

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S SONGS FROM THE EVERMORE ALBUM

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the use of figurative language in three songs from Taylor Swift's Evermore album: "Willow," "Champagne Problems," and "Gold Rush." Figurative language is a crucial element in song lyrics, enabling artists to express emotions and abstract ideas creatively. The study applies Perrine's theory, which classifies figurative language into five types: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony. The data are taken from the official lyrics of the selected songs, supported by repeated listening to capture emotional and contextual nuances. A qualitative descriptive method is used to identify and analyze instances of figurative language. The analysis focuses on how these figures of speech function in expressing emotional depth, storytelling, and thematic complexity. The findings reveal that metaphor and personification are the most dominant types, indicating Taylor Swift's tendency to convey feelings through implicit comparison and human-like expressions. The study highlights the artistic and literary value of popular song lyrics, affirming that they can be treated as modern poetic texts worthy of academic analysis.

Keywords: *Figurative Language, Song Lyrics, Taylor Swift, Evermore, Metaphor*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a basic tool for communication but also an artistic medium through which people express emotions, ideas, and identity. In literary works and music, language often goes beyond its literal meaning and becomes a creative instrument for conveying abstract concepts and feelings (Wijaya & Nasution, 2018). One of the most important elements that enriches this process is figurative language. Figurative language allows writers and songwriters to create vivid imagery, evoke emotional responses, and express ideas in a symbolic and powerful way.

The use of figurative language has long been associated with poetry and literature, but in recent years, song lyrics have been increasingly studied as

modern poetic texts. Scholars argue that song lyrics can function as cultural and literary artifacts that deserve close textual analysis (Caldwell Brown, 2016). Previous studies, such as Setiawan (2014) on Coldplay's lyrics and Hilmi et al. (2018) on One Direction, have revealed how figurative language contributes to the emotional and thematic depth of popular songs. These works highlight that music lyrics are not merely a form of entertainment but also a site of artistic expression and narrative construction.

Despite growing academic interest in figurative language in music, research on Taylor Swift's later works, particularly her *Evermore* album, remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on her earlier albums, such

as *Red* and 22 Setiawati & Maryani (2018), or have analyzed figurative expressions only in a general discourse framework (Dewi et al., 2020). Very few studies have applied a clear literary framework, such as Perrine's (1978) classification of figurative language, to Swift's newer songs.

This gap provides the main rationale for the present research. Song lyrics, especially those written by artists like Taylor Swift, are rich in symbolic expressions that resonate with listeners. However, without systematic analysis, many of these nuanced meanings remain unexplored. By analyzing figurative language, we can uncover how popular music communicates complex emotions, tells stories, and reflects cultural values. This kind of study contributes to both literary analysis and music studies, expanding our understanding of how modern audiences interact with poetic language in everyday life. Although *Evermore* has been praised for its introspective and poetic qualities, there is a lack of research that systematically categorizes and interprets the figurative language within its songs. Without such analysis, the depth and literary significance of these lyrics might be overlooked, and the contribution of popular music to the broader field of literature might be undervalued. This study therefore addresses the following questions:

1. What types of figurative language are found in Taylor Swift's songs "Willow," "Champagne Problems," and "Gold Rush"?
2. What meanings are conveyed through these figurative expressions, and how do they contribute to the songs' emotional and narrative depth?

To answer these questions, the research applies Perrine's (1978)

theoretical framework, which categorizes figurative language into simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony. By systematically identifying and interpreting these devices, this study aims to demonstrate that Swift's lyrics are not merely commercial products but modern poetic texts worthy of academic exploration. As previous scholars have noted, examining figurative language in song lyrics opens new perspectives on how art and language intersect in popular culture (Dewi et al., 2020) (Sembiring, 2020).

In summary, this introduction sets the stage for a focused exploration of figurative language in Taylor Swift's *Evermore*. It moves from a broad discussion of the artistic function of language to the specific research problem, providing background, context, and justification for the study. By filling the identified research gap, this work contributes to the growing recognition of song lyrics as meaningful and analyzable forms of contemporary literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of figurative language has been a significant subject in both literary and linguistic research. Figurative expressions allow writers and speakers to communicate ideas that go beyond the literal level, creating imagery, emotional resonance, and stylistic richness. According to Perrine (1978), figurative language consists of five main types—simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony—that are commonly used in literary works to add depth and artistic value. Over the years, these categories have served as a framework for analyzing not only poems and novels but also modern song lyrics.

