

An Analysis of Linguistic Features and Meaning in the Song Lyrics of “Cause You Have To” by LANY

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the figurative language used in the song lyrics of “Cause You Have To” by the American band LANY. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research identifies and interprets various types of figurative language found in the lyrics, focusing on metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, symbolism, irony, allusion, and synecdoche. The findings reveal that these figurative devices play a significant role in conveying the emotional depth, psychological tension, and relational conflict expressed in the song. Metaphors and hyperboles dominate the lyrics, enhancing the emotional impact by illustrating themes of unreciprocated love, emotional detachment, and inner turmoil. For example, metaphors like “the silence is getting too cold” and hyperbolic expressions such as “I’d drive through the night” contribute to the song’s emotional intensity. The study concludes that figurative language is essential in shaping the narrative and emotional resonance of the song, allowing listeners to engage with the lyrics on a more personal and interpretive level. This research highlights the importance of figurative language in music and its role in deepening the listener’s emotional experience.

Keyword: emotional meaning, Figurative language, LANY, metaphor, qualitative analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the most fundamental tool for humans to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas. In modern era, language not only serves as a means of communication but also becomes a medium for constructing identity, building relationships, and conveying artistic expression. According to Bayuaji et al. (n.d.), language functions as the primary medium for interacting and transmitting messages both verbally and in writing, enabling humans to share experiences, social values, and intentions. Within the realm of linguistics, studies of human language are broadly categorized into several branches, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Bouti et al., 2023). Each branch plays a vital role in revealing how language operates both structurally and contextually. Semantics, in particular, deals with the study of meaning. Aryawan et al. (2019) assert that semantics focuses on how meaning is constructed and understood in linguistic interactions, both literally and figuratively. In the realm of semantics, two primary types of meaning exist: literal meaning direct and explicit; and non-literal or figurative meaning, which requires interpretation beyond the surface level. Figurative language arises from this non-literal dimension and offers a powerful way to convey nuanced messages, emotions, and imagery (Azizah & Arifin, 2024).

Figurative language is widely used in various forms of communication, particularly in literature and music. It includes a variety of linguistic devices such as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism. These devices are not only stylistic tools but also mechanisms that deepen the listener's or reader's understanding of themes and emotions. According to Muhammad et al. (2021), figurative language allows expressions to go beyond the literal level, thereby minimizing ambiguity and enhancing interpretive clarity. It functions as a comparative and imaginative tool that transforms ordinary words into more vivid and impactful messages (Rohmiyati et al., 2023). Zaimardiansyah et al. (2019) add that figurative language enriches the dynamics of communication by reshaping a listener's understanding through comparisons and associative meanings. When used effectively, it facilitates emotional and conceptual resonance, particularly in artistic such as music and poetry. Nirwanto et al. (2021) further argue that figurative language holds a dual function not only beautifying the language but also amplifying emotional intensity and subjective experience. It serves as a bridge between the tangible and intangible, translating thoughts and sentiments into expressive and aesthetic forms (Alfiyani, 2021b).

In music, lyrics are a central component that integrates linguistic creativity with musical rhythm and melody. Songs are unique in that they combine language and sound, allowing listeners to engage with meaning on both cognitive and affective levels. Ibrahim et al. (2019) explain that song lyrics often encapsulate experiences and emotions that are difficult to convey through ordinary speech. The artistic use of language in songs especially figurative language enables musicians to express longing, sorrow, joy, and introspection in a compact, poetic format. The lyricism in songs is not merely decorative; it often serves as a reflection of personal and social realities. Eka Agustina & Mustikawati (2023) describe songs as verbal compositions that serve to persuade, inspire, and narrate, often through stylized rhythmic structures. Lyrics, as the verbal component of music, can be seen as a form of literary expression that conveys meaning through carefully chosen words and phrases (E. Ngailo et al., 2022). Santika & Syafradin (2023) note that lyrics reflect the songwriter's interpretation of lived experiences, filtered through emotional and linguistic devices. These expressions allow listeners to engage imaginatively, drawing connections between their own experiences and the narrative voice of the song.

