

Analysis of Figurative Language in Selected Taylor Swift's *Lover* Album and Its Contribution to English Learning

Nahdawati

nahdazulkuflimappidalle@gmail.com

Rahmatul Ummu Arifin

rahmatulummu@gmail.com

Sitti Hawaena

sittihawaena123@gmail.com

Uswatun Hasanah

uswatunuswa010599@gmail.com

Nanda Safitri

syafitrinanda206@gmail.com

**Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Abdul Mujib Laewang
Dampal Selatan**

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the types of figurative language found in selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album and to interpret their meanings, as well as examine how these figurative languages contribute to English learning. The study focuses on three songs, *Cruel Summer*, *The Archer*, and *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, and applies the theories of Siswantoro (2002), Leech (1981), and Krashen (1982). Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through document analysis and open ended questions. The results identified seven types of figurative language: metaphor, symbol, hyperbole, personification, simile, paradox, and synecdoche. Metaphor and symbol were the most frequently used types, followed by hyperbole, personification, simile, paradox, and synecdoche. These figurative expressions conveyed abstract emotional experiences such as heartbreak, longing, vulnerability, and self-reflection. The findings also show that analyzing figurative language through song lyrics supports English learning by providing meaningful input, enriching vocabulary, and fostering interpretative thinking. The use of authentic materials such as songs creates an affective learning environment that aligns with Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory, particularly the Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis. In conclusion, integrating figurative language analysis through song offers both linguistic and emotional value, making song lyrics a meaningful and engaging medium in the context of English learning.

Keywords: Figurative Language; Song Lyrics; English Learning; Taylor Swift; SLA Theory

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental aspect of human communication, serving as a medium for expressing thoughts, emotions, and ideas. It is a complex system of symbols and sounds that enables individuals to convey meaning and interact with one another. Throughout history, language has evolved alongside human civilization, influencing cultural development, social interactions, and artistic expression. One of the most significant functions of language is its role in literature and music, where it becomes a powerful tool for storytelling and emotional connection (Crystal, 2019).

In the context of literature, language is used to construct narratives, develop characters, and evoke emotions. Writers employ various linguistic devices, including figurative language, to enhance the depth and impact of their works (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Similarly, music, particularly songs, integrates language through lyrics, allowing artists to communicate messages, share experiences, and engage listeners on a deeper level. The combination of melody and language makes songs an effective medium for emotional expression and cultural storytelling (Frith, 2020).

One of the most compelling aspects of song lyrics is the use of figurative language, which adds layers of meaning and artistic value to the text. Figurative language includes devices such as metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole, which enhance the expressiveness of a song (Siswantoro, 2002). Through figurative language, songwriters can convey emotions, create vivid imagery, and engage listeners beyond the literal meanings of words. However, despite its artistic value, figurative language can pose challenges for non-native English speakers, as its interpretation often requires an understanding of cultural context and symbolic meanings (Leech, 1981).

Taylor Swift is one of the most influential singer-songwriters in contemporary music, known for her lyrical depth and poetic storytelling. Her 2019 album *Lover* is particularly notable for its extensive use of figurative language, making it a rich source for linguistic analysis. The album explores themes of love, self-reflection, and personal growth, employing metaphors, symbolism, and imagery to enhance its messages (Petrusich, 2020). The selection of *Lover* as the focus of this study is based on several factors. First, the album represents a blend of contemporary and poetic song writing. Second, Taylor Swift's global popularity ensures that students are already familiar with her music, increasing engagement and motivation in the learning process. Lastly, the album's themes are relevant to young adults, making it easier for students to relate to the lyrics and comprehend their figurative meanings.

The participants in this study are English Education students at STKIP ABMUL Dampal Selatan, as they would have obtained foundational knowledge and skills in English language acquisition during the first semester. Incorporating authentic

materials like song lyrics in English learning is becoming an important pedagogical approach. By analysing the figurative language in *Lover*, the researcher can explore how songs can be used as instructional materials to enhance students' comprehension and engagement in learning English. This aligns with the principles of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful input in language learning (Krashen, 1982).

