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Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature

| ISSN (Online) 2502-146X |

Linguistics

Mapping Emotion Through Metaphor: A Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of Adele's *21*

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Submission Track

Recieved: February 12, 2026
Final Revision: Februari 27, 2026
Accepted : March 7, 2026
Available Online: March 30, 2026

Keyword

Adele; Emotion; Metaphor; Stylistics; 21

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of metaphor in selected songs from Adele's album *21* through the lens of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980). Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyses seven tracks: *Rolling in the Deep*, *Rumour Has It*, *Turning Tables*, *Don't You Remember*, *Set Fire to the Rain*, *Love Song*, and *One and Only*—to identify the types and functions of metaphor within the lyrics. A total of 60 metaphorical expressions were found and categorized into three major conceptual types: structural (28), orientational (19), and ontological (13). The dominance of structural metaphors indicates Adele's reliance on analogy-based mappings to construct emotional narratives, while orientational metaphors reveal how spatial concepts encode emotional states. Ontological metaphors further demonstrate how abstract feelings are framed as concrete entities, enhancing intimacy and emotional resonance. The findings suggest that metaphor in Adele's songwriting operates not only as a stylistic feature but also as a cognitive mechanism that shapes how emotional experience is represented and interpreted. This study contributes to stylistics and cognitive linguistics by highlighting the role of metaphor as a meaning-making resource in contemporary song lyrics.

INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a medium for communication but also as a symbolic system through which individuals construct and interpret meaning. Among the linguistic resources available to speakers and writers, metaphor plays a particularly significant role. Metaphor enables people to conceptualize abstract or emotional experiences through more concrete and familiar domains such as space, movement, or physical sensation (Halim et al., 2025; Kövecses, 2020). In artistic expression, metaphor becomes more than a cognitive shortcut; it serves as a stylistic strategy to evoke imagery, amplify emotion, and shape interpretation (Gibbs, 2022). Popular music, as a cultural artifact, integrates musical sound and poetic language, making it a fertile domain for metaphorical expression

Song lyrics uniquely bridge written and oral forms, enabling meaning to be experienced both intellectually and emotionally. In contemporary music, metaphors frequently function as narrative tools that encode personal emotion (Landau, 2016), identity formation (Zangwill, 2007), and social commentary (Collins & Torres, 2016). Zhang et al. (2024) emphasize that the emotional resonance of popular songs often depends less on literal meaning and more on metaphorical representations that invite listeners to participate cognitively in the emotional experience of the singer (Pannese et al., 2016). This rhetorical power has led to growing scholarly interest in figurative language in modern music.

Within this domain, Adele's album *21* (2011) has attracted global attention for its emotional intensity and vulnerability. The album explores themes such as heartbreak, memory, betrayal, and personal growth, earning critical acclaim not only for its musicality but also for its lyrical craftsmanship. Several scholars

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.25077/vj.15.1.1-12.2026

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argue that Adele's emotional force is rooted in her use of metaphor and imagery, which translate deeply personal experiences into universally relatable narratives (Schneider et al., 2022). Through metaphor, Adele constructs vivid emotional landscapes that enable listeners to conceptualize heartbreak as fire, rain, war, or distance—images that transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Although metaphor analysis has been widely conducted across various genres—such as political speeches (Charteris-Black, 2021), literary novels (Kövecses, 2021) and learning process at class (Halim et al., 2025), research focusing on metaphor in song lyrics remains comparatively limited. A number of studies have attempted to explore metaphor in music. Metaphor studies in popular music have gained increasing attention internationally, particularly through the influence of foundational works by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a framework for understanding how metaphor structures human cognition. Kövecses (2020) expanded this approach by emphasizing the role of embodiment and emotional experience in metaphor use, which becomes particularly relevant in analysing music expressing personal narratives such as heartbreak. Charteris-Black (2021) and Semino et al. (2018) further contributed by exploring metaphor in discourse and narrative genres, demonstrating how figurative language shapes audience perception and emotional engagement. In relation to song lyrics, scholars such as Herrera and Alonso (2024) and Werner (2024) show that metaphor functions as a dominant stylistic and cognitive mechanism in contemporary music, especially in genres that foreground vulnerability and emotional storytelling. While these studies highlight metaphor as an essential meaning-making resource in song lyrics, research focusing specifically on Adele's *21* is still limited and lacks systematic analysis grounded in conceptual metaphor theory. Therefore, the present study extends this body of research by examining metaphor types and meanings in Adele's selected songs, situating her work within a global scholarly conversation on metaphor in music.

