

The Analysis of Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's *Lover* Album

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Abstract

This thesis explores the types and functions of figurative language in the Lover album on the Spotify platform. Figurative language is a style of language that is not conveyed directly, but rather through beautiful and meaningful ways to reinforce the message and convey feelings more emotionally. The study identifies various types of figurative language, including similes, metaphors, personification, symbolism, metonymy, apostrophe, and others. These are used not only to enrich the poetic quality of the lyrics but also to deliver deeper meanings. The functions of figurative language are observed to create vivid imagery, to make abstract ideas more concrete, to emphasize important ideas, and to add emotional intensity. The study concludes that Taylor Swift uses figurative language to convey complex feelings and themes of life that many people can relate to in beautiful songs.

Keywords: *Figurative language, Spotify, Linguistics, Lover, Taylor Swift*

Introduction

Literature, in its broadest sense, serves as a profound mirror reflecting human expression, thoughts, feelings, and ideas about life and the world. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, it functions as a crucial medium for cultural critique, reinforcement of societal values, and affirmation of shared ideals. Whether presented in written or spoken form, literature possesses an inherent power to educate and impart wisdom, conveying the rich tapestry of human experiences and insights.

Among the diverse forms of literary expression, songs stand out as a particularly resonant medium. As a form of poetry set to music, songs uniquely combine linguistic artistry with melodic harmony to articulate emotions, ideas, and personal narratives. Songwriters frequently employ a range of poetic devices, such as rhyme, metaphor, imagery, and wordplay, to craft lyrics that are both emotionally impactful and artistically rich. This intricate use of language allows

for the communication of complex sentiments and abstract concepts in a manner that is often more vivid and memorable than literal expression.

This research aims to delve into the intricate world of lyrical craftsmanship, specifically focusing on the strategic deployment of figurative language within song lyrics. By analyzing how artists utilize various figures of speech, we can gain a deeper understanding of the communicative power of popular music and its capacity to forge strong emotional connections with its audience. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in linguistics and literary analysis by exploring the nuanced ways in which figurative language enriches meaning and enhances the listener's experience.

Literary Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical frameworks and concepts that underpin the analysis of figurative language in song lyrics. It delves into the foundational principles of semantics, explores the multifaceted definitions and characteristics of figurative language, and examines its various types and functions as presented by prominent linguists and literary theorists. This review serves to establish the theoretical basis for the research, guiding the identification and interpretation of figurative language within the selected song lyrics.

Semantics

Semantics, a core branch of linguistics, is dedicated to the systematic study of meaning within language. Derived from the Greek word meaning 'meaningful' or 'significant,' semantics investigates how language conveys information and how that information is interpreted by listeners or readers. As defined by Lyons (1977), semantics encompasses the analysis of how words and sentences are used to communicate meaning.

Various linguists offer complementary perspectives on semantics. Yule (2006: 100) describes it as the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, a view echoed by Hurford et al. (2007: 1). Griffiths (2006: 15) further elaborates that semantics involves the context-independent analysis of word and sentence meaning, functioning as a descriptive discipline aimed at understanding

the inherent linguistic meaning known by native speakers. Saeed (2016: 3) defines semantics as the study of meaning conveyed through language, while Kearns (2011: 1) emphasizes its focus on the meanings of individual words and their combinations, which collectively form the basis of an utterance's overall interpretation.

In semantic analysis, the emphasis is consistently placed on the conventional or widely accepted meanings of words, rather than subjective or situational interpretations. This approach prioritizes objective and general meanings, avoiding the exploration of context-specific nuances. Consequently, linguistic semantics is primarily concerned with the established meanings communicated through the structured use of words, phrases, and sentences within a given language system.

Figurative Language

Language serves as an indispensable tool for human communication, enabling individuals to express their thoughts, intentions, and objectives. The language employed in social interaction can convey human thoughts either directly or indirectly. Often, ideas are documented in written media to ensure broader awareness and transmission across generations. The meaning conveyed through language can vary significantly among individuals, influenced by personal style and characteristics.

