# Analyzing Figurative Language in Niki's Song Lyrics to Teach Listening Comprehension for EFL Learners

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**Abstract.** Popular songs contain cultural background that can be used as learning materials to help students comprehend listening skills. Popular songs from an Indonesian singer, Nicole Zefanya, can be used. This study was intended to analyze figurative language found in Nicole Zefanya's song lyrics to teach listening comprehension through qualitative research. The population used in this study is Nicole Zefanya's newest album titled "Nicole". Through simple random sampling, the researchers selected three of Niki's songs entitled "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", and "Oceans and Engines". The result of this study found that between the three songs, metaphor was commonly used. This research also divided learning activities into three listening activities, which are pre-listening, whilst listening, and post listening.

**Keywords:** Figurative Language, Teaching Listening, Song Lyrics.

## 1. Introduction

Listening is one of the skills that all language learners need to acquire, especially for English foreign learners. Students who did not get enough exposure to English language may encounter problems. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, students faced several problems related to listening comprehension. Lestari et al [1] mentions several problems that emerge when it comes to listening problems are; lack of equipment to assist listening activities, a shortage of listening tools, little time in classroom for listening activities, boredom, students' low abilities in prediction techniques, inadequate vocabulary, some students are easily distracted in classroom, and the provided materials are not suitable for students' level. It is unfortunate that Indonesian students encountered those problems because listening allows English foreign students to comprehend other skills like reading, writing, and speaking. In consequence, English foreign students in Indonesia tend to have low ability in listening comprehension.

Students' low ability in listening comes from unfamiliar vocabulary and students' level of focus. Unfamiliar vocabulary is the common problem encountered in learning any language skill. Students who are limited in their vocabulary may find many unfamiliarity within the listening session in the classroom. They may start using their prior knowledge and predicting skills in order to try understanding those unfamiliar words. However, students may trap themselves to mistranslate the unfamiliar vocabulary. If the meaning of vocabulary wasn't in line with the

context, students may face confusion which leads to mistranslation [2]. In other words, students' prediction strategy needs to be lifted up in order to avoid mistranslation.

Prediction strategy deals with students' ability to guess what comes next based on the context that is being discussed. Prediction helps students to comprehend language better. In line with Lestari et al [1] that mentioned boredom becoming one of the problems in listening comprehension, prediction can make classroom environments more interactive. Prediction strategy keeps students' minds active and engaged, which significantly lowers the possibility that they will fall asleep during listening class [3]. Students tend to get more focus because they use their background knowledge and imagination. Prediction may also stimulate discussion in the classroom which will give students the chance to speak in English. However, the more they focus, the more boredom comes. Therefore, teachers need to find ways to increase students' focus level, but at the same time making the classroom environment more enjoyable.

To overcome problems that have been mentioned above, teachers can use songs and lyrics as listening materials. Song is one of authentic materials that have been researched to improve listening skills. Authentic materials refer to things that are not made for learning, such as newspapers, movies, songs, etc. An experimental study was done to see an increase of students' listening skills through songs and with the help of authentic video. The result was students who received lessons utilizing song and authentic video performed better compared to those who received conventional methods [4]. The increase in students' listening skills was due to their interest in the chosen song that makes them subconsciously learn new vocabulary or meaning. In other words, utilizing songs in the classroom brings many benefits to students. Afriyuninda & Oktaviani [5] mentioned that songs can stimulate extensive listening and intensive listening, introduce a topic and language point, stimulate creativity and imagination, and make the learning environment more relaxed. Students tend to be more relaxed in the learning process, because they feel like they did not learn by force and learning feels more natural when song is used.

Other than that, lyrics in songs contain figurative language which allows students to gain more focus while making the learning environment more relaxed. Figurative language is one of the language expressions which does not have a literal meaning of what is going to be said. Figurative language can help students be more aware of the meaning in vocabulary based on the context and help escalate students' focus, so it can help students avoid mistranslating. The first step to translate a language is to comprehend the whole context of the original language. Then the target language needs to be similar to the source language [6]. Thus, figurative language can help students to sharpen their listening comprehension skills. Besides, many studies have found that songs tend to create less anxiety in the classroom environment. Some researchers state that the human brain processes songs in a different way than usual spoken language which makes language acquisition easier [7]. Utilizing songs as listening materials will likely make the classroom environment more relaxed and enjoyable for students. However, teachers need to choose the right song to use in the classroom.

