

Analyzing Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's Selected Songs: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: This study explores the use of figurative language in selected songs by Taylor Swift to understand its prevalence and impact. The primary objectives are to identify the types of figurative language used and determine the most dominant form. Employing a qualitative approach, this research analyzes five songs: "Bad Blood," "Blank Space," "Look What You Made Me Do," "End Game," and "You Belong With Me." The study utilizes the theoretical framework of Kennedy and Gioia to categorize figurative language into metaphors, similes, hyperboles, repetitions, symbols, and personifications. Findings reveal that metaphors are the most dominant, accounting for 38% of the figurative language, followed by hyperboles (24%) and repetitions (16%). The results underscore the role of figurative language in enriching song lyrics, creating depth, and enhancing listener engagement. These insights provide a foundation for further exploration of figurative language in contemporary music and its relevance to literary studies.

Keywords: Figurative language, metaphor, song lyrics, Taylor Swift, literary analysis

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool for human communication, serving as a medium to express thoughts, emotions, and creativity. In literature, language takes on an artistic form, manifesting in genres such as poetry, prose, and songs. According to Halim et al. (2023), language facilitates connections and enriches interpersonal relationships through communication. Within the realm of literature, figurative language emerges as a critical element, enhancing the aesthetic and interpretative dimensions of written and oral expressions.

Figurative language encompasses devices such as metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and symbols, which convey meanings beyond their literal interpretations. As Knickerbocker and Reninger (1979) suggest, these devices enable writers to explore complex ideas and emotions through creative associations and vivid imagery. This study examines figurative language in song lyrics, a literary form that blends poetic devices with musical elements to convey nuanced messages.

There have been several studies of figurative language conducted earlier, for examples conducted by Sopiandah and Inayah (2021), Aryawan et al. (2019), Wahyuningtyas (2019), Arifah (2016) and, Koech (2013). Sopiandah and Inayah (2021) studied about the analysis of figurative language in girl on fire song lyrics by Alicia Keys. The research used descriptive qualitative method to analyze the contextual meaning of figurative language used in that song lyrics. Based on the result, there are some kinds of



figurative language used in Alicia Keys' song entitled *Girl on Fire*, such as alliteration, cliché, hyperbole, idiom, imagery, metaphor, personification, repetition, simile, and symbol. The contextual meaning of each figurative language is also clarified. The conclusion of this research is there are some kinds of figurative language use by Alicia Keys in her song titled *Girl on Fire*.

Aryawan et al. (2019) studied about a semantic analysis of figurative language found in Eminem's Song. The research used descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data through the figurative language carries non-literal meaning which helps the songwriters to convey the meaning of songs. After the data were collected, the data were analyzed by using Cresswell's theory. Based on the result, the research found that there are 136 data containing figurative language and 12 types of figurative language which are used in the song lyrics. Simile type of figurative language is mostly used in the song lyrics. Therefore, it is suggested that the students keep learning to do figurative language analysis in literary works in order to enrich their insight about figure of speech.

Wahyuningtyas (2019) studied about Language Style Seen From Figurative Language Perspective in Taylor Swift's Red Album. The research used qualitative method to collect and analyze the data through observation and library study. In this research, there are two observed such as to figure out what types of figurative language and find out what language style concluded based on the five selected songs in Red album. In this research, use Stylistic theory by Simpson to applied as the main approach to analyze the object study. Based on the result, in this study found nine kinds of figurative language such as simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony in the five selected songs from the album.

Arifah (2016) studied about Figurative Language Analysis in Five John Legend's Song. The research used the descriptive qualitative method to describe figurative language which is the study use of semantic is one of part the linguistic theory. In this research, use two theories such as Sharndama & Suleiman's theory for identifying figurative language and then use theory from Hillaby were put to support the understanding of linguistics context from the song lyrics. The research also collected the category used in the research is that readers will comprehend that such theory can be used to give a clearer better understanding of figurative language. Based on the result, the research was found in John Legend's songs lyric such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, oxymoron, paradox, symbol, allusion, and enumeration.