Figurative language, also known as a figure of speech, represents a non-literal mode of expression that necessitates interpretation to grasp its intended meaning (Elder, 2004: 292). It conveys meanings that cannot be communicated through strictly literal means, utilizing words or expressions whose interpretations differ from their conventional definitions. Knickbocker (1963: 363) posits that figures and symbols act as images, offering unique avenues to explore the less known.

Human communication frequently involves two layers of meaning: denotation, which refers to the literal and exact definition of a word, and connotation, which imbues meaning with emotional, cultural, or attitudinal nuances. Figurative language is a significant area of study that leverages connotation. Abrams (1999: 96) defines figurative language as a noticeable

deviation from typical word order, employed by users to achieve a specific meaning or effect. Often, figurative language proves more effective than direct statements in conveying meaning, functioning essentially as a figure of speech.

Distinguished from functional language, figurative language is characterized as poetic. Poetry extensively uses figurative language to create aesthetically pleasing prose and to add distinctive effects to meanings. Various classifications of figurative language devices exist. Perrine (1969: 56-60) identifies 16 classifications, including simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, irony, hyperbole, and understatement. Taylor (1981: 167) categorized figurative language into three distinct groups: comparison and substitution (e.g., simile, metaphor, allusion, metonymy, analogy, allegory); substitution in representation (e.g., synecdoche, personification, symbol); and contrast through contradiction and reversal (e.g., overstatement, understatement, paradox or oxymoron, irony).

Rozakis (1995: 28) further defines figurative language as "saying one thing in terms of another," emphasizing its nature as an indirect comparison. Given their metaphorical essence, figurative language expressions cannot be interpreted literally. Devices such as personification, metaphor, simile, and apostrophe are examples of comparative figurative language, frequently employed to enrich literary works, particularly poetry. The researcher's choice of Rozakis' (1995) theory is based on its clear, practical, and comprehensible explanation of figurative language, making it highly relevant and applicable for literary analysis. Rozakis highlights the fundamental role of comparison and non-literal meaning in figurative language, which is particularly pertinent for stylistic analysis in poetic texts.

Types of Figurative Language

Figurative language encompasses a wide array of devices, each serving a unique purpose in enhancing expression. Based on Rozakis (1995), the following types are commonly identified:

- **Allegory:** A literary or artistic device where an abstract idea or concept is expressed through more concrete objects, characters, or narratives. For

example, the myth of Icarus allegorically warns against excessive ambition.

- **Apostrophe:** A rhetorical device where a speaker directly addresses an absent or imaginary person, an abstract concept, or an inanimate object. An example is Macbeth speaking to Duncan's absence in Shakespeare's play.
- **Simile:** A direct comparison between two fundamentally different things using connective words like "like," "as," or "than," or verbs such as "seems." For instance, "The sky looks bright at dawn, like someone rejoicing in a birth."
- **Metaphor:** A direct comparison between two dissimilar objects without using "like" or "as," creating a conceptual connection that transforms understanding. "My love is a rose" is a classic example.
- **Personification:** Attributing human characteristics or emotions to non-human entities (animals, inanimate objects, abstract concepts), thereby enhancing expressive quality. "That piece of chocolate cake is calling my name" exemplifies this.
- **Symbolism:** A literary device where a concrete, tangible object represents an abstract idea, emotion, or concept, adding deeper meaning. The use of "flower" or "butterfly" to denote delicacy is an example.
- **Metonymy:** Substituting a word or phrase with another closely associated with it, allowing the substituted term to represent the original idea. "The pen is mightier than the sword" is a common instance.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Employing words whose sounds imitate or reflect the natural noises they describe, enriching the auditory experience. Tennyson's "moan of doves" and "murmuring of innumerable bees" illustrate this.
- **Pathetic Fallacy:** Attributing human emotions or characteristics to elements of the natural world, as seen in "the ocean's cruel crawling foam."

- Oxymoron: Combining two seemingly contradictory or opposing terms to create a paradoxical effect, conveying complex or layered meanings, such as "sweet pain."

