

ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE USED IN SELECTED BEACH HOUSE SONGS

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Abstract: *This study focuses on figurative language in selected Beach House songs. The aim of this research is to understand the meaning behind song lyrics that contain figurative language using Laurence Perrine's theory of figurative language. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, based on Cresswell's (2018) theory of qualitative approach, where the lyrics are thoroughly studied and specific phrases are examined for their deeper meanings. The findings show that only four types of figurative language appear across the three selected songs: Space Song, Sparks, and Levitation, namely metaphor, symbolism, simile, and imagery. These elements are used to convey abstract emotions, inner conflict, memory, and transformation. It can be concluded that figurative language in Beach House's lyrics serves as a subtle yet powerful tool to construct emotional atmosphere and deepen interpretive meaning within the songs.*

Keywords: *Figurative Language, Song, Beach House.*

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is a fundamental branch of linguistics that examines the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences within language. According to Lyons (1977), semantics is "the study of meaning in language," combining both lexical meaning and structural meaning—how the words come together to form a large unit. In semantics, we also study the relationship between words and meanings in each sentence. The meaning in semantics can be divided into two parts: the first one is literal meaning, and the second one is non-literal meaning. Literal meaning is the original meaning of a sentence, while non-literal meaning is the opposite; it has an implied meaning. Cruse (2004) proceeds on to state that semantics deals with analyzing sense relations such as synonymy, hyponymy, and antonymy, which contribute to the systematic nature of meaning. Understanding semantics is critical for understanding communication, cognition, and linguistic structure, making it an important topic of research in both theoretical and applied linguistics.

Figurative language is a part of semantics, which enables speakers and writers to transcend literal meanings, convey abstract ideas, evoke emotions, and engage audiences on a symbolic level. Figurative language is a critical component in poetry, prose, music, and even rhetorical speech, as it enriches the texture of communication by making it more vivid, imaginative, and emotionally resonant (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Figurative language includes metaphors, similes, symbolism, imagery, and other figures of speech and plays a crucial role in enriching texts with nuanced emotional and conceptual depth. As Perrine (1969) argues, the use of figurative language is essential in literature and music because it "affords a way of saying much in brief compass; it adds emotional intensity; and it can be a means of revealing tone."

In this modern era, figurative language is commonly found in song lyrics, serving as a powerful tool to express meanings beyond their literal interpretation. Lyrics often transcend direct statements by using figurative expressions to construct imagery, mood, and emotion, making them more impactful for listeners. As Abrams and Harpham (2012) note, figurative language in poetry—a literary form closely related to song lyrics—functions not merely as ornamentation but as an essential mechanism for meaning-making, reinforcing the position of music within the broader domain of literature. In line with this perspective, language scholars have also recognized the significance of figurative language in shaping semantic interpretation. Perrine (1969), for instance, defines a figure of speech

as any way of saying something other than the ordinary way. Perrine outlines several major types of figurative language, such as metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, symbolism, hyperbole, synecdoche, allegory, understatement, metonymy, paradox, apostrophe, and irony. A closer examination of these categories reveals how each contributes to the richness of meaning conveyed in both poetic and lyrical texts.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher analyzed the data using a descriptive qualitative method with a semantic approach to examine the lyrics in selected Beach House songs. Creswell (2018) defines the descriptive qualitative approach as emphasizing exploring the meaning and experiences in detail. The present study focuses on three selected songs by Beach House: Space Song, Sparks, and Levitation—which are known for their poetic and emotionally resonant lyrics. These songs were chosen based on their lyrical complexity and richness in figurative expressions, which provide a valuable source for analysis. The researcher collected the song lyrics from verified online platforms to ensure accuracy and consistency in the data.

This research applied a descriptive qualitative method because the data were analyzed in the form of words and expressions rather than numbers. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore and interpret the figurative language used in the lyrics, uncovering meanings that go beyond the literal and examining how these elements contribute to the song's emotional and thematic depth. The data collection technique employed in this study was documentation, which involved reading and identifying lines and phrases that contain figurative language. Each identified expression was then categorized based on the types of figurative language as classified by Perrine (1969), which include metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, imagery, synecdoche, allegory, understatement, irony, paradox, metonymy, and apostrophe.

