

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF : A STUDY OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN LANY'S SONG LYRICS

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Abstract

This study examines figurative language and its connection to the Five Stages of Grief as portrayed in tracks from LANY's self-titled debut album, LANY (2017). Specifically, the research aims to categorize the figurative devices found in "Super Far," "Hurts," "13," and "Hericane" using Laurence Perrine's framework, and to explore how these expressions reflect the grief stages outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied, using the songs' lyrics as the main source of data. Data gathering involved close textual reading, pinpointing instances of figurative language, and sorting emotional content according to the five recognized grief stages. Results show ten categories of figurative language-metaphor, hyperbole, symbol, personification, paradox, irony, synecdoche, apostrophe, simile, and understatement-appearing a combined 35 times. Metaphor and hyperbole emerged as the leading types, each appearing nine times (25.71%), while symbol followed with seven instances (20%). Regarding the grief-stage analysis, 32 emotional expressions were found spanning all five stages. Depression proved the most frequent, appearing 13 times (40.6%), trailed by bargaining (21.9%), anger (18.8%), denial (12.5%), and acceptance (6.2%). These results suggest figurative language serves a central function in conveying feelings tied to love, heartbreak, yearning, and inner conflict. By merging figurative language analysis with the Five Stages of Grief model, this study offers a richer perspective on how emotional significance is built within LANY's lyrical content.

Keywords: Figurative Language, Five Stages of Grief, Song Lyrics, LANY

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INTRODUCTION

Popular music has become one of the most influential forms of cultural expression because it reflects human emotions, personal experiences, and social realities. Through the combination of melody and lyrics, songs enable listeners to understand and relate to emotional experiences such as love, loss, longing, and identity (Juslin, 2013; Negus, 2011). Beyond entertainment, song lyrics function as literary texts that communicate meanings through creative language, allowing listeners to interpret emotional messages from different perspectives (Machin, 2010; Simpson, 2014). Consequently, song lyrics have attracted increasing scholarly attention in linguistic and literary studies as valuable objects for examining the relationship between language and emotional expression.

One of the most distinctive linguistic features found in song lyrics is figurative language. Rather than conveying meaning literally, figurative language enables songwriters to communicate abstract ideas and emotions through imaginative expressions. According to Perrine (1969), figurative language expresses one idea by referring to another in order to create deeper meaning and stronger emotional impact. Figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, and paradox enrich lyrical expression by transforming complex psychological experiences into vivid and relatable images. Recent studies also emphasize that figurative language plays an essential role in representing emotions because it connects abstract feelings with concrete experiences, allowing listeners to interpret emotional meaning more effectively (Forceville, 2016; Gibbs, 2017; Kövecses, 2010).

Among various emotional themes represented in popular music, grief remains one of the most universal and complex human experiences. Feelings of loss, heartbreak, disappointment, and emotional recovery are frequently portrayed in contemporary song lyrics. These emotional experiences can be understood through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, consisting of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014). Although individuals do not necessarily experience these stages in a fixed sequence, the model provides a useful framework for understanding emotional transitions during the grieving process (Corr & Corr, 2013; Stroebe et al., 2017). Consequently, combining figurative language analysis with the Five Stages of Grief offers a comprehensive approach to examining how emotional experiences are represented through linguistic expression.

One contemporary music group whose lyrics consistently portray emotional vulnerability is LANY. Led by Paul Jason Klein, LANY is widely recognized for composing songs that explore romantic relationships, separation, longing, and emotional healing through poetic language and personal storytelling (Caramanica, 2017). Their self-titled debut album, *LANY* (2017), received considerable attention because its lyrics present relatable emotional experiences supported by atmospheric musical arrangements (Billboard, 2017). Among the songs in the album, *Super Far*, *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane* portray different emotional responses to relationship loss, making them appropriate data for investigating the relationship between figurative language and emotional expression.

