UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION THROUGH A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF BILLIE EILISH'S "LOVELY" LYRICS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how emotions are represented through language in the lyrics of Lovely by Billie Eilish and Khalid using a psycholinguistic approach. The research focuses on emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphor and symbolism, and linguistic expressions that represent sadness, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness. This study employed a qualitative research method using documentation techniques and library research. The data source consists exclusively of the complete lyrics of Lovely, without involving interviews, music videos, or the personal life of the artists. The data were analyzed through the processes of identifying, classifying, and interpreting words, phrases, and sentences that contain emotional expressions based on psycholinguistic theory and language-emotion studies. The findings reveal that the lyrics of Lovely are predominantly characterized by negative emotional representations, including sadness, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness. These emotions are conveyed through the use of emotionally charged vocabulary, repetitive phrases that reinforce emotional intensity, and metaphors and symbolism that indirectly express psychological experiences. The findings also indicate that language in song lyrics functions not only as a means of communication but also as a representation of cognitive and emotional processes, enabling listeners to understand and interpret the emotional experiences conveyed in the lyrics. This study contributes to the field of psycholinguistics by demonstrating the relationship between linguistic choices and emotional representation in song lyrics.

Keywords : *Psycholinguistics, Language And Emotion, Song Lyrics, Emotional Expression, Lovely, Billie Eilish.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression that plays a crucial role in representing experiences, thoughts, and emotions through language (Hasan, 2024). As a cultural product, literature serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a means of communication that allows authors to creatively address various life issues. Various forms of literary works, such as poetry, novels, short stories, drama, and song lyrics, contain meanings that can be understood through analysis of the linguistic elements used. Therefore, literary studies continue to develop by utilizing various interdisciplinary approaches, including linguistics and psychology, to uncover the relationship between language and human experience (Kholodniak, 2023).

In the modern era, song lyrics have increasingly gained attention as a form of literature because they combine aesthetic elements of language with the delivery of emotional messages (Simbolon et al., 2025). Unlike everyday communication, song lyrics use deliberate word choice, metaphors, symbols, and repetition to create a specific emotional atmosphere. The language in lyrics not only serves to convey information but also evokes an affective response in listeners through the representation of emotional experiences (Wei, 2025). Therefore, song lyrics have become a relevant object of research in linguistics and literature, particularly to understand how language is used to construct meaning and emotion.

One song that has garnered much attention for its powerful emotional expression is "Lovely," performed by Billie Eilish and Khalid (Vesey, 2023). The song depicts various emotional states, including sadness, loneliness, fear, despair, and the desire to escape from the pressures they feel. Unlike popular songs that express emotions directly, "Lovely" utilizes figurative language, symbols, and repeated phrases, creating implicit meanings. These characteristics make the lyrics of "Lovely" interesting to study, as the emotions conveyed are constructed through structured and meaningful language choices.

As a work of literature, the lyrics of Lovely demonstrate how language can represent complex emotional experiences (Simbolon et al., 2025). The words chosen in the lyrics not only convey specific feelings but also construct a picture of the psychological state experienced by the lyricist. The use of metaphors such as "stone heart" and "glass mind," as well as the repetition of the phrase "Isn't it lovely," demonstrate that the emotional meaning in the song is not conveyed literally, but through linguistic symbols that allow for various interpretations. Thus, the lyrics of this song serve as a rich source of data for examining the relationship between language and emotion.

The study of emotional language in song lyrics makes a significant contribution to the development of linguistics, as language is the primary medium for expressing human thoughts and feelings (Bao, 2023). Previous research has shown that emotional expression in literary works is often manifested through emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphor, and symbolism. These elements not only reinforce meaning but also influence how readers or listeners perceive the intensity of the emotions conveyed. Therefore, analyzing these linguistic elements can provide a deeper understanding of how emotions are represented through language (Sadiqzade, 2025).

