

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter presents and discusses the research background, research problems, research objectives, research significance, research scope, and the definition of key terms. Those are very important to give a brief explanation about the intended study.

A. Background of the Study

Language has always held an essential part of human life because it lets people express ideas, emotions, and beliefs in ways that others can understand. According to the Oxford Dictionary, language is *"a system of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way."* This definition shows that language is not only a medium for delivering information but also a shared system that binds individuals within a community. Without language, interactions would be limited, and the social world would be far less organised. From this viewpoint, it becomes clear that language is foundational to all human activities.

In addition to being a tool for communication, language shapes how people interpret their experiences. Through language, individuals describe what they see, feel, and imagine. This makes language a powerful means of connecting meaning. It helps people make sense of the world, connect events with emotions, and form judgments about what they encounter. Language, therefore becomes tightly connected to how people understand themselves and

others. The ability to articulate thoughts-whether through speech, writing, or symbol plays a major role in developing one's identity and worldview.

Language also functions as a carrier of culture. Stories, traditions, beliefs, and shared memories are preserved and passed down through language. In consideration, Crystal (2003) explains that language appears in spoken, written, and symbolic forms, each playing different roles in human society. Spoken language captures everyday interaction and oral tradition; written language preserves information across generations; and symbolic language conveys meaning through signs, images, and non-verbal expressions. This diversity of forms shows that communication is not limited to literal words; meaning can be shaped through tone, rhythm, gesture, or visual symbols. From this perspective, language is not only a tool for communication but also a cultural archive.

Keraf (2009) argues that language also has expressive, social, and intellectual functions. As an expressive tool, language allows individuals to show their inner feelings. As a social tool, it helps people adjust to their surroundings and participate in group life. As an intellectual tool, it supports the development of reasoning, learning, and critical thinking. These functions show how language becomes a foundation of human growth. When people use language creatively, such as through storytelling, poetry, or song, they are not only communicating but also shaping deeper layers of meaning. Here, the writer argues that the creative use of language is often the space where emotional, artistic, and spiritual dimensions emerge most clearly.

One of the artistic spaces where language plays a major role is music. People across cultures listen to music not only for entertainment but also for comfort, reflection, and emotional support. Music can influence mood, strengthen memory, and stimulate reflection in ways that ordinary speech cannot. Because melody interacts closely with emotion, music often becomes a companion in personal or spiritual journeys. Its universal nature makes it accessible to people regardless of age, background, or language.

Among the many forms of musical expression, songs hold a unique place. A song blends words and melody into a unified message. The rhythm, tone, and arrangement guide listeners to feel the meaning of the lyrics more deeply. Because songs are memorable, they often become part of a listener's daily experiences and emotional life. For some people, certain songs become reminders of specific events, personal struggles, or spiritual reflections. This is why songs are often described as "emotional texts" that reach listeners on both rational and emotional levels.

Lyrics are the heart of a song. They carry the main message the songwriter wishes to express. Unlike everyday conversation, lyrics are crafted to evoke feelings and images. They are concise yet often rich with layers of meaning. Through lyrics, songwriters share stories, values, and reflections that resonate with listeners. The writer believes that lyrics work as a bridge between the personal experience of the songwriter and the emotional world of the listener (Frith, 1996).

To create this depth of meaning, songwriters frequently use figurative language. Figurative expressions allow abstract ideas to become more vivid

and relatable. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphor plays a crucial role in human cognition, helping people understand one concept through the lens of another. This explains why figurative expressions are widely used in songs: they help listeners grasp complex emotions or spiritual ideas more concretely. Images like "light," "path," or "journey" can represent inner growth, divine guidance, or personal challenges.

This becomes especially important in songs that carry spiritual or religious messages. Spiritual concepts such as hope, faith, gratitude, or devotion are often abstract and difficult to express in literal terms. Figurative language offers a symbolic way to communicate these ideas so that listeners can feel them more deeply. When a songwriter uses imagery of "light" to describe divine presence, the listener intuitively understands the message even if it is not explained directly. This symbolic communication is what allows spiritual songs to become emotionally powerful.

Maher Zain is one of the artists known for combining meaningful lyrics with an accessible musical style. His songs often convey Islamic values in ways that appeal to modern audiences. Themes such as repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, and prophetic love frequently appear in his works. His ability to use simple language while maintaining emotional and spiritual depth makes his songs widely appreciated across cultures. In this sense, Maher Zain uses music as a bridge connecting contemporary listeners to traditional Islamic teachings.

Among his works, "The Chosen One, Peace Be Upon You, Assalamu 'Alayka" stands out as a tribute to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The song uses symbolic expressions to describe the Prophet as a source of guidance and compassion. Images of "light," "purity," and "gentleness" are used to reflect the Prophet's character. These expressions resonate deeply with Muslim listeners because they align with traditional Islamic portrayals of prophetic virtues. The melody of the song enhances this spiritual atmosphere, encouraging listeners to reflect on the values embodied by the Prophet.

