



FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN TAYLOR SWIFT’S SONGS (A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS)

Suleman Bouti¹

Rusni Podungge²

Irmawaty Umar³

Meity Dasinsingon⁴

¹ Universitas Negeri Gorontalo 1, Kota Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia.

² Universitas Negeri Gorontalo 2, Kota Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

³ Universitas Negeri Gorontalo 3, Kota Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Negeri Gorontalo 3, Kota Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

email:

s_bouti@ung.ac.id

podunggerusni@gmail.com

irmawaty.umar@ung.ac.id

meitydasinsingon01@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to find out the types of figurative language meaning in Taylor Swift’s songs. There are two songs by Taylor Swift in the album 1989 with the title blank space and new romantics were used in this research as the data. This research has conducted with used descriptive qualitative method. The approach used in this research is a semantic analysis based on linguistics theory. This research used two main theories by Abram (1999), which focuses on analyzing the types of figurative language and the theory of meaning by Leech (1974) which focuses on analyzing the meaning in blank space and new romantic songs. The technique of collecting the data used library research. The data were analyzed by identifying, classifying, and analyzing. This research indicated seven types of figurative language were found in this research. As the result, there are 6 types of metaphor, 6 types of simile, 2 types of personification, 4 types of hyperbole, 12 types of symbolism, 1 type of irony, and 2 types of paradox. Furthermore, the researcher also found 5 types of semantic meaning in blank space and new romantic songs. There are 5 types of connotative meaning, 11 types of affective meaning, 9 types of social meaning, 1 type of conceptual meaning, and 2 types of collocative meaning.

Keywords: semantic, Figurative language, song, blank space, new romantics.

Received:

Accepted: Desember 2022

Published: Januari 2023



INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, songs have become an inseparable part of human life because they can give listeners moral value. Songs are written based on daily life, culture, adventure, and deep feelings. Songs also have a meaning or purpose that can be delivered to listeners. Talking about the meaning of language means talking about linguistics because linguistics is a study of language that contains an analysis of language, language meaning, and language in context. According to Widdowson (1996), the study of human language is known as linguistics. To find out the component of language, linguistics has been divided into several branches. They are phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics.

In semantics, meanings are divided into two types, which are literal meaning and non-literal meaning. The literal meaning can be easily interpreted because it used real, precise, and limited meaning without making associations with symbolic meaning. While the non-literal meaning is the word or sentence that has a different meaning from the real meaning. Non-literal is a study of linguistics called figurative language that found in poems, songs, speech, or novels.

Figurative language is indirect communication in which the meaning is more important than the actual utterance. According to Heller (2011) figurative language “refers to groups or words that exaggerate or alter usual meaning of the component words that may involve analogy to similar concept or other context and may involve exaggeration” (p. 62-63). Furthermore, figurative language is not only used in daily communication, but it is quite common in songs to make the lyrics more interesting and more aesthetic. Briefly, the pieces of song lyrics are meaningless.

The researcher choose song as an object because Most people who listen to English songs do not understand the messages and hidden meanings delivered in that songs. Every piece of a song has implied meaning for listeners. The songwriter makes a song to express their feelings to the listeners. The researcher is interested to interpret *Blank Space and New Romantics* songs because they contain many figurative languages that have implied meanings.



LITERATURE REVIEW

SEMANTIC

Semantic is a branch of linguistics dealing with the meaning of words or sentences as linguistic expressions. Meaning is a message conveyed by words, sentences, and symbols in a context. According to Heller (2011) meaning is that something that is conveyed or signified, sense or significance, something that one wishes to convey especially by language and interpret goal, intent, or end inner significance. It means that meaning is communicated through language that conveyed the message to somebody. According to Leech (1974) meaning is divided into seven types. They are:

1. Conceptual meaning is a word based on the structure and form of the word that has a clear and logical meaning. Besides, conceptual meaning, also known as denotative meaning, refers to the first thought that comes to mind.
2. Connotative meaning is a word or sentence that has implied or explicit meaning. This type is concerned with the accurate word or expression that is used.
3. Social meaning is a piece of information that convey expression about certain social characteristic. This meaning includes the expression and stylistic formality of an utterance.
4. Affective meaning is the sense to show emotion that relies upon the meditation of the other categories of conceptual, connotative, or stylistic meaning about personal feelings in that context.
5. Collocative meaning is associated with another sense of the same expression. This type happened in multiple conceptual meanings.
6. Associative meaning is the study of a phrase, sentence, or word showing the expression of the context. Besides, reflected meaning is one sense of a particular word affects the understanding of the other sense of the word.