Several previous studies have examined figurative language and grief in song lyrics from different perspectives. Maryatul Qibtiya (2025) analyzed figurative language and the Five Stages of Grief in Olivia Rodrigo's songs and found that metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism effectively represent emotional transitions during heartbreak. Eleonora Connie Pramesthi (2024) investigated the grief stages in Louis Tomlinson's *Two of Us* and demonstrated that all five stages are reflected throughout the lyrics. Similarly, Mohamad Ziad Pilomonu (2024) explored the album *Ballads 1* by Joji and reported that depression and acceptance dominate the emotional journey presented in the songs. Jessica Novia (2023) examined *Burn* from *Hamilton* using a psycholinguistic perspective and concluded that anger, bargaining, and depression are strongly represented through linguistic choices. Meanwhile, Suci Ayustika Dewi (2025) focused on conceptual metaphors in Taylor Swift's *Folklore* and revealed that metaphor plays an important role in representing grief and emotional healing.

Although these studies demonstrate that figurative language and grief are closely related, most of them analyze either figurative language or the stages of grief separately. Only limited attention has been given to explaining how different types of figurative language systematically construct emotional progression throughout the grieving process. Furthermore, previous studies have focused primarily on artists such as Olivia Rodrigo, Taylor Swift, Joji, Louis Tomlinson, and the musical *Hamilton*, while LANY's debut album remains relatively underexplored despite its strong emphasis on emotional storytelling. This limitation indicates the need for further investigation integrating linguistic and psychological approaches within a single analytical framework.

Based on this research gap, the present study integrates Laurence Perrine's theory of figurative language with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief to examine emotional

expression in four selected songs from LANY's debut album. Unlike previous studies that primarily identify either figurative language or grief stages independently, this research explains how figurative expressions represent the progression of emotional responses throughout the grieving process. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing discussion of stylistic and psychological analysis in popular music by demonstrating how figurative language functions not only as a literary device but also as a medium for expressing complex emotional experiences.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the types of figurative language employed in the lyrics of *Super Far*, *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane* and to analyze how these figurative expressions represent the speaker's emotional journey through Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. The findings are expected to enrich studies in linguistics and literary criticism while providing a deeper understanding of how contemporary popular music communicates emotional meaning through creative language.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the use of figurative language and the representation of emotional expression in LANY's song lyrics. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to interpret meanings, experiences, and linguistic phenomena embedded in textual data rather than numerical information (Creswell, 2014). The study integrates Laurence Perrine's theory of figurative language (1969) and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014) to analyze how figurative expressions convey emotional experiences in the selected songs.

The object of this research consists of four songs from LANY's self-titled debut album *LANY* (2017): *Super Far*, *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane*. These songs were purposively selected because they prominently portray themes of love, separation, longing, and emotional vulnerability while containing various forms of figurative language. The primary data were the song lyrics obtained from the official album release and verified through reliable lyric sources to ensure textual accuracy. Secondary data consisted of scholarly books and journal articles related to figurative language, grief theory, and qualitative text analysis, which provided the theoretical foundation for interpreting the data.

Data were collected using documentation techniques. The researcher repeatedly listened to the selected songs to understand their emotional context and carefully read the lyrics to identify figurative expressions. The lyrics were then organized into an analytical table, and lyric excerpts containing figurative language were highlighted and coded according to Perrine's classification. Subsequently, the identified expressions were examined to determine how they represented the emotional stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance based on Kübler-Ross's model.

Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis following the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, lyric excerpts containing figurative language were identified and classified according to their types. Second, each figurative expression was interpreted based on its contextual meaning within the song. Third, the emotional content represented by each expression was categorized into the appropriate stage of grief. Finally, the relationships between figurative language and the stages of grief were interpreted to explain how linguistic choices contribute to emotional expression in the selected songs.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher employed theory triangulation by interpreting the data through two complementary theoretical perspectives, namely Perrine's theory of figurative language and Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. In addition, all interpretations were consistently based on the original lyrics and supported by relevant scholarly references to ensure analytical credibility and transparency.

RESULT AND DISSCUSION

Result

The findings are presented according to the two research objectives: (1) identifying the types of figurative language used in the selected songs and (2) examining how the lyrics represent the Five Stages of Grief proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. The analysis was conducted on four songs from LANY's self-titled debut album, namely *Super Far*, *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane*.