Function of Figurative Language

According to Rozakis (1999: 159), figurative language serves several key purposes in written works:

To create vivid images: Figurative language helps readers visualize or feel something more vividly and tangibly. Devices like metaphors and similes are crucial in producing descriptions that are both vivid and emotionally expressive. For instance, "Her voice was music, shooting the chaos in his mind like a gentle lullaby" artistically portrays the calming quality of a voice.

To make abstract ideas more concrete: This function transforms abstract concepts (e.g., pain, love, loss) into more tangible and perceptible experiences. By bridging intangible concepts with concrete and visual experiences, figurative expressions convey complex meanings more clearly and profoundly. Metaphors like "Time is a thief" or similes such as "His anger erupted like a volcano" make abstract ideas relatable.

To emphasize important ideas: Figurative language frequently highlights main messages, making them more prominent and memorable. It underscores particular values, themes, or perspectives intended by the writer, allowing important ideas to become clearer and more impactful. Examples include "Freedom is the oxygen of the soul" or "Their silence was louder than a thousand words."

To add emotional intensity: Figurative language significantly enhances emotional expressions. Through vivid comparisons and strong imagery, writers can convey emotions like sorrow, love, anger, or hope in a deeper and more impactful way. The metaphor "Her heart was a shattered mirror, each piece reflecting a different pain" powerfully illustrates emotional turmoil.

Research Method

The researcher employed specific research methods to obtain more in-depth and comprehensive results, as the use of appropriate research methods is crucial in achieving research objectives. This research adopts a qualitative approach, which fundamentally differs from quantitative approaches, particularly in terms of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report preparation. In this research, the primary data consists of lyrics from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album, which are examined for their use of figurative language.

This research uses two categories of data: main data and additional data. The main data comes from the song lyrics in the album *Lover* (2019) by Taylor Swift. The data is presented in the form of lyrics. The secondary data in this research was obtained from various sources such as publications in scientific journals, books, and other relevant literature, as well as referring to previous studies that discuss similar topics. In qualitative research, data collection involves four basic types: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials.

Finding and Discussion

After identifying the various types of figurative language found in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's *Lover* album, this section discusses the specific functions of these stylistic devices. The analysis focuses on how figurative language is employed in the lyrics to convey deeper and more expressive meanings. The use of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs serves not only to enhance the aesthetic quality of the lyrics but also plays a significant role in reinforcing the delivery of emotional and thematic messages. Through the use of figurative language, the lyrics become more vivid, imaginative, and emotionally touching. The following discussion presents the key functions of figurative language in the data, as categorized by Rozakis (1999).

To Create Vivid Images

Figurative language is used to help readers "see" or "feel" something more vividly and tangibly through creative language. Devices such as metaphors and similes are crucial in producing descriptions that are both vivid and emotionally expressive.

Data 1: "I once believed love would be burning red, but it's golden" (Daylight, Swift, 2019: line 31-32)

The use of strong colors like "red" and "golden" allows listeners to imagine love as something that glows or shines, helping to create clear visual images in their minds.

Data 9: "I'm drunk in the back of the car, and I cried like a baby coming home from the bar" (Cruel Summer, Swift, 2019: line 81)

The simile "cried like a baby" compares the character's crying to that of a baby, a familiar and easily imaginable image. This comparison allows the listener to envision loud, emotional crying, making the character's situation feel real and powerful.

Data 29: "I've been sleepin' so long in a twenty-year dark night" / "And now I see daylight, I only see daylight" (Daylight, Swift, 2019: line 7-8)

The phrase "twenty-year dark night" describes a long, dark period in the author's life, evoking an atmosphere full of sadness. The word "daylight" signifies happiness and new hope after a difficult period. This contrast allows listeners to easily imagine the author's journey from darkness to light.

Data 2: "I love you, ain't that the worst thing you ever heard" (Cruel Summer, Swift, 2019: line 32)

These lyrics present a strong emotional conflict. A statement of love, usually beautiful, is instead described as painful. This creates a deep emotional impression, illustrating the complicated nature of love and highlighting that it can be a source of pain, not just happiness.

