A Study of Figurative Language in Christina Aguilera's Songs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze in use of figurative language in Christina Aguilera's songs and to interpret the meaning of the figurative language found in the lyrics to see how the words in her songs can convey the meaning and how the language in her songs can create an image in the mind of the listener. In this study, the qualitative research approach was employed. There were 27 songs chosen for analysis.

The research analyzed the research sample and classified it according to the characteristics of rhetorical devices.

The analysis was done by using the figure of speech. The results show that the songs contained the following ten types of figurative language: rhyme (49.85 %), anaphora (19.07 %), hyperbole (9.38 %), metaphor (5.58 %), personification (3.81 %), symbolism (3. 81 %), alliteration (3.51 %), simile (2.64 %), allusion (2.06 %), and oxymoron (0.29 %).

Keywords: Christina Aguilera, Figurative Language

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Introduction

Language has a very important role of communication in human life. We use language as a tool to express ideas, feelings and to build relationship with other people. People cannot do their activities well without language. By using language, we can describe our feelings, emotions and thoughts easier than using other elements. We cannot respond or react if we do not understand what other people say, write or signal. Hornby (1972 : 473) states, "Language is human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, feelings, and desire by means of a system sounds and sound symbols." People use language to communicate and interact with each other. It is easier to convey information to other people in order to share knowledge. This is supported by Bolinger (1975 : 14) who claims that "Human-language is a system of vocal-auditory communication, interacting with the experiences of its users, employing conventional signs composed of arbitrary patterned sound units and assembled according to set rules." It means that a human cannot be separated from the language since the language is a primary tool of communication to be used. The main purpose of communication is to send a message to another human. In sending the message, the sender not only uses an explicit message or direct expressions but also uses an implicit message or indirect expressions, where the meaning of the message is different from the usual message, for example, when figurative language is used. Figurative language is the language that has more than one meaning. It is the language which does not convey the real meaning. The figurative meaning does not fit again with the concept of the world. It is transferred from the real meaning; however, there is still relation between them, if people want to understand it deeply (Hasanah, 2012 : 1).

In general, figurative language is the kind of language which departs from the language employed in the traditional, literal ways of describing persons or objects. Using figurative language is making imaginative description in a fresh way. It is usually immediately obvious whether a writer is using figurative language (Reaske, 1966: 33).

According to Perrine (1988 : 565) , figurative language is the language that cannot be taken literally (or should not be taken literally) as it involves saying something other than ordinary ways or saying one thing and mean another. Figurative language is used in imaginative rather than literal sense; it is used widely in daily speech and writing. Beekman and Callow (1974 : 94) claim that figurative senses are based on associative relations with the primary sense. Figurative language is often used in the daily communication, literary works (novel, poems, poetry, and short story), speech, and in advertisements.

Figurative language is language which makes use of certain devices called "figure of speech", most of which are techniques for comparing dissimilar objects to achieve effects beyond the range of literal language. Figure of speech is a rhetorical form of how to use words in speaking or writing to convince or persuade the audience. Figurative expressions are used to assure, persuade, motivate, encourage and fascinate the audience. It is a powerful rhetoric tool to clarify meaning, to provide vivid examples, to emphasize ideas, to stimulate associations and emotions, to ornament sentences and to amuse audience (Montessory, 2011 : 11).

Using figurative expressions entails making imaginative description in fresh ways. It requires much imagination and focuses the readers or listeners to attend the connotation rather than the denotation because the sentence has hidden meaning behind the lexical meaning. It is usually immediately obvious whether a writer or a speaker is using figurative or literal language. The writer or speaker uses particular symbols to express the idea.

There are two purposes of using figurative expressions namely pragmatic purpose and referential purpose. The pragmatic purpose of using figurative expression is to appeal to sense or interest, to clarify, to please, to delight and to surprise. On the other hand, the referential purpose of using figurative expressions is to describe a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely (Telaumbanua, 2010 : 11).

