

An Analysis of Figurative Language and Imagery in British and American Pop Songs

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate figurative language and imagery in British and American pop song lyrics. The research elicits their similarities and differences in terms of type and the number of occurrences of figurative language and imagery between British and American pop song lyrics. The subjects are twenty English pop songs, ten of which are British, and the others are American, from the Official Singles Chart Top 100 website between 21 and 27 February 2020.

The findings on figurative language showed that (1) figurative language was more numerous and more varied in the American songs (i.e. 303 times; 9 types) than in the British songs (i.e. 270 times; 8 types) and (2) the most frequently found type was metaphor, which accounted for approximately three-quarters in both British and American songs.

The findings on imagery revealed that (1) imagery was more numerous in the British than in the American songs, 314 times and 248 times respectively, but it was found 5 types in both groups, and (2) the most frequently found type was organic imagery, which was more numerous in the American than in the British songs, 73.79% and 53.82% respectively.

The pervasiveness of certain types of figurative language and imagery in these pop songs could indicate a crucial role they play in conveying lyrical messages, expressing profound emotions, and creating strong impressions in the audience's mind.

Keywords: figurative language, imagery, pop songs, British pop songs, American pop songs

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การวิเคราะห์ภาษาภาพพจน์และจินตภาพในเพลงป๊อปบริติชและอเมริกัน

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์และจินตภาพในเพลงป๊อปบริติชและอเมริกัน และเปรียบเทียบความคล้ายคลึงและความแตกต่างในการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์และจินตภาพในเชิงประเภทและจำนวนระหว่างเพลงป๊อปบริติชและอเมริกัน โดยวิเคราะห์จากเพลงป๊อปภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 20 เพลง แบ่งเป็นเพลงป๊อปบริติช 10 เพลง และเพลงป๊อปอเมริกัน 10 เพลง จากเว็บไซต์ออฟฟิเชียลซิงเกิลส์ชาร์ตท็อป 100 ระหว่างวันที่ 21-27 กุมภาพันธ์ 2563

ผลการศึกษาการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ พบว่า (1) เพลงป๊อปอเมริกันมีการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์จำนวนมากกว่า และหลากหลายประเภทกว่าเพลงป๊อปบริติช กล่าวคือ 303 ครั้ง 9 ประเภท และ 270 ครั้ง 8 ประเภท ตามลำดับ และ (2) ภาษาภาพพจน์ประเภทที่พบบ่อยที่สุด คือ อุปลักษณ์ ซึ่งคิดเป็นประมาณสามในสี่ส่วนของจำนวนการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ทั้งหมดทั้งในเพลงป๊อปบริติชและอเมริกัน

ผลการศึกษาการใช้จินตภาพ พบว่า (1) เพลงป๊อปบริติชมีการใช้จินตภาพจำนวนมากกว่าเพลงป๊อปอเมริกัน กล่าวคือ 314 ครั้ง และ 248 ครั้ง ตามลำดับ แต่มีการใช้จินตภาพจำนวน 5 ประเภทเหมือนกัน และ (2) จินตภาพประเภทที่พบบ่อยที่สุด คือ จินตภาพด้านความรู้สึก ซึ่งเพลงป๊อปอเมริกันมีการใช้จินตภาพประเภทนี้จำนวนมากกว่าเพลงป๊อปบริติช กล่าวคือ 73.79% และ 53.82% ตามลำดับ

จากการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์และจินตภาพบางประเภทเป็นจำนวนมากในเพลงป๊อปเหล่านี้ อาจกล่าวได้ว่า ภาษาภาพพจน์และจินตภาพเหล่านี้มีบทบาทสำคัญในการสื่อความหมายเนื้อเพลง ถ่ายทอดอารมณ์ความรู้สึกอันลึกซึ้ง และสร้างความประทับใจให้กับผู้ฟัง

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาภาพพจน์ จินตภาพ เพลงป๊อป เพลงป๊อปบริติช เพลงป๊อปอเมริกัน

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Introduction

Figurative language and imagery are pervasive in everyday communication. They are not only restricted in literary works such as fiction and poetry but also commonly expressed in song lyrics. In other words, figurative language in music plays a significant role in elaborately expressing feelings and thoughts implicitly rather than explicitly (Sharndama & Suleiman, 2013) as well as communicating ideas clearly and effectively (Holmes, 2003). As some ideas are abstract and complex in nature and are not easily understood or stated directly, the use of figurative language in music allows songwriters to convey a complicated meaning and clarity using the connotative sense instead of the denotative sense of words. As in Taylor Swift's "The Story of Us," for example, the songwriter uses a simile, i.e. like, to convey her deep sadness at a romantic relationship breakup of her and her boyfriend by comparing it to a tragedy as in the line "And the story of us looks a lot like a tragedy now" (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013).

Imagery, on the other hand, is the use of words or phrases that appeal to human senses. In lyrics, imagery is used to give the audience a sense of how the subject being described looks, sounds, and feels, among others (Yastanti & Safitri, 2016). Using imagery allows songwriters to clarify meaning and intensify emotions as well as allow the audience to place themselves inside the songs, e.g. "to see the picture, hear the sounds, feel their effects, and so on" (Ewer, 2014). In Alicia Keys' "Girl on Fire," for instance, the songwriter uses visual and tactile imagery, i.e. flame, which appeals to the sense of sight and touch to illustrate the nature of the girl on fire as in the line "Looks like a girl, but she's a flame" (Yastanti & Safitri, 2016).

