



## An Analysis of Figures of Speech in Grammy-Award Winning “Song of the Year” during 2010-2017

### การวิเคราะห์ภาษาภาพพจน์ใน “เพลงแห่งปี” ของรางวัลแกรมมี่ ประจำปี ค.ศ. 2010-2017

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#### Abstract

This quantitative-qualitative research aimed to examine the frequency and percentage of occurrences of the “trope” and “scheme” categories of figures of speech used in Grammy-Award winning “Song of the Year” of 2010-2017 and to interpret the meanings conveyed by the most frequently-used “trope.” It was found that the “scheme” type was used much more frequently than the “trope” type. Among the “tropes,” “symbol” was the most dominant; whereas, “assonance” (repetition of vowels) was the most active “scheme.” Symbols allowed a wider, universal range of interpretations than other figurative types, despite the limited space of verse. Meanwhile, assonance helped deliver the intended messages through symbols beautifully. A combination of these figures of speech defined Grammy-Award quality songs.

**Keywords:** Figures of Speech, Grammy Award, Song of the Year

#### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเชิงปริมาณและคุณภาพนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาค่าความถี่และร้อยละของการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ชนิด “trope” และ “scheme” ใน “เพลงแห่งปี” ของรางวัลแกรมมี่ ประจำปี ค.ศ. 2010-2017 และเพื่อตีความความหมายของภาษาภาพพจน์ชนิด “trope” ที่ใช้บ่อยที่สุด การวิจัยพบว่าภาษาภาพพจน์ชนิด “scheme” ใช้บ่อยมากกว่าชนิด “trope” มาก ในบรรดา “trope” “สัญลักษณ์” ใช้มากที่สุด และ “สัมผัสสระ” เป็น “scheme” ที่ใช้งานบ่อยที่สุด “สัญลักษณ์” ช่วยให้เกิดความที่หลากหลายและเป็นสากลมากกว่าภาษาภาพพจน์ชนิดอื่นๆ แม้เพลงมีพื้นที่จำกัด ขณะที่ “สัมผัสสระ” ช่วยให้การส่งสารผ่านสัญลักษณ์เป็นไปอย่างงดงาม การผสมผสานของภาษาภาพพจน์ทั้งสองชนิด คือคำนิยามของเพลงคุณภาพระดับรางวัลแกรมมี่

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#### Introduction

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Song lyrics differ from other texts in that they are a short poetic composition with a rhythmic structure created to fit a designed melody. In general, lyrics, regardless of their genres, are packed with figurative language (Permatasari et al., 2016) such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, symbol, etc. so as to create as much powerful impression from not so many lines of verse on the listeners as possible. Thus, to understand the contents of songs is not always an easy task. As defined by Isa et al. (2017), Listiani (2015), and Wren and Martin (1981), figures of speech refer to expressions with connotative meanings which cannot be simply obtained from the literal meanings of component words but, rather, derived through various means of interpretation such as through comparison, contrast, reference, allusion, etc. Following Leech (1969) and Leigh (1994), figures of speech are divided into two types; namely, “trope” and “scheme.” “Trope” means the use of words that gives a prominent change in their standard or literal meanings and require interpretation (Abrams, 1988; Hawkes, 1979; Leech, 1969; Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Some examples of tropes are simile, metaphor, irony, personification, and so on. For example, “You are the apple of my eyes” carries a metaphorical meaning (trope) “You are very special to me.”

Meanwhile, “scheme” refers to rhetorical arrangement of words which aims to create aesthetics of sounds or beauty of utterances such as assonance, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, and so on, and this kind of arrangement does not invoke any change in word meanings (Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). For instance, “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers” sounds beautiful due to the effect of alliteration- the repetition of the initial consonant /p/ in every word. Hence, if we can manage to understand the “trope” of the lyrics and appreciate their “scheme,” listening to a song is then not simply hearing voice and music but undergoing an experience through appreciating the intended messages meant to deliver from the composers to the listeners.

