

## Analysis of Metaphors in the Song “Christmas Song” by Back Number: An Approach using Stephen Ullmann Theory

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**Abstract.** This research aims to analyze the use of metaphors in the song "Christmas Song" performed by Back Number. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with Stephen Ullmann's theory approach. The data used in this analysis is the lyrics of the song "Christmas Song". The data is analyzed in-depth to identify the types of metaphors contained in the lyrics. The research stages include data collection, analysis, and interpretation, with the aim of formulating conclusions based on the analysis results. The results of the research indicate that the dominant metaphors in "Christmas Song" are abstraction.

**Keywords:** abstraction; metaphor; song

### RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Humans use language as a tool of communication to convey their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and opinions. (A'yun, 2022, p. 357). One of the most effective ways to express language is through songs. Songs have become a commonly used medium for self-expression and are an integral part of societal life worldwide (Hoke et al., 2023, p. 2237). Aside from being utilized by musicians or music producers as a means of self-expression, songs can also be considered as channels for the everyday life, emotions, or psychological states of their listeners (Widiyanti & Wahyuningsih, 2022, p. 599). According to Kristiyanti (on Bahri, 2022, p. 463) songs are a medium of expression used by their creators to convey their observations, experiences, and personal perceptions. This creative process involves manipulating words and language with the aim of creating appeal and a unique identity in every lyric or verse. This strategy aims to bring forth a deeper artistic dimension and highlight the unique characteristics in every line or stanza of the lyrics. By utilizing various figures of speech and literary techniques, songwriters are able to create more engaging and captivating works for listeners while also expressing personal experiences in a creative and emotionally stirring manner.

Based on research conducted by several experts, it appears that there is an agreement that metaphorical language style is one of the most commonly encountered among various language styles found worldwide (A'yun, 2022, p. 358). The utilization of metaphors in songs isn't confined to any specific culture or nation, it's a widespread practice found in music from various countries, included Japan (Hoke et al., 2023, p. 2237), as seen in the works of Back Number (バックナンバー, Bakku Nambā), a Japanese rock trio consisting of Iyori Shimizu, Kazuya Kojima, and Hisashi Kurihara, this rock trio has achieved a great success with their song titled "Christmas Song" which song they performed reached the number one spot on the Japan Hot 100 chart 2016 (<http://www.billboard-japan.com/charts/detail?a=hot100&year=2016&month=1&day=4>). The song "Christmas Song" depicts an individual struggling to express their feelings to their lover. This character feels sad, awkward, and jealous because they are unable to express their true emotions. Perhaps there is a fear of expressing love due to uncertainty or fear of rejection. This song depicts the internal conflict experienced by the character, where the desire to love and be loved contradicts the inability to move forward in the relationship. Due to the fear felt by the character, they use several metaphorical

expressions in their sentences to avoid directly expressing their feelings. With a metaphors within it, the song "Christmas Song" is intriguing to further examine, providing an opportunity to analyze the use of metaphors in popular musical literature. This analysis includes various types of metaphors used, the implied meanings within them, and the role of these metaphors in conveying messages and emotions to the listeners.

According to Stephen Ullmann, as explained in his work "The Principles of Semantics" (1957), metaphor itself is a technique involving the use of words or phrases with their original meanings to convey ideas that are not directly related literally but share similarity in one or more aspects. According to Ullmann (on Putri & Putri, 2021, p. 69) based on semantic analysis, metaphors can be classified into four main categories. First, there are anthropomorphic metaphors, which channel human attributes or behaviors onto non-human entities, such as "head of the office." Second, there are synesthetic metaphors, which transfer sensory experiences from one sense to another, for example, "sweet memories." Third, there are zoomorphic metaphors, which link animal attributes with other concepts, such as "bird's song." Fourth, there are abstraction metaphors, where concrete concepts are transferred into the abstract domain or vice versa, such as "you are my star".

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Previous research applying the same theoretical approach was conducted by Annisa Putri in 2021, titled "Analisis Gaya Bahasa Metafora Pada Lirik Lagu Karya *LiSA*" in the Japanese Language Education, English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang. The results of the research on *LiSA*'s song lyrics identified four types of metaphors based on Stephen Ullmann's theory that is anthropomorphic, synesthetic, abstraction, and zoomorphic metaphors. Among these four types, abstraction metaphors appeared most frequently. The difference between Annisa Putri's research and the author lies in the research object used, the author used the lyrics of "Christmas Song" by Back Number, while Annisa Putri research focused on the lyrics of songs by *LiSA*.