Teachers can use popular songs due to their close relation to students' social environment. Learning materials must include familiarities on students' everyday life and culture [8]. Noticing the cultural background of students may help students to comprehend learning better. One of the songs that can be chosen from is Nicole Zefanya. Nicole Zefanya, known as Niki, is an Indonesian singer and songwriter that has been internationally recognized for her songs and meaningful lyrics. The researchers saw potential to analyze Nicole Zefanya's song due to the

singer's cultural background as Indonesian. In 2022, Niki released an album that contained songs that she made while she was still a senior high school student in Indonesia. Considering Nicole Zefanya's cultural background, the researchers found an urge to analyze the figurative language and the potential activities to use her songs contained in her newest album "Nicole" to increase students' listening comprehension skills, yet at the same time making the classroom environment more relaxed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze figurative language in songs and to find the potential activities for enhancing students' listening comprehension skills.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Figurative Language
Figurative language is one of the language features that is usually used to express emotion implicitly. Figurative language may be used to convey an emotion, idea, or a notion that can't be interpreted literally [9]. Figurative language has several types. Kennedy and Gioia [10] describes figurative language into 10 types;

### Simile
Simile is used when comparing two different things. However, the things that are being compared to come from different types. Comparative phrases "like" or "as" were usually used.
*His smile was as bright as the sun.*

### Metaphor
Metaphor is an imaginative way to describe a person, things, or a notion. Metaphor often used *is, are, was,* or *were.*
*She is the light in my sorrow.*

### Personification
Is the expression that gives objects a human-like character.
*The pen starts to dance above blank paper.*

### Irony
Irony is an expression that states the opposite from a fact. For example, "*What a smart move!*" in literal meaning means a good decision. However, if the speaker used irony, it means a bad decision.

### Synecdoche
Synecdoche is an expression that only mentions one part of a specific object to represent a whole object.
*All hands on deck!*
The word *hands* is used to represent a whole crew ship.

### Apostrophe
Apostrophe is an expression that considers a person or things that exist or does not exist to be present.
*I have talked to my inner child.*

### Allegory
Allegory used to explain something implicitly by the use of symbols or particular part of an

object to represent an idea or principles.
*Life is like a spinning wheel.*

**Paradox**
Paradox is a statement which contradicts each other.
*I don't like to say this, but this is the beginning of the end.*
The statement above means the speaker needs to acknowledge that something is about to come to an end.

**Repetition**
Repetitions are usually found in songs or poetry to emphasize particular things.
*We are never, ever, ever getting back together.* (Taylor Swift - We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together).

**Hyperbole**
Hyperbole is an exaggeration of a statement containing non-literal meanings.
*She flew to cloud 9 when he said 'hi'.*

## 2.3 Songs and Lyrics in ELT
Songs and lyrics are one of authentic materials that have been researched to increase students' language skills. Some studies have found that authentic materials are helpful in language learning. Authentic materials, specifically songs, offer their melodies and rhythm that calm human nerves. Songs are enjoyable to hear since they are poetry with distinct rhythms and harmonies [11]. Utilizing songs in the classroom makes the learning environment more natural and students may be more engaged in the learning activities. One experimental research that used authentic materials, such as songs to teach listening skills, found that the post test score of a group who taught by songs achieved 95 while other groups who taught using conventional methods achieved 85 [12]. In line with that research, lyrics in songs contain figurative language that could increase students' level of focus. Songwriters tend to apply figurative language to enhance and make the lyrics appealing, which end up making the listeners use their imagination to visualize and interpret the implicit meaning in figurative language used [11]. Figurative language can stimulate students' imagination and increase their focus during classroom activities. If imagination and students' focus come along, there's a low chance of boredom and their prediction skills can increase. Therefore, utilizing songs in ELT will bring many benefits to teachers and the students.