7. Thematic meaning is denoting the organization of a message in terms of information structure. This type is explaining the part of the meaning in the sentence that is commonly defined.

Types of Figurative Language

Figurative language is a method used by people or writers to convey their intentions indirectly. The use of figurative language in a sentence often has the effect of specific influences. According to Abrams (1999) figurative language is categorized into ten types. They are metaphors, similes, synecdoche, personification, metonymy, allegory, hyperbole, irony, symbolism, and paradox.

Metaphor

A metaphor compares two different things that have similarities that do not use the words like or as. According to Abrams (1999), "metaphor is a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison" (p. 97).

Simile

Simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things using the word *like* or *as*. According to Abrams (1999) "simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word like or as" (p. 97)

Synecdoche

A synecdoche is a figurative language that covers or represents words or sentences to signify the whole part. According to Abrams (1999) "synecdoche is a part of something is used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part" (p.98).

Personification

Personification is a figure of speech that describes an animal or an abstract term to have a human characteristic. According to Abrams (1999) "in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings" (p. 99).



Metonymy

A metonymy is a figure of speech that represents something that is closely related to each other. According to Abrams (1999), “metonymy is a literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experience” (p. 98).

Allegory

Allegory is a figure of speech that expresses the narrative in which events, actions, characters, settings, or objects to representation a hidden meaning. According to Abrams (1999) “allegory is a figure of speech that is defined as the narrative other literary vehicles can be adapted to the purposes of indirect satire” (p. 277).

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an exaggeration that is created to emphasize a point or bring out a sense of humor. Abrams (1999) stated that “hyperbole is a bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility” (p. 120).

Irony

Irony is a statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the genuine meaning. Irony is divided into two types. They are soft irony that used for humor and hard irony that used for sarcasm. According to Abrams (1999) “Irony is there remaining the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects” (p.135).

Symbolism

Symbol is defined as a thing that could be an object, a person, a situation, or an action that represents something more abstract. According to Abrams (1999), “symbolism is a term used to describe a word or phrase that refers to an object or event that represents something or has a range of meaning beyond itself” (p. 311).

Paradox

Paradox is a statement that includes two opposite truths. According to Abrams (1999) “Paradox is a statement that appears to be logically contradictory or illogical on the surface but understood in a reasonable manner” (p. 201).



METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used qualitative methods to determine the meaning of figurative language in *Blank Space* and *New Romantics* song by Taylor Swift. The researcher described the figurative language analysis in Taylor Swift's songs. According to Wiersma (1995, as cited in Brigita Astri Wulandari, 2018, p. 29), the study of a classification and description process is the focus of qualitative research. The researcher used the qualitative method to find out the meaning of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs.

APPROACH

In this research, the researcher used semantic analysis, which uses componential analysis. Componential analysis is the instrument to analyze whether the sentences are included in figurative language. The researcher chose a semantic analysis to interpret the meaning of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs. According to Paul R Kroeger (2018, p. 4), semantics is concerned with the inherent meaning of words and sentences as linguistic expressions. It means that semantics is a way to classify and convey experiences through language that uses hidden meaning.

TECHNIQUE OF COLLECTING THE DATA

In the technique of collecting the data the researcher use library research to know the figurative language meaning in *Blank Space* and *New Romantics* songs by Taylor.

Library Research

Library research is material in in the form of novel, magazines, songs, articles, papers, and textbook. In this library research, the researcher initially conducted a research about figurative language in Taylor swift's songs lyric in the album 1989 with the title *Blank Space* and *New Romantics* songs. The reason why the researcher use library research



because the data are taken from printed material, such as the song lyrics, book and dictionaries to support the analysis. The data that are collect from the internet that are also considered to complete the analysis.

