

## **INTERPRETING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE FOUND IN "RED" BY TAYLOR SWIFT**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the figurative language used in "Red" by Taylor Swift. The figurative language plays an important role in songwriting, enabling artists to express emotions, create vivid imagery, and portray complex themes. From concepts in literary analysis and discourse studies, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the lyrics to identify and interpret some figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, repetition, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism. This study engages contextual meaning and social impacts from the singer to interpret the meaning of the lyrics. Hence, this research contributes to our understanding of the role of figurative language in songwriting and adjusts insight into how music communicates meaning and relates to audiences.

**Keywords: Figurative Language, Lyrics Analysis, Taylor Swift**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language is the structure of words and communication devices to talk within the same area, nation, or tradition (Verderber, 1999). By applying language, it'll help people to enrich their knowledge and information. In daily activities, people use language to talk and reach an understanding of each other. Therefore, language is the tool to reveal human feelings and thoughts (Djoyosuroto, 2007).

Language is meaningful and it's related to Semantics. Semantics is the study of meaning and the relationship between linguistic form and meaning (Kroeger, 2019). Semantics talks about the inseparable or natural meaning of words in a sentence. Correlation between implicitly expressed feelings and the semantic meaning are connected resulting in better communication.

Aside from uttering words directly, humans can also use language to deliver information about their thoughts, feelings, etc explicitly. The platform that language takes as the intermediary varies through print media (newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and pamphlets), electronic devices (TV, radio, mobile phone, laptop, PC), and even social media (social applications like Instagram, Youtube, X, Spotify). Of all of the platforms, one that is especially amusing to hear is a song.

Griffe (1992) said that songs are produced by vocals, lyrically meaningful, and have harmony. Songs mainly functioned to please the listeners, to motivate, to channel feelings, and to express talent. Types of songs are also diverse in the message to the audience, such as expressing sad emotions, confessing love for something, or just reminiscing about the author's memory. It reflects that songs are passionate and have concluded part of the figurative concept in the lyrics.

A figurative concept in terms of context is the figurative language used to make a figure or speech more relevant, convincing, and affecting. There are types of figurative language, such as simile, metaphor, and personification, found in the song lyrics in common that were written by composers or lyricists.

Preceding the types of figurative language, it's important to know what is the purpose of figurative language in serving humans. Dancygier (2014) stated that the communication goal and creative purposes are included in the figurative functions. These functions support the usage of the types of figurative language (Perrine, 1996) such as :

1. Metaphor: Figure of speech in which a direct comparison is made between two things that have similarities (without using “like” or “as”)
2. Simile: Same as metaphor but simile uses different phrases (like or as)
3. Personification: Inanimate object attributed to human characteristics. (The statue would kill me with its stare)
4. Hyperbole: Usage of exaggeration in emphasizing or effecting. (I haven't seen you in ages)
5. Metonymy: Replacing the name of things with a similar one. (White House for the President's House).
6. Irony: Indicate the opposite meaning of what it intended. (The doctor got sick)
7. Understatement: The opposite of hyperbole, decreases the meaning. (It's a bit chilly today—when the temperature outside is 5 degrees)
8. Paradox: Consists of two opposite facts but still makes sense. (End of beginning)
9. Allegory: Words that have hidden meanings. (She crossed the bridge – it represents to adulthood)
10. Symbolism: Word's meaning that represents something else. (Blue symbolizes loneliness)

These figurative languages are utilized to examine the lyrics' meaning in songs. Some research, particularly by Muhammad (2021), stated that to expose the sense of language found in the lyrics, this can be recognized and perceived by the listeners. Supporting the listeners to understand the meaning of a song.

According to that, the researcher is interested in analyzing the figurative language in the song “Red” by Taylor Swift. Widely known that Taylor Swift wrote an album inspired by her relationship, especially in this album also named “Red”, she talks about how she's being treated by her boyfriend Jake Gyllenhaal at the moment.

Therefore, the researcher intended to undertake the following research questions:

1. What types of figurative language that used in Red by Taylor Swift?
2. What are the social impacts and contextual meanings of figurative language found in the song?.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In literary works, a method is crucial to employ in developing analysis research. There are two types of methods used in research which are qualitative dan quantitative research approaches. Qualitative identically related to descriptive data, meanwhile, quantitative identically uses numbers in data collection, data interpretation, and performance results.

The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to establish the handling of the problems and dig deeper into a better understanding. The qualitative descriptive approach is a type of research that portrays the existing data as direct, and descriptive and prioritizes the process over the results ( Moleong, 2006).

The steps in this study are:

1. Examine the data by reading the data.
2. Determine and categorize the figurative language used in the song.
3. Explore the interpretation by identifying the social impact and contextual meaning.