Although conceptual metaphor theory has been applied in studies of song lyrics internationally, much of this research focuses on non-English musical traditions (Šeškauskienė & Levandauskaitė, 2013), cross-linguistic comparisons (Almirabi, 2015; Boers, 2003), or broad corpus-based analyses (Stefanowitsch, 2005, 2006) rather than English-language popular music. Existing work tends not to examine a single album or a specific mainstream artist in depth. To date, there is no peer-reviewed international study that systematically categorizes structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors in Adele's *21* using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework, nor one that investigates how these metaphors contribute to the album's stylistic identity and thematic cohesion. Thus, previous research has not yet extensively analysed the metaphorical system in Adele's *21* using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), particularly in relation to both types of metaphor and their contextual meanings.

Recognizing this gap, the present research applies a cognitive-stylistic approach to examine metaphors in selected songs from Adele's *21*. By classifying metaphor types—structural, orientational, and ontological—and interpreting their meanings within the lyrical context, this study aims to understand how metaphor contributes to Adele's emotional storytelling and stylistic identity. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of conceptual metaphor theory with stylistic analysis applied to a single, influential contemporary album, offering a focused and empirically grounded understanding of how metaphors function cognitively and artistically in modern song lyrics.

Based on the rationale above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of metaphors are used in Adele's selected songs in Album *21*?
2. What are the meanings of metaphorical expressions found in Adele's selected songs in Album *21*?

METHODS

Study Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach is appropriate because the objective is to describe, identify, and interpret conceptual metaphors used in Adele's selected song lyrics. Qualitative research allows an in-depth exploration of linguistic meaning, especially metaphor, which is inherently interpretive, contextual, and symbolic. The study is guided by the Conceptual

Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2014), which suggests that metaphor functions as a cognitive mechanism used to structure abstract experiences through more concrete conceptual domains.

Sources of Data

The data source of this research consists of song lyrics from Adele's *21* album. Although the album contains eleven tracks, only seven songs were purposively selected due to their metaphorical richness, thematic relevance, and stylistic variation. The selected songs are *Rolling in the Deep, Rumour Has It, Turning Tables, Don't You Remember, Set Fire to the Rain, Love Song,* and *One and Only*.

These songs provide sufficient linguistic variety to examine the patterns and meanings of conceptual metaphors within Adele's songwriting style.

Research Instrument

In qualitative linguistic research, we function as the primary instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). We responsible for selecting the data, interpreting the metaphorical expressions, and relating them to the theoretical framework. To support the analysis and ensure transparency and systematic processing, we used several additional instruments:

1. Data Coding Sheet

   This sheet was designed to record each identified metaphor and included the following fields:

   - Song title
   - Lyric excerpt
   - Type of metaphor (structural, orientational, ontological)
   - Conceptual mapping
   - Interpretative meaning
   - Contextual/emotional notes

2. Classification Framework Table

A classification table based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) metaphor taxonomy was used as a guideline to ensure consistent categorization of metaphor types.

Procedures of Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of the following stages:

1. Listening: The researcher repeatedly listened to the selected songs to understand the emotional tone, delivery, and contextual expression.
2. Transcription and Identification: The lyrics were read while listening to the songs to identify metaphorical expressions, focusing on non-literal and figurative language.
3. Classification: Identified metaphors were categorized based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor types: structural, orientational, and ontological.
4. Interpretation: Each metaphor was interpreted based on its conceptual domain, meaning, and stylistic function within the lyrical context.
5. Conclusion Drawing: Findings were compared with the research questions and interpreted to determine Adele's metaphorical patterns and the roles they play in constructing emotional meaning.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages:

