

Conceptual Metaphor in Contemporary Indonesian Pop Lyrics Reality Club' Song: "Love Epiphany"

Metafora Konseptual dalam Lirik Lagu Pop Indonesia Kontemporer: Lagu Reality Club, "Love Epiphany"

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Description Submission: 20 May 2026 Revised: 09 July 2026 Accepted: 28 August 2026 Approved: 01 September 2026	This research aims to explore the conceptual metaphors embedded in the lyrics of "Love Epiphany", the album of the Indonesian contemporary indie pop band, Reality Club. The study is using descriptive qualitative content analysis in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The study finds 15 units of linguistic data and categorises them into 3 types of metaphors, i.e., structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. The total number of metaphor occurrences is 20, as in some cases, the classification is overlapped. Structural metaphors (9) were most dominant, followed by ontological (7) and orientational (4). Love is conceptualised along source domains of hunt, negotiation, game and journey (structural), shelter, monument and binding entity (ontological) and spatial orientations of forward, backwards and vertical movement (orientational). Contextual analysis shows that four key factors, relationship development stages, temporality, emotional ambivalence, and shared human experience, dynamically shape metaphorical interpretation throughout the song's narrative arc. These results confirm that conceptual metaphorical language in song lyrics functions not only as an aesthetic device but as a fundamental cognitive mechanism for structuring and communicating abstract human experience, with implications for cognitive linguistic research in Indonesian popular music.
Keywords Conceptual metaphor Song lyrics Cognitive linguistics Reality Club Figurative Language	
Kata Kunci Metafora konseptual Lirik lagu Linguistik kognitif Reality Club Bahasa Figuratif	
	Abstrak <i>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi metafora konseptual yang tertanam dalam lirik lagu "Love Epiphany", album dari band indie pop kontemporer Indonesia, Reality Club. Studi ini menggunakan analisis konten kualitatif deskriptif dalam kerangka Teori Metafora Konseptual. Studi ini menemukan 15 unit data linguistik dan mengkategorikannya ke dalam 3 jenis metafora, yaitu metafora struktural, ontologis, dan orientasional. Jumlah total kemunculan metafora adalah 20, karena dalam beberapa kasus, klasifikasinya tumpang tindih. Metafora struktural (9) paling dominan, diikuti oleh ontologis (7) dan orientasional (4). Cinta dikonseptualisasikan sepanjang domain sumber berburu, negosiasi, permainan, dan perjalanan (struktural), tempat berlindung, monumen, dan entitas pengikat (ontologis) serta orientasi spasial gerakan maju, mundur, dan vertikal (orientasional). Analisis kontekstual menunjukkan bahwa empat faktor kunci, tahap perkembangan hubungan, temporalitas, ambivalensi emosional, dan pengalaman manusia yang dibagikan, secara dinamis membentuk interpretasi metaforis sepanjang lengkung narasi lagu tersebut. Hasil ini mengonfirmasi bahwa bahasa metaforis konseptual dalam lirik lagu berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai perangkat estetika tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme kognitif fundamental untuk</i>

menyusun dan mengkomunikasikan pengalaman manusia yang abstrak, dengan implikasi untuk penelitian linguistik kognitif dalam musik pop Indonesia.



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1. Introduction

Language is a very important part of human life as it is the main way we communicate our thoughts, feelings and experiences. Besides sharing information, people also use language to create meaning, share points of view, and form social connections through complex communication processes (Mailani et al., 2022). Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a means for expressing deeper and wider aspects of human experience, as is shown by lyrics in songs and other art forms and literature.

Song lyrics constitute one of the most salient examples of artistic language use. The dense, aesthetic, and emotional choices of words allow the songwriters to deliver messages, generate feelings, and engage the listeners as part of popular literature (Mawarsih et al., 2024). Studies on English-language popular music similarly demonstrate that conceptual metaphors operate as the dominant figurative mode in song lyrics, structuring emotional experience through systematic mappings from concrete domains (Nugraheny & Yuwita, 2023). Usually, the meanings are built through the use of figurative language in the song lyrics, which is a strategy employed by the songwriters to generate aesthetic effects and to improve the intended meanings (Sabrina et al., 2023). Song lyrics often require more nuanced readings because figurative language operates on a different level than the literal.

