

## METAPHOR ANALYSIS IN “DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS” AND “FALSE GOD” SONG LYRICS BY TAYLOR SWIFT

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Received: 25-06-2023

Accepted: 30-06-2023

Published: 30-06-2023

### Abstract

Taylor Swift is an American singer who released the album *Lover* in 2019. In the album, there are songs titled "Death by Thousand Cuts" and "False God" whose lyrics tell about her love story. In this study, the researcher tries to reveal the meaning of the lyrics of the two songs with metaphors. Metaphors are often used in songwriting to implicitly convey meaning. Taylor Swift, who has always been known for her incredible lyrics, is no exception. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative with a metaphorical approach according to Ullman and Leech. The result obtained is that the two songs have the same number of metaphors. The song "Death by Thousand Cuts" has 6 metaphors out of 16 lines of lyrics, and the song "False God" has 6 metaphors out of 15 lines of lyrics. Then the metaphor with the highest number according to the data analysis is the type of metaphor from concrete to abstract with a total of 5. From the results of the analysis of the two songs, it proves that the role of metaphor in a song can help listeners understand meaning and feelings in depth. By using concrete to abstract metaphors, Taylor Swift tries to tell a clear story to listeners through her songs.

**Keywords:** *Metaphor, meaning, semantics, song, lyric*

### INTRODUCTION

As social beings, we cannot be separated from language in our daily life. Language is the 'original noise' usually used by human beings. Humans usually use language for their needs of life such as expressing emotions, desires, and questions about all things that live and exist in this world. So, language is essential and arbitrary, it means that it can change at any time.

The object of this study is the song lyrics metaphor of Taylor Swift's songs, called "Death By A Thousand Cuts" regarding the pain of a break-up relationship, and "False God" heavy religious imagery song to compare Swift's relationship with her then-boyfriend, Joe Alwyn. The songs are arranged by Taylor Swift and Jack Antonoff from the album "Lover". This research of analysis metaphors in Taylor Swift's songs was conducted because of the phenomenal album "Lover". According to early numbers provided to Billboard by Nielsen Music, *Lover* sold nearly 500,000 actual copies in its first 48 hours of sale. That sum includes a huge number of presales that were delivered when the set was finally released, and it's enough to give Swift the crown when it comes to the title of bestselling album of the year.

The researcher hopes that this study can help readers and listeners to have a better understanding of the meaning of the song. By making it more captivating for the listeners. Since not everyone has had the same experience as Taylor Swift, they could find it difficult to relate to her. Metaphors also help the listeners understand the depths of feelings the song's writer meant to communicate. Thus, the song's usage of metaphors has a big impact on how the story is told through the song's lyrics.

### Review of literature

According to Sapir (1921), linguistics is the study of language. Linguistics branches are divided into micro linguistics and macro linguistics. Micro linguistics, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. While macro linguistics such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, anthropological, and computational.

According to Pateda (2010), semantics is a sub-discipline of linguistics that study of meaning. Meaning in semantics is more to sense. Semantics tries to understand what meaning is as an element of language and how it is constructed by language as well as interpreted, obscured, and negotiated by speakers and listeners of language. Understanding the meaning of each language element so well will prevent us from a civil conflict. Polite language starts with understanding the correct meaning of the word.

According to Moeliono (2003), The song has the meaning of a variety of rhythmic sounds. As a work of art involving the melody and vocal color of the performer, a song is a work of art that is tied to the arts of sound and language. The lyrics have a form of a message in the form of written words and sentences that can be used to create a variety of meanings. In its functions, songs, and lyrics generally use a means that encourages sympathy about reality or even imaginative stories. Therefore, a song can also provoke or mean propaganda in getting interested, it also plays someone's emotions and feelings. In the lyric of a song, sometimes the song's writer uses figurative language, where there are many hidden meanings inside the lyrics.