1. Data Condensation: Data were reduced by selecting relevant metaphorical expressions, classifying them into theoretical categories, and transforming them into coded analytical units.
2. Data Display: The reduced data were presented narratively and descriptively, with each metaphor discussed in relation to: its type, conceptual mapping, song context, and interpretive meaning.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Conclusions were drawn based on recurring metaphorical

patterns and meanings. Verification was conducted through theoretical triangulation, consistency checks with the coding sheet, and alignment with the emotional narrative of the songs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dataset in this research consists of Adele's lyrics from the album *21*. The metaphors identified were taken from selected tracks, including *Rolling in the Deep, Rumour Has It, Turning Tables, Don't You Remember, Set Fire to the Rain, Love Song,* and *One and Only.* Each lyric was closely examined and categorized according to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework of metaphor. The metaphorical expressions found were grouped into three types: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. The interpretations of these metaphors reveal a range of meanings throughout the album. This study found several the types of metaphors contained in Adele's song along with interpreting the meaning of Adele's lyrics. The are as follow:

Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphors are metaphors that "structure one concept in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). These metaphors allow us to understand complex or abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete or familiar experiences, such as understanding argument as war, love as a journey. Here are the title and stanza from Adele's song which belongs to the structural metaphor:

Song Title: *Rolling in The Deep*

Stanza 1

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 ahead and sell me out and I'll lay your ship bare

From the stanza above, the structural metaphor was found in the second stanza in line 1 with the concept fire is emotional. The abstract concept of fire here refers to a form of emotion hidden in the heart. In line 2, the structural metaphor was found in the word dark, the case structural concept of dark is sorrow. The abstract concept of dark here refers to the sorrow what her feel.

The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of this verse is about the relationship between two people where a person has an emotion, the word fire shows as a form of emotion that is in his heart. because that emotion made her realize the truth. when out of the darkness she saw crystal clear. the phrase crystal clear in this verse is true life. she realized that she was underestimated and hurt by her partner all along.

Stanza 2

The scars of your love remind me of us

They keep me thinking that we almost had it all

The scars of your love, they leave me breathless

I can't help feeling

The structural metaphor was found in the second stanza in line 3 with the concept scars is suffering. The abstract concept of a scar here refers to the suffering experienced by a person. The word is described as a word that bears or feels something unpleasant. The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of this verse is about a relationship that can't be maintained anymore, the singer describes that in reality, she is a victim who is always hurt by someone.

Song Title: *Rumour Has It*

Stanza 3

Bless your soul, you've got your head in the clouds

She made a fool out of you and boy, she's bringing you down

She made your heart melt, but you're cold to the core

Now rumour has it, she ain't got your love anymore

The structural metaphor was found in line 1 with the concept head in the clouds is unclear thinking. The abstract concept of "head in the clouds" in this verse refers to a state of mental confusion or lack awareness, where a person is disconnected from reality and unable to think clearly. The phrase metaphorically describes the mind as being obscured by clouds, making it difficult to "see" the truth. Just as clouds block vision, confusion or denial blocks a person's judgment. This implies that the person is being naïve or blindly hopeful, especially in terms love.

In line 3 the structural metaphor with the concept emotion is temperature. The abstract concept of emotion in this verse is expressed through physical sensations of temperature, where "heart melt" represents a feeling of emotional warmth, openness, or being touched, while "cold the core" symbolizes emotional distance, numbness, or lack of affection. The metaphor shows that emotional experiences are felt like changes in body temperature. Warmth implies love and vulnerability, while coldness implies rejection or detachment. This suggests a shift in the emotional state of the person, from being moved by love to becoming emotionally closed off.

The last in line 4 the structural metaphor with the concept love is a possession. The abstract concept of love in this verse is described as tangible object that can be owned, lost or taken away. The phrase "she ain't got your love anymore" suggest that love is something that can be held or possessed by someone, just like a physical item. This metaphor implies that emotional attachment is not just a feeling, but a kind of ownership or control that can change hands. It frames love as an object of value that once belonged to the other woman but is now no longer in her possession.