The next step in the analysis was to interpret the meaning and function of each figurative expression within the context of the song. By doing so, the study aimed to understand how figurative language enhances the poetic quality of the lyrics and reflects the mood, tone, and underlying message conveyed by the songwriter. Furthermore, analyzing these figurative elements provides insight into the artistic style of Beach House and the way their music communicates abstract concepts such as longing, memory, emotion, and identity. Through this methodology, the research seeks not only to classify the types of figurative language present in the selected songs but also to highlight the importance of figurative language in shaping the listener's interpretive experience and emotional connection to the music.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data from the selected Beach House song, which are: Space Song, Sparks, and Levitation, there are at least four figurative language types that are contained in the songs, such as metaphor, symbolism, simile and imagery. The complete figurative languages are displayed below.

Beach House's are rich in figurative language that conveys multiple themes and implied meanings. Here are the results of figurative language in their selected song, called Space Song, Levitation, and Sparks.

1. Metaphor

"Tender is the night" (Space song, line 13)

This line presents a metaphor that reimagines the night as something gentle and caring, rather than dark and frightening. By describing the night with the word "tender," the lyricist introduces an emotional contrast that encourages a deeper reflection on how darkness can also offer comfort. In line with Perrine's idea that metaphors allow people to experience one thing in terms of another, this metaphor does more than decorate the line—it reshapes the listener's understanding of what the night represents.

This metaphor also suggests an atmosphere of emotional vulnerability. The tenderness of the night reflects the internal state of the speaker, revealing a desire for softness and peace in a time of possible grief or uncertainty. In this way, the metaphor creates an intimate emotional setting, suggesting that even in the absence of light, one can find solace. The lyric allows the listener to see darkness not just as the end of the day, but as a meaningful space where healing and reflection may take place.

“What makes this fragile world go ‘round?” (Space song, line 17)

This line uses metaphor to highlight the delicate and uncertain nature of human existence. The phrase “fragile world” compares the world to a breakable object, implying that life and the systems within it are easily disrupted. While the metaphor is subtle, it powerfully conveys vulnerability and impermanence. Rather than simply describing the world as a place, it is framed as something constantly at risk, yet still moving. This movement, expressed in the phrase “go ‘round,” introduces a question about what keeps life going despite its fragile condition. It invites reflection on unseen emotional or relational forces that sustain balance and continuity.

This metaphor also resonates with broader emotional and existential themes. It suggests that behind the world’s constant motion lies something both invisible and essential—perhaps love, hope, or connection. The use of the word “fragile” personalizes the image, evoking a sense of emotional exposure and human sensitivity. In this way, the metaphor not only reveals the speaker’s introspective state, but also invites the listener to consider the delicate yet enduring nature of relationships, emotions, and life itself.

2. Symbolism

“A flash of light” (Space song, line 4)

This line presents a symbolic image that carries emotional and psychological depth. Rather than referring to a literal flash, the phrase can be interpreted as a symbol of sudden memory or realization. In the midst of emotional darkness or loneliness, this brief “light” breaks through—suggesting the appearance of a vivid memory or moment of clarity. In Perrine’s view, a symbol carries meaning beyond its surface, and here, the image of light becomes a key to understanding the speaker’s inner state. It serves as a contrast to the surrounding emotional darkness, suggesting that even in moments of isolation, a memory or feeling can resurface to momentarily illuminate the past.

This symbol also evokes a strong sense of nostalgia. The suddenness of the flash implies that the memory appears unexpectedly, perhaps triggered by emotion or longing. The light does not remain, but its brief presence leaves a lasting impression—similar to how powerful memories can interrupt loneliness with a mixture of warmth and pain. In this sense, the “flash of light” becomes a symbol not just of memory, but of emotional interruption: a short-lived reminder of something meaningful that once existed. Through this symbolism, the song offers insight into how even brief moments from the past can shape the present emotional experience, revealing the complex relationship between memory, loss, and personal reflection.