Koeh (2013) the research used a lexical pragmatic study. The study aimed at was to examine lexical items that form the nucleus of meaning and analysis. The study findings

affirmed that lexical items use in the selected Kipsigis songs acquire activation through encyclopedic that work as weak implicatures in the Relevance Theory. This study focuses on the linguistic nature characteristics of the songs. The result of this study, based on the analysis of figurative language there are; Metaphors, Symbolism, Personification, and proverbs which proved to be relevant in the select songs. the Relevance Theory. This study focuses on the linguistic nature characteristics of the songs. The result of this study, based on the analysis of figurative language there are; Metaphors, Symbolism, Personification, and proverbs which proved to be relevant in the select songs.

From the several research above, it shows that figurative language studies have been carried out in Alicia Keys song lyrics (Sopiansyah, 2021), Semantic analysis on Eminem's song (Aryawan, 2019), Language Style on Red Album (Wahyuningtyas, 2019), Figurative language in John Legend's song (Arifah, 2019) and, Kipsigis song lyrics (Koech, 2013). However, this study of the figurative language in this song is still a step and most of it is found in films, novels, and poetry, therefore the researcher chose to take the style of language in Taylor Swift's songs to examine what types of figurative language and the most dominant in Taylor Swift's song lyrics.

The research is guided by two primary questions: (1) What types of figurative language are used in Taylor Swift's selected songs? (2) Which form of figurative language is most dominant? By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover patterns in Swift's lyrical style and contribute to the broader understanding of figurative language in contemporary music.

Employing a qualitative methodology, the study analyzes song lyrics using theoretical framework of six figurative language types (Kennedy, 1990): metaphor, simile, hyperbole, repetition, symbol, and personification. Data were collected by listening to the selected songs, transcribing their lyrics, and identifying instances of figurative language. The analysis revealed that metaphors are the most frequently used device, appearing in 38% of the lyrics analyzed. Hyperboles (24%) and repetitions (16%) follow as the next most common forms. For instance, in the song "Bad Blood," metaphors such as "Now we got bad blood" and "Band-aids don't fix bullet holes" illustrate emotional conflicts through vivid comparisons. Similarly, "Blank Space" employs similes and hyperboles to depict the complexities of romantic relationships. These findings highlight Swift's mastery in using figurative language to evoke imagery and convey layered meanings.

This study contributes to the academic discourse on figurative language by providing insights into its application in modern music. It also underscores the importance of figurative language in engaging audiences and enhancing the emotional resonance of

lyrics. Future research could extend this analysis to other artists and genres, exploring the cultural and linguistic dimensions of figurative language in music. By focusing on the intricate use of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs, this research not only enriches the understanding of her artistry but also demonstrates the enduring relevance of literary devices in contemporary music. The findings serve as a valuable resource for educators, students, and music enthusiasts, fostering a deeper appreciation for the interplay between language and music.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the use of figurative language in Taylor Swift's selected songs. The qualitative approach is deemed appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth examination of textual data, allowing for the identification and interpretation of figurative language in song lyrics.

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, focusing on the textual content of five selected songs by Taylor Swift: "Bad Blood," "Blank Space," "Look What You Made Me Do," "End Game," and "You Belong With Me." These songs were chosen based on their popularity and the richness of their lyrical content. Expanding the selection criteria or adding songs from diverse phases of Swift's career could enhance representativeness (Warsidi, 2022, 2023; Warsidi et al., 2024; Warsidi, 2024a). The data were collected through a systematic process. First, the researcher selected and downloaded the lyrics of the chosen songs from a reliable online source. Next, the lyrics were carefully reviewed while listening to the songs to ensure accuracy and contextual understanding. Instances of figurative language were identified and categorized according to Kennedy's framework (Kennedy, 1990), which includes metaphor, simile, hyperbole, repetition, symbol, and personification.

The analysis involved several steps: transcription and initial review of the song lyrics to identify figurative language. Categorization of the identified figurative language into six types (Kennedy, 1990). Quantification of the occurrences of each type to determine the most dominant form. Interpretation of the findings in the context of the song's themes and overall narrative.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researcher cross-verified the data through multiple readings and rechecks. Additionally, the analysis was reviewed by peers familiar with figurative language and literary analysis to confirm the accuracy of categorization and interpretation (Warsidi & Adnan, 2024; Warsidi, 2024b; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024).