In summary, language serves as a powerful tool for communication, artistic expression, and education. Figurative language, in particular, plays a significant role in enhancing the depth and impact of song lyrics, making them valuable materials for English learning. However, understanding figurative language poses challenges for non-native speakers, highlighting the need for engaging and authentic learning resources. This study focuses on analyzing the figurative language in selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album and its contributions to English learning. The album was chosen due to its lyrical richness and global appeal, while English Education students at STKIP ABMUL Dampal Selatan were selected as participants to explore the practical applications of figurative language in language learning. By examining how figurative language influences comprehension and pedagogy, this research aims to provide insights into song based English learning and its implications for future educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Figurative language is a form of language use that goes beyond literal meaning in order to create deeper expression, vivid imagery, and emotional impact. It is widely found in literary works, daily communication, and song lyrics because it allows writers and speakers to express abstract ideas in a more creative and meaningful way. According to Colston (2015) and Verdonk (2017), figurative language helps convey complex thoughts by using expressions that require interpretation beyond their surface meanings. Perrine (1982) and Larson (1997) also explain that figurative language enriches meaning, stimulates imagination, and strengthens the aesthetic value of language. Therefore, figurative language plays an important role in understanding how language functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium of artistic and emotional expression.

Siswanto (2002) classifies figurative language into several types, including metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, paradox, and symbol. A metaphor is an implicit comparison between two different things without using comparative words, while a simile compares two things explicitly by using words such as "like" or "as." Personification gives human characteristics to non-human objects, animals, or abstract ideas, making the description more vivid and emotionally expressive. Hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration used to emphasize meaning or emotional intensity. Synecdoche refers to the use of a part to represent the whole or the whole to represent a part. Meanwhile, paradox presents a seemingly contradictory statement that reveals a deeper truth, and symbol refers to

an object, word, or image that represents a broader abstract meaning. These types of figurative language are useful for analyzing song lyrics because they help reveal the emotional and poetic qualities of the text.

Meaning is another important concept in language analysis because it helps readers or listeners understand the message conveyed in a text. Leech (1981) categorizes meaning into seven types: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning. However, this study focuses on conceptual meaning, which refers to the literal or basic meaning of a word. Conceptual meaning, also known as denotative meaning, is considered the core of linguistic communication because it provides the direct meaning of a word without emotional or cultural associations. Larson (1997) states that conceptual meaning is usually the first meaning learned by language learners and is closely connected to real-world references. In analyzing figurative language, identifying conceptual meaning is important because it helps clarify the literal basis of an expression before interpreting its figurative meaning.

In the context of Taylor Swift's *Lover* album, conceptual meaning is used to interpret figurative expressions found in selected songs. Since figurative language often contains symbolic, emotional, or comparative elements, understanding the literal meaning of words and phrases becomes the first step in revealing their deeper meaning. For example, metaphors and symbols in song lyrics may not be understood only through their dictionary meanings, but their conceptual meanings help guide interpretation. By analyzing both literal and figurative meanings, learners can understand how language is used creatively to express feelings such as love, heartbreak, longing, vulnerability, and self-reflection. Thus, the study of meaning supports a deeper understanding of how figurative language functions within song lyrics.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the process by which individuals learn a language other than their first language. Ellis (1997) explains that SLA involves both natural exposure and formal instruction, which together contribute to language development. One influential theory in SLA is Krashen's theory, particularly the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1982) argues that learners acquire language effectively when they receive comprehensible input, or language input that is slightly above their current level of competence. This concept is known as $i+1$. In relation to this study, song lyrics can serve as authentic and meaningful input because they expose learners to real English expressions, vocabulary, sentence structures, and figurative language in an engaging context.

The affective filter hypothesis explains that emotional factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence influence language acquisition. When learners are motivated and relaxed, they are more likely to absorb language input effectively. Murphey (1992) argues that songs support language learning because rhythm, repetition, and melody can improve pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and

listening comprehension. Songs also create an enjoyable learning atmosphere that may lower students' anxiety and increase their interest in learning English. Therefore, analyzing figurative language in Taylor Swift's *Lover* album can contribute to English learning by providing authentic input, enriching vocabulary, developing interpretation skills, and encouraging critical thinking. In this way, song lyrics become not only a source of entertainment but also a meaningful medium for supporting second language acquisition.