In regard to research on figures of speech in song lyrics, eight previous studies have been reviewed; namely, Ain (2013), Azwardi (2016), Isa et al. (2017), Listiani (2015), Locario (2018), Permatasari et al. (2016), Suriyawongpaisal (2013), and Sutiyono (2013). Ain (2013) examined the types of figures of speech in English songs of the 2009 album “Thank You Allah” sung by Maher Zain. The figurative language found was as follow: hyperbole, personification, metaphor, simile, alliteration, irony, litotes, euphemism, parallelism, antithesis, and synecdoche with hyperbole being a dominant one. It was suggested that with understanding of the deep meanings conveyed through these figures of speech, the listeners would appreciate the glory of God better. In the same year, Sutiyono (2013) found seven kinds of figures of speech in Avril Lavigne’s “The Best Damn Thing” Album, and they were anaphora, hyperbole, repetition, simile, personification, parallelism, and metaphor. These figures were used to portray the biography of the singer.



Besides, Suriyawongpaisal (2013) carried out descriptive and interpretive content analysis to identify the figures of speech commonly used in Taylor Swift's thirty-nine songs to convey the American cultural values and to explain how each category of these values was delivered by the figures of speech. These thirty-nine songs were retrieved from three albums: "Taylor Swift, Fearless, and Speak Now" issued in the years 2006 to 2010. It was found that metaphor, simile, and hyperbole were most frequently used to express the American cultural values; namely, love and care (bond and relationship), individualism (independency), honesty and trust, and liberalism (dignity).

Next, Listiani (2015) found seven types of figurative language in Taylor Swift's "Speak Now" album: simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, synecdoche, symbol, and oxymoron. Then, Azwardi (2016) analyzed four song lyrics of Coldplay; i.e., "Yellow, Sky Full of Stars, Fix You, and Paradise," and four figures of speech were found; i.e., hyperbole, metaphor, personification, and simile. All these figures of speech helped intensify the expressions about life. In the same year, Permatasari et al. (2016) studied figures of speech and themes used in three selected songs "Nude, All I need, and Videotape" of Radiohead's "Rainbow" album. Four kinds of figurative speech were revealed: metaphor, hyperbole, paradox, and metonymy. These figures invoked gloomy and negative feelings: self-doubt, disappointment, and depression in "Nude," unrequited love in "All I need," and a dying man and his message to his loved ones in "Videotape."

Next, Isa et al. (2017) analyzed Taylor Swift's "1989" album, and eight figures of speech were found; namely, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, and symbol. All these figures of speech helped deliver Swift's feelings and attitudes toward her couple. Finally, Locario (2018) investigated an effect of the use of songs on English language learning. A think-aloud technique was applied to seven undergraduate Chinese students taking the "English Through Songs" class at a university in Thailand, and two English unfamiliar songs; i.e., "Forever Young" by Alphaville and "Marry Me" by Rhett Lawrence were used as an instrument with the former containing simile, metaphor, and hyperbole and the latter lacking figurative language. The think-aloud activity showed that the song which contained the figures of speech could encourage the participants to think critically through the methods of comparison, exemplification, explication, synonyms, etc. more successfully than the song which had no figure of speech in it. Therefore, it was recommended that songs with figurative language could serve as an effective tool for language teaching.

All these previous studies show that a wide variety of figures of speech could be used to express some messages in song lyrics. However, it can be claimed that some figures of speech were more common in songs than others, especially **simile**, **metaphor**, **personification**, and **hyperbole**. Within a limited space of lyrics, it seems that figures of speech could serve as an efficient apparatus for transmission of profound messages such as



cultural values, attitudes towards life, love, and relations, and many more. Instead of direct statement of the contents, figurative language managed to allow the composers to emphasize the points being made.

