


# Constructing Male Immaturity through Figurative Language: A Stylistic Analysis of Sabrina Carpenter’s “Manchild”

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2848>

\*Yasin Ali Rogas, Ristati, Dellis Pratika<sup>abc</sup>

<sup>123</sup>English Language Education, Universitas Palangka Raya, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [yasinrogas@gmail.com](mailto:yasinrogas@gmail.com)

## A B S T R A C T

This study examines how figurative language constructs male immaturity in Sabrina Carpenter’s *Manchild*. The song was selected because it has attracted widespread public attention for its critical portrayal of male behavior through rich figurative expressions, making it an appropriate text for stylistic analysis. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study applies Perrine’s and Rozakis’ classifications of figurative language alongside Leech and Short’s stylistic theory to analyze both the types and functions of figurative expressions. The data consist of lyric lines collected through documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that irony is the dominant device (36.8%), followed by hyperbole (31.6%) and sarcasm (15.8%), while metaphor, paradox, and ambiguity occur less frequently. Rather than functioning independently, these devices interact to construct a critical representation of male immaturity. Irony serves as the primary evaluative strategy, whereas hyperbole and sarcasm intensify criticism through exaggeration and ridicule. This study contributes to stylistic and linguistic research by integrating figurative language classification with functional analysis and demonstrating how figurative language constructs gendered meaning and social criticism in contemporary popular music.

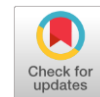
**Keywords:** *Figurative Language, Stylistic Analysis, Gender Representation, Masculinity*

### Article History:

Received 16<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Accepted 10<sup>th</sup> July 2026

Published 11<sup>th</sup> July 2026



## INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental means of human communication that enables individuals to express ideas, emotions, experiences, and social meanings across various contexts. Beyond serving as a vehicle for exchanging information, language also functions as a social resource through which people construct identities, negotiate relationships, and interpret the world around them (Hall, 2021). In everyday interaction, speakers use language not only to convey messages but also to express attitudes, establish interpersonal connections, and achieve communicative goals. From a functional perspective, meaning is created through the interaction between linguistic forms and their social contexts, making language an essential element of effective communication (Gee, 2025). Furthermore, language reflects cultural values and social practices, allowing individuals to participate in communities and shape shared understandings through discourse (Swarniti, 2022). As communication increasingly occurs through digital media and popular culture, the study of language has become increasingly important for understanding how meaning, identity, and social relationships are constructed in contemporary society (Tagg, 2024).

In artistic and literary works, the function of language becomes more complex and intensified as language use is not restricted to its literal function but also extends to more imaginative and stylistically complex uses to create aesthetic effects and convey deeper meanings (Eagleton, 2008; Leech, 2015). One key linguistic feature that enables such complexity is figurative language. Figurative language refers to expressions whose meanings extend beyond their literal interpretation, allowing speakers or writers to convey abstract, emotional, or evaluative meanings more effectively (Perrine & Arp, 1992; Rozakis, 1995). Figurative language is widely used across literary genres, including poetry, prose, and song lyrics, to enhance emotional intensity and communicative impact (Anggraini et al., 2022; Gea et al., 2025).

Song lyrics represent a distinctive form of literary expression that combines linguistic creativity with musical elements. In vocal music, language serves as a medium of expression, interacting with sound to convey meaning (Denac, 2022). Similarly, both music and language offer creative possibilities for expressing human experience and emotion (Sloboda, 1985). In contemporary popular music, song lyrics frequently employ figurative language to communicate complex emotional states, personal experiences, and social messages (Nur Fadilla et al., 2023). Unlike ordinary language, lyrics rely heavily on imaginative expressions to intensify meaning and engage listeners. As a result, figurative language in song lyrics plays a crucial role in shaping how meanings are constructed and interpreted, particularly in relation to themes such as relationships, identity, and emotional experience.