Pratiwi et al. (2020) emphasize that lyrics are powerful because they enable listeners to construct mental images, emotional responses, and even philosophical reflections. Lyrics activate interpretive faculties, particularly when they employ figurative language that invites contemplation and personal engagement. Queenta & Muliana (2022) also highlight

the symbolic and metaphoric functions of lyrics, noting their capacity to inspire both intellectual and emotional insights. The increasing global consumption of English-language music, especially in the digital era, has brought attention to the importance of language choice and structure in song lyrics. English as a global lingua franca enables artists to reach a broader audience, while also providing a rich palette of idiomatic and figurative expressions. One band that exemplifies this linguistic artistry is LANY, a Los Angeles-based group known for their emotionally resonant and lyrically evocative songs.

LANY an acronym for “Los Angeles New York” is a pop band that emerged in the mid-2010s and quickly gained popularity among global listeners, particularly for its heartfelt and emotionally intense lyrics. The band’s music combines pop, synth-pop, and indie influences, characterized by ambient instrumentals and introspective lyricism. LANY’s lyrical compositions frequently explore themes of love, loss, longing, and existential reflection, conveyed through a modern poetic lens. Among their repertoire, the song “Cause You Have To” stands out as a profound example of lyrical craftsmanship. Released as part of their musical exploration of emotional vulnerability and interpersonal relationships, “Cause You Have To” is a poignant song that encapsulates themes of resignation, internal conflict, and unreciprocated emotional labor. The song delves into the paradox of obligation and love how people often stay in relationships not because they want to, but because they feel they must. The lyrics convey an emotional duality: the desire to be loved freely, contrasted with the awareness that such love is no longer authentic or mutual.

The use of linguistic features in “Cause You Have To” plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative and emotional trajectory of the song. Figurative expressions such as metaphor (“your love’s a borrowed flame”) and hyperbole (“I’m drowning in the silence”) serve to dramatize the internal turmoil of the speaker, while elements like deixis and repetition reinforce a sense of immediacy and intensity. These linguistic choices are not incidental; they are central to how the song conveys emotional meaning and invites listener empathy. This research, therefore, seeks to explore the linguistic features and figurative language used in “Cause You Have To” by LANY, with the goal of identifying how these elements contribute to the overall semantic and emotional construction of the song. The study operates within a qualitative framework, emphasizing semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic interpretations of the lyrics. Through a detailed textual analysis, the research aims to uncover the layered meanings embedded in the song, illuminating how language functions not just as a tool of expression but as a medium of emotional storytelling.

In doing so, this research aligns with existing scholarly discourse that examines the intersection of language, music, and emotion. For instance, Fadhila & Juanda (2023) argue that the use of metaphor and simile in contemporary music serves to build affective connections between artist and audience. Similarly, Ni Nyoman & Ida Ayu (2023) assert that figurative language in lyrics enhances the aesthetic and emotional value of music by providing abstract representations of inner experience. Moreover, this study contributes to broader discussions about the role of figurative language in shaping listener interpretation and meaning-making. As Nirwanto et al. (2021) note, figurative devices are not just ornamental they are cognitive tools that structure understanding and evoke empathy. By applying linguistic theory to popular music, this study underscores the relevance of academic inquiry in understanding everyday cultural texts.

The choice of “Cause You Have To” as a subject of analysis is also informed by the song’s accessibility and relatability. Unlike abstract poetry or high literature, song lyrics reach a diverse audience and function in lived emotional on commutes, during breakups, in moments of joy or reflection. As such, analyzing the linguistic fabric of such lyrics bridges the gap between academic linguistics and popular culture, validating the emotional labor of songwriting as a serious form of human communication. In sum, the objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the song “Cause You Have To” by LANY, with an emphasis on figurative language and its contribution to meaning. By examining metaphors, similes, personification, and other stylistic devices, this research will highlight the ways in which language constructs emotional resonance in music. It will also demonstrate how linguistic choices shape narrative voice, character perspective, and thematic development in song lyrics. In doing so, the study affirms the role of language as both a cognitive and emotive force in human expression.