Songs have been recognized as a universal communicative tool in every society because songs are entertaining for many people. In the modern world, songs are the most powerful work of art in people's daily life since music can evoke various emotions. They create an emotional effect and make an association between things and ideas that are not related. Figurative expressions beautify the sentences and magnificent words interest the reader or hearer by expressing the ideas and feelings through the sentences (Reaske, 1966: 33). In songs, we can find lyrics, which complete and beautify the song and make the listener more interested in listening to because composers communicate to the society by expressing their ideas and feelings through the songs. Furthermore, one is able to learn many aspects of knowledge related to English language, especially figurative language. Learning figurative meaning through songs also helps to understand English when it is used by native speakers because learning to use figurative language is an important step in developing a mature and rich writing style. Particularly many songs use several kinds of figurative language.

Figurative language is used in all kind of songs. It makes the general lyric to be more interesting and more attractive. Listeners will appreciate the beauty of songs more than in general language. In addition, figurative language in songs will make listeners enjoy getting the meaning of a song well. Therefore, the researcher investigated figurative language used in Christina Aguilera's songs in order to find out whether figurative language plays an important role to help her songs to become popular among listeners around the world because figurative language in her songs refers to a ways of describing something by comparing it to another and language used by writers to produce images in readers' minds and to express ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways.

Objectives

1. To analyze figurative language in the lyrics of Christina Aguilera's songs.

2. To study the frequencies of figures of speech used in the lyrics of Christina Aguilera's songs, and the category which is used the most.

3. To examine the function of figurative language in the lyrics of Christina Aguilera's songs.

Method

The methods that the researcher has used in this study were as follows:

1. The researcher collected the lyrics of Christina Aguilera's songs.

2. The researcher selected 27 songs in 7 albums of Christina Aguilera and then studied the figurative language used in the songs.

3. The researcher categorized figure of speech into each type.

4. The researcher analyzed the data to find out the frequencies of the figurative language in the songs.

5. The researcher found the frequencies and the number of figures of speech. Then, the researcher presented the results.

6. The researcher made a conclusion, discussion, and recommendation.

Results

The study aims to identify the types of figurative language employed in Christina Aguilera's songs written between 1999 and 2012. The classification of figurative language found in Christina Aguilera's songs is based on the theoretical framework of McQuarrie Mick (1996). There are 10 types of figurative language employed in 27 songs of Christina Aguilera including alliteration, allusion, anaphora, hyperbole, metaphor, oxymoron, personification, rhyme, simile, and symbolism. It was found that figurative language is used in every song. Many types of rhetorical devices are the decoration of each song. They are also used to communicate with the listeners in a dynamic and powerful way as well as to stir their imagination.

The analysis of figurative language used in 27 songs of Christina Aguilera reveals that rhyme is found the most (49.56 %), followed by anaphora (19.07 %), hyperbole (9.38 %), metaphor (5.58 %), symbolism (4. 10 %), personification (3.81 %), alliteration (3.51 %), simile (2.64 %), allusion (2.06 %), and oxymoron (0.29 %). which similarly corresponds to the finding of both Chatrada (2005) and Surawate (2012). Chatrada (2005) analyzed figurative language in Sir Cliff Richard's top ten song. A songwriter communicates to listeners with imaginative ways of expressing love and related emotion and to present various aspects of the culture. Figurative language was found in Sir Cliff Richard's top ten song: simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, personification, understatement, hyperbole, and imagery by using the theory of figurative language. And Surawate (2012) investigated figurative language used in the composition of national anthems. The role of figurative language are obviously seeing in empowering the social and cultural values of a particular nation among the audience through certain form of linguistic and musical representation. There were 11 types of figurative language in this study: repetition, alliteration, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, personification, apostrophe, metaphor, allusion, hyperbole, and simile.

Example of Figurative Language
1. Alliteration

Telling the truth to you gives me wings
  In the phrase **"telling the truth to"** the same initial letter **"T"** is repeated.

2. Allusion

Tarzan and Jane were swingin' on a vine

  The phrase **"Tarzan and Jane"** refers to famous characters in a series of 24 adventure novels written by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912 to 1965 and the movie Tarzan & Jane produced by Walt Disney, and released on: July 23, 2002.

3. Anaphora

  All I want is you, come over here baby
  All I want is you, you know you make me go crazy
  All I want is you, now baby don't be shy
  The sentence **"all I want is you"** is repeated at the beginning.