A substantial body of research has examined figurative language in song lyrics. For instance, studies on contemporary music have identified various types of figurative language and demonstrated how these devices contribute to the expression of emotions and thematic content. Research on Taylor Swift's songs reveals that figurative language conveys deep emotional experiences and personal narratives (Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022). Other studies by Saraswati & Skolastika (2025) show that figurative expressions can enhance emotional intensity and represent complex relational dynamics. Similarly, investigations of Taylor Swift's song albums indicate that figurative language is widely used to create imagery, emphasize feelings, and construct meaning beyond literal interpretation (Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). Research on Ariana Grande's songs identified various types of figurative language, with metaphor as the most dominant form (Nur Fadilla et al., 2023). Other research on Adele's songs also demonstrates that figurative language, particularly hyperbole, intensifies emotional expression and enhances the aesthetic quality of the lyrics (Hanisfi et al., 2022).

Despite these contributions, existing studies exhibit several limitations. Many of them focus primarily on identifying and categorizing types of figurative language without sufficiently explaining how these devices function together to construct meaning. While some research considers contextual meaning, it often lacks a systematic stylistic framework that links linguistic form to interpretive function. Relatively few studies explicitly address how figurative language contributes to the construction of social identities, particularly in relation to gender and masculinity. This is a significant gap, considering that language, especially in popular music, plays a central role in shaping and negotiating gender representations. As highlighted in studies of gender and

popular music, artistic expressions can both reflect and challenge dominant gender norms and power relations (Werner, 2024).

The present study addresses these gaps by focusing on Sabrina Carpenter's song "Manchild," which centers on the representation of male immaturity in romantic relationships. The term "manchild" itself encapsulates a paradoxical identity, referring to an adult male who exhibits childlike immaturity. This notion resonates with broader cultural discussions of masculinity, where contemporary society has been observed to blur the boundaries between adulthood and immaturity, producing what has been described as the "boy-man" phenomenon (Cross, 2008). Furthermore, psychological perspectives suggest that emotionally immature individuals often demonstrate limited self-awareness, responsibility, and relational competence (Gibson, 2023). These perspectives indicate that the concept of male immaturity is not only personal but also socially constructed and culturally embedded.

From a theoretical standpoint, such constructions can be understood through discourse and performativity. Gender identities are not fixed but are continuously produced through repeated linguistic and social practices (Butler, 2015). In this context, figurative language becomes a crucial mechanism for articulating and evaluating identities. Therefore, analyzing figurative language in "Manchild" provides insight into how linguistic choices construct and reinforce representations of male immaturity.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how figurative language functions in Sabrina Carpenter's "Manchild." Specifically, the objectives of this research are: (1) to identify and classify the types of figurative language used in the song, and (2) to analyze how these figurative devices function stylistically to construct the representation of male immaturity. By integrating figurative language classification with stylistic analysis, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed in song lyrics, particularly in relation to gendered identity and social critique.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which focuses on exploring and interpreting the meaning embedded in textual data rather than measuring variables numerically (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on understanding meaning, context, and interpretation through descriptive data. More specifically, this research adopts a document or content analysis approach, since the primary data source is a written text (Ary et al., 2010). This approach is appropriate because the research seeks to identify types of figurative language and examine how these linguistic features function stylistically to construct the concept of male immaturity.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates two complementary perspectives. First, the classification of figurative language is based on the frameworks proposed by Perrine & Arp (1992) and Rozakis (1995), which provide systematic categories such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, and sarcasm. These classifications enable the identification of various figurative devices present in the lyrics. Second, the study employs the stylistic approach proposed by Leech & Short (2015) to analyze how these

figurative expressions function in constructing meaning. This stylistic framework focuses on how linguistic choices produce aesthetic, emotional, and evaluative effects within a text. By combining these frameworks, the study not only identifies the types of figurative language but also explains how they contribute to the construction of the representation of male immaturity in the song.

The data of this study consist of the lyrics of the song "Manchild" by Carpenter (2025). The data collection and analysis follow the interactive model, which consists of three concurrent activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data condensation phase, the researcher selected and focused the data by identifying lyric lines that contain figurative language. Each identified unit was then coded according to the classification of figurative language, using a layered coding approach that distinguishes between primary and secondary devices where necessary. In the data display phase, the coded data were organized into a structured table to facilitate systematic analysis and pattern identification. This display allows the researcher to observe relationships between figurative language types and their stylistic functions. In the conclusion drawing and verification phase, the researcher interpreted the data to explain how figurative language constructs the representation of male immaturity. The conclusions were continuously reviewed and verified by re-examining the data and ensuring consistency between the findings and the theoretical frameworks.