METHODS

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to examine how students identify and interpret figurative language in selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album and how this activity contributes to English learning. A qualitative descriptive design was considered appropriate because the study focused on students' interpretations, experiences, and reflections rather than numerical measurement. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore the deeper meanings behind students' understanding of figurative expressions in song lyrics and their relevance to language learning. The subjects of this research were English Education students from the Class of 2023, along with the researcher. The students participated by identifying and interpreting figurative language in the selected song lyrics and by answering reflective questions related to their learning experience. The researcher also conducted an independent analysis of the lyrics and guided the students during the research process. This involvement allowed the researcher to compare students' interpretations with the theoretical framework used in the study.

The object of this research was figurative language found in three selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album, namely "Cruel Summer," "The Archer," and "Death by a Thousand Cuts." These songs were chosen because they contain rich figurative expressions that are suitable for linguistic and educational analysis. The figurative language analyzed in this study included metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, paradox, and symbol. These songs were also considered relevant for English learning because they provide authentic language input and emotionally engaging content for students.

Instruments and Procedures

The data in this study were collected through document analysis and open-ended questions. Document analysis was used to examine figurative language found in selected song lyrics by referring to Siswantoro's classification of figurative language and Leech's theory of conceptual meaning. Open-ended questions were used to explore students' experiences in interpreting figurative language and its contribution to their English learning. The data collection techniques consisted of several stages. First, the researcher analyzed the selected song lyrics independently by identifying types of figurative language based on Siswantoro's classification and

interpreting their meanings using Leech's framework of conceptual meaning. Second, the researcher validated the findings through supervisor triangulation to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis. Third, students conducted their own analysis of the selected song lyrics by identifying and interpreting figurative expressions. Fourth, students answered open-ended questions related to their learning experiences, the challenges they faced, and the benefits of analyzing figurative language in song lyrics. The students' responses were examined using Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory, especially the Input Hypothesis. This theory was used because it emphasizes the importance of meaningful and comprehensible input in language acquisition. In this study, song lyrics were viewed as authentic input that could help students improve comprehension, vocabulary, interpretation skills, and engagement in English learning.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, summarized, and categorized relevant data from document analysis and students' responses. The data were grouped based on the types of figurative language, the meanings of the expressions, students' interpretations, and their reflections on English learning. In the data display stage, the findings were organized into tables and descriptive explanations. The tables were used to present the types of figurative language found in the selected songs, while the descriptive explanations were used to explain students' interpretations and learning reflections. This stage helped the researcher identify similarities and differences between the researcher's analysis and students' interpretations. In the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher identified patterns from the findings and connected them with Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory, particularly the role of song lyrics as meaningful and comprehensible input. The conclusions focused on how figurative language analysis helped students understand deeper meanings in English texts, develop critical thinking, improve vocabulary awareness, and increase their engagement in English learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the three selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Lover* album, namely "Cruel Summer," "The Archer," and "Death by a Thousand Cuts," revealed that the lyrics contain various forms of figurative language. Based on Siswanto's classification, seven types of figurative language were identified: metaphor, symbol, hyperbole, personification, simile, paradox, and synecdoche. These figures of speech were found to play an important role in constructing emotional expression, poetic imagery, and deeper meaning in the selected lyrics. The most dominant types of figurative language found in the selected songs were metaphor and symbol, each appearing ten times. Metaphor was used to express abstract

emotions through concrete images, while symbol was used to represent deeper emotional and psychological meanings. These two types appeared frequently because the songs mainly discuss complex emotional experiences such as love, heartbreak, vulnerability, longing, and inner conflict.

Hyperbole appeared eight times in the selected lyrics. This type of figurative language was used to exaggerate emotional experiences and emphasize the intensity of pain, sadness, or desire. Expressions such as “killing me slow” and “death by a thousand cuts” show how exaggeration creates a stronger emotional impact. Through hyperbole, the lyrics become more expressive and allow listeners to feel the emotional pressure experienced by the speaker. Personification appeared five times in the selected songs. This type was found in lyrics that give human qualities to abstract ideas or inanimate objects. For example, expressions such as “flashbacks waking me up” and “I ask the traffic lights if it’ll be alright” show that memories and traffic lights are presented as if they could act or respond like humans. This makes the lyrics more vivid, dramatic, and emotionally engaging.

Simile and paradox each appeared four times in the selected lyrics. Simile was used to create clear comparisons, such as comparing crying to a baby or pacing like a ghost. These comparisons help listeners visualize emotional conditions more easily. Meanwhile, paradox was used to express contradiction, confusion, and inner conflict. Paradoxical expressions show that emotional experiences in relationships are often complex and inconsistent. Synecdoche was the least frequent type of figurative language, appearing only two times. Although it occurred less often, synecdoche still contributed to the meaning of the lyrics. This type was found when parts of the body or certain physical elements were used to represent the whole person or emotional self. For example, the use of body parts in the lyrics suggests that the speaker gives her whole self emotionally in a relationship.