Figurative language is a type of communication that does not use a word's strict or realistic meaning. Common in comparisons and exaggerations, figurative language is usually used to add creative flourish to written or spoken language or explain a complicated idea. According to Kavka (2003), "Figuration is idioms that use words in non-literal sense or unusual manner to add vividness, beauty, etc., to what is being said or written." From the definition, it can be concluded that figurative language is created to make a great vision from the words that are being said or written. A metaphor is a figure of speech that is used to equate something else or is known as a figure of speech.

According to Searle (2012), Figure of speech is a style of language used to convey messages imaginatively. Metaphor is non-literal meaning, If somebody says, "Sally is a block of ice," or "Sam is a pig," it assumes that the speaker speaks metaphorically instead of literally. A metaphor is used by a person to express a purpose or a message that wants to convey to others, but it cannot be directly understood. A metaphor is used to compare what is intended to be expressed with something else that usually has a resemblance to a physical being, a trait, or a character, even according to one's perception. According to Ullman (2009:203), there are 4 types of metaphors, those are:

1. Anthropomorphic Metaphor

Anthropomorphic metaphors transfer the characteristics of human life, which include behavior, nature, and human characteristics, to inanimate objects when comparing one concept to another.

2. Animal Metaphor

This type of metaphor transfers an animal or an animal part or something related to an animal to an image or something else. It is generally based on a resemblance of form that is clear enough that it lacks strong expressive power.

3. Concrete to abstract Metaphor

The third category arises during the transference of a concrete concept to an abstract concept, or vice versa. This type of metaphor turns something real into unreal.

4. Synesthetic Metaphor

This type of metaphor is essentially a transfer or transference from one experience to another or a response of a concept to another based on the experiences. For example, "His eyes are cold" refer to how gives an unfriendly look, not that they are physically cold to touch.

In addition, Leech (1981) states there are 7 types of metaphorical expression meaning, those are:

1. Conceptual meaning

It is usually considered that conceptual meaning, also known as denotative or cognitive meaning, is the most important aspect of language communication. Denotative meaning is also known as main meaning, and it refers to the meaning implied by a word when it is.

2. **Connotative meaning**  
Connotative meaning is an expression's communicative value in addition to its strictly intellectual substance. It's anything that goes beyond the literal meaning of a term and suggests its characteristics in the actual world. It has a deeper meaning than the dictionary definition.
3. **Social Meaning**  
The social meaning of a piece of language refers to the meaning it conveys about the social context in which it is used.
4. **Affective meaning**  
It is the emotional associations or consequences of words produced by the reader or listener.
5. **Reflected meaning**  
Reflected meaning entails an interconnectedness on the lexical level of language; it is the meaning that emerges in the situation of multiple conceptual meanings when one sense of a word becomes part of our response to another sense.
6. **Collocative meaning**  
Collocative meaning comprises the affiliations a word obtains on account of the implications of the words, which tends to happen in its environment.
7. **Thematic meaning**  
Thematic meaning refers to the meaning sent by the speaker's or writer's organization of the message in terms of order, focus, and emphasis.

## **METHOD**

In this study, the researcher used descriptive qualitative research as a research design. Sugiyono (2005) states qualitative research is research that is used to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people both individually and in groups. The descriptive method aims to describe a phenomenon accurately based on the characteristics of the research. For this research, the descriptive method will be used to identify, describe, analyze, and classify the various types of Ullman's metaphors (2009) used in the song "Death By A Thousand Cuts" and "False God" by Taylor Swift. Qualitative research is usually in the form of descriptive, and the data collected for this type of research is in the form of words, with the results presented in the form of quotations.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Types of Metaphors in the lyric songs "Death by A Thousand Cuts" and "False God" by Taylor Swift.**

The songs of Taylor Swift "Death by A Thousand Cuts" and "False God" from the album "Lover" use some metaphors in the lyrics. These metaphors also have certain types which can be analyzed by using the theory from Ullman (2009:203). The results of this study are explained in the tables below.

