

THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR ANALYSIS OF THE SONG LYRIC “THE COUGH SYRUP” BY YOUNG THE GIANT

Nisa Nur Azizah

Sastra Inggris, Universitas Sebelas April, Sumedang

E-mail: nurazizahnisa34@gmail.com

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| ABSTRACT | This research aims to identify and classify conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of the song “Cough Syrup” by Young the Giant based on the theory of Lakoff & Johnson (1980). The method used is qualitative with documentation technique to obtain data from song lyrics. The analysis shows that there are three main types of conceptual metaphors: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors describe life as a physical journey and a search for the meaning of life. Orientational metaphors display emotional changes through the direction of motion, such as up-down or short-long, helping listeners understand the psychological state of song characters. Ontological metaphors make abstract ideas such as thoughts, the world, and feelings concrete by turning them into objects or living things to make them easier to understand. The findings prove that metaphors not only function as a language style, but also as a cognitive and emotional tool that connects language with life experiences. In addition, the results of this study have the potential to be a stimulating teaching resource in English language learning, especially in understanding figurative meanings in real contexts such as music. |
| Keywords | Conceptual Metaphor, Song lyrics, The Cough Syrup, Young the Giant, Figurative Language |

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, there are no boundaries between music creators and listeners in interpreting a song. A song can have different meanings according to the opinions of music lovers. This happens because of the internet and social media that is easily accessible, listeners are not only passive listeners, but also take part in analyzing which then produces new meanings. This condition proves that song interpretation is flexible and depends on each individual, so it is important for us to learn how meaning is formed, especially through the use of language and language styles such as metaphors.

Metaphor is the way humans use words or phrases that are different from their literal meaning, resulting in a new meaning (Fadhila & Juanda, 2023). This metaphor serves to explain something, as if something is another thing (Manalu et al, 2021). In communication, conceptual metaphors become more essential (Fadhila & Juanda, 2023). Conceptual metaphor is a step to know one abstract concept by comparing another concept (Zhao, Zheng & Zhao, 2023). Thus, metaphors are used to understand abstract things including in literary works.

Literature is a tool to express human feelings, thoughts, experiences, views, and ideas conveyed imaginatively through writing or oral language. Language is a sound symbol that has a special order so that it can produce meaning in communication. By speaking, humans can connect with each other to express their emotions (Fajrin, 2021). As well as a means to exchange information, experiences, whether it is about culture or personal (Benerjee & Soward, 2022). Apart from expressing feelings, language is also wrapped into

something informative, aesthetic or artistic (Hanif et al, 2022). In aesthetic, expressive, and artistic manifestations can be found in poetry or song lyrics.

Songs are part of literary works that have long been recognized by humans (Natahaniel & Sannnie, 2018), as a place to express abstract feelings (Vanh, 2025). The lyrics of Young the Giant's "Cough Syrup" illustrate the complex interaction between metaphor and expression of emotion. The song not only expresses the writer's emotions and ideas, but also conveys life values. Such as hope, struggle, and the search for the true meaning of life that matches the situation and emotions of the listeners. Metaphor is part of figurative language, an object is compared in an indirect way rather than literally (Lewis, 2021). By exploring the conceptual metaphors contained in the lyrics of this song, it will explain the explicit and implicit meanings conveyed by Young the Giant.

There have been many studies conducted on the analysis of metaphors in song lyrics, including Maulana & Wibowo (2025), investigating the metaphors contained in the lyrics of Bruno Mars songs such as Talking to the Moon, It Will Rain, and Just the Way You Are. Second, Arif & Apriyanti (2024) focused on explaining the meaning and type of metaphor in Daniel Caesar Song's lyrics. Third, Listiawati, Sudiatmi & Muryati (2025), focused on analyzing the expression of emotions in the lyrics of the song "Ah" by Nadin Amizah using metaphor. Furthermore, Atallah & Wibowo (2025), focused on identifying and implicating the use of metaphor in Harris J's song lyrics. Finally, Fadhila (Juanda (2023), investigated the conceptual metaphors that appear in the lyrics of the song "Is You" by Jay Chang.

In previous studies, there have been many conceptual metaphor analyses in literary works or song lyrics using the theory of John Lakoff & Johnson (1980). However, metaphor analysis especially in the lyrics of the song the cough syrup by Young the Giant has not been found. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and classify conceptual metaphors contained in the song the cough syrup and how the meaning of conceptual metaphors is implemented by the author as a message and emotions conveyed. By applying John Lakoff & Johnson's metaphorical approach in depth, this research contributes to a better understanding of how conceptual metaphorical meanings are depicted in the lyrics of the song "The Cough Syrup".
Semantic.

In general, semantics is a study that studies the meaning of language in depth in a word, phrase, or sentence (Olmen & Athanasopoulos, 2018), how language is structured and conveyed (Hussain & Sajid, 2015), and grammatical meaning is formed not always from language but, because of the cognitive function of the brain (Benedetti, 2016). Semantic is further divided into several parts, one of which is figurative language. Figurative language is the language used by someone to convey their emotions by using words in indirect statements (Abdullah & Rahmawati, 2018). In this figurative language is further divided into several parts, one of which is metaphor, this metaphor can help understand the original meaning and avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity of meaning (Andina, 2022). Therefore, semantics and metaphors are related to each other, and are important to use in understanding the meaning of language.