Metaphor is one of the most common and important figurative language types. For cognitive linguistics metaphor is not a stylistic figure but a fundamental cognitive mechanism. Lakoff & Johnson (2008) argue that we systematically understand abstract concepts in terms of more concrete and experiential domains. This is called conceptual mapping from the source domain to the target domain. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has transformed the study of metaphor from a field of interest to rhetoricians only, to a major research area in cognitive science and linguistics.

There are three main conceptual metaphor types. First, structural metaphors express one concept in terms of another. For example, LOVE IS A JOURNEY employs the metaphor of travel (with a path, destination, and obstacles) to help us understand romantic relationships. Second, orientational metaphors describe abstract states in terms of spatial orientations, such as up-down and forward-backward. For example, "HAPPY IS UP" and "SAD IS DOWN" are examples of bodily experience projections onto emotional concepts. Third, ontological metaphors treat abstract experiences as things or entities that have boundaries and physical properties, thereby making them countable, nameable, and locatable (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). These three groups create the conceptual framework employed in this study for finding and examining metaphors in song lyrics.

Research from different disciplines also supports the cognitive dimension of metaphor. Metaphors are vital cognitive devices to connect concrete and abstract experiences and thus to facilitate meaning-making in the communication (Beknazarova et al., 2021). (Kövecses, 2010) stresses that the metaphorical conceptualisation is grounded in bodily and cultural experience, rendering metaphors universal and culture-specific simultaneously. Research in the Indonesian linguistic context reveals that the use of metaphorical conceptualisations in song lyrics is a projection of the culture of the users and their cognitive frameworks, which indicates that conceptual metaphors are universal and culturally specific (Irwansyah, 2021). This means that conceptual metaphors are not only universal concepts but they are also affected by some cultural and linguistic contexts.

Song lyrics are becoming more and more well-known as texts that are rich in language and can be analyzed in a systematic way. (Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022) illustrate that figurative language, especially metaphor, enables songwriters to concretize abstract emotions, rendering song lyrics both aesthetically pleasing and analytically significant. Zyga (2020) demonstrates that conceptual metaphors in song lyrics interact with vocal delivery and musical structure to influence emotional meaning, highlighting the intricacy of lyrical interpretation. Research conducted by Susandhika & Widarsini (2025) on Indonesian pop songs validates the prevalence of conceptual metaphors in illustrating emotional experiences such as love, longing, and loss.

Reality Club is an Indonesian indie band that is known for its reflective and literary-quality lyrics. Their song "Love Epiphany" (2023) on the album Reality Club Presents is especially helpful as an example of metaphor, because it employs figurative language so well to communicate the complicated experience of romantic love. Considering this richness, the present study aims at identifying and analysing conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of "Love Epiphany" from the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson's (2008) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, paying particular attention to how linguistic context shapes the interpretation of those metaphors. Hence, this study attempts to answer two main questions, i.e. what types and kinds of conceptual metaphors can be identified in the lyrics and how the linguistic context can help in understanding those metaphors.

In previous studies on the Reality Club works, various kinds of analytical methods have been used. Hafizhah (2024) analyzed the implicit meaning in the music video of "Love Epiphany" through the semiotic framework of Roland Barthes. She noted that verbal and visual elements work together to create layered denotative and connotative meanings. Revanza & Putra (2025) studied the same video by adopting the Barthesian semiotics to analyse the love language representations. This is consistent with the role of lyrical narratives in the construction of emotional meanings. Utungga Pasopati et al. (2024) applied Eternalism to interpret the philosophical content of Reality Club's song "2112", exposing abstract ideas of time, memory and consciousness. However, there has been no existing study to explore conceptual metaphors in "Love Epiphany" (2023) from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, which results in a gap in the understanding of how Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor typology is reflected in the

language of the song and how context influences the interpretation of these metaphors. Hence, this study aims to identify, classify and analyse the conceptual metaphors in the lyrics and also to investigate how contextual factors influence their interpretation. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the field of cognitive linguistics and become a model in the study of figurative language in contemporary Indonesian popular music.

