

**Unpacking Figurative Language
and Idiom in Eminem's
*Mockingbird***

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the types of figurative language and idiomatic expressions in Eminem's song "Mockingbird," and to explain the meanings that lend emotional depth to the lyrics. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method because it focuses on the interpretation of literary elements in song lyrics. The research data consists of words, phrases, and lines of lyrics that contain figurative language and idioms. The data were interpreted using Perrine's framework of figurative language and McCarthy and O'Dell's classifications of idiomatic expressions. The results show that the lyrics contain several types of figurative language, such as metaphors, symbols, hyperbole, and irony, as well as idioms that reinforce the emotional nuances and natural language style. These expressions represent the themes of fatherly love, trauma, protection, regret, and determination. Overall, this study concludes that the figurative language and idioms in the song "Mockingbird" not only serve as stylistic embellishments but also as important devices that deepen the meaning and enhance the aesthetic appeal and emotional value of the song's lyrics.

Key words

figurative language, idiomatic expression, semantic analysis, stylistic analysis

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Introduction

In a social and cultural context, language is a fundamental component that accommodates human interaction and development. Through language, humans can express their thoughts, feelings, or ideas to others. Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a medium for expressing aesthetics, emotions, and culture. In its use, language is not always literal or direct but is also used figuratively to evoke a deeper meaning. This use of language is called figurative language. Figurative language is not a deviant or difficult form of communication (Fussell & Moss, 1996). On the contrary, figurative language is a natural part of various types of discourse and is even considered one of the basic ways humans understand and conceptualize the world. Through figurative language, speakers can convey deeper emotional meaning and create stronger images in listeners' minds (Dorji & Durgin, 2025b).

In the fields of literature and music, figurative language occupies an important position as an artistic tool that allows writers or songwriters to convey their ideas and feelings more expressively and add to the beauty of the language used (Agustina & Mustikawati, 2023; Ratna Putri Krisnisa et al., 2025; Yusri & Taqdir, 2025). In addition, idioms are often found in musical works. These are distinctive expressions whose literal meanings cannot be translated; they have idiomatic meanings that can be understood only in context. Idioms reflect the cultural richness and communication style of native speakers of the language, and add color to the delivery of messages. Furthermore, idiomatic expressions in English song lyrics help listeners grasp emotional and contextual meanings beyond literal interpretation (Antonsson, 2012). This proves that the use of idioms not only enriches the language but also deepens the emotional meaning conveyed in song lyrics.

In language and literature studies, song lyrics are often viewed as poetic texts that utilize various stylistic devices to convey meaning and emotion. Stylistic analysis focuses on the use of language, including figurative language and idiomatic expressions, which play a crucial role in creating aesthetic beauty and facilitating a deeper understanding of meanings. Figurative language and idioms allow songwriters to convey complex experiences and emotions indirectly and more expressively. Eminem is a musician renowned for his innovative and emotionally charged use of language in his lyrics, particularly in conveying personal experiences and relationships with his family. One of his popular songs, *Mockingbird* (2004), is often considered a song full of feelings and reflections on the role of a father.

Although *Mockingbird* is known as an emotionally charged song often discussed for its meaning and the biography of its creator, linguistic studies specifically examining the relationship between figurative language and idiomatic expressions in rap or hip-hop lyrics remain relatively limited. Most previous studies tend to focus their analysis on figurative language alone or interpret the meaning of songs in general, without providing an in-depth linguistic explanation of why a particular lyric is classified as belonging to a certain type. Therefore, the analysis of *Mockingbird* is relevant because this study not only identifies and interprets, but also explains the basis for its classification based on

linguistic characteristics, thereby showing how figurative language and idioms work together to construct emotional narratives in rap lyrics. Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of stylistics and semantics by showing how figurative language and idioms operate in song lyrics as musical literary texts. In practice, this study can serve as a reference for language learners and teachers in understanding the use of idiomatic expressions and figurative language in authentic contexts, especially in popular song lyrics.

