaphor reflects four main characteristics, such as emotional, reflective, and sensory that help to create an emotional expression of the songs. Through Knickerbocker and Renninger’s (1963) and Ullmann’s (1964) theories application, the study identifies how metaphors serve not only for making the lyrics look good, but also as a tool to convey an emotional depth. Concrete-to-abstract metaphors in this research is not merely a stylistic choice but a reflection of the songwriter's characteristic to transform concrete objects into powerful emotional narratives, enabling listeners to connect

more deeply with the lyrics.

The limitation of this study is analyzing 12 lyrics from only three songs in the *Eternal Sunshine* album. This finding does not represent the full range of Ariana Grande's discography. Moreover, this only focuses on concrete-to-abstract metaphor and doesn't compare it with other metaphor types. The use of concrete-to-abstract metaphor significantly enhances the emotional resonance of Ariana Grande's songs by representing intangible feelings into vivid, relatable imagery. For instance, concrete images *sage* transformed into abstract experiences such as heartbreak, longing, or emotional safety. This type of metaphor shift enriches the lyrical content and strengthens the personal and emotional impact of the songs, making them more meaningful.

This study contributes to the deep understanding of metaphor use in modern music by emphasizing the role of concrete-to-abstract metaphor in expressing complex emotional experiences. By offering insights into both the form and function of figurative language in song lyrics, this research encourages further exploration of metaphor in contemporary songwriting, literature, and linguistics. Comparative frequency and function of different metaphors across multiple artists and genres could be explored for future research. In addition, further study could analyze how concrete-to-abstract metaphors evolve an artist's career and reveal their personal and artistic development over time.

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