Nevertheless, despite the congruent findings about the significance of figurative speech in song lyrics, a few issues called for further exploration. First, all the past works focused their analysis on some particular singers or albums, but none of them attempted to examine the figurative language from the angle of award-winning songs. A question was raised as to why some songs were given awards, but others were not, and whether figures of speech played any role in the victory. So, this current research placed its scope on Grammy-Award winning "Song of the Year." As known, the Grammy Awards are well-accepted as the world's leading society of music professionals, and they are given only to the quality songs in both lyrics and melody. More importantly, the awarding is not judged based on the stage performances and the amount of sales or chart positions. Thus, an analysis of the Grammy-Award winning lyrics was good enough for a research project.

Secondly, we cannot deny that what makes a song lyric successfully popular includes several matters beyond the connotative use of meanings (i.e., the "trope" category of figurative language), and that is the beauty of language (i.e., the "scheme" category of figurative language). Therefore, both "tropes" and "schemes" were the focus of this current study, which none of the previous researches had initiated in the analysis of song lyrics. Finally, since most of the past works focused only on a qualitative method of analysis, and since the current research focused on award-winning songs, a question followed as to whether some figure of speech attracted the Grammy Awards over another. As a result, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied to achieve an answer to the question.

### Objectives

Based on the three issues which called for further examination as mentioned above, two objectives were set as follow.

1. To examine the frequency and percentage of occurrences of the "trope" and "scheme" categories of figures of speech used in Grammy-Award winning "Song of the Year" of 2010-2017.
2. To interpret the meanings conveyed by the most frequently-used "trope."

### Research Questions

Based on the two objectives stated above, two research questions were raised as follow.

1. What were the frequency and percentage of occurrences of the "trope" and "scheme" categories of figures of speech used in Grammy-Award winning "Song of the Year" of 2010-2017?
2. What were the meanings conveyed by the most frequently-used "trope"?



## Significance

The findings of this research were expected to fill up the three gaps of the past findings as earlier stated and to be able to contribute certain benefits to literature classes and/or other language classes.

## Scope

The current study focused on both “trope” and “scheme” groups of figures of speech and focused on the lyrics, not the melody and the performances, of the songs which won the title of “Song of the Year” of Grammy Awards in the years 2010-2017.

## Research Methods

### 1. Research material

The research material consisted of eight Grammy-Award winning songs which won the title “Song of the Year” in 2010-2017. They were Antebellum’s “Need You Now” (2010), Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep” (2011), Fun’s featuring Janelle Monae’s “We Are Young” (2012), Lorde’s “Royals” (2013), Sam Smith’s “Stay With Me” (2014), Ed Sheeran’s “Thinking Out Loud” (2015), Adele’s “Hello” (2016), and Bruno Mars’ “That’s What I Like” (2017). They were retrieved from <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/awards/winners-nominees/140> (Recording Academy Grammy Awards, n.d.).

### 2. Instrument

To obtain answers to the questions on the types of figures of speech used in the eight “Songs of the Year,” four analytical frameworks from four past researches were merged; i.e., Katz et al. (1998), Kennedy (1979) as cited in Isa et al. (2017), Sutyono (2013), and รัตนากกรณ์ สอนสมฤทธิ์ และ เสาวภาคย์ กัลยาณมิตร (2562). The definitions and examples of these figures of speech obtained from these previous works were as follow.

#### 2.1 “Trope” category of figures of speech

The “trope” category which was used as the framework of analysis consisted of the following: **allegory** (use of characters in the story to represent a class of something), **allusion** (reference of outside sources), **apostrophe** (addressing to someone who is not really there), **euphemism** (use of nicer words to make unpleasant situations sound better or softer), **hyperbole** (overstatement of something), **idiom** (a fixed pattern of speech with a peculiar meaning), **irony** (saying the opposite to the real feelings or situations), **metaphor** (making a comparison of two things, without using a linking word such as “like, as, or than,” **metonymy** (substitution of one thing with another related thing), **onomatopoeia** (a word imitating natural sounds), **oxymoron** (two or more words which are opposite to one another such as “sweet sorrow”), **paradox** (two contradictory, yet possible, utterances), **personification** (giving inanimate items animate qualities), **rhetoric question** (asking a question but not to elicit



an answer), **simile** (comparison of two or more things, using a linking word such as “like, as, or than”), **symbol** (use of a word to represent an abstract idea), **synecdoche** (use of “a part” to refer to “the whole;” and use of “the whole” to refer to “a part”), and **understatement** (speaking of something serious or important with lighter remarks)