Literature Review

Music is widely recognized as a multidimensional form of art that carries aesthetic, emotional, cultural, and social functions. Because music expresses human experiences in ways that often go beyond literal explanation, listeners often rely on non-literal language to describe what music means to them. Yüksel (2020) argues that the expressive nature of music makes metaphors and other figurative expressions essential in capturing meanings that cannot be fully conveyed through literal language. Given this strong reliance on symbolic and imaginative expression in music, understanding figurative language and idioms becomes crucial for analyzing how songwriters communicate emotion and meaning. Figurative language is an essential element in both linguistic and literary studies. According to Syafitri & Marlinton (2018), figurative language is often found in various literary works such as articles, advertisements, novels, poetry, and music. Figurative language is opaque because its meaning must be interpreted beyond the literal words, and this non-literal form also produces a more emotional and dynamic effect (Vulchanova et al., 2019; Dorji & Durgin, 2025a). Furthermore, figurative language is a style of language used to beautify a work and is expressed differently from its literal meaning (Tracy et al., 2021). Perrine (Faheem et al., 2022) classifies figurative language into 13 types: personification, metaphor, simile, irony, symbol, hyperbole, synecdoche, metonymy, allegory, paradox, understatement, apostrophe, and repetition.

Among these types, several are particularly relevant in the study of song lyrics. As Vo Dai Quang states, metaphor is the transference of word meaning based on the similarity between two things as regards function, character, size, shape, age, color, etc. (Thi & Thu, 2019). It differs from a simile because it implies comparison without using connecting words such as like or as (Sancita, 2023). In contrast, a symbol is something that represents or refers to a broader and more complex idea, value, emotion, or abstract concept. As explained by Jandaghi & Zohdi (2018), symbolism is a stylistic device that enriches the meaning of literary works by helping readers relate to the characters and plot, while also serving aesthetic, political, social, and cultural purposes. Hyperbole, according to Aljadaan (2018), involves deliberate exaggeration to emphasize emotional truth and enhance the expressive impact of language. It functions as a stylistic tool to dramatize experiences, allowing the audience to perceive the intensity of feelings conveyed by the speaker or writer. Irony represents another key category of figurative language. Irony treats what is regarded as (actually) bad as (apparent) good, which is a way of speaking that praises something positively when the real purpose is to convey a negative

assessment (Airaksinen, 2020). More specifically, Verbal irony is a form of figurative language that allows a speaker to mock or tease and to comment on the fact that things have not gone as expected by stating things in a way that is distinct from, and sometimes even opposite to, the intended meaning (Pexman, 2023). Irony and imagery are stylistic devices used to criticize social norms. This can be seen in the song Stan, where Eminem turns fan obsession into tragedy as a form of criticism of celebrity culture (Budiman & Dwijayanti, 2025). This contrast highlights underlying conflict or complexity, often revealing the difference between appearance and reality. Through irony, writers can express subtle criticism, humor, or inner struggle without explicitly stating it.

In addition to figurative language, idioms also play a significant role in stylistic expression. Idioms are expressions formed from a combination of words whose meanings cannot be interpreted literally but rather arise from the unique relationship between their constituent elements. In other words, idioms represent a combination of non-conventionality and contingency (Socolof et al., 2022). Idioms are phrases and sentences that do not mean exactly what their literal meanings suggest (Gulay, 2018). In line with this view, Ndruru (2024) explains that idioms function as a single semantic unit whose overall meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of the individual words; rather, it must be interpreted as a unified construction. In linguistics, Idioms belong to the same group of figurative expressions as metaphors and proverbs (Makhmudova et al., 2025). Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings extend beyond the literal, enriching communication with cultural nuance and emotional depth (Tulkinovna, 2025). Figurative language and idioms are closely related in communicative function and style. Both serve similar communicative functions by conveying emotional meaning and simplifying abstract concepts in public messages (Minahel Sada Hussain et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have examined figurative language in song lyrics from various genres. Constantia (2023) analyzed 20 traditional Sikka songs and identified five types of figurative language, revealing that the figurative meanings in the songs describe prayers and hopes, romantic relationships, and the social life of the Sikka people. In line with that study, research by Subekti (2023) analyzed eighteen NF songs in the album *The Search* and found eight types of figurative language with a total of 62 data points, in which hyperbole was the most dominant because NF used it to express emotions excessively, thereby strengthening the meaning and emotional connection in the lyrics. In addition, research by Fauziah (2022) analyzed two Gorillaz songs (*Feel Good Inc* and *Clint Eastwood*) and identified five types of figurative language, concluding that both songs convey social criticism and describe psychological conditions through strong contextual meaning. In this regard, research by Amin et al. (2021) shows that idioms in German pop lyrics can be accurately detected using collocation and context features, proving that idiom identification does not require complex linguistic processing and contributing significantly to the analysis of figurative language in music texts. In addition, research by Made et al. (2021) identified 19 idiomatic expressions in Westlife songs, consisting of phrasal verb idioms and verbal idioms, with phrasal verb idioms being the most dominant type in expressing the meaning of the lyrics. In previous studies, Puspita (2018) analyzed