**Table 1.** The Types of Metaphors in the Taylor Swift’s Song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” and “False God”

No	Lyric	Types of Metaphor
<b>Death By A Thousand Cuts</b>		
1.	Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts	<b>Abstract to concrete</b>
2.	Flashbacks waking me up	<b>Anthropomorphic</b>
3.	Chandelier's still flickering here	<b>Anthropomorphic</b>
4.	Gave up on me like I was a bad drug	<b>Concrete to Abstract</b>
5.	I ask the traffic lights if it'll be all right. They say, "I don't know"	<b>Anthropomorphic</b>
6.	Quiet my fears with the touch of your hand	<b>Abstract to concrete</b>
<b>False God</b>		
7.	In the ocean separating us. Remember how I'd fly to you	<b>Animal</b>
8.	Staring out the window like I'm not your favorite town	<b>Concrete to abstract</b>
9.	I'm New York City	<b>Concrete to abstract</b>
10.	You get lost when you're led by blind faith	<b>Anthropomorphic</b>
11.	Blind faith	<b>Concrete to abstract</b>
12.	<b>You're the West Village</b>	<b>Concrete to abstract</b>

**Discussion Table 1**

The song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” compares the possible break-up of a relationship to a slow, painful death. It was inspired by the Netflix film *Someone Great*, rather than an aspect of Swift’s personal relationship, although she had dreams that she was going through the same thing in her life. Meanwhile, the song “False God” uses heavy religious imagery to compare Swift’s relationship with her then-boyfriend, Joe Alwyn, to something all-powerful and greater than themselves.

**Data 1:** *Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts*

Data (1) belong to abstract to concrete. The phrase “Saying goodbye” is abstract and the word “Death” is concrete, both show the relationship between one experience and another where the speaker felt goodbye is like death. The song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” was a form of execution and torture used in China from 900 CE in which prisoners condemned for especially severe crimes would be slowly put to death by having each of their limbs cut off. It means that the lyrics tell how torture far more unpleasant than a sudden break or end.

**Data 2:** *Flashbacks waking me up*

From the data (2), it was found that the lyric has an anthropogenic metaphor. The word “Flashbacks” it’s a noun and it’s non-human, connected with the phrase “Waking me up” which is an activity that humans will do to wake someone from their dream. It means that the word flashback here is likened to a person who has awakened someone from their dream.

**Data 3:** *Chandelier's still flickering here*

Data (3) is categorized as an anthropomorphic metaphor. “Chandelier” is an object and “Flickering” is an adjective that is usually used for human eye disorders, such as the cause of mental anxiety problems. It could say the chandelier flickered like an eye. But, the actual meaning does not like that.

**Data 4:** *Gave up on me like I was a bad drug*

Data (4) is categorized as concrete to abstract metaphor. This type of metaphor turns something real into unreal. For example the word “Me/I” is a pronoun for people, then this person is likened to a “Bad drug” that cannot be consumed and has bad effects. The meaning of this lyric is why the lover gives up on the relationship as if this person is as bad as a drug.

**Data 5:** *I ask the traffic lights if it'll be all right. They say, "I don't know"*

Data (5) contains an anthropomorphic metaphor. It can see from the lyric that a person asks about the traffic lights and they answer “I don’t know”. It could be concluded that the traffic lights transferred the characteristics of human behavior. While the traffic lights are inanimate object but in the lyrics it seems as if it is alive and can communicate with people.

**Data 6:** *Quiet my fears with the touch of your hand*

Data (6) shows a synesthetic metaphor, it exploits a similarity between experiences in different sense modalities. The sentence “Quiet my fears” is one experience, linked with “The touch of your hand” which is also an experience with sense. It means the speaker fears will vanish if her partner can calm her down with physical touch which is more to a hug, as we hear the word hug we can imagine the warmth and comfort of the touch of a given embrace.

