

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SONG LYRICS: FEMINISM PERSPECTIVES OF KATY PERRY'S ROAR

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**Abstract:** Song can be used as a medium of expression because it expel feelings and thoughts as well as a medium of entertainment. Song lyrics created by composers often use distinctive language to create aesthetic effects, such as figurative language and imagery. Unfortunately, the use of it often makes listeners not fully aware of the song meaning and not feeling the emotions that are actually intended to be conveyed. This study aims to reveal the meanings and messages implied in the lyrics of Katy Perry's song Roar through an analysis of figurative language and imagery from a feminism perspective. The method used is descriptive qualitative through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and the last is drawing conclusions. The results showed that there were 7 types of figurative language; simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, symbol, paradox, and hyperbole. In addition, Katy also uses 4 types of imagery; visual imagery, auditory imagery, organic imagery, and kinesthetic imagery. All the figurative language and imagery represent Katy's feelings and struggles against the downturn during her relationship with her ex-lover and managed to get up hence she can love herself. This is the message that Katy wants to convey to all women in the world that they are precious beings who have choices in their lives and are able to stand alone without any help from men.

**Keywords:** feminism; figurative language; imagery; Roar song; women empowerment.

### INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a crucial issue lately. Most mental health problems emerge before the age of 18 with the period from 18 to 25 being a particularly susceptible developmental time in a person's life (McLafferty *et al.*, 2017). For instance, about 19.86% of the adults in America experienced a mental illness (Reinert *et al.*, 2021). Many people are starting to realize that maintaining mental health is no less important than maintaining physical health. World Health Organization (2022) noted that mental illness in the community increased by 13% in the last 10

years. Even mental health conditions currently cause 1 in 5 years to live with a disability and 20% of adolescents and children in the world have problems related to this illness.

Mental health is defined as a positive concept related to the social and emotional well-being of people and communities. This concept is related to the enjoyment of life, the ability to cope with stress and sadness, the fulfillment of goals and potential, and a sense of connection with others (United Nation, 2022). Ridlo (2020) added that mental health is an important aspect in realizing comprehensive health. Even, mental health can be

caused by noises (Guha, 2022). Therefore, a balance between being mentally and physically healthy is the key to a happy life.

Many people have begun to realize the importance of mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the world around the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China. The spread of this virus has become a frightening and horrendous issue throughout the world (Wandra *et al.*, 2021). The existence of large-scale social restrictions or commonly known as lockdowns dramatically limits the movement of people to be able to carry out their usual activities. People are forced to work and study from home. This ultimately leads to a lot of depression tendencies for some people.

This awareness of mental health ultimately causes people to look for solutions in order to treat their own mental health. Healing is also a current trend that is often done by the community, especially among millennial. Activities such as vacations, eating well, cooking, sewing, listening to music, and other relaxing activities are believed to relieve the stress they experience. Participation in sport directly improves mental health, reducing the impact of depression and anxiety through physical fitness, social engagement and skill building (Reid *et al.*, 2022). Park (2021) explains that healing becomes part of the final process when a person is completely healed by the inclusive aspects of mental, emotional, physical, biological, and social factors.

In addition to healing, providing motivation is no less important for mental health. This acts as a reinforcement for a person to be able to stay strong and face life's problems. Motivation can also be obtained from various media, one of which is through songs and music. Music has played a role as the media in modern society (Purwandari *et al.*, 2022).

As mentioned earlier, listening to songs is a fairly popular method for releasing stress. Ideology and thoughts are also reflected in songs (Afipah & Andriani, 2022). The lyrics of a song can have multiple textual meanings, yet many people have varied views of how to understand the lyrics (Rokhmah & Santoso, 2022). In addition, song lyrics usually contain of figurative language (Swarniti, 2022).

