

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN SELECTED SONGS OF “RED” BY TAYLOR SWIFT

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the types and meanings of figurative language in Taylor Swift's song lyrics. On the surface level, figurative language cannot be translated literally. The study is descriptive qualitative, and the data are in the forms of figurative language taken from eight selected songs in Taylor Swift's album "Red" collected by documentation technique. The data are then analyzed using content analysis by referring to the framework of Knickerbocker & Reninger's theory (1985) on figurative language. From the analysis, there are 57 types of figurative language in the selected songs, namely hyperbole 31,5%, simile 19,3%, metaphor 17,5%, metonymy 5,3%, irony 3,5%, symbol 7,0%, personification 10,6%, paradox 3,5% and synecdoche 1,8%. Furthermore, the meaning of each figurative language used in the song lyrics is contextually explored and allied with the content of the song lyrics which conveys the various deep expressions of feeling and emotion of Taylor Swift as both a singer and a songwriter.

Keywords: *figurative language; song lyrics; woman singer; woman songwriter*

1. Introduction

Song lyric is generally considered as a form of literary work that uses figurative language which presents more imaginative language to attract the attention of music listeners. Song lyrics are often used by authors as a means to express feelings and various kinds of emotions. Besides, song lyrics are also used to convey certain meanings and messages through words. Song lyrics usually have different meanings and descriptions which are often sourced from the songwriter's real-life experiences. However, to understand the lyrics of the song, it requires an understanding of meaning, including figurative meaning. This figurative meaning is included in the realm of semantic studies as revealed by Kreidler (2014) that in semantic studies two kinds of meaning are studied, namely literal meaning and figurative meaning. Compared to literal language, figurative language is the inventive use of words to provide readers with imagination and interpretation of meaning in context (Lazar, 2003).

Figurative language itself is a language expression that is commonly applied in literary works. One of the literary works is song lyrics that resemble poetry. Descriptive words in figurative language have meanings that go beyond the literal meaning, namely using symbols to describe other things or events. Additionally, Figurative words function to explain, strengthen, live, stimulate, and decorate an object (Keraf, 2009: 129). They basically provide another way to enrich the additional dimension of language. Figurative language is

also called a metaphor because it means to bring meaning from the literal meaning to the figurative level. Many writers use this style of language to transfer their impressions of something to give a message that has a special effect in understanding each sentence of their work (Knickerbocker & Reninger, 1985). Correspondingly, figurative language is a way of saying something in an unusual way. In the context of literary works, the writer avoids the use of literal meaning. In short, figurative language is used to convey feelings, thoughts, and perceptions that cannot be expressed literally.

Taylor Swift's songs are songs popular that use lots of figurative languages. Besides, song lyrics are considered to be a kind of language expression which deploys variety of figurative languages, the application of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs is the focus of this study. Moreover, Taylor Swift is a famous American singer and songwriter. This is evidenced by her songs that are always hit around the world. She has been able to score many awards at a young age for her best-selling albums. In her songs, Taylor Swift usually uses various figurative languages, which possibly make some of her songs a bit difficult to understand for people who do not understand implicit and metaphorical language. In this study, several songs in the same album, namely "Red" were selected considering that those songs contain considerable number of figurative language usages. The songs selected included *All Too Well* (10 minute version), *Red*, *22*, *I Knew You Were Trouble*, *Everything Has Changes*, *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together*, *Start Again*, and *Starlight*.