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, several criteria based on qualitative research principles outlined by Miles et al. (2014) were applied, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through careful, repeated examination of the data and the consistent application of established theoretical frameworks. Dependability was ensured by providing a clear, systematic description of the research procedures, enabling the study to be evaluated or replicated by other researchers. Confirmability was maintained by grounding all interpretations in the data, supported by explicit lyric excerpts and systematic coding. These measures ensure that the findings are not based on subjective assumptions but are firmly rooted in the textual evidence and analytical process.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the study's findings from the analysis of figurative language in the song "Manchild" by Sabrina Carpenter. Each lyric line was treated as a unit of analysis, and a dominant-type coding approach was applied while still acknowledging the possibility of layered figurative meanings. The results are presented in tabular form to provide a clear and systematic overview of the types of figurative language identified, along with their corresponding stylistic functions.

Table 1. Figurative Language and Stylistic Functions in "Manchild" by Sabrina Carpenter

No	Lyric Excerpt	Primary Device	Secondary Devices	Stylistic Function
----	---------------	----------------	-------------------	--------------------

*Constructing Male Immaturity through Figurative Language: A Stylistic Analysis of Sabrina Carpenter's "Manchild"*

1	You said your phone was broken, Just forgot to charge it	Irony	Sarcasm, Understatement	Evaluative exposure
2	Whole outfit you're wearing / God, I hope it's ironic	Sarcasm	Irony	Ridicule
3	Did you just say you're finished? / Didn't know we started	Irony	Sarcasm	Dismissal
4	It's all just so familiar / Baby, what do you call it?	Irony	Sarcasm	Patterned evaluation
5	Stupid / Or is it / Slow? / Maybe it's / Useless? / But there's a cuter word for it, I know	Sarcasm	Hyperbole, Irony	Intensification through ridicule
6	Manchild	Metaphor	–	Characterization
7	Why you always come a-running to me?	Hyperbole	–	Dependency emphasis
8	Fuck my life	Hyperbole	–	Emotional intensification
9	Won't you let an innocent woman be?	Irony	Sarcasm	Self-positioning
10	Never heard of self care	Sarcasm	Irony	Criticism
11	Half your brain just ain't there	Hyperbole	Sarcasm, Understatement	Ridicule
12	Why you always come a-running / Taking all my loving from me?	Hyperbole	Metaphor	Emotional amplification
13	Why so sexy if so dumb?	Paradox	Sarcasm, Hyperbole	Contrastive ridicule
14	And how survive the Earth so long?	Hyperbole	Sarcasm	Mockery
15	If I'm not there, it won't get done	Hyperbole	Sarcasm	Self-elevation
16	I choose to blame your mom	Irony	Sarcasm, Metonymy	Deflection
17	Oh, I like my boys playing hard to get / And I like my men all incompetent	Irony	Sarcasm	Self-irony
18	And I swear they choose me / I'm not choosing them	Irony	Contrast	Reversal
19	Amen / Hey, men!	Ambiguity	Wordplay	Phonological foregrounding

Table 2. Frequency of Primary Figurative Language

Type	Frequency	Percentage
------	-----------	------------

Irony	7	36.8%
Hyperbole	6	31.6%
Sarcasm	3	15.8%
Metaphor	1	5.3%
Paradox	1	5.3%
Ambiguity	1	5.3%
Total	19	100%

The results show that irony is the most dominant figurative device, followed by hyperbole and sarcasm. This distribution implies that the construction of meaning in the song is primarily achieved through contrastive and evaluative mechanisms rather than purely descriptive ones. Irony serves as the central strategy for highlighting the gap between expectation and reality, while hyperbole intensifies emotional and evaluative expressions. Sarcasm, although less frequent as a primary device, operates as an important reinforcing layer that sharpens the critical tone of the lyrics. Overall, the interaction of these figurative devices demonstrates that the song's meaning is constructed through a combination of contrast, exaggeration, and an evaluative stance, which collectively contribute to the representation of male immaturity.