Even Bist and Smith in Fadhliya (2021) found the fact that music can help the healing process. Recently, many musicians have created songs that can be used as self-healing media for their listeners. For example, Yura Yunita with the song *Tenang* which tells the story of self-reflection, the song *Si Weak* which is sung by RAN feat Indies,

or Isyana Sarasvati who is successful with the song *For the Wounded Heart* which is dedicated as an encouragement to people who are experiencing failure, and many others (Azzahra, 2022). This relaxing and encouraging effect plays a major role in the mental healing process.

It is undeniable, the moral message to be conveyed by the songwriter can bring different effects. Katy Perry, for example, can be said as one of the successful songwriters and singers who inspires women to be strong in facing any challenges in life. *Roar's* song which is the first single from her third album, *Prism* in 2013, has successfully inspired women to survive in difficult relationships with men and love themselves (Martin, 2022).

Basically, the song is indeed used as a medium of expression because it can express feelings and thoughts as well as a medium of entertainment. In addition, songs also have a function as an educational medium that aims to educate and increase knowledge and become a motivational medium to provide encouragement or enthusiasm. Furthermore, songs can even be a medium of social criticism that aims to convey perceptions or opinions related to people's lives. Through song lyrics, listeners are invited to interpret through the brain which stores experience and knowledge and process them as a basic basis for digesting lyrics (Larasati, 2019).

The lyrics of the song itself consist of a series of words that are well composed in attractive language by the songwriter and performed in a beautiful voice by the singer. Song lyrics which are created by songwriters use distinctive language to create an aesthetic effect. Each song lyric has its own uniqueness to combine with the musical tone. Typical language commonly used by songwriters are figurative and imagery language.

Figurative language is the use of descriptive words, phrases, and sentences to convey a message that means something without saying it directly. The style of language is intended to make the reader/listener get a certain effect from its use (Kania, 2021). These effects are used to construct images to deepen audience understanding and empower words using a variety of emotional, visual and sensory connections. Figurative language is usually used for several purposes. For instance, comparing two different ideas, to deepen understanding, explain ideas that may be difficult to understand, show deeper emotions and connections, influence audiences, make connections, facilitate visualization of

explanations, and arouse emotions.

In addition to figurative language, there is also imagery language. Dharlie & Samanik (2021) argue that images are initiated by language in literature. Through the imagery language an author then remembrances instances of physical and even sensual insight. It could be contemplate as a bridge which relates to the external world.

Unfortunately, even though it creates an aesthetic effect for a song's lyrics, the use of figurative and imagery language often makes the listener not fully understand the meaning of the song and feel less emotion that is actually intended to be conveyed. This is in line with the results of the questionnaire distributed to 14 students from the 6th semester of English Literature study program of Universitas Bina Darma regarding students' understanding of the meanings and messages implied in song lyrics. The results of the questionnaire showed that only 50% of students were able to understand the meaning of the song lyrics completely and deeply. While the rest do not understand and cannot explain in detail the meaning of the song lyrics. Therefore, there needs to be a comprehensive analysis so that listeners understand correctly the hidden meaning in a song.

The gap between song lyrics composers and song listeners caused by the use of poetic language also makes phenomenal songs like "Roar" not conveyed properly. Therefore, through an analysis of the use of figurative language and imagery in the lyrics of the song Roar sung by Katy Perry, this study aims to dig deeper into the meanings contained in the lyrics and the messages implied by the writer to the listeners. In addition, researchers also explore the extent to which this song provides a motivational or encouraging effect as a means of healing for the listeners.

