

Figurative Language in Songs & in Everyday Communication

ESL360

27 June 2026

Lesson Objectives:

Figurative Language Skills

- Identify five types of figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery) when you hear them in songs or conversations
- Explain the purpose of each figurative language device in everyday communication
- Transform ordinary sentences into vivid descriptions using at least three different figurative language techniques

Grammar:

- Use present continuous tense to create "film-like" figurative descriptions that show action and movement
- Use simple tenses to create "picture-like" figurative descriptions that capture a moment

Vocabulary:

- Define and use these terms: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery, figurative language, literal meaning

Pronunciation:

- Pronounce word endings clearly, especially -ed, -s, and -ing sounds in figurative expressions
- Use connected speech naturally when speaking figurative phrases (linking words smoothly)

Everyday Communication:

- Use figurative language to describe your feelings and experiences more vividly in conversations
- Make your stories and descriptions more memorable and engaging for listeners
- Express opinions and emotions more powerfully in both spoken and written communication

Lost in Translation Game

Question 1

What does the German idiom **“I only understand the train station”** mean?

- A) I understand the directions perfectly.
- B) I understand a little, but I need more details.
- C) I don't understand a thing about what that person is saying.
- D) I understand the words, but I disagree with the message.

Lost in Translation Game

Question 2

What does the Russian idiom **“You can sharpen with an ax on top of this head”** mean?

- A) To be easily persuaded by others.
- B) To be open-minded and flexible.
- C) To be extremely stubborn and unchangeable.
- D) To be clever and quick to learn.

Lost in Translation Game

Question 3

What does the Swedish idiom **"It fell between chairs"** mean?

- A) To say a task was supposed to be handled, but it was forgotten and no one did it.
- B) To admit you did something perfectly and on time.
- C) To describe a plan that worked even better than expected.
- D) To explain that someone completed a task early to be helpful.

Lost in Translation Game

Question 4

What does the Latvian idiom "**Go pick mushrooms**" mean?

- A) To invite someone on a relaxing nature walk.
- B) To tell someone to hurry up and get moving.
- C) To remind someone to finish their chores first.
- D) To tell someone to go away and leave you alone.

Lost in Translation Game

Question 5

What does the French idiom **“The carrots are cooked!”** mean?

- A) The situation can't be changed.
- B) The situation is improving quickly.
- C) The situation can still be changed easily.
- D) The situation is confusing but fixable.

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Every language uses figurative expressions

What are some examples in your own native languages?

WHY STUDY FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE?

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Receptive Purpose <-----

To better understand native English--spoken & written

Productive Purpose ---->

To make your everyday conversations more vivid, interesting, and memorable.

To describe your feelings, tell better stories, and express yourself more powerfully.

Literary Devices in English

- Similes
- Metaphors
- Personification
- Hyperbole
- Imagery

Similes

Definition: Comparing two things using "like" or "as"

Song Example: "... Like a bridge over troubled waters ..." (Simon & Garfunkel)

Everyday Uses:

Describing feelings: "I'm as tired as a marathon runner."

Making complaints vivid: "This traffic is like a parking lot."

Explaining experiences: "Learning English is like climbing a mountain—challenging but rewarding."

Metaphors

Definition: Saying something IS something else (without "like" or "as")

Song Example: "You are my sunshine" (classic song)

Everyday Uses:

Expressing love: "My daughter is my sunshine."

Describing situations: "This project is a nightmare."

Talking about time: "Monday mornings are torture."

Personification

Definition: Giving human qualities to non-human things

Song Example: "The wind is howling" or "The sun is smiling"

Everyday Uses:

Describing weather: "The rain is dancing on my window."

Talking about technology: "My computer is refusing to cooperate today."

Describing food: "The coffee is calling my name."

Hyperbole

Definition: Extreme exaggeration for emphasis

Song Example: "I've loved you for a thousand years . . ." (Cristina Perri)

Everyday Uses:

Showing hunger: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

Expressing exhaustion: "I've told you a million times."

Describing waiting: "I've been waiting forever."

Imagery

Definition: Descriptive language using the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch)

Song Example: "I can feel it in my bones" or "Sweet like honey"

Everyday Uses:

Describing food: "The pizza was hot, crispy, and melted in my mouth."

Sharing experiences: "The beach was warm, the waves were crashing, and I could taste the salt in the air."

Telling stories: "The room was freezing, dark, and smelled like old books."

“Happy” by Pharrell Williams

Listen to the song.

What is the song about?

Describe how it makes you feel.

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**Let’s look at the figurative language devices the artist uses to make us
feel this way . . .**

"Happy" by Pharrell Williams

**Identify at least one
example of . . .**

Simile

Metaphor

Personification

Hyperbole

Imagery

It might seem crazy what I am 'bout to say

Sunshine, she's here you can take a break

I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space, huh

With the air, like I don't care, baby, by the way, huh

Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you know what happiness is to you

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

Here come bad news, talking this and that (talk, yeah)

Well, give me all you got and don't hold back (yeah)

Well, I should probably warn you, I'll be just fine (yeah)

No offense to you, don't waste your time, here's why

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Pronunciation Practice

To use figurative language effectively in speaking, you need clear pronunciation.

Two key focus areas:

1. word endings
2. connected speech.

These will help you sound more natural and be better understood.

Word Endings

The Rule: Always pronounce word endings clearly

- Dropping -ed: "I feel tire" instead of "I feel tired"
- Dropping -s: "She feel like" instead of "She feels like"
- Dropping -ing: "I'm float" instead of "I'm floating"

Listen & Notice the Difference:

Incorrect: "My heart is race." [say it dropping the -ing]

Correct: "My heart is racing." [emphasize the -ing clearly]

Incorrect: "Time fly when I'm happy." [drop the -s]

Correct: "Time flies when I'm happy." [clear -s sound]

Incorrect: "I feel like I'm trap." [drop the -ed]

Correct: "I feel like I'm trapped." [clear -ed sound]

Word Endings Practice

The Rule: Always pronounce word endings clearly

- "I'm floating on air."
- "My heart dances in my chest."
- "I feel trapped in a cage."
- "She's glowing like the sun."