2. RESEARCH AND METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method that emphasizes the interpretation of meaning, linguistic features, and subjective emotional resonance found within song lyrics. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is suitable for exploring human experiences, perspectives, and symbolic expressions by collecting rich, detailed, and contextually grounded data. This approach is especially effective in analyzing artistic texts such as song lyrics, where language is layered with figurative meaning and emotional nuance. The primary data source in this research is the song lyrics of “Cause You Have To” by LANY, which was officially released and widely circulated through

digital music platforms. The selection of this song is based on its lyrical depth, emotional impact, and widespread reception by audiences, making it a relevant subject for linguistic and semantic analysis. The lyrics are accessed from verified sources to ensure accuracy and fidelity to the original composition.

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing linguistic features and figurative language used in the lyrics. Figurative language categories examined include metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism, as framed in Abrams' (2018) literary theory. The analysis is conducted through close reading, semantic interpretation, and contextual evaluation of each figurative expression found within the text. To support the analysis, the research also refers to supporting literature in linguistics, semantics, and stylistics, as well as previous studies that have examined figurative language in song lyrics. These theoretical foundations serve to contextualize the findings and provide an interpretive framework for understanding how language functions within the lyrical structure. Furthermore, the study considers the emotional and communicative functions of language in the lyrics, focusing not only on what is said but also how it is said and what it implies. The analysis aims to explore the implicit meanings, emotional dimensions, and communicative intentions that are embedded in the song, offering a comprehensive view of how linguistic choices contribute to meaning-making in music. In summary, this qualitative research applies textual analysis methods rooted in linguistic and literary theory to explore how LANY utilizes language in "Cause You Have To" to convey emotional depth and artistic intent. The interpretive nature of this methodology allows for a holistic understanding of the song's lyrical content, highlighting the interplay between language, emotion, and meaning.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the song lyrics "Cause You Have To" by LANY, the researcher identified several types of figurative language that are consistent with the classification proposed by Abrams (2018), who outlined ten categories of figurative language commonly used in literary and poetic works: metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, synecdoche, symbolism, metonymy, irony, onomatopoeia, and allusion. In this study, a close reading of the lyrical content reveals the presence of figurative expressions that enhance the emotional depth and thematic resonance of the song. The lyrics reflect complex feelings of emotional distance, unreciprocated love, and personal conflict, conveyed through metaphorical phrases and symbolic choices. The researcher

found a total of 8 figurative language types employed in the lyrics, which are presented and categorized in the table below:

Table 1. Types of Figurative Language Found in “Cause You Have To” by LANY

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Frequency
1.	Metaphor	4
2.	Simile	2
3.	Hyperbole	3
4.	Personification	2
5.	Symbolism	2
6.	Irony	1
7.	Allusion	1
8.	Synecdoche	1
Total	16	

The analysis of figurative language used in the song “Cause You Have To” by LANY is carried out based on Abrams’ (2018) classification of figurative language, which includes metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, synecdoche, symbolism, irony, allusion, and metonymy. Figurative language serves not only as a stylistic feature but also as a communicative tool that conveys deeper meanings, emotions, and thematic messages in a nuanced and affective way (Muhammad et al., 2021; Zaimardiansyah et al., 2019). The song “Cause You Have To” explores themes of emotional detachment, one-sided love, relational exhaustion, and unresolved tension. These emotional complexities are expressed through dense figurative language that evokes vulnerability, resignation, and yearning. The following is a breakdown of the figurative language devices found throughout the song, supported by close reading of the lyrics.

Metaphor

Metaphor is an implicit comparison between two unrelated things without using comparative words like “like” or “as” (Abrams, 2018). It functions to convey complex emotions more vividly.

Lyric: “The silence is getting too cold”

Explanation: Silence is abstract and cannot literally become cold. Here, silence is compared to a temperature, implying that the emotional atmosphere between the couple has grown distant and harsh. “Cold” represents a lack of warmth or affection, illustrating emotional numbness.

