# AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND MORAL FOUNDATIONS IN SELECTED SONG LYRICS FROM *THE GREATEST SHOWMAN* SOUNDTRACK

**A THESIS**


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## DECLARATION OF AUTHENCITY

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I hereby sincerely state that the thesis entitled "**An Analysis of Figurative Language and Moral Foundations in Selected Song Lyrics from *The Greatest Showman* Soundtrack**" is my own work. It does not contain any work of other people, except those cited in the quotations and the references as a scientific paper should.

The researcher is responsible for his thesis if in the future, it is proved to contain others' work or to imitate others' thesis. This declaration was written by the researcher.

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## ABSTRACT

English song lyrics can be used as written texts for interpreting language and meaning in EFL contexts. This research aimed to identify the types of figurative language, the moral foundations, and the text-based relation between both elements in selected song lyrics from *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack. This research used a descriptive qualitative design supported by document analysis and directed qualitative content analysis. The data consisted of 153 analyzable lyric lines from "A Million Dreams," "Rewrite the Stars," and "This Is Me," taken from archived Spotify lyric displays. The instruments included figurative language and moral foundations codebooks, line-by-line coding sheets, analytic notes, and a relation matrix. Figurative language was coded using Perrine's categories, while moral foundations were coded using Moral Foundations Theory. The findings show 101 figurative language occurrences, with metaphor as the dominant type, appearing 57 times. The lyrics also show 79 moral foundation occurrences, with loyalty as the dominant foundation, appearing 35 times. The relation analysis identified 48 relation-supporting lines, where figurative wording expressed, clarified, or reinforced moral foundations through textual evidence. The findings may provide examples of evidence-based lyric interpretation for reading and literature-related activities in English Language Education.



*Keywords:* figurative language, Moral Foundations Theory, song lyrics, qualitative content analysis, English Language Education

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The writer realizes that this thesis still has shortcomings in content, organization, and language. Therefore, constructive comments and suggestions are welcomed for further improvement. The writer hopes that this thesis can be useful for readers, future researchers, teachers, and students who are interested in song lyrics, figurative language, moral foundations, and English Language Education.

Pontianak, 7 June 2026
The Writer

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Song lyrics have been used as English learning materials in recent EFL studies. Nabila et al. (2026) investigated students' perceptions of using song lyrics to improve reading comprehension. Their study reported that song lyrics supported students' reading motivation, vocabulary, contextual meaning, and main ideas. However, the same study also reported challenges, including slang and figurative meanings. This finding is relevant to the present research because it shows that song lyrics can be used in reading-related activities, but their meanings still require careful interpretation.

Song lyrics are used in this research as written verbal texts. Spann (2024) presents the C.A.R.E. framework for using pop songs in second language learning, covering creativity, analysis, response, and English. Sudar et al. (2023) also analyzed lexical and contextual meanings in soundtrack lyrics and related the findings to teaching reading skills. These studies support the position that song lyrics may be examined as texts, not only as listening materials or entertainment. Therefore, this research treats song lyrics as English texts that can be read, coded, and interpreted through textual evidence.

This topic is relevant to the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Tanjungpura. The Outcome-Based Education Curriculum includes English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature as fields that

can guide students in writing a thesis (ELESP UNTAN, 2020). The curriculum also includes learning outcomes related to literary knowledge, research knowledge, and comprehensive studies of literature and research (ELESP UNTAN, 2020). The module handbook supports this direction through Poetry in ELT, which includes figurative language and interpretation, and Research on ELT, which introduces qualitative research, data analysis, and research problems (ELESP UNTAN, 2025). Therefore, this research is placed in English Language Education because it connects English lyric texts, figurative language, interpretation, and qualitative research practice.

Figurative language becomes the first focus of this research because the selected lyric lines contain nonliteral expressions that require interpretation. Perrine et al. (2018) provide categories of figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. These categories are used to identify how lyric lines create meaning through comparison, imagery, exaggeration, or symbolic expression. Thus, figurative language is analyzed to explain how wording in the selected lyric lines builds meaning beyond literal expression.