4. Hyperbole

  Step into the fantasy
  The phrase **"step into the fantasy"** is an exaggeration.

5. Metaphor

  I am a blank page waiting for you to bring me to life.
  The sentence **"I am a blank page"** makes a comparison between two unlike objects without using the words **"like" or "as"**.

6. Oxymoron

  Shine **bright**, day and **night**, look at how I glitter, glitter
  The words **"bright" and "night"** are contradicting ideas in the sentence.

7. Personification

  Ooohhh, **my body's sayin' let's go**
  The sentence **"my body's sayin' let's go"** refers to giving qualities to non-living things.

8. Simile

  Free with my words, **free as a bird**
  The phrase **"free as a bird"** compares **"free"** with **"bird"** by using **"as"**.

9. Symbolism

What was **cloudy** now is clear! Yeah, yeah!
The word **"cloudy"** represents an obstacle or problem.

10. Rhyme

I could feel it from the **start**,
Couldn't stand to be **apart.**
The words **"start" and "apart"** create a rhyme at the end of each line.

The results of the analysis of figurative language are illustrated in the table 1.

Table 1: Types of Figurative Language and the Frequency of the Figures of Speech in 27 Songs of Christina Aguilera

Figures of Speech	Frequency	Percentage
Rhyme	169	49.56 %
Anaphora	65	19.07 %
Hyperbole	32	9.38 %
Metaphor	19	5.58 %
Symbolism	14	4.10 %
Personification	13	3.81 %
Alliteration	12	3.51 %
Simile	9	2.64 %
Allusion	7	2.06 %
Oxymoron	1	0.29 %
Total	341	100 %

The table above presents the percentage of figurative language found in Christina Aguilera's songs. It can be seen that Rhyme was the most remarkable figurative figure of speech used in the songs (49.56 %) while oxymoron is found the least in the songs (0.29 %).