## 2.2 “Scheme” category of figures of speech

The “scheme” category which was used as the framework of analysis comprised the following: **anadiplosis** (the last word of the previous utterance repeated as the first word of the following utterance), **anastrophe** (two phrases switching their usual order), **anaphora** (the repeated use of the first part of the utterances), **antithesis** (use of two opposite ideas in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect), **alliteration** (repetition of the first consonant sounds), **antimetabole** (repetition of a phrase in a reverse order), **assonance** (repetition of the same vowel sound), **asyndeton** (two utterances with their connector dropped), **ellipsis** (words are left out from a sentence but the sentence can still be understood), **parenthesis** (addition of a word, a phrase, or a sentence to explain something), **expanalepsis** (the initial part of an utterance repeated at the end of that same utterance), **epistrophe** (the last part of the utterances repeated), **climax** (ordering words to develop the peak of situations), **polysyndeton** (use of several conjunctions in the same utterance), **repetition** (the same words, phrases, or sentences repeated), and **rhyme** (repetition of the vowel and final consonant of the last words of two lines).

## 3. Data collection and analysis

The lyrics of the eight “Songs of the Year” were first collected from the Grammy website “<https://www.grammy.com/grammys/awards/winners-nominees/140>.” Then, each lyric was read carefully, and, following the definition framework stated earlier, the researcher highlighted all the possible figures of speech, rechecked them, and listed the confirmed ones with their excerpts in a table. In any case of doubt, the researcher sought advice and verification from the thesis adviser. To answer research question (1), every occurrence of each figure of speech was marked and tallied for the frequency, and then percentage of the total occurrences of each figure of speech was calculated. To answer research question (2), the most frequently-used “trope” figure of speech, which was obtained from the first research question, was interpreted for the deeper meanings and the intended messages. All the interpretations were verified by the thesis advisor.

## Findings

The findings of the research were presented into two parts, following the two research questions stated earlier.

### 1. Frequency and percentage of occurrences of figures of speech used in Grammy-Award winning “Song of the Year” of 2010-2017









“Scheme” Category of Figures of Speech	Grammy-Award Winning “Song of the Year”								Freq. and (%)
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
11. Anadiplosis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12. Anastrophe	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13. Antithesis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14. Antimetabole	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15. Expanalepsis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16. Epistrophe	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Frequency and (%)	66 (6.27)	193 (18.33)	125 (11.87)	177 (16.81)	68 (6.46)	93 (8.83)	119 (11.30)	212 (20.13)	1,053 (100)

Table 3 shows that among the sixteen “scheme” types of figures of speech, the three most frequently-used “schemes” were “**assonance**” (the repetition of the same vowel sound) (439 times, 41.69%), “**alliteration**” (the repetition of the first consonant sounds) (273 times, 25.93%), and “**repetition**” (the same words, phrases, or sentences repeated) (208 times, 19.75%). For example, “So *let's set* the world on fire...” (“We Are Young” - Song of the Year 2012) and “Sex *by the fire* at night...” (“That’s What I Like”- Song of the Year 2017) carried a repetition of the vowels (**assonance**). The examples of **alliteration** were “These *nights never* seem to go to plan...I don't want you to leave, will you *hold my hand*...” (“Stay With Me”- Song of the Year 2014). The use of **repetition** was seen in many songs such as “Hey, hey, hey...I got a condo in Manhattan” (“That’s What I Like”- Song of the Year 2017) and “You had my heart inside of your hand... But *you played it... You played it... You played it... You played it* to the beat...” (“Rolling in the Deep”- Song of the Year 2012).