idiomatic expressions in six Mariah Carey songs and found that idioms, especially phrasal verbs, not only contribute to the meaning of the lyrics but also beautify and strengthen the expression of the songs.

Overall, previous studies show that figurative language and idiomatic expressions are important stylistic devices in song lyrics because language serves as a means of human creativity and is used imaginatively through various forms of stylistic devices in literary works and artistic expressions (Aras et al., 2024). Moreover, Mustansar et al. (2024) note that communication that lacks stylistic variation tends to sound monotonous and unengaging. In contrast, the use of a distinctive language style helps attract the listener's or reader's attention and maintains their interest. However, most of these studies tend to analyze figurative language and idioms separately, or focus only on identifying their types and frequencies of occurrence, without thoroughly discussing their stylistic functions in constructing emotional and narrative meaning. In addition, much of the research remains descriptive. It does not provide an in-depth linguistic explanation of the basis for classifying an expression as a particular form of figurative language or an idiom. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by integrating the analysis of figurative language and idiomatic expressions into a single stylistic framework and by explaining how these two linguistic elements work together to build emotional expression in the lyrics of Eminem's song "Mockingbird."

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to describe and interpret the types and meanings of figurative language and idioms in Eminem's "Mockingbird." The qualitative approach is appropriate for literary analysis since it allows the researcher to explore meaning, interpretation, and stylistic elements within a text. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this method emphasizes understanding literary expression, symbolic meaning, and artistic representation as reflected in the lyrics (Creswell, 2014; Croker, 2009; Silverman, 2015). The descriptive nature of this research enables detailed observation of how figurative and idiomatic expressions enrich the song's aesthetic, expressive, and literary dimensions.

The object of this study is the song "Mockingbird" by Eminem, which was released in 2004 as part of the *Encore* album. This song was chosen because it features rich, emotionally layered lyrics that demonstrate Eminem's mastery of language and symbolism. The song's narrative, written in a confessional, personal tone, offers a variety of stylistic features ideal for literary interpretation. The data consist of words, phrases, and lines within the lyrics that contain figurative language and idiomatic expressions. The data source is the official lyrics from eminem.com, verified by listening to the original audio recording to ensure accuracy and context.

The data analysis follows the theoretical frameworks proposed by Perrine (1969) for figurative language and McCarthy and O'Dell (2010) for idioms. Each expression identified in the song is classified according to its type, such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, irony, or symbolic imagery, and interpreted according to its

contextual meaning within the lyrics (Krippendorff, 2022; Stake, 2010). Idiomatic expressions are analyzed for their figurative senses and their role in enhancing naturalness, rhythm, and emotional resonance in the song. The analysis proceeds through four stages: identification, classification, interpretation, and conclusion. Through these steps, the researcher aims to reveal how figurative and idiomatic expressions contribute to the artistic construction and the song's overall message. The findings from this analysis are expected to enrich literary studies, particularly in the exploration of language style in modern music, and to provide useful insights for readers, students, and educators interested in the intersection of language, culture, and artistic expression.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section presents and discusses the results of an analysis of the use of figurative language and idioms found in Eminem's song "Mockingbird." This analysis is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Perrine (1969) for figurative language and McCarthy & O'Dell (2010) for idioms. Each expression found in the lyrics is analyzed based on its type, reason for categorization, and implicit or symbolic meaning that appears in the context of the song. These findings are organized into several subcategories according to the types of figurative language and idioms used by the songwriter.

Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal how Eminem uses figurative and idiomatic expressions to create depth of meaning, convey messages about family, love, and life struggles, and enhance the artistic and aesthetic value of his song lyrics. The discussion focuses not only on identifying linguistic elements but also on interpreting the literary and symbolic functions that enrich the song's overall meaning. Table 1 presents the findings of the figurative language types.

Table 1. Figurative Language Types

No	Lines	Expressions	Figurative Language
1	5-6	What did Daddy always tell you? Straighten up, little soldier	Metaphor
2	10-11	Hailie, I know you miss your mom, and I know you miss your dad When I am gone, but I'm tryin' to give you the life that I never had	Symbol
3	14	'Cause you're scared, I ain't there, Daddy's with you in your prayers	Symbol
4	84-85	And if you ask me to, Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird I'ma give you the world	Hyperbole
5	88-89	And if that mockingbird don't sing and that ring don't shine I'ma break that birdie's neck	Hyperbole
6	12	I can see you're sad, even when you smile, even when you laugh	Irony

7	23	The harder that I try to do that, the more it backfires on me	Irony
8	25	Daddy don't want you to see, but you see just as much as he did	Irony
9	7	Stiffen up that upper lip	Idioms
10	8-9	What you cryin' about? You got me	Idioms

1. Metaphor

Excerpt 1:

“What Daddy always tell you? Straighten up, little soldier.” (line 5-6)

This line of lyrics is a metaphor because it makes an implicit comparison between a child and a soldier without using connecting words such as “like” or “as.” The phrase “little soldier” is not meant literally; the child in question is not a real soldier but a symbol of determination, strength, and courage in the face of difficult situations. Through this metaphor, Eminem equates his child's struggle with family breakdown with the struggle of a soldier on the battlefield. Emotionally, this metaphor describes a father's efforts to strengthen his child amid the chaos of their lives. By referring to Hailie as a “little soldier,” Eminem implies that his daughter has become a resilient figure who has survived the metaphorical “war” within their household. This expression affirms the father's love and pride in his child's fortitude, and serves as a symbol of encouragement to remain steadfast and brave in the face of life's difficult realities.

2. Symbol

Excerpt 2:

"Hailie, I know you miss your mom, and I know you miss your dad.

When I'm gone, but I'm tryin' to give you the life that I never had" (lines 10-11)

In the context of Eminem's songs and his entire discography, this phrase serves as shorthand for a series of bad experiences from his past. The phrase “the life that I never had” symbolizes Eminem's childhood full of trauma — abandoned by his father, living in poverty, experiencing bullying, and family conflicts. This symbol represents Eminem's determination as a father not to repeat the same mistakes and to strive to provide a better life for his child. This is reinforced by Eminem's statement in The Rolling Stone Interview entitled The Serious Side of Eminem. In the interview, Eminem explicitly described growing up without a father figure, experiencing unstable home life, and witnessing his sister and niece trapped in the same cycle of family problems. He stated that his childhood was chaotic. Furthermore, Eminem emphasized that his main goal as a father is to provide

things he never had as a child. He said: "I just want her and my immediate family... to have things I didn't have: love and material things. But I can't just buy them things. I have to be there." (TOURE, 2004a).

