

An Analysis of Metaphors on Noel Gallagher at High Flying Birds Album

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use of metaphors in Noel Gallagher's *High Flying Birds* album, aiming to classify the types of metaphors employed in the song lyrics and uncover their underlying meanings. The research examines ten songs using a descriptive qualitative approach, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory as the primary analytical framework. The lyrical data were collected from publicly available sources and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) model. The findings reveal three dominant metaphor types—ontological, structural, and orientational with structural metaphors appearing most frequently. These metaphors function as symbolic representations of emotional and existential themes such as struggle, identity, love, and resilience. Gallagher often translates abstract concepts into concrete imagery such as light, roads, storms, and clocks—enabling listeners to perceive complex human experiences in a tangible manner. The study concludes that metaphors in *High Flying Birds* serve not merely as stylistic devices but as cognitive tools that shape listeners' understanding of life and emotional realities. This research contributes to semantic studies by demonstrating how conceptual metaphors in song lyrics construct meaning beyond literal interpretation and reinforce music's role as a medium of cultural and emotional expression.

Keyword: metaphor; semantics; song lyrics; conceptual metaphor theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is the scientific study of language, analyzing how it is structured, how it works, and how it is utilized in verbal communication. The purpose of linguistics is to scientifically examine language—its structure, use, development, and underlying principles. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines linguistics as the science of language, including its structure, acquisition, and relationship to different forms of communication (Wardhaugh, 1972; Ngongo et al., 2025).

Linguistics is the academic examination of language that emphasizes its structure, usage, evolution, and role in interaction. As characterized by scholars such as Wardhaugh and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, it is a methodical field that investigates how language is constructed, acquired, and connected to communication. Linguistics has various branches that examine different elements of language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics.

For a brief explanation of these seven language aspects, the researcher will explain them briefly. Phonology analyzes the sound system in language, such as phonemes (the smallest sound units that distinguish meaning). Morphology studies the structure of words and how words are formed, including morphemes (the smallest units of meaning). Syntax is the study of how words combine to form grammatical phrases and sentences. Semantics studies how words, phrases, and sentences are understood. Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context—how speakers use language in actual interactions. Sociolinguistics studies how language varies across social groups and contexts. Psycholinguistics examines how language is processed and represented within the human mind.

The study of meaning in language, including lexical, grammatical, and contextual meanings, falls under the purview of semantics, which is a subfield of linguistics (Sutikno et al., 2025). Semantics helps us

realize that context, not just word structure, contributes to meaning. Semantics is defined as “the study of the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and other linguistic units” (Yule, 2020). He stresses that the meaning of words is interpreted in light of both linguistic and non-linguistic context.

Studying how words and phrases convey meaning is the focus of semantic linguistics. It explores how phrases, terms, and sentences constitute meaning, how those meanings combine, and how they relate to the real world, context, and human cognition. It involves the interpretation of both literal meanings and implied or contextual meanings. For that reason, the researcher will be reading the language of song lyrics from a semantic perspective (Herman et al., 2025).

There are eight kinds of semantic components that the researcher discovered, one of which examines metaphorical statements. Therefore, semantics can be described as follows: one of the three levels of language evaluation, interpreted as the science of meaning—phonology, grammar, and semantics (Chaer, 1994, p. 2). The purpose of semantics is to discover why meaning is more complex than simply the words formed in a sentence.

Semantics has eight types, namely behaviorist semantics, descriptive semantics, generative semantics, grammatical semantics, lexical semantics, historical semantics, logical semantics, and structural semantics. Behaviorist semantics is a way of studying semantics based on the psychological school of behaviorism. Descriptive semantics investigates how people actually use language in their daily lives at a certain time and place. Generative semantics examines how semantic structures change when sentences are formed. Grammatical semantics studies the meaning of a sentence in terms of its syllables. Lexical semantics studies the meaning of a particular word (lexeme) and examines how meanings interact within a vocabulary—not only in terms of literal meaning (denotation) but also ambiguity and subtlety.

