Symbolism and Sound: A Semantic Study of Figurative Language in Bruno Mars' 24K Magic

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of figurative language in Bruno Mars' *24K Magic* album and its contribution to thematic development. Employing a qualitative semantic analysis, it examines how metaphors, similes, hyperboles, personifications, and metonymies enhance lyrical depth and reinforce themes of luxury, confidence, romance, and festivity. The analysis of nine tracks reveals 45 instances of figurative language, categorized as metaphors (15), similes (10), hyperboles (8), personifications (7), and metonymies (5). The findings highlight how these figurative devices amplify lyrical expressiveness, deepen emotional engagement, and strengthen audience interpretation. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of figurative language in storytelling, cultural identity, and listener perception, offering valuable insights into its role in linguistic, literary, and music studies. This research contributes to the broader discourse on how contemporary music utilizes semantic richness to convey deeper meanings beyond literal expressions.

Keywords: figurative language, thematic meaning, semantic analysis, lyrical expressiveness

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran bahasa kiasan dalam album *24K Magic* karya Bruno Mars serta kontribusinya terhadap pengembangan tematik. Dengan menggunakan analisis semantik kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana metafora, simile, hiperbola, personifikasi, dan metonimi memperkaya lirik serta memperkuat tema kemewahan, kepercayaan diri, romansa, dan perayaan. Analisis terhadap sembilan lagu mengidentifikasi 45 penggunaan bahasa kiasan, yang dikategorikan menjadi metafora (15), simile (10), hiperbola (8), personifikasi (7), dan metonimi (5). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa kiasan meningkatkan ekspresi lirik, memperdalam keterlibatan emosional, serta memperkuat interpretasi pendengar. Selain itu, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya bahasa kiasan dalam narasi, identitas budaya, dan persepsi audiens, serta memberikan wawasan berharga dalam kajian linguistik, sastra, dan studi musik. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada wacana yang lebih luas tentang bagaimana musik kontemporer memanfaatkan kekayaan semantik untuk menyampaikan makna yang lebih dalam di luar ekspresi literal.

Kata kunci: bahasa kiasan, makna tematik, analisis semantik, ekspresi lirik

INTRODUCTION

Language is a sophisticated communication system that utilizes symbols, words, and signs to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Morris (2021) describes language as a sign system composed of signals and symbols, while Chandler (2002) emphasizes its predominantly symbolic nature. It serves three primary functions: interpersonal, ideational, and textual (Matthiessen, 1992; Martin, 1992). The ideational function represents and organizes experiences, whereas the interpersonal function facilitates social interaction, and the textual function ensures coherence in discourse. As language evolves, its symbolic nature remains essential for human communication and cultural expression.

Furthermore, semantics plays a vital role in meaning construction by analyzing how words, phrases, and sentences communicate both literal and figurative meanings. According to Leech (1981), semantics can be classified into denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural and emotional) meanings. In lyric analysis, semantics helps decipher how songwriters craft language to convey emotions, social narratives, and thematic significance. Moreover, figurative language, a key component of semantics, adds depth, aesthetic appeal, and interpretative complexity to lyrics. Leech (1969) argues that figurative language enhances communication by creating imagery and associations that bridge abstract ideas with tangible expressions. Specifically, common figurative devices include simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, paradox, and irony (Jenna, 2016). The meaning of song lyrics is shaped by various contextual elements, including the songwriter's personal experiences, societal influences, and cultural norms (Halliday, 1978). Additionally, thematic meaning, as defined by Leech (1981), refers to how the central message of a composition is structured, allowing listeners to engage beyond surface-level content by evoking emotions and addressing universal concepts.