Excerpt 3:

'Cause you're scared, I ain't there, Daddy's wit' you in your prayers" (lines 14)

The word "prayers" becomes a symbol of reflection on love and an eternal spiritual connection between father and child. Although Eminem is often not physically present for his daughter ("I ain't there"), he affirms his presence through prayer, a universal symbol that represents a source of inner strength and non-physical presence. Prayer here becomes a symbolic meeting point that connects the child's fears (of distance and loss) with the father's assurance of love and protection (spiritual presence). This symbolic interpretation is reinforced by Eminem's admission in the lyrics of "When I'm Gone": "Baby, Daddy ain't leavin' no more" "Daddy, you're lyin'/You always say that, you always say, 'This is the last time'/But you ain't leaving anymore, Daddy, you're mine"/She's piling boxes in front of the door, trying to block it/"Daddy, please! Daddy, don't leave! Daddy, no, stop it!"/Goes in her pocket, pulls out a tiny necklace locket/It's got a picture, "This'll keep you safe, Daddy, take it with you"/I look up, it's just me standing in the mirror", and also in his interview with *Mojo in the Morning*, where he directly admits that one of the biggest burdens in his life is the guilt of often leaving his family. Eminem explained that many of the emotional scenes he described in his songs, such as Hailie stacking boxes in front of the door to prevent him from leaving, actually happened in real life. He said: "The guilt of always having to leave... those things really happened... I hated leaving my family." This statement shows that his physical absence was not just part of the song's narrative, but a real and recurring experience in his life. Therefore, the symbol of "prayers" becomes even more meaningful, where prayer is an alternative form of presence that he can offer when he cannot be physically present due to the demands of his career.

3. Hyperbole

Excerpt 4:

"And if you ask me to, Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird

I'ma give you the world" (lines 84-85)

This statement is a form of exaggeration (hyperbole) because it is clearly impossible for someone to literally "give the world." These lyrics symbolize Eminem's strong determination to do anything for his child's happiness, even things that seem impossible. Emotionally, this hyperbole reflects a sense of guilt and a desire to make amends for the fractured state of his family. By adapting the classic lullaby "Hush, Little

Baby,” Eminem creates a soft and protective tone that contrasts with the harsh reality of his life as a rapper.

Excerpt 5:

"And if that mockingbird don't sing and that ring don't shine

I'ma break that birdie's neck" (lines 88-89)

This line is hyperbolic because it uses extreme language and is not meant to be taken literally. Eminem certainly does not mean to literally “break the bird's neck.” The expression serves as a rhetorical exaggeration to describe the emotional intensity and determination to protect his child from disappointment. This symbolic threat signifies a desire to destroy anything that stands in the way of his child's happiness, showing the contrast between the gentleness of the promise (giving a gift) and the expressive violence as a manifestation of protective emotions and despair. This hyperbole reinforces the image of a father who fights hard so that his child does not lose hope.

4. Irony

Filik et al. (2014) explain that irony occurs when the intended meaning contrasts with the literal expression, creating emotional or situational contradictions. In *Mockingbird*, irony is present in several lines where Eminem’s words of comfort mask deeper sorrow or guilt:

Excerpt 6:

"I can see you're sad, even when you smile, even when you laugh" (lines 12)

This sentence is ironic because, in the emotional and narrative context of the song "Mockingbird," the lyrics reveal a contradiction between outward expressions (smiles and laughter) and inner feelings (sadness). Eminem realizes that his daughter's apparent happiness does not reflect her true emotional state. This irony is further reinforced when Eminem continues in the lyrics: “I can see it in your eyes, deep inside, you wanna cry/‘Cause you're scared, I ain't there, Daddy's wit’ you in your prayers”. In these lyrics, Eminem senses that his daughter wants to cry, an emotional state arising from his absence as a father.

Excerpt 7:

"The harder that I try to do that, the more it backfires on me" (lines 23)

These lyrics are classified as situational irony because they present a sharp contrast between expectations and reality. Logically, the harder someone tries (The harder that I try), the better the results should be. However, in this line, the opposite is true: the more effort I put in, the greater the failure (the more it backfires on me). This creates a

surprising, painful, and ironic effect. Emotionally, these lyrics describe Eminem's frustration and despair as a father struggling to keep his family together amid public pressure and personal conflict. In the context of the previous lyrics, "Lookin' puzzled, in a daze, I know it's confusing you / Daddy's always on the move, Mama's always on the news," we see how Eminem's efforts to be a good father actually worsen the situation. This irony reinforces the bitter reality: the harder he tries to fix things, the greater the rift in his family becomes.