Conceptual Metaphor

In 1980, George Lakoff & Mark Johnson first published a theory on conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphor is a way of understanding the meaning of language in depth, it also functions to understand something (George Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors also help to explain difficult and abstract ideas in people in everyday life so that it becomes easier (Wicaksono et al, 2024). More clearly, metaphor is a figurative language that compares one concept with another to see the similarities between the two (Sinthya, Dahnilyah & Erni, 2022). Luna & Pereira (2021) argue that in metaphors in fine

arts, music is needed to make the storyline stronger. Lyrics and melody become a unified whole, so as to understand the meaning emotionally, intellectually, and make feelings more prominent when listening to songs (Vanh, 2025). Thus, metaphors in song lyrics are often found, and are always interrelated to add aesthetic value to the music.

a. 1 Type of Metaphor

There are various types of metaphors including structural, orientational and ontological (Pratiwi, Sujatna & Indrayani, 2020).

b. Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphor is a type of metaphor that specifically studies an abstract concept through metaphorical structure (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). More specifically, this more structured concept often arises by using concepts that are more recognizable and experienced in everyday life (Manalu et al, 2021). For example, "Argument is war", in this case the word "argument" refers to war. When arguing, people attack their opponents because they try and win the argument. With this, the word argument has the same meaning as war.

c. Oriental Metaphor

Oriental metaphor is a type of metaphor that organizes concepts based on directional (spatial) orientations that are related to each other (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Also, it is often related to human physical experience, such as front-back, deep-shallow, top-bottom. For example, "happy is up, sad is down", the feeling of happiness is often considered to be in the upper position, while sadness is often considered in the lower position.

d. Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphor is a type of metaphor that understands an abstract thing as if it can be perceived (concrete) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This metaphor usually arises when viewing events, activities, emotions and ideas as tangible forms (Manalu et al, 2021). It can also help to understand and describe things that humans experience, although not as detailed as physical objects.

2. METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods to analyze the types and meanings of metaphors in the lyrics of the song *The Cough Syrup* by Young the Giant using Lakoff & Johnson's theory. Qualitative method is a type of research used to understand the meaning given by a person or a set to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method was chosen to gain an understanding of meaning through non-numerical descriptions. It also focuses on exploring in detail and understanding the use of conceptual metaphors as a tool to release emotions in the song *The Cough Syrup*.

Data collection technique uses documentation technique to explain the metaphors contained in the lyrics of the song "The Cough Syrup". The data of this research was obtained from the lyrics of the song entitled "The Cough Syrup" posted by the official channel of the band Young the Giant on Sportify. Young the Giant is an indie rock band from the United States formed in 2004. As for one of the most hit songs, "The Cough Syrup" managed to achieve the Sportify Global Chart achievement to #155 in Brazil in 2014. In this song there are also metaphorical expressions that describe human psychological and social conditions.

The data analysis technique in this research uses condensed data, which is data that has been selected and focuses only on metaphorical parts. Then, the data is displayed in a table, and finally the conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After analyzing, in this section is the data presentation of the types of metaphors found in the lyrics of the song "The Cough Syrup". The metaphors are classified into three parts: 1) structural metaphor; 2) oriental metaphor and 3). Ontological metaphors based on the theory of Lakoff & Jhonson 1980. The following are the data and explanations of each type of metaphor:

Table 1. Type of Metaphor

| No | Type of Metaphor | Amount |
|--------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | Structural Metaphor | 3 |
| 2 | Oriental Metaphor | 4 |
| 3 | Ontological Metaphor | 9 |
| Total | | 16 |

Structural Metaphor

From the data that has been analyzed, three lyrics were found that belong to the structural metaphor section, including:

"If I could find a way to see this straight"

This word "find a way" refers to clear and straight awareness or understanding.

"I'd run away to some fortune that I should have found by now"

This metaphor is shown through the search for the meaning of life described as a physical journey

"And so I run now to the things they said could restore me"

The phrase refers to the journey of life that begins to feel worthwhile.

Oriental metaphor

From the data that has been analyzed, four lyrics were found that belong to the structural metaphor section, including:

"Life's too short to even care at all, whoa oh-ah"

The phrase uses the physical concept of "short" to interpret the limited duration of life.

"If I could find a way to see this straight"

The word "straight" refers to a clear understanding.

"I'm waiting for this cough syrup to come down, come down"

The phrase shows a change in high emotions from stable to stable.

"I'm coming up now, coming up now"

The phrase shows the movement of an emotional state that changes for the better

Ontological Metaphor

From the data that has been analyzed, nine lyrics were found that belong to the structural metaphor section, including:

"I'm losing my mind, losing my mind, losing control"

The phrase interprets mind and control as things that can be possessed and lost.

"There fishes in the sea, they're staring at me, whoa-oh, oh"

This metaphor is shown in the depiction of fish as conscious and seeing creatures.