Figurative Language in LANY's Selected Songs

Table 1 presents the distribution of figurative language identified in the four selected songs.

Table 1. Types of Figurative Language Identified in LANY's Selected Songs

No.	Types of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Metaphor	9	25.71
2	Hyperbole	9	25.71
3	Symbol	7	20.00
4	Personification	2	5.71
5	Paradox	2	5.71
6	Irony	1	2.86
7	Synecdoche	1	2.86
8	Apostrophe	1	2.86
9	Simile	1	2.86
10	Understatement	1	2.86
Total	10 Types	35	100

As shown in Table 1, a total of 35 instances of figurative language were identified across the four songs. Metaphor and hyperbole were the most frequently used types, each occurring nine times (25.71%), indicating that LANY predominantly employs indirect comparison and exaggeration to communicate emotional experiences. Symbol ranked third with seven occurrences (20.00%), suggesting that symbolic expressions also play an important role in conveying meanings beyond the literal level.

Personification and paradox each appeared twice (5.71%), whereas irony, synecdoche, apostrophe, simile, and understatement were identified only once (2.86%) each. Although these latter figures occurred less frequently, they contributed to the stylistic variation and enriched the emotional expression throughout the lyrics.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that metaphor, hyperbole, and symbol constitute the dominant figurative devices in the selected songs, accounting for more than seventy percent of the total figurative expressions identified.

Representation of the Five Stages of Grief

The second objective of this study was to identify the representation of the Five Stages of Grief in the selected lyrics. The distribution of each stage is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of the Five Stages of Grief in LANY's Selected Songs

Stage of Grief	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Denial	4	12.50
Anger	6	18.75
Bargaining	7	21.88
Depression	13	40.63
Acceptance	2	6.25
Total	32	100

As presented in Table 2, all five stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross were identified in the selected songs. Among the five stages, depression was the most dominant, occurring 13

times (40.63%). This stage appeared in all four songs and primarily reflected feelings of sadness, loneliness, disappointment, emotional exhaustion, and psychological vulnerability experienced by the speakers.

The second most frequent stage was bargaining, with seven occurrences (21.88%). The lyrics expressing this stage generally conveyed hope, regret, and attempts to preserve or repair broken relationships. Anger ranked third with six occurrences (18.75%), indicating emotional frustration, disappointment, and resentment toward failed relationships.

The denial stage appeared four times (12.50%), illustrating the speakers' reluctance to fully acknowledge the reality of separation or emotional loss. Meanwhile, acceptance was identified only twice (6.25%), making it the least represented stage. This finding suggests that emotional resolution occupies only a small portion of the selected lyrics, whereas the songs predominantly emphasize the emotional struggle experienced during the grieving process.

In summary, the findings indicate that LANY's selected songs portray grief primarily through depression, bargaining, and anger, while acceptance appears relatively limited. The distribution demonstrates that the emotional narrative of the songs focuses more on experiencing and processing emotional pain than on achieving complete emotional recovery.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that grief in LANY's selected songs is represented as a dynamic emotional process rather than a fixed sequence of psychological stages. Across the songs *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane*, the speaker experiences different combinations of Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, with depression emerging as the most dominant emotional response. This finding supports Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014), who argue that grief is not necessarily experienced in a rigid linear order because individuals may move repeatedly between emotional stages depending on their personal experiences and emotional conditions. Similarly, Stroebe et al. (2017) emphasize that the five-stage model should be understood as a flexible framework rather than a universal progression, allowing different stages to appear with varying intensity throughout the grieving process.

The dominance of depression indicates that the speakers primarily experience grief through sadness, emotional exhaustion, regret, guilt, and psychological vulnerability after the deterioration of romantic relationships. Expressions such as *Frozen with my thoughts*, *The more you love, the more it hurts*, *Our home's a wreck*, and *I've done my best to carry all this weight* illustrate that grief extends beyond the experience of losing another person and develops into emotional suffering that influences the speakers' perception of themselves and their surroundings. According to Kübler-Ross (1969), depression emerges when individuals fully recognize the emotional consequences of loss and begin confronting the permanence of the situation. The present findings strengthen this perspective because the speakers consistently demonstrate emotional paralysis, self-blame, loneliness, and hopelessness before reaching any form of emotional resolution.