On the other hand, six types of “schemes” were not found, and they were anadiplosis, anastrophe, antithesis, antimetabole, expanalepsis, and epistrophe. Moreover, all the eight songs applied the “scheme” figures of speech in their lyrics. The first three “Songs of the Year” which used the schemes most frequently consisted of Bruno Mars’ “That’s What I Like” (2017) (212 times, 20.13%), Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep” (2011) (193 times, 18.33%), and Lorde’s “Royals” (2013) (177 times, 16.81%).

## 2. Meanings conveyed by most frequently-used “trope” figure of speech

As shown in Table 2, “**symbol**” was the most frequently used in Grammy-Award winning “Song of the Year” of 2010-2017 with the frequency of thirty-two times (40.00%) of all eighty occurrences of tropes. In this section, all the symbols found in the five songs were interpreted so as to understand the intended messages and to appreciate the potential effects of “symbols” on the quality of each of these “Songs of the Year.”



### 2.1 Symbols in “Royals” by Lorde (Song of the Year 2013)

This song was about a woman who was born a lay simple person having nothing near a lavish life, but later she had everything like all the rich had. Nevertheless, she declared that she was not attached to all the luxuries although others might have thought she was caught in her wealth. Rather, it was not about the belongings she was proud of but the power to live her life as she wanted it to be. The woman in the song was interpreted as the singer herself by some commentators. An excerpt of the lyric was cited below.

“I've never seen a *diamond* in the flesh  
 I cut my teeth on wedding rings in the movies  
 ...  
 We don't care, we're driving *Cadillacs* in our dreams  
 But everybody's like *Cristal, Maybach, diamonds* on your timepiece  
*Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash*  
 We don't care, we aren't caught up in your love affair  
 And we'll never be royals  
 It don't run in our blood  
 ...  
 Let me be your ruler, you can call me *Queen B*  
 And baby I'll rule (I'll rule I'll rule I'll rule)  
 Let me live that fantasy  
 ...”

The story about her luxuries and wealth was not directly uttered but could be interpreted through the use of “symbols” of **richness**; namely, “a diamond, Cadillacs, Cristal, Maybach (expensive car), diamonds on your timepiece, Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash.” Meanwhile, the story about having **the power and right to live her life** as she wanted to (i.e., a life without care and a life without being trapped in luxurious possessions) was expressed through the use of the symbol “**Queen B(ee)**,” who had the most power in the group and had liberty to do whatever she wanted. It represented a lay person who could arise to a powerful status in society, just like the singer herself. In conclusion, all these symbols helped highlight the theme of the song “a lay person with luxury and with power to live life as she wanted to.”

### 2.2 Symbols in “That’s What I Like” by Bruno Mars (Song of the Year 2017)

This song was about a man bragging about his wealth and luxurious lifestyle to attract a woman to love him and to have sex with him. The message was quite straightforward with such utterances as “you and your ass invited, wake up with no jammies, sex by the fire at night.” But to intensify the boastful expression of **wealth**, a lot of “symbols” came into play’ i.e., “a condo in Manhattan, a beach house in Miami, lobster tail for dinner,



Cadillac, gold jewelry, strawberry champagne on ice, silk sheets and diamonds all white, shopping sprees in Paris, twenty-four karats." See their uses in the song cited below.

"Hey, hey, hey

I got *a condo in Manhattan*

Baby girl, what's hatnin'?

You and your ass invited

...

Turn around and drop it for a player, drop-drop it for me

I'll rent *a beach house in Miami*

Wake up with no jammies (nope)

*Lobster tail for dinner*

Julio, serve that scampi

You got it if you want it, got, got it if you want it

Said you got it if you want it, take my wallet if you want it, now

Jump in the *Cadillac*

(Girl, let's put some miles on it)

...

And I'm gonna give it to you

*Gold jewelry* shining so bright

*Strawberry champagne on ice*

Lucky for you, that's what I like, that's what I like

...