Historical semantics is the investigation of meaning frameworks over time. Logical semantics is a branch of modern logic dealing with symbolic concepts and notations. Structural semantics is an approach to the study of meaning that emerged from the structuralist tradition in linguistics. There is something called connotative meaning, which is one of the keys to analyzing paragraphs, words, and sentences based on their context. Semantics is a field of linguistics that studies meaning, with the aim of understanding that meaning is not solely determined by word order, but also by context and other factors that contribute to its complexity.

Figurative language is a type of expression used to generate a more powerful emotional or imaginative impact, used non-literally to communicate significance. Leech (1981) notes that figurative meaning results from a departure from literal meaning to achieve artistic and expressive effects (Purba et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2025). Figurative language is symbolic, using non-literal language to present deep meaning and leave a strong impression on readers and listeners. Figurative language explains meaning in unusual or indirect ways (Sinabutar, 2019; Lumbantobing et al., 2021).

Figurative language enhances communication by making writing and speech more vivid, interesting, and impactful. Frequently applied to generate imagery or convey complex concepts, figurative language contains words or terms with meanings beyond their literal use. Simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, allusion, and onomatopoeia are some common types of figurative language. In this study, the researcher focuses on metaphor as part of semantic analysis.

Metaphor is a form of expression that employs terms or phrases with symbolic significance rather than their straightforward meaning, portraying something in a more creative way. Metaphors are not only language tools but also thinking tools. Metaphors allow us to understand one thing by comparing it to another (Sitorus et al., 2020). These metaphors are the “metaphors we live by” as they influence our perceptions and actions unconsciously, forming our basic knowledge of experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Based on their utility and emphasis, metaphors appear in many forms. Some main types are nominal, verbal, adjectival, and conceptual metaphors. Nominal metaphor uses a noun to express something indirectly through comparison. Verbal metaphor uses a verb to express figurative meaning. Adjectival metaphor uses an adjective to convey meaning by attributing qualities not literally possessed. Conceptual metaphor describes one idea in terms of another idea and reflects how we think and understand the world.

Metaphor relates to meaning and purpose, expressing thoughts through symbolic phrases rather than simple definitions. It offers a more imaginative way to communicate. Metaphors help us understand ideas by comparing them to others, shaping how we perceive experiences. They may be explicit, implicit, anthropomorphic, or transitions from concrete to abstract. Explicit metaphors state comparisons directly, implicit metaphors do so indirectly, anthropomorphic metaphors give human traits to non-human entities, concrete-to-abstract metaphors use physical objects to represent ideas, and synesthetic metaphors connect sensory experiences.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is not simply a stylistic feature of language; it is a fundamental structure of human thought that shapes how we understand abstract concepts. This conceptual nature of metaphor is crucial in interpreting artistic and emotional expression, especially in music and literature, including Noel Gallagher’s album *High Flying Birds*.

Metaphors are a way to express complex concepts and feelings as well as to enhance language. Kövecses (2010) states that metaphors help people frame abstract experiences in a more concrete and relatable way. He explains that a metaphor bridges a source domain and a target domain, significantly communicating themes such as death, grief, identity, and emotional struggle. The researcher's purpose to uncover hidden meanings within the album's lyrics aligns with the semantic study of metaphor, as it interprets how symbolic language reflects broader human experiences.

Many listeners appreciate the album for its sound and emotional tone but may not recognize the metaphorical structures underlying the lyrics. The album employs metaphors—explicit, implicit, anthropomorphic, synesthetic, and abstract—to enhance its complexity. For example, it features a conceptual metaphor for death and transition, presenting mortality not as an end but as a ceremonial or transformative experience.

Other songs depict inner battles, societal expectations, and emotional resilience, allowing listeners to connect their personal experiences with the symbolic journey described in the music. The appeal of *High Flying Birds* stems partly from this rich metaphorical language. Young people, who often face existential questions and emotional challenges, find resonance in metaphors expressing pain, defiance, and hope. These metaphors become tools for emotional processing and identity formation, even without conscious awareness—demonstrating Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) claim that “we live by metaphor.”

Metaphor in *High Flying Birds* is not merely artistic ornamentation; it carries meaning, emotion, and connection. Through the lens of semantics, particularly metaphor theory, the researcher reveals that the album's lyrics have symbolic depth that enhances their impact and universality. This analysis highlights the significance of metaphor in understanding not only language but also the lived experiences it represents.

With this, the researcher can uncover hidden meanings within the lyrics of Noel Gallagher's album *High Flying Birds*. Although many listeners enjoy the album, they remain unaware of its deeper lyrical content. Even though this study began as a personal project, the researcher found that the album's themes speak to a wider audience. Since many young people relate to the issues explored in the songs, this broader connection likely explains the album's considerable appeal.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research all rely on research designs, which lay out the ground rules for how a study will be conducted, according to Creswell (2009). The purpose of research is to comprehend an issue, and the researcher chooses the best methodology for designing the experiment and utilizing the most effective methods. A research design is a comprehensive plan or framework for conducting a research study. It outlines the overall strategy, methods, and procedures used to collect, analyze, and interpret data, ensuring a systematic and coherent approach to address the research problem.

Descriptive qualitative research is concerned with what is or what exists, related to what happens before and how it influences what happens next. In short, descriptive qualitative research focuses on issues that have a point of view on current conditions.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research methodology. Qualitative descriptive research, according to Creswell (2012), includes surveys and fact-finding inquiries intended to define the traits of people, circumstances, or groups, as well as the present state of affairs (Jahrir et al., 2025). Qualitative research does not use statistical methods to analyze theories or hypotheses but instead interprets variables and human experiences in order to investigate social issues.

B. Research Subject

The research subject refers to individuals, groups, or entities that serve as the source of data in a study. This subject may consist of individuals, groups, institutions, or social phenomena being observed, depending on the research approach used. According to Moleong (2017), in qualitative research, the subject is referred to as a source or informant who possesses deep experience or knowledge about the topic being studied. In quantitative research, the subject typically refers to the population and sample whose data will be statistically analyzed.

The instrument used in this research is the researcher himself, who listens, observes, and analyzes the lyrics to identify and interpret metaphors. This means the researcher is the only one who can reveal the true meaning of the lyrics from the *High Flying Birds* album. Therefore, the researcher must have a deep understanding so that it gives a beautiful imagination to readers and listeners, showing how deep the messages contained in these lyrics are on the album.

C. Research Object

The research object is the main aspect or focus that is being studied from the subject. It may include behaviors, perceptions, performance, policies, organizational structures, or specific variables within a phenomenon. Sugiyono (2016) explains that the research object is something that becomes the center of the researcher's attention to be studied and analyzed in order to draw conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation.

In this study, the valid research object is the song lyrics from the album *High Flying Birds* by Noel Gallagher, consisting of 10 songs. The lyrics were downloaded from YouTube, which the researcher and the public can access to obtain the album's music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CIKsoobQxw&list=PLcnPdZHP01-YIISi-XTYax_Z_ZsOYAfqy

D. Technique of Data Analysis

The source of the data is the lyrics of the songs containing metaphorical language that the researcher wants to analyze, collected from the YouTube link mentioned in the research object. To improve validity, the researcher employed data triangulation in this investigation. This method, which is frequently used to ensure data accuracy, makes use of external sources as tools for comparison or verification.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), studying a topic from several perspectives, data sources, or views is known as research triangulation. This approach adds to the legitimacy and reliability of the research findings by cross-checking data and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied. The researcher used the data triangulation approach, also known as source triangulation, to review and confirm the study's findings.

The validity and reliability of the research findings are enhanced by this method, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and cross-checks data. This method enables scholars to compile data from many sources to facilitate the examination of sentence structures in Noel Gallagher's album *High Flying Birds*. Reducing, displaying, and drawing conclusions are the three primary phases in qualitative data analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994). To confirm valid data, the researcher used Miles and Huberman's technique, which involves three key interrelated steps.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

In Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory, there are three types of metaphors: ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors. The researcher analyzed the data based on the triangulation method/technique to find which sentence patterns mostly appear in the album. After analyzing the data with the triangulation method/technique, the researcher found the metaphor types that appear most frequently in the album.

Based on this research, the researcher concludes that ontological and structural metaphors are used more commonly than orientational metaphors in the lyrics. The researcher will describe the number of metaphor types used in the album.

Example: Noel uses natural metaphors (rainbow, sun, horizon) and animals (tiger) to depict inner restlessness, escape, and the search for freedom.

Table 1. Types of metaphor used in the Song

Song Titles	Ontologic	Structural	Orientalional
Everybody's on the run	5	6	4
Dream on	6	5	1
If I had a gun	7	5	-
The death you and me	5	4	1
I wanna live in a dream in my record machine	6	4	2
AKA.. What a life	3	5	-
Soldier boys and jesus freaks	4	5	1
AKA.. Broken arrow	2	6	2
Stranded on the wrong beach	2	4	1
Stop the clocks	3	3	2
Total	43	47	14

B. Discussion

The discussion of the results of the analysis is summarized by the researcher. It was found in a lyric excerpt, "All people on the village green are gathered round their TV screens," from the song "Soldier Boys and Jesus Freaks," which was studied by the researcher. There is an implied meaning in the sentence, namely that communication is a container, which means that the container is a reflection of a society that accepts messages from the government at face value.

The analysis revealed that the lyrics contained three different metaphors. In percentages, ontological metaphors appeared 43 times (41%), structural metaphors 47 times (45%), and orientational metaphors 14 times (13%). This shows that the songwriter wrote the lyrics based on his bitter experiences in life, embedded in metaphorical language so that they could be expressed and conveyed through these songs.

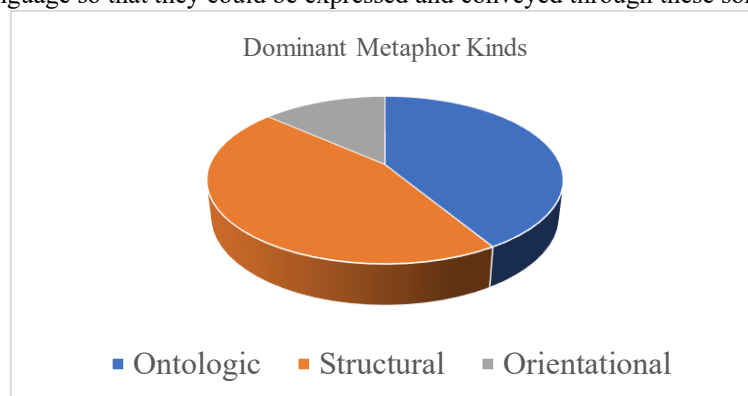


Figure 1. Dominant Types of Metaphors Found in Songs

The analysis shows that the lyrics in Noel Gallagher's album *High Flying Birds* utilize a wide variety of metaphors. The most dominant metaphor is structural, followed by ontological. This suggests that metaphors serve not only as linguistic decoration but also as Gallagher's primary means of conveying abstract ideas, emotions, and perspectives on life. This finding can be explained through the metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which states that metaphor is a way of thinking, not just a style of language. For example, metaphors like "life is a journey" or "love is war," which appear in Gallagher's lyrics, demonstrate a conceptual mapping process between concrete and abstract experiences. In this way, listeners not only enjoy the beauty of the lyrics but also understand the personal experiences and emotional messages Gallagher intends to convey. This is intended to give listeners the opportunity to change themselves or become aware of their mistakes in order to achieve a life goal.

The results of this study align with previous research examining metaphors in song lyrics, such as Hanafi Wibowo and Ardea Regita's (2024) study, which found that metaphors serve to explore major themes such as life, death, identity, rebellion, and social critique. Similarly, Lien Dien Marsa Dndraha (2018) primarily discusses love, happiness, sadness, and passion, utilizing metaphors to express everyday emotions. However, this study found that the metaphors in Gallagher's lyrics not only emphasize personal and emotional themes but also contain existential and social nuances rarely explored in depth in previous research.

These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research reinforces the view that metaphor is a cognitive element underlying how humans understand the world and is not limited to literary works or poetry. Practically, this research can contribute to the study of popular culture and the teaching of language and literature, particularly in introducing figurative language to students through songs that are close to their everyday lives, thus making figurative language popular with many people, including teenagers, especially in learning English.

However, this study has several limitations. The analysis focused on only one album, thus not fully representing Noel Gallagher's entire body of work. Furthermore, the interpretation of metaphorical meaning in the lyrics is subjective, influenced by the researcher's cultural and linguistic background. This could affect the results if examined by other researchers with different perspectives. Nevertheless, this study helps people engage their minds to better understand situations, conditions, and even the feelings of people who are not personally known, through the words spoken in the lyrics. This is where the three types of metaphors are revealed to express meaning and the reasons why that meaning is expressed.

In structural metaphors, meaning is expressed by mapping one concept onto another. In Noel Gallagher's songs, for example, the concepts of life, love, and struggle are often described through the structures of a journey, war, or a burden. For example:

"Depends on the weight of my load" → describes life as a journey carrying a heavy load.

"You can't fight the feeling" → depicts feelings as a war that cannot be won.

In this way, abstract experiences such as love, loss, and the search for meaning in life become easier to understand because they are structured through real physical experiences—walking, fighting, falling, being stranded. This metaphor dominates because it most effectively expresses the inner and existential journey of

humans, who are accustomed to thinking through concrete experiences. Almost all of the songs in the album are related to the search for direction and life's journey.

In the orientational metaphor, meaning is conveyed through spatial direction that reflects a person's condition and emotions. Examples from Noel Gallagher's songs:

"Falling in and out of love" → feelings of love are described through up-and-down movements.

"Shine a light into the shadows" → light and dark are used to describe hope and despair.

The up-down or light-dark spatial orientation helps listeners feel emotions visually and physically. For example, "up" is associated with happiness or strength, while "down" indicates sadness or downfall.

Human emotions are closely linked to bodily experience. When sad, a person's expression is gloomy and their body is hunched over. Conversely, when happy, a person smiles and stands tall or even jumps. That is why orientational metaphors are a natural way to describe emotional states, used not only by Noel Gallagher, but also in Westlife's lyrics, where many up-and-down metaphors appear to describe love and loss.

Ontological metaphors treat thoughts, emotions, and time as if they were real or controllable objects. Examples from Noel Gallagher's songs:

"Lost inside my head behind a wall" → the mind is described as a closed room.

"Stop the clocks" → time is described as a physical object that can be stopped.

"Storm clouds sucking up my soul" → the soul is considered an object that can be absorbed or lost.

These metaphors allow listeners to understand complex feelings such as loneliness or loss through concrete visual images, as if they can "see" the form of those feelings. Ontological metaphors are necessary because the human brain needs boundaries to understand abstract concepts. By turning abstract ideas such as "soul," "time," or "emotion" into objects, listeners can feel, imagine, and experience them in a tangible way.

This is why, in research on Noel Gallagher, *The Black Parade*, and Westlife, ontological metaphors always appear strongly—because they help connect the mind with physical experience.

4. CONCLUSION

The metaphor analysis of Noel Gallagher's *High Flying Birds* album used Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, which consists of ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors. The results show that structural metaphors are the most frequently used. This research is more developed than previous studies because it explores deeper meanings through a different medium, namely Noel Gallagher's *High Flying Birds* album, which contains rich metaphorical expressions that make it easier for the researcher to conduct a more idealistic and meaningful analysis.

The lyrics in the album are dominated by structural metaphors that create a complete narrative about a person's journey to achieve peace in life. These metaphors do not merely serve as stylistic elements but function as conceptual tools that help listeners understand abstract experiences through concrete imagery, reinforcing the emotional and philosophical depth conveyed in the songs.

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