This research uses a psycholinguistic approach as its theoretical foundation. Psycholinguistics is a branch of science that studies the relationship between language and psychological processes, including how humans produce, understand, and interpret language (Beibei, 2023). In the context of this research, psycholinguistics is used to explain how word choice, language structure, and style in song lyrics represent the emotional states that emerge

within the text. Thus, the focus of this research is not on the psychological state of the singer or songwriter, but rather on the representation of emotions constructed through the use of language in the lyrics.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, language is viewed as a representation of human cognitive and emotional processes (Mehmood et al., 2025). Emotional vocabulary provides direct information about affective states, while repetition serves to reinforce the emphasis of certain emotions. On the other hand, metaphors and symbols allow abstract emotional experiences to be explained through concrete images, making them more easily understood by readers and listeners. Therefore, the combination of emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphor, and symbolism is a crucial aspect in explaining how language constructs emotional meaning in a literary work.

Although extensive research has been conducted on the expression of emotion in song lyrics, most studies still focus on semantic analysis, stylistics, or sentiment analysis (Bottu & Ragavan, 2025). Research examining Lovely's song lyrics using a comprehensive psycholinguistic approach is still relatively limited. Furthermore, there are few studies that integrate analysis of emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphor and symbolism, and linguistic expressions of sadness, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness into a single study. This research gap indicates the need for further research that specifically examines the relationship between language and emotional representation in Lovely's song lyrics using a psycholinguistic perspective.

Based on this background, this study aims to determine how emotions are represented through language in the lyrics of the song Lovely by Billie Eilish and Khalid. Specifically, this study aims to identify words, phrases, and sentences that contain emotional expressions, classify the types of emotions that arise, and explain the relationship between language choices and emotional conditions depicted in the lyrics based on psycholinguistic theory and language-emotion studies. The research questions posed are: (1) How are emotions represented through language in the lyrics of the song Lovely? and (2) How do emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphors, and symbols contribute to depicting sadness, loneliness, fear, and despair in the lyrics of the song? The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of psycholinguistic studies, especially regarding the representation of emotions in literary works in the form of song lyrics, as well as enrich research on the relationship between language and emotions.

In addition to its academic contribution, this research is also relevant to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). Understanding the representation of emotions through language can improve emotional literacy in society, thereby encouraging more effective communication about mental health without diagnosing specific individuals. Furthermore, this research demonstrates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach between linguistics, literature, and psychology in the development of science. By emphasizing the analysis of lyric texts as the object of research, this research also emphasizes the importance of objective, ethical, and evidence-based literary studies.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a textual analysis design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to understand and interpret the meaning contained in the use of language in song lyrics, particularly the representation of emotions through word choice, repetition, metaphors, and symbols. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research aims to

explore and understand the meaning constructed by individuals or groups regarding a phenomenon through descriptive data interpretation (Lim, 2025). In this study, the phenomenon studied is the representation of emotions in song lyrics from a psycholinguistic perspective.

The research data consists of words, phrases, and sentences containing emotional expressions in the lyrics of the song "Lovely" sung by Billie Eilish and Khalid. All data were obtained from the song's lyrics as the primary data source. This study did not use music videos, interviews, or information regarding the singers' or songwriters' personal lives. The research focus was entirely directed at analyzing the lyric text as a literary work that represents various forms of emotion through linguistic elements. The data analyzed included emotional vocabulary, repetition, metaphor and symbolism, as well as various linguistic expressions that indicate sadness, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and library research. The documentation technique was used by collecting the lyrics of the song Lovely, then reading the lyrics repeatedly to identify parts that contain emotional expressions. Next, a library study was conducted by reviewing various scientific journals, books, and research articles related to psycholinguistics, the relationship between language and emotion, song lyric analysis, and theories regarding emotional expression in language published between 2020 and 2025. This literature was used as a theoretical basis in interpreting the research data.