Moral foundations become the second focus of this research. The term moral foundations is used because this research applies Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) as its theoretical framework. The relationship between moral foundations and moral values is addressed through recent studies. Preniqi et al. (2023) investigated moral values and musical choices through lyrics and audio analysis. Preniqi et al. (2024) also used MFT to detect moral values in music

lyrics. Zangari et al. (2025) describe MFT as a framework used to identify moral foundations and analyze moral dimensions from textual data. Based on these studies, this research keeps the term moral foundations to stay consistent with MFT, while recognizing that the five foundations can be used to identify moral aspects in lyric lines.

*The Greatest Showman* soundtrack was selected because it provides a bounded source of written English lyrics and has been used in previous studies. Marpaung et al. (2022) examined figurative language in *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack lyrics. Wijayanti et al. (2022) examined lexical cohesion in several songs from the same soundtrack. Rahmani (2020) discussed figurative language and moral interpretation in "A Million Dreams," while Dimela (2023) analyzed figurative language and contextual meaning in the same song. These studies show that the soundtrack has research continuity. However, this research does not repeat their focus because it analyzes figurative language, moral foundations, and the text-based relation between both elements.

This research focuses on three songs: "A Million Dreams," "Rewrite the Stars," and "This Is Me." The songs were selected through purposive selection. First, they belong to the same soundtrack album. Second, they are available as written lyric texts that could be archived. Third, they were included in previous soundtrack-based research. Fourth, they could be segmented into lyric lines for line-based qualitative analysis. Therefore, the selection was based on source boundary, research continuity, and suitability for the research procedure.

Previous studies have not answered the specific focus of this research. Studies on *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack have discussed figurative language, lexical cohesion, contextual meaning, or moral interpretation. However, they have not separated figurative language coding, moral foundations coding, and text-based relation analysis. Studies by Preniqi et al. (2023) and Preniqi et al. (2024) show that lyrics can be studied in relation to moral values through MFT, but their approaches use lyric-audio features, annotation, or computational classification. The present research fills this gap by using qualitative close reading to examine how figurative wording expresses, clarifies, or reinforces moral foundations in selected lyric lines.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative design supported by document analysis and directed qualitative content analysis. Figurative language and moral foundations are coded separately before their text-based relation is examined. A text-based relation is discussed only when both elements appear in the same lyric line and when the figurative wording helps express, clarify, or reinforce the moral foundation. This research is limited to written lyric lines from the archived Spotify lyric display. It does not analyze music, melody, vocal performance, choreography, film scenes, songwriter intention, singer belief, audience response, students' learning outcomes, students' moral development, or cultural comparison. This limitation keeps the research focused on textual evidence in selected English song lyrics.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What types of figurative language are used in the selected song lyrics from *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack?
2. What moral foundations are reflected in the selected song lyrics based on Moral Foundations Theory?
3. How does figurative language express, clarify, or reinforce moral foundations in selected lyric lines where both are supported by textual evidence?

## 1.3 Research Purposes

The purposes of this research are:

1. To identify the types of figurative language used in the selected song lyrics from *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack.
2. To identify the moral foundations reflected in the selected song lyrics based on Moral Foundations Theory.
3. To explain how figurative language expresses, clarifies, or reinforces moral foundations in selected lyric lines where both are supported by textual evidence.

## 1.4 Research Significance

### 1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to contribute to the study of English song lyrics as written verbal texts. It applies Perrine's figurative language

categories and MFT to the same lyric data, but the two frameworks are used separately before their text-based relation is examined. The theoretical contribution is limited to showing how figurative language and moral foundations are reflected in “A Million Dreams,” “Rewrite the Stars,” and “This Is Me” through textual evidence.

### 1.4.2 Practical Significance

This research is expected to be useful for English Language Education, especially in reading, literature, and Poetry in ELT contexts. Teachers and lecturers may use selected findings as examples of evidence-based lyric interpretation. Students may use this research as a reference for observing how lyric interpretation is supported by wording, figurative meaning, moral aspects, and lyric-line evidence.

### 1.4.3 Methodological Significance

This research is expected to offer a traceable procedure for qualitative lyric analysis. The procedure uses archived lyric displays, line numbering, coding sheets, theory-based categories, analytic notes, and a relation matrix. This procedure helps show how figurative language and moral foundations can be coded separately before their relation is interpreted. It also helps prevent unsupported assumptions that every figurative expression carries a moral foundation or that every moral foundation depends on figurative wording.