**Data 7:** *Remember how I'd fly to you?*

Data (7) contains an animal metaphor. This type of metaphor usually uses animal body parts or animal names or something related to animals to describe something. The word that indicates the phrase as an animal metaphor is “Fly”. It means that the activity mostly referred to the characteristic of an animal such as a bird. The use of this metaphor indicates an effort for the speaker's lover.

**Data 8:** *Staring out the window like I'm not your favorite town*

Data (8) has a concrete to abstract metaphor. The word “I” is a person likened to a “Town” or a city. The city here is defined as a metropolitan city where it is very comfortable to live. However, that glance showed that this person was staring at the town like it was boring to him.

**Data 9:** *I'm New York City*

Data (9) has a concrete to abstract metaphor. This type of metaphor turns an unreal concept into a real, one by treating an abstract concept as a concrete concept by giving it characteristics of a concrete, animate object. Data (9) showed that “I” is a person and “New York City” the big city in the USA, the fact that New York City is home to every famous person in the world.

**Data 10:** *You get lost when you're led by blind faith*

Data (10) above has an anthropomorphic metaphor. While “Led” has the meaning of guiding or leading which is human behavior, associated with “Blind Faith” which is an abstract concept and is not real.

**Data 11:** *Blind Faith*

Data (11) above has a concrete to abstract metaphor. The word “Blind” is usually referred to eyes that unable to see. The word “Faith” is a belief and it is abstract. But, it doesn't mean that faith could not see with eyes like humans. Data (11) means believing without any evidence or true understanding.

**Data 12:** *You're the West Village*

Data (12) expresses concrete to abstract metaphors. This type of metaphor turns an unreal concept into a real one. It is the same as the data (9). The word “You” which is refer to a person/the speaker partner and “The West Village” is a neighborhood in the western section of the larger GreenwichVillage neighborhood of Lower Manhattan, New York City.

## Meaning of the Metaphorical expression in the song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” and “False God” by Taylor Swift

The lyrics of Taylor Swift’s songs “Death By A Thousand Cuts” and “False God” also have certain meaning types which can be analyzed by using the theory from Leech (1981). The results of this study are explained in the tables below.

**Table 2.** Meaning of the metaphorical expression in Taylor Swift’s Song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” and “False God”

No	Lyrics	Meaning
<b>Death By A Thousand Cuts</b>		
1.	Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts	<b>Connotative</b>
2.	Flashbacks waking me up	<b>Connotative</b>
3.	Chandelier's still flickering here	<b>Collocative &amp; Connotative</b>
4.	Gave up on me like I was a bad drug	<b>Affective</b>
5.	I ask the traffic lights if it'll be all right They say, "I don't know"	<b>Connotative</b>
6.	Quiet my fears with the touch of your hand	<b>Conceptual</b>
<b>False God</b>		
7.	In the ocean separating us Remember how I'd fly to you	<b>Connotative</b>
8.	Staring out the window like I'm not your favorite town	<b>Collocative</b>
9.	I'm New York City	<b>Connotative</b>
10.	You get lost when you're led by blind faith	<b>Conceptual</b>
11.	Blind faith	<b>Conceptual</b>
12.	You're the West Village	<b>Connotative</b>

### Discussion Table 2

The song “Death By A Thousand Cuts” compares the possible break-up of a relationship to a slow, painful death. It was inspired by the Netflix film *Someone Great*, rather than an aspect of Swift’s personal relationship, although she had dreams that she was going through the same thing in her life. Meanwhile, the song “False God” uses heavy religious imagery to compare Swift’s relationship with her then-boyfriend, Joe Alwyn, to something all-powerful and greater than themselves.

#### **Data 1:** *Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts*

Based on the meaning, data (1) contains a connotative meaning. Data (1) shows nonliteral and has implied meaning. As we can see in the previous discussion “Death by a thousand cuts” doesn’t mean killed by a thousand knives, but it has the meaning of slow torture of the break-up relationship after effect. The phrase “Saying goodbye” and “Death” have the same emotion as sadness.