Excerpt 8:

"Daddy don't want you to see, but you see just as much as he did" (lines 25)

This line also contains situational irony, as it describes the conflict between intention and outcome. Eminem wants to protect his daughters from the trauma and conflict he experienced in his childhood (Daddy don't want you to see), but tragically, his daughters witness the same things (you see just as much as he did). These lyrics reflect Eminem's deep guilt and sadness, as he struggles to be the ideal father but is trapped in a chaotic cycle of life. Emotionally, this irony confirms that history seems to repeat itself, with Eminem's bitter childhood experiences being relieved by his daughters. This situation highlights the inner conflict of a father who feels he has failed to provide perfect happiness for his family.

5. Idioms

Excerpt 9:

"Stiffen up that upper lip" (lines 7)

This phrase is categorized as an idiom because its meaning cannot be understood literally from the words that make it up. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the expression "to keep a stiff upper lip" is an idiomatic command that means to remain strong and not succumb to sadness when facing difficulties. In these lyrics, Eminem, as a father, encourages his daughter to hold back her tears and stay strong, even as they face difficult times in their family. This expression symbolizes determination and emotional resilience, illustrating the father's desire to protect and prepare his child for the harsh realities of life. This idiom also reflects cultural values of resilience and a never-give-up spirit, which are often associated with the character of American society.

Excerpt 10:

"What you cryin' about? You got me" (lines 8-9)

This line is an idiom because it has a non-compositional meaning, meaning that its overall meaning ("I'm here for you and will protect you") cannot be interpreted directly

from the literal meaning of each word (“You got me” = “You have me”). This idiomatic meaning is also reinforced by the context of the previous sentence, “What you cryin' about?”, which shows a father's attempt to calm his child down. The phrase “You got me” has a deeper meaning than just “you have me.” In the context of the song, this sentence describes the assurance and sense of security that a father gives his child, that he will always be by his side as a protector and source of strength. This phrase symbolizes a father's love, care, and responsibility. By using idioms that are common in everyday conversation, Eminem naturally expresses warmth and sincerity, reinforcing the emotional closeness between father and child in the song.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that figurative language and idiomatic expressions in Eminem’s *Mockingbird* function not merely as ornamental linguistic devices but as central mechanisms for constructing emotional meaning and narrative depth. The interwoven use of metaphors, symbols, hyperbole, irony, and idioms enables the songwriter to articulate complex affective experiences—such as guilt, vulnerability, devotion, trauma, and protection—through indirect yet emotionally resonant expression. This confirms Perrine’s (1969) theoretical claim that figurative language intensifies meaning by evoking imagery, compressing experience, and heightening emotional response. In the context of narrative rap, these figurative strategies allow for the communication of intensely personal experiences in a form that is aesthetically engaging while maintaining psychological subtlety.

Metaphorical constructions such as “little soldier” and symbolic elements like “prayers,” “the life that I never had,” and “mockingbird” function as affective signifiers that encode emotional resilience, spiritual connection, and paternal devotion. These findings resonate with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that metaphor structures not only language but also emotional and cognitive experience. The metaphor of the child as a soldier frames familial struggle as a form of emotional warfare, while symbols such as prayer and home transform absence and guilt into spiritual presence and moral responsibility. Hyperbolic expressions (“I’ma give you the world”, “I’ma break that birdie’s neck”) further amplify affective intensity, functioning as rhetorical exaggerations that dramatize paternal sacrifice and protective instinct rather than literal intent. In line with Claridge’s (2011) account of hyperbole as a pragmatic strategy for emotional emphasis, these expressions serve to externalize internal conflict and moral urgency.