*Silk sheets and diamonds all white*

Lucky for you, that's what I like, that's what I like

...

I promise that your smile ain't gon' never leave

*Shopping sprees in Paris*

Everything *twenty-four karats*

Take a look in that mirror (take a look)

Now tell me who's the fairest

...

Jump in the *Cadillac*

(Girl, let's put some miles on it)

Anything you want



...

### Symbols in “Rolling in the Deep” by Adele (Song of the Year 2011)

This song was about a heartbreaking experience of a woman who was cheated by her man. The listeners could feel her deep anguish turning into anger after realizing his unfaithfulness. Everything in their married life became shattered, and her heart was broken so badly that she could never forgive him. He would get nothing but the same pain that he had caused in her. The theme of “deep sorrow and utmost anger” was not directly uttered in the song but aesthetically conveyed through a series of seven symbols, which were “fire, dark, ship, scars, home, door, and gold.” See the excerpt of the song below.

“There's a **fire** starting in my heart  
 Reaching a fever pitch and it's bringing me out the **dark**  
 Finally I can see you crystal clear  
 Go 'head and sell me out and I'll lay your **ship** bare  
 See how I leave with every piece of you  
 Don't underestimate the things that I will do  
 ...  
 The **scars** of your love remind me of us  
 They keep me thinking that we almost had it all  
 ...  
 Making a **home** down there 'cause mine sure won't be shared  
 ...  
 You had my heart inside your hand  
 But you played it with a beating  
 Throw your soul through every open **door**  
 Count your blessings to find what you look for  
 Turned my sorrow into treasured **gold**  
 You pay me back in kind and reap just what you sow  
 we could've had it all  
 ...”

The “**fire**” in the very first line could be interpreted into the woman’s “**rage**” and, at the same time, “a sense of becoming **enlightened**.” Usually, “fire” gave a sensation of heat and danger which could threaten life of people nearby; meanwhile, it could serve as a lighter which made us see things clearer. Therefore, with the two possible interpretations, the first line of the song led the listeners to feel that the woman was extremely angry with someone (who, we learned later in the song, referred to her husband or boyfriend who cheated on her), and through this anger, she finally saw the real inside of her man- an disloyal, unloving person. The use



of the symbol “fire” at the start of the lyric as such powerfully ignited the emotional attachment to the story to be recounted in the following lines of the verse.

The symbol “**dark**” in the second line could be interpreted as both “**despair**” and “**stupid blindness**” of the woman. With the first sense of meaning, we learned later in such line as “We could’ve had it all” that they built their lives together and could have become successful if the man had not crumbled them, leaving her in despair. With the second sense of meaning, we learned from the third line “Finally I can see you crystal clear” that she had left herself in stupidity and blindness, having been cheated by her husband or boyfriend.

The symbol “**ship**” could refer to “**life**.” The woman declared to make his life (ship) miserable with “I’ll lay your *ship* bare.” He would have nothing left but pain (uttered later in the song). In addition, the word “ship” could be viewed as a pun with “shit,” giving the picture of a life of a **bastard**. The symbol “**scars**” in the lines “The *scars* of your love remind me of us. They keep me thinking that we almost had it all” could possibly mean “**physical abuse** (beating)” and “**emotional anguish**” of the woman in the song. Then, the symbol “**home**” in the line “Making a *home* down there ‘cause mine sure won’t be shared” could be interpreted as “**a family life**,” which had reached its end (the separation) between the woman and the man. The next symbol was “**door**” in the line “Throw your soul through every open *door*.” A “door” usually referred to an “**opportunity**,” but in this song, it could mean a chance in a bad way because the phrase “throw your soul” suggested that the man was not loyal and might have slept with other women whenever he had a chance. Finally, the symbol “**gold**” in the line “Turned my sorrow into treasured *gold*” could be interpreted as “**fulfilment**” in the sense that the man would eventually get the same pain from losing her, and his pain was like a reward at the end of her sorrow.