The data sources are divided into two kinds of sources, such as primary sources and secondary sources (Sutanto, 2007). The primary source is the song “Red” by Taylor Swift, and the secondary sources are the website and fan demographic as the sample data source.

The researcher selected the song as the data because the researcher favored the song and it’s easy listening and attractive to some people. The data collection techniques are through observation and digital traces. Observation from the Spotify app to find the lyrics and digital traces from the singer’s social media and news.

Following up the technique, the next step is making the analysis. First, identify the type of figurative language and whether it has metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, irony, understatement, paradox, allegory, & symbolism or not. Second, analyze the meaning of each figurative language that is found and determine the cultural factors that shape the meaning of the lyrics. Last is the forming of the conclusion

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

After identifying the type of figurative language, four types are found in the song “Red” by Taylor Swift. Which are similes, metaphors, symbolism, hyperbole, and personification. These types are conducted to find the contextual meaning and what relates to cultural factors. This can be seen in the following table 1.

**Table 1.**

| No. | Expression/Lyric   | Figurative Language  |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1.  | Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead end street   | Simile               |
| 2.  | Faster than the wind   | Metaphor             |
| 3.  | Passionate as sin  | Simile               |
| 4.  | Loving him is like trying to change your mind                      | Simile               |
| 5.  | Like the colors in autumn, so bright, just before they lose it all | Personification      |
| 6.  | Loving him was blue, like I’d never known                          | Symbolism, Hyperbole |
| 7.  | Missing him was dark gray, all alone                               | Symbolism, Hyperbole |
| 8.  | Forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you never met      | Simile               |

|     |  |                           |
|-----|--|---------------------------|
| 9.  | But loving him was red   | Symbolism                 |
| 10. | Loving him was red   | Symbolism                 |
| 11. | Touching him was like realizing all you ever wanted was right there in front of you          | Simile                    |
| 12. | Memorizing him was as easy as knowing all the words to your old favorite song                | Simile                    |
| 13. | Fighting with him was like trying to solve a crossword and realizing there’s no right answer | Simile                    |
| 14. | Regretting him was like wishing you never found out that love could be that strong           | Simile                    |
| 15. | Remembering him in flashbacks and echoes   | Metaphor, Personification |
| 16. | But moving on from him is impossible   | Hyperbole                 |
| 17. | When I still see it all in my head   | Metaphor                  |
| 18. | In burning red   | Symbolism                 |
| 19. | Burning, it was red  | Symbolism                 |
| 20. | And that’s why he’s spinning ‘round in my head   | Metaphor                  |
| 21. | Comes back to me, burning red  | Symbolism                 |
| 22. | His love was like driving a new Maserati down a dead end street                              | Simile                    |

The social impacts of Taylor Swift related to the “Red” song are inspiring a new generation to be expressive about their feelings, embracing heart-breaking memories by screaming the song and bringing intimacy to her fans. With her artistic style of writing songs, Taylor Swift manages to connect with the listeners.

### Discussion

The table indicates the categorization of figurative language used in the “Red” song by Taylor Swift. It shows the position of figurative language in the song which consists of 9 similes, 7 symbolisms, 2 hyperboles, 3 metaphors, and 2 personifications. The usage of this figurative language helps to convey the message of the lyrics and the emotion of the singer to the audience. The artistic use of the language aims to affirm the feelings and immerse the listeners into the singer’s experience related to the song.

The analysis of cultural factors and contextual meaning of the figurative language employed in the lyrics of “Red” by Taylor Swift is shown below.

#### Lyric 1

“Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street”

The sentence has simile meanings because it uses “like” to compare phrases that have similarities. The comparison shows that when she loves someone, it might have an exciting start as described as driving a luxury car which is a Maserati, but eventually, it leads to a useless relationship just like driving down a dead-end street.

#### Lyric 2

“Faster than the wind”

The phrase involves having a metaphor meaning that the driving or the excitement she experiences surpasses the speed of the wind.

Lyric 3

“Passionate as sin”

The phrase entails having a simile meaning which is the action she did as tempted and as zealous as what sin is.

Lyric 4

“Loving him is like trying to change your mind”

The sentence engages having a simile meaning which is the act of love by her has the same meaning as trying to change our mind.

Lyric 5

“Like the colors in autumn, so bright, just before they lose it all” (Personification)

The sentence comprises a personification meaning shown in attributing an inanimate object (the color”) that it can lose things like an animate object (person or animal).

Lyric 6

“Loving him was blue, like I’d never known” (Symbolism, Hyperbole)

The sentence covers two figurative meanings which are symbolism and hyperbole. In symbolism, it shows that loving him has the tone of blue, and in hyperbole, she intends to tell how it feels when loving him just like something she never experienced before and making her sad in an exaggerated way.

