

Metaphorical Expressions in Coldplay's 'Fix You': A Cognitive Semantic Perspective

Elyzabeth Agustin

Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo

ecaatalking@gmail.com

Lailatul Musyarofah

Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo

lailatulmusyarofah@universitaspgridelta.ac.id

Siti Aisyah

Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo

siti.aisyah.yes@gmail.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Language serves as a symbolic system for organizing thought, where metaphors act as vital cognitive tools rather than mere decorative devices. **Gap:** There is a lack of systematic exploration regarding how inner experiences in popular lyrics utilize universal cognitive patterns through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). **Purpose:** This study aims to identify and classify metaphorical expressions in Coldplay's "Fix You" to demonstrate how concrete images explain abstract emotions. **Method:** A descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze eight identified metaphorical expressions, categorized based on Lakoff and Johnson's framework. **Main Findings:** The analysis reveals that abstract emotional states are systematically mapped onto physical source domains, such as Journey, Damage, and Possession. Orientational metaphors emerged as the most dominant type, indicating a reliance on spatial direction to communicate recovery. **Conclusion:** The lyrics utilize universal cognitive schemas to convey resilience, confirming that popular songs are rich cognitive artifacts for linguistic analysis. **Limitation:** This research is limited to a single lyrical analysis and does not include empirical data from listeners' perspectives.

Keywords: cognitive semantic; coldplay; fix you; metaphorical expressions; song lyric

1. Introduction

Language serves as a primary symbolic system for organizing human thought and experience, reflecting how individuals perceive and arrange reality. In the framework of cognitive linguistics, metaphors have shifted from being viewed as mere decorative stylistic devices to being recognized as vital cognitive tools central to human cognition. Following the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff, Johnson, & Berkeley, (1980), metaphors function by systematically mapping tangible source domains onto abstract target ones. Within the view of cognitive semantics, language does not act independently of the mind; rather, it reflects the conceptual processes through which humans understand the world.

Metaphors shape how abstract ideas are comprehended. For example, in the metaphor "time is money," the idea of money (a physical substance that people engage with on a daily basis) is used to explain time. This is why people refer to time as something that can be "spent," "wasted," or "saved." Metaphors, according to this viewpoint, are cognitive tools that express how individuals think about the world, rather than decorative language. Language, through metaphor, reflects human experience and structures abstract ideas (Burhanudin, Bisri, Aisyah, & Hastuti, 2025). The argument is supported by the wider discipline of cognitive semantics, which stresses the interconnectedness of meaning, human cognition, and embodied experience.

In the view of cognitive semantics, language does not act independently of the mind, but rather reflects how people perceive, comprehend, and arrange reality. Within this view, metaphors are not simply language expressions, but also cognitive systems that map tangible worlds onto abstract ones in a systematic manner. Thus, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) stands as a central model of cognitive semantics, illustrating how metaphorical mappings represent fundamental processes of meaning-making. In support of this Gurning, Daniel Saputra (2025) highlight that the human mind constructs meaning through conceptual processes, while Hermandra et al. (2023) show through the analysis of song lyrics that metaphorical expressions reveal both universal and culture-specific patterns of human cognition. These studies confirm that adopting a cognitive semantic perspective with CMT as the theoretical foundation provides a strong basis for analyzing metaphorical expressions in song lyrics such as Coldplay's *Fix You*.

Within this theoretical framework, songs become a particularly valuable topic of research since they include a wealth of metaphorical expressions that represent both personal feelings and communal cultural significance. Consequently, song lyrics become valuable research objects as they are rich cognitive artifacts that reveal systematic patterns of human cognition. The lyrical richness of Coldplay's works has gained significant interest due to its deep connection to metaphorical patterns. Among their discography, *Fix You* (2005) stands out because its lyrics contain abundant conceptual metaphors representing hope, healing, and resilience. Harahap (2021) examined Coldplay's music and discovered that the semantic meanings in their lyrics are intimately tied to metaphorical patterns. His research found that the band's songs are both lyrical and intellectually structured to portray human concerns and hopes. Similarly, Siregar (2015) analyzed metaphorical phrases in Coldplay songs and determined that the band's figurative language offers listeners with meaningful imagery that cuts over cultural boundaries. These findings show that Coldplay's music is rich in metaphor, but the depth of its cognitive frameworks is yet unknown. Among Coldplay's works, *Fix You* (2005) stands out as one of the most metaphorically representative songs. It does not gain scholarly interest merely because of its global popularity, but more importantly because the lyrics contain abundant conceptual metaphors that symbolize hope, healing, and resilience. Dewi (2025), for example, identified systematic metaphorical mappings in *Fix You* using a cognitive semantics approach and concluded that the song effectively conveys universal human experiences through figurative language. This highlights why *Fix You* is chosen as the focus of the present study: its lyrical richness offers fertile ground for examining how metaphor functions as a cognitive tool for meaning-making.