#### **Data 2:** *Flashbacks waking me up*

Data (2) contains a connotative meaning. The literal meaning of the lyrics is a “flashback” of their previous relationship “Waking up” which mean made the speaker realize from her dream that

the relationship was over. The lyrics continue with “Cause the morning comes, and you’re not my baby” proofing the flashbacks is about the past of the relationship.

**Data 3:** *Chandelier's still flickering here*

Data (3) has a collocative meaning. Because the “Chandelier” is an object usually hanging in the bedroom. “Here” refers to the bedroom because it was mentioned in the previous lyrics that there is a sentence “Waking me up” which of course was done in the bedroom. The connotative meaning of the lyrics is to describe harboring feelings for someone after a breakup.

**Data 4:** *Gave up on me like I was a bad drug*

Data (4) express an affective meaning. It shows the emotional associations or consequences of words produced in the reader or listener. The people who listen to the lyrics may feel pity.

**Data 5:** *I ask the traffic lights if it'll be all right. They say, "I don't know"*

Data (5) The lyrics also express a connotative meaning. The traffic lights tell drivers if they should move forward (green), slow down (yellow), or stop (red). If they’re not working properly, it can lead to traffic jams and car accidents. According to Taylor Swift (2013) in the interview, she said, “Relationships are like traffic lights. And I just have this theory that I can only exist in a relationship if it’s a green light.”

**Data 6:** *Quiet my fears with the touch of your hand*

Data (6) The lyrics contain a conceptual meaning. Because what the lyrics said is the same as the dictionary meaning. This means the speaker's fears will vanish if her partner can calm her down with physical touch which is more to a hug, as we hear the word “Hug” we can imagine the warmth and comfort of the touch of a given embrace.

**Data 7:** *Remember how I'd fly to you?*

Data (7) contains connotative lyrics. The word “Fly” doesn’t mean fly with wings like a bird, but it has to fly with an airplane to catch up with her boyfriend even though he was out of the country that had to cross the sea.

**Data 8:** *Staring out the window like I'm not your favorite town*

Data (8) has a connotative meaning. The city there refers to a relationship that might be feeling bored and he misses his lover which from a different country at the time.

**Data 9:** *I'm New York City*

Data (9) has a connotative meaning. The meaning implied in the phrase is the speaker doesn't mean turning into a city, but she likens herself to someone her lover can turn to anytime because she is always there for him.

**Data 10:** *You get lost when you're led by blind faith*

Data (10) has a conceptual meaning. From the data (10), the person told that the symptoms are hard to notice when you’re not trained to see blind faith, and you’ll get lost. Data (10) states that if you are already involved in a romantic relationship, despite knowing that staying together would be a challenge, it can be “Led by blind faith”.

**Data 11:** *Blind Faith*

Data (11) has a conceptual meaning. In a relationship, ‘blind faith’ refer to the crossed path or crossed line. So, sometimes we don't realize that we have led by blind faith, for example, willing to do anything for our partner.

**Data 12:** *You're the West Village*

Data (12) contains a connotative meaning. It's connected with the "I'm New York City" which refers to the speaker, which he could come to or 'go in' at any time. And, "You're the West Village" is the speaker partner, from the description above the West Village is a neighborhood inside New York City. So it means the partner can come inside her, and the lyrics lead to a sexual meaning.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of "Death By A Thousand Cuts" and "False God" song lyrics, from 16 lyrics of "Death By A Thousand Cuts", there are 6 lyrics that contain metaphor. And, from the 15 lines of the "False God" song, there are 6 lyrics that contain metaphors. Among the two songs, there are 6 metaphors found in "Death By A Thousand Cuts" and 6 metaphors found in "False God" and the total is 12 metaphors. Of all of the categories of metaphors, the one used most often in the song is the concrete to abstract metaphor with 5 data found in the song. These metaphors are significantly more dominant than the others because contains feeling and abstract noun as abstract concept. Therefore, by giving it concrete attributes it assists the listeners to understand the story conveyed in the song lyrics.

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