

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Research in the cognitive semantics field, specifically conceptual metaphor, has been of growing interest. Metaphor refers to a word or phrase used to describe somebody/something else in a way that differs from their literal definition, to show that the two things have the same qualities (Knowles & Moon, 2006). Metaphor fills in the gaps in lexicality when an adequate term to describe a situation, process, action, or feelings is unavailable, to explain a relatively abstract concept in terms the hearers are more familiar with, to reconceptualize human experience using different perspectives, to emphasize and justify arguments or actions to appear more persuasive, to express emotion, etc. (Goatly, 2005). From a cognitive perspective, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) introduced the notion of metaphor as a way for humans to conceptualize the abstract concept of human bodily experience, such as emotions and thoughts, by linking it with a more concrete experience rather than merely as a linguistic device, which they called Conceptual Metaphor Theory. They have found that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but also in the way humans think and act. As a result, metaphor is often found reflected in the byproduct of human thoughts and actions in the form of art, such as music.

Music is an integral part of everyday life that provokes strong emotional and cognitive responses. One of the most defining characteristics of music is that it is communicative, providing a means for emotions and ideas to be expressed, communicated, and shared (Macdonald et al., 2012). Artists utilize music as an

emotional outlet for them to pour their thoughts and hearts out. It is a way for them to channel their emotions and turn them into art that listeners can enjoy and relate to (Macdonald et al., 2012). Furthermore, music provides a way for the artists to express themselves while at the same time speaking to the hearts of the listeners. Through various musical components, such as the melody and song lyrics, artists can evoke emotions in the listeners. Among these elements, song lyrics are deeply personal, as oftentimes, they stem from the songwriter's personal experiences (Simbolon et al., 2025). According to Yunus & Francis (2023), song lyrics are a variety of poetry that depict a person's deepest thoughts and emotions. Therefore, song lyrics function as a medium for self-expression and emotional expression, such as expressing anxiety.

Anxiety is a vague fear that arises from an unknown and abstract source. According to Levitt (2015), anxiety is differentiated from fear; when the threatening object or scenario is known and identifiable to the affected individual, we ought to employ the term "fear" as opposed to anxiety. Because of its abstract and subjective nature, anxiety is often difficult to describe and communicate to others. In this case, by linking anxiety with concepts that are more concrete and more familiar, metaphor facilitates a way for individuals to express their anxiety in a language that other people can understand.

One of the artists who uses a lot of metaphor in their song lyrics is a well-known singer-songwriter, Niall Horan. He uses metaphors to convey his emotions, describes mental processes through imagery, and delivers them through his lyrics. Niall has recorded four number-one albums to date: his first album *Flicker* (2017), his second album *Heartbreak Weather* (2020), his third album *The Show* (2023),

and his most recent, *Dinner Party* (2026). In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* (2023), Niall Horan has spoken up about dealing with anxiety. His personal experiences with anxiety are reflected in his works, where he frequently writes songs with anxiety as an underlying theme. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing Niall Horan's song lyrics to investigate the conceptual metaphors used in his song lyrics.

Several studies have been conducted regarding conceptual metaphors in song lyrics. One of them was conducted by Jannah & Istiqomah (2021), in which they identified what and how conceptual metaphors and the image schemas of the metaphors are used in Kahitna's song lyrics. They used a descriptive qualitative method by combining Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) and Kovecses's (2010) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and Image Schemas proposed by Johnson (1987) and Saeed (2016). The study shows that nine conceptual metaphors are present in Kahitna's song lyrics. Furthermore, the Containment schema, Path schema, and Force schema are found to be present in the song lyrics.

Similarly, Nugraheny & Yuwita (2023) examined how the singer-songwriter SZA used conceptual metaphors in five of her songs, which were specifically chosen to be analyzed. The study applied a descriptive qualitative research approach, which includes semantic analysis and conceptual metaphor mappings. The findings revealed that the songs conveyed life's journey, love stories, and sadness, and they managed to identify 10 metaphoric data.

Moreover, Winoto (2022) conducted a study that examined the conceptual metaphors in British Pop and Rock song lyrics. The study focused primarily on the use of conceptual metaphors and their roles in song lyrics. By applying a descriptive

qualitative approach and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Winoto found that, of the 24 conceptual metaphors identified in the lyrics, the most common type is structural metaphor, which makes up 18 in total, followed by 5 ontological metaphors and 2 orientational metaphors.

In addition, another previous study on Niall Horan's song lyrics was conducted by Salsabila (2023), which identified the types and meaning of the idiomatic expressions by using the Boatner and Gates (1975) theory. The study used the qualitative method and identified 7 types of idioms out of 40 data taken from 10 songs.