Several previous studies paid attention to the use of figurative language in song lyrics. An example is a study entitled A Stylistic Study of Figurative Language in Katy Perry's Song Lyric from Witness Album conducted by Syahrina (2019). The results of this study indicate that there are several types of figure of speech used in the lyrics of the song Roar by Katy Perry where metaphor dominates. However, there was no imaging analysis that became one of the objects in this study. Besides, Nursolihat and Kareviati (2020) in a study entitled An Analysis of Figurative Language Used in The Lyric of "A Whole New World" by Zayn Malik and Zhavia Ward showed that the song A Whole New World uses figurative language such as alliteration,

simile, personification, metaphor, and hyperbole. In addition, the contextual meaning of each figurative language used in the song's lyrics is also explained. Furthermore, Hariyanto (2017) in The Analysis of Figurative Language Used in the Lyric of Firework by Katy Perry (A Study of Semantic) shows that in the song Firework there are several figurative languages, namely simile, metaphor, hyperbole, affiliation, symbol, paradox, and personification. The contextual meaning is clearly conveyed in the lyrics of the song. When viewed from the research above, it is clear that the topic of language style and imagery in songs is very interesting to study.

## METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. Aprilia (2021) stated that the data in descriptive research is analyzed through qualitative methods because it is not a numerical data. This method was chosen because it can clearly describe the use of figurative and imagery language in the lyrics of the song Roar by Katy Perry.

Furthermore, Manjunatha (2019) argues that descriptive research primarily focus on the characteristics of the phenomenon, included population, which becomes its study. It tries to reveal more on the "what", not the "why", of the research subject. Descriptive research itself is a study that systematically describes a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, or provides information about the living conditions of a community, or describes attitudes towards issues.

Meanwhile, Mohajan (2018) categorizes qualitative research as a social science research which assembles and considers the non-numerical data to interpret the data meaning. It is projected to comprehend the social life through the research of targeted places or populations. This type of research leads to social aspects of the world and tries to find answers about them.

In this study, there are two data collection techniques, namely observation and documentation. Observations are made by paying close attention to the use of language in the lyrics of the song Roar by Katy Perry so that it can be traced which words contain figurative language and imagery language. In addition, the researchers also make observations by watching the video clip of the song on the Youtube channel in order to visually emphasize the intended meaning.

In carrying out the documentation, the researchers note every figurative language and

imagery found in the lyrics of the song Roar by Katy Perry. Any data found was separated according to their respective categories in order to facilitate the data analysis process. According to Sugiyono (2011), although not using the interview method, document studies are still a complement to the use of observation and interview methods in qualitative research.

As for analyzing the data, this study uses the Miles and Huberman method with three plots that occur simultaneously. The flow is data reduction, data presentation, and the last is drawing conclusions. The theory used is the analysis of figurative language and imagery from Perrine and Thomas. In addition, the author also uses a feminist perspective to explore the issue of women's empowerment in the song.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As previously explained, this study uses Perrine and Thomas' theory to analyze the use of figurative and imagery language in Katy Perry's Roar song lyrics. Furthermore, based on the results of the second analysis, the researchers dissect the aspect of feminism to get a picture of the meaning of this song as a whole as well as to see what effect or message Katy Perry wants to convey in the song.

According to Perrine in Marhamah (2018) figurative language is another way to add more dimensions to a language. Perrine himself divides the figurative language into twelve (12) types; simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, litotes (understatement), and irony. Based on the analysis, only 7 types of figurative language were found.

Table 1. *The use of figurative language*

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Song Lyrics
1	Simile	<i>Like</i> thunder, gonna shake the ground Now I'm floatin' <i>like</i> a butterfly Stinging <i>like</i> a bee
2	Metaphor	Already brushing off <i>the dust</i> <i>the eye of the tiger</i> You're gonna hear me <i>roar</i>
3	Personification	Like <i>thunder</i> , gonna shake the ground
4	Synecdoche	You hear <i>my voice</i> , you hear that sound

5	Symbol	I used to <i>bite my tongue</i> and hold my breath Scared to rock <i>the boat</i> and make a mess Stinging like <i>a bee</i> , I earned <i>my stripes</i> Louder, louder than <i>a lion</i>
6	paradox	You held me <i>down</i> , but I got <i>up</i> (hey) I went from <i>zero</i> , to my own <i>hero</i>
7	Hyperbole	<i>Dancing through the fire</i> 'Cause I am a champion, and you're gonna <i>hear me roar</i>