The frequency of the different types of figures of speech is given in Figure 1.
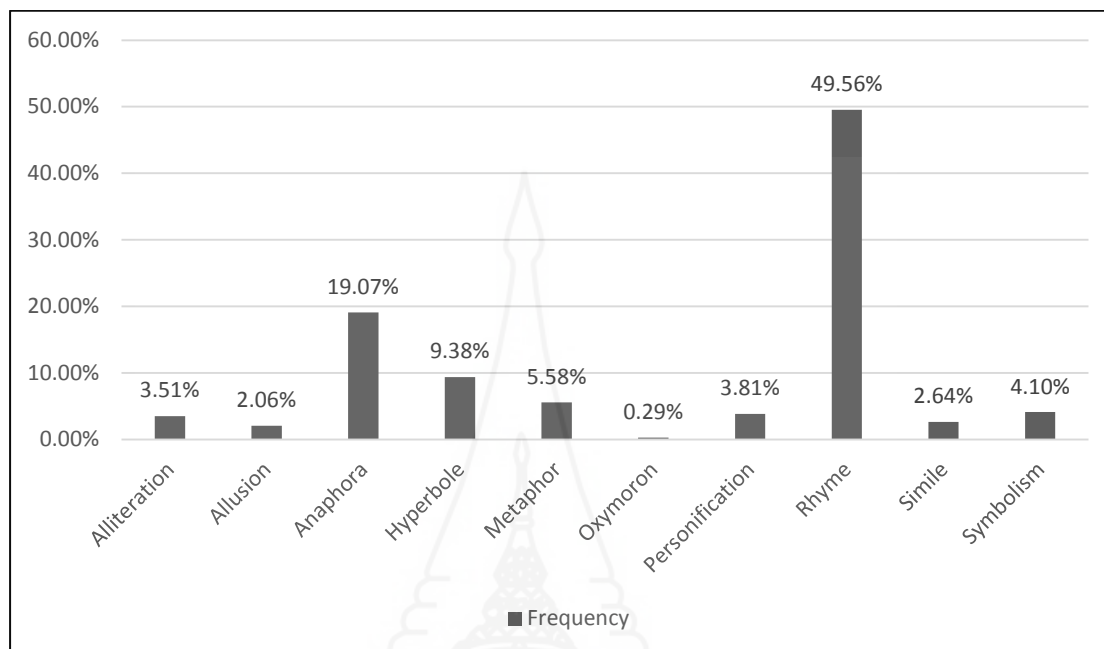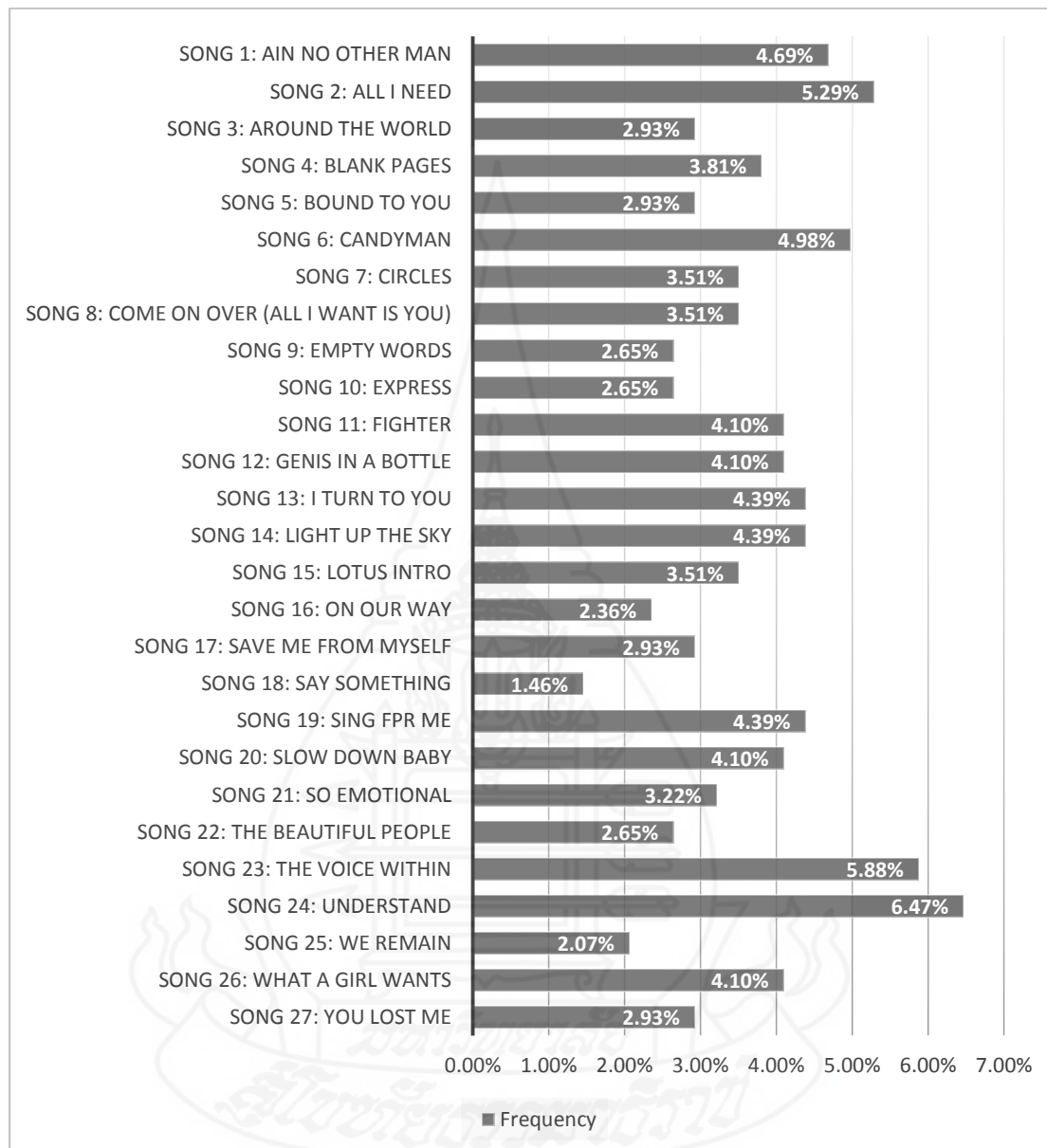
Figure 1: Frequency of Figures of Speech