The use of figurative language in English songs has been constantly investigated. Many studies explore the use of figurative language in songs performed by American singers (Listiani, 2015; Arifah, 2016; Hariyanto, 2017; Maftuhah, 2018), while a few researches examine it in songs performed by British singers (Trichomwaree, 2015; Angellia, 2018). To date, however, research on the use of figurative language together with imagery in English songs, either by British or American singers, remains scarce in the body of literature (Siallagan, Manurung, & Sinaga, 2017). To be more exact, past research tends to focus more on the use of figurative language than the use of imagery in English songs, instead of investigating both figurative language and imagery simultaneously.

As British English and American English are major, distinct dialects of English, which typically differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling to some extent, it is worth investigating whether and to what extent they are similar and/or different in the use of figurative language and imagery in song lyrics. The present research, therefore, aimed at exploring the use of these literary devices in pop music, which is one of the most popular music genres in the world.

The research findings were expected to reveal specific prevalent types of figurative language and imagery that pop songwriters commonly use to communicate lyrical messages and

emotions, to reflect certain similarities and/or differences in the use of figurative language and imagery in pop music, specifically in these major dialects of English, and to bridge the aforementioned gap in the current body of research in this field.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the types of figurative language and imagery commonly used in British pop song lyrics and the extent to which they are used in these lyrics.
2. To investigate the types of figurative language and imagery commonly used in American pop song lyrics and the extent to which they are used in these lyrics.
3. To elicit the similarities and/or differences in the type and number of figurative language and imagery between British and American pop song lyrics.

Literature Review

Pop Songs

Pop music, also known as pop, is a type of music that appeals to a wide audience mainly because of its short songs, strong beats, and catchy melodies that are easy to remember (“Pop music,” n.d.a). Most pop songs share certain features, that is, they are usually two-to-five-minute songs that include a repeated verse-chorus structure, a good rhythm, and a pleasant melody that can be easily sung to (“What is pop music?,” n.d.). They also include elements from other genres such as rock, dance, and country (“Pop music,” n.d.b). Pop song lyrics are often emotional and about love and relationship, and many lyrics are self-referential, making references to the performers’ own experience (“Pop music,” n.d.c). As Nishina (2017) found, pop songs, among other genres, frequently use such words as “I,” “you,” “life,” “heart,” and “dreams.”

Sentiments expressed through pop song lyrics have changed significantly from positive ones such as joy, confidence, and openness toward negative ones such as anger, fear, and sadness since the 1950s (Napier & Shamir, 2018). Additionally, popular song lyrics that make references to romantic relationships have declined, while those making references to sexual behavior and objectified bodies have increased from 1960 to the 2000s (Smiler, Shewmaker, & Hearon, 2017). As pop song lyrics generally involve conveying abstract ideas, feelings, and qualities, as mentioned above, one of the techniques of communicating ideas and emotions clearly and effectively is using literary devices, namely figurative language and imagery, as elaborated further on in the following sections.

Figurative Language

Figurative language is a figure of speech in language used to convey the meaning that its literal meaning cannot convey (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007). Generally, figurative language is used to help readers better understand the meaning of the message that writers intend to convey. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007), figurative language can be classified into 9 types as follows.

1) Simile compares two unlike things that share certain similar features, using the words “like” or “as.” An example of a simile is, “Your fingers are like sausages.” In this statement, the appearance of one’s fingers is compared to that of sausages. Another example is, “Freedom is like religion to us” in John Legend’s “Glory.” This compares freedom and religion using the word “like” (Arifah, 2016).

2) Metaphor compares two unlike things by stating that one thing is another even though they are not alike in the literal sense. Unlike similes, metaphors do not use the words “like” or “as.” An example of a metaphor is, “Your fingers are sausages.” This statement compares one’s fingers and sausages, and it does not literally mean that one’s fingers are sausages. Instead, it means that one’s fingers are large and long. Another example is, “You’re my kryptonite” in One Direction’s “One Thing.” As kryptonite, a fictional substance, can hurt the character Superman, the comparison between you and kryptonite implies that the person the speaker is referring to can make him weak, even though he is extremely strong (Fitria, 2018).

3) Personification gives human characteristics to non-living objects and thus makes the objects be able to act like humans. An example of a personification is, “Summer’s breath,” in which summer is given human characteristics and ability to take a breath. Another example is, “I’m weaker. My words fall, and they hit the ground” in One Direction’s “Stole My Heart.” In this line, “words” can “hit the ground” like humans (Fitria, 2018).

4) Apostrophe is a figure of speech speakers use to directly speak to something that is not visible or is not present or is not spoken to in general. It is also used to speak to a non-existent person or an abstract idea. An example is, “Return, Delights!” The use of apostrophe in lyrics, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, has not been studied yet.