## 1.5 Research Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on figurative language and moral foundations in three selected songs from *The Greatest Showman* (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack), namely "A Million Dreams," "Rewrite the Stars," and "This Is Me." The data are written lyric lines taken from the archived Spotify lyric display. Figurative language is identified through Perrine's categories, while moral foundations are identified through Moral Foundations Theory. The primary unit of analysis is the lyric line, although surrounding lines are used as context when meaning continues across line breaks.

The scope of this research is limited to textual analysis. Therefore, the discussion is based on lyric wording, line context, coding categories, and textual evidence. Elements outside the written lyrics, such as music, choreography, film scenes, songwriter intention, singer belief, audience response, and cultural comparison are not included as data. The study also does not include classroom implementation or learner-response data because it does not aim to measure learning outcomes.

This research is also limited by its qualitative and interpretive design. Different readers may interpret some lyric lines differently. To make the analysis traceable, the research uses archived lyric displays, line numbering, theory-based categories, coding sheets, analytic notes, and a relation matrix. Non-meaningful vocal expressions such as "oh," "oh-oh," "la," and "na" are excluded only when they function as sound and do not carry clear meaning.

The relation between figurative language and moral foundations is limited to the same lyric line. A relation is identified only when both elements appear in the same line and when the figurative wording helps express, clarify, or reinforce the moral foundation. Frequency and percentage are used as descriptive support for the qualitative findings, not as statistical testing or generalization beyond the selected songs.

## 1.6 Terminology

The following terms are used in this research to clarify the discussion.

### 1.6.1 Song Lyrics

Song lyrics refer to the written verbal text of a song used as data in this research. The lyrics are treated as written lines that can be read, numbered, coded, and interpreted. This term refers only to the written lyrics and does not include melody, vocal delivery, choreography, film scenes, songwriter intention, singer belief, or audience response.

### 1.6.2 Analyzable Lyric Lines

Analyzable lyric lines refer to lyric lines that remain in the data after the exclusion criteria are applied. Lines that only contain non-meaningful vocal expressions, such as “oh,” “oh-oh,” “la,” and “na,” are excluded when they function only as sound and do not carry clear meaning in the lyric context. Repeated lyric lines remain analyzable when they contain meaning and can support textual evidence.

### 1.6.3 Figurative Language

Figurative language refers to nonliteral expression found in the selected lyric lines. In this research, figurative language covers wording whose meaning cannot be fully explained through literal reading alone. A lyric line is identified as figurative language only when it shows a clear nonliteral signal and fits one of the figurative language categories used in this research.

### 1.6.4 Moral Foundations

Moral foundations refer to the five moral categories in MFT: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. In this research, these categories are used to identify moral aspects reflected in the selected lyric lines. The term is related to moral values because the five foundations provide theory-based categories for reading moral meaning in texts. However, this research does not use moral values as a broad or general label. It uses moral foundations as the specific categories defined in MFT.

### 1.6.5 Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)

MFT refers to the theoretical framework used to classify moral foundations into care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. In this research, MFT is used to identify moral foundations reflected in the wording of the selected lyric lines. MFT is not used to explain songwriter intention, singer belief, listener response, students' moral development, or moral judgment of the songs.

### 1.6.6 Text-Based Relation

Text-based relation refers to the interpretive link between figurative language and moral foundations in the same lyric line. It does not mean statistical correlation, causality, or a fixed model between figurative language and moral foundations. A text-based relation is identified only when figurative wording helps express, clarify, or reinforce the moral foundation in the same lyric line. Simple co-occurrence is not enough to establish a text-based relation.

### 1.6.7 *The Greatest Showman* Soundtrack Lyrics

*The Greatest Showman* soundtrack lyrics refer to the archived Spotify lyric display of the three selected songs from *The Greatest Showman* (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack). The selected songs are "A Million Dreams," "Rewrite the Stars," and "This Is Me." This term refers only to the archived written lyric displays used in this research and does not include other songs from the soundtrack, live-performance versions, fan transcriptions, annotated lyric websites, music, choreography, film scenes, or audience response.