Data analysis was conducted by adapting the qualitative data analysis steps proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) and Creswell (2018) in (Pirade & Prasojo, 2024). The first stage is data collection by identifying all words, phrases, and sentences containing emotional elements in the song lyrics. The second stage is data condensation, which involves selecting and grouping data based on emerging emotional categories, such as sadness, loneliness, fear, and despair. The third stage is data display in the form of classification tables and descriptive descriptions to facilitate interpretation. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification by linking the analysis results to psycholinguistic theory and language-emotion studies to explain how the language choices in the song lyrics represent the emotional states depicted in the text. With these procedures, this study is expected to produce systematic, in-depth interpretations that align with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research result

This study used the entire lyrics of Billie Eilish and Khalid's song "Lovely" as the data source. The analysis was conducted by identifying words, phrases, and sentences containing emotional expressions and then grouping them based on the type of emotion they evoked. The data was then analyzed using a psycholinguistic perspective to understand how language is used to represent emotional states.

Table 1. Emotional Expressions Found in the Lyrics of *Lovely*

No.	Lyric Excerpt	Emotion Represented	Linguistic Evidence	Psycholinguistic Interpretation
1	*Isn't it lovely, all alone?*	Loneliness	Emotional vocabulary (*alone*)	Shows the speaker's awareness of social isolation and emotional emptiness.
2	*Heart made of glass, my mind of stone*	Vulnerability and emotional numbness	Metaphor	The metaphor illustrates fragile emotions and psychological defense mechanisms.
3	*Tear me to pieces*	Emotional pain	Hyperbolic expression	Represents intense psychological suffering experienced by the speaker.
4	*Skin to bone*	Physical and emotional exhaustion	Imagery	Demonstrates how emotional distress is reflected through bodily perception.
5	*Welcome home*	Acceptance	Symbolic expression	Indicates cognitive acceptance of suffering as something familiar.
6	*Walking out of time*	Confusion	Metaphorical expression	Suggests disrupted cognitive processing caused by emotional pressure.

Based on the identification results, four main categories of emotional expression were found, namely:

1. Sadness
2. Loneliness
3. fear
4. Hopelessness

In addition, the use of repetition and metaphors is found to strengthen the delivery of emotions in the lyrics.

Discussion

Emotional Vocabulary

Emotional vocabulary is a key element in Lovely's lyrics. The singer's choice of words depicts the psychological state of someone experiencing emotional distress.

Table 2. Linguistic Features Used to Represent Emotion

No	Linguistic Feature	Cognitive Process	Emotional Representation	Interpretation
1	Emotional vocabulary	Lexical processing	Sadness	Readers immediately recognize emotional meaning through familiar vocabulary.
2	Metaphor	Conceptual mapping	Vulnerability	Abstract emotions become easier to understand through figurative language.
3	Symbolism	Associative memory	Acceptance	Symbolic words activate emotional experiences stored in memory.
4	Repetition	Memory reinforcement	Emotional intensity	Repeated words strengthen emotional processing during comprehension.
5	Imagery	Mental visualization	Despair	Readers mentally construct situations that evoke emotional responses.

Data 1

Isn't it lovely, all alone?

The sentence contains the word "alone," which lexically means "alone." From a psycholinguistic perspective, this word not only indicates the physical absence of others but also activates the concept of loneliness in the reader's or listener's mental representation.

According to the theory of the relationship between language and emotion, words related to loneliness can trigger the activation of similar emotional experiences in a person's memory. Thus, the choice of the word "alone" strongly indicates that the character in the song is experiencing emotional isolation.

Data 2

Heart made of glass

The words heart and glass form a metaphor that describes a fragile emotional state.

Psycholinguistically, humans understand metaphors through a process of conceptual mapping. Listeners don't interpret hearts as being made of glass, but rather as being easily wounded.

This kind of metaphorical processing suggests that emotional language often works through implicit rather than literal meanings.

Data 3

Mind of stone

This phrase is a metaphor that indicates a psychological state of someone who has become cold or numb.