While previous studies have explored metaphors in popular music such as research on Taylor Swift, Lana Del Rey, or semiotic analyses of Coldplay's albums a specific focus on *Fix You* using a systematic CMT approach remains limited. Most existing analyses on this iconic song have relied on descriptive or semiotic methods. This study addresses the gap by utilizing a cognitive semantic perspective to map how inner experiences of grief and recovery in *Fix You* are structured through universal cognitive schemas. By doing so, this research not only confirms the role of songs as cognitive artifacts but also highlights their pedagogical value as authentic materials in EFL contexts.

Previous studies on metaphors in Coldplay's lyrics have mostly relied on descriptive and semiotic methods, with very few exploring systematic conceptual mappings using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Furthermore, in-depth analysis of an iconic song like *Fix You* that connects metaphors, emotions, and universal cognitive schemas remains limited. By adopting a cognitive semantic perspective, this research proposes that the conceptual mappings in *Fix You* such as light as hope, journey as life, and fluid as emotion represent universal cognitive tendencies.

Theoretically, this study confirms that songs are not just artistic works but also cognitive artifacts that reveal how humans conceptualize the world. Practically, song lyrics offer great pedagogical value in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts to increase student engagement Ahmad et.al., (2024), as authentic materials are highly beneficial for language development (Anjarningsih, 2025). Based on these considerations, the present research aims to address the existing gaps by conducting a detailed analysis of metaphorical expressions in *Fix You*. Specifically, this study focuses on two main objectives: first, to identify the metaphorical expressions in the lyrics, and second, to show how these expressions use concrete images to explain abstract feelings. This will provide a clearer understanding of how metaphors function in song lyrics.

2. Method

A descriptive qualitative approach is used in this study to examine the metaphorical expressions in Coldplay's "Fix You" lyrics. (2014) asserts that qualitative research is a useful method for investigating and comprehending the interpretation that people or groups provide to a social or human issue. In this case, the study concentrates on the conceptual mappings that the music uses to express emotions. The official lyrics to "Fix You" from the 2005 album *X&Y* serve as the main source of info.

The data for this study consists of metaphorical expressions extracted from the official lyrics of Coldplay's *Fix You*, sourced from <https://genius.com/Coldplay-fix-you-lyrics> to ensure textual accuracy. The decision to focus exclusively on this single song is a purposive choice; as suggested by Patton (2015), purposeful sampling allows for an in-depth, information-rich analysis of a specific phenomenon. In this case, *Fix You* was selected due to its high density of diverse metaphorical categories orientational, ontological, and structural within a single narrative arc of grief and resilience. While this narrow scope ensures a granular and systematic application of CMT, it is acknowledged as a limitation that the findings may not represent the broader metaphorical patterns across Coldplay's entire discography.

The research instruments used are the researchers themselves as the primary human instrument, supported by data sheets to document and categorize the findings. The data collection follows a systematic procedure: first, a comprehensive

reading of the entire lyrics is performed to understand the holistic context. Second, the lyrics are screened to identify lines containing metaphorical expressions. Third, a detailed selection is made at the word or phrase level to pinpoint specific linguistic metaphors.

3. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of Coldplay's *Fix You* reveals eight distinct metaphorical expressions, which are classified into three types based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework: orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors. The distribution and classification of these metaphors are summarized in the tables below.