Katy Perry uses simile for a number of times to directly associate her power as a woman. The words *thunder*, *butterfly*, and *bee* are paired with the word like in order to show her mental state at that time. The word *thunder* or *rumble* is used to show that she is not 'small' as what her partner has assumed so far. Precisely, Katy Perry ensured that she had considerable strength and it could be frightening when it appeared. Meanwhile, the word *butterfly* is associated as a form of a woman who is beautiful and elegant. This indicates that Katy wants to portray herself as not a rude and angry woman, but an elegant and calm figure in her beauty. However, *bee's* next words again indicate that whenever she is being bullied and threatened, then Katy would not stay silent or retaliate.

Metaphors are also used in Roar's songs. The word *the dust* describes trivial or unimportant matters that have been taken care of by Katy. This refers to the man, Katy's partner previously made she feel small and insignificant. Furthermore, the word *the eye of the tiger* describes her toughness and strength as an independent woman. Katy positioned herself as a woman who has no fear of anything, including her previous partner. *Roar's* words then emphasized her strength and mental ferocity. *Roar* which is the roar of a tiger is often used by this animal when it feels threatened and shows that he is the ruler of an area.

The personification of the word *thunder* that seems to shake the land is related to the previous lyrics. Katy intends to give a warning to her ex-boyfriend that her 'voice' that was muffled and ignored is now echoing so loudly. There was no longer any fear in him; there was only a so great power and even terrifying.

The word *voice* in the lyrics of this song is a representative of Katy herself. The voice intended is a statement of Katy's feelings about her previous relationship where she did not get the freedom of

expression. However, when she realized that the man did not make her valuable, she then dared to voice what was on her mind.

Furthermore, symbols are the most used figurative language by Katy in Roar's lyrics. The term *bite my tongue* is commonly used when people want to show silence. This indicates that Katy used to just being quiet when she was under pressure from her partner. While the boat symbol represents Katy's relationship with her former lover. As for the bee, it is known as an animal that is diligent and likes to colonize. They will get angry and then sting people or anything that tries to disturb their nest. In fact, the lines or stripes on the bee's body anatomically function as self-defense. The light color sends a message signal to the predator to stay away because basically the light color indicates the body is poisonous and not good to eat (Ashari, 2019). While other animals are used as symbols, the lion is once again used as a sign of strength and power inside Katy.

Paradox which is a style of language or figurative language that seems to contradict general assumptions is also used in the lyrics of this song. Katy shows her ups and downs during a relationship with her ex-lover. When she was dropped but she was able to get back on her own feet. Therefore, when she is down and feels like a loser (zero) she can still try to be a hero with her own strength.

The phrase *dancing through the fire* also shows how Katy struggles to get through the worst part of her life. She managed to get through all the problems that made her down and was able to get up with a smile and pride on her face. In the end, Katy wants to emphasize her strength with the phrase *hear me roar* where the sound of a tiger roaring shows that Katy is no longer afraid of her past. Both of these phrases are hyperbolic with exaggerations of reality. The goal is to give a magical effect and show a sense of super power in Roar's lyrics.

Furthermore, Perrine & Thomas in Wijaya and Afriana (2022) classify the types of imagery into 7 types, namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, tactile imagery, olfactory imagery, gustatory imagery, feeling imagery, and motion imagery. Of the seven types of imagery above, Katy Perry only uses 4 types of imagery in her song.