Another study was conducted by Diva E. M. Hoke in 2023 from the Japanese Language Education Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano, Indonesia, titled "ANALISIS METAFORA DALAM LAGU JEPANG". Research on the lyrics of "Nightcord" by 25ji identified four types of metaphors, with abstraction metaphors being the most dominant. The difference between Diva E. M. Hoke's research and the author's lies in the research object used, the author used the lyrics of "Christmas Song" by Back Number, while Diva E. M. Hoke's research focused on the lyrics of "Nightcord" by 25ji.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative descriptive research. According to Sugiyono (on Valentin et al., & Wahyuningsih, 2023, p. 478) The qualitative descriptive method is a method in which collected data is analyzed by directly describing the data without alteration. According to Sugiyono (2016, p. 9), this approach focuses on researching the natural conditions of objects, as opposed to experiments which are typically conducted under specific settings. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the research object using descriptions, explanations, and careful understanding.

The data source used is the lyrics of the song "Christmas Song" obtained from the website <https://genius.com/Back-number-christmas-song-lyrics>. The method used to analyze the data is the read-listen method, according to Sudaryanto (on Ismail et al., 2022, p. 44) the read-listen method is an approach applied in language research to carefully observe the use of language in the research object. This method is commonly used in language research to observe language usage in the analyzed context, both orally and in writing. The research process includes data collection, analysis, and interpretation, with the aim of formulating conclusions based on the analysis results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis conducted, two types of metaphors were found in the lyrics of the song "Christmas Song" based on Stephen Ullmann's theory approach, with a total number of data being at least three metaphors. Abstraction metaphors are the most dominant, with one zoomorphic metaphor, and two abstraction metaphors. Here is an example analysis of a verse from the lyrics of "Christmas Song" containing metaphors:

### 1. Animal Metaphor

#### 1.1 Deer Antlers

はしやぐ恋人達は

*Hashagu koibito tachi wa*

The lovers who's making out

トナカイのツノなんか生やして

*Tonakai no Tsuno nanka hayashite*

Will only grow deer antlers

よく人前で出来るなあ

*Yoku hitomae de dekirunaa*

How dare they do that in public

いや 羨ましくなんてないけど

*Iya, urayamashikunante nai kedo*

No, I don't feel jealous at all

The lyrics depict someone's emotional experience of feeling jealous or uncomfortable seeing their partner being affectionate with someone else in public. The metaphor used, “トナカイのツノなんか生やして” (growing deer antlers) symbolically represents the emergence of jealousy or discomfort. An example scenario in the song is when someone openly witnesses their partner showing closeness to someone else in public, such as hugging or engaging in intimate behavior. This disturbs the individual, making them feel unsettled, suspecting that their partner may have feelings for someone else or may even be cheating.

In scientific explanation, this situation reflects the experience of interpersonal jealousy, which is an emotional response to potential threats to one's intimate relationship. Jealousy is a complex emotional response involving feelings of loss, insecurity, and uncertainty. When partners display intimacy with

others in public, it can trigger these feelings, making individuals feel threatened or undervalued in their relationship. The metaphor "growing deer antlers" figuratively represents these feelings, highlighting the intensity and presence of jealousy in someone's experience.

Deer antlers have long been used as a symbol of jealousy in various cultural metaphors, considering that male deer with large antlers use them to demonstrate strength and dominance in competition among stags. In real life, these antlers are attributes that develop on male deer as evidence of superiority in reproduction or territory defense. In the context of the lyrics, the metaphor of deer antlers represents the qualities of jealousy, desire for dominance, or competition among partners. When relationships become too intimate in public, one or both partners may feel threatened or insecure, reminiscent of the competition among deer in the wild. Therefore, the use of this metaphor highlights the emotional complexity in human relationships, where excessive intimacy can trigger jealousy or discomfort similar to competition in the wild.

The use of the phrase “トナカイのツノ” (deer antlers) which refers to a part of an animal's body, in the lyrics indicates the presence of an animal metaphor. In this sense, the metaphor connects human traits or emotions with the characteristics or behaviors of animals. In this case, "deer antlers" are used as a symbol to convey feelings of jealousy or discomfort in the context of human relationships, depicting the complex dynamics of human interaction through analogies from the animal kingdom.

## 2. Abstraction

### 2.1 Stars

星に願いをなんてさ柄じゃないけど  
*Hoshii ni negai wo nante sa gara janai kedo*  
I'm not used to wishing upon a star, but...

結局君じゃないと嫌なんだって  
*Kekkyoku kimi janai to iya nandatte*  
After all, it won't do if it's not you

見上げてるんだ  
*Miageterunda*  
So i look up at the sky.

The lyric reflects a person's changing attitude toward aspirations and hopes in their life, triggered by the presence of a beloved individual. Initially, the individual expresses a skeptical attitude toward achieving their desires, even in relation to stars as symbols of hope. However, when they encounter the presence of their loved one, their paradigm shifts. Awareness of the importance of the beloved in their happiness alters their perspective on hopes and aspirations. Eventually, the individual realizes that the presence or absence of their loved one significantly impacts their happiness. Recognizing the value of this relationship, they feel compelled to change their attitude toward hope. Through their gaze at the sky, symbolizing a source of aspiration and hope, the individual expresses their desire for their dreams to be fulfilled and for their beloved to be with them.