Irony emerges as a particularly significant device in articulating emotional contradiction, especially in lines such as “even when you smile, even when you laugh” and “the harder that I try... the more it backfires on me.” Consistent with Filik et al.’s (2014) definition of irony as a contrast between literal expression and intended meaning, these ironic constructions reveal the dissonance between outward reassurance and inner despair. This supports the view that irony in confessional rap functions as an affective strategy for expressing psychological fragmentation and unresolved guilt. The ironic

tension between intention and outcome—particularly in the father’s failed attempts to protect his children—adds a tragic dimension to the narrative, reinforcing the theme of cyclical trauma and moral regret.

Idiomatic expressions such as “stiffen up that upper lip” and “you got me” play a complementary role by grounding symbolic and metaphorical language in everyday communicative practice. Drawing on McCarthy and O’Dell’s (2010) characterization of idioms as fixed expressions with non-compositional meaning, these phrases introduce colloquial authenticity and interpersonal warmth into the lyrical discourse. The idiom “stiffen up that upper lip” conveys cultural values of emotional resilience and stoicism, while “you got me” serves a pragmatic purpose, offering assurance of protection and solidarity. Their presence supports Carter’s (2004) argument that idiomaticity in literary and lyrical texts enhances naturalness and relational intimacy, allowing emotional symbolism to remain accessible rather than abstract.

Compared to earlier studies (e.g., Constantia, 2023; Subekti, 2023), which primarily focused on identifying dominant figurative forms, the present study extends the analytical scope by integrating figurative language and idioms within a unified stylistic and semantic framework. Rather than treating these elements as discrete categories, this research demonstrates their interactional synergy in constructing emotional coherence. Figurative devices encode symbolic meaning, while idioms anchor that meaning in culturally familiar discourse. This integrated perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how rap lyrics operate simultaneously as poetic texts and as socially grounded communicative acts.

Critically, the findings also challenge the assumption that figurative language in popular music functions mainly as aesthetic embellishment. In *Mockingbird*, figurative and idiomatic expressions serve a confessional and ethical function: they negotiate responsibility, remorse, and emotional inheritance within a fractured family structure. This aligns with theories of narrative identity (McAdams, 2001), which view storytelling as a means of constructing moral selfhood through linguistic representation. Eminem’s strategic deployment of figurative language thus becomes a form of emotional testimony, transforming personal trauma into a shared narrative of care, guilt, and resilience.

Overall, this study confirms that an integrated analysis of figurative language and idioms yields deeper stylistic and semantic insight into song lyrics as literary discourse. The findings reinforce Perrine’s (1969) claim that figurative language intensifies meaning, while extending it by demonstrating how idiomatic expressions function as pragmatic bridges between poetic symbolism and everyday emotional communication. Consequently, *Mockingbird* exemplifies how popular music lyrics can operate as emotionally sophisticated texts that fuse literary artistry with interpersonal sincerity.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the use of figurative language and idiomatic phrases in Eminem's song Mockingbird plays a significant role in creating depth of meaning, emotion, and narrative power in the song's lyrics. Figurative language, such as metaphors, symbols, hyperbole, and irony, not only serves as an aesthetic element but also as a stylistic device to convey themes such as a father's love, inner turmoil, regret, and struggles in life. Meanwhile, idiomatic phrases contribute significantly to creating a natural, communicative, and authentic impression of language, enabling emotional messages to be conveyed more clearly and relevantly to everyday experiences. Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of stylistics and semantics by showing that figurative language and idioms work together to construct meaning and emotion in narrative rap lyrics. The results of this study confirm that an analysis integrating these two linguistic elements can provide a deeper understanding of song lyrics as musical literary texts, especially in the hip-hop genre, which often combines personal expression with a unique linguistic style.

However, this study has several limitations. The analysis focused on a single song and used descriptive qualitative methods, so the results cannot be generalized. Therefore, it is hoped that future research will explore figurative language and idiomatic phrases in more songs, either within a single album or across different genres, or compare several songs by different singers and analyze a larger collection of song lyrics to obtain a broader stylistic picture of popular song lyrics.

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