The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of this stanza describes a man who is emotionally confused and easily swayed. The phrase "head in the clouds" shows that he is blinded by infatuation, unable to see reality clearly because his mind is clouded by false hope or illusions. Although the women he is with may have once touched his heart (made your heart melt), the relationship has turned cold and distant (cold to the core), indicating that the emotional connection is gone. These metaphors to emphasize that true love not just about fleeting passion, but about fleeting passion, but about deep and lasting emotional commitment. The metaphor "she ain't got your love anymore" further suggest that love has been lost or taken back, as if it were a possession. Overall, this stanza communicates that the man has been emotionally misled, and the love he once gave to someone else no longer exists.

Song Title: *Turning*

Stanza 2

Under haunted skies I see you, ooh

Where love is lost, your ghost is found

I braved a hundred stroms to leave you

As hard as you try, no, I will never be knocked down

The structural metaphor was found in the second line. In this line, the abstract concept of ghost is being compared with human. Thus, the conceptual metaphor in this stanza is ghost is human. The interpretation meaning of this metaphor in this stanza is about the sorrowness that someone's has in relationship so that she saw his partner as someone horrible as a ghost and need to be left.

Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors are not metaphors that "structure one concept in relation to another but organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 14). Orientation metaphors show spatial orientation concepts such as: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow. Orientation metaphors have our physical and cultural experiences, for example, in some cultures the future is ahead of us, whereas in other cultures it is behind (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 16).

Here are several the title and stanza from Adele's song which belongs to the orientational metaphor:

Song Title: *Don't You Remember*

When was the last time that you thought of me?

Or have you completely erased me from your memory?

I often think about where I went wrong

The more I do, the less I know

The orientational metaphor is found in stanza 4, line 4 from the stanza above. The phrase "The more I do, the less I know" signifies the existence of a spatial concept with the conceptual metaphor knowing is up / not knowing is down. In conceptual metaphor theory, up is generally associated with clarity, control, and understanding, while down implies confusion, failure, or lack of insight.

In this line, the speaker reflects on her emotional turmoil by expressing that the more she tries to analyze or fix the situation, the more confused and uncertain she becomes. The metaphor suggests a decline in mental clarity, where increased effort results in decreased understanding this downward movement represents emotional collapse and disorientation. The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of this stanza is that the speaker is overwhelmed by the complexity of her emotional state. Despite trying to understand where the relationship went wrong, she feels more lost and uncertain. The orientation of "down" in this metaphor communicates the internal descent into confusion and emotional darkness, showing that effort does not always lead to answers, but sometimes to more doubt.

Song Title: *Set Fire to The Rain*

Stanza 1

I let it fall, my heart

And as it fell, you rose to claim it

It was dark and I was over

Until you kissed my lips and you saved me

My hands, they were strong

But my knees were far too weak

To stand in your arms

Without falling to your feet

The orientational metaphor is found in stanza 1, line 1 from the stanza above. The phrase "I let it fall, my heart" signifies the existence of a spatial concept with the conceptual metaphor down is sadness or failure. In this line, the act of the heart falling represents emotional collapse, sorrow, or defeat. It metaphorically illustrates the speaker's vulnerability and emotional downfall caused by love or heartbreak.

Then, the orientational metaphor is also found in line 2 in the phrase "you rose to claim it". This phrase represents the conceptual metaphor up is power or control. The verb rose suggests upward motion, which in metaphorical terms implies strength, dominance, or authority. The speaker's emotional descent contrasts with the other person's rise, symbolizing the imbalance in emotional power within the relationship.

Next, the orientational metaphor is found again in line 8. The phrase "my knees were far too weak" and "falling to your feet" represent the metaphor down is submission or defeat. In this verse, the weakening knees and falling posture symbolize the speaker's inability to stand strong, suggesting surrender or emotional helplessness in the presence of the person she loves.

The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning of this stanza is that the speaker experiences an intense emotional fall marked by vulnerability and surrender. The contrast between her collapse and the other person's rising indicates an emotional imbalance where love renders her weak, yet elevates the other. Her physical and emotional descent into submission illustrates how powerful and consuming the emotional attachment has become.

Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphors are concrete metaphors connected with something abstract, ontological metaphors are one of the most basic tools we have for understanding our experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Here are several the title and stanza from Adele's song which belongs to the ontological metaphor:

Song Title: *Love Song*

Stanza 2

Whenever I'm alone with you

You make me feel like I am young again

Whenever I'm alone with you

You make me feel like I am fun again

The ontological metaphor in this stanza was found line 2, from the phrase "You make me feel like I am young again". In this line, youth is not just an age but a metaphorical state of being associated with vitality, freedom, and joy. The abstract emotional experience is treated as a recoverable physical condition, making it an ontological metaphor. And in line 4 the ontological metaphor was found, from the phrase "You make me feel like I am fun again." Here, fun is described not as an action or experience, but as an inherent part of the speaker's identity—something that can be lost and then returned. It conceptualizes fun as a tangible aspect of the self, hence an ontological metaphor.

The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning from these stanzas suggests that being with the loved one evokes a renewed sense of vitality, joy, and emotional restoration. Love is portrayed as a transformative force that reawakens the speaker's inner liveliness and playfulness, allowing her to re-experience life with youthful optimism and emotional freedom.

Stanza 4

Whenever I'm alone with you

You make me feel like I am home again

Whenever I'm alone with you

You make me feel like I am whole again

The ontological metaphor is found in stanza 1 line 2, Adele's song entitled Lovesong, from the stanza above the phrase "You make me feel like I am home again." In this stanza, the word home is used metaphorically to represent a feeling of safety, comfort, and emotional belonging. The abstract emotion of security or emotional intimacy is conceptualized as a physical location a home. Thus, the verse contains personification and an ontological metaphor with the concept that emotions are locations or physical entities that one can be brought back to.

In line 4 the ontological metaphor is found, from the phrase "You make me feel like I am whole again." In this line, the concept of being "whole" is used metaphorically to express a state of emotional completeness. The speaker's emotional state is conceptualized as a physical object that can be broken or restored. Thus, this metaphor treats the self or emotions as physical entities, with the concept that wholeness equals emotional well-being.

The interpretation of the metaphorical meaning from these stanzas highlights how the presence of a loved one restores both emotional balance and a deep sense of belonging. The speaker feels not only emotionally complete and healed suggesting that prior to the relationship she experienced fragmentation or inner emptiness but also comforted and grounded, as though she has returned home after being emotionally distant. These metaphors emphasize how love functions as both a stabilizing force and a place of refuge, where personal identity and emotional security are renewed through connection with another.

Song Title: *One and Only*

Stanza 1

You've been on my mind

I grow fonder every day

Lose myself in time

Just thinking of your face

God only knows why it's taken me

So long to let my doubts go

You're the only one that I want

The ontological metaphor in this stanza was found in line 6, from the phrase "to let my doubts go." In this stanza, "doubts" are treated as tangible objects that can be held inside the self and then released, as if they have a physical form. This conceptualizes emotions as physical entities that can be manipulated or moved.

The interpretation of metaphorical meaning from this stanza is about how the speaker views emotional hesitation (doubt) as something internal and heavy that must be released in order to move forward in love. Letting go of doubt becomes an emotional act of liberation, showing her readiness for vulnerability and trust.

Stanza 2

I don't know why I'm scared

I've been here before

Every feeling, every word

I've imagined it all

You'll never know if you never try

To forget your past and simply be mine

The ontological metaphor in this stanza was found in line 6, from the phrase "To forget your past." Here, the past is conceptualized as a thing that can be held onto or let go, suggesting it has physical form or presence in one's emotional life. The interpretation of metaphorical meaning from this stanza is that the speaker encourages the listener to release emotional baggage by treating the past like a physical burden. Forgetting the past symbolizes freeing oneself from its weight in order to embrace a new emotional connection.

