THE ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S ANTI-HERO SONG LYRICS

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ABSTRACT; *This study aims to identify and analyze the types of figurative language used in Taylor Swift's song Anti-Hero. The research applies a qualitative descriptive method and uses Perrine's theory of figurative language as the primary framework. The data source is the full lyrics of Anti-Hero obtained from Genius.com. The analysis reveals six types of figurative language throughout the song: allegory, personification, apostrophe, repetition, metaphor, and simile. Among them, allegory and simile appear most frequently, each found in two instances. Overall, the song reflects Swift's internal struggles, including her self-image, anxiety, and vulnerability as a public figure.*

Keywords: Figurative Language, Song Lyrics, Taylor Swift.

ABSTRAK; Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis jenis-jenis bahasa kiasan yang digunakan dalam lagu Taylor Swift, Anti-Hero. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan menggunakan teori bahasa kiasan Perrine sebagai kerangka utama. Sumber data adalah lirik lengkap lagu Anti-Hero yang diperoleh dari Genius.com. Analisis ini mengungkap enam jenis bahasa kiasan di sepanjang lagu: alegori, personifikasi, apostrof, repetisi, metafora, dan simile. Di antara keenam jenis tersebut, alegori dan simile paling sering muncul, masing-masing ditemukan dalam dua contoh. Secara keseluruhan, lagu ini mencerminkan perjuangan batin Swift, termasuk citra diri, kecemasan, dan kerentanannya sebagai seorang figur publik.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Kiasan, Lirik Lagu, Taylor Swift.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential part of human life, serving not just as a communication tool, but also as a reflection of human thought, emotion, and experience. As Hariyanto (2007) points out, language is deeply intertwined with social relationships, it allows individuals to express desires, emotions, and ideas, shaping the way people connect with each other and

the world around them. One of the most creative and emotionally charged uses of language today is through music, particularly song lyrics.

Songs have become a powerful medium in contemporary culture. They offer not only entertainment but also a platform for expressing personal and social messages. Lubis (2017) defines a song as a combination of lyrics and melody that conveys feelings and ideas through sound. People listen to songs for various reasons like relaxation, emotional release, inspiration, or even to make sense of their own lives. However, not all listeners engage with songs in the same way. While some enjoy only the rhythm or beat, others focus more deeply on the lyrics, searching for hidden meanings and emotional truths.

Understanding the message behind song lyrics is not always easy, especially when the songwriter uses figurative language. Figurative language includes expressions that go beyond literal meanings. It uses metaphor, symbolism, and other literary devices to create vivid imagery or convey abstract ideas. Sweeney (1995) defines figurative language as a creative form of expression used to evoke emotion and stimulate the imagination. It plays a crucial role in poetry and songwriting because it can subtly communicate complex feelings or experiences in a way that straightforward language cannot.

In popular music, figurative language is often used to capture personal struggles, social commentary, or emotional depth. Taylor Swift, a globally recognized singer-songwriter, is known for her poetic lyrics and introspective songwriting style. Her music often incorporates figurative devices to narrate personal experiences, emotional conflicts, and social perceptions. In her 2022 album *Midnights*, Swift explores themes of anxiety, insecurity, fame, and self-awareness. One of the standout tracks, *Anti-Hero*, is a deeply personal song that has resonated with many fans for its honesty and vulnerability.

Anti-Hero blends lyrical poetry with pop sensibility, offering listeners a glimpse into Swift's internal battles with self-image and public expectation. The song uses rich figurative language to describe feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and alienation, emotions that are relatable yet rarely spoken about so candidly in mainstream pop. For this reason, analyzing the figurative language in this song can offer deeper insight into both the lyrical techniques Swift employs and the broader emotional landscape of the piece.

This study is motivated by the belief that song lyrics, when studied closely, can offer as much depth and nuance as traditional literary texts. The goal of this research is to identify and analyze the types of figurative language used in Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" and to explore how these devices contribute to the overall meaning and emotional resonance of the song. Using Perrine's theory as the analytical framework, this study aims to highlight the poetic qualities of contemporary music and encourage further literary appreciation of pop culture texts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, which is suitable for analyzing non-numerical data such as words, expressions, and textual meaning. As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences and interpreting meanings through language. In this case, the method is used to explore the figurative language found in Taylor Swift's *Anti-Hero* song lyrics and to describe the types and functions of each figurative device used in the song.

The primary data source in this research is the full lyrics of the song *Anti-Hero*, written and performed by Taylor Swift. The lyrics were accessed from Genius.com, a popular and reliable platform known for providing accurate and annotated song lyrics. The selection of this song is based on its lyrical complexity and emotional depth, which makes it a rich text for literary analysis. Additionally, *Anti-Hero* is one of the most talked-about tracks from Swift's 2022 *Midnights* album, offering relevance both in terms of popularity and artistic expression.

To guide the analysis, this study uses Perrine's (1992) theory of figurative language, which categorizes figures of speech into thirteen major types: metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe, allegory, irony, hyperbole, understatement, symbol, paradox, metonymy, synecdoche, and repetition. For the purpose of this research, only the types of figurative language that actually appear in the data are discussed in detail.

The process of data collection and analysis followed these steps:

1. Data Identification: The researcher carefully read and re-read the *Anti-Hero* lyrics to identify expressions or lines that appear to contain figurative language.

2. Data Classification: Each identified expression was categorized based on Perrine's classification. The figurative language type was noted, and the context of its use was taken into account.