2. Method

The present study uses a descriptive qualitative approach and content analysis to find the conceptual metaphors in the song lyrics of "Love Epiphany" by Reality Club (2023). A qualitative framework is appropriate as the data are lyrical texts where meanings are implicit, contextual and interpretive, which are better examined through interpretive analysis rather than quantitative measurement (Zyga, 2020). This study employs content analysis as the primary analytical method to systematically identify, categorise and interpret metaphorical language using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008), further elaborated by (Waruwu et al., 2026).

The study's data source is the official lyrics of Reality Club's "Love Epiphany" (Reality Club, 2023). They were sourced from digital music services and the band's official YouTube channel. The data units are words, phrases, clauses and sentences extracted from the lyrics which are representative of conceptual metaphorical structures, more specifically those in which a source domain is mapped onto a target domain to generate meaning. We gave each piece of data a code in order (D1, D2, D3, etc) so we could keep track of it.

The researcher was the main tool (human instrument) in the data collection and analysis process. Some of the analytical tools that were useful included a data classification sheet to identify and record metaphorical expressions, a typology table to categorise metaphors as structural, orientational or ontological, and a contextual analysis framework to examine the linguistic and situational factors that influence people's understanding of things. The same instruments were used in the same way each time so the analysis was systematic and reliable.

The data analysis was broken down into four parts. First, we chose and listed all the linguistic units that could have a metaphorical structure. Secondly, each identified unit was classified into one of the three groups according to the three-part typology of conceptual metaphors (structural, ontological and orientational). If an expression had more than one type, it was said to belong to more than one group. Third, we examined the linguistic context of each metaphor, including its position in the lyric narrative, the emotional tone of the surrounding lines and the overall thematic structure of the song, to explore how context influences people's interpretation of metaphors. Fourth, the full analysis brought together the overall patterns of use of conceptual metaphors and their meaning for making sense of the song.

The data was continuously and systematically examined in relation to the primary text to ensure validity. The categorisation of each metaphor was

validated through comparison with the theoretical frameworks of Lakoff & Johnson (2008) and corroborated by empirical studies employing similar content analysis approaches, including Fadhila & Juanda (2023) on conceptual metaphors in song lyrics, and Sabrina et al. (2023) on conceptual metaphors in Indonesian pop music. The triangulation of theoretical frameworks, relevant literature and primary data enhances the credibility and coherence of the findings.

3. Result and Discussion

The systematic content analysis of the lyrics of "Love Epiphany" by Reality Club (2023) yielded 15 linguistic data units that contain conceptual metaphors. These are units like words, phrases and clauses that construct romantic experiences via conceptual mappings from concrete to abstract domains. The 15 data units were classified into three kinds of metaphors, structural metaphors (SM), orientational metaphors (OM), and ontological metaphors (OntM). Some units displayed features of more than one type at the same time, which led to 20 total occurrences of metaphors in 15 data points (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1
Classification of Conceptual Metaphors in the Lyrics of Love Epiphany (2023)

Data Code	Lyric Excerpt	SM	OM	OntM	Brief Note
D1	<i>You use your finite sense of humor to entertain her</i>	–	–	✓	Humor as a finite resource
D2	<i>Always on the hunt for what you should send next</i>	✓	–	–	Love is a hunt
D3	<i>Worried you'll soon run out of jest</i>	–	–	✓	Humor as a finite resource
D4	<i>We're all just looking to connect...</i>	✓	✓	–	Love as connection & forward movement
D5	<i>You compromise, you make some deals</i>	✓	–	–	Love is negotiation
D6	<i>Back where you started</i>	✓	✓	–	Relationship as backward movement
D7	<i>It's just the same old song and dance</i>	✓	–	–	Love as repetitive performance
D8	<i>A safety net or a love trance</i>	–	–	✓	Love as a shelter and mental state
D9	<i>Bound by jewels, your happiness</i>	–	–	✓	Love as a binding entity