Previous research consistently shows that figurative language plays a central role in enhancing song lyrics. Setiawan (2014), in his study on

Coldplay's lyrics, identified metaphors and personifications as dominant devices, revealing how they convey abstract emotions and universal human experiences. These findings were echoed by Hilmi et al. (2018), who investigated figurative expressions in One Direction's *Up All Night* album. Their study highlighted similes and hyperboles as tools for expressing youthful love, energy, and longing. Although these studies examined different artists, they share a common theme: songwriters intentionally use figurative language to enrich their narratives and make them more relatable and memorable.

Scholars also emphasize the literary quality of song lyrics. Caldwell Brown (2016) argues that lyrics function as a form of modern poetry, capable of engaging audiences not only through rhythm and melody but also through literary techniques such as symbolism and figurative language. This perspective positions popular music within the broader scope of literary analysis, encouraging scholars to treat lyrics as texts that can be critically examined and appreciated in the same way as traditional literature. These arguments form a strong foundation for exploring how figurative language functions in contemporary songs.

Research focusing on Taylor Swift further supports these patterns but also shows areas that remain underexplored. Setiawati & Maryani (2018) analyzed figurative language in songs from Swift's *Red* album, identifying simile and hyperbole as key devices for portraying emotional intensity and personal reflection. Their findings resonate with earlier studies on other artists, demonstrating that the stylistic use of figurative language is a hallmark of compelling songwriting. Dewi et al. (2020) offered a more specific thematic focus in their analysis of *Look What You*

Made Me Do, uncovering metaphors and irony that reflect themes of identity and empowerment. These studies show that Swift's lyrics are rich in literary devices, adding layers of meaning beyond the surface narrative.

Sembiring (2020), although studying Mariah Carey's songs from a pedagogical perspective, also reinforces the idea that figurative language is pervasive in popular music and valuable for educational purposes. This convergence of findings across different studies demonstrates a well-established understanding: figurative language is integral to songwriting, enhancing the emotional, cultural, and artistic dimensions of music.

However, despite these advances, a clear research gap exists. Most previous studies center on earlier albums or different artists, leaving a lack of scholarly attention on Taylor Swift's later works, particularly her *Evermore* album. This album has been widely praised for its introspective tone, narrative complexity, and mature songwriting, yet there is limited research that systematically classifies and interprets its figurative language using a robust framework such as Perrine's (1978). Existing analyses often stop identifying examples without grouping them by type or exploring their deeper meanings within the songs' contexts. As a result, our understanding of Swift's artistic evolution and the literary value of her recent lyrics remains incomplete.

By applying Perrine's framework to three selected songs—"Willow," "Champagne Problems," and "Gold Rush"—this research not only builds upon existing literature but also extends it by focusing on a newer album that has not been thoroughly examined. It addresses the lack of systematic classification and interpretation in prior studies, offering a more organized and

in-depth analysis of figurative language in Swift's work.

In addition to filling this gap, the present study contributes to broader discussions in the field. A well-conducted literature review serves as a basis for knowledge development and can even inspire new directions for research. By synthesizing findings from earlier studies and applying them to a contemporary case, this study reinforces the idea that popular music deserves recognition as a valuable subject for literary and linguistic inquiry. It provides evidence of how figurative language shapes listener perception and deepens narrative meaning, potentially guiding educators, critics, and researchers in appreciating song lyrics as a legitimate form of modern poetry.

This literature review shows how previous research collectively underscores the importance of figurative language in songwriting while revealing a gap in the analysis of Swift's *Evermore*. This synthesis and identification of research gaps provide a solid foundation and clear justification for the current study, ensuring that it contributes meaningfully to both academic literature and the understanding of contemporary popular music.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the use of figurative language in selected songs from Taylor Swift's *Evermore* album: "Willow," "Champagne Problems," and "Gold Rush." A qualitative descriptive method allows the researcher to analyze data in the form of words, phrases, and contextual meanings, which are essential in interpreting literary elements such as metaphors, similes, and personifications.

According to Colorafi & Evans (2016), a qualitative descriptive

approach is a methodological strategy used to produce a comprehensive summary of a particular event or phenomenon using everyday language. Unlike more abstract forms of qualitative inquiry such as phenomenology or grounded theory, qualitative description stays close to the data, thus allowing researchers to stay on the surface of words and events while still presenting accurate and data-driven interpretations. This method is particularly useful when the goal is to get direct answers to questions about the experiences, meanings, and interpretations of the participants, without extensive theoretical transformation of the data. This approach is suitable for examining how figurative language functions in song lyrics and how it conveys emotional depth.