Table 2. *The use of imagery language*

No.	Type of Imagery	Song Lyrics
1	Visual imagery	<i>I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter</i>

		<i>Stinging like a bee, I earned my stripes</i>
2	Auditory imagery	<i>You hear my voice, you hear that sound Like thunder, gonna shake the ground 'Cause I am a champion, and you're gonna hear me roar Louder, louder than a lion Roar, roar, roar, roar, roar</i>
3	Feeling imagery	<i>Scared to rock the boat and make a mess So I sat quietly, agreed politely I guess that I forgot I had a choice I let you push me past the breaking point I stood for nothing, so I fell for everything 'Cause I am a champion, and you're gonna hear me roar I went from zero, to my own hero</i>
4	Motion imagery	<i>I used to bite my tongue and hold my breath Scared to rock the boat and make a mess So I sat quietly, agreed politely You held me down, but I got up (hey) Already brushing off the dust Dancing through the fire Stinging like a bee, I earned my stripes</i>

The imagery of feeling and motion dominates the lyrics of Katy Perry's song Roar. Five lines that use the word *scared*, *bite my tongue* and *hold my breath*, *sat quietly*, *agreed politely*, *forgot I had a choice*, *let you push me past the breaking point*, and *stood for nothing fell for everything*, and so on, definitely lead the listeners of this song to feel how afraid and helpless Katy is during a relationship with her ex-lover. She does not dare to speak up and is too afraid to change the habits of their relationship. She forgets that life in essence has a choice, but because of the fear so she feels that she has no choice. However, the listeners were then led to share Katy's feelings when in the end she was no longer burdened, and even became a winner in this inner turmoil, from being a nobody to being a hero in her own life.

The next image that is widely used is the image of hearing or sound. The words *voice*, *thunder*, and *roar* that are used repeatedly invite listeners to seem to hear the powerful voices that arise in Katy. This voice signifies Katy's self-awareness

that her life is precious and cannot be ruined by anyone.

Furthermore, only two visual images were found, namely *the eye of the tiger* and *stripes*. The use of these two animals did not escape Katy's intention, who wanted to convey that she was no longer afraid of anything. In fact, she is stronger than what others imagine.

Feminism is very strong in the lyrics of the song Roar sung by Katy Perry. Katy points out that women are used to being stereotyped as the weak side and can only accept the treatment of men who are superior. The stereotype was then developed and believed communally by most people. Steele & Aronson in Saputri & Neisya (2021) explain that stereotypes like this are common in gender relations and have an impact on human life from the past until now. Women will tend to be taught domestic things, such as being a mother, raising children, serving their husbands, and so on.

Katy initially felt the same way. Her voice seemed muted. She is used to just accepting all the treatment of her ex-lover. Even the relationship she was in felt like it was working properly so she was too afraid to change "the boat" or the relationship. She also allows her ex-partner to push her to the point of collapse without being able to fight back.

However, Katy managed to build her confidence and fight the oppression of it all. She was able to rise, showing her immense and unstoppable strength. Like the thunder that came from the sky and the roar of a tiger splitting the silence of the forest.

This power then becomes the meaning and implied message that Katy wants to convey in the song Roar. She believes that women usually have a fear inside of their selves so they do not dare to fight the stereotypes that are attached to them. Katy points out those women essentially have the option to rise from adversity and stand on their own two feet without help from anyone.

## CONCLUSION

Of the 7 figurative languages, included Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Synecdoche, Symbol, Paradox and Hyperbole and 4 imageries, namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, feeling imagery, and motion imagery revealed that Katy tries to show her feeling and emotion toward her ex-boyfriend. It showed the story of Katy herself who at first felt intimidated and always kept silent in her relationship with her former partner. The stereotype attached to women who must always

obey and serve men has influenced Katy's thoughts in acting. However, when Katy has the courage to choose to rise from adversity, she manages to show that women are not that weak. They have a hidden power that when shown is capable of overcoming any obstacle and against any conditions. This is the message that Katy wants to convey through her song to all women in the world. Basically, women are valuable beings who have choices in their lives and are able to stand alone without any help from men.

The research on the song lyrics is still widely open for further research. Through the lyrics, the researchers may find many psychological, social, and cultural that influenced the song writer reflected in it. There is also many Katy's song that contains the feminism issues. It can be elaborated and analyzed into many perspectives, not only the language.

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