Stanza 3

I dare you to let me be your, your one and only

I promise I'm worthy

To hold in your arms

So come on and give me the chance

To prove I am the one who can walk that mile

Until the end starts

The ontological metaphor is found in stanza 3 line 3, from the phrase "To hold in your arms.". In this context, love or emotional closeness is treated as a physical object that can be held or possessed. The interpretation of metaphorical meaning from this stanza is that the speaker desires to become someone emotionally important so significant that their presence can be held and embraced like a cherished possession. This metaphor shows love as something tangible and deeply personal.

This study explores metaphorical expressions in selected songs from Adele's *21* album through Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The analysis demonstrates that metaphor functions as a central linguistic and cognitive mechanism in the construction of emotional meaning within the lyrics. The metaphors identified were grouped into three conceptual categories—structural, orientational, and ontological—with structural metaphors emerging as the most frequent (28 instances), followed by orientational (19 instances) and ontological metaphors (13 instances).

The dominance of structural metaphors suggests that Adele frequently frames abstract emotional states through concrete experiential concepts. For example, the lyric *"There's a fire starting in my heart"* (Rolling in the Deep) reflects the mapping *emotion is fire*, illustrating emotional escalation through a physical phenomenon. Similarly, the underlying mapping *love is a journey*, seen in the phrase *"walk that mile"* (One and Only), aligns with Lakoff and Johnson's framework, where love is conceptualized as movement, progress, or struggle. These findings reinforce more recent scholarship, such as Kövecses

(2020) and Gibbs (2022), who argue that emotional experience is embodied and primarily understood through metaphorical conceptualization rooted in life experience.

Orientational metaphors, which rely on spatial contrast (e.g., up/down, high/low), also play a significant role. In *Set Fire to the Rain*, the line *"I let it fall, my heart"* exemplifies the mapping *sadness is down*, signaling an emotional decline or loss of control. Conversely, phrases such as *"you rose to claim it"* suggest *power is up*, reflecting empowerment or dominance. These systematic mappings align with insights from Zhang et al**.** (2025), who emphasize that listeners intuitively interpret such spatial metaphors because they mirror embodied interactions with the physical world.

Ontological metaphors in the album further demonstrate how intangible emotional states are conceptualized as physical forms or objects. For instance, *"scars of your love"* (Rolling in the Deep) reflects a metaphor in which emotional pain becomes a visible, concrete mark, emphasizing its permanence. Likewise, *"giving up your heart"* (One and Only) positions the heart as a transferable object, foregrounding emotional vulnerability. Such metaphors resonate with Semino's (2018) claim that ontological metaphors allow emotions to be "handled, contained, or negotiated" as if they were material entities.

Compared with earlier research, this study offers a deeper stylistic and cognitive reading. For example, Sumolang (2021) analyzed metaphors in *Set Fire to the Rain* using Wahab's (1986) taxonomy but did not incorporate cognitive processing frameworks. More recent research, such as Denroche (2023)**,** indicates a growing scholarly trend toward multimodal metaphor analysis in song lyrics; however, detailed stylistic examination remains limited. In contrast, this study integrates conceptual metaphor theory with stylistic interpretation, offering a more holistic perspective on how metaphor functions semantically, aesthetically, and psychologically.

Nonetheless, the study acknowledges several limitations. The analysis is restricted to a single album, leaving Adele's broader discography unexamined. Interpretation is partly subjective, shaped by contextual and cognitive inference. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on written lyrics and does not consider musical or visual modalities such as tone, timbre, instrumentation, or music video imagery—elements that recent multimodal studies (Collins & Torres, 2016) consider essential to metaphor interpretation. From a psychological perspective, the findings support the argument that metaphors serve a therapeutic and cognitive purpose in songwriting. By transforming abstract emotional experiences—such as betrayal, loss, and hope—into concrete images, listeners are able to make sense of their own emotional states.

