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A STUDY OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN CHILDREN'S SONGS LYRICS FROM COCOMELON

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ABSTRACT

Abstract—This study aims (1) to examine the types of figurative language frequently found in 25 children's songs from the CoComelon channel, and (2) to explore possible explanations for the observed patterns in figurative language use. Using purposive sampling and a quantitative approach, 77 instances of figurative language were identified and classified into nine categories according to Kennedy and Gioia (2007), along with three additional categories proposed by Leigh (1994). The findings, arranged from the most to the least frequent, show that Repetition (31.16%) and End Rhyme (29.87%) were the dominant devices, followed by Onomatopoeia (22.07%), Hyperbole (5.19%), and Apostrophe (3.89%). The least frequent types, namely Simile, Metaphor, and Personification, were found with equal frequency (2.59% each), while Paradox, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Understatement were not identified (0%). The observed patterns suggest that CoComelon songs rely heavily on simple, sound-based devices that support young children's language development, memorization, and cognitive processing. Overall, the predominance of these forms indicates that figurative language in children's music plays a significant role in enhancing linguistic, conceptual, and emotional learning.

Keywords—children's songs, CoComelon, figurative language

INTRODUCTION

Music is deeply connected to human life and reflects our emotions and experiences in ways words alone cannot. From lullabies that soothe infants to songs that inspire communities, music moves us, shapes our moods, and fosters connection, showing how closely humans and music are intertwined. Music is not only valued for its lyrics as a medium through which human thoughts and emotions are expressed and widely appreciated, but it also serves as a catalyst for social change and a source of emotional uplift for listeners (Krasin, 2021). Historically, music has been integrated into religious rituals, used to transmit historical narratives and cultural beliefs, and employed to strengthen morale during wartime. Drawing on Affective Theory, Pratama and Fadji (2020) further argue that song lyrics embody moral values as well, such as religiosity, love, humility, and peace-loving attitudes.

Additionally, music also plays a vital role in early childhood development, particularly for children under six who rely more on visual and auditory experiences than on written symbols (Disua et al., 2021). As a natural part of young children's daily lives, music supports their

physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Singing and playing musical instruments encourage movement, develop fine and gross motor skills, reduce aggressive tendencies, and stimulate creativity. Group music activities also help children build social skills, while creating or responding to melodies promotes brain development (Disua et al., 2021). Beyond physical and cognitive benefits, early childhood songs nurture emotional well-being by fostering gentleness, emotional balance, relaxation, and happiness (Sakalpasak & Halathaingam, 2019). Cheerful melodies can make children feel secure in their environment, enhance their enjoyment of learning, and strengthen their early thinking and language abilities.

When it comes to song lyrics, one of the tools often employed is the “figurative language,” embedded within words to beautify the lyrics or deepen the meaning intended by the songwriter. Such figurative expressions invite listeners to engage their imagination, allowing them to visualize ideas more vividly than literal wording alone would permit.

Although scholars differ in how they categorize figurative language—sometimes proposing overlapping groups and at other times distinguishing separate types (e.g., Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014; Glucksberg & McGlone, 2001; Mezo, 1999)—they generally agree on its essential characteristic: a figure of speech refers to one thing while conveying a meaning that goes beyond its literal sense. This indirectness is deliberate. By prompting the audience to make interpretive connections, figurative language enriches the texture, emotional resonance, and overall aesthetic quality of a text, making communication more engaging and impactful.

With that said, figurative language in songs is worth investigating, especially in children’s songs, which have distinctive characteristics such as simple and repetitive melodies, playful rhythms, catchy lyrics, and emotionally engaging content that supports learning, imagination, and social development. However, a quick review of studies on figurative language in songs shows that most previous research focuses on general song types, while studies specifically on children’s songs are scarce. Moreover, the limited research that does exist tends to employ only conventional categories of figurative language in its analysis. Related research also shows that special expressions require careful analysis to understand their meaning (Sukwises et al., 2024), a principle that likewise applies to figurative language in children’s songs.