3. Interpretation: After classifying the figurative devices, the researcher interpreted their meanings, both literal and implied, within the broader context of the song. This step aimed to uncover the emotional and poetic intentions behind Swift's use of language.

4. Analysis: The identified data were then analyzed more deeply to understand how these figurative expressions reflect the themes of the song, such as self-doubt, vulnerability, public pressure, and emotional fatigue.

By using a close reading approach and focusing on textual analysis, this study seeks not only to categorize the types of figurative language used but also to demonstrate how each contributes to the lyrical and emotional power of the song. The analysis is entirely text-based and does not involve listener interpretation, music production elements, or visual media associated with the song (such as the music video). The focus remains solely on the lyrics as a literary text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study found six types of figurative language in Taylor Swift's *Anti-Hero*: allegory, personification, apostrophe, repetition, metaphor, and simile. These figurative expressions help the songwriter communicate complex feelings like anxiety, guilt, and self-blame in a poetic and emotional way. Below is an analysis of each type, supported by selected excerpts from the lyrics.

1. Allegory

Allegory is a type of figurative language that expresses a second or deeper meaning beneath the literal one. Taylor Swift uses allegory to show emotional struggles that aren't directly stated.

Line 1: ***"Midnights become my afternoons."***

This lyric shows how the speaker's routine has been affected, likely due to emotional distress or overthinking at night. The phrase doesn't just describe a sleep schedule; it represents how upside-down her internal world feels.

Line 2: *"I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror."*

Here, the "sun" may represent outside judgment or pain, while the "mirror" stands for self-reflection. The contrast suggests that the speaker is more willing to face harsh external criticism than to confront her own inner flaws. This is a powerful way to express avoidance and self-denial.

2. Personification

Personification is used to give human qualities to non-human things. Swift uses it to bring emotions to life, making them feel active and present.

The line: *"When my depression works the graveyard shift,"*

shows how depression is treated like a person who works at night. This makes the feeling of sadness more vivid and relentless. It shows that her depression doesn't rest—it becomes strongest when everything else is quiet.

3. Apostrophe

Apostrophe is used when a speaker addresses someone or something that isn't actually present, making the emotional experience more dramatic and personal.

In the line: *"All of the people I've ghosted stand there in the room,"*

the speaker imagines being confronted by the people she has cut off. They are not really there, but the guilt and memory of them feel real and overwhelming. This line turns abstract regret into a visible, haunting image.

4. Repetition

Repetition is the reuse of the same word or phrase to create emphasis. It helps deliver strong emotional effects in songs and poetry.

One of the most memorable examples appears in the repeated line: ***"It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me."***

This repetition shows the speaker's acceptance, or maybe internalization, of blame. Saying it over and over reflects the voice inside her head and shows how much she believes it.

5. Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech where one thing is described as another, without using comparison words like "like" or "as." Swift uses metaphors to describe how isolated or misunderstood she feels.

A powerful metaphor appears in the line: ***"I'm a monster on the hill."***

She describes herself as a monster that others might be afraid of or stay away from. The "hill" makes her seem distant or removed from people. This metaphor reflects feelings of being out of place, too visible, and yet disconnected from others.

6. Simile

Simile is a direct comparison that uses words like "like" or "as." It helps create vivid images in the listener's mind.

In the line: ***"Did you hear my covert narcissism I disguise as altruism, like some kind of congressman?"***

Swift compares her masked selfishness to that of a politician. This simile is ironic and critical, but also reveals how deeply she questions her own motives.

Another simile appears in the phrase: ***"Tale as old as time."***

By using this line, Swift compares her repeated emotional experiences to a familiar and timeless story. It shows that her struggles feel never-ending and predictable, like something that happens over and over again.

Discussion

The analysis of figurative language in *Anti-Hero* shows how Taylor Swift uses poetic devices to express emotional complexity without being overly literal. These figures of speech

help her communicate feelings of guilt, anxiety, and self-doubt in a way that feels both personal and relatable. Rather than stating emotions directly, she relies on metaphors, allegories, and repetition to paint a more vivid emotional picture.

This creative use of language makes the song more impactful for listeners and highlights the important role that figurative language plays in connecting personal expression to a broader audience. It also supports the idea that pop lyrics can be as rich in meaning as traditional literature.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

After analyzing the lyrics of Taylor Swift's *Anti-Hero*, this study identified six types of figurative language based on Perrine's (1992) theory: allegory, personification, apostrophe, repetition, metaphor, and simile. Among these, allegory and simile appeared most frequently. Each figurative device plays a specific role in helping the songwriter express deep emotional struggles in a creative and poetic way.

The findings of this study highlight how figurative language in song lyrics can function just like it does in poetry or literature. It allows artists to say more than what's on the surface and to express things that are too complicated, or too painful, to say directly. For listeners, this means that songs like *Anti-Hero* can offer more than entertainment; they can provide comfort, understanding, and a sense of shared experience.

This analysis also shows how literary tools like metaphor and allegory are still very relevant in today's pop culture. Taylor Swift's writing proves that popular music can be both relatable and literary, blending emotional depth with poetic technique.

For future researchers, this study can serve as a starting point for analyzing figurative language in other songs or albums. Comparing Swift's songwriting style with that of other artists, or exploring how figurative language changes across albums and genres, would be valuable next steps. This kind of research doesn't just celebrate music, it shows how language, creativity, and emotion are deeply connected.

In the end, *Anti-Hero* is more than just a hit song, it's a piece of personal storytelling filled with meaningful lines that speak to many. By analyzing its figurative language, we gain insight not only into the lyrics, but also into the emotions and experiences behind them.

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