D10	<i>Mini-monuments of your love</i>	–	–	✓	Love as a monument/object
D11	<i>Blessings from up above... love escapes you too</i>	–	✓	✓	Upward orientation + love as a moving entity
D12	<i>That's just the game... you'll win</i>	✓	–	–	Love is a game
D13	<i>We'll find love through the ages</i>	✓	–	–	Love as a life journey
D14	<i>My sex drive drops</i>	✓	✓	–	Love changes over stages + downward orientation
D15	<i>Will you spend forever with me, love?</i>	✓	–	✓	Love as lifelong companionship

Note: SM = Structural Metaphor; OM = Orientational Metaphor; OntM = Ontological Metaphor; ✓ = identified; – = unidentified

Table 2
Summary of Conceptual Metaphor Frequencies

Type of Conceptual Metaphor	Frequency
Structural Metaphor (SM)	9
Ontological Metaphor (OntM)	7
Orientational Metaphor (OM)	4
Total Occurrences	20

Note: The total number of metaphors (20) is greater than the number of lyric lines (15) because some of the lyric lines have more than one type of conceptual metaphor. These results provide the basis for further interpretation in the Discussion.

Structural metaphors are the most common category, with nine data units. The metaphors operate via the transfer of the organised structure of a real source domain onto an abstract target domain, and so give shape and system to the experience of love (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). The concept LOVE IS A HUNT is activated in data D2 by the phrase “Always on the hunt for what you should send next”. Here romantic communication is seen as a strategic activity, requiring timing, calculation, and continued effort, much like hunting. This metaphor shows that current relational dynamics, particularly in the digital communication context, are cognitively constructed as goal-directed pursuits (Kövecses, 2010).

Data D4 shows the metaphor “LOVE IS A CONNECTION” in the line “We’re all just looking to connect.” Romantic relationships are viewed as intentional means of creating strong ties between people here. “Connect” means to purposefully and laboriously close emotional distance, implying that love doesn’t just happen, it’s actively built through communication. This is consistent with

findings in cognitive linguistics more generally: this conceptualisation is characteristic of an intentional and culturally situated employment of structural metaphor to construe relational intention (G. Steen, 2017).

In data D5 the phrase "You compromise, you make some deals" shows the structural metaphor LOVE IS A NEGOTIATION. This mapping sees romantic relationships as transactions that require both people to change and balance between their competing interests. It implies that love is not only a feeling but a structured way of relating to others based on rules that are similar to those of a contract. The idea has surfaced in cross-cultural studies of love metaphors. Relational discourse in these studies often stems from the areas of commerce and law (Kövecses, 2010).

Data D6 introduces the structural metaphor RELATIONSHIP AS BACKWARD MOVEMENT through the phrase "Back where you started." Unlike forward-oriented metaphors that conceptualize progress, this mapping highlights the possibility of regression in romantic relationships—a return to an earlier, less developed emotional state following periods of investment and change. This metaphor captures the lived experience of relational stagnation or deterioration and enriches the song's thematic complexity by acknowledging non-linear relational dynamics. Data D7, through "the same old song and dance," maps love onto ROUTINE AND PERFORMANCE, indicating that relationships can lose their dynamism and become predictable repetitions, an experience that generates emotional disconnection.

The metaphor "LOVE IS A GAME" in data D12 is used to show that romantic relationships are similar to games, in which there are rules and people can win or lose. The structural mapping aligns with broader findings in the study of love metaphors in popular music, which report game and competition schemas as some of the most recurrent conceptualisations of romantic experience by Climent & Coll-Florit (2021), and it encapsulates the ambiguity and strategic nature of contemporary romantic relationships. The data D13, "We'll find love through the ages," generate LOVE IS A JOURNEY, arguably the most culturally embedded structural metaphor for romantic experience in English and many other languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). In this view, love is a long-term journey through time that emphasises commitment, shared goals and depth of time.