## 2.4 Previous Studies
Some previous works have been conducted related to figurative language analysis in songs and using songs as listening materials. The first study done by Alfiyani [13] discussed Niki's songs focus on searching for the dominant figurative language, the meaning, and the contribution to teaching poetry. In Alfiyani [13] qualitative research, the dominant figurative found in the Niki's song "Lose", "Indigo", and "La La Lost You" is metaphor. Between the three songs, "Lose" contains more figurative language than the other two. The researcher also elaborates some of the meaning behind all figurative language found. The researcher also mentions that songs can contribute to teaching poetry to make students more focused, help students to absorb the materials, and make the learning more interesting. However, the researcher didn't mention how to apply those three songs as teaching materials. In what level of students' those three songs can be applied to also hasn't been mentioned by the researcher.

The second previous research done by Luscaputri [14] analyzes the meaning behind Ed Sheeran's selected songs, "Thinking Out Loud", "Nina", and "Photograph". The researcher found that the most dominant figurative language is hyperbole. The researcher also divided song lyrics into conceptual and connotative meanings. The result was that between the three songs, connotative meaning has more lines (17 lines) than conceptual meaning (11 lines). Nonetheless, this research didn't argue more about why people need to understand Ed Sheeran songs or how to learn English skills through Ed Sheeran songs. Ed Sheeran was a well-known British singer which may have beneficial potential if his song was used for ELT to get students more exposed to British english.

The last previous research also deals with figurative language found in song. The research was conducted by Fajrin & Parmawati [15] that analyzes figurative language based on its context that is contained in Bruno Mars's song lyrics titled "Grenade". The study used a descriptive qualitative method. The researcher found three types of figurative language which are metaphor, hyperbole, and repetition. Hyperbole as figurative language that mostly found the song lyrics. The researcher also explains what is the meaning behind the figurative language found, which is a love betrayal. Once again, this research does not mention why readers should know about the meaning behind figurative language found in the song lyrics titled "Grenade". Meanwhile, Bruno Mars and his song titled "Grenade" was a hit and may have beneficial possibilities to use his song as learning materials.

From the previous studies mentioned above, this current study will analyze figurative language found in Nicole Zefanya's selected song. The researcher chose Niki Zefanya's song because she is an Indonesian singer that has been internationally acknowledged. Since Niki is an Indonesian, the researchers believe that students can relate more to Niki Zefanya's cultural background. The selected songs were also from her newest album, "Nicole". This album mostly tells a story about her high school love life which will be more relatable for senior high school students' social environment. Therefore, this current study will be focusing to find out;
1. What types of figurative language is used in the selected song?
2. What are potential learning activities that can be implemented for enhancing Indonesian senior high school students' listening comprehension skills?

## 3. Research Methodology

This current research used qualitative research to analyze the data of figurative language in the selected song. Several previous studies will be used to find potential learning activities that can be implemented for enhancing Indonesian senior highschool students' listening comprehension skills. Qualitative research can be used to comprehend deeper understanding of the object [16]. The data was collected through documentation then analyzed using figurative language explained by Kennedy & Gioia [10]. The population of this study is Nicole Zefanya's songs in her newest album "Nicole" which was released in August 2022. In order to choose the sample, the researchers used simple random sampling and picked three songs. The three songs are "High School in Jakarta", "Oceans and Engines", and "Anaheim". To analyze the data, the researchers used Cresswell that was explained in Sugiyono [16];
1. Preparing the data.
   The researchers surfed the internet to find out Niki's tracklist of the newest album, then decided to choose the three songs.
2. Read or look at all the data.

The lyrics from the three songs were all collected to do the reading. The researchers also listened to the songs and watched the music video several times in order to comprehend the figurative language in the songs and lyrics.

3.  Identify and analyze the three songs.
    Figurative language in the lyrics of each song were identified and analyzed. Kennedy and Gioia' [10] theory that explains ten types of figurative language is used. There are simile, metaphor, personification, irony, synecdoche, apostrophe, allegory, paradox, repetition, and hyperbole.
4.  Categorizing the figurative language.
    After the researcher identified and analyzed the figurative language found in each song, the researcher started to categorize based on the types of figurative language.
5.  Conclusion
    The last step, the researcher drew a conclusion to answer the first research question.

To find potential learning activities, several previous studies will be discussed. The researchers will elaborate potential learning activities by dividing into pre-listening, whilst listening, and post listening. The learning activities will focus more on teaching listening comprehension for senior high school students because the lyrics were more closely related to high school students' lives.

# 4. Result & Discussion

## 4.1 Result
Research findings discuss the types of figurative language found in the NIKI's selected song entitled "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", and "Oceans and Engines". The findings will be described as follows.