This study therefore aims to address this gap by investigating figurative language in songs on CoComelon, a platform that presents songs and animated cartoons for young children. Most of its content consists of English songs with lively rhythms and colorful visuals, designed to support children’s development, particularly in vocabulary, language, listening, speaking, and social behavior. The combination of visual and auditory media is easy to understand and effectively captures children’s attention. Parents can use this platform as a tool to teach their children English and foster positive behaviors, provided it is used with appropriate supervision and engagement (Anggraini et al., 2022).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the types of figurative language frequently found in children's songs on CoComelon.
2. To explore possible explanations for the observed patterns in figurative language use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Music and Children

Music plays an important role in many aspects of a child's development. It supports physical growth by enhancing coordination and motor skills, and from a cognitive perspective, listening to music can improve perception, memory, and problem-solving abilities (Alimi Selmani, 2025). Swanson (1991) further explains that music is universal and allows people to express emotions and ideas that words alone cannot convey. Engaging young children with music and the arts thus supports their cognitive, creative, and emotional development.

In early childhood education, singing in particular offers several benefits (Community Early Learning Australia, 2023). First, it develops language skills by improving vocabulary, pronunciation, and memory. Second, it enhances social skills by fostering cooperation and a sense of belonging. Third, it supports emotional development, helping children express feelings and gain confidence. Fourth, it promotes cognitive growth by reinforcing concepts such as counting and improving attention. Together, these benefits demonstrate how music can be a powerful tool for holistic development in young children.

Figurative Language in Children's Songs

"Most poems are more memorable than most ordinary speech, and when music is combined with poetry the result can be more memorable still."

(Kennedy & Gioia, 2007: 697)

Like many poems, songs are organized into stanzas, and songwriters require listeners to pay close attention to their words (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007). In this way, lyrics serve as a medium for conveying ideas, emotions, and messages. To enrich their meaning and aesthetic appeal, songwriters often employ figurative language in their lyrics (Fitriani et al., 2025). Several previous studies have examined the use and significance of figurative language in songs. The majority of this research has concentrated on songs for adults, particularly by popular artists such as Ariana Grande (Simatupang et al., 2023), Taylor Swift (Setiawati & Maryani, 2018), and Rihanna (Marhamah, 2018). In contrast, children's songs have received comparatively less scholarly attention. Although a few studies have addressed figurative language in children's songs (Ramadhani et al., 2024; Wisran, 2023; Yosiana, 2022), they primarily focus on traditional categories of figurative language. These studies typically report the presence of similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, paradox, metonymy, and irony,

albeit in varying frequencies, suggesting that while children's songs do employ figurative devices, research in this area remains limited and less diverse in scope.

Considering these limitations, the present study incorporates both the traditional categories of figurative language identified by Kennedy and Gioia (2007) and the additional types proposed by Leigh (1994).

According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007: 680-688), the categories of traditional figurative language include:

1. Simile: "a comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually *like*, *as*, *than*, or a verb such as *resembles*"
2. Metaphor: "a statement that one thing is something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not"
3. Personification: "a figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, nature) is made human"
4. Apostrophe: "a way of addressing someone or something invisible or not ordinarily spoken to"
5. Overstatement (Hyperbole): "a point with a statement containing exaggeration"
6. Understatement: the opposite of overstatement
7. Metonymy: "the name of a thing is substituted for that of another closely associated with it"
8. Synecdoche: "the use of a part of a thing to stand for the whole of it or vice versa"
9. Paradox: "a statement that at first strikes us as self-contradictory but that on reflection makes some sense"

In addition to the nine categories, Leigh (1994) investigated the use of figures of speech in print advertisement headlines and expanded the classification of figurative language into a systematic framework with two main categories. The first category, tropes, includes two subcategories: puns and associations, the latter of which encompasses animate associations, contradictory associations, visual associations, verbal substitutions, exaggeration and understatement, and rhetorical questions. The second main category, grammatical structures, includes word order, deliberate word omissions and insertions, repetitions, and rhyme. Building on the framework of Kennedy and Gioia (2007), and considering insights from early childhood education and Pressley's (1977) examination of imagery and children's learning, visual associations (onomatopoeia), repetitions, and rhyme were selected to supplement the nine categories proposed by Kennedy and Gioia (2007).