5) Overstatement, also known as hyperbole, emphasizes a point with a statement containing exaggeration. An example of an overstatement is, “I’ve told him a thousand times.” This does not necessarily mean that one person has literally told another person a thousand times, but it is used to exaggerate the number of times one person has told another one. Another example is, “Had me in the palm of your hand” in Taylor Swift’s “All You Had to Do Was Stay.” It is an overstatement to have one person in the palm of another person. In fact,

the speaker emphasizes that her lover should stay with her and never let her go (Siallagan, Manurung, & Sinaga, 2017).

6) Understatement makes a situation seem less important or serious than it really is. An example is, "I have to have this operation. It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain" (Nordquist, 2018). In this statement, the speaker deliberately makes the brain tumor surgery seem less serious than it really is. The use of understatement in lyrics, to the best of the authors' knowledge, has not been presented in literature before.

7) Metonymy is a type of figurative language in which an object or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it. For example, "the White House," which is the official residence and workplace of the president of the United States, is used as a metonym to refer to the president and his or her administration. Another example is, "And the life you had in Dublin now ain't nothing but a dream" in The Script's "Paint the Town Green." In this line, "Dublin," the capital city of Ireland, is used as a metonym to refer to Ireland (Harmastuty, 2016).

8) Synecdoche is a type of figurative language that uses part of a whole to refer to the whole. For example, the term "wheels," which is a part of an automobile, can be used to refer to the automobile, as in "She showed off her new wheels" ("On synecdoche and metonymy," n.d.). Another example is, "I'm not the kind of girl who should be rudely barging in on a white veil occasion" in Taylor Swift's "Speak Now." The term "white veil," which serves to cover the bride's face, is used to refer to the wedding (Listiani, 2015).

9) Paradox is a statement that appears to be self-contradictory. An example is, "The peasant lives in a larger world than the globe-trotter." This statement seems contradictory that peasants who stereotypically have very little knowledge go much farther than world travelers, yet it may be valid when it means in terms of spiritual rather than physical journey. Another example is, "Now I'm standing alone in a crowded room" in Taylor Swift's "The Story of Us." This seems contradictory that the speaker says she is standing alone, which means without other people, but in a crowded room, which means a room full of people. This may be valid when it means she is feeling very lonely even among the crowd (Listiani, 2015).

Imagery

Like figurative language, imagery plays an important role in conveying lyrical messages and profound emotions by enabling audience to create vivid mental pictures. Imagery refers to the use of language that appeals to human senses (Arp & Johnson, 2011). Imagery allows readers or listeners to feel more connected to the message by pulling out their senses and experiences, so they can understand the message more deeply. According to Arp and Johnson (2011), imagery can be classified into 7 types as follows.

1) **Visual imagery** uses words to appeal to the sense of sight, such as red roses. In this example, the rose is described in detail with color. Another example is, “She’s just a girl, and she’s on fire” in Alicia Keys’ “Girl on Fire.” The phrase “on fire” describes the state of burning, including flame, heat, and light. This line describes the girl as a person with a burning passion (Yastanti & Safitri, 2016). The phrase “on fire” can also appeal to the sense of touch and thus can be classified as tactile imagery.

2) **Auditory imagery** uses words to appeal to the sense of hearing or sound, such as buzzing, which allows readers to experience a continuous, low sound such as the one a bee makes. Another example is, “Just hear this song ’cause you can’t go wrong when you value” in Alicia Keys’ “A Woman’s Worth.” Using the phrase “Just hear this song,” the singer encourages the audience to listen to this song to value a woman’s worth.

3) **Olfactory imagery** uses words to appeal to the sense of smell, such as fragrance, which gives a pleasant smell to readers’ mind. Another example is, “I will go out of my way to prove I still smell her on you” in Nirvana’s “Lounge Act.” Using the word “smell,” the singer describes the fragrance of deodorant on another person (Utomo, 2006).

4) **Gustatory imagery** uses words to appeal to the sense of taste, such as sweet, which helps readers recognize the taste of something sweet. The example of gustatory imagery in lyrics, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, is not available at present.

5) **Tactile imagery** uses words to appeal to the sense of touch by describing how something physically feels, such as its texture or temperature. An example is, “Bruises on the fruit” in Nirvana’s “In Bloom.” Using the word “bruises,” the singer describes the texture of the fruit as soft (Utomo, 2006). The word “bruises” also refers to marks where the skin is darker in color and thus can be classified as visual imagery as well.

6) **Organic imagery** uses words to describe internal sensations, feelings, and emotions, such as hunger, love, fear, disgust, and sadness. An example is, “And I start to get weak” in Alicia Keys’ “Superwoman.” In this line, the singer describes her feeling of weakness using the word “weak” (Yastanti & Safitri, 2016).

7) **Kinesthetic imagery** uses words to describe physical movement or action, such as pump, which is used to describe the act of forcing liquid or gas to move to somewhere, as in the statement “The heart pumps blood to the lungs.” Another example is, “And he likes to sing along / And he likes to shoot his gun” in Nirvana’s “In Bloom.” This line describes a person’s act of singing and shooting (Utomo, 2006).