Lyric 7

“Missing him was dark gray, all alone” (Symbolism, Hyperbole)

The sentence also has the same figurative meaning as the previous lyric, but it differs in the context in which the tone of dark gray is used to describe her current emotions that are making her feel lonely since she’s missing him.

Lyric 8

“Forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you never met” (Simile)

The sentence embraces simile meaning which means comparing when she’s trying to forget him as much as she’s trying to know a stranger, the challenge is it’s impossible to do when she’s too attached to that person even forgetting the memories.

Lyric 9

“But loving him was red” (Symbolism)

This phrase covers the symbolic meaning using the “red” as the representative word about what it’s like to love him. Red represents passionate love, intense emotions, and romantic relationships. But it was all in the past because it uses the past tense.

Lyric 10

“Loving him was red” (Symbolism)

The phrase included in repetition on previous lyrics which means the same.

Lyric 11

“Touching him was like realizing all you ever wanted was right there in front of you”

The sentence engages the simile meaning that means using “as” as the comparison between touching the person and realizing what she wants. It implied that what she wanted was the person or him that was in front of her.

Lyric 12

“Memorizing him was as easy as knowing all the words to your old favorite song”  
(Simile)

The sentence consists of a simile meaning that compares phrases that are similar according to the author. In this case, memorizing him is easy like memorizing lyrics in all of his favorite songs.

Lyric 13

“Fighting with him was like trying to solve a crossword and realizing there’s no right answer”

The sentence has a simile meaning and uses “as” to compare phrases fighting with him, trying to solve a crossword, and realizing there’s no right answer, which means there is no use in fighting causes it doesn’t come up with a solution.

Lyric 14

“Regretting him was like wishing you never found out that love could be that strong”

The sentence contains a simile meaning and tells about how she will regret if she ends things with him just like wishing never to meet him and build a strong love.

Lyric 15

“Remembering him in flashbacks and echoes”

The sentence entails two figurative languages which are metaphor and personification. In metaphor, comparing flashbacks and echoes that it still vividly stays in the memory. In personification, the echoes are attributed as something that can repeat things just like memory being recalled.

Lyric 16

“But moving on from him is impossible”

The sentence comprises a hyperbole meaning. The exaggeration of using impossible to something possible.

Lyric 17

“When I still see it all in my head”

The sentence has a metaphoric meaning in which she just has a vivid and clear image in her head by using the word “see”.

Lyric 18

“In burning red”

The sentence entered the category of figurative which is symbolism. It means something that burns has the color red and represents passionate love in Western culture.

Lyric 19

“Burning, it was red”

The sentence has the same figurative meaning as the previous lyric and it reflects a repetition of the lyrics.

Lyric 20

“And that’s why he’s spinning ‘round in my head”

The sentence engages a metaphoric meaning which means the thought of him is just persistent and recurring inside her head.

Lyric 21

“Comes back to me, burning red” (Symbolism)

The sentence has a metaphoric meaning which means asking for the passionate love between each other to reappear.

Lyric 22

“His love was like driving a new Maserati down a dead end street” (Simile)

The sentence has a simile meaning just like the first lyrics, but this means from a different perspective on the man's side and she writes that she feels that the man feels the same about the state of the relationship.

The result of social impact on the song makes the song successful in engaging the fans and not disappointed in Taylor Swift's works. Especially in the “Red” song on Red Album gaining much attention at the time. Widely known as a singer, composer, and songwriter, Taylor Swift still survives through the decades

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the analysis of the figurative language used in the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s song “Red” shows how the words and metaphors used can create a very detailed and meaningful picture. By using figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, symbols, and hyperboles and by giving human traits to inanimate objects, Swift comes up with a love story, a break-up story, and a story of self-discovery that is deeper than words and tunes.

Thus, the song is rich in figurative language which helps to stir up feelings, describe situations, and express ideas. For instance, the metaphors used in the text such as “Loving him was red” and “Forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you never met” help the reader get a clear picture of the passion and agony of love and the pangs of loss. The comparison, for instance, as seen in the phrases “Loving him is like driving a

new Maserati down a dead-end street” and “Faster than the wind, adds to the meaning by providing comparisons that are relatable to the audience.

Symbolism, hyperbole, metaphor, and personification serve to enhance the lyrical content and to give the audience a more detailed look into the artist’s state of mind and life events. Clichés and other forms of figurative language are employed to give the reader a sense of the gradual escalation and eventual stagnation of the song.

In conclusion, the use of figurative language in the song “Red” not only contributes to the quality of the lyrics and songwriting in general but also helps the artist to touch people’s hearts and create a bond between the artist and the audience. Therefore, through the identification of the social impacts as well as the contextual meaning of the language used, we can extend our appreciation of how music can articulate emotions and occurrences. Taylor Swift in her song ‘Red’ employs various forms of figures of speech and this view supports the fact that lyrical analysis is paramount in unveiling the hidden meaning behind music and art

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