The research design centers on descriptive analysis, focusing on detailed explanation of the types and meanings of figurative expressions. Descriptive research is appropriate when the goal is to understand and interpret phenomena in their natural context. Since song lyrics represent creative literary expression, a descriptive design enables a deeper understanding of how language operates in this medium. No experimental manipulation is involved, as the research emphasizes interpretation rather than causality.

The unit of analysis consists of words, lines, and phrases in the lyrics that show evidence of figurative language. These units are examined individually and collectively to determine how they contribute to the song's overall theme and emotional tone. Figurative expressions are classified according to Perrine's theory: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony.

The source of data is taken from the official lyrics published on

<https://www.lyricfind.com/>.

The researcher also listened to the songs repeatedly to gain a holistic understanding of the lyrical context and emotional tone. This listening process enhances interpretation, ensuring that analysis is grounded in both textual and auditory elements. The procedure of data analysis involves the following steps:

1. Transcribing the song lyrics and conducting close reading.
2. Identifying phrases and lines that contain figurative language.
3. Classifying the figurative language based on Perrine's categories.
4. Interpreting the meaning of each figurative element within the context of the song.
5. Analyzing the emotional and narrative function of each figurative device.

Each expression is examined to determine how it shapes the listener's understanding of the themes—such as love, regret, longing, or resilience—that are prominent in the songs. By evaluating how Taylor Swift's lyrical choices reflect these emotional themes, the study provides insight into her songwriting as a form of literary expression.

The qualitative approach offers flexibility and depth, allowing the researcher to explore not only what kinds of figurative language are used, but also why they are used and how they affect the listener's perception. The study draws on existing literature in linguistics, semantics, and stylistics to support interpretations and ensure that findings are grounded in established theoretical frameworks.

The methodology provides a structured yet interpretive process to analyze song lyrics as literary texts. Through this approach, the study uncovers the artistic and emotional power of figurative language in Taylor

Swift's *Evermore* album, affirming its place in academic literary analysis.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Taylor Swift is known for her lyrical prowess, and in the *Evermore* album, her use of language becomes increasingly mature, reflective, and emotionally nuanced. Each of the three selected songs tells a distinct story with unique emotional textures, and figurative language plays a central role in shaping those narratives. The findings show that Swift does not use figurative language arbitrarily, but rather with intention—to communicate vulnerability, critique social norms, romanticize memory, and express emotional transitions. Each song uses figurative language to craft meaning that goes beyond the literal, requiring listeners to interpret and reflect.

This section presents the findings of the analysis based on the five categories of figurative language defined by (1978): simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony. Each type is discussed with theoretical support from previous studies and is illustrated with concrete lyric examples taken from three selected songs—Willow, Champagne Problems, and Gold Rush—together with interpretations that reveal their deeper meanings.

4.1 Simile

According to Padillah et al. (2016), a simile is a comparative language style characterized using connective words such as like or as to make two different things explicitly similar. A simile links two unrelated elements to create vivid imagery and clarify abstract emotions. For example:

*Willow – “I’m like the water when
your ship rolled in that night.”*

The speaker compares herself to water, suggesting fluidity, openness, and emotional readiness to embrace love.

Gold Rush – “Eyes like sinking ships.”

The eyes are compared to sinking ships, evoking depth, sadness, and overwhelming emotion.

Gold Rush – “With your hair falling into place like dominoes.”

This simile creates a visual image of hair falling effortlessly and beautifully, reflecting admiration and fascination.

4.2 Metaphor

Oktavianus et al. (2024) state that a metaphor involves understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another without using explicit comparative words. A metaphor transfers meaning from one domain to another to express emotions and concepts indirectly yet powerfully. For example:

Willow – “Life was a willow, and it bent right to your wind.”

Life is metaphorically described as a willow tree bending to someone's influence, illustrating adaptability in love.

Champagne Problems – “Your heart was glass, I dropped it.”

The heart is compared to fragile glass, symbolizing emotional vulnerability and regret.

Gold Rush – “My mind turns your life into folklore.”

The mind is described as mythologizing someone's life, showing how memories can become idealized stories.

