

AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE ON THE SONG LYRIC “STYLE” BY TAYLOR SWIFT

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ABSTRACT

This study entitled *An Analysis of Figurative Language on the Song Lyric “Style” by Taylor Swift’s* aims to find out the types of figurative language used in Taylor Swift lyrics and to describe the contextual meaning of the figurative language used in Taylor’s lyrics. The research data was obtained from Taylor Swift’s song entitled Style. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method such as observation and library research in collecting research data. The researchers used qualitative theory which goes through a series of steps and iterations: gathering data, examining data, comparing prior data to newer data and developing new data to gather. After analyzing and discussing the lyrics of the song titled Style by Taylor Swift, the researchers can conclude that there are many types of figurative language found in this study. In this study, figurative language found is personification, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, repetition, allusion, consonance and irony. Thus, we can see that the listeners of the song can interpret a song better.

Keywords: figurative language, qualitative, descriptive analysis, song.

INTRODUCTION

Language is very important for communication in society. We cannot communicate in a genuine sense without language. Language is art because through language we can share everything which is related especially to literal work that is usually used in the art of language or usually called figurative language. It is applied in any communication forms such as in conversation, article, novel, song lyric, poem, newspaper and so on.

According to Knickerbocker (1963: 637), “figurative language is also called metaphorical language or simply metaphor because it means to carry the meaning from literal meaning to the figurative level.” Many authors use this kind of language style for transferring their impression of something to give special effects in understanding every sentence of their works. There are plenty of ways to express our feelings through language such as writing a song.

A song is one of the media used to express the feeling which is sung by the human voice, it is interesting to be analyzed because many varieties of words can be found in the song lyrics. Song is one of the familiar literatures in the listener's ear. According to Jamal's (1988:5) reveals that "songs can be described as art works in singing to musical instruments accompaniment." In addition, Hornby USA (1995) can be defined "song as a short rhyme or set of verses in music and aimed to be sung."

Taylor Swift is known for her poetic and expressive lyrical writing style. She often uses figurative language to convey emotional stories in her songs. This makes the lyrics interesting to analyze from the point of view of figurative language. Swift uses various types of allusion language in her lyrics, such as metaphor, hyperbole, simile, personification, irony and others. Swift song lyrics are very accessible and widely available. This makes it easier for researchers to collect data and analyze the use of figurative language in their songs.

Song lyrics often serve as a powerful medium for storytelling, conveying emotions and themes through carefully crafted language. One of the key elements that enhance lyrical depth is figurative language, which allows artists to create vivid imagery, symbolism, and emotional resonance. Taylor Swift, known for her evocative songwriting, frequently employs various literary devices to enrich her music. This study focuses on her song "Style" from the 1989 album, analyzing the different types of figurative language used and their impact on the song's meaning and listener interpretation. By examining how Swift integrates metaphor, imagery, symbolism, personification, and repetition, this research aims to demonstrate how figurative language contributes to the emotional and artistic value of contemporary music.

This study was focused on analyzing the kinds of figurative language that occur in Taylor Swift song lyrics *Style*. Taylor Swift was born on December 13, 1989. She is a ten-time Grammy winner, the youngest recipient in history of the music industry's highest honor, the Grammy Award for Album of the Year and she is the only female in the history of The Grammy's to win Album of the Year, twice. The researcher chose this album because there are so many figurative languages in the song lyrics.

Swift signed to Big Machine Records in 2005, debuting as a country singer with the albums Taylor Swift (2006) and Fearless (2008). The singles "Teardrops on My Guitar", "Love Story", and "You Belong with Me" found crossover success on country and pop radio formats. She incorporated rock on Speak Now (2010) and electronic on Red (2012),

later re-calibrating her image from country to pop with the synth-pop set 1989 (2014); the ensuing media scrutiny inspired the hip-hop-imbued Reputation (2017). The albums contained the Billboard Hot 100 number-one singles "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together", "Shake It Off", "Blank Space", "Bad Blood" and "Look What You Made Me Do".

Shifting to Republic Records in 2018, Swift released the electropop album Lover (2019) and explored indie folk styles in the 2020 albums Folklore and Evermore. She experimented with subdued pop genres on Midnights (2022) and The Tortured Poets Department (2024), and began re-recording her Big Machine albums as Taylor's Version due to an ownership dispute with the label. Through the 2020s, she garnered the US number one songs "Cardigan", "Willow", "All Too Well", "Anti-Hero", "Cruel Summer", "Is It Over Now?", and "Fortnight". She has undertaken six concert tours, including the Eras Tour (2023–2024), the highest-grossing tour of all time. Her films include Miss Americana (2020), All Too Well: The Short Film (2021), and The Eras Tour (2023) the highest grossing concert film.