Data 21: "I blew things out of proportion, now you're blue" (Afterglow, Swift, 2019: line 1)

The word "blue" is used to describe feelings of sadness. This conjures images of the color blue, closely associated with melancholy, allowing listeners to imagine a gloomy mood and feel the sadness conveyed.

Data 25: "With every guitar string scar on my hand" (Lover, Swift, 2019: line 11)

The word "scar" caused by a string becomes a tangible symbol of sacrifice in love. This serves as a vivid illustration, enabling the listener to more deeply feel the pain that has been experienced.

To Make Abstract Ideas More Concrete

This function aims to transform abstract ideas, such as pain, love, or loss, into more tangible and perceptible experiences for the listener. Through figurative language, intangible concepts are bridged with concrete and visual experiences, conveying complex meanings more clearly and profoundly.

Data 31: "Even when I lose my mind" (Afterglow, Swift, 2019: line 35)

This phrase transforms the abstract idea of losing emotional control into something more concrete. The expression "lose my mind" makes it easier for listeners to clearly imagine the author's state of distress and loss of control.

Data 14: "I like shiny things, but I'd marry you with paper rings" (Paper Rings, Swift, 2019: line: 12)

The phrase "paper rings" concretizes the abstract idea of sincere love into something real and easy to imagine, symbolizing marriage with only simple rings. This illustrates that true love does not depend on luxury, allowing listeners to feel the sacrifice and sincerity of that love more clearly.

Data 3: "The whole school is rolling fake dice" / "You play stupid games, you win stupid prizes" (Miss Americana & Heartbreak Prince, Swift, 2019: line 21-22)

These lyrics, through allegory, transform abstract societal or political issues into concrete actions ("rolling fake dice," "play stupid games") and consequences ("win stupid prizes"), making the complex feelings of disillusionment more relatable.

Data 20: "I take this magnetic force of a man to be my lover" (Lover, Swift, 2019: line 21)

The metaphor "magnetic force" concretizes the abstract idea of powerful attraction in love, making it feel physically palpable. This serves to clarify the abstract idea of love and adds emotional intensity to the lyrics.

Data 6: "Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men" (Miss Americana & Heartbreak Prince, Swift, 2019: line 27)

The phrase "boys will be boys" satirizes the tolerance of immature behavior, while the rhetorical question "where are the wise men" expresses disappointment at the lack of maturity. These lyrics emphasize important ideas about gender inequality and moral responsibility by presenting abstract societal issues in a concrete, critical tone.

To Emphasize Important Ideas

Figurative language is often used to highlight the main messages in a song, making them more prominent and memorable. It emphasizes particular values, themes, or perspectives that the songwriter intends to convey, allowing important ideas to become clearer and more impactful for the listener.

Data 33: "It's blue, the feeling I've got" (Cruel Summer, Swift, 2019: line 10)

The word "blue" symbolizes sadness. Through the use of color symbolism, the emotion is strongly emphasized without being stated explicitly, placing it at the core of the lyric's meaning and making the conveyed feeling stand out more clearly and meaningfully.

Data 34: "You gotta step into daylight and let it go" (Daylight, Swift, 2019: line 52)

The phrase "step into daylight" emphasizes the importance of moving from darkness to light—leaving the past behind and starting anew. The repeated word "daylight" reinforces the song's message, ensuring listeners understand the importance of change and freedom.

Data 26: "All the king's horses, all the king's men couldn't put me together again" (The Archer, Swift, 2019: line 32)

The metonymy "all the king's horses, all the king's men" represents immense power and authority. This emphasizes that even such great power cannot mend the author's inner wounds, highlighting the severity of emotional pain and suggesting its irreparable nature.

Data 35: "American glory faded before me" (Miss Americana & The Heartbreak Prince, Swift, 2019: line 42)

This metaphor describes the fading glory of American culture as a direct, personal experience. It emphasizes the important idea of loss of values and past glory,

conveying a sense of decline and inviting reflection on social and emotional changes over time.