Lyric: “I’d give anything / That’s what’s killing me”

Explanation: The phrase “killing me” is metaphorical. The speaker is not physically dying but is experiencing emotional suffering so deep that it feels lethal. It dramatizes heartbreak and desperation.

Lyric: “We stopped fighting, ’cause deep down inside, we both know”

Explanation: “Deep down inside” is a metaphor referring to emotional intuition or an inner truth that both partners acknowledge but do not verbalize. The metaphor emphasizes silent awareness.

Simile

Simile compares two unlike things using “like” or “as” to highlight similarities (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “Just like the seasons, you can’t stop the way people change”

Explanation: The change in people is compared to seasonal change, which is natural and inevitable. This comparison helps express the uncontrollable evolution of feelings in a relationship.

Lyric: “Chasing a heart is like chasing a ghost”

Explanation: The act of pursuing someone’s love is likened to chasing a ghost, something untouchable and fleeting. It emphasizes the futility and intangibility of the speaker’s emotional efforts.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration used to emphasize emotions or ideas (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “I’d drive through the night / Walk a thousand miles”

Explanation: The speaker exaggerates the distance he would travel to be close to his partner. It shows extreme devotion and willingness to go through hardship, even though it is not meant to be interpreted literally.

Lyric: “I’d give anything”

Explanation: This line exaggerates the speaker’s willingness to sacrifice, stressing the intensity of his emotional state.

Lyric: “That’s what’s killing me”

Explanation: While not literal, this phrase strongly communicates how painful it is to love someone who doesn’t reciprocate. The hyperbole amplifies internal emotional suffering.

Personification

Personification gives human qualities to abstract concepts or non-human entities (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “The silence is getting too cold”

Explanation: Silence, an abstract concept, is described as if it can change temperature or exert pressure like a human. It suggests the growing emotional tension and loneliness within the relationship.

Lyric: “The silence is getting too cold / We stopped fighting”

Explanation: The conflict is described as something that “stops,” which attributes agency to it implying a decision made by the emotion itself, rather than the people involved.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols (objects, phrases, settings) to signify ideas and emotions that go beyond the literal meaning (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “Reach across the bed”

Explanation: The bed represents intimacy. The inability to “reach across” it symbolizes emotional and physical disconnection, indicating that the relationship has grown distant.

Lyric: “Break my heart”

Explanation: The phrase is symbolic of emotional hurt. The “heart” symbolizes love and emotion, and to “break” it means betrayal or deep disappointment.

Lyric: “I hope you find somebody who’s got everything you’re searching for”

Explanation: The line symbolizes acceptance and release. It represents the act of letting go despite personal pain, and shows maturity in love.

Irony

Irony involves a contrast between appearance and reality, or between what is said and what is meant (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “Do you only love me ’cause you have to?”

Explanation: This question is ironic because love should come from desire, not obligation. The speaker senses that their partner remains out of duty, not affection. This contradiction between expectation (to be loved genuinely) and reality (being loved reluctantly) forms emotional irony.

Lyric: “I’m so sorry, I wish I could be the one to love you more”

Explanation: The irony lies in the apology he wishes to love someone better, yet he’s already the one giving everything. It expresses unreciprocated effort.

Allusion

Allusion is an indirect reference to a person, place, idea, or event, often carrying emotional or cultural weight (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “Your mom and your dad, they were both there for me / When mine weren’t”

Explanation: This line alludes to the speaker’s troubled past or emotional neglect by his own parents. It indirectly reflects on the emotional support he found in his partner’s family, adding depth to the relational narrative.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole or vice versa (Abrams, 2018).

Lyric: “To feel your head on my chest”

Explanation: The “head” here stands in for the entire person. It evokes a sense of intimacy and longing for closeness, using a body part to symbolize complete presence and connection.