Related Studies

Figurative language and imagery in English songs have been widely investigated. Previous research found that figurative language is numerous and varied in English songs regardless of music genres: pop (Fitria, 2018), rock (Saputra, 2015; Ramadiansyah, 2018), soul

(Arifah, 2016), electronica (Yulidar, 2014), and hip-hop (Kulwachai, Mungthaisong, & Santhi, 2017). The most commonly found types of figurative language in English songs are hyperbole (Harmastuty, 2016; Adhuri, 2017; Hariyanto, 2017; Maftuhah, 2018) and metaphor (Keskomon & Tipayasuparat, 2015; Trichomwaree, 2015). In addition to hyperbole and metaphor, other types that are frequently found in English songs include simile and personification (Yulidar, 2014; Keskomon & Tipayasuparat, 2015; Nurdiana, 2015; Harmastuty, 2016).

While many past studies focus on the use of figurative language in English songs, only a few studies examine the use of figurative language along with imagery. Angellia (2018), for example, analyzed Ed Sheeran's songs and found metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, imagery, and symbolism. Also, Siallagan, Manurung, and Sinaga (2017) analyzed Taylor Swift's songs and found eight types of figurative language and six types of imagery, the most dominant figurative language types of which were personification, hyperbole, and simile, while the most dominant imagery types of which were visual, kinesthetic, and organic. As the theme of love, life, and friendship runs through most of these songs, these literary devices are probably used to convey these abstract ideas, feelings, and concepts clearly and effectively.

Additionally, Yastanti and Safitri (2016) investigated imagery used in Alicia Keys' songs: *Girl on Fire*, *Superwoman*, and *A Woman's Worth*, and elicited the messages the lyrics conveyed. In this study, four types of imagery were found: auditory, kinesthetic, visual, and organic. An example is, "Nobody knows that she's a lonely girl" in "Girl on Fire." This line uses the word "lonely" to describe the girl's emotional state. As the lyrics under investigation generally portray women as strong, supportive, and worth, imagery is likely to help emphasize the image of women as the ones who should be treated properly, fairly, and equally.

The use of figurative language and imagery in song lyrics seems to be influenced by certain factors. One possibility is that the number and type of figurative language in lyrics may be attributable to music genre. In their analysis of Eminem's 50 hip-hop songs, Kulwachai, Mungthaisong, and Santhi (2017) found almost half of the figurative language occurrences were slang (47.2%), followed by simile (21.1%) and hyperbole (11.8%). As hip-hop is considered music and culture (Kulwachai, Mungthaisong, & Santhi, 2017), the frequent use of slang, which is a very informal language that goes beyond the literal meaning of words, probably characterizes hip-hop music and language use among particular groups of people.

In contrast, in his study of Taylor Swift's 39 pop songs, Suriyawongpaisal (2013) found that three most frequently found types of figurative language were metaphor (43.89%), simile (11.76%), and hyperbole (8.14%). As pop songs generally involve expressing a wide range of sentiments, such as joy, fear, and sadness (Napier & Shamir, 2018), the frequent use of metaphor, among other literary devices, probably helps songwriters convey these emotional states, and metaphor may be typical of pop songs.

Another contributing factor in the use of figurative language in lyrics may be the period in which the songs were written, performed, or released. In an analysis of figurative language in lyrics in the 1970s and those in the 2000s, Saputra (2015) found that hyperbole and personification usually appeared in lyrics in both periods; however, figurative language was more numerous and varied in the 70s than in the millennium songs. In other words, the types of figurative language found in lyrics in the 70s were imagery, hyperbole, personification, paradox, metonymy, alliteration, allegory, idiom, and simile, whereas those in the millennium were idiom, hyperbole, paradox, and personification. This probably indicates the popularity of figurative language use in lyrics in different eras.

In addition to music genres and song periods, singers' or lyricists' native language, society, and culture may also have an influence on the use of figurative language in lyrics. In their comparative study of figures of speech between top 50 English and Persian pop song lyrics, Ashtiani and Derakhshesh (2015) found a significant difference in the use of figures of speech in lyrics between the two languages. Overall, Persian songs had a greater number of figures of speech than English songs, 221 and 158 respectively. Also, personification and hyperbole were more frequently used in Persian than in English songs, while simile and metaphor were not significantly different in the songs between these languages. This can be due to differences in songwriting strategies adopted by songwriters with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Although prior studies have extensively investigated figurative language and imagery in English song lyrics, a comparative study of figurative and imagery in English pop song lyrics performed by British and American singers has been scarce. In other words, some research focuses on single singers' lyrics (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013; Listiani, 2015; Arifah, 2016), while some others analyze only one song (Hariyanto, 2017; Ramadiansyah, 2018). Some others analyze and conclude the use of figurative language from a mixture of different music genres (Saputra, 2015; Budiarti, 2017). A large majority of studies have focused more on figurative language than imagery in English songs, and consequently existing literature may not reveal a clear picture of figurative language and imagery in present-day English pop songs. This research, therefore, aimed at investigating whether British and American pop songs nowadays were similar or different in their use of figurative language and imagery in terms of type and number.

Research Methodology

Subject of the Study

Twenty pop songs, ten of which were sung by British singers/bands and the others by American singers/bands, were collected from the Official Singles Chart Top 100 between 21 and 27 February 2020 (see Appendix). The charts were based on the official sales of

downloads, CD, vinyl, audio streams, and video streams. The songs were selected as they were ranked top 10 pop songs sung by 10 British singers and the others were ranked top 10 pop songs sung by 10 American singers. In other words, each singer was selected for his/her own highest-ranked song only. All singers are singer-songwriters, which means they write, compose, and perform their own songs.