### 4.1.1 Types of figurative language found in the selected song.
Based on Kennedy and Gioia [10] that explained about figurative language, the researchers have found 26 lines in lyrics that contain figurative language. The following table will show how many figurative languages are found in "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", and "Oceans and Engines" by Niki.

**Table 1.1** Figurative Language Found in "High School in Jakarta", "Oceans and Engines", and "Anaheim".

| Types of Figurative Language | Songs Title | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | High School in Jakarta | Anaheim | Oceans and Engines | |
| Irony | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Metaphor | 3 | 3 | 6 | 12 |
| Simile | - | - | - | 0 |
| Personification | - | - | - | 0 |
| Synecdoche | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Apostrophe | - | - | - | 0 |
| Paradox | - | - | - | 0 |
| Allegory | - | - | - | 0 |
| Repetition | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Hyperbole | 2 | 5 | 4 | 11 |
| Total | | | | 26 |

Based on the table above, the researchers discovered that the types of figurative languages used in three of Niki's songs, "High School in Jakarta," "Anaheim," and "Oceans and Engines," were irony, metaphor, synecdoche, repetition, and hyperbole. The researchers did not find simile, personification, apostrophe, paradox, and allegory in the song. In "High School in Jakarta", the researchers found that it contains 1 irony, 3 metaphors, and 2 hyperboles. On the other hand, the song title "Anaheim" contains 3 metaphors, 1 repetition, and 5 hyperboles. The last song, titled "Oceans and Engines" contains 6 metaphors, 1 synecdoche, and 4 hyperboles. Therefore, the table above has already answered the first research question which is what types of figurative language are used in songs titled "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", "Oceans and Engines".

### 4.1.2. The Prominent Figurative Language found in the selected song

Based on the data above, the researchers conclude that metaphor is the dominant figurative language of 26 expressions from Niki's songs "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", and "Oceans and Engines". The researchers discovered three figurative language metaphors in the song "High School in Jakarta", three in "Anaheim", and six in Oceans and Engines, for a total of 12 figurative language metaphors. Niki frequently employs figurative language metaphors in her songs. Explain and compare something, a feeling, or an object to other words with similar characteristics, so that the meaning is conveyed to the audience effectively and is more interesting. The researchers then found the next dominant figurative language in Niki's song lyrics, namely hyperbole. The researchers found two figurative language hyperboles in "High School in Jakarta", five in "Anaheim", and four in "Ocean and Engines", with a total of 11 figurative language hyperboles in Niki's selected songs. Followed by expressions of irony, in "High School in Jakarta", a synecdoche in "Oceans and Engines", and a repetition in "Anaheim".

### 4.2 Discussion

### 4.2.1 Meaning Behind Figurative Language Found in the Selected Song

Here are some brief explanations behind the meaning of each figurative language found;

**Iron**
*It was orange from three percent peroxide, thanks to you (Song High School in Jakarta, Line 6)*

This specific line that stated "thanks to you" was one of the examples of how Niki used irony in "High School in Jakarta". This due to "thanks to you" was one of the expressions that usually used to show gratitude towards someone. However, this lyric means differently than the literal meaning.

**Metaphor**
*But even with gin and surgin' adrenaline (Song Oceans and Engines, Line 34)*
*I see you're all that can intoxicate (Song Oceans and Engines, Line 35)*

The lyrics contain figurative language metaphors. The meaning of the lyrics of the song is that Niki is trying to do everything she can to forget a man. However, no matter how hard she tries to forget it, Niki's love for the man is greater. Therefore, it is very difficult to forget the man no matter how hard she tries.

**Synecdoche**
*Plungin' into all kinds of diversions (Song Oceans and Engines, Line 32) Like blush wine and sonorous soirées (Song Oceans and Engines, Line 33)*

In the lyrics there is a figurative language of synecdoche. This is shown in the lyrics of line 32 which states that Niki tries to do everything possible, and in the lyrics of line 33 Niki mentions the type of alcohol. Therefore, this lyric belongs to the synecdoche type because the 'kinds of diversions' referred to in the lyrics are trying different types of alcohol.