The students’ interpretations showed that they were generally able to identify and explain the meaning of figurative expressions in the selected songs. Most students could relate the figurative language to emotional conditions such as sadness, confusion, longing, and heartbreak. However, some students experienced difficulty in interpreting abstract expressions, especially symbols and paradoxes, because these types require deeper contextual understanding. The open-ended responses also showed that analyzing figurative language through song lyrics contributed positively to English learning. Most students stated that the activity helped them improve vocabulary, understand non-literal meanings, and become more interested in learning English. Songs were also considered more enjoyable than conventional textbook materials because they provided emotional connection, authentic language input, and motivation for learning.

Table 1. Distribution of Figurative Language in Selected Songs from Taylor Swift’s Lover Album

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Frequency	Example Lyric	General Meaning / Function

1	Metaphor	10	“Fever dream high in the quiet of the night”	Represents intense and surreal emotional experience
2	Symbol	10	“Blue” / “The Archer” / “Invisible smoke”	Represents sadness, vulnerability, or hidden suffering
3	Hyperbole	8	“Death by a thousand cuts”	Exaggerates emotional pain and heartbreak
4	Personification	5	“Flashbacks waking me up”	Gives human qualities to memories or objects
5	Simile	4	“I cried like a baby”	Creates direct comparison to clarify emotion
6	Paradox	4	“What doesn’t kill me makes me want you more”	Shows contradiction and inner emotional conflict
7	Synecdoche	2	“My heart, my hips, my body, my love”	Uses parts of the body to represent the whole self
Total		43		

The findings show that figurative language plays a significant role in strengthening the meaning of Taylor Swift’s selected song lyrics. The use of metaphor, symbol, hyperbole, personification, simile, paradox, and synecdoche demonstrates that song lyrics are not only forms of entertainment but also literary texts rich in linguistic and emotional value. Through figurative language, the songs communicate feelings that cannot always be expressed effectively through literal language. Metaphor and symbol were the most frequently found types of figurative language. This finding indicates that Taylor Swift’s lyrics rely heavily on indirect expression and symbolic imagery. Metaphors such as “summer’s a knife” and “I’ve been the archer, I’ve been the prey” transform emotional experiences into concrete images. These expressions allow listeners and students to understand abstract feelings such as pain, fear, and vulnerability in a more imaginative way.

The frequent use of symbols also shows that the lyrics contain layered meanings. Words such as “blue,” “garden gate,” “ghost,” and “invisible smoke” do not only carry literal meanings but also represent emotional states. For example, “blue” may symbolize sadness, while “invisible smoke” suggests hidden pain. In English learning, this type of analysis encourages students to move beyond dictionary meanings and interpret language based on context. Hyperbole contributes to the

emotional intensity of the songs. Expressions such as “killing me slow” and “death by a thousand cuts” are not meant to be understood literally. Instead, they dramatize heartbreak and emotional suffering. For students, recognizing hyperbole is important because it helps them understand how English speakers often use exaggeration to express strong feelings in creative and informal contexts.

Personification also enriches the lyrics by making abstract ideas and objects appear alive. When the lyrics mention “flashbacks waking me up” or traffic lights responding to a question, they create dramatic emotional scenes. This helps students understand how language can be used creatively to describe psychological conditions. Personification also supports students’ ability to recognize imagery and emotional tone in English texts. Although simile, paradox, and synecdoche appeared less frequently, they still have meaningful contributions. Simile helps clarify emotion through direct comparison, making the lyrics easier to visualize. Paradox reflects emotional contradiction, especially in relationships where love and pain exist together. Synecdoche represents the whole self through body parts or specific elements, showing emotional involvement in a compact but powerful way.