Instrument

The lyrics of the selected songs were obtained from <https://genius.com/> using the search engine “Search lyrics & more” on the website. This website was selected because it provided complete and accurate lyrics for further analysis. Four tables on a spreadsheet were created and designed to collect data on figurative language in British songs, figurative language in American songs, imagery in British songs, and imagery in American songs. The figurative language tables included details on song title, type of figurative language, part of the lyrics containing figurative language, frequency, and note on the use of figurative language in each song. Similarly, the imagery tables included details on song title, type of imagery, part of the lyrics containing imagery, frequency, and note on the use of imagery in each song.

Data Collection and Analysis

First, figurative language and imagery in each of the lyrics were identified and classified according to the framework of Kennedy and Gioia (2007) and that of Arp and Johnson (2011) respectively. Then parts of the lyrics containing figurative language were coded and recorded in the figurative language tables, and those containing imagery were coded and recorded in the imagery tables. Next, each occurrence of figurative language and imagery found in the songs was tallied to identify frequency and percentage of each type of figurative language and imagery in both British and American pop songs (Research Objectives 1 and 2). During this process, the researchers initially worked individually toward this step and subsequently worked collaboratively to arrive at an agreement. Finally, the use of figurative language and imagery in British pop songs was compared with that in American pop songs to identify similarities and/or differences in terms of type and number (Research Objective 3).

Results

The research results were divided into three major sections: 1) figurative language and imagery in the British pop song lyrics, 2) figurative language and imagery in the American pop song lyrics, and 3) similarities and differences in terms of type and number of figurative language and imagery between the British and American pop song lyrics.

1. Figurative Language and Imagery in the British Pop Song Lyrics

The first research objective was to investigate the types of figurative language and imagery used in the British pop song lyrics and the extent to which they were used in these lyrics. The results revealed that figurative language was used 270 times in total, and 8 types were found in the British pop songs. As Table 1 shows, the most frequent type was metaphor, which accounted for 74.44%, followed by overstatement (10.37%) and synecdoche (3.70%). The next types were apostrophe and simile, which were found with the same number (2.96%), followed by personification (2.59%), metonymy (2.22%), and paradox (0.74%). However, the only type that was not found in the British pop songs was understatement.

Table 1 Figurative language in the British pop song lyrics

Type	Number	Percent
Metaphor	201	74.44
Overstatement	28	10.37
Synecdoche	10	3.70
Apostrophe	8	2.96
Simile	8	2.96
Personification	7	2.59
Metonymy	6	2.22
Paradox	2	0.74
Understatement	0	0
Total	270	100

The following are some examples of figurative language in the British pop song lyrics.

1) Metaphor: “Now I know I have met an angel in person” (Perfect by Ed Sheeran). This statement compares the singer’s lover and an angel, and it does not literally mean that the singer has met a spiritual being. Instead, it means that the singer perceives his lover as an angel that stereotypically possesses kindness and beauty.

2) Overstatement: “I'd walk through fire for you” (Adore You by Harry Styles). This line does not necessarily mean that one person literally would walk through fire for another, but it is used to exaggerate the person’s willingness to do whatever it takes for another person.

3) Synecdoche: “Don't start caring about me now” (Don’t Start Now by Dua Lipa). In this line, caring that is generally considered part of love is used to refer to love. To be more specific, the singer intends to tell her ex-lover that it is too late to come back and love her now.

4) Apostrophe: “Home grown alligator, see you later” (Shotgun by George Ezra). In this line, the singer is speaking to an “alligator,” which is a symbol of Australia, the country he previously visited. Thus, he speaks to the hypothetical entity that does not really exist.

5) Simile: “Lonely days I’m feeling like a fool for dreaming” (To Die for by Sam Smith). Using the word “like,” the singer compares himself to a fool for desperately longing for someone to die for.

6) Personification: “Cannot recognize the sound of my own heart calling” (This Is Real by Jax Jones ft. Ella Henderson). In this line, one’s heart is a non-human object but has been given human characteristics since calling can only be performed by living creatures.

7) Metonymy: “Time flies by in the yellow and green” (Shotgun by George Ezra). In this line, the yellow and green are not referred to colors in general but are closely associated with the Australian national colors, i.e. green and gold. In other words, the yellow and green here are used to refer to Australia.

8) Paradox: “I know you like to be alone but hate being lonely” (Lonely by Joel Corry). This line employs self-contradictory words or concepts. When you are alone, you are likely to feel lonely. Therefore, if you would like to be alone, you should accept rather than hate loneliness.

In the British pop songs, imagery was used 314 times in total, and 5 types were found, as indicated in Table 2. The most frequent type was organic (53.82%), followed by kinesthetic (26.75%) and visual (15.92%). The next type was tactile (3.18%), and the last type was auditory (0.32%). However, the types that were not found in these songs were olfactory and gustatory.