With 200 million records sold, Swift is one of the world's best-selling music artists and has a record seven albums that each sold one million copies first-week in the US. She is the highest-grossing touring artist and the richest female musician, and the first billionaire with music as the primary source of income. She has been listed amongst history's greatest artists by publications such as Rolling Stone and Billboard, as well as the only individual from the arts to have been named the Time Person of the Year (2023). Her accolades include 14 Grammy Awards (including a record four Album of the Year wins), a Primetime Emmy Award, and a record four IFPI Global Recording Artist of the Year awards. Swift is the most-awarded artist of the American Music Awards, the Billboard Music Awards, and the MTV Video Music Awards.

This analysis is significant because it not only explores the artistic aspects of song lyrics but also provides educational value by helping language learners and literature enthusiasts understand how figurative language operates in a real-world context. Studying the figurative expressions in "Style" highlights the intersection between popular culture and literary appreciation, showing how modern music can serve as an accessible medium for literary analysis and deeper cultural understanding.

METHODOLOGY

The analyzing research approach and design is qualitative approach, usually focused on descriptive or narrative results. This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the figurative language used in Taylor Swift's song "*Style*." A qualitative approach is suitable for exploring and interpreting the meaning behind words, phrases, and literary devices within the lyrics. This research focuses on understanding how figurative language enhances the song's narrative and emotional impact. The result of qualitative evaluations is quite useful for studying more deeply about people's experiences, perceptions, and views on something.

In this research, the researchers used a descriptive qualitative method, in which the data are described systematically to get an accurate and factual result. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009:22). This research carried out by formulating problem, collecting data, classifying data and analyzing data. According to Arikunto (2006:321), study document is getting the data about case or variable as note, transcripts, book, magazine, etc. The research design used is content analysis, which involves systematically examining the lyrics to identify and categorize instances of metaphor, imagery, symbolism, personification, and repetition. Content analysis enables the researchers to explore the relationship between figurative language and the overall theme of the song. By analyzing these elements, the study aims to interpret the deeper meanings embedded in the lyrics and how they contribute to the listener's comprehension and emotional response.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the various ways in which figurative language enhances the meaning and emotional depth of *Style*. By employing literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, symbolism, personification, simile, hyperbole, and repetition, Taylor Swift effectively conveys the themes of nostalgia, attraction, and an enduring relationship. Each figurative element contributes uniquely to the song's lyrical richness, making it more engaging for listeners.

Metaphors are used to establish a vivid connection between the subject and well-known cultural references, such as James Dean, which evoke timeless charm and rebellion. Similes, such as "you got that James Dean daydream look in your eye," strengthen these

comparisons by directly linking characteristics of the subject to familiar icons. Imagery plays a crucial role in creating a cinematic effect, allowing listeners to visualize scenes of a late-night romance. Symbolism reinforces the song's central message, suggesting that the relationship described is enduring and unaffected by trends or time. Hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, adds emotional intensity, particularly in lines that describe the highs and lows of the relationship. Personification subtly enhances the atmosphere, making the narrative more immersive. Finally, repetition reinforces key ideas, ensuring that the song's themes are emphasized and memorable.

Repetition reinforces key ideas, ensuring that the song's themes are emphasized and memorable. Together, these literary devices not only enhance the song's poetic quality but also shape how listeners engage with its meaning. The impact of figurative language in *Style* extends beyond aesthetics—it also affects how listeners interpret the song.

The impact of figurative language in "*Style*" extends beyond aesthetics—it also affects how listeners interpret the song. By using universally recognizable symbols and evocative descriptions, Swift creates lyrics that are open to multiple interpretations, resonating with a wide audience. This adaptability contributes to the song's lasting popularity, as different listeners may relate to its meaning in personal ways.

Furthermore, the use of figurative language in "*Style*" exemplifies the broader significance of literary devices in song writing. It demonstrates how pop music, often regarded as commercially driven, can also contain profound poetic elements. Swift's ability to blend storytelling with artistic expression showcases the evolving nature of contemporary music and its capacity to evoke deep emotions through language.

The analysis clearly shows that figurative language is central to the emotive and aesthetic impact of *Style*. The combination of metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole enriches the narrative and creates a compelling portrayal of complex emotional states. However, it is important to acknowledge that the interpretation of these devices is inherently subjective. Listeners may perceive the song's meaning differently depending on their personal experiences, cultural background, and even generational influences. For example, older listeners familiar with James Dean's legacy might associate the reference with classic Hollywood rebellion, while younger audiences may interpret it more abstractly as an emblem of timeless coolness. Similarly, cultural perspectives can shape how individuals relate to the song's depiction of romance, fashion, and emotional intensity. The varied interpretations among different listeners

point to the influence of individual and societal contexts on the reception of the song’s meaning.