The students’ responses indicate that song lyrics can support English learning by providing authentic and meaningful input. This finding is relevant to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. The lyrics expose students to real English expressions, vocabulary, idioms, and figurative structures. Although some expressions are challenging, they encourage students to infer meaning from context. The use of songs also supports Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis because students reported greater motivation and emotional engagement. When students enjoy the learning material, they tend to feel more relaxed and interested in the learning process. Therefore, figurative language analysis through songs can be considered an effective learning activity because it improves vocabulary, develops interpretative thinking, increases motivation, and creates a more meaningful English learning experience.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on analyzing figurative language found in selected songs from Taylor Swift’s *Lover* album, namely *Cruel Summer*, *The Archer*, and *Death by a Thousand Cuts*. The study aimed to identify the types of figurative language used, interpret their meanings using Leech’s (1981) theory of conceptual meaning, and explore their contribution to English learning based on Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition Theory (1982). The findings revealed seven types of figurative language, as classified by Siswantoro (2002): metaphor, symbol, hyperbole, personification, simile, paradox, and synecdoche. Among these, metaphor and symbol appeared most frequently, each occurring ten times. Hyperbole followed with eight occurrences, personification with five, simile and paradox with four each, and synecdoche with two. The distribution of these types was influenced by the lyrical content of the songs, not by any particular difficulty

in interpretation. The high frequency of metaphor and symbol shows their central role in expressing emotional depth and poetic imagery in the selected songs.

The figurative expressions in the lyrics conveyed various emotional experiences such as longing, heartbreak, vulnerability, and internal conflict. Through the lens of conceptual meaning, these figures of speech were shown to represent abstract feelings through vivid and relatable imagery. Figurative language not only enhances the aesthetic richness of lyrics but also carries layered meanings that stimulate critical interpretation. This demonstrates its potential to support English learning by encouraging deeper comprehension and analytical skills. The use of figurative language in song lyrics can be an effective and enjoyable tool to support English learning. It not only provides linguistic and semantic enrichment but also offers emotional and motivational benefits for students.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1957). A Glossary of Literary Terms. In *College Composition and Communication* (Vol. 8, Issue 4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/354930>
- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Colston, H. L. (2015). Using Figurative Language. In *Mind, Metaphor and Language Teaching*. New York:Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. In *Jurnal Sains dan Seni ITS* (4th ed., Vol. 6, Issue 1). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. & P. C. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among 5 Approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Fahnestock, J. (2017). Rhetorical Style:The Uses of Language in Persuasion. In *Jurnal Sains dan Seni ITS* (Vol. 6, Issue 1). Oxford University Press.
- Frith, S. (2020). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Harvard University Press.
- Glucksberg, S. (2008). Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphor to Idioms. In *Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphor to Idioms*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195111095.001.0001>
- Habibi, M. S. (2016). *An Analysis of Figurative Language in Edensor Novel by Andrea Hirata*. 1–66.
- Hickok, G., & Small, S. L. (2019). Neurobiology of Language. In *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16999-6_3334-2
- Johnson, E. B. (2002). *Contextual Teaching and Learning: What It Is and Why It Is Here to Stay*. Corwin Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Larson. (1997). *Meaning-Based-Translation-M-L-larson.pdf* (p. 294). USA:

University of America.

- Leech, G. (1981). *Geoffrey leech semantics* (2nd ed.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Lynch, L. M. (2008). *Using Music to Promote Learning in the ESL Classroom*. The TESL Journal.
- Medina, S. L. (2002). *Using Music to Enhance Second Language Acquisition: From Theory to Practice: Language, Literacy, and Academic Development for English Language Learners*. Pearson Education.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Method Sourcebook (3rd edition)*. SAGE Publications.
- Murphey, T. (1992). *Music and Song*. Oxford University Press.
- Petrusich, A. (2020). Taylor Swift's *Lover* is an album of recalibration. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com>
- Pym, A. (2014). Exploring translation theories, Second edition. In *Exploring Translation Theories, Second Edition*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315857633>
- Sharndama, E. C., & Suleiman, J. B. A. (2013). *An analysis of figurative languages in two selected traditional funeral songs of the Kilba people of Adamawa State*. 4(4), 166–173. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEL12.156>
- Simpson, P. (2014). *Stylistic: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge.
- Siswanto. (2002). *Analisis puisi: Sebuah pengantar teori dan praktik*. Pusat Penerbitan Universitas Terbuka.
- Verdonk, P. (2017). The Stylistics of Poetry. In *Jurnal Sains dan Seni ITS* (Vol. 6, Issue 1). 50 Bedford Square 1385 London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Willman, Chris. *Album Review: Taylor Swift's 'Lover'*. Variety, 23 Aug. 2019.