Table 2 Imagery in the British pop song lyrics

Type	Number	Percent
Organic	169	53.82
Kinesthetic	84	26.75
Visual	50	15.92
Tactile	10	3.18
Auditory	1	0.32
Olfactory	0	0
Gustatory	0	0
Total	314	100

The following are some examples of imagery in the British pop song lyrics.

1) Organic imagery: “Just because you're lonely doesn't mean we go back to the start” (Lonely by Joel Corry). The word “lonely” conveys one’s internal sensation of feeling sad or unhappy because of being alone.

2) Kinesthetic imagery: “If you don't wanna see me dancing with somebody” (Don’t Start Now by Dua Lipa). The word “dancing” represents one’s physical movement or action.

3) Visual imagery: “Brown skin and lemon over ice” (Adore You by Harry Styles). This line uses the sense of sight to give a clear picture of a person’s skin color and a glass of drink.

4) Tactile imagery: “I’ll be ridin’ shotgun underneath the hot sun” (Shotgun by George Ezra). This line uses the sense of touch that is seen in the hot sun.

5) Auditory imagery: “When you said you looked a mess, I whispered underneath my breath” (Perfect by Ed Sheeran). This line uses the phrase “whisper underneath one’s breath” to help listeners perceive how quietly the singer whispers to himself.

2. Figurative Language and Imagery in the American Pop Song Lyrics

The second research objective was to investigate the types of figurative language and imagery used in the American pop song lyrics and the extent to which they were used in these lyrics. The results showed that figurative language was used 303 times in total, and 9 types were found in the American pop songs. As demonstrated in Table 3, the most frequently found type of figurative language was metaphor, which made up 76.90%, followed by personification (8.25%) and overstatement (3.96%). The next types were metonymy (3.30%), apostrophe (2.97%), synecdoche (2.64%), and simile (1.32%). Lastly, the least frequent types were paradox and understatement, each of which was found only once (0.33%).

Table 3 Figurative language in the American pop song lyrics

Type	Number	Percent
Metaphor	233	76.90
Personification	25	8.25
Overstatement	12	3.96
Metonymy	10	3.30
Apostrophe	9	2.97
Synecdoche	8	2.64
Simile	4	1.32
Paradox	1	0.33
Understatement	1	0.33
Total	303	100

Here are some examples of figurative language in the American pop song lyrics.

1) Metaphor: “You ain’t trying to be wasting time on stupid people and cheap lines I’m sure, I’m sure” (What A Man Gotta Do by Jonas Brothers). In this line, time is compared to a valuable commodity, which can be, for instance, spent, saved, and even wasted.

2) Personification: “And the memories bring back, memories bring back you” (Memories by Maroon 5). In this line, memories, which are a non-human object, have been given human ability to bring someone back to another person.

3) Overstatement: “I’d move the earth or lose a fight just to see you smile ‘cause you got no flaws, no flaws” (What A Man Gotta Do by Jonas Brothers). In this line, a person appreciates his lover so much that he would do whatever it takes to please her as he perceives

her to be perfect. The use of the phrase “no flaws, no flaws” exaggerates this statement to emphasize how dearly he loves her.

4) Metonymy: “Now my heart feel like December when somebody say your name” (Memories by Maroon 5). In the Northern Hemisphere, December signals the cold winter season and can be associated with loneliness or even depression. This line thus conveys how lonely or depressed the singer feels when someone utters the name of the addressee he cannot stop thinking about. This metonymy can also give rise to a metaphor, and vice versa.

5) Apostrophe: “Cheers to the wish you were here, but you're not” (Memories by Maroon 5). In this line, the singer speaks to an abstract idea, namely wish, which is a feeling of wanting, hoping, and desiring something, rather than speaking to a person.

6) Synecdoche: “Now my heart feel like December when somebody say your name” (Memories by Maroon 5). In this line, one’s heart, which is part of a person, is used to refer to the speaker. In other words, “my heart” refers to “I.”

7) Simile: “Prolly why I got him quiet on the set like zip” (Say So by Doja Cat). In this statement, the singer mentions that her crush is quiet like a zip. Here, the act of her loved one’s keeping his mouth shut and being quiet is compared to a zip, using the word “like.”

8) Paradox: “You were my life, but life is far away from fair” (No Time to Die by Billie Eilish). This line represents a self-contradictory statement because the singer initially mentions that her ex-lover was her life, but then she adds that her life is not fair. This may imply that she grumbles about her ex-lover instead of appreciating him as expressed in the beginning.

9) Understatement: “I wanna start this out and say / I gotta get it off my chest / Got no anger, got no malice / Just a little bit of regret” (You Should Be Sad by Halsey). In this song, the singer refers to the toxic relationship with her ex-lover who treated her very badly. Although she has not healed from the breakup, she mentions that she has “just a little bit of regret.” This can be an understatement as she is trying to decrease the intensity of her sadness.

The analysis of imagery in the American pop songs revealed that imagery was used 248 times in total, and 5 types were found. As presented in Table 4, the most frequently found type of imagery was organic (73.79%), followed by kinesthetic (12.90%) and visual (7.26%). The two least frequent types were auditory (5.24%) and tactile (0.81%), while the types that were not found were olfactory and gustatory.