Simultaneous structural and orientational mappings are shown in Data D14, LOVE CHANGES OVER STAGES and DECLINE IS DOWNWARD. The phrase "my sex drive drops" links the ageing related physical and emotional changes to a model of vertical decline. This is achieved by combining the structural metaphor of time change with the orientational schema of downwards movement. This dual mapping illustrates what Lakoff & Johnson (2008) say about some metaphors being rooted in biology. Data D15 Will you spend forever with me, love? Romantic commitment is not an instantaneous feeling but a long-term relationship where two people are always together. LOVE IS LIFELONG COMPANIONSHIP.

The second most frequent category is ontological metaphors, with seven data units. These metaphors allow us to imagine abstract concepts as physical entities with boundaries, properties and quantifiable existence (Lakoff & Johnson,

2008). The lexical items "finite" and "run out" in D1 and D3 build humour as a limited resource through the mapping HUMOUR IS A RESOURCE. This ontological framing views emotional expressiveness as a type of social capital that can be exhausted by overuse. This framing reflects the cognitive structuring of the relational self-presentation strategies as resource management (Beknazarova et al., 2021).

The data D8 contains two overlapping ontological mappings, LOVE IS A SHELTER ("safety net") and LOVE IS A TRANCE ("love trance"). The first one considers love as a spatial entity of protection, for the sake of emotional security, the second one considers love as a psychologically changed state with a defined beginning and bounds. These mappings together demonstrate the simultaneous conceptualisation of love as external supportive structure and as internal altered state, two different ontological framings, which are used to reflect the ambivalent psychological experience of romantic attachment (Kövecses, 2010). Data D9 and D10 also materialise love via LOVE IS A BINDING ENTITY ("bound by jewels") and LOVE IS A MONUMENT ("mini-monuments of your love"), presenting love as a constraining physical force and as a lasting material record respectively. These mappings reveal the intentional deployment of ontological metaphors in lyrical discourse to render emotional experience physically palpable and conceptually finite (G. Steen, 2017).

"Love escapes you" in Data D11 is a phrase expressing that LOVE IS A MOVING ENTITY, which attributes to love autonomous mobility and the power to leave. This ontological frame resonates with the phenomenological experience of lost love, the felt reality of the disappearance of love being cognitively represented as the departure of a bounded entity, not as the gradual dissipation of a state. Data D15 develops ontological framing in terms of LOVE IS A SHARED SPACE, i.e. the long term romantic relationship as a co-inhabited domain, a move from purely affective to spatial and relational ontology.

The least frequent category, orientational metaphors, add much to the directional and dynamic texture of the song meaning. These metaphors are based on embodied spatial schemas, specifically vertical (up-down) and horizontal (forward-backward) orientations, which are rooted in physical experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). D4 builds the forward orientation through "looking to connect", and the implicit trajectory of "what happens next". LOVE MOVES FORWARD forms a spatial framing of relational progression. In particular, this forward schema characterises love as always goal-oriented, always directed towards a future state. This conceptualisation is consistent with culturally dominant narratives of romantic development.

The phrase "back where you started" in Data D6 reverses this forward trajectory, instantiating RELATIONSHIP AS BACKWARDS MOVEMENT. This orientation towards the past is expressed through a spatial inversion that indicates a relational regression, a way of describing how the collapsing of relational progress is experienced as a return to a previous location in emotional space. In Data D11, 'up above' introduces a vertical dimension, mapping blessings and grace onto an upward spatial schema that is consistent with the cultural convention MORE IS UP / GOOD IS UP. But the lyrical context of this

phrase, a narrative of emotional decline, creates productive tension between the positive valence of the upward schema and the deteriorating relational trajectory of the song.

The downward schema reappears in data D14 with “drops”, confirming the orientational metaphor DECLINE IS DOWNWARD. This vertical framing of emotional and biological diminishment is one of the most bodily-grounded orientational metaphors, based on the physical experience of falling and decrease. The orientational metaphors in “Love Epiphany” by (Reality Club, 2023) work together to add a kinetic aspect to the conceptualisation of love in the song, mapping the abstract temporal and emotional dynamics of romantic relationships onto spatial schemas that readers can intuitively understand through embodied experience.