These findings are also consistent with previous studies examining grief in song lyrics. Novia (2023), Pramesthi (2024), Pilomonu (2024), and Dewi (2025) similarly reported that depression frequently becomes the most dominant grief stage because lyricists tend to emphasize emotional suffering rather than emotional recovery. However, the present study extends these findings by showing that depression is strengthened through figurative language, allowing grief to be represented not only psychologically but also aesthetically. Metaphors such as *Frozen with my thoughts* and *carry all this weight*, symbols including *The sunset's black and white* and *Our home's a wreck*, and paradoxical expressions such as *The more you love, the more it hurts* transform abstract emotional experiences into concrete images that readers and listeners can easily visualize. This finding supports Kövecses (2010) and Gibbs (2017), who

explain that conceptual metaphors enable abstract emotions to be understood through familiar physical experiences, making complex psychological conditions more accessible to audiences.

Another important finding concerns the uneven distribution of the grief stages across the songs. While *13* contains all five stages proposed by Kübler-Ross, *Hurts* represents only denial, bargaining, and depression, whereas *Hericane* includes anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance without denial. This variation suggests that song lyrics do not necessarily aim to portray the complete grieving process but instead emphasize emotional moments that best support the narrative of each composition. Such findings reinforce Williams (2021), who argues that lyrical speakers function as constructed personas rather than direct reflections of real-life psychological experiences. Consequently, emotional progression within song lyrics is often shaped by artistic purposes instead of chronological psychological development.

The relatively limited appearance of denial and acceptance further demonstrates that LANY's songwriting focuses primarily on emotional conflict instead of emotional closure. Denial appears only when speakers remain attached to idealized memories or previous expectations, whereas acceptance appears only after prolonged emotional struggle. This pattern reflects the tendency of contemporary popular music to highlight unresolved emotions because emotional vulnerability creates stronger audience engagement (Juslin, 2013; Harris & Brown, 2021). Modern songwriting frequently emphasizes uncertainty, longing, and emotional ambiguity, allowing listeners to interpret lyrics according to their own personal experiences (Davies, 2017; Machin, 2010).

The bargaining stage also occupies a significant position throughout the findings. Rather than expressing direct negotiation, bargaining appears through hope, reassurance, reconciliation, and the desire to preserve emotional intimacy despite recognizing relationship problems. Expressions such as *I want you to want me to stay*, *Start over again*, and *It might be bad right now, but losing you would really suck* indicate that the speakers continue imagining alternative possibilities before fully accepting loss. This interpretation aligns with Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014), who explain that bargaining often appears through internal dialogues and imagined possibilities intended to delay emotional separation.

Similarly, anger is consistently represented through the attribution of responsibility toward the romantic partner. Instead of expressing aggressive behavior, anger appears as frustration, confusion, disappointment, and attempts to identify the source of emotional suffering. Questions such as *Who got inside your mind?* and metaphors like *A hericane* illustrate how speakers externalize emotional pain by assigning responsibility to their partners. This finding supports Corr and Corr (2013), who argue that anger frequently functions as a psychological response to perceived injustice during grieving rather than as purely hostile behavior.

An important contribution of this research lies in demonstrating the close relationship between figurative language and grief representation. Previous studies generally examine either figurative language (Muzzaqi, 2020; Embu Ngera, 2023; Puspasari, 2025; Salsabila & Setyowati, 2024) or grief stages separately (Novia, 2023; Pilomonu, 2024; Pramesthi, 2024; Dewi, 2025; Qibtiya, 2025). In contrast, the present study integrates these two perspectives by showing that figurative language functions as the primary linguistic mechanism through which psychological stages of grief are communicated. Metaphor, symbolism, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, simile, and personification each strengthen particular emotional responses and help listeners understand psychological experiences that might otherwise remain abstract. This finding supports Simpson (2014), Carter (2021), and Clark (2022), who argue that stylistic choices significantly influence the interpretation of emotional meaning in literary texts.