The study focuses exclusively on the figurative language in the selected songs by

Taylor Swift. It does not consider other aspects of the songs, such as musical composition or production. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to the English lyrics and does not account for potential cultural or linguistic nuances that may influence interpretation. Addressing these factors in future studies could provide more comprehensive insights.

By adopting this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the use and impact of figurative language in Taylor Swift's music.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and provides an analysis of the identified figurative language types across Taylor Swift's selected songs. The results address the research questions, highlighting the types of figurative language used and identifying the most dominant form.

Results

The analysis revealed six types of figurative language across the five selected songs: metaphors, similes, hyperboles, repetitions, symbols, and personifications. The distribution and frequency of these types are summarized below:

Metaphors:

Metaphors were the most frequently identified type, appearing in 38% of the analyzed lyrics. For instance, in "Bad Blood," the metaphor "Band-aids don't fix bullet holes" effectively conveys unresolved emotional conflicts.

Hyperboles:

Hyperboles constituted 24% of the figurative language, with examples like "I'm dying to see how this one ends" from "Blank Space" exaggerating emotional intensity.

Repetitions:

Repetitions accounted for 16%, as seen in "Look What You Made Me Do," where the repeated phrase "Look what you made me do" emphasizes frustration and accountability.

Similes:

Similes comprised 14%, such as "I read you like a magazine" from "Blank Space," drawing vivid comparisons to enhance imagery.

Personifications:

Personifications made up 5%, illustrated by phrases like "It's like your eyes are liquor" from "End Game," attributing human qualities to inanimate objects.

Symbols:

Symbols were the least common, at 3%, exemplified by the "rose garden filled with thorns" in "Blank Space," symbolizing beauty intertwined with pain.

DISCUSSION

The dominance of metaphors in Taylor Swift's lyrics underscores her ability to encapsulate complex emotions through vivid and relatable imagery. This finding aligns with Kennedy (1990) assertion that metaphors enhance narrative depth and audience connection. For example, metaphors in "Bad Blood" transform personal grievances into universally understood conflicts, resonating with a broad audience.

The significant presence of hyperboles and repetitions highlights their role in intensifying emotional expression and reinforcing key themes. Hyperboles, such as those in "Blank Space," dramatize the highs and lows of romantic relationships, while repetitions in "Look What You Made Me Do" amplify the song's accusatory tone.

Although less frequent, similes, personifications, and symbols add layers of meaning and artistic flair. Similes provide clarity by drawing direct comparisons, while personifications and symbols enrich the lyrical narrative with imaginative and interpretative possibilities.

These findings demonstrate that Taylor Swift's use of figurative language is not merely decorative but integral to her storytelling. Her lyrics balance accessibility and sophistication, appealing to diverse audiences while maintaining artistic integrity. Future studies could explore how cultural and linguistic nuances influence listener interpretations, broadening the scope of this research.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the significant role of figurative language in Taylor Swift's music, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing lyrical depth and audience connection. Among the five selected songs analyzed, metaphors emerged as the most dominant type of figurative language, accounting for 38% of the instances. This prevalence underscores Swift's ability to vividly convey complex emotions and themes through creative comparisons. Hyperboles and repetitions also played crucial roles, amplifying emotional intensity and emphasizing key themes in her music.

The findings highlight that figurative language is not merely an artistic embellishment but a vital tool for storytelling and emotional engagement in contemporary music. Swift's adept use of similes, personifications, and symbols further enriches her narratives, providing listeners with layered meanings and interpretative possibilities. This research contributes to the broader understanding of figurative language's impact on music and its significance in literary and cultural studies. It demonstrates how figurative language can transform lyrics into powerful expressions of personal and universal experiences.

Future studies could expand this analysis to include diverse musical genres and artists, exploring cross-cultural and linguistic nuances in figurative language usage. Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring importance of figurative language in music, reaffirming its role in connecting artists with their audiences on both an emotional and intellectual level. Taylor Swift's artistry exemplifies how figurative language can transcend mere words, creating a profound and lasting impact on listeners.

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