## Discussion

### Figurative Language as a Mechanism of Evaluation

The findings show that figurative language in "Manchild" functions primarily as a mechanism of evaluation rather than mere stylistic ornamentation. This is most clearly reflected in the dataset's dominance of irony. Rather than directly stating that the male figure is irresponsible or immature, the song repeatedly exposes these traits through contradiction. For instance, statements that appear neutral on the surface are systematically undermined by contextual cues, producing a pattern of evaluative exposure. For example, the line "You said your phone was broken, just forgot to charge it" creates meaning by contrasting the excuse "broken" with the much simpler reality "just forgot to charge it". This contrast highlights the person's carelessness and presents it as something trivial rather than serious. In this way, the line reflects irony, where sarcasm is used to mock or criticize the situation (Rozakis, 1995). Similarly, the line "Did you just say you're finished? / Didn't know we started" further illustrates how evaluation is carried out through figurative contrast rather than direct accusation. On the surface, the speaker appears to question the status of the interaction, but the second clause immediately undermines the first clause's premise. By stating "didn't know we started," the speaker implies that whatever the other person considers meaningful or complete was never significant to begin with. In both cases, evaluation emerges indirectly, through the gap between literal meaning and intended interpretation.

In stylistic terms, this pattern aligns with the foregrounding concept proposed by Leech & Short (2015), in which deviation from expected or literal meaning draws attention and intensifies interpretation. The frequent use of irony creates a sustained pattern of semantic deviation, which functions to highlight the incompetence of the male figure in the song. In these lyrics, irony consistently creates such deviation, forcing the listener to reinterpret the literal statement and recognize the underlying critique embedded within it. This supports the argument that figurative language is central to

meaning construction in literary texts, as it enables writers to convey attitudes and judgments with greater nuance (Eagleton, 2008; Leech, 2015).

This finding both aligns with and extends previous research. While earlier studies such as Nur Fadilla et al. (2023) emphasize that figurative language enhances meaning and interpretive depth beyond literal expression, they often frame this function in terms of emotional expression. For example, recent studies on song lyrics frequently highlight how figurative language conveys feelings, personal experience, or emotional intensity (Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022; Saraswati & Skolastika, 2025). While those functions are present in many lyrical texts, the present findings indicate that figurative language in "Manchild" is primarily used to assess and critique rather than to express emotion. In other words, the song relies less on emotional disclosure and more on linguistic strategies that expose and judge behavior. This shows that figurative language can serve a more critical function, acting as a tool for evaluation and judgment rather than solely for emotional expression.

### Construction of Male Immaturity Through Linguistic Contrast

The construction of male immaturity in the song is achieved through repeated patterns of linguistic contrast, rather than direct description. The term "manchild" is central to how the song constructs the idea of male immaturity, and its effect comes from the way it compresses a complex contrast into a single lexical unit. The word brings together two categories that do not normally coexist: "man," associated with adulthood, maturity, and responsibility, and "child," associated with immaturity, dependence, and a lack of self-control. This fusion creates a conceptual contradiction that defines the character from the outset. This reflects what Rozakis (1995) describes as a direct metaphor, since no comparative markers such as "like" or "as" are used. Instead, the qualities of "child" are directly mapped onto "man". As Lakoff & Johnson (2008) argue, metaphor functions as a conceptual system that structures how we understand abstract ideas. In this case, the mapping *adult is child* frames immaturity as an inherent trait rather than an occasional behavior.

This conceptualization is reinforced throughout the lyrics by repeated contrasts between expected adult behavior and the actions described. For instance, the line "Never heard of self-care" serves as a concise yet sharp form of evaluative criticism, and its force lies in its contrast between literal meaning and implied judgment. On the surface, the statement suggests complete ignorance, as if the addressee has no knowledge at all of what self-care is. However, in context, this is clearly not meant to be taken literally. Instead, it implies that the person behaves in ways that show a consistent lack of responsibility or awareness, particularly in managing their own affairs. The exaggeration of "never heard" intensifies the critique by presenting neglectful behavior as a total absence of understanding. The irresponsibility of the "manchild" is further explained through the line "If I'm not there, it won't get done," which positions the speaker as the responsible agent in contrast to the addressee's incompetence.