"A wet world aches for a beat of a drum, oh-whoa oh, oh"

The phrase describes the wet world as a living being that feels pain and needs support.

"I'd run away to some fortune that I should have found by now"

The meaning of the word "fortune" here refers to a goal that can be pursued.

"I'm waiting for this cough syrup to come down, come down"

The use of the phrase describes a mental state that requires escape.

"Out of the blue"

The word in the lyrics of this song is interpreted as a living thing that comes from somewhere or Heaven (which cannot be seen).

"A dark world aches for a splash of the sun"

The phrase is described as a living being who feels pain and needs happiness.

"These zombies in the park, they're looking for my heart"

The word zombies here mean living things that have lost their feelings.

"Restore life the way it should be"

The phrase is interpreted as a living thing that can be restored to its original state.

The results of this study show that conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of the song "The Cough Syrup" play an important role in helping to express feelings, thoughts and messages to be conveyed. With these structural, orientational and ontological metaphors, music lovers can better realize inner conflicts through experiences that are often experienced.

This structural metaphor refers to life as a real journey, interpreted as a search for the meaning and purpose of life, while the orientational meaning shows changes in feelings and thoughts through the direction of motion, such as emotions that rise and fall and time that feels long and short. And while, an ontological metaphor describes abstract concepts such as thoughts, the world, and feelings to be like living things with the aim of being easily understood.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this research is that there are three types of conceptual metaphors found in the lyrics of the song "The Cough Syrup" including structural, orientational and ontological metaphors. However, the most dominant metaphor in this song is ontological metaphor. This metaphor helps in describing the meaning of life conveying changes in feelings, as well as psychological states that can be understood by listeners. Thus, this song is not only limited to entertainment but, as a place to channel emotions and also thoughts.

5. REFERENCES

- Abdullah., & Rahmawati, U. R. (2018). An analysis of figurative language in Avril Lavigne songs in album *Avril Lavigne*. *Journal of English Language and Literature (JELL)*, 3(1), 9–26.
- Andina, F. N. (2022). *Analysis of metaphorical expression in Katy Perry's song*. Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Andalas.
- Arif, F. Z., & Apriyanti, F. (2024). The metaphor analysis of Daniel Caesar's song lyrics. *Teaching English as Foreign Language, Literature and Linguistics*, 4(1), 1–7. <https://ejournal.unhasy.ac.id/index.php/TEFLIC>
- Atallah, N., & Wibowo, H. (2025). Analysis of metaphor in Harris Jung's songs. *BRIGHT: A Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature*, 8(1), 20–30.
- Benedetti, G. (2016). The semantics of grammatical elements: A new solution. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3(6), 493–509. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20150306.34>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fadhila, N., & Juanda. (2023). The conceptual metaphor analysis in the song lyric "Is You" by Jang Chang (2020). *Mahadaya*, 3(2), 309–316.
- Hussain, S., & Sajid, S. (2015). Semantics in EFL classroom: A brief review. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(9), 39–43. www.iosjournals.org
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lewis, L. F. (2021). Definition: Metaphor. In F. R. Volkmar (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*.
- Listiawati, R., Sudiatmi, T., & Muryati, S. (2025). The use of metaphor as an expression of emotion in song lyrics "Ah" by Nadin Amizah. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 11(1), 111–119. <https://ejournal.warmadewa.ac.id/index.php/jret>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Maulana, N. N., & Wibowo, H. (2025). The analysis of the metaphor in selective song lyrics. *English Education, Linguistics, and Literature Journal*, 4(1), 34–43. <https://jurnal.unupurwokerto.ac.id/index.php/educalitra/indexe-ISSN>
- Manalu, C. N. F., Sitopu, M. K., Silaban, A. P., & Saragih, E. (2021). Metaphorical expression in song lyrics in English textbook senior high school. *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEA) Journal*, 4(2), 293–303. <https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v4i2.1966>
- Pratiwi, D. R., Sjatna, E. T. S., & Indrayani, L. M. (2020). A cognitive semantic analysis of conceptual metaphor in Lang Leav's poetry. *International Journal of English Language & Literature Studies*, 5(4), 936–940. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.54.16>
- Sinthya, F., Dahnilyah., & Erni. (2022). An analysis of conceptual metaphor in the poems entitled "Classic Poetry Series" by William Blake. *IDEAS: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 10(2), 1661–1665.
- Van Olmen, D., & Athanasiopoulos, P. (2018). Semantics. In *English Language* (2nd ed.). Palgrave.
- Vinh, V. H. (2025). An analysis of the conceptual metaphor in the song "Yesterday" by Paul McCartney. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publication*, 15(1), 13–17.
- Wicaksono, H., Sari, I. N., Santoso, A., & Martutik. (2024). Conceptual metaphor in the lyrics of the song *Soul Mantra* by Aviwkila as a cognitive linguistic study of life motivation

narrative. *ISLLAC: Journal of Intensive Studies on Language, Literature, Art, and Culture*, 8(2), 384–399. <http://journal2.um.ac.id/index.php/jisllac>

Zhao, X., Zheng, Y., & Zhao, X. (2023). Global bibliometric analysis of conceptual metaphor research over the recent two decades. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1042121. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1042121>