Table 1. Identified Metaphors

No	Lyric Line	Metaphorical Word/Phrase	Type of Metaphor (Lakoff et al., 1980)	Reason
1	"Lights will guide you home"	Lights	Orientalational	Hope is light
2	"I will try to fix you"	Fix you	Structural	Emotional damage is physical damage
3	"When you lose something you cannot replace"	Lose	Ontological	Loss is physical possession
4	"Tears stream down your face"	Stream	Orientalational	Tears are fluids
5	"Stuck in reverse"	Stuck	Orientalational	Life is a journey
6	"When you're too in love to let it go"	Let go	Ontological	Emotional bond is a physical hold
7	"And ignite your bones"	Ignite	Ontological	Vitality is fire
8	"And high up above or down below"	High up above / Down below	Orientalational	Well-being is up and bad is down

Table 2. Mapping Analysis

No	Metaphorical Expression	Source Domain (Concrete)	Target Domain (Abstract)
1	Lights	Light	Hope/Guidance
2	Fix you	Physical Damage	Emotional/Mental Problem
3	Lose	Losing a Possession	Grief/Loss
4	Stream	Flowing Liquid	Flow of Tears/Emotion
5	Stuck	Hindered physical journey	Difficulties/Failure
6	Let go	Releasing a Hold	Ending an Attachment
7	Ignite	Setting Fire	Rejuvenation/Inspiration
8	High up / Down below	Vertical Location	Emotional/Spiritual State

As presented in Table 1 and Table 2, eight metaphorical expressions were identified and classified into three categories: orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors. Orientalational metaphors were the most frequent, accounting for 50% of the data, indicating that spatial orientation plays a significant role in conceptualizing emotional states in the song.

Structural metaphors allow abstract emotional experiences to be understood through concrete physical processes. The expression "I will try to fix you" conceptualizes emotional suffering as physical damage, suggesting that emotional pain is something that can be repaired. This mapping reinforces the idea of recovery and external support in overcoming psychological distress.

Ontological metaphors conceptualize emotions and experiences as physical objects or substances. For example, the phrase “lose something you cannot replace” frames loss as the disappearance of a physical possession, emphasizing its permanence and emotional value. Similarly, the expression “ignite your bones” represents emotional renewal as fire, symbolizing vitality and inner strength.

Orientational metaphors organize emotional experiences using spatial relationships. The expressions “high up above or down below” and “lights will guide you home” associate positive emotional states with upward movement and light, while negative states are associated with downward direction or lack of progress, as seen in “stuck in reverse.” These mappings reflect universal embodied experiences that structure emotional understanding.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the song systematically maps abstract emotional experiences onto concrete physical domains such as movement, possession, and repair. This confirms that metaphor functions as a cognitive mechanism that enables listeners to understand complex emotional states through familiar physical experiences. Therefore, the strong relationship between the song context and the cognitive structure found here forms a substantial basis for an in-depth discussion of the theoretical implications of these findings.

The empirical findings substantiate the initial hypothesis that metaphorical expressions in *Fix You* instantiate universal cognitive patterns rooted in embodied experience. The systematic nature of source-target mappings directly confirms theoretical predictions derived from Conceptual Metaphor Theory, demonstrating that abstract emotional comprehension necessarily proceeds through concrete experiential frameworks (Koch, 1967; Lodovikus et al., 2025). The predominance of journey schemas aligns with extensive cross linguistic evidence documenting LIFE IS A JOURNEY as among the most ubiquitous conceptual metaphors across human cultures (Fauzi et al., 2025). The present findings extend this generalization specifically to musical discourse, confirming that songwriters access identical cognitive resources as speakers in everyday communication. This aligns with Inayah & Amalia, (2024) who found that metaphors in pop lyrics act as a bridge between subjective experience and universal understanding. Nasution et al., (2023) examined Coldplay's broader lyrical corpus and identified synesthetic metaphors as most dominant, suggesting the band employs varied metaphorical strategies across compositions. However, the current analysis of *Fix You* specifically reveals journey and container schemas as predominant, indicating thematic requirements shape metaphor selection songs addressing healing and recovery particularly motivate spatial and physical frameworks.

The repair metaphor (“I will try to fix you”) presents theoretically significant implications regarding damage conceptualization. Kim et al., (2023) analyzing the same composition through semiotic frameworks confirmed that *Fix You* constructs emotional meaning through both denotative and connotative layers, with repair imagery functioning as central organizing principle. Their findings corroborate the current analysis while extending interpretation to include how literal and figurative dimensions interact. The repair framework's prevalence raises unresolved questions such as Why do mechanical repair rather than organic healing metaphors dominate? This asymmetry may reflect cultural assumptions regarding agency distribution in recovery contexts repair implies external intervention upon passive objects, whereas healing suggests self-directed biological processes. Container schemas appear with notable frequency, structuring both emotional expression (tears as substance overflow) and romantic attachment (being “in” love). Samosir et al., (2024) examining figurative language across multiple Coldplay compositions documented hyperbole as most frequent device (33%), followed by metaphor and simile (16% each). Their findings suggest Coldplay's stylistic repertoire extends beyond metaphor to include various figurative strategies. However, within *Fix You* specifically, container metaphors prove particularly salient for expressing emotional intensity through spatial boundedness overwhelming emotions “overflow” bodily containers, while profound attachments “trap” individuals within emotional spaces.