This is where sarcasm becomes the primary device. As outlined by Rozakis (1995), sarcasm is a form of irony used specifically for mockery or criticism, in which the intended meaning sharply contrasts with the literal expression. In this line, the speaker

does not genuinely question the addressee's knowledge, but rather, the statement ridicules their behavior by framing it as if they are completely incapable of basic self-awareness. The effect is direct and evaluative, reinforcing the portrayal of immaturity.

Moreover, the line "*Why so sexy if so dumb?*" sharpens the construction of male immaturity by presenting a clear internal contradiction. It brings together two qualities that are not typically expected to align: "sexy," which signals attractiveness and desirability, and "dumb," which implies a lack of intelligence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). The tension between these two attributes creates what Perrine & Arp (1992) identify as a paradox, where seemingly incompatible ideas are placed side by side to produce meaning through contradiction. Rather than resolving this tension, the line sustains it, forcing the listener to confront the inconsistency in the character being described.

This paradox is not presented as a neutral observation. The interrogative form suggests a question, but it is not intended to elicit an answer. Instead, it functions rhetorically, expressing disbelief that such opposing qualities can coexist. This is where sarcasm becomes a secondary but crucial layer. As Rozakis (1995) explains, sarcasm often operates through irony with a clear intent to mock or criticize. In this case, the speaker uses the question format to ridicule the addressee, turning the contradiction into a point of derision rather than curiosity.

More broadly, this paradox contributes to the ongoing construction of male immaturity in the song. By highlighting a mismatch between outward appeal and intellectual or behavioral competence, the line reinforces the idea that surface-level desirability does not compensate for underlying deficiencies. The contradiction becomes part of a larger pattern in which expected adult qualities are consistently undermined, further strengthening the portrayal of the "*manchild*" as a figure defined by inconsistency and inadequacy. In other words, they highlight a gap between the ideal image of adulthood and the reality of behavior that falls short of those standards.

Such representation resonates with broader socio-cultural discussions of masculinity. Cross (2008) identifies the emergence of the "boy-man" phenomenon, where traditional markers of adulthood are increasingly destabilized, resulting in blurred boundaries between maturity and immaturity. The song reflects and reinforces this phenomenon by presenting male immaturity as a recognizable pattern and recurring social type rather than an isolated case. At the same time, this pattern supports Ricoeur (2003) notion of semantic tension, which explains how meaning is generated through these contradictions. The tension between "man" and "child," or between competence and incompetence, is not resolved but sustained, allowing meaning to emerge through the interaction of opposing elements. In this sense, figurative language serves as a bridge between individual behavior and broader cultural narratives about masculinity, translating abstract social concepts into concrete linguistic expressions.

Compared to Santika & Syafryadin (2023), who emphasize metaphor as the dominant device in song lyrics, the present findings show that metaphor plays a relatively limited but conceptually central role. Instead of multiple metaphors constructing meaning, a single, condensed metaphor like "*manchild*" anchors the analysis,

while other devices, such as irony and hyperbole, reinforce it. This suggests a different stylistic strategy in which conceptual labeling is supported by evaluative contrast.

### Hyperbole and Sarcasm as Intensification Strategies

According to Perrine & Arp (1992), hyperbole involves deliberate exaggeration for emphasis, and in this song, it serves to strengthen the speaker's critical stance. The lines "Half your brain just ain't there" and "And how survive the Earth so long?" demonstrate how hyperbole and sarcasm operate not merely as expressive devices but as structured strategies of intensification and evaluation. Both lines rely on extreme exaggeration: the first reduces cognitive ability to an impossible deficit, while the second questions the addressee's very capacity to function in the world. These are not literal claims but deliberate overstatements that amplify perceived incompetence. In line with Perrine & Arp (1992) definition, hyperbole functions here as a form of emphasis; however, its role extends beyond intensification into evaluative judgment.

This use of hyperbole aligns with Hanisfi et al. (2022), who argue that exaggerated expressions in song lyrics create a dramatic effect and emphasize meaning. However, the function observed in "Manchild" differs in orientation. Whereas previous studies often associate hyperbole with emotional intensity or personal vulnerability, the hyperbole in this song is directed outward, constructing mockery and criticism rather than expressing emotion.