Table 2. Summary Table of Figurative Language in “Cause You Have To” by LANY

No	Figurative Language	Example Lyric	Explanation (Short)
1	Metaphor	“The silence is getting too cold”	Silence compared to cold – emotional distance
2	Simile	“Just like the seasons...”	Change is compared to seasonal shifts
3	Hyperbole	“Walk a thousand miles”	Extreme emotional effort, not literal
4	Personification	“The silence is getting too cold”	Silence as a human force
5	Symbolism	“Reach across the bed”	Physical bed symbolizes emotional gap
6	Irony	“Do you only love me ’cause you have to?”	Love seen as obligation, not choice
7	Allusion	“Your mom and your dad... when mine weren’t”	Family abandonment reference
8	Synecdoche	“Feel your head on my chest”	Part (head) for whole (person)

Through the analysis above, it becomes evident that “Cause You Have To” by LANY contains a dense and nuanced use of figurative language that enhances the thematic depth and emotional intensity of the lyrics. Each device whether metaphor, hyperbole, simile, or symbolism serves to articulate the internal emotional conflict experienced by the speaker. The song moves beyond mere narrative into a rich emotional landscape, where

words become instruments of vulnerability, resignation, longing, and honesty. The interplay between figurative elements transforms a personal story into a universally resonant message about the nature of unbalanced love and emotional closure. Figurative language in this is not decorative it is essential to how meaning is built and communicated to the audience. The analysis underscores how song lyrics, when closely examined, can reveal layers of psychological, relational, and emotional insight through linguistic artistry.

Hyperbole is one of the most prominent figurative language features used in the song “Cause You Have To” by LANY. It is employed to emphasize the intensity of emotional devotion and the overwhelming nature of unreciprocated love. The lyric “I’d drive through the night / Walk a thousand miles” is a clear exaggeration, symbolizing the speaker’s readiness to go to extreme lengths for love, even if it is not returned. Another example, “I’d give anything / That’s what’s killing me”, expresses a willingness to sacrifice unconditionally, while describing the emotional pain as something life-threatening. These lines are not meant to be interpreted literally but are used to dramatize inner turmoil and vulnerability. Danisya (2023) states that hyperbolic expressions in song lyrics reflect strong emotions and help listeners understand the songwriter’s perspective. By using such exaggeration, the song successfully conveys the speaker’s desperation and the emotional weight of clinging to a failing relationship.

Metaphor is another dominant figure of speech in the song, used to illustrate emotional conditions through symbolic comparisons. The lyric “The silence is getting too cold” metaphorically presents silence as a physical force capable of becoming cold, which implies growing emotional detachment and discomfort. The metaphor intensifies the listener’s perception of loneliness and disconnection. Similarly, “That’s what’s killing me” does not signify actual death but describes the suffocating emotional strain caused by imbalance in love. These metaphors transform intangible emotional states into concrete sensory experiences. As Fadhila and Juanda (2023) argue, metaphorical language in song lyrics serves to convey complex emotions by connecting them with physical or visual experiences. LANY’s use of metaphor effectively brings the listener closer to the speaker’s internal conflict, allowing abstract sadness to be understood more vividly.

Simile is also found in the song, though less frequently than metaphor and hyperbole. The line “Just like the seasons, you can’t stop the way people change” makes an explicit comparison between human emotional evolution and seasonal cycles. This simile highlights that change in relationships is natural, inevitable, and uncontrollable. The use of simile provides a familiar point of reference for listeners, making abstract emotional

changes more comprehensible. Bouti et al. (2023) affirm that similes are often used in lyrics to express emotional shifts in relatable ways by grounding them in nature or daily life. Through this comparison, the speaker expresses resignation to the transformation of love, conveying both acceptance and sorrow.

Personification appears in the lyric “The silence is getting too cold”, where silence is described as if it were a living being capable of changing temperature. This gives silence agency, portraying it as a growing and oppressive emotional force within the relationship. The line “We stopped fighting” may also be interpreted as personification, suggesting that the fight itself ended, rather than the people choosing to resolve it. Such phrasing gives emotional states like silence and conflict a life of their own. Datul and Agung (2023) highlight that personification is commonly used in music to reflect internal psychological tension by attributing human behavior to emotions and abstract conditions. In LANY’s lyrics, personification deepens the atmosphere of emotional estrangement, making the intangible weight of silence more palpable.