“A vision turning green” (Sparks, line 4)

The phrase presents a rich and layered symbol. The word green carries a variety of possible meanings, including growth, envy, and even an unnatural shift in perception. Within the context of this lyric, the shift in color may symbolize a change in the way the speaker sees or understands something—an emotional or mental transformation that feels both beautiful and unsettling. As Perrine suggests, a symbol goes beyond its literal meaning, and in this case, “green” becomes a symbolic marker of psychological complexity. The vision refers not only to literal sight but also to inner awareness, which undergoes a change that introduces new insight alongside emotional tension.

This symbolic transformation can be interpreted in multiple emotional directions. On one hand, “green” may suggest renewal and personal growth, pointing to the possibility of emotional healing or awakening. On the other hand, it is often linked to envy or distortion,

indicating that this altered perception might also come with discomfort or longing. The lyric reflects the dual nature of emotional change—how an evolving understanding can bring both clarity and pain. In this way, “a vision turning green” captures the multifaceted nature of human emotion, suggesting that the act of seeing differently often brings both vulnerability and depth.

“From the spine rising through the mind” (Sparks, line 31)

This phrase uses bodily imagery to express a symbolic connection between physical strength and mental or emotional awareness. The word “spine” typically represents the core of physical structure—associated with stability, support, and resilience—but in this lyric, it symbolizes something deeper. It suggests the foundation of inner strength or emotional grounding. The imagery of something “rising through the mind” indicates a movement from the body to consciousness, symbolizing an internal awakening or realization that begins within and gradually reaches awareness.

This upward movement portrays a process of transformation, where personal strength evolves into clarity or understanding. The “spine” serves not only as a physical symbol but as a metaphor for emotional depth and the quiet power that supports self-reflection. As this force rises “through the mind,” it implies that insight is not purely rational but rooted in the body’s emotional memory. The lyric, therefore, offers a symbolic perspective on how strength and thought are intertwined—suggesting that meaningful understanding often emerges from the core of one’s being, bridging the physical and the mental.

“House melting down” (Sparks, line 2)

The line “House melting down” in Sparks (line 2) presents a surreal and emotionally charged symbol. A “house” often represents safety, permanence, and emotional grounding, yet in this lyric, it is described as “melting down”—a striking image that evokes instability, disorientation, and emotional collapse. The melting effect gives the scene a dreamlike or nightmarish quality, suggesting a distortion of reality. Rather than standing as a place of comfort, the house becomes a symbol of vulnerability, where the familiar structure of stability is dissolving before one’s eyes.

This symbolic collapse may reflect inner emotional turmoil, such as grief, anxiety, or a loss of control. The image suggests that even what seems solid and dependable—like relationships, identity, or mental stability—can unexpectedly fall apart. The melting house becomes a metaphor for the fragility of human constructs, both physical and emotional. It highlights the tension between what people perceive as secure and the unpredictable forces that can undermine that security. In this way, the lyric opens up a space to explore themes of existential dread and emotional fragility, portraying the inner world as just as unstable as the outer one.

“From an empty seat / a flash of light” (Space song, line 3-4)

The lines “From an empty seat / a flash of light” in Space Song (lines 3–4) combine two vivid symbolic images that convey a strong emotional contrast. The “empty seat” suggests absence, loss, or emotional distance—perhaps the memory of someone who is no longer there. It evokes a quiet, haunting presence through absence, creating a setting that feels hollow yet emotionally charged. This emptiness is immediately followed by “a flash of light,” an image that interrupts the stillness with sudden clarity or memory. The juxtaposition between these two images—stillness and motion, darkness and light—produces a cinematic and emotionally resonant effect.

Together, these symbols express the complexity of remembering someone or something that is gone. The “empty seat” grounds the speaker in loneliness or longing, while the “flash of light” suggests how memory or realization can momentarily illuminate that emptiness. It is not just about grief, but about how moments of understanding often rise unexpectedly in spaces of silence. The contrast between the two images highlights the emotional weight of the past and how its presence continues to echo through absence. In

this way, the lyric captures how memory functions: fleeting, sudden, and deeply intertwined with feelings of both pain and connection.