Comparison with related investigations reveals both convergent and divergent patterns. Dewi (2025) analyzing slang usage in Coldplay's *X&Y* album identified conceptual meaning as predominant semantic type, demonstrating how lexical choices beyond metaphor contribute to meaning construction. Their focus on colloquial language complements the current metaphorical analysis by illustrating multiple linguistic levels through which Coldplay achieves emotional expression. Similarly, Puspitorini & Hamdani (2021) examining selected Coldplay songs identified hyperbole as dominant figurative device, with connotative meanings prevailing. These findings suggest compositional variation different songs exploit different regions of available figurative space based on thematic requirements. The possession metaphor (“lose something you cannot replace”) warrants particular attention for its cultural implications. (Putranto, Buwono, Ardani, & Inawati, 2024) investigating translation shifts in English-Indonesian renderings of *Fix You* documented seventeen instances where noun phrase structures required modification, with structure shift proving most common. Their findings illuminate how possession metaphors translate across linguistic systems Indonesian lacks direct equivalents for certain English possessive constructions, necessitating structural adaptations that potentially alter metaphorical force. This observation suggests metaphor's apparent universality admits language-specific constraints in actual usage.

Theoretical Implications

These findings advance cognitive semantic theory by demonstrating popular music as legitimate data source for investigating conceptual systems. Barung et al., (2025) analyzing figurative language across Spotify's top hits identified 200 figurative expressions within 8,352 words, with metaphors and hyperboles most frequent. Their large scale corpus

study validates the current focused analysis by confirming metaphorical density characterizes successful popular music generally, not merely individual compositions. Songs represent naturalistic linguistic production subject to aesthetic constraints that potentially reveal cognitive preferences successful songs presumably employ metaphors that resonate broadly, suggesting they tap particularly salient or accessible conceptual mappings. Furthermore, Fauzi et al., (2025) examining Billie Eilish's lyrics through cognitive semantics identified ontological, orientational, and structural metaphors expressing emotional experiences. Their findings parallel the current analysis while extending to different artistic contexts, suggesting cross-artist consistency in fundamental cognitive structures despite stylistic variation. This convergence strengthens claims regarding metaphor's systematic basis in embodied experience rather than arbitrary linguistic convention.

Practical and Pedagogical Applications

The demonstrated metaphorical richness validates song lyrics as instructional materials for foreign language education, particularly in English as Foreign Language contexts. Aras et al., (2024) explicitly advocate incorporating hit songs into language teaching curricula, particularly for vocabulary instruction, based on documented linguistic richness. Their pedagogical recommendations align with the current findings, suggesting *Fix You*'s metaphorical complexity offers valuable learning opportunities. By integrating such songs, educators can foster 'metaphorical competence,' helping students grasp how abstract emotions like 'healing' are conceptualized as 'repairing' or 'moving forward.' This approach not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also deepens students' cultural and metalinguistic awareness, making the learning process more engaging. Metaphor comprehension requires cultural and conceptual knowledge beyond literal semantic competence, making figurative language challenging yet valuable for advanced learners. Puspitorini & Hamdani (2021) emphasize that figurative language in Coldplay's songs "simplifies and clarifies understanding" rather than complicating it, making such materials accessible for learners. They argue songs prove "very suitable for English Learners who want to improve their English skills in analyzing lyrics that contain figurative language." The current analysis provides detailed metaphorical mappings that instructors could employ as pedagogical models, enabling students to recognize systematic patterns while engaging culturally relevant materials, maintaining interest and motivation.

Beyond vocabulary acquisition, metaphor-focused lyrical analysis cultivates metalinguistic awareness and conscious understanding of language structures and functions. When learners identify source and target domains, they develop analytical skills transferable to other discourse types. Such activities promote critical thinking by requiring students to articulate relationships between concrete and abstract concepts. Furthermore, collaborative classroom discussions about metaphorical interpretations acknowledge multiple valid readings, fostering tolerance for ambiguity and interpretive diversity. These pedagogical benefits extend beyond linguistic competence to encompass broader cognitive and intercultural skills increasingly valued in globalized educational contexts.