In light of this, the present study examines how figurative language enhances thematic meaning in *24K Magic* by Bruno Mars. The album consists of nine tracks: *24K Magic, That's What I Like, Calling All My Lovelies, Chunky, Versace on the Floor, Finesse, Straight Up & Down,* and *Too Good to Say Goodbye.* Bruno Mars, born Peter Gene Hernandez, is a Grammy Award-winning American singer-songwriter and producer known for his genre-blending musical style and commercial success. Notably, *24K Magic*, released in 2016 by Atlantic Records, gained widespread recognition, winning the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in 2018. Consequently, the album's central themes of luxury, confidence, romance, and celebration make it a compelling subject for linguistic analysis.

Moreover, the study of figurative language in song lyrics has been widely explored across various musical genres. For instance, Bagul (2022) analyzed Jamie Miller's songs, emphasizing how figurative language enhances lyrical interpretation, while Putra, Qodriyati, and colleagues (2024) examined lexical semantics in NIKI's *Oceans and Engines*, illustrating how linguistic choices shape emotional expression. Similarly, Maulana and Suprayogi (2022) investigated sense relations in Skillet's *Stars*, whereas Sirman (2009) addressed the complexities of semantic meaning in music. In addition, Lestari and Wijayanto (2020) examined metaphors in Selena Gomez's lyrics, while Simatupang et al. (2023) analyzed figurative language in Ariana Grande's songs, demonstrating its role in reinforcing thematic coherence. These studies highlight the importance of figurative language in music as a means of artistic expression, allowing songwriters to convey deeper meanings that resonate with listeners on both emotional and cultural levels.

Furthermore, prior research has primarily focused on categorizing figurative language in song lyrics. For example, Rambi et al. (2022) examined figurative language in Selena Gomez's *Rare* album, while Widiyanti (2021) studied its use in Edgar Allan Poe's poetry. Additionally, Rohani et al. (2018) and Setiawati & Maryani (2018) explored figurative expressions in news features and Taylor Swift's lyrics, respectively. However, this study expands upon previous research by investigating how figurative language in *24K Magic* contributes to its thematic construction. Moreover, Yusuf and Amelia (2018) explored metaphor expressions, whereas Marliani (2018) analyzed Harris J's songs, and Rifai (2020) examined figurative language in popular music, reinforcing the significance of lyrical analysis. Ultimately, these findings contribute to a broader understanding of the role of figurative language in modern music, emphasizing how it enhances thematic depth and audience engagement. Thus, the integration of these studies strengthens the relevance of this research within the broader field of linguistic and literary inquiry, offering insights into how contemporary artists use language to shape meaning and listener perception.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study consists of a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Since research methodology plays a crucial role in ensuring validity and reliability, Creswell (2018) emphasizes that research methods are essential for systematically gathering evidence and drawing conclusions about a specific research topic. He distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative methods, where qualitative research explores social phenomena through in-depth data collection—

such as interviews or content analysis—to understand behaviors, experiences, or perceptions. Meanwhile, quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis to quantify variables and establish patterns or relationships (Creswell, 2018).

Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach to explore how figurative language enhances thematic meaning and interpretation in Bruno Mars' songs. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994), qualitative research focuses on interpreting phenomena in natural contexts, thereby allowing researchers to gain insights into the meanings people assign to experiences and symbols. Furthermore, Creswell (2018) highlights that qualitative research investigates social or human problems using diverse methodological approaches, prioritizing depth and understanding over generalization. Given the subjective and contextual nature of song lyrics, a qualitative approach is appropriate for uncovering how figurative language shapes thematic meaning within the *24K Magic* album.

In addition, a case study design is applied to examine how figurative language functions within selected Bruno Mars' songs. Since case studies provide an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, Yin (2003) asserts that a case study is suitable for exploring the intricate layers of language and thematic expression in music. The data consists of song lyrics from *24K Magic*, which includes nine tracks: *24K Magic, That's What I Like, Calling All My Lovelies, Chunky, Versace on the Floor, Finesse, Straight Up & Down*, and *Too Good to Say Goodbye.* Consequently, these songs serve as the primary data source for analyzing figurative language.