Sarcasm, alongside hyperbole, sharpens this evaluation by introducing a mocking or derisive tone. Statements that appear superficially positive are revealed to carry negative implications, thereby reinforcing the critical perspective (Rozakis, 1995). For example, the line "Oh, I like my men all incompetent" appears to express preference, but the context clearly signals the opposite. The statement functions as mock approval, reinforcing criticism through inversion. Similarly, "Never heard of self-care" uses a seemingly neutral statement to convey strong disapproval. In both cases, sarcasm depends on the listener's ability to recognize the gap between literal and intended meaning, making it closely related to irony but more explicitly evaluative (Rozakis, 1995). Importantly, sarcasm often operates in conjunction with irony and hyperbole, creating layered meanings that intensify the overall effect.

This pattern both aligns with and extends previous research. It supports the general claim of Nur Fadilla et al. (2023) that figurative language enhances meaning beyond literal expression, but it challenges the tendency to interpret figurative language primarily as emotional expression (Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022; Saraswati & Skolastika, 2025). Instead, the findings demonstrate that exaggeration and sarcasm can function as tools of evaluative discourse. This is consistent with more recent studies suggesting that irony and sarcasm in song lyrics can disrupt expectations and critique social representations (Arifah et al., 2025). In "Manchild," this critique is directed toward masculinity, where exaggerated incompetence undermines traditional expectations of male capability.

### Layered Meaning and Interaction of Figurative Devices

Another significant finding of this study is that figurative language in "Manchild" operates through overlapping and interacting devices rather than through isolated

categories. Many lines simultaneously exhibit multiple figurative features, creating layered meanings. For example, the line "You said your phone was broken, just forgot to charge it" combines irony with a subtle form of understatement, while "Half your brain just ain't there" merges hyperbole with sarcasm. These examples show that meaning is constructed through interaction rather than through single devices.

This phenomenon can be explained through Lakoff & Johnson (2008) view, which holds that figurative language reflects interconnected conceptual systems in which multiple mappings can coexist. Similarly, Ricoeur (2003) argues that meaning emerges from the semantic tension between literal and figurative interpretations, rather than from a single, fixed meaning. The interaction between devices creates layers of meaning that cannot be fully explained by classification alone. The data in this study support these perspectives, as meaning is consistently produced through the interaction of multiple figurative devices within the same line.

Moreover, the pre-chorus "Stupid / Or is it / Slow? / Maybe it's / Useless? / But there's a cuter word for it, I know" incorporates sarcasm with hyperbole and irony. The line operates primarily through sarcasm, using a sequence of labels like "stupid," "slow," and "useless", that reads less like genuine evaluation and more like a deliberately exaggerated, mocking judgment. This escalation in tone builds toward the closing remark, "there's a cuter word for it," which appears to soften the criticism but in fact sharpens it. By implying a gentler alternative while maintaining a clearly derisive tone, the statement intensifies the insult rather than mitigating it. This effect is reinforced through hyperbole, as the accumulation of extreme negative descriptors exaggerates the subject's perceived shortcomings, signaling that the intent is not a literal assessment but amplified criticism. At a structural level, irony emerges from the contrast between the phrase "cuter word" and the harsh language that precedes it. The suggestion of something "cute" clashes with the severity of the insults, creating a tension that underscores the speaker's mocking intent rather than offering any real softening of the critique.

This is a strong example of foregrounding through parallelism and escalation, where the use of short, fragmented lines creates a rhythmic pattern that draws attention to form, while the cumulative structure gradually intensifies the evaluative force. Rather than delivering its impact immediately, the sequence builds toward a delayed punchline, allowing meaning to emerge through progression rather than from any single lexical item (Leech & Short, 2015).

This layered structure also explains why certain devices, such as sarcasm, appear less frequently as primary categories but remain highly significant in the overall interpretation. Sarcasm often functions as a secondary layer that intensifies or modifies the meaning produced by irony or hyperbole. Consequently, the analysis of figurative language must move beyond simple classification and account for the dynamic interaction between devices.