While conceptual metaphor theory has been applied in previous studies on song lyrics by various artists, most of them focused on identifying metaphor types and mappings in general. No previous study identified the conceptual metaphor in Niall Horan's song lyrics, specifically how the singer-songwriter Niall Horan conceptualizes and maps the abstract concept of anxiety into a more concrete, tangible concept. Furthermore, previous research on Niall Horan's lyrics examined idiomatic expressions rather than conceptual metaphors. Therefore, there remains a gap regarding how Niall Horan conceptualizes anxiety through metaphorical expressions in his songs.

The selected songs, which will be analyzed in a further chapter, are songs that presumably contain conceptual metaphors that express the abstract concept of anxiety. The data from this study are obtained from five songs from Niall Horan's solo discography. The songs include: *Since We're Alone*, *Mirrors*, *Dear Patience*, *Meltdown*, and *Science*. These songs are selected because of their underlying

themes and expressions related to anxiety, emotional turmoil, uncertainty, self-reflection, and psychological stress, making them relevant to the focus of this study.

Based on the explanation above, this study is an attempt to reveal the metaphorical mappings Niall Horan uses in his song lyrics to conceptualize anxiety. Unlike previous studies, this study will focus on applying the Conceptual Metaphor Theory framework to a particular setting of modern song lyrics about complex emotion. Thus, this study aims to investigate how metaphors can help bridge the gap between difficult-to-explain human experiences, namely anxiety. In addition, this study will facilitate a better understanding of how metaphorical expressions are used to convey mental struggles, which can help music listeners to appreciate the lyrics more.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the explanation of the background, the problems of the study are formulated as follows:

1. What conceptual metaphors are used to represent anxiety in Niall Horan's song lyrics?
2. How are the mappings of abstract and concrete domains in Niall Horan's songs to express anxiety?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research question, this particular study aims to:

1. Reveal the conceptual metaphors used to represent anxiety in Niall Horan's song lyrics.

2. Reveal the mappings of abstract and concrete domains in Niall Horan's song lyrics to express anxiety.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing selected song lyrics from Niall Horan's discography from three of his albums: *Flicker* (2017); *Heartbreak Weather* (2020); and *The Show* (2023), by using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory to reveal the mappings he uses to conceptualize anxiety. The selected song titles are: *Since We're Alone*, *Mirrors*, *Dear Patience*, *Meltdown*, and *Science*.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the linguistic field, particularly for those interested in the analysis of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor and the songs of the mentioned singer, such as:

1. **Theoretical Significance**

Theoretically, this study should provide a substantial contribution to the field of cognitive semantics, specifically in the application of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It offers a better understanding of how metaphors serve as crucial cognitive tools as well as poetic devices by analyzing how abstract emotions are constructed through language. This study adds to the existing knowledge on how human cognitive processes classify abstract internal experiences into concrete linguistic expressions.

2. Practical Significance for Students/Researchers

For linguistics students and researchers interested in song lyric analysis, this study is a useful practical resource. It provides a methodical way to identify and analyze conceptual metaphors in modern pop music. This study can aid future researchers in examining the relationship between linguistics and psychology by offering a thorough mapping of metaphors, particularly regarding how music might be used to convey mental health issues.

3. Social Significance/General Public

Additionally, by offering another perspective on Niall Horan's discography, this study is important to both the general public and music lovers. It enables listeners to understand the underlying themes of anxiety and mental toughness better by going a step further, beyond the literal interpretation of the words. In the end, this study raises awareness of how language can be employed to express and destigmatize anxiety in modern society.

1.6 State of the Art

The fundamental notion of Conceptual Metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson is expanded upon in this study. Although earlier researches have thoroughly mapped metaphors in a variety of literary works, this study is an attempt to broaden that framework by applying it to the particular setting of modern pop lyrics. This study emphasizes the cognitive process of how abstract notions are rooted in situational or physical reality, in contrast to traditional metaphorical analysis that concentrates on aesthetic appeal.

What differentiates this study from the previous studies is that this study focuses on Niall Horan's portrayal of anxiety. This study explores the complex conception of a particular psychological state, whereas many linguistic analyses of song lyrics have concentrated on topics of romance or social criticism. By analyzing songs like Since We're Alone, Mirrors, Dear Patience, Meltdown, and Science, this study explores a unique data set that has not been extensively examined from a cognitive semantics perspective, particularly regarding the internal struggle of anxiety.

This study's attempt to close the gap between abstract emotional experience and linguistic structure makes it novel. Instead of merely finding metaphors, this study examines how the singer-songwriter uses them to help the listener relate to and comprehend the invisible "anxiety." By identifying how Niall Horan creates a particular "metaphorical world" to convey mental health difficulties, this study goes beyond recurring patterns. It makes a novel contribution to the study of figurative language in music.