Researches related to figurative language in song lyrics have previously been conducted across song genres. Some of them are the research conducted by Arditami (2017) entitled an analysis of figurative language found in Katy Perry's song "Firework", and by Milana & Ardi (2020) who analyzed figurative language in Justin Bieber's selected songs. In addition, Lusiana & Qomariana (2017) identified the figurative language used in the lyrics of selected songs in Taylor Swift's album, "1989", and Listiani (2015) explored figurative language found on the song lyric by Taylor Swift's "Speak Now" album. Similarly focusing on figurative language, Nursolihat & Kareviati (2020) identified figurative language used in the lyric of "A Whole New World" by Zayn Malik and Zhavia Ward. Another study was conducted by Dewi, Hidayat & Alek. (2020) investigating figurative language in lyric of the song "Lose You Love Me", while Permana & Winarta (2019) also studied figurative and imagery within the Fight Song. Besides, Daniswara, & Winaya (2016) examined the meaning of figurative language with reference to four Iron Maiden's songs. Fajrin & Parmawati (2021) also conducted research analyzing figurative language found in the song of Bruno Mars entitled "Grenade", while Permana & Rajeg (2018) also conducted research entitled figurative language in the song lyrics of Passenger's album "All the Little Lights". Further, other research was also conducted by Yastanti, Suhendar, & Pratama (2018) who investigated figurative language in song lyrics of "Linkin Park".

This study has the same focus as those of the previous studies, namely the analysis of figurative language and its meaning in song lyrics. However, this study investigates those figurative languages by exploring the song lyrics in the album "Red" by both the singer and the song writer Taylor Swift. As the singer and the song writer, the expression of feeling and emotion in her song lyrics is an interesting site to investigate. This research is expected to present linguistic insight regarding figurative language in popular songs by woman singer and woman songwriter.

2. Literature Review

A. Figurative Language

In semantics, the dimensions of meaning include understanding relations, grammatical and lexical elements, denotation, connotation, morphemes, homonyms, lexical ambiguity, polysemy, sentences, and meanings (Kreidler, 2014). In addition, Chaer (1994) categorizes four types of semantics which are distinguished based on the level or part of the language that is the object of research i.e. a) Lexical Semantics which is a type of semantics whose object of research is the lexicon of a language; b) Grammatical Semantics which is a type of semantics whose object of research is grammatical meanings from the morphological level; c) Syntactic Semantics which is a type of semantics whose research objectives are based on matters relating to syntax and d) Semantic Meaning which is a type of semantics that deals with the use of figurative forms, such as metaphor, irony, litotes, etc. In this study, figurative language style falls under the semantic meaning. Figurative language or often called figure of speech is a style of language used to convey a message imaginatively or figuratively with the aim that the reader or listener gets a certain effect. In general, figurative language is previously used for literary works such as poetry; nevertheless, as the resemblance of poetry, figurative language is also frequently in song lyrics.

Figurative language, according to Lazar (2003) is a form of rhetoric, the use of words in speaking and writing to convince or influence the reader. The use of language style makes the presentation of literary works more imaginative, fresh and memorable and displays an aesthetic effect. The aesthetic effect causes literary works to have artistic value. The artistic value of literary works does not mean only because of the style of language, but also because of the style of storytelling or the arrangement of the plot. However, language style is the highest indicator in the value of a literary work. Figurative language according to Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985) is also simply called a metaphor because it means to bring meaning from the literal meaning to the figurative level. Many writers use this style of language to transfer their impressions of something to give a message that has a special effect in understanding each sentence of their work. The use of specific language styles such as style figurative language in song lyrics is able to influence the listener to be able to know the song writer ideas. Through this style, the listeners are brought to feel feelings and expressions such as the expression of pleasure or anger.

Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985) proposed twelve types of figurative language i.e., metaphor, simile, symbol, personification, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole, irony, paradox, dead metaphor, imagery and allusion.

a. Simile

According to Keraf (2009: 138) simile is used to say that something is the same as other things. Simile is a comparative figure of speech. Often used to compare two things, usually denoted by a conjunction, such as like, as, than, or the verb like Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985). By using simile figure of speech, the writer can compare ideas with parables of objects or figures that have similar characteristics to the description of the idea intended by the author. For example, "He is cold as ice."

b. Metaphor

Metaphor is identical to a simile in that it compares two things, but it does not use the words "as" or "like" to use it. Metaphor is a kind of figurative language to think something in analogy (Alm-Arvius, 2003: 90; Knickerbocker & Reninger, 1985). It is a statement that one thing is another, which it is not in a literal sense. It often does not

require words like "like" or "as" to connect sentences. For example: "He is the apple of my eye."