Data 36: "Devils roll the dice, angels roll their eyes" (Cruel Summer, Swift, 2019: line 7)

This metaphor illustrates the opposition between risky actions and moral judgment. It emphasizes the idea that impulsive decisions ("devils roll the dice") are often met with disapproval from more morally upright individuals ("angels roll their eyes"), highlighting emotional and moral conflicts within the song.

To Add Emotional Intensity

Figurative language significantly enhances emotional expressions in writing. By employing vivid comparisons and strong imagery, writers can convey emotions such as sorrow, love, anger, or hope in a deeper and more impactful way.

Data 4: "Who could ever leave me, darling? But who could stay?" (Afterglow, Swift, 2019: line 10)

This rhetorical question expresses the lyrical character's doubt and emotional vulnerability, reflecting an inner conflict between feeling worthy of love and fearing abandonment. This adds emotional intensity and deepens the sense of loneliness.

Data 22: "I've been the archer, I've been the prey" (The Archer, Swift, 2019: line 9)

These metaphors compare the singer to an "archer" (one who hurts) and "prey" (one who is hurt). This increases emotional intensity by vividly portraying inner conflict, tension, and emotional turmoil, allowing listeners to feel the emotional pain more strongly.

Data 38: "Can I go where you go?" (Lover, Swift, 2019: line 9)

This rhetorical question, though not requiring an answer, conveys strong longing, need, and emotional dependence. It adds emotional intensity by acting as a sincere plea full of love, allowing the listener to feel the depth of the author's feelings and attachment.

Data 39: "Religion in your lips" (False God, Swift, 2019: line 15)

This metaphor equates one's lips with something sacred, like religion. It describes physical or emotional intimacy as a form of devotion and deep trust, adding emotional intensity by conveying that the relationship is not merely romantic but also spiritual and profoundly meaningful.

Data 40: "I love you, ain't that the worst thing you ever heard?" (Cruel Summer, Swift, 2019: line 39)

This rhetorical question, combined with irony, describes intense emotional conflict. It conveys that a declaration of love, usually joyful, is painful in the context of a complicated relationship, adding emotional intensity by presenting a strong inner tension between hope and pain.

Data 13: "And I hope I never lose you, hope it never ends, I'd never walk Cornelia street again" (Cornelia Street, Swift, 2019: line 52)

The repetition of "hope" and the simple sentence structure convey a profound fear of loss. This amplifies the emotional intensity, depicting both genuine hope for the relationship's longevity and a deep dread of its potential end.

Data 41: "I've got a hundred thrown-out speeches I almost said to you" (The Archer, Swift, 2019: line 4)

The hyperbole "a hundred" emphasizes the vast number of unsaid words, while "thrown-out speeches" suggests repeated attempts to compose them, ultimately unuttered due to fear or pain. This reinforces the song's emotional intensity by describing an invisible but deeply painful internal conflict.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the analysis in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes that the researcher analyzes the types of figurative language found in selected song lyrics from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album. Using Rozakis' theory and Leech's theory as the primary framework, the research identifies ten types of figurative language: allegory, apostrophe, simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism, metonymy, onomatopoeia, pathetic fallacy, and oxymoron.

The findings show that Taylor Swift employs figurative language not only for aesthetic expression but also to convey emotions and abstract ideas more vividly. For example, metaphors such as *My love is a rose* or similes like *I cried*

like a baby enhance the emotional tone of the lyrics. Personification, symbolism, and metonymy also contribute to the construction of layered meanings within her songs. Through this figurative language, Taylor Swift transforms personal experiences into poetic stories that many people can relate to. In terms of function, the figurative language in the *Lover* album serves four primary purposes to create images, to make abstract, to emphasize important ideas, and to add emotional intensity.

This research concludes that figurative language is not merely decorative but serves as a powerful means of communication in songwriting. Taylor Swift album *Lover* demonstrates how poetic language can add meaning and strengthen emotional connections in popular music.

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