Furthermore, while figurative language significantly enhances the listener’s experience, it also presents challenges in establishing a singular, definitive interpretation. This subjectivity suggests that further research involving a broader demographic of listeners could provide more comprehensive insights into how figurative language in popular music shapes individual and collective understanding.

The analysis confirms that figurative language is a vital element in Taylor Swift’s *Style*, contributing to the song’s ability to convey deep emotional and aesthetic dimensions. The use of metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole not only constructs vivid imagery but also invites diverse interpretations that resonate with the audience on a personal level. This study supports the argument that figurative language is an essential component in the formation of meaning and artistic expression within song lyrics. Future research could explore how different artists and genres employ figurative language, comparing its role in pop music with other styles such as rock, R&B, or folk. Additionally, investigating how listeners from varied cultural backgrounds interpret these devices could provide deeper insights into the universal and genre-specific aspects of lyrical storytelling.

The summary table of research findings are provided below.

No	Figurative Language	Example	Explanation	Function
1.	Personification	“And we go crashing down, we come back every time” (Line 11) "Midnight / You come and pick me up, no headlights" "Long drive / Could end in burning flames or paradise" "He can't keep his wild eyes on the road"	Attributes human action (crashing, come back) to the relationship, emphasizing its up and downs. Midnight is personified as if it has the ability to "pick up" the speaker. The long drive is given the human-like ability to determine an outcome (burning flames or paradise). Wild eyes are described as if they have the ability to focus or not focus on the road.	Highlights the cyclical and resilient nature of the relationship.
2.	Metaphor	“You got that James Dean	Compares a subject’s look to James Dean’s	Convey timelessness and

		daydream look in your eye" (Line 9) "And I got that red lip classic thing that you like" "And when we go crashing down, we come back every time" "Cause we never go out of style" "He can't keep his wild eyes on the road" "I got that good girl faith and a tight little skirt"	iconic image without using "like" or "as." The phrase red lip classic thing metaphorically represents a timeless, elegant style. Crashing down is a metaphor for a relationship experiencing difficulties or breaking apart. The relationship is metaphorically compared to a timeless fashion trend that never becomes outdated. Wild eyes is a metaphor for recklessness, distraction, or lack of focus. Good girl faith is a metaphor for innocence or trustworthiness, contrasting with the tight little skirt, which could symbolize a more daring or playful side.	charm associated with the subject.
3.	Imagery	"You got that long hair, slicked back, white t-shirt" (Line 13) "And I got that red lip classic thing that you like" "You got that long hair, slicked back, white T-shirt" "The lights are off, he's taking off his coat" "Takes me home"	Creates a vivid visual image of the subject's appearance. The red lips and classic style evoke a strong visual of a vintage, elegant look. A clear visual image of someone with long hair, styled sleekly, and wearing a white T-shirt. Helps the listener visualize a dimly lit or dark space where someone is removing their coat. Suggests the physical action of moving, potentially evoking feelings of warmth or familiarity.	Help listeners visualize the scene and connect emotionally with the narrative.

		"And when we go crashing down, we come back every time" "Watch us go 'round and 'round each time" "It's been a while since I have even heard from you" "I say, 'I heard, oh / That you've been out and about with some other girl'"	The phrase "crashing down" evokes the sensation of sudden impact or emotional turbulence. Creates an image of something repetitive, like a cycle that keeps repeating. The word "heard" draws attention to the absence of sound or communication. Reinforces the theme of listening and spoken conversation.	
4.	Symbolism	"Red lip, classic thing that you like." (Line 10) "Midnight / You come and pick me up, no headlights" "Long drive / Could end in burning flames or paradise" "James Dean daydream look in your eye" "Red lip classic thing that you like"	Represents timeless beauty and enduring appeal through the image of classic red lipstick. Midnight symbolizes secrecy, mystery, or a forbidden love. No headlights suggest moving in the dark, symbolizing secrecy, uncertainty, or something hidden. Long drive symbolizes the journey of a relationship. Burning flames represents destruction, passion, or heartbreak. Paradise symbolizes happiness and fulfillment in love. James Dean symbolizes rebellion, classic charm, and a bad-boy persona. Red lips symbolize timeless beauty,	Evokes nostalgia and suggest lasting attraction.