Table 4 Imagery in the American pop song lyrics

Type	Number	Percent
Organic	183	73.79
Kinesthetic	32	12.90
Visual	18	7.26
Auditory	13	5.24
Tactile	2	0.81
Olfactory	0	0
Gustatory	0	0
Total	248	100

Here are some examples of imagery in the American pop song lyrics.

1) Organic imagery: “It’s been a long time since you fell in love” (Say So by Doja Cat). The phrase “fell in love,” conveys one’s internal sensation of being very attracted to someone and beginning to love them.

2) Kinesthetic imagery: “Yeah, snappin’ all up on the ‘Gram, ass going crazy (Woo)” (Roxanne by Arizona Zervas). The word “snappin’” means taking a lot of photographs quickly, and it represents one’s physical bodily movement or action.

3) Visual imagery: “Toast to the ones here today” (Memories by Maroon 5). This line uses a sense of sight to give a picture of “toast,” which involves raising one’s glass together with others and then drinking in honor of someone or something.

4) Auditory imagery: “Skrrt skrrt” (Roxanne by Arizona Zervas). The word “skrrt” is used to create the sound similar to the noise of a car drifting.

5) Tactile imagery: “This dancing was killing me softly” (Lose You to Love Me by Selena Gomez). The word “softly,” which means gently or not forcefully, describes one’s feeling of touch or movement.

3. Similarities and Differences between British and American Pop Song Lyrics

The final research objective was to elicit the similarities and/or differences in terms of type and number of figurative language and imagery between the British and American pop song lyrics.

The analysis of figurative language revealed that the American and the British pop songs were similar and different in terms of type and number of occurrences of figurative language to some extent. One similarity was that the most frequently used type of figurative language in both American and British songs was metaphor, and this type alone accounted for approximately three-quarters of the total figurative language in all lyrics, 76.90% and 74.44% respectively. Additionally, both American and British songs were similar in the least frequently used types of figurative language. In other words, the least frequent types in the American

songs were paradox (0.33%) and understatement (0.33%), each of which was used only once. Likewise, the least frequent type in the British songs was paradox (0.74%), while understatement was not found in the lyrics.

Despite the aforementioned similarities, the American pop songs differed partly from the British pop songs in three specific ways. One difference was that the number of occurrences of figurative language in the American songs was greater than that in the British songs, 303 times and 270 times respectively. Another difference was that 9 types of figurative language were found in the American songs, while 8 types were found in the British songs. The final difference was the three most frequent types of figurative language. In the American songs, these were metaphor (76.90%), personification (8.25%), and overstatement (3.96%). In contrast, the three most frequent types were metaphor (74.44%), overstatement (10.37%), and synecdoche (3.70%) in the British songs.

Unlike the use of figurative language, the analysis of imagery revealed several more similarities than differences between the British and the American pop songs. The first marked similarity was that both British and American songs used five types of imagery: organic, kinesthetic, visual, tactile, and auditory, while the other two types, i.e. olfactory and gustatory, were not found in the lyrics. The second similarity was that the most frequently used type of imagery in the British and American songs was organic, 53.82% and 73.79% respectively. Another similarity lay in the three most frequent types of imagery, i.e. organic (53.82%), kinesthetic (26.75%), and visual (15.92%) in the British songs; organic (73.79%), kinesthetic (12.90%), and visual (7.26%) in the American songs.

However, there was a difference in the number of occurrences of imagery in the British and American pop songs. To be specific, the number of occurrences of imagery in the British songs was greater than that in the American songs, 314 times and 248 times respectively.

Discussion

Figurative Language in the British and American Pop Songs

The present research aims at investigating figurative language and imagery in British and American pop song lyrics and also eliciting similarities and differences in terms of number and type of figurative language and imagery between British and American pop song lyrics.

The analysis of the 20 English pop songs shows that figurative language is commonly used in both British and American song lyrics. However, figurative language is more numerous and more varied in the American song lyrics (i.e. 303 times; 9 types) than in the British song lyrics (i.e. 270 times; 8 types). Presumably, American pop lyricists tend to use figurative language as a strategy for expressing ideas, thoughts, or feelings more frequently than British ones. The pervasiveness of figurative language in these songs corresponds with the findings of

previous studies on figurative language in English pop songs (e.g. Ashtiani & Derakhshesh, 2015; Listiani, 2015; Arifah, 2016). This indicates that figurative language is one of the pivotal features pop lyricists generally use to communicate ideas to the audience.

In both British and American songs, metaphor is the most frequently found type of figurative language, which alone accounts for three-quarters of all occurrences of figurative language. These findings agree with those of prior research (e.g. Suriyawongpaisal, 2013; Ashtiani & Derakhshesh, 2015). The frequent use of metaphors in pop songs is probably due to the fact that metaphor is not merely a matter of language but the way humans think and react to the surroundings. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), humans' ordinary conceptual system is largely metaphorical in nature. This enables speakers to characterize a more abstract conceptual domain (e.g. feeling, thought, and concept) by means of a more concrete conceptual domain (e.g. physical or tangible thing). This is the reason why pop songs, which often involve expressing thoughts, feelings, and ideas, contain a number of metaphors.