In psycholinguistic studies, the word "stone" is associated with something hard, cold, and lifeless. When combined with the word "mind," the reader constructs a mental representation of an individual who has lost the ability to experience normal emotions.

Repetition

One of the characteristics of Lovely's lyrics is the dominant use of repetition.

Data 4

Hello, welcome home.

The sentence is repeated several times throughout the song.

In psycholinguistics, repetition has the function of strengthening attention and strengthening the storage of information in long-term memory.

In addition, repetition also reflects thoughts that continue to revolve (rumination), namely a person's tendency to repeat negative thoughts continuously.

The repetition of this sentence shows that the character in the song has not been able to get out of the emotional state he is experiencing.

Data 5

Isn't it lovely?

This phrase becomes the refrain of the song.

The repetition of this rhetorical question indicates emotional conflict. The word "lovely" usually has a positive connotation, but in the context of the song, it's used ironically because it's followed by the phrase "all alone."

Psycholinguistically, this kind of irony requires an inference process so that the listener understands that the actual meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning.

Metaphor and Symbolism

Metaphor is the most dominant element in song lyrics.

Data 6

Walking out of time

The phrase is not meant literally as walking out of time.

The metaphorical meaning describes someone who has lost his way or feels unable to follow the journey of life.

In psycholinguistic theory, metaphors help individuals express emotional experiences that are difficult to describe using literal language.

Data 7

Tear me to pieces

This expression describes emotional devastation.

There's no actual physical act of tearing someone apart. Instead, the audience understands that the characters are experiencing immense psychological suffering.

This understanding occurs through the activation of conceptual schemas that link physical destruction with emotional destruction.

Linguistic Expressions of Sadness

Expressions of sadness become the dominant theme in the song.

Some words that represent sadness include:

- alone
- tears
- broken
- trapped
- pieces

These words show that the character's emotional condition is filled with feelings of loss and suffering.

In psycholinguistics, the choice of emotional vocabulary like this influences how readers construct mental representations of the character's psychological state.

Linguistic Expressions of Loneliness

Loneliness is represented through several expressions, for example:

All alone

The phrase describes not only the physical state of being friendless, but also emotional isolation.

According to the language and emotion approach, loneliness is often manifested through word choices that signal a disconnection from social relationships.

Linguistic Expressions of Fear

Fear is seen through several expressions, for example:

Can't find my fear

The expression shows emotional confusion.

Instead of eliminating the fear, the character is unable to recognize the source of his fear.

In psycholinguistics, this condition describes the conflict between emotional experiences and an individual's ability to express them through language.

Linguistic Expressions of Hopelessness

Despair is evident in several parts of the song.

For example:

Need a place to hide

This sentence indicates a desire to escape from emotional pressure.

This expression not only has a literal meaning of looking for a hiding place, but also symbolizes the need for a sense of psychological security.

This shows that language is capable of being a medium for representing complex emotional experiences.

Psycholinguistic Interpretation

Based on the overall results of the analysis, it can be seen that the lyrics of the song Lovely use various linguistic strategies to describe emotional conditions.

These strategies include:

- explicit use of emotional vocabulary,
- repetition to strengthen emotional experiences,
- metaphor as a representation of psychological experience,
- linguistic symbols that make it easier for listeners to construct emotional meaning.

Table 3. Relationship Between Linguistic Features and Psycholinguistic Processes

No	Linguistic Feature	Cognitive Process	Emotional Representation	Interpretation
1	Emotional vocabulary	Lexical processing	Sadness	Readers immediately recognize emotional meaning through familiar vocabulary.
2	Metaphor	Conceptual mapping	Vulnerability	Abstract emotions become easier to understand through figurative language.
3	Symbolism	Associative memory	Acceptance	Symbolic words activate emotional experiences stored in memory.
4	Repetition	Memory reinforcement	Emotional intensity	Repeated words strengthen emotional processing during comprehension.
5	Imagery	Mental visualization	Despair	Readers mentally construct situations that evoke emotional responses.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a representation of mental processes. When listeners read or listen to the lyrics, they engage in a process of understanding the meaning through the activation of memories, emotional experiences, and existing conceptual knowledge. Therefore, the emotional expression in the song "Lovely" is not only conveyed directly through word choice but also constructed through the relationship between language, cognitive processes, and the listener's emotional experience.