c. Personification

Personification is an implicit comparison whose figurative term of the comparison is always human being. It is a kind of figurative language in which inanimate things, animals, and ideas are given human characteristics (Lazar, 2003). Personification can have a significant impact on the reader's perceptions. For example: "broken-hearted songs can pull me into painful memories."

d. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figurative language in which a word is used to declare other things, because they have close relationship (Knickerbocker & Reninger, 1985). It is a figure of speech in which one object's name is replaced by another that is closely related to it. For example: "Can you give me a hand carrying this box up the stairs?".

e. Symbol

The symbol, *symbollein*, is taken from Greek and used as a verb that means to match. Alm-Arvius (2003) refers a symbol as something that is used to represent or is thought to represent something else. A symbol, more precisely, is a word, phrase, or other utterance with several, interrelated meanings. For example: "She had a voice like a thunder".

f. Synecdoche

Keraf (2009: 142) argues that synecdoche is a figurative language that uses part of something to express the whole (*pas pro toto*) or on the contrary uses the whole to state a part (*totem pro parte*). As an example: "All eyes on you".

g. Paradox

The word paradox refers to a type of language that integrates claims that oppose each other. In English, contradiction could refer to the absence of truce among truths, interpretations, and actions (Picken, 2007). For example: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself".

h. Hyperbole

Hyperbole according to Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985) is a language style that contains an embellished statement, by exaggeration. Additionally, hyperbole is a kind of language style that contains an exaggerated statement, by overstating something that is expressed excessively (Keraf, 2009). For example: "Salsa has a heart like an angel".

i. Irony

The style of irony comes from the word *eironeia* which means pretend or deception. Irony language style is a reference in which someone expresses something with a different meaning to what is actually meant (Knickerbocker & Reninger, 1985). "Irony is a figure of speech in which words are utilized in such a way that their intended meaning is distinct from the real meaning of the words" (Keraf, 2009: 143). In simple terms, it is the distinction between appearance and actuality. For example: "Your room is so tidy that nothing in the corner of the room is not covered in paper waste".

B. Song Lyrics

An element that is significant in a song is the lyrics of the song. Song lyric is an expression of the soul or feelings, which are poured in the form of words or sentences (Ali, 2006). The lyrics of the song generally tell something to the audience listener, it can be a sad story, a happy heart, a love, longing, and so on. In addition, a song is like a stylistic vocal game and word meaning deviation is a language game in creating song lyrics. Besides, musical notation and melodies adapted to the lyrics are used to amplify the lyrics, so that listeners get carried away with what the author was thinking. Through the lyrics of the song in the form of messages as well as spoken words and sentences, the function is to create an atmosphere and image of imagination to the listener and create various meanings. The function of the song as a medium of communication is to sympathize with reality and imaginative stories.

Song lyrics are included in the literary genre because the lyrics are literary works (similar to poetry) that contain an outpouring of personal feelings in the wording of a song (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003: 678). Hence, the lyrics are analogous with poetry but served with songs that belong to the genre of imaginative literature. Every song must have a specific purpose to be conveyed to the public as listeners. The song contains a line of words that well assembled in an interesting style by the composer and delivered in the beautiful voice of the singer. In this study, the researcher explores the figurative language in the lyrics of the selected songs by Taylor Swift in the album "Red" because they have a variety of interesting lyrics written by their own singer.

3. Research Method

This research is descriptive qualitative, and it is designed to identify the types and the meaning of figurative language in selected song lyrics taken from Taylor Swift's songs in the album entitled RED which was released in 2012 i.e., "All Too Well (10 mins version)" were "Red", "22", "Everything Has Changed", "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together", "I Knew You Were Trouble", "Begin Again", and "Starlight". The data were collected by documentation technique and were analyzed deploying content analysis by referring to the theory of figurative language by Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985).