The understanding of these metaphors is not only determined by the internal conceptual structures of these metaphors but also highly affected by the contextual factors. From the analysis four key contextual dimensions emerge. First, the stage of relational development: the narrative arc of the song moves from the playful, effortful earlier stages of courtship (D2, D4) through the negotiated middle stage of established relationship (D5, D7) to the ageing, reflective late stage (D14, D15). The developmental progression systematically varies the metaphors used in the song in terms of their types and orientations. Second, temporality: the recurrence of temporal markers, “through the ages,” “spend forever,” “soon run out,” provides a temporal scaffolding into which metaphorical meanings are placed, so that the interpretive context is profoundly informed by time.

Third, emotional ambivalence: the song doesn't present love as always positive. It recognises the co-existence of security and entrapment (D8, D9), progress and regression (D4, D6) and blessing and loss (D11). This ambivalence opens up the interpretive possibilities of the metaphors and gives rise to polysemic readings which do not lend themselves to easy resolution. Fourth, intersubjective and cultural resonance: the metaphors of the song are very communicatively accessible, because they are based on source domains like hunting, games, journeys and monuments that are deeply rooted in common cultural experience. These familiar domains allow audiences to project their existing relational experiences, with interpretations that are personally resonant, beyond the specific lyrical narrative (Kövecses, 2010). This result supports Steen's (2023) claim that the conscious use of metaphors in discourse requires a conscious participation of the audience in cross-domain mappings, which in turn increases affective and cognitive involvement.

The integration of the three kinds of metaphors and their modulation in context indicate that there is an integrated and advanced conceptual structure underlying the lyrics of “Love Epiphany” by Reality Club (2023). Love is a process that has structure (structural metaphors), a physical object that can be handled (ontological metaphors), a journey that has direction (orientational metaphors). These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive but interpenetrate and reinforce one another, creating a multi-layered conceptual portrait of romantic love as complex, dynamic, temporally extended, and fundamentally embodied.

The study supports the claim of Lakoff & Johnson (2008) that the most intimate experiences in our lives are understood and communicated through a rich network of interacting conceptual metaphors, and confirms the findings of Susandhika & Widarsini (2025) and Sabrina et al. (2023) that Indonesian popular music is a fertile ground for studying cognitive-linguistic metaphor construction.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the lyrics of Reality Club's "Love Epiphany" constitute a linguistically and cognitively rich text in which conceptual metaphors are the main means of producing meaning in relation to the experience of romantic love. The data analysis was conducted through systematic content analysis based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Fifteen data units were identified and classified into three metaphor types, namely structural, ontological, and orientational, resulting in twenty total metaphor occurrences.

The first research question showed that the most dominant type of metaphor is structural metaphor (9 occurrences) which shows the tendency of the song to structure the abstract experience of love with concrete, structured source domains such as hunting, negotiation, gaming and journeying. Seven ontological metaphors were identified that conceptualise love as a bounded and manipulable object (a shelter, a monument, a binding force), which allows listeners to conceptualise love as something having concrete physical properties. The four cases of orientational metaphors introduced a spatial and kinetic element to the lyrics by mapping relational progress and emotional decline onto embodied schemas of forward, backwards and vertical movement.

The interpretation of these metaphors is dynamically shaped by four contextual factors: the stages of relational development represented in the lyrical narrative; the temporal scaffolding of love across life stages; the emotional ambivalence pervading the content of the song; and the intersubjective cultural resonance of its source domains. These contextual factors do not merely alter individual metaphors, but actively co-construct the larger conceptual architecture through which the song's vision of love is conveyed.

The findings indicate that the metaphorical language in contemporary Indonesian pop lyrics functions as a sophisticated cognitive tool to express the complexity of human emotional experience. The study provides a replicable analytic model for investigators and teachers of cognitive linguistics and literary studies to analyse figurative language in popular cultural texts. Future work should apply this approach to larger corpora of Indonesian popular music, explore cross-cultural comparative metaphor analysis, and examine multimodal frameworks that consider the interplay of lyrical, musical, and visual meaning-making.

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