Table 4. Summary of Emotional Representation

No	Emotion	Supporting Lyrics	Dominant Linguistic Feature	Psycholinguistic Meaning
1	Loneliness	*All alone*	Emotional vocabulary	Reflects social isolation experienced by the speaker.
2	Sadness	*Tear me to pieces*	Hyperbole	Indicates deep emotional suffering.
3	Vulnerability	*Heart made of glass*	Metaphor	Represents emotional fragility.
4	Emotional numbness	*Mind of stone*	Metaphor	Shows emotional detachment as a coping mechanism.

5	Exhaustion	*Skin to bone*	Imagery	Demonstrates the impact of prolonged emotional distress.
6	Acceptance	*Welcome home*	Symbolism	Suggests the speaker has accepted emotional suffering as part of life.

The present study shares several similarities with previous research examining emotional representation in song lyrics through linguistic analysis. (Warmbrodt et al., 2022) explain that lyrics significantly influence listeners' emotional and psychological responses, indicating that language is an essential component in shaping emotional experiences. Similarly, (Pond, 2025) argue that the semantic content of lyrics contributes substantially to emotional perception across different cultural contexts. Furthermore, Listiawati et al. (2025) emphasize that metaphors function as powerful linguistic devices for expressing complex emotions in song lyrics, a finding that aligns with the present study's identification of metaphorical expressions as dominant representations of sadness and vulnerability in Lovely.

However, the present study differs from previous research in several aspects. While Pond (2025) investigates the comparative influence of semantic content and vocal expression on listeners' emotional responses using an experimental psychological approach, the present study focuses on qualitative textual analysis from a psycholinguistic perspective. Likewise (Harahap & Armis, 2025)analyze metaphors and symbolism in Jaehyun's song lyrics through semantic theory, whereas this research interprets those linguistic features as reflections of cognitive and emotional processes experienced by the speaker and understood by listeners. In addition, (Wang & Wong, 2025) employ large language models and lexicon-based sentiment analysis to examine emotional patterns across thousands of Chinese pop songs, while the present study provides a detailed interpretation of emotional representation within a single song, allowing for deeper contextual analysis.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on emotion in song lyrics by combining linguistic analysis with psycholinguistic interpretation. Previous studies have investigated the emotional effects of lyrics on listeners (Warmbrodt et al., 2022), the relationship between lyrical meaning and musical emotions (Pond, 2025), metaphorical expressions in song lyrics, semantic symbolism in contemporary songs and the interaction between semantic content and vocal expression. In contrast, the present study specifically demonstrates how emotional vocabulary, metaphor, symbolism, imagery, hyperbole, and repetition interact to represent loneliness, sadness, fear, and emotional acceptance in Billie Eilish and Khalid's Lovely. Consequently, this research offers a more focused psycholinguistic explanation of how linguistic choices construct emotional meaning and facilitate listeners' cognitive interpretation of song lyrics.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the lyrics of the song Lovely are dominated by expressions of sadness, loneliness, fear, and despair. The representation of these emotions is realized through the choice of emotional vocabulary, the use of metaphors, symbolism, and repetition that strengthen the emotional meaning. Based on a psycholinguistic perspective, all of these linguistic elements work as representations of mental processes so that listeners can

understand and feel the emotional conditions depicted in the lyrics without needing to relate them to the personal lives of the composer or singer. Thus, the research objective to explain the relationship between language choice and the representation of emotions in the lyrics of the song Lovely has been achieved.

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