3. Simile

“And it goes dark again / just like a spark” (Sparks, line 10-11)

The lines “And it goes dark again / just like a spark” in Sparks (lines 10–11) use a simile to illustrate the fleeting nature of clarity or emotional light. The phrase “just like a spark” draws a direct comparison between the return of darkness and the brief life of a spark. By using the word “like,” the lyricist emphasizes the momentary quality of brightness—suggesting that light, whether literal or symbolic, exists only briefly before fading. This simile not only highlights the impermanence of these moments but also evokes a rhythmic cycle of light and dark, of hope and despair, which echoes throughout the song.

The comparison deepens the emotional tone by underscoring how quickly moments of insight, joy, or connection can disappear. Just as a spark flares up and then vanishes, emotional clarity or presence can be fleeting, returning once again to emotional darkness. This use of simile reinforces the theme of repetition and the fragile nature of illumination—both internal and external. Through this, the lyric conveys the unstable rhythm of human emotion, where brightness is never guaranteed to last, but still leaves an impression even in its disappearance.

4. Imagery

“From the spine rising through the mind” (Sparks, line 31)

The line “From the spine rising through the mind” in Sparks (line 31) employs vivid kinetic imagery to evoke the sensation of inner movement and transformation. The phrase suggests a flow of energy beginning from the “spine”—a physical and emotional center—moving upward “through the mind.” This rising motion creates a feeling of awakening or realization, where the body and the mind are symbolically and physically linked. The image captures not just movement, but also the progression from instinct or emotion to awareness, evoking a moment of inner shift that feels both powerful and intimate.

This imagery blends the physical with the psychological, portraying realization as something that can be felt in the body as well as understood mentally. The upward direction implies growth, elevation, and clarity, while also hinting at the overwhelming nature of sudden understanding. Rather than presenting realization as a calm or passive event, the lyric presents it as something rising—active, alive, and urgent. Through this sensory language, the listener is invited to feel the experience, not just comprehend it, making the emotional journey more immersive and profound.

“It was late at night / You held on tight” (Space Song, lines 1–2)

The lines “It was late at night / You held on tight” in Space Song (lines 1–2) present subtle yet effective imagery that appeals to the senses of time and touch. The phrase “late at night” evokes a quiet, introspective atmosphere—often associated with solitude, vulnerability, or emotional openness. Meanwhile, “you held on tight” introduces a tactile sensation, suggesting physical closeness and emotional tension. Together, these lines create a sensory setting that captures a fleeting yet intimate moment shared between two people.

This imagery blends temporal and physical elements to immerse the listener in a specific emotional experience. The darkness of night amplifies the act of holding on, emphasizing both comfort and desperation. It implies a moment where silence and connection coexist, allowing listeners to feel the vulnerability of the scene rather than simply observe it. Unlike more abstract expressions found elsewhere in the song, this opening uses concrete, sensory detail to ground the emotion in a relatable and physical moment—making it a quiet but powerful example of imagery.

Based on the analysis of Space Song, Sparks, and Levitation, it can be observed that the lyrics mainly employ four types of figurative language: metaphor, symbolism, simile,

and imagery. There is no other figurative devices such as personification, irony, metonymy, understatement, allegory, apostrophe, or hyperbole were found in these three songs. This shows that the lyrics focus on emotional depth through subtle and selective poetic elements, aligning with the dreamlike tone of the music.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of figurative language in three selected songs by Beach House—Space Song, Sparks, and Levitation—through a semantic lens and based on Perrine’s classification. The analysis revealed that the dominant types of figurative language found in these songs are metaphor, symbolism, simile, and imagery. These elements are used not excessively, but with precision and subtlety, contributing to the dreamlike and emotional tone that characterizes the band's lyrical style.

The use of figurative language in the lyrics enhances the emotional depth, creates vivid mental imagery, and conveys abstract ideas in a poetic and accessible manner. While other forms such as personification, hyperbole, or irony are absent, the selected figurative elements function effectively in expressing themes of memory, vulnerability, emotional transformation, and longing. Thus, the study concludes that Beach House’s lyrical approach relies on a minimalist yet meaningful use of figurative language to evoke introspective and atmospheric experiences for the listener..

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