According to Leigh (1994), onomatopoeia is the use of words whose sounds echo their meaning, repetition involves the deliberate reuse of words or phrases for effect, and rhyme, particularly end rhyme, refers to the correspondence of sounds at the ends of lines or phrases.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the figurative language found in children's songs on the CoComelon channel, in accordance with the stated objectives. Specifically, the quantitative approach was used to address the first research objective, while the qualitative approach was employed for the second.

Data collection

The samples were selected using purposive sampling, with 25 of the most popular children's songs from the CoComelon channel chosen. The lyrics were transcribed and compiled in Microsoft Word for analysis.

Research instruments

The study used the following instruments:

1. Microsoft Excel to calculate percentages and determine frequencies of the identified figurative language in the song lyrics.
2. Microsoft Word to compile the lyrics of the 25 selected songs for the purpose of classifying types of figurative language.
3. Oxford Dictionary to verify the meanings and contexts of vocabulary appearing in the children's songs, ensuring accurate and precise analysis of figurative language.
4. IOC (Index of Item-Objective Congruence) through expert evaluation, with three distinguished experts providing feedback, namely Mrs. Charlotte Amalie Aca-ac Yuson, Dr. Aungkana Sukwises, and Ms. Jennilou Thompson Plankraiphet.

The analysis of figurative language was conducted using twelve categories, combining nine traditional types identified by Kennedy and Gioia (2007) with three additional types from Leigh (1994).

Data analysis

The analysis to address the first research objective was carried out in the following steps:

1. Classifying the types of figurative language based on nine categories according to Kennedy and Gioia (2007), along with three additional categories proposed by Leigh (1994), using inter-rater reliability (IRR) between the researchers and the supervisor. Any discrepancies were reviewed and discussed to reach a consensus on the classification of each type.

2. Using Microsoft Excel to process the data and calculate the percentage of each type of figurative language using the formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{T} \times 100$$

where:

P = percentage

F = frequency of each type of figurative language

T = total number of figurative language instances found

To precisely identify the types of figurative language appearing in children's songs on the CoComelon channel, the following Excel functions were used:

- Frequency calculation: COUNTIF (first result:last result, "name of the figurative language to be counted")
- Total sum calculation: SUM (first result:last result)

This analysis enabled the systematic determination of the proportion and frequency of each type of figurative language across all 25 songs and allowed the identification of the types that appeared most frequently.

Then, the observed patterns in figurative language use were interpreted by comparing them with previous studies and scholarship to address the second objective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Figurative language frequently found in children's songs on CoComelon

Table 1 Identified figurative language

Figurative language	Frequency	Percentage
Repetition	24	31.16
End Rhyme	23	29.87
Onomatopoeia	17	22.07
Hyperbole	4	5.19
Apostrophe	3	3.89
Personification	2	2.59
Metaphor	2	2.59
Simile	2	2.59
Paradox	-	0

Figurative language	Frequency	Percentage
Metonymy	-	0
Synecdoche	-	0
Understatement	-	0
Total	77	100

As seen from Table 1, the analysis of 25 CoComelon songs revealed eight types of figurative language. The most commonly used devices were Repetition (31.16%) and End Rhyme (29.87%), followed by Onomatopoeia (22.07%), Hyperbole (5.19%), and Apostrophe (3.89%). The least frequent types included Simile, Metaphor, and Personification (each 2.59%), while Paradox, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Understatement were not identified (0%).

2. Possible explanations for the observed patterns in figurative language use.

Examples are illustrated below, arranged from the most to the least frequent type of figurative language, to shed light on the factors influencing their use and to provide a basis for discussing possible explanations for the observed patterns in children's songs on CoComelon.