In the process, the data are converted into code with the following details: to indicate the title of the song using the code D(no)/title/album title. For example, for the Red song on the Red album, the code is written as follows: D1/R/R. Then for the next song with the title All Too Well, it is written D2/ATW/R. Meanwhile, to show each song's lyrics along with the type of figurative language, use the following code; single data along with numbering (datum)/type of figurative language/number. For example, for the lyrics of the song "But something about it felt like home somehow" identified simile, the code used is Datum 1/Si/1. The next example in the lyrics "Autumn leaves falling down like pieces into place" is also identified as simile, so the code used is as follows Datum 2/Si/2.

4. Results and Discussion

From the selected song in 'Red' album by Taylor Swift, 57 figurative languages were collected and nine figurative languages were found. In addition; those figurative languages can be categorized and summarized in the following table:

No.	Kind of Fig Lang	No of Occurance	Percentage
1	Simile	11	19,3%
2	Hyperbole	18	31,5%
3	Metaphor	10	17,5%
4	Metonymy	3	5,3%
5	Symbol	4	7,0%
6	Irony	2	3,5%
7	Personification	6	10,6%
8	Paradox	2	3,5%
9	Synecdoche	1	1,8%
Total	100%		

Table 1. Kinds of figurative language

The researchers chose eight songs from the same album, namely Taylor Swift's Red album. The songs are All Too Well (10 mins version), Red, 22, Everything Has Changed, We are Never Ever Getting Back Together, I Knew You were Trouble, Begin Again and Starlight. This research has found nine figurative languages i.e. hyperbole, simile, metaphor, metonymy, personification, irony, paradox, symbol, and synecdoche. The most common figurative language found is hyperbole. This is reinforced by the many lyrics that seem exaggerated to attract listeners' attention. Considering that most of the songs performed by Taylor Swift use figurative language, it is not surprising that a lot of figurative language was found. For a detailed explanation, here is an explanation of each figurative language along with its contextual meaning.

a. Simile

Simile is a comparison of two things, usually denoted by a connective, such as like, as, than, or a verb like resembles. In general, a simile is a sort of figurative language used to describe the similarity of two objects (in shape, colour, characteristic etc). Some of the songs below include the type of Simile: "But something bout it felt like home somehow" (D2/ATW/R).

These lyrics are in the song All Too Well (10 mins version). This lyric contains a simile figure of speech because it is reinforced by the word "like" which means to show an explicit comparison. The contextual meaning contained in this lyric is that "she" feels comfortable when with "him". *Felt like home* means comfortable. Home is associated with a comfortable place.

b. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech in which something is exaggerated in order to emphasize the information in the sentence. "That magic's not here no more" (D2/ATW/R). This lyric is in the song All Too Well (10 mins version). This lyric includes hyperbole because the sentence is exaggerated to achieve a meaning. In this lyric the word "magic" means love. Therefore, the contextual meaning is that there is no longer love that is felt in the relationship.

c. Metaphor

Metaphor is one of the figures of speech that uses analogies or parables. Metaphor is also defined as a word or phrase that is used to refer to something else to show how similar

the two things are. Some of the songs below include the type of Metaphor including “Wind in my hair” (D2/ATW/R). This lyric is in the song All Too Well (10 min version). This lyric contain metaphor because word “wind” is used as an analogy of “flowing hair”.

d. Metonymy

Metonymy is the use of a substitute name for an object in the form of a characteristic, attribute, or brand. Some of the songs below include the type of Metonymy including;

“Your cheeks were turning red” (D2/ATW/R). This lyric is in the song All Too Well. This lyric contains metonymy because the word “turning red” means blushing. The contextual meaning of this lyric is that his cheeks are blushing.

e. Symbol

A symbol is an object that describes or symbolizes another object. Some of the songs below include the type of Symbol for example “You were tossing me the car keys” (D2/ATW/R). This lyric is in the song All Too Well. This lyric contains symbol because “tossing me the car keys” means asking to drive the car. The contextual meaning of this lyric is “he” asked “her” to drive the car.

f. Irony

Irony is a satire figure of speech where the definition of irony is a style of language that contains statements that are very contradictory or inversely proportional to the actual situation. The instance is “fuck the patriarchy”, key chain on the ground” (D2/ATW/R); This lyric is in the song All Too Well (10 mins version). This lyric contains Irony because the sentence “fuck the patriarchy” is a satire on people who think that women cannot do anything, while in fact, women can lead her own life.