Many researchers have taken interest in analyzing figurative language in Maher Zain's songs. Studies such as Pasaribu (2021), Prawiro (2019), Yuliawati and Hasan (2013), Riftasandha et al. (2025), and Anggraini (2019) focus mainly on identifying figurative devices like metaphor, personification, and symbolism. Their findings offer insights into the aesthetic elements of Maher Zain's works. However, the writer observes that these studies remain descriptive. They do not explore how figurative expressions in the lyrics contribute to spiritual meaning or how listeners interpret the deeper messages behind the imagery.

This leaves a clear research gap. While previous studies have mapped the figurative language in several of Maher Zain's songs, none have specifically analysed how the figurative language in the songs *The Chosen One*, *Peace Be Upon You*, and *Assalamu Alayka (English Version)* conveys Islamic spiritual meanings, particularly those reflecting the relationship between human beings and the divine and related to prophetic values. Existing studies generally focus solely on identifying the types of figurative language found in the song lyrics, without exploring how these expressions function to communicate deeper spiritual ideas. As a result, these studies fail to fully explain how imagery,

symbolic words, and expressive comparisons shape listeners' understanding of devotion, compassion, and spiritual guidance.

This limitation is significant because, as argued by Abrams and Harpham (2012), figurative language in literary texts is not merely decorative but functions as a medium for conveying complex meanings beyond literal expression. Similarly, Perrine (1977) emphasizes that figurative language enables writers to communicate abstract and emotional experiences more effectively. In the context of religious or spiritual texts, symbolic language becomes even more important because spiritual experiences are often difficult to express directly. Therefore, ignoring the interpretive function of figurative language results in an incomplete understanding of the text's deeper meaning.

The author argues that this is a significant omission because spiritual songs often rely on symbolic expression to communicate messages that cannot be expressed literally. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by interpreting how figurative language expresses and reflects Islamic spiritual meanings in the songs *The Chosen One*, *Peace Be Upon You*, and *Assalamu Alayka* (English Version). This research goes beyond simple identification and focuses on understanding how metaphor, imagery, hyperbole, and personification work together to create spiritual messages in lyrics. Thus, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic pop songs communicate religious values through artistic linguistic choices.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its approach to connecting figurative language with spiritual meaning in the selected songs. Previous studies have largely only listed or classified the types of figurative language

found in Maher Zain's work. Instead, this study explores how metaphors, symbols, and poetic imagery in lyrics help express spiritual values such as guidance, compassion, purity, and the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This interpretive approach is supported by Kuntowijoyo (2007), who argues that prophetic values emphasise the integration of spiritual awareness, humanisation, and social transformation. In addition, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that metaphor is fundamental in shaping human understanding and experience, including abstract concepts such as spirituality. These perspectives reinforce the idea that figurative language plays a crucial role in constructing and conveying spiritual meanings, not merely as stylistic devices but as conceptual tools.

This study is of academic importance because it demonstrates how metaphorical language can be used to express deeper spiritual ideas rather than simply creating aesthetically pleasing words. Linguistically, this work helps explain how metaphorical expressions carry meaning beyond their literal meaning. Literarily, this study shows that modern Islamic pop song lyrics can be analyzed as meaningful texts containing symbols, themes, and moral messages. Spiritually, this study reveals how Islamic values can be represented through poetic expression in contemporary song lyrics. This study is also valuable in terms of its methodological approach. By combining the analysis of metaphorical language with the interpretation of spiritual meaning, it offers a practical analytical model that can be applied to future research on religious songs or other modern spiritual texts. Therefore, this study contributes not only

to the understanding of the selected songs but also to the broader discussion of how language, art, and spirituality interact in contemporary culture.

B. Research Questions

This study aims to:

1. What types of figurative language are used in Maher Zain's songs "The Chosen One", "Peace Be Upon You", and Assalamu Alayka"?
2. What types of Islamic spiritual meanings are reflected in the lyrics of those songs?
3. How does figurative language relate to the expression of those spiritual meanings in those songs?

C. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. To identify the types of figurative language used in Maher Zain's songs "The Chosen One", "Peace Be Upon You", and "Assalamu Alayka".
2. To identify and classify the types of Islamic spiritual meanings reflected in the lyrics of those songs.
3. To analyze the relationship between figurative language and the expression of Islamic spiritual meanings in the songs.

These objectives aim to provide a systematic analysis starting from the identification of figurative language, followed by the classification of Islamic spiritual meanings, and finally examining the relationship between linguistic expression and spiritual interpretation.

D. Significances of the Study

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the study of literature, especially in the area of figurative language. The study also contributes to literary criticism by connecting rhetorical devices with the expression of Islamic spiritual meanings, showing how language in songs functions not only as an artistic medium but also as a channel of religious and emotional expression.