(1) Repetition

“Round and round”

(Wheels on the Bus)

Repetition is the use of a word or phrase more than once to emphasize meaning or create interest. In CoComelon songs, repetition is used to enhance sound and rhythm, capture children's attention, reinforce word meaning, aid memorization, and support musical structure. For example, in (1), the word “round” is repeated, making it easy for young listeners to sing along and understand the lyrics.

The high frequency of repetition observed in children's songs can be scientifically explained by previous research on early learning. According to the Queensland Government (2023), young children's brains form strong neural connections through repeated exposure to words, sounds, and concepts, helping to build the foundations for lifelong learning. Similarly, Schwab and Lew-Williams (2016) found that repeating words across successive sentences in child-directed speech enhances vocabulary acquisition by allowing children to detect patterns and consolidate memory. BBC (n.d.-a) also notes that babies and toddlers need repetition to learn and thrive, as repeated experiences strengthen synaptic connections in the brain.

Notably, the findings contrast with previous studies on figurative language in songs for adults, where metaphor, simile, and hyperbole are most popular (e.g., Fitriani et al., 2025; Ketaren et al., 2021). This difference may suggest that children's songs prioritize simplicity, predictability, and memorability over abstract or complex comparisons. Devices like Repetition and End Rhyme are easier for young listeners to perceive, process, and reproduce, aligning with their cognitive and linguistic development, whereas more sophisticated figures of speech

are better suited to adult audiences who can appreciate nuance, subtlety, and figurative meaning.

(2) End Rhyme

“Itsy bitsy spider climbed up the water spout.

Down came the rain and washed the spider out!”

(The Itsy Bitsy Spider)

End Rhyme is the use of similar or identical words at the end of lines to make a song pleasant, rhythmic, and memorable. In this study, End Rhyme, as in (2), emphasizes sound patterns, helping children develop listening skills, pronunciation, and awareness of language sounds. This aligns with Leigh’s (1994) concept of a “sound scheme,” where techniques like rhyme enhance both aesthetic quality and emotional impact. Similarly, Dunn (n.d.) notes that rhymes, commonly known as nursery rhymes, are an enjoyable way for young children to learn English, supporting sound exploration, rhythm, listening, pronunciation, and memorization. Sharing rhymes with adults builds confidence and encourages communication. These nursery rhymes, often animated and sung by BBC Children’s TV presenters, provide engaging resources for Early Years learning (BBC, n.d.-b). This helps explain why End Rhyme was the second most common type in the study.

(3) Onomatopoeia

“With a neigh neigh

Here And a neigh neigh”

(Old MacDonald)

Onomatopoeia is the use of words that imitate sounds perceived through the senses. As in (3), the word “neigh” imitates the sound of a horse. In this study, onomatopoeia reflects a key feature of children’s songs, which often use natural sound words such as “bzzz,” “neigh,” “vroom,” or “splash” to match events in the song. This helps children develop listening skills, understand the relationship between sounds and meanings, and improve pronunciation and sound awareness. Onomatopoeia also appears frequently in infants’ earliest words, though research is limited. Findings from the wider iconicity literature suggest that its sound-symbolic nature makes it inherently learnable, supporting early production. This is considered in relation to Imai and Kita’s (2014) “sound symbolism bootstrapping hypothesis”, which examines acquisition through perception, production, and interaction (Imai and Kita, 2014, as cited in Laing, 2019: 173). Likewise, this aligns with Narkwachara’s (2010:14) observation that children aged 4-6 are naturally curious about the world around them.