On the other hand, paradox and understatement are the least frequent types in the present research. In other words, paradox is found twice in the British songs and once in the American songs, while understatement is not found in the British songs and only once in the American songs. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (i.e. Yulidar, 2014; Hariyanto, 2017). The rare use of paradox probably depends on the lyricists' personal style and purpose. Since paradox involves making self-contradictory statements, it may cause confusion to the audience if it is overused. As understatement is generally intended to be ironic, comedic, modest, or polite, it may not serve the personal purpose of the lyricists.

Imagery in the British and American Pop Songs

Like figurative language, imagery is common in both British and American pop song lyrics. However, imagery is more numerous in the British than in the American pop songs, 314 times and 248 times respectively.

In both British and American songs, five types of imagery are found: organic, kinesthetic, visual, tactile, and auditory. The other two types that are not found are olfactory and gustatory. The findings in this research are quite similar to Yastanti and Safitri's (2016) study that found four types of imagery in Alicia Keys' songs: auditory, kinesthetic, visual, and organic, whereas the other three types, i.e. tactile, olfactory, and gustatory, were not found.

The three most frequently found types of imagery in the present research are organic, kinesthetic, and visual in both British and American songs, although organic is more numerous in the American than in the British songs, 73.79% and 53.82% respectively. Similarly, Siallagan,

Manurung, and Sinaga's (2017) study of imagery in Taylor Swift's "1989" album found six types of imagery: visual, kinesthetic, organic, auditory, tactile, and olfactory. In this study, three most frequently found types were visual (48.39%), kinesthetic (22.58%), and organic (16.13%).

The prevalence of organic imagery is probably due to the fact that the dominant theme in pop songs is love ("Pop music," n.d.c) together with many other sentiments (Napier & Shamir, 2018). Accordingly, organic imagery plays an important role in communicating profound emotions and creating deep impressions in the audience's mind. Undoubtedly, organic imagery is more reasonable to create mood in emotional song lyrics than olfactory and gustatory imagery. The use of imagery may also depend on a genre. That is, different genres involve using different types of imagery. A literary genre of recipes, for instance, may involve using olfactory and gustatory imagery more frequently than other types of imagery.

It is worth noting that one instance of figurative language or imagery can be classified into more than one type. An example is, "Toast to the ones here today" (Memories by Maroon 5). The word "toast" can be classified as visual and kinesthetic imagery as it involves holding up one's glass and then drinking a glass of alcohol as an expression of good wishes or respect. Additionally, figurative language is closely related to imagery. That is, one instance of imagery can, though not necessarily, evoke figurative language. At the same time, figurative language can bring imagery to emphasize its own figurative sense. An example is, "Set fires to my forest" (Lose You to Love Me by Selena Gomez). This phrase can be classified as visual, tactile, and kinesthetic imagery, which also evokes a metaphor to emphasize the damage the singer's ex-lover has caused to her.

The findings of this research, however, have to be seen in light of certain limitations. As this study collected data from 20 English pop songs, this sample size was too small to be representative of all English pop songs; consequently, the statistical findings might not be generalizable. Also, this insufficient sample size could impact the overall results and conclusions drawn from this research.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

According to the analysis of the English pop songs, figurative language and imagery seem common in both British and American pop songs. While figurative language is more numerous and varied in American songs, imagery is more numerous in British songs. The noticeable pervasiveness of certain types of figurative language, e.g. metaphor, and those of imagery, e.g. organic, indicates a crucial role they play in conveying lyrical messages, expressing profound emotions, and creating strong impressions in the audience's mind. Conversely, the rarity of

some types of figurative language, i.e. paradox and understatement, and those of imagery, i.e. olfactory and gustatory, appears of lesser importance in the songs investigated.

As the use of figurative language and imagery may be influenced by various factors, such as music genre, song period, and lyrical language, the findings in this research merely represents the use of figurative language and imagery in present-day British and American pop songs. Further research may investigate whether certain types of figurative language and imagery are specific to certain music genres and/or periods. It may also investigate to what extent the use of these literary devices in particular music genre varies from one language to another. Additionally, it is important to collect data from a sufficient sample size in order to generalize about the subject and conclude valid research results.

Appendix

The data were collected from the Official Singles Chart Top 100 on the Official Charts website (<https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/>) between 21 and 27 February 2020. Information on the songs, i.e. position, title, and singer, is presented as follows.

British Pop Songs

Position	Title	Singer
5	Don't Start Now	Dua Lipa
13	Adore You	Harry Styles
14	Lonely	Joel Corry
20	To Die For	Sam Smith
25	Better Off Without You	Becky Hill
34	Don't Call Me Up	Mabel
36	Perfect	Ed Sheeran
40	Birthday	Anne Marie
46	This Is Real	Jax Jones ft. Ella Henderson
86	Shotgun	George Ezra

American Pop Songs

Position	Title	Singer
1	No Time To Die	Billie Eilish
15	You Should Be Sad	Halsey
21	Say So	Doja Cat
22	Falling	Trevor Daniel
23	What A Man Gotta Do	Jonas Brothers
27	Lose You To Love Me	Selena Gomez
32	Roxanne	Arizona Zervas
37	Know Your Worth	Khalid and Disclosure
42	Memories	Maroon 5
52	React	The Pussycat Dolls

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