TECHNIQUE OF ANALYZING THE DATA

After collecting the data from the library research, the researcher then analyzed the data by using descriptive qualitative method analysis.

After the data was obtained, the researcher identified each sentence from *blank space* and *new romantics* song lyrics to categoriez into figurative language, then classifying figurative language based on each types, and analyzied the meaning of figurative language based on leech theory about semantic meaning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

FINDINGS

After analyzing the lyrics, the researcher discusses the findings to clarify the research problem. the data are classified and interpreted into several steps which are displayed, described, and discussed. First, all the data findings were displayed in general and specific figurative language. Then, the researcher described each data in this study including describing the meaning of figurative language. The last, the data discussed the meaning of figurative language in *Blank Space* and *New Romantics* song.

Metaphor

In the blank space song, the researcher found two sentences of figurative language type metaphor: “Love's a game, wanna play?” And “but I've got a blank space, baby”. The first sentence is, “Love's a game, wanna play?”. This sentence presents implied meaning that compares love to a game. According to Abrams (1999) “metaphor is a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison” (p. 97). The word “love” means a strong feeling of deep affection for somebody. While the word “game” means playing with rules or doing



things for pleasure. Taylor Swift describes love has four characteristics magic, madness, heaven, and sin. When she says, "wanna play?" she has invited the man to play in four characteristics of love that person feels when falling in love with somebody.

In *New Romantics*, the researcher found four sentences of figurative language of metaphor, there are "Honey life is just like a classroom", "Baby we're the New Romantics", "It's poker, he can't see in my face," and "Heartbreak is the national anthem". In this song Taylor Swift uses metaphor in line 11 "Honey, life is just like a classroom." In this line, Taylor is comparing life to a classroom. The reason for choosing this sentence as a metaphor is because it is one of the criteria of metaphor, which is comparing two different things without using the word like or as. According to Abrams (1999, p. 97), "metaphor is a word or expression that denotes one kind of thing applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison.". The meaning of this sentence is everyone has different problems, but these problems can make lessons and experiences that can help us become better individuals.

Simile

In this song, the researcher found one data of simile in the sentence "I can read you like a magazine". This sentence implied the meaning corresponding to the term "you" to "magazine," using the word like to compare that word. According to Abrams (1999), a simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things explicitly indicated by the word like or as (P.97). The word "you" means the person to whom the speaker is speaking. At the same time, the term "magazine" is one of the media that contain information. The meaning of this sentence is that Taylor can see this man's character that love is not an incredible thing, but love is material.

In *New Romantics*, Taylor Swift uses simile in line 13 "And every day it's like a battle". In this line, Taylor compares every day to battle. The reason for choosing this sentence as a simile is that it is one of the criteria of a simile according to Abrams' theory, which is comparing two different things using the word like or as. These sentences present implied meaning that the people who have problems every day will fight with themselves because a



part of themselves does not accept the problem, so it becomes a negative emotion that affects their mental health.

Personification

In *Blank Space*, one sentence of figurative language personification is "ain't it funny rumors fly". The reason for choosing this sentence is personification because it is seen from criteria in terms of personification, which describes an abstract term with human characteristics. According to Abrams (1999) either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings (P.99). Likewise, in the sentence "Ain't it funny rumors fly", the word "rumors" is an abstract thing that can fly. The meaning of this sentence is that rumors about this man that regard love as material things have spread out. Taylor believes that before the man dates her, he knows about Taylor because he has the power to get information.

In *New Romantics*, the researcher found two data of figurative language type personification which is the sentence "The lights and noise are blinding.". The word lights and noise are abstract things that cannot be blind, unlike people. This sentence means that a group of people who have problems in life come to the party to vent the mental emotions they feel.

Hyperbole

The sentence "I'm dying to see how this one ends". The reason for choosing this sentence is it is seen from the criteria of hyperbole. Hyperbole is an exaggeration of a statement. Abrams (1999) stated that hyperbole is a bold overstatement or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility (P.20). This sentence exaggerates "dying," which means that she is extremely curious about the ending of their relationship. Will it have a happy ending, or will this guy become her next mistake.