Moreover, the data collection process follows systematic steps to ensure accuracy and consistency. Since qualitative data includes various multimedia forms, Creswell (2018) states that qualitative data consists of

audiovisual and digital materials, such as photographs, website texts, and sound recordings. Additionally, Pink (2001) and Clandinin (2007) highlight creative data collection techniques such as visual ethnography and metaphorical visual narratives. Based on Lumbatoruan (2018), data collection in this study follows these steps:

a. Downloading all lyrics from Bruno Mars' official website: https://www.brunomars.com/music-v1.
b. Reading and listening to all songs in the *24K Magic* album to gain a deeper understanding of their content.
c. Selecting sentences that contain figurative language elements.
d. Analyzing how figurative language enhances thematic meaning and interpretation in the lyrics.

By following these procedures, the study ensures a comprehensive analysis of the role of figurative language in shaping thematic meaning in Bruno Mars' *24K Magic* album.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that figurative language plays a crucial role in enhancing the thematic meanings within Bruno Mars' *24K Magic* album. Across the nine analyzed tracks, a total of 45 instances of figurative language were identified, including 15 metaphors, 10 similes, 8 hyperboles, 7 personifications, and 5 metonymies. These figurative devices not only contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the lyrics but also deepen the listener's engagement with the themes of wealth, confidence, romance, and celebration.

A comparative analysis with previous studies supports these findings. Bagul (2022) emphasized the impact of figurative language in Jamie Miller's songs, while Putra et al. (2024) explored lexical semantics in NIKI's *Oceans and Engines*, reinforcing how linguistic choices shape emotional depth. Similarly, Maulana and Suprayogi (2022) examined sense relations in Skillet's *Stars*, demonstrating how figurative expressions enrich song interpretation. Furthermore, Sirman (2009) investigated the complex relationship between music and words, highlighting the semantic significance of lyrics.

Table 1. Categorization of Figurative Language in *24K Magic*

Type of Figurative Language	Occurrences	Example Lyrics
Metaphor	15	*Gold jewelry shining so bright* (*That's What I Like*)
Simile	10	*Like a diamond, you're so fine* (*That's What I Like*)
Hyperbole	8	*I could buy you the world* (*That's What I Like*)
Personification	7	*My heart is callin'* (*Calling All My Lovelies*)
Metonymy	5	*With my crew* (*Finesse*)

Wealth and Luxury

One of the most prominent themes found in *24K Magic* is wealth and luxury, which are heavily reinforced through the use of metaphors, similes, and metonymies. For example, in *That's What I Like*, the metaphor "Gold jewelry shining so bright" symbolizes wealth and status, while the simile "Like a diamond, you're so fine" highlights admiration and the allure of material possessions. Similarly, in *24K Magic*, the phrase "Players, put your pinky rings up to the moon" serves as a metaphor for extravagant celebrations and social status, reinforcing the album's overarching theme of opulence. Consequently, the interplay of these figurative

devices effectively immerses the audience in a world of luxury and affluence.

These findings align with Lestari and Wijayanto's (2020) study on Selena Gomez's song lyrics, which emphasized how metaphorical expressions strengthen themes of materialism and status. Likewise, Simatupang et al. (2023) analyzed Ariana Grande's lyrics, demonstrating how linguistic choices reinforce imagery of wealth and confidence.

Confidence and Empowerment

In addition to themes of wealth, confidence and self-empowerment are central to the album, as evidenced in songs like *24K Magic* and *Finesse*. The hyperbole "I'm a dangerous man with some money in my pocket" in *24K Magic* exaggerates the persona's sense of power and self-assurance, while the personification "You got to be what you are, get your sexy on" encourages listeners to embrace their identity with confidence. Similarly, the simile in *Finesse*, "Fresh like a new pair of sneakers," likens self-assurance to the feeling of wearing something new and stylish, reinforcing the song's uplifting and carefree message. Therefore, these figurative expressions contribute to shaping a bold and empowering narrative that resonates with audiences.