Practically, the results of this research can be beneficial for several parties:

- a) **For students and researchers of literature and linguistics**, this study can serve as a reference for further research on figurative language and meaning-making in literary texts, especially song lyrics.
- b) **For students and scholars in Islamic studies and religious education**, this research provides insights into how Islamic values and spiritual reflections can be communicated effectively through artistic media such as music. The findings may help in integrating songs as learning media in religious education contexts, fostering not only linguistic awareness but also spiritual sensitivity among learners.
- c) **For general readers and listeners of Maher Zain's songs**, the study may deepen their appreciation of how figurative language enhances the spiritual atmosphere of 3 of Maher Zain's songs, allowing them to experience religious devotion and emotional reflection more profoundly.

E. Scope And Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the analysis of figurative language and its role in constructing spiritual meaning in three songs by Maher Zain: "The Chosen One," "Peace Be Upon You," and "Assalamu Alayka" (English Version). This research was conducted as part of a literary and linguistic analysis, emphasizing how stylistic language contributes to the expression of spiritual values in song lyrics.

The scope of this study is limited to the content of the selected song lyrics. Therefore, only the written lyric texts will be examined as the primary data source. The analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting 5 types of figurative language, such as metaphor, imagery, personification, symbolism and hyperbole, and explaining how these linguistic elements function expressing or reflecting layers of Islamic spiritual meaning. The theoretical framework of this study is primarily based on stylistic and semantic approaches, supported by perspectives from spiritual literary studies to understand the deeper meanings expressed in the texts.

A limitation of this study lies in the fact that it does not analyze other musical elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, or performance style. While these musical components contribute to the emotional impact of a song, they fall outside the linguistic and literary framework of this study. Furthermore, this study does not include empirical data such as listener perceptions, audience reception, or comparative analysis with other religious songs, as such approaches would require different research methods, such as interviews, surveys, or musicological analysis. By focusing on the lyrical texts

of the three selected songs, the researcher aims to achieve a deeper and more focused interpretation of how figurative language functions as a medium for expressing spiritual meaning. This limitation ensures that the study remains manageable, coherent, and analytically consistent within the fields of literary and linguistic studies.

F. Definition of Key Terms

In this section, the author defines several key terms used in this study, entitled *Analyzing Figurative Language and Its Connection to Islamic Spiritual Meanings in Maher Zain's Selected Songs* 'The Chosen One', 'Peace Be Upon You', and 'Asalamu Alayka'. Clarification of these terms is necessary to avoid misunderstandings of the main concepts discussed in this study.

1. Figurative Language

Figurative language refers to the use of words or phrases that go beyond their literal meaning to create vivid imagery, emotional depth, and artistic expression. Through forms such as metaphor, imagery, hyperbole, and personification, language becomes more expressive and meaningful, allowing abstract ideas or feelings to be conveyed in creative ways. As stated by Abrams and Harpham (2012), figurative language is an essential element in literary works that enriches meaning and enhances readers' imagination. Similarly, Perrine (1977) explains that figurative language enables writers to communicate complex ideas and emotions more effectively than literal language.

In this study, figurative language is understood as a linguistic device used to express the spiritual values contained in the songs *The Chosen One*,

Peace Be Upon You, and *Assalamu Alayka (English Version)*. Each figurative expression is analyzed to demonstrate how it reinforces the message of faith, devotion, and admiration for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

2. Islamic Spiritual Meaning

Islamic spiritual meaning in this study refers to deeper values or messages related to one's relationship with God, inner faith, and moral awareness. It reflects a sense of devotion, gratitude, and admiration for the teachings and character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). According to Kuntowijoyo (2007), spiritual values are closely related to prophetic values, which emphasize transcendence, humanization, and liberation in human life. In addition, Pargament (1997) states that spirituality involves the search for the sacred and the expression of meaning in relation to the divine.

In the context of this study, spiritual meaning is defined as the moral and emotional essence conveyed through the lyrics of the selected songs. These meanings illustrate how the lyrics inspire sincerity, compassion, love for the Prophet, and deeper spiritual reflection among listeners.

3. Literary Analysis

Literary analysis is a method used to examine and interpret texts to understand how their ideas, themes, and artistic elements are constructed. This analysis involves analyzing language, structure, symbolism, and imagery to uncover the deeper meaning of a text. According to Barry (2009), literary analysis focuses on interpreting texts through critical approaches

that reveal underlying meanings and structures. Similarly, Klarer (2004) explains that literary analysis examines how literary elements such as figurative language and symbolism contribute to meaning.

In this study, literary analysis is used to explore how the figurative language in Maher Zain's selected songs expresses spiritual values. This analysis focuses on how words, images, and symbolic expressions work together to create messages of devotion, admiration, and love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

4. Maher Zain's Songs

The songs analyzed in this study are *The Chosen One*, *Peace Be Upon You*, and *Assalamu Alayka* (English Version), performed by Maher Zain, a singer known for producing Islamic and spiritual music. These songs express admiration, respect, and love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through poetic and meaningful lyrics. According to Al-Asyhar (2023), contemporary Islamic music, including Maher Zain's works, serves as a medium for conveying spiritual messages and religious values in a modern cultural context.

In this study, the lyrics of these songs are treated as literary texts and used as the primary data source. The songs are analyzed to understand how metaphorical language is used to convey spiritual messages and represent themes such as devotion, compassion, guidance, and admiration for the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).