		"We never go out of style" "He can't keep his wild eyes on the road" "When we go crashing down, we come back every time" "Good girl faith and a tight little skirt"	confidence, and femininity. Style symbolizes lasting love or a relationship that endures trends and time. Wild eyes symbolize temptation, distraction, or an inability to stay committed. The road symbolizes the path of life or a relationship. Crashing down symbolizes emotional turmoil, breakups, or conflicts in a relationship. Good girl faith symbolizes innocence, purity, or trust.	
5.	Repetition	"We never go out of style" (Repeated) "You got that James Dean daydream look in your eye" "And I got that red lip classic thing that you like" "And when we go crashing down, we come back every time" "Take me home / Just take me home / Yeah, just take me home" "Out of style"	Repeats the phrase to emphasize the theme of timelessness. Repeated in the chorus, emphasizing the classic, rebellious image of the person being described. Repeated to highlight the contrast between the two characters and their appeal to each other. Repeated to stress the cyclical nature of the relationship – breaking up and coming back together. The repetition of "take me home" conveys longing and urgency. The phrase is echoed at the end to drive home the song's central message.	Reinforces the enduring nature of the relationship and ensures memorability.
6.	Allusion	"You got that James Dean	References cultural icons (James Dean, classic	Enhances meaning

		daydream look" & "I got that red lip classic thing" "And I got that red lip classic thing that you like"	fashion) to connect with widely known symbols. Allusion to vintage Holly wood glamour, referencing iconic female stars like Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn	through cultural context and familiarity. who were known for their signature red lips and elegant style.
7.	Consonance	"Midnight, you come and pick me up, no headlights" (Line 5) "You come and pick me up, no headlights" "Long drive / Could end in burning flames or paradise" "Fade into view, oh" "And I got that red lip classic thing that you like" "When we go crashing down, we come back every time" "You got that long hair, slicked back, white T-shirt" "Takes me home / The lights are off, he's taking off his coat"	Repeat the "t" sound to create a rhythmic effect. The repeated "p" and "k" sounds in pick, up, and headlights create a smooth flow. The repetition of the "d" sound in could, end, and paradise enhances rhythm. The "v" sound in view and oh creates a soft, flowing effect. The repeated "t" sound in got, that, classic, and that adds emphasis. The "k" sound in crashing, come, back creates a strong, percussive effect. The "k" sound in slicked, back, and T-shirt adds cohesion. The repetition of "t" and "k" sounds in takes, coat, lights give the line a rhythmic quality.	Adds a musical quality and smooth flow to the lyrics.
8.	Irony	"I say. I heard, oh that you've been out and about with	Suggests a contrast between the speaker's words and underlying emotions, indicating suspicion.	Introduces complexity and subtle emotional tension in the narrative.

		some other girl" (Line 19) "Could end in burning flames or paradise" "And I should just tell you to leave 'cause I / Know exactly where it leads, but I / Watch us go 'round and 'round each time" "When we go crashing down, we come back every time" "We never go out of style"	Situational Irony: A relationship is expected to bring happiness (paradise), but it also has the potential for destruction (burning flames) Dramatic Irony: The speaker knows that the relationship is unhealthy and will end badly, yet she continues to repeat the cycle. The listener understands this self-awareness, making the situation ironic. Situational Irony: A relationship that repeatedly "crashes down" is expected to end permanently, but instead, they always return to each other, defying expectation. Verbal Irony: The phrase suggests permanence and timelessness, but the relationship is actually unstable, constantly breaking up and reuniting. The irony lies in the fact that their "style" is actually a cycle of impermanence.	Creating an ironic contrast between love and pain.
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CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song *Style* highlight the significance of pragmatics in understanding the deeper meanings embedded within the song. Through figurative language, language learners not only enhance their linguistic knowledge but also develop the ability to use creative and expressive language in both speech and writing. Figurative language varies depending on the composer's artistic vision, allowing for different interpretations based on the context and themes presented in the lyrics.

This study identifies multiple types of figurative language in *Style*, including hyperbole, personification, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, and irony. These literary devices contribute to the song's depth and enable listeners to engage with the lyrics on a more meaningful level. By recognizing and analyzing these elements, audiences can gain a richer understanding of song lyrics, demonstrating how figurative language enhances both artistic expression and interpretation.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that figurative language plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional and aesthetic appeal of popular music. The use of vivid imagery and symbolic references allows listeners to connect personally with the lyrics, making the song more relatable and impactful. This highlights the broader significance of literary devices in songwriting, reinforcing the idea that music is not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for storytelling and artistic expression.

Future research could build upon this study by analyzing figurative language in different genres of music, exploring how cultural and linguistic differences influence the use of literary devices in songwriting. Additionally, examining how different listener demographics interpret figurative language in lyrics could provide valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and musical appreciation.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that figurative language is an essential element in music, enhancing the way meaning is conveyed and experienced. By studying its use in song lyrics, learners and researchers alike can gain a deeper appreciation of the intricate relationship between language and art in contemporary music.

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