To sum up, in Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep” (Song of the Year 2011), symbols were used throughout the song. All of them highlighted the woman’s anguish and rage and the man’s disgusting unfaithfulness. The thorough appearance of symbols helped keep the intensified feelings of the listeners intact from the first line to the end of the song successfully.

### 2.3 Symbols in “We Are Young” by Fun featuring Janelle Monae (Song of the Year 2012)

This song was about a young man feeling sorry about his behavior (or abuse) – using drugs and addicted to alcohol drinking. It seemed that he was apologizing to his woman (girlfriend or wife) and asking for spending the night with her, but, at the same time, he was still making an excuse and continued on drinking (while his friends were using substances in the bathroom), and, finally, he might go home with some other woman and spend the night together. To deliver the interpretations of his unpleasant behaviors- being abusive, making excuses, and sexual indulgence, “symbol” was used in the song, and they were “scar, holes, fire.” See the excerpt of the lyric below.

“...

My friends are in the bathroom getting higher than the Empire State



My lover she's waiting for me just across the bar  
 My seat's been taken by some sunglasses asking about a *scar*, and  
 I know I gave it to you months ago  
 I know you're trying to forget  
 But between the drinks and subtle things  
 The *holes* in my apologies, you know  
 I'm trying hard to take it back  
 ...  
 Tonight, we are young  
 So let's set the world on *fire*  
 We can burn brighter than the sun  
 ..."

The symbol "**scar**" in the lines "My seat's been taken by some sunglasses asking about a *scar*, and I know I gave it to you months ago" could be interpreted as the man's "**physical or emotional abuse**" inflicted on his woman, probably under the influence of substance or alcohol abuse. Later, the symbol "**holes**" was used in the lines "But between the drinks and subtle things. The *holes* in my apologies, you know. I'm trying hard to take it back." The "**holes**" could be viewed as "**flaws**," so, even though he was sorry about his behaviors, he still could not resist the temptations (e.g., drinks, drugs, and women). Then, the word "**fire**" was used in "And you feel like falling down, I'll carry you home. Tonight, we are young. So let's set the world on *fire*" and was repeated throughout the song. This symbolic "**fire**" suggested his "**sexual acts or indulgent spirit under the influence of all the temptations**." Its repetition reflected that the young man very much enjoyed the worldly pleasure- drugs, alcohol, sex, and, probably, so did his woman. The excuse behind these behaviors was "We were young."

#### 2.4 Symbols in "Hello" by Adele (Song of the Year 2016)

This song was about a woman who was attempting to contact her boyfriend (or husband) so as to apologize for what she had done to him (i.e., broken up with him). Her attempt was not successful, but she understood the situation. See some part of the lyric below.

"Hello, it's me  
 I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet  
 To go over everything  
 ...  
 When we were younger and free  
 I've forgotten how it felt before the *world* fell at our feet  
 There's such a difference between us  
 And a million miles



Hello from *the other side*  
 I must've called a thousand times  
 To tell you I'm sorry  
 For everything that I've done  
 ...”

There were two symbols in the lyric: “the world” and “the other side.” As for the symbol “**the world**” in the line “I’ve forgotten how it felt before the *world* fell at our feet,” it could be interpreted as the couple’s “**married life**,” which fell apart. As for the symbol “**the other side**” in the line “Hello from *the other side*. I must’ve called a thousand times,” it could mean two things: “**the other side of the door or the other world**.” Therefore, the sensation of desperate attempts was understood by the listeners not only because the couple were very much far apart but also because the woman was already dead.