In *New Romantics*, the researcher found the lyric "We wait trains that just aren't coming.". The sentence interprets implied meaning that the people are experiencing a bore out that affects a person's mental health in living a monotonous life. To deal with boredom and



tiredness, they cannot wait for the condition to end. However, we must fight the feeling of boredom by starting more productive activities to develop ourselves in living life.

Symbolism

The sentence “Magic, madness, heaven, sin” is a kind of figurative language of symbolism. Symbolism describes an object, a person, a situation, or an action. According to Abrams (1999), symbolism is a term used to describe a word or phrase that refers to an object or event that represents something or has a range of meanings beyond itself (p.3110). Each word in the sentence has a different meaning. The word magic is a symbol of love, which means people can forget themselves and not care about their background, weakness, or their real characters when people fall in love. People will do anything for someone they love and can change their principle. The word madness symbolizes crazy, which means love can create mixed feelings and erasure. In a relationship, people can feel happy or sad. While the word heaven is a symbol of happiness in a relationship. Which means they are doing what makes them happy. The last word sin is a symbol representing the sexual in a relationship. The meaning of this sentence is that in a relationship, the people falling in love will feel mixed feelings in expressing their love. The meaning of this sentence is in a relationship there are some characteristics of love to express our feelings to somebody.

In *New Romantics*, the researcher found the data in the lyric “We show off our different scarlet letters”. In this lyric, the phrase “scarlet letters” is a symbol of the alienation resulting from the mistakes that have been made in life. The meaning of this sentence is people who have bored out feel ashamed because they feel ostracized by society. They feel alone when having a problem because there is no one to help them to face their problems.

Irony

Moreover, the researcher found the data in the lyric “Please leave me a stranded. It’s so romantic.”. The reason for choosing this sentence as irony is because it is one of the criteria of irony. This is related to the theory by Abrams (1999). According to him, the irony remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding the case; not, however, to deceive, but to



achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects. This sentence means that they enjoy the party atmosphere by dancing together to vent the mental emotions they feel, and they want to be trapped in the party because like people who have no problems in life because when they are alone, they feel the mental emotion again.

Paradox

In *Blank Space*, the researcher found the data in the sentence “Cause you know I love the players and you love the game”. The reason for choosing this sentence as a paradox is because it is one of the criteria of paradox. According to Abrams (1999, p. 201), paradox is logically contradictory or illogically on the surface, understood in a reasonable manner. The meaning of this sentence is Taylor like the type of man who has power and plays with women’s feelings. While the man likes the drama in the relationship.

In *New Romantics*, the researcher found the lyric “We need love, but all we want is danger.”. The reason for choosing this sentence as a paradox is because it is one of the criteria of paradox, which paradox is a sentence that includes two opposite truths. The meaning of this sentence is sometimes in life, we need the closest people to give affection or love, but what we do is keep facing the problems alone, and there is no place to share which makes it worse.

DISCUSSION

This section aims to describe the detailed analysis and issues of the research result that have been presented in the previous chapter. To frame the discussion of the finding, this chapter employs the result as the guidelines. Analysis and interpretation in song lyric use theory based on Leech (1974, p. 9) find out the meaning of figurative language in *Blank Space* and *New Romantics* song by Taylor Swift. According to him, meaning is divided into seven types there are conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, collocative meaning, associative meaning, and thematic meaning.



Conceptual Meaning

The first result of this research is the types of figurative language which is conceptual meaning because this research focuses on analyzing the meaning in Taylor Swift's songs. It is important to know the meaning of Taylor Swift's song. The previous part discussed what types and meanings of figurative language that used in Taylor Swift's songs. The following discussed the semantic meaning of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs.