This finding also addresses a limitation in previous studies, which tend to focus on identifying types of figurative language without examining their interaction. Studies such as those by Anggraini et al. (2022), Gea et al. (2025), Santika & Syafryadin (2023) provide valuable classifications but often treat figurative devices as discrete units, and do not examine how these devices interact within a single text. In contrast, the present

analysis demonstrates that figurative language functions as an integrated system, in which multiple devices work together to produce meaning, and that this interaction is essential for understanding how meaning is constructed.

### Figurative Language and Gendered Representation

Beyond its linguistic and stylistic functions, figurative language in "Manchild" contributes to the construction of gendered representation. Through repeated use of evaluative and critical figurative expressions such as irony, hyperbole, and sarcasm, the song constructs a consistent image of masculinity characterized by immaturity and incompetence. This representation is not delivered explicitly but is built cumulatively through stylistic choices that expose behavioral patterns.

This aligns with Butler's (2015) concept of performativity, which suggests that gender identities are constructed through repeated discursive acts rather than existing as fixed attributes. In this context, the recurring use of figurative language contributes to the construction of a particular version of masculinity, one that deviates from traditional expectations of responsibility and competence. The label "manchild" itself, repeated throughout the song, becomes more than a descriptive term; it acts as a performative utterance that continuously reinforces the identity it names. Each ironic remark, exaggerated criticism, or sarcastic statement contributes to this construction, gradually solidifying the association between masculinity and immaturity within the song's discourse.

This representation also supports broader findings in studies of gender in popular music, which suggest that song lyrics can both reflect and challenge dominant gender norms. As Werner (2024) argues, popular music plays a role in negotiating gender representations. The findings of this study support this view, as the song does not simply depict male immaturity but actively critiques it through linguistic strategies. In "Manchild," the figurative language does not simply mirror existing stereotypes; it actively critiques them. By highlighting incompetence, dependency, and lack of self-awareness, the lyrics challenge traditional expectations of men as responsible, capable, and emotionally stable. The repeated contrast between what is expected and what is depicted creates a critical stance toward these norms, suggesting a shift in how masculinity is understood and evaluated. In doing so, the song participates in a wider discourse that questions traditional constructions of masculinity.

The portrayal of male immaturity in the song also resonates with psychological perspectives. Emotional immaturity is often associated with limited self-regulation, lack of accountability, and difficulty in maintaining balanced relationships (Gibson, 2023). These traits are consistently reflected in the lyrics, not through explicit psychological terminology but through figurative expressions that translate abstract concepts into concrete and relatable forms. For instance, hyperbole and sarcasm exaggerate these traits to make them more apparent, while irony exposes the gap between expected and actual behavior. In this way, figurative language translates psychological traits into linguistic form, making them accessible and relatable for listeners.

Importantly, the construction of masculinity in "Manchild" is not neutral; it is evaluative and critical. The speaker's voice consistently positions the male figure as lacking, while simultaneously asserting her own awareness and agency. This dynamic

reflects a broader discursive shift in which female perspectives in popular music articulate critique rather than passively narrate experience. Figurative language serves as the key mechanism through which this critique is expressed, allowing the speaker to challenge and reinterpret gender roles without resorting to direct or overly explicit statements.

Overall, the findings indicate that figurative language in "Manchild" by Sabrina Carpenter serves not only as a stylistic device but also as a powerful tool for constructing meaning and critiquing gendered identities. Through the interaction of dominant figurative types such as irony, hyperbole, and sarcasm, the song creates a coherent and sustained representation of male immaturity, linking individual behavior to wider cultural and psychological frameworks. This demonstrates that language is not only central to shaping meaning but also participates in the construction and negotiation of social perception.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how figurative language functions in Sabrina Carpenter's *Manchild* and found that meaning is constructed primarily through evaluative and contrastive strategies rather than literal description. Irony emerges as the dominant device, supported by hyperbole and sarcasm, while metaphor, though less frequent, provides the conceptual foundation of the song. These figurative devices work together to create layered meanings by contrasting expectation with reality, competence with incompetence, and adulthood with childishness. Through these recurring oppositions, the lyrics construct a coherent representation of male immaturity and reinforce the label "manchild" as a form of social evaluation. The findings demonstrate that figurative language functions not only to express emotions but also to deliver social criticism and construct gendered identities. By integrating figurative language classification with stylistic analysis, this study addresses the gap between identifying linguistic devices and explaining their contribution to meaning construction. Nevertheless, the analysis is limited to a single song, restricting broader generalization. Future research should examine multiple songs, artists, or genres and investigate audience interpretations of figurative language in relation to contemporary understandings of masculinity and gender representation.