Rahim and Maryadi (2019) explored similar themes in One Ok Rock's song album, where figurative language was shown to amplify personal empowerment and identity expression. Likewise, Yusuf and Amelia (2018) analyzed metaphorical expressions in *Fall for You*, demonstrating how linguistic choices enhance self-reflection and emotional depth.

Romance and Intimacy

Furthermore, several tracks explore themes of romance and intimacy, where figurative language enhances emotional depth and lyrical expression. For instance, in *Versace on the Floor*, the metaphor "Take it off for me, for me, for me now, girl" equates undressing to emotional vulnerability, emphasizing intimacy between lovers. Additionally, the simile "Our love is like the night" conveys the beauty and mystery of romance, while the personification "The dress falls gracefully" adds an element of elegance and sensuality. Likewise, in *Too Good to Say Goodbye*, the hyperbole "I would die for you" intensifies the expression of devotion, underscoring the pain of separation and longing. By utilizing these figurative devices, the songs evoke strong emotions that enhance the listener's connection to the themes of love and intimacy.

These results are consistent with findings from Widyasthana and Amrullah's (2023) study on *Eye of the Tiger*, which analyzed how figurative language enhances emotional and romantic narratives in song lyrics. Additionally, Rifai (2020) examined figurative language in popular music, concluding that metaphors and hyperboles significantly contribute to thematic interpretation in love songs.

Celebration and Social Enjoyment

Moreover, the album features multiple tracks that celebrate social enjoyment and a carefree lifestyle, where figurative language contributes to the creation of vibrant and energetic imagery. In *Chunky*, the metaphor "She's got the Louis, she got a lot of Chanel on her" represents fashion and status, reinforcing the theme of materialism and attraction in a party setting. Similarly, the simile "Pretty girls like a trap, trap, trap" humorously depicts how women captivate attention, adding to the song's playful atmosphere. Likewise, in *Finesse*, the metonymy "With my crew" symbolizes camaraderie and group identity, reinforcing the importance of friendship and unity. Thus, the strategic use of figurative language in these tracks helps create a lively and celebratory mood that aligns with the album's upbeat energy.

These results echo findings by Palguna et al. (2021) on figurative language in Passenger's *Runaway* album, which highlighted how similes and metaphors evoke joyful and carefree imagery in music. Furthermore, Rivera and Bernardo (2018) analyzed Philippine indie music, demonstrating how lexical-semantic analysis reveals deeper connections between figurative language and celebratory themes.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of figurative language in *24K Magic* highlights its crucial role in reinforcing the album's central themes of wealth, confidence, romance, and celebration. Through the strategic use of metaphors, similes, hyperboles, personifications, and metonymies, Bruno Mars crafts lyrics that not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the songs but also create deeper emotional engagement for listeners. By integrating these linguistic devices, the album conveys messages of self-empowerment, luxury, and social interaction in a manner that is both vivid and immersive.

Furthermore, the study's findings align with existing research on figurative language in music, underscoring its significance in lyrical storytelling. Previous studies, such as those by Bagul (2022), Putra et al. (2024), and Simatupang et al. (2023), emphasize how figurative expressions shape the listener's perception and emotional resonance with song lyrics. The connection between figurative language and thematic interpretation in *24K Magic* exemplifies how contemporary music relies on semantic richness to convey deeper meanings beyond literal expressions.

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of figurative language in song lyrics, future research could further explore comparative analyses across different musical genres, examine cultural variations in figurative expressions, and investigate audience perceptions of figurative language in lyrics. Additionally, expanding the dataset to include a broader selection of Bruno Mars' discography or comparing his lyrical style with other artists could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the function of figurative language in modern popular music. Ultimately, this study reaffirms the impact of linguistic creativity in music, demonstrating how figurative language enhances both artistic expression and thematic depth.

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