Conceptual meaning is the real meaning of a word. One example of a previous study in conceptual meaning entitles "Meanings of Figurative Language in LED ZEPPELIN'S *STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN* (2019)". The context of the lyrics in this song caught both the songwriter and the listeners off guard because it is so unusual for a rock band to discuss slower music than usual. The listener is hard to understand the lyrics of this song because the songwriter used implied meaning. Furthermore, in the *Blank Space* song, there is a lyric "New money, suit, and tie" that is included in conceptual meaning because each word in this sentence represents a similar nearly identical meaning with wealth. The meaning of this sentence is the man who is dating Taylor is a rich person and can do everything he wants because he has power.

Connotative Meaning

The second result in this research is figurative language that include into connotative meaning. To explain the findings, the researcher relies on cases that occurred in the previous study. The case which is in accordance with the previous study resulted in three main points to be classified the types of figurative language and solve the meaning of the song by using semantic feature. In addition, during this stage, case findings will be discussed based on a comparison of relevant previous studies and the underlying theory. As indicated by the findings, the second result of this study included into figurative language type metaphor. In addition, in the *New Romantics* song, the lyric "Honey life is just like a classroom" is included in connotative meaning because it has implied meaning in it. The



word “classroom” is a place that is identic to learning. The meaning of this sentence is everyone has different problems, but these problems can make lessons and experiences that can help us become better individuals.

Social Meaning

The third result of this research is figurative language that is included in social meaning. To explain the findings, the researcher relies on cases that occurred in the previous study. In *New Romantics* song, the lyric “Baby we’re new romantics” is included in social meaning, because there is a special meaning in it. The phrase “New Romantics” seems to have a meaning about romanticism in a relationship, but in fact, it represents subculture. The meaning of this lyric is the group of people who are having the same problem in life.

Affective Meaning

The fourth result in this sentence the researcher found the semantic types of affective meaning. According to Leech (1974) “Affective meaning is the sense that to show emotion that relies upon the meditation of the other categories of conceptual, connotative, or stylistic meaning about personal feeling in that context.”. As indicated by the findings, the second result of this study included into figurative language type metaphor. The lyric “Love’s a game, wanna play?” represents Taylor’s personal feelings about love. The word “love” means deep affection or deep feelings for somebody. While the word “game” means something play with the rules or doing things for pleasure. The meaning of this sentence is love has a character that can be played with the rules. Taylor also represents the characteristics of love as magic, madness, heaven, and sins. When she said “wanna play”? it means Taylor invited the man to play with four characters of love.

Collocative Meaning

The fourth result in this research is figurative language types of symbols that include collocative meaning. According to Leech (1974) “Collocative meaning is consist of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur



in its environments.”. As indicated by the findings, the result of this study included in figurative language type symbol. In *Blank Space*, “Cherry lips, crystal skies” is collocating two words to become one phrase “Cherry lips” refers to red on the lips, and “Crystal skies” refers to blue skies. The meaning of this sentence is in a sunny day Taylor dressed up beautifully to meet the man. Meanwhile, she is feeling angry and sad because she was guessing how this relationship would end. The sentences of collocating two words become one phrase such as “stolen kisses”, “requited feeling”, and “pretty lies” refers to liars. The meaning of this sentence is only Taylor that has feelings for the man, but the man does not, and Taylor begun feels a lie in their relationship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

The researcher found that 7 types of figurative language were found in this research. As the result, there are 6 types of metaphor, 6 types of simile, 2 types of personification, 4 types of hyperbole, 12 types of symbolism, 1 type of irony, and 2 types of paradox. Furthermore, the researcher also found 5 types of semantic meaning in *blank space* and *new romantic songs*. There are 5 types of connotative meaning, 11 types of affective meaning, 9 types of social meaning, 1 type of conceptual meaning, and 2 types of collocative meaning.

RECOMMENDATION

For other researcher the result of this research study can be a reference for conducting other research related to this research. This research can give more information and experience about figurative language. For students, this study will be helpful for students in understanding the importance of figurative language in songs’ lyrics to know the meaning of the song. While, for lecturer, this study can be used to teach figurative language through semantic analysis in songs’ lyrics as a teaching material.



References

- Abrams, H. M. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. USA: Thomson Place, Boston.
- Heller, D. (2011). Figurative Speech as a Representation of meaning.
- Kroeger, Paul R. (2018). *Analyzing meaning: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Berlin: Published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