## REFERENCES

- Anggraini, A., Aryanika, S., & Indrasari, N. (2022). Figurative language and contextual meaning: In Thomas Hardy poems. *Wiralodra English Journal (WEJ)*, 6(2), 38-53. <https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v6i2.186>
- Arifah, D., Sigalingging, A. Y., & Rangkuti, R. (2025). A cognitive stylistic: irony and sarcasm in the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's "Norman F\*\*\*Ing Rockwell!" using schema theory. *Jurnal Penelitian Inovatif*, 5(2), 1413-1420. <https://doi.org/10.54082/jupin.1501>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Razavieh, A. (2010). Introduction to research in education. In *Wadsworth*.
- Butler, J. (2015). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Carpenter, S. (2025). *Manchild*. Island Records. <https://open.spotify.com/track/42UBPzRMh5yyz0EDPr6fr1>

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cross, G. S. (2008). *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity*. Columbia University Press.
- Denac, O. (2022). Interdisciplinary connections: Musical and language activities. *Creative Education*, 13(10), 3174–3181. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.1310201>
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Fatikha, A. R., & Masykuroh, Q. (2022). Figurative language in selected songs of "Red" by Taylor Swift. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 6(2), 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v6i2.5711>
- Gea, M. K., Pasaribu, T. K., & Sinambela, E. (2025). An analysis of figurative language in Sabrina Carpenter's song album "Short N' Sweet". *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, 9(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.25157/jall.v9i1.17133>
- Gee, J. P. (2025). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Gibson, L. C. (2023). *Disentangling from Emotionally Immature People: Avoid Emotional Traps, Stand Up for Yourself, and Transform Your Relationships as an Adult Child of Emotionally Immature Parents*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Hall, C. J. (2021). Incorporating Ontological Reflection into Teacher Education about English for Global Learners: A Rationale and Some Guiding Principles. In Y. Bayyurt (Ed.), *Bloomsbury World Englishes: Volume 3 - Pedagogies* (pp. 11–26). Bloomsbury.
- Hanisfi, I., Lestari, S. D., & Wageyono. (2022). An analysis on figurative language of song lyrics of Adele's album entitled "25." *Lunar: Language and Art Journal*, 6(2), 164–176. <https://doi.org/10.36526/ln.v6i2.2458>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
- Leech, G. (2015). *Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding*. Routledge.
- Leech, G., & Short, M. (2015). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. Routledge.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data analysis A methods Sourcebook* (3th editio). Sage Publications.
- Nur Fadilla, D. A. N., Ariani, S., & Dewi Max, J. I. S. (2023). A stylistic analysis of figurative language in Ariana Grande's song lyrics. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya*, 7(4), 1301–1312. <https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v7i4.8705>
- Perrine, L., & Arp, T. R. (1992). *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (8th ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Ricoeur, P. (2003). *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. Routledge.
- Rozakis, L. (1995). *How to Interpret Poetry*. Macmillan General Reference.
- Santika, P., & Syafryadin. (2023). An analysis of figurative language in song lyrics of the album "Midnights" by Taylor Swift. *Wiralodra English Journal*, 7(1), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v7i1.189>
- Saraswati, K. T. A., & Skolastika, I. M. P. (2025). Figurative expressions of romantic infatuation in Sabrina Carpenter's songs. *IDEAS: Journal on Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 13(2), 5258–5268. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7815>
- Sloboda, J. A. (1985). *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music*. Clarendon Press.
- Swarniti, N. W. (2022). Analysis of figurative language in "Easy on Me" song lyric. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 8(1), 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.55637/jr.8.1.4708.13-18>
- Tagg, C. (2024). Digital Language and Communication. In L. Wei, Z. Hua, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (Vol. 2, pp. 68–80). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003082637-8>
- Werner, A. (2024). *Feminism and Gender Politics in Mediated Popular Music*. Bloomsbury Academic.