Cultural and Artistic Significance

The universal accessibility of *Fix You* across diverse listener populations likely stems from its exploitation of broadly shared embodied experiences. Dewi (2025) analyzing the same composition identified ontological and orientational metaphors as predominant types, with existence and space image schemas structuring meaning. Her findings regarding metaphorical types complement the current domain-mapping focus, together illustrating how *Fix You* achieves emotional resonance through multiple interconnected cognitive mechanisms. Journey, repair, container, and possession schemas transcend specific cultural boundaries because they derive from universal human interactions with physical environments, explaining the song's global resonance. Kim et al., (2023) investigating lyric translation frameworks emphasizes that successful translation requires balancing "singability and semantics" while integrating "musical, linguistic, and cultural dimensions." Their computational approach to translation evaluation underscores metaphor's centrality to lyrical meaning translators must preserve metaphorical mappings while adapting to target language constraints. This challenge confirms that metaphors constitute core rather than peripheral elements of lyrical communication, validating cognitive semantic approaches to song analysis.

The artistic sophistication evident in *Fix You* emerges not from metaphorical novelty but from strategic deployment of familiar cognitive frameworks in emotionally evocative configurations. Chris Martin's compositional craft demonstrates how conventional metaphorical systems, when skillfully combined and contextualized through musical elements, generate profound affective impact. This observation challenges romantic notions equating creativity with radical innovation, suggesting instead that artistic effectiveness derives from masterful manipulation of shared conceptual resources. The song's enduring popularity across two decades and multiple cultural contexts validates this approach, audiences worldwide recognize and respond to these metaphorical patterns precisely because they reflect fundamental human experiences. Moreover, the metaphorical consistency within *Fix You* contributes to its thematic coherence. Rather than employing disparate or contradictory metaphor types, the composition maintains conceptual unity through repeated emphasis on spatial, physical, and substantial domains. This strategic coherence prevents cognitive dissonance that might arise from incompatible metaphorical frameworks competing within single compositions. Future research examining metaphorical coherence as a predictor of song success could illuminate relationships between cognitive consistency and audience reception.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several constraints limit the current investigation's scope and generalizability. First, analysis of a single composition prevents broader conclusions regarding authorial style, genre conventions, or temporal trends. Subsequent research should examine extensive lyrical corpora across multiple artists, genres, and historical periods to identify systematic variation in metaphorical preferences, following models established by Aras et al., (2024) in their multi-song corpus analysis. Second, the current methodology relies exclusively on the researcher's interpretation without empirical validation through listener comprehension studies. Future investigations should employ experimental methods assessing how actual audiences interpret identified metaphors, whether alternative mappings emerge, and how cultural background influences understanding. Putranto et al. (2024) demonstrate that translation studies offer one avenue for such investigation, comparing original and translated versions reveals how metaphors function across linguistic communities.

Third, the analysis neglects musical dimensions, melody, harmony, rhythm, and vocal delivery that potentially interact with lyrical content to shape meaning. Kim et al., (2023) illustrate how computational methods can integrate musical and linguistic analysis, suggesting future research could quantitatively assess relationships between metaphorical density and musical features. Fourth, comparative analysis across similar compositions remains unexplored. Vikri & Nurcholis (2022) and Barung et al., (2025) were analyzing multiple Coldplay songs and identified different metaphorical profiles, suggesting systematic variation worth investigating. They identified about "Do songs addressing particular emotions favor specific metaphor types?" and "Does Coldplay's metaphorical style evolve across career stages?". Puspitorini & Hamdani (2021) assert song-based learning benefits English learners, but controlled studies assessing learning outcomes remain necessary. They investigated "Do students exposed to metaphor-focused lyrical analysis demonstrate improved figurative language comprehension compared to traditional instruction?" Such research could establish evidence-based pedagogical practices.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the emotional power of Coldplay's *Fix You* stems from its systematic use of universal cognitive metaphors, particularly the Repair and Journey schemes. These findings confirm that popular songs are not merely entertainment but sophisticated cognitive artifacts that map complex grief onto tangible physical experiences. Practically, this research advocates for the use of song lyrics as authentic materials in EFL classrooms to improve students' metaphorical competence and critical thinking. Future research should expand this analysis to larger corpora to explore whether these metaphorical patterns remain consistent across different musical genres and eras.

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