Future research may extend this study by examining metaphor usage across Adele's complete discography, comparing her work with artists from other genres, or incorporating multimodal stylistic approaches. Audience response studies, such as surveys or reception analyses, may also enrich understanding of how metaphors are interpreted and emotionally processed by listeners.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that metaphor is not merely a decorative linguistic feature in Adele's songwriting but a fundamental cognitive and expressive strategy. Through structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors, Adele transforms personal emotional experience into vivid and relatable imagery. This reinforces recent scholarly claims that metaphor serves as a bridge between cognition, creativity, and affect, making it an essential analytical lens in both linguistic and musical discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of metaphorical expressions in seven selected songs from Adele's *21* album using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The analysis revealed that metaphor serves as a central stylistic and cognitive device in Adele's songwriting, shaping emotional meaning and transforming abstract psychological experiences into concrete, relatable imagery. The metaphors identified were categorized into three main types—structural, orientational, and ontological—with structural metaphors appearing most frequently. This pattern indicates that Adele's lyrics often conceptualize emotional experiences such as heartbreak, longing, betrayal, and healing through embodied and physical experiences. Through this process, language not only describes emotion but also constructs

and frames it in a way that resonates with listeners.

The findings also demonstrate that orientational and ontological metaphors contribute significantly to emotional interpretation within the lyrics. Orientational metaphors, grounded in spatial concepts such as *up/down* or *in/out*, help listeners visualize emotional shifts, power relations, and psychological states. Ontological metaphors further reinforce meaning by treating abstract emotions as tangible objects or physical entities. Together, these metaphor types reveal that Adele's songwriting relies on conceptual mapping to evoke emotional depth and narrative coherence, supporting contemporary scholarship suggesting that metaphor in music is both an expressive and cognitive mechanism.

The results of this study have several implications. Theoretically, the findings reaffirm that metaphors in song lyrics should be examined not only as literary embellishments but also as cognitive structures that shape meaning and emotional reception. Practically, this study offers insights for educators, linguists, and music analysts interested in exploring figurative language in multimodal texts. The research also contributes to the growing body of work in cognitive stylistics and popular music analysis, expanding current understanding of how linguistic creativity operates within contemporary songwriting.

However, the study is not without limitations. The analysis was limited to one album, and interpretations were based solely on textual meaning without examining other multimodal elements such as vocal performance, instrumentation, or visual representation. Moreover, metaphor interpretation inherently involves subjective judgment, which may vary across listeners and cultural contexts. These limitations suggest caution in generalizing findings beyond the scope of the selected data.

Based on the outcomes of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for future research. Further investigations may expand the dataset to include Adele's complete discography or compare metaphor usage across different artists, genres, or cultural backgrounds. Future studies may also adopt a multimodal approach, incorporating sound, visuals, and audience response to provide a more comprehensive understanding of metaphor in music. Additionally, empirical methods such as reception studies, corpus tools, or psycholinguistic experiments could further illuminate how listeners interpret metaphorical lyrics and how these metaphors influence emotional processing.

In conclusion, this study confirms that metaphor is a vital element of Adele's lyrical style in the *21* album, functioning not only as a linguistic tool but also as a means of shaping emotional meaning and listener engagement. By transforming abstract emotions into vivid and relatable expressions, metaphor strengthens the connection between the artist and the audience, demonstrating the power of figurative language in contemporary music. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of metaphorical analysis in understanding how language, cognition, and emotion interact within song lyrics—an area that continues to offer rich potential for exploration within applied linguistics and stylistic studies.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors confirm that this manuscript complies with the ethical requirements set forth by *Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature*. No human participants, animal subjects, or personally identifiable data were involved in the conduct of this study. The research is based solely on publicly available song lyrics and does not include data extracted from social media platforms or private communication sources. The authors affirm that this work is original, has been prepared responsibly, and adheres to ethical standards for scholarly publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nurhuda Fajar was responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the research methodology, conducting the data collection and analysis, preparing the initial manuscript draft, and organizing the visual elements of the work. **Abd Halim** supervised the research process, provided validation of the analytical procedures, contributed to manuscript revision and refinement, and coordinated project administration. **Muhammad Hasbi** contributed to the investigation process, assisted in providing resources and technical support, and participated in reviewing and editing the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors of this study declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the content of this paper. We confirm that the research did not receive any funding from organizations or individuals that could influence the objectivity and results of the study. The authors commit to conducting the research with transparency and adherence to ethical guidelines in scientific research.

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