Word Endings Practice

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Remember: the ending carries important grammar information.

'I'm float' is incorrect grammar. 'I'm floating' is correct.

**Clear endings make your communication
grammatically accurate and easier to understand.**

Connected Speech

The Rule: Link words together when one word ends with a consonant and the next begins with a vowel.

Examples from "Happy":

- "I'm a hot air balloon" → "I'm_a hot_air balloon" [link the words]
- "feel like a room" → "feel_like_a room"
- "give me all you got" → "give_me_all_you got"

Listen to the difference:

"I. feel. like. a. room. without. a. roof."

Natural English Rhythm: "I feel like-a room without-a roof."

hot or ice hotorice

Connected Speech Practice

The Rule: Link words together when one word ends with a consonant and the next begins with a vowel.

"as light as a feather" → "as light_as_a feather"

"I'm on top of the world" → "I'm_on top_of the world"

"like a fish out of water" → "like_a fish_out_of water"

"My mind is racing" → "My mind_is racing"

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"My mind is racing" → "My mind_is racing"

Remember: To understand spoken English more completely and to speak English more fluently, you must practice listening to and producing connected speech.

Combined Pronunciation Practice

The Rules:

Always pronounce word endings clearly.

Link words together when one word ends with a consonant and the next begins with a vowel.

1. "I'm feeling like I'm floating on air."
2. "My heart is dancing in my chest."
3. "She's as happy as a child on her birthday."

Grammar - Present Continuous Tense vs. Simple Tenses

Video

Picture

Grammar - Present Continuous Tense vs. Simple Tenses

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Picture

A FILM shows action and movement—things happening right now.

We use present continuous tense for this

A PICTURE captures one frozen moment—a state or condition. We use simple tenses for this.

Grammar - Present Continuous Tense vs. Simple Tenses

Present Continuous Tense (Video)

"My heart is dancing in my chest."
(shows ongoing action)

"Happiness is flowing through my veins."
(shows movement)

"The music is lifting my spirits."
(shows active process)

Simple Tenses (Picture)

"My heart is a drum."
(describes what something IS)

"Happiness fills my veins."
(describes a state)

"The music lifts my spirits."
(describes a general truth)

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Both are correct, but they create different feelings.

Continuous tense: more dynamic and alive-like watching a film.

Simple tense: more permanent-like a photograph.

Choose based on what feeling you want to create.

Grammar - Present Continuous Tense vs. Simple Tenses

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Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 1:

.

Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 1: present continuous, showing action happening now

.

Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 2:

.

Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 2: simple tense, describing what time IS.

.

Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 3:

.

Grammar - Film or Picture?

Listen carefully and determine which tense is being used:

Example 3: present continuous, showing action happening now.

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Everyday Communication Practice

In small groups is to transform boring sentences into vivid, memorable sentences using the figurative language techniques we've learned today.

Your Task:

1. Work in small groups
2. Read each boring sentence
3. Rewrite it using at least one figurative language device
4. Make it more interesting, memorable, and vivid
5. Think about real situations where you'd say this
6. Be ready to share your best transformations

Remember: you can use similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, or imagery. You can create 'films' with continuous tenses or 'pictures' with simple tenses. Be creative! Make these sentences come alive.

Everyday Communication Practice

'I'm very cold today.' How could we transform this?"

Options:

'I'm as cold as an ice cream cone.' (simile)

'I'm a snowflake in human clothes, floating from car to Costco.'

(metaphor + imagery)

'My feet are screaming for a warm pair of socks.' (personification)

'I could climb into a hot frying pan and still be cold.' (hyperbole)

Same basic meaning—tired—but vivid and memorable.

Someone hearing these sentences can feel how cold you are.

"BORING SENTENCES" WORKSHEET:

Transform these everyday sentences using figurative language:

Group #1

Boring: "I'm very tired today."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "My children are very energetic."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "I'm nervous about my mammogram."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "The traffic was really bad this morning."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "I'm very happy about my daughter's success."

Your vivid version: _____

Group #2

Boring: "My house is always messy."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "I have too much work to do."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "My friend always supports me."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "I love spending time with my family."

Your vivid version: _____

Boring: "Learning English is difficult but rewarding."

Your vivid version: _____

Lesson Objectives:

Figurative Language Skills

- Identify five types of figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery) when you hear them in songs or conversations
- Explain the purpose of each figurative language device in everyday communication
- Transform ordinary sentences into vivid descriptions using at least three different figurative language techniques

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Word Artist Song Festival - NEXT week!

1. Select an English song
2. Close your eyes and listen to the song several times. Pay attention to the image created in your mind. What do you feel? see? hear? taste? smell?
3. Open your eyes and listen to the song while reading the lyrics. Underline the figurative language devices (metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, imagery). How does this figurative language affect how you feel when you listen to the song?
4. Create "Word Art" (5-8 sentences) using 5+ descriptive, sensory words or figurative language devices to describe how you feel when you listen to the song. Note: You are not describing the song. You are describing how the song makes you feel.
5. Create a 3-slide Canva presentation. Slide 1–Introduction (Song Title, Artist, 30-second excerpt of song with written lyrics). Slide 2–Word Art (5-8 sentence description that uses 5+ sensory words about how the song makes you feel). Slide 3–A favorite line from the song. Explain why you selected this line.
6. Save your Canva presentation to a shared Google Drive folder. You will have 5 minutes to present your slides.