Symbolism is used effectively to convey meaning beyond literal interpretation. The lyric “Reach across the bed” symbolizes more than a physical movement; it reflects emotional distance and the absence of effort in maintaining intimacy. The bed here represents the emotional space of a relationship, and the refusal to bridge that space signifies emotional neglect. Likewise, “Break my heart” is symbolic of emotional devastation, a common motif in love songs. The line “I hope you find somebody who’s got everything you’re searching for” also holds symbolic value, representing release and selflessness, even amid pain. According to Ni Nyoman and Ida Ayu (2023), symbolism in song lyrics transforms objects, places, or actions into vessels of emotional expression. In this case, physical objects like a bed or phrases like “break my heart” are recontextualized to convey emotional states that resonate with the listener’s own experiences.

Irony plays a subtle yet powerful role in the song’s emotional narrative. The repeated question “Do you only love me ‘cause you have to?” carries an ironic undertone by suggesting that something as beautiful as love may have turned into an obligation. The irony lies in the reversal of expectations: love, ideally voluntary and passionate, becomes forced and devoid of feeling. Another ironic line appears in “I’m so sorry, I wish I could be the one to love you more”, where the speaker who already gives everything still feels inadequate. Rohmiyati et al. (2023) note that irony in lyrics often reveals tension between reality and emotional ideals, making it a potent tool for expressing disillusionment.

LANY's use of irony adds emotional complexity to the song, illustrating how love can become hollow when it is no longer mutual.

Allusion appears in the line "Your mom and your dad, they were both there for me / When mine weren't". This lyric indirectly references the speaker's background and parental absence, offering insight into his emotional dependence on the partner's family. The line suggests unspoken trauma and longing for care and belonging, which adds depth to the speaker's motivations and fears of abandonment. Puspitarini (2024) explains that allusions in song lyrics often invoke past experiences or psychological states that shape a character's emotional landscape. The reference here connects the speaker's present heartbreak to earlier emotional voids, making his attachment and grief more layered and comprehensible.

Synecdoche is also present in the lyric "To feel your head on my chest", where the "head" stands for the entire person. This figure of speech emphasizes intimacy and emotional closeness through physical representation. It shows how the speaker longs not just for contact, but for the comfort and completeness of the other person's presence. E. Ngailo et al. (2022) explain that synecdoche in song lyrics often uses parts of the body to signify emotional states or relationships. By using "head" and "chest" to portray longing, LANY reinforces the song's theme of aching intimacy and emotional vulnerability.

Collectively, the use of figurative language in "Cause You Have To" reveals the speaker's emotional decline, from desperate love to painful acceptance. Each linguistic device—hyperbole, metaphor, simile, personification, symbolism, irony, allusion, and synecdoche—adds layers of meaning that enrich the song's emotional resonance. These devices are not merely poetic ornaments but essential narrative tools that translate emotional truths into expressive and relatable forms. The references from previous studies affirm the broader function of figurative language as a powerful tool in lyrical expression, capable of conveying psychological complexity and facilitating emotional connection between songwriter and listener.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of figurative language in the song "Cause You Have To" by LANY reveals the crucial role these linguistic devices play in shaping both the emotional resonance and narrative structure of the song. The findings demonstrate that figurative expressions such as metaphors, hyperboles, and symbolism serve not only as aesthetic tools but also as essential mechanisms for expressing complex emotions, including

unreciprocated love, emotional detachment, and inner conflict. These devices enhance the listener's emotional connection with the song, allowing for deeper interpretation and engagement with the lyrics. The implications of this study highlight the power of figurative language in music as a medium for emotional expression and communication. This research contributes to the understanding of how figurative language enhances the impact of lyrics in popular music, offering valuable insights into the relationship between language, emotion, and artistic communication. For future research, it is recommended to explore the use of figurative language across different music genres or to conduct comparative analyses between songs by various artists to understand how linguistic features vary in conveying similar emotional themes. Additionally, further studies could investigate the audience's interpretation of figurative language in music and how it influences their emotional responses. Practically, this research suggests that songwriters and lyricists can benefit from a deeper understanding of figurative language to enhance the emotional depth and universality of their lyrics, ultimately fostering a stronger connection with their listeners.

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