The findings also contribute theoretically by extending the application of Kübler-Ross's grief model beyond clinical and psychological contexts into literary and popular music studies. While the model was originally developed to explain responses to terminal illness and bereavement (Kübler-Ross, 1969), this study demonstrates that it also provides an effective framework for understanding grief arising from romantic relationship loss. This supports recent

scholarship suggesting that grief may emerge from various forms of emotional separation rather than death alone (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014; Stroebe et al., 2017).

Practically, this research provides useful implications for literary studies, stylistics, and music studies. For literary and linguistic researchers, the findings demonstrate how figurative language operates simultaneously as an aesthetic device and a psychological representation of emotion. For educators, the songs may serve as effective teaching materials for introducing figurative language, stylistic analysis, and literary interpretation because the emotional experiences presented are relatable to young adults. Furthermore, for listeners, understanding the grief stages embedded in song lyrics may encourage greater emotional awareness and provide insight into how popular music functions as a medium for expressing, processing, and communicating complex emotional experiences.

Overall, this study demonstrates that LANY constructs grief not simply through explicit descriptions of sadness but through carefully selected figurative expressions that represent different psychological stages of emotional loss. The integration of stylistic analysis and Kübler-Ross's grief theory constitutes the primary novelty of this research because it explains not only what emotional stages appear in the lyrics but also how linguistic and literary devices construct those emotional experiences. Consequently, the study enriches interdisciplinary discussions between literary stylistics, psychology, and popular music studies while offering a more comprehensive understanding of emotional representation in contemporary song lyrics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to analyze the types of figurative language and the representation of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief in four selected songs from LANY's *LANY* (2017) album, namely *Super Far*, *Hurts*, *13*, and *Hericane*. The findings demonstrate that figurative language and the stages of grief are closely interconnected in constructing emotional meaning throughout the lyrics. Among the identified figurative language types, metaphor and hyperbole emerged as the most dominant devices, indicating that LANY primarily represents emotional experiences through imaginative comparisons and intensified expressions. Meanwhile, depression was identified as the most dominant stage of grief, followed by bargaining, anger, denial, and acceptance, suggesting that the emotional narratives in the selected songs emphasize sadness, emotional exhaustion, longing, and the struggle to cope with relationship loss rather than complete emotional recovery.

These findings confirm that figurative language functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as a linguistic strategy for representing complex psychological experiences. Through metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, personification, paradox, and other figurative expressions, abstract emotions such as grief, regret, disappointment, vulnerability, and hope become more concrete and emotionally accessible to listeners. The findings further demonstrate that Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief can be effectively applied to the analysis of contemporary song lyrics, showing that grief resulting from romantic relationship loss may be represented through literary language in ways that resemble broader psychological responses to loss.

The primary contribution of this study lies in integrating Laurence Perrine's theory of figurative language with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief within the context of contemporary popular music. While previous studies have generally examined figurative language or grief separately, this research demonstrates how stylistic devices actively construct and reinforce the psychological stages of grief represented in song lyrics. Consequently, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by bridging literary stylistics and psychological approaches to lyric analysis, thereby providing a more comprehensive framework for interpreting emotional representation in popular music.

The findings also have several implications. Theoretically, this study expands the application of grief theory beyond clinical contexts into literary and stylistic studies while reinforcing the role of figurative language in conveying emotional meaning. Practically, the

findings may serve as a reference for researchers, lecturers, and students in literature, linguistics, and music studies by illustrating how contemporary song lyrics can be analyzed through interdisciplinary perspectives. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of popular music as a meaningful medium for understanding emotional experiences and developing literary interpretation skills.

This research is limited to four songs from a single album and employs qualitative textual analysis; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to LANY's entire discography or to popular music as a whole. Future studies are recommended to examine a broader corpus of songs across different albums or artists to compare patterns of figurative language and grief representation. Further research may also integrate other theoretical perspectives, such as cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, discourse analysis, semiotics, or audience reception studies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional meaning is constructed, interpreted, and experienced through contemporary song lyrics.

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