In the real world, stars are celestial objects consisting of hot gases that emit light and heat through nuclear reactions in their cores. Physically, stars come in various shapes and sizes depending on their

type, but generally, they shine brightly in the night sky and appear as points of light. Stars can vary in size, color, and distribution throughout space. However, in the realm of language and literature, "the star" is often used metaphorically to symbolize more abstract concepts such as hope, dreams, or love. In this context, stars are considered symbols of desires or aspirations. When someone says "I'm not used to hoping for the star," they may be indicating that they usually don't put much faith in luck or fate. The comparison lies in the contrast between the physical nature of stars in the universe and their metaphorical significance in human thought. Physically, stars are distant and immense celestial objects, while in the metaphorical context, "the star" can become a symbol of desire, dreams, or love, which are more abstract and related to human emotions. Therefore, the use of "the star" as a metaphor of abstraction allows us to convey complex or emotional ideas using simple yet powerful imagery.

## 2.2 Depths of Heart (Lubuk Hati)

会いたいと毎日思ってた

*Aitai to mainichi omotte te*

I want to meet you every day

それを君に知って欲しくて

*Sore wo kimi ni shitte hoshikute*

I want you to know that

すれ違う人混みに君を探している

*Surechigau hitogomi ni kimi wo sagashiteiru*

I search for you in the crowd that keeps passing by

こんな日は他の誰かと笑ってるかな

*Konna hi wa hoka no dareka to waratteru kana?*

Did you smile with someone else today?

胸の奥の奥が苦しくなる

*Mune no oku no oku ga kurushiku naru*

The depths of my heart (lubuk hati) feel tight.

The lyrics above depict a character who constantly thinks about their lover. The character in the song always wants to be with their lover at all times, but also feels jealousy and pain when imagining their lover being with and laughing happily with others. The lyric “胸の奥の奥が苦しくなる” (The depths of my heart feel tight) portrays the pain experienced by the character. In the context of the Indonesian language, "The depths of my heart" can be translated as "lubuk hati." "Lubuk" refers to the deep parts of rivers, seas, and lakes that are often good places for fishing or other water-related activities. The term is also used to describe objects with deep indentations, such as plates or dishes. Scientifically, "lubuk" refers to the deep areas beneath the surface of water, both in oceans and lakes, with depths reaching thousands of feet and often inaccessible to sunlight. These areas frequently serve as habitats for various types of sea creatures adapted to low-light conditions. While in Indonesian context, 'hati' (or 'heart' in English context) is the vital organ in the body of humans and other vertebrate animals responsible for blood circulation. It is located within the chest cavity, specifically in the upper part. The heart functions primarily as the central pump that propels blood throughout the body.

In the context of the song lyrics, the expression "lubuk hati" or "The depths of my heart" is not about physical pain experienced in the heart organ, but rather serves as a metaphor to depict deep emotional pain. The term "lubuk hati" (depths of heart) is often used in language and culture to refer to the center of emotions, feelings, and intimacy of an individual. When someone says that they feel pain or sadness "in the depths of their heart," it indicates that the pain is profound and affects the core of who they are as a person. This metaphor illustrates the complexity of one's emotions and the depth of feelings they experience. The deep emotional pain may be caused by various situations or experiences, such as loss, disappointment, heartbreak, or profound sadness. The words "lubuk" or "depths" portray that the pain is not merely surface-level, but truly felt in the depths of one's soul. The use of metaphors like this in song lyrics often aims to convey complex and deep emotions artistically, allowing listeners to feel the emotions expressed in the song more strongly. By employing visual imagery like "lubuk hati," singers or songwriters can express emotional states that are difficult to convey directly with ordinary words. Therefore, "lubuk hati" in the song lyrics depicts the depth and intensity of emotions felt, rather than being merely a physical matter. In this case, "lubuk hati" is a physical concept used to represent or depict the depth of someone's emotional feelings. Although "hati" (heart) is a physical organ in the human body, in this context, the word is used to describe something unseen, namely the depth of feelings or emotions. Therefore, this falls under the category of abstract metaphor.

## CONCLUSION

Research has found that the song "Christmas Song" by Back Number employs various metaphors, primarily focusing on the use of abstract metaphors. Overall, the song's lyrics convey complex emotional messages about love, hope, desire, and uncertainty through a variety of metaphors. The use of abstract metaphors highlights the complexity in expressing feelings that are difficult to articulate directly. Thus, the song "Christmas Song" provides a profound insight into the dynamics of human relationships and the intricacies of the emotions involved.

The authors also suggest for a more in-depth examination of the metaphors present in the song "Christmas Song" utilizing the same theoretical framework applied to other types of metaphors, or alternatively employing different theoretical perspectives.

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