Figure 1 shows the frequency of using figurative language in Christina Aguilera's songs. The song which contained the most figurative language was "Understand" (6.47 %), followed by "The Voice Within" (5.88 %), "All I Need" (5.29 %), "Candyman" (4.98 %), "Ain't No Other Man" (4.69 %), "I Turn To You" (4.39 %), "Light Up The Sky" (4.39 %), "Sing For Me" (4.39 %), "Fighter" (4.10 %), "Genie In A Bottle" (4.10 %), "Slow Down Baby" (4.10 %), "What A Girl Wants" (4.10 %), "Blank Page" (3.81 %), "Circles" (3.51 %), "Come On Over (All I Want Is You)" (3.51 %), "Lotus Intro" (3.51 %), "So Emotional" (3.22 %), "Around The World" (2.93 %), "Bound To You" (2.93 %), "Save Me From MySelf" (2.93 %), "You Lost Me" (2.93 %), "Empty Words" (2.65 %), "Express" (2.65 %), "The Beautiful People" (2.65 %), "On Our Way" (2.36 %), "We Remain" (2.07 %), and "Say Nothing" (1.46 %). The results of frequency of using figurative language in Christina Aguilera's songs is given in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Frequency of using figurative language in songs

Discussion

Figure 2 shows the different kinds of figurative language used in Christina Aguilera's songs. The results show that rhyme was found more than any figure of speech. Rhyme is one of those secret devices in songs that can make songs much more interesting. It is a repetition of similar sounds in two or more different words. Anaphora in the songs produces a strong emotional effect because the songwriter uses it to move on the climax of the song contexts. Anaphora uses the repetition of the first word or set of words at the beginning of sentence. It is also used to emphasize words by repeating them at the beginning of the neighboring clauses or verses. Hyperbole

exaggerates the statement to heighten effect and is usually meant to be humorous of funny. It produces a strong impression and is not intended to be understood literally. It gives greater emphasis and is more colorful than common factual descriptions. Metaphor conveys the feeling and emotion through words that help the reader understand the message easier. It moves one step further than a simile. The songwriter often gains a more powerful effect for attention in lyrics. It is an implied comparison between two usually unrelated things indicating a likeness. Personification refers to giving human qualities to something that is not human. It is a comparison which the author uses to show something in an entirely new light, to communicate a certain feeling or attitude towards it and to control the way a reader perceives it. Symbolism is used as an image that conveys an abstract representation from something to another thing. It uses images of objects, persons, events, and gestures. This gives the author much more freedom in developing the meaning. It gives a new meaning and a new look to something that could be simple. Alliteration occurs when series of words in a row (or close to in the row) have the same first consonant sound. It is used to create melody, establish mood, call attention to important words, and point out similarities and contrasts. Simile compares one thing to another different thing to assist the reader in developing a meaningful image. Besides, it is used to make their writing more interesting and entertaining. Allusion uses a brief and indirect reference to famous person, place, thing, idea, significant event, literary work, etc. The reference can broaden the listener's understanding to describe in detail the person or thing to which it refer. Oxymoron shows a phrase in which the parts are contradictory or incongruous in one of several ways to create a rhetorical effect by paradoxical means. It is also used to produce a dramatic effect and add the emotion with mood of songs.

In brief, all types of figurative language used in 27 songs of Christina Aguilera can make the songs more interesting and also paint vivid images in the minds of listeners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study further research could be beneficial for different groups of people study as follows:

1. The teacher can apply this study as a guideline for teaching English from songs. A song can be useful because it offers grammar, vocabulary and expressions in an entertaining way. Using English songs and rhyme to teach students is a good selection for creating relaxed atmosphere of teaching rather than studying only from books.

2. The learner may study the semantic features such as the figures of speech found in Christina Aguilera's songs in order to enhance their English skills. The learner can improve their English language, be able to use English more naturally and improve their listening and comprehensive skills.

3. The researcher can study how English language is used in various kinds of songs such as folk song, rock, hip hop, etc. Besides the researcher can further study the semantic features in different written works for example, social media on the internet, radio scripts, information and advertisement on the internet.

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