**Repetition**
*'Cause I am lost, but not in you (Song Anaheim, Line 20) Yes, I am lost, but not in you (Song Anaheim, Line 21)*
These lyrics use figurative language repetition. In this lyric, Niki wanted to make it clear that she was lost or had no idea what she was doing, but not with the man in the story.

**Hyperbole**
*In a perfect world, I'd kill to love you the loudest (Song Anaheim, Line 5) But all I do is live to hurt you soundless (Song Anaheim, Line 6)*

This lyric uses a figurative language hyperbole. The meaning of the lyrics of the song is that Niki is willing to do anything to love the man. The lyric "I'd kill to love you the loudest" doesn't literally mean killing, but it means being willing to do anything to love a man.

### 4.2.2 Possible Learning Activities
For answering the second research question, which is what are the possible learning activities that can be implemented to teach listening through songs, the researchers will elaborate by dividing into three steps. However, before anything else, teachers need to analyze students' needs, characteristics, and learning objectives. The three songs by Niki, "High School in Jakarta", "Anaheim", and "Oceans and Engines", were more suited for senior high school students due to the content and the vocabulary in the songs. This learning activity will teach listening comprehension using the selected song divided into three steps; pre-listening, whilst listening, and post listening.

**Pre-listening**
After teachers observe and determine students' needs, characteristics, and determine learning objectives. To start the activities, teachers need to introduce the songs first. Introducing the topic

of the song was one of the first steps to teach listening skill through songs [17]. In pre-listening activities, the teacher can also show a picture of Niki and ask several warming up questions to the students. Students can listen to the songs for fun before doing whilst listening. Teachers can also explain and give an example of one or more figurative language that are contained in the songs.

**Whilst listening**
Well-designed activities can assist students in comprehending meanings. In this step, teachers can ask the students to do reading while listening activities to enhance their comprehension skills. Providing both written and spoken format from the songs can allow the students to increase their comprehensive input, vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation, and infer both spoken and written language [18]. Teachers can start by dividing students in groups or pairs then give students a worksheet containing the lyrics of the song they are going to listen to. Then, students are asked to mark the lyrics, which include figurative language, while listening to the song played by the teacher. Teacher can play the songs several times.

**Post listening**
Post-Listening Activities consist of tasks that aim to help students reflect on the listening experience. These activities are carried out after the teacher has done pre-listening and whilst listening activities. After the listening session, a step that can be done is to check students' understanding by asking students to make a reflective report related to the songs they heard, this can be done orally or in writing. Moreover, teachers can provide questions related to the songs. One study that analyzed songs in Indonesian second grade senior high school textbooks, suggested that teachers should provide several types of questions related to figurative language [19]. Other than that, teachers can ask students to have a brief discussion about the meaning of the song taken from their previous listening task to stimulate students' imaginative and eventually listening skills.


# 5. Conclusion

Based on results and discussions, the researchers found that the three songs contain 26 expressions of figurative language. The researcher discovered five types of figurative language that were used in the three songs, namely; irony, metaphor, synecdoche, repetition, and hyperbole. Simile, personification, apostrophe, paradox, and allegory are not found within three songs.

To answer the first research problems, the researchers discovered "High School in Jakarta" contains 3 figurative language metaphors, "Anaheim" contains 3, and "Oceans and Engines" contains 6. For totals, the researcher found 12 figurative language metaphors of the total number of figurative languages found in three Niki's selected songs. Thus, metaphor is the dominant figurative language found in Niki's selected songs. The researchers then discover the next dominant figurative language in the selected song lyrics, namely; 11 hyperbolic expressions. "High School in Jakarta" contains 2 figurative language hyperboles, "Anaheim" contains 5, and "Oceans and Engines" contains 4. These are followed by an ironic expression in "High School in Jakarta", a synecdoche in "Oceans and Engines", and a repetition in "Anaheim".

For the second research question, the possible activities have three main steps. The first is pre-

listening activities, in which the teacher introduces songs to students before the listening activities begin. This activity can be referred to as a warm-up before the teacher directs the students to the next step. The second step is to engage in activities while listening. During this activity, students begin to listen to songs provided by the teacher. Post-listening activities are carried out after the teacher has completed pre-listening and while listening activities. The activities carried out included asking students to write a reflective report about the songs they heard, as well as discussing the songs with their friends. For further studies, this current research looks forward to seeing how these songs are implemented in learning activities for senior high school students.

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