(4) Hyperbole

“One jumped into the sky, swinging its tail so high”

(Five Little Dinosaurs)

Hyperbole is the use of exaggerated statements or phrases that go beyond literal truth to emphasize meaning, convey intensity, or add humor and excitement. Although the words are not literally true, hyperbole makes the story more engaging and dramatic, as in (4). The findings contrast with studies on adult songs, which tend to favor Hyperbole (Fitriani et al., 2025; Ketaren et al., 2021), and with Wisran’s (2023) study on children’s songs from the 1990s and 2000s, where Hyperbole was the most popular in the 2000s. This discrepancy may be because Wisran’s study focused only on devices such as Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Metonymy, Symbolism, Paradox, Hyperbole, and Irony, excluding Repetition, End Rhyme, and Onomatopoeia, which are particularly accessible and effective for young listeners.

(5) Apostrophe

“London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady”

(London Bridge is Falling Down)

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker addresses something that is unseen, imaginary, or abstract, rather than a person or object that is normally present or directly referenced. As in (5), “my fair lady” exemplifies apostrophe, addressing the bridge as if it were alive, even though it is an inanimate object, not capable of responding. Given that children respond better to simpler language, Apostrophe appears less frequently than Repetition, End Rhyme, or Onomatopoeia, as it involves abstract ideas or absent entities and conveys personal or intimate expression—concepts that are difficult for young listeners to grasp.

According to Table 1, Personification, Metaphor, and Simile were observed with similarly low frequency in the songs, with the latter two in particular involving abstract concepts that are harder for young children to grasp, as previously discussed.

(6) Personification

“The cheese stands alone.”

(Farmer in the Dell)

Personification is the use of words to give human characteristics, emotions, or abilities to non-living or abstract things, creating a more vivid impression for the reader or listener. As in (6), where the cheese is portrayed as having human-like qualities. Surprisingly, although Personification is often encouraged and used in children’s songs (Harmon, n.d.; Yosiana, 2022) and was the most popular device in the 1990s (Wisran, 2023), CoComelon songs used it far less than Repetition, End Rhyme, and Onomatopoeia.

(7) Metaphor

“Life is but a dream!”

(Row, Row, Row your Boat)

Metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things by stating that one is another, as in (7). Although not literally true, it highlights similarities for the listener or reader.

(8) Simile

“Now we all dance like dinosaurs”

(Five Little Dinosaurs)

Simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things that share similar characteristics, often using words such as “as” or “like,” as in (8).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the types of figurative language frequently used in children’s songs on CoComelon and explored possible reasons behind their observed patterns.

In the study, a total of eight types of figurative language were identified in the analysis of 25 songs, arranged from the most to the least frequent: Repetition, End Rhyme, Onomatopoeia, Hyperbole, Apostrophe, Personification, Metaphor, and Simile.

In response to the second objective, it was found that Repetition, End Rhyme, and Onomatopoeia occurred most frequently because they offer simplicity, predictability, and strong sound patterns that support young children’s language learning. These devices make lyrics easier to perceive, remember, and sing along to, aligning with early cognitive development and the educational aims of children’s music. In contrast, Apostrophe, Metaphor, and Simile appeared far less often because they rely on abstract ideas, imaginative comparisons, or figurative meanings that young listeners find difficult to interpret. While adult songs typically favor more complex figurative expression, children’s songs prioritize clarity and accessibility.

Hyperbole also appeared less frequently than expected; although previous studies found it highly common in both adult songs and children’s songs from the 2000s, this difference may stem from the fact that earlier research excluded Repetition, End Rhyme, and Onomatopoeia, which are particularly effective for young audiences. Finally, although Personification is often encouraged in children’s music and was the most popular device in the 1990s, it appeared only minimally in CoComelon songs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Future research should adopt a more inclusive and theoretically comprehensive framework for figurative language, expanding beyond traditional devices to include Repetition, Rhyme, and Onomatopoeia. These sound-based forms play a key role in early learning, so including them would provide a more accurate and theoretically comprehensive understanding of how figurative language functions in children's songs.

2. Future studies should also examine a wider range of children's songs, including traditional, local, or culturally specific songs, as these may employ different figurative language patterns. Broadening the dataset could reveal whether the trends observed in CoComelon are consistent across other genres of children's music or unique to digital, media-produced content.

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