Gold Rush – “It fades into the gray of my day-old tea.”

Feelings are compared to stale tea, signifying emotions that have lost their vibrancy.

4.3 Personification

According to Belkhir (2021), personification assigns human motivations, characteristics, or activities to non-human entities, making abstract ideas or objects seem alive and relatable. In these lyrics, personification adds emotional depth:

Willow – “Lost in your current like a priceless wine.”

The current is described as having the power to capture or hold someone, as if it were alive.

Willow – “Head on the pillow, I could feel you sneaking in.”

Feelings are personified as someone sneaking in quietly, indicating an emotional presence.

Champagne Problems – “Love slipped beyond your reaches.”

Love is described as moving away, like a person walking out of reach.

Champagne Problems – “November flush and your flannel cure.”

The season and clothing are personified as possessing healing powers.

Gold Rush – “Walk past, quick brush.”

A fleeting touch is given human-like intention, as if conveying an unspoken message.

4.4 Hyperbole

Putri & Marlina (2023) explain that hyperbole is a stylistic device that intentionally exaggerates something to emphasize emotion, clarify feelings, or create a dramatic effect. Hyperbole heightens the emotional stakes:

*Willow – “The more that you say,
the less I know.”*

This exaggerates confusion in a relationship.

*Willow – “But I come back stronger
than a 90’s trend.”*

This overstates recovery strength by comparing it to the cultural resurgence of 90’s trends.

*Champagne Problems – “This
dorm was once a madhouse.”*

The dorm is exaggerated to convey emotional chaos.

*Gold Rush – “I don’t like that
anyone would die to feel your
touch.”*

An exaggerated expression of how desirable someone is.

4.5 Irony

Tavadze (2019) defines irony as a contrast between what is said and what is meant, or between expectation and reality. Irony creates layers of meaning and prompts deeper interpretation:

*Willow – “Wreck my plans, that’s
my man.”*

A normally negative action (wrecking plans) is expressed positively, showing ironic affection.

*Willow – “Every bait and switch
was a work of art.”*

Deceptive actions are ironically celebrated as art.

*Champagne Problems – “You had
a speech, you’re speechless.”*

A contrast between preparation and unexpected silence.

*Champagne Problems – “She
would’ve made such a lovely bride,
what a shame she’s fucked in the
head.”*

Complimenting and condemning in the same breath reveals social irony and judgment.

*Gold Rush – “Falling feels like
flying till the bone crush.”*

The thrill of falling in love is ironically contrasted with the pain of heartbreak.

By grouping the analysis according to figurative language type and anchoring each with relevant references and concrete lyric evidence, this discussion highlights how each device functions across multiple songs. Simile clarifies emotions through explicit comparison, metaphors convey complexity through indirect comparison, personification animates abstract concepts, hyperbole intensifies feelings through deliberate exaggeration, and irony reveals contradictions between appearance and reality. Together, these literary devices highlight Taylor Swift’s skill in crafting lyrics that resonate both emotionally and poetically.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of figurative language in three songs from Taylor Swift's *Evermore* album—*Willow*, *Champagne Problems*, and *Gold Rush*—through Perrine's (1978) theoretical framework, which classifies figurative language into simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony. By grouping the analysis according to these categories rather than by individual songs, the research provides a clearer and more systematic understanding of how each device functions within contemporary songwriting.

The findings show that simile and metaphor are consistently employed to create vivid imagery and express complex emotions, while personification adds layers of human qualities to abstract ideas, deepening the listener's engagement with the lyrics. Hyperbole amplifies emotional intensity and dramatizes subjective experiences, whereas irony introduces tension between appearance and reality, inviting critical reflection on social expectations and personal relationships.

Beyond identifying these devices, the analysis demonstrates that Swift's use of figurative language is deliberate and artistically driven. Her lyrics operate as more than mere entertainment; they function as modern poetic texts that reflect nuanced emotional states and cultural commentary. This synthesis highlights how figurative language not only enriches narrative and emotional depth but also contributes to the broader understanding of popular music as a legitimate field of literary and linguistic inquiry.

In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of figurative language as a powerful tool in songwriting—one that transforms personal stories into universal expressions of human

experience. These findings can serve as a foundation for future research, encouraging further exploration of figurative language across different artists, genres, and cultural contexts. This work affirms that popular music deserves recognition as a valuable site for academic analysis and literary appreciation.

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