g. Personification

Personification is language style that gives the nature or behavior of inanimate objects. This lyric is an example of the type of Personification: “A never-needy, ever-lovely jewel whose shine reflects on you” (D2/ATW/R). This lyric is in the song All Too Well (10 mins version). It contains personification because it uses the word “jewel” as a retainer of the characteristic of inanimate objects with human. The contextual meaning of this lyric is that “she” thinks that her boyfriend was valuable and amazing just like the jewel.

h. Paradox

Paradox figure of speech is a figure of speech whose meaning is contrary to the existing words. “For breakfast at midnight” (D3/22/R), this lyric is in the song 22. This lyric contains paradox because “breakfast” is usually used for morning eating. But in this lyric, the contextual meaning is they having fun until forget the time.

i. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is figure of speech that states something in its entirety or states the whole for a part. “When you said you needed space” (D5/WNGBT/R), This lyric is in the song We are Never Ever Getting Back Together. This lyric contains synecdoche because it states the whole for a part of “space”.

This study revealed several figurative languages contained in the selected songs belonging to Taylor Swift. The finding showed that the type of figurative language that most often appears is hyperbole with a frequency of eighteen times with a percentage of 31.5%. While the type of figurative language that least frequently appears is Synecdoche with the frequency of occurrence only once with a percentage of 1.8%. Further, Hyperbole being the dominant figurative language might indicate that the songwriter, Taylor Swift, uses hyperbole as an implicit expression in giving emotional and dramatic effects excessively in each verse of the song. Taylor Swift's song themes mostly contain possible implicit meanings such as heartbreak, complicated love, and so on. Hence, hyperbole is regarded the most appropriate figurative language to emphasize those themes.

In addition, out of twelve figurative languages as proposed in Knickerbrocker & Reninger's theory (1985), there are only nine figurative language that found in this study. This could be because the figurative language found is in accordance with the interpretation of the song lyrics under study. The three figurative languages that are not included in the song's lyrics are Onomatopoeia, Allegory and Allusio. The three figurative languages are not included in the song lyrics studied because they are not in accordance with the themes of Taylor Swift's song lyrics.

Further, the result of this study is in alignment with the previous studies, particularly those by Lusiana & Qomariana (2017), Dewi, Hidayat & Alek (2020), Yastanti, Suhendar, & Pratama (2018) and Fajrin (2021), who investigated the figurative language from song lyrics, and resulted the research findings that the most dominant figurative languages are hyperbole because the song messages about negative things such as pain heart, and treachery are very deep.

Based on the previous studies above, the results of their research and the results of this study have the same findings, namely analyzing the types and meaning of figurative language. Nevertheless, this study applied the theory of figurative language by Knickerbrocker & Reninger (1985) on the song lyrics sung and written by the same singer and songwriter i.e., Taylor Swift.

Moreover, this study also confirms the application of the types of figurative language as proposed by Knickerbrocker & Reninger (1985) on song lyrics. While in their seminal book "Interpreting Literature" they proposed twelve types of figurative language, this study showed that Taylor Swift only uses nine types of figurative language to support her in conveying messages about the eight selected songs. This highlights that the variety of figurative language in song lyrics can also be determined by the genre and the theme of the song, therefore; not all types of figurative language must presence in a song lyric or even in an album.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed eight Taylor Swift's songs from one album "Red". In general, all the songs that have been investigated are based on the life experiences of Taylor Swift. Figurative language in this case. The hyperbole and figurative imagery of Taylor Swift's songs are dominant because most of the context of the song's lyrics is the depiction and emphasis of conflict, heartache and deep betrayal. The lyrics are mostly conveying deep feeling and emotion, so the words used in the song are exaggerated by comparing the original meaning with the explicit words.

This research is hoped to be applicable for students to elaborate the types of figurative language as a learning resource. It is also hoped that further researchers will be

able to analyze figurative language on more various song genres and from different language perspectives.

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