In conclusion, the use of “symbols” added up beauty to a lyric. With a limited space, symbols helped deliver the intended message effectively. Moreover, the aesthetics of the songs was heightened by the fact that “symbols” could extend more than one meaning, depending on different listeners, a variety of interpretations as such could powerfully attract attention from the listeners and could leave long-term impression to their ears and heart.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The current study **reconfirmed** the previous findings about the use of a variety of figures of speech in song lyrics (e.g., symbol, idiom, metaphor, allusion, hyperbole, personification, synecdoche, apostrophe, rhetoric question, paradox, onomatopoeia) and the dominant roles of metaphor and hyperbole in songs. It also asserted that figurative language carried so much aesthetic power that famous song lyricists enjoyed exercising so that their attitudes and emotions could be delivered to the audience with impressive subtlety. Consequently, none of the “Songs of the Year” of the Grammy Award Academy did not contain figures of speech.

Despite the similar findings as mentioned, this study offered **two new additions** to research on figurative language in songs, and they are the empowering dominance of “**symbol**” and the enchanting role of “**scheme**.” Unlike the previous findings about the common use of “simile, metaphor, and hyperbole” in songs, “symbol” was proven a more favorable tool for Grammy-quality song composers than other types of “scope” (40% of occurrences across the prize-winning songs).

It is assumed that the nature of “**symbol**” (i.e., the use of one or a few words to represent an abstract idea) provides a wider, universal range of interpretations than other types of “scopes.” One symbolic word in



the songs such as “fire” allows the song writers to convey as many messages as they want within the limited space and the melodic constraints of the lyrics and also permits the audiences to exercise their life experiences and imagination to interpret the contents as they deem possible. For instance, the same word “fire” could be interpreted as “the woman’s rage” or “a sense of becoming enlightened” in “Rolling in the Deep” but rather as “sexual acts or indulgent spirit under the influence of all the temptations” in “We Are Young.” Furthermore, **no cultural approach** is necessary when it comes to interpretation of “symbol,” unlike interpretation of “metaphor.” The metaphor “a piece of cake” is not always understood by all the audiences if not knowing about the English-speaking culture, but the symbol “fire” is universally approachable. The **conciseness** yet **universality** of “symbol” can easily make the songs reach the heart and soul of any listeners, and, consequently, an award is ready to be delivered to those which can successfully touch all lives.

In regard to the enchanting role of “**scheme**” in songs, this research revealed that the “scheme” category of figurative language was another key tool which rendered aesthetics and beauty to the award-winning songs (i.e., assonance, alliteration, repetition, rhyme, parenthesis, anaphora, ellipsis, polysyndeton, asyndeton, climax). In fact, the use of “scheme” is very much more frequent than the use of “scope” of the figures of speech (92.94% versus 7.06% of all occurrences). However, this finding is not surprising because, as mentioned earlier, song lyrics are not an ordinary text but a poetic piece of art with a rhythmic pattern, and no other techniques could fulfil this aesthetics delivery but the “scheme” category, especially “assonance” (the repetition of the same vowel sound), “alliteration” (the repetition of the first consonant sounds), and “repetition” (the same words, phrases, or sentences repeated). Therefore, this study added to research on the use of figurative language in songs that a perfect combination of “trope” and “scheme” figures of speech definitely led to the title of “Song of the Year” given by a world-class award such as a “Grammy Award.”

### Implications

A topic about “figures of speech” was usually a part of a teaching plan of literature of all genres. The findings about the dominant roles of the “scheme” and “scope” types of figures of speech in song lyrics may be used as exemplifications or illustrations in the lectures. Listening to popular songs, especially Grammy-Award winning songs, may help attract attention from the learners more successfully than simply reading the literary texts. In addition, following Locario (2018), the findings in this research may also contribute to teaching analytical and critical reading classes. The activity of interpretation of figures of speech in songs can potentially help sharpening the learners’ analytical mind in addition to helping making the classes fun and enticing.

### Recommendations for Future Research

A further study of figurative language in the Grammy-Award “Song of the Year” of the years following 2017 may proceed to reconfirm or to refute the present findings about “symbol” and “assonance.” Moreover, a





future research may place an aim to depict the factors which can possibly be responsible for why some “trope” and some “scheme” types are not used by lyricists and why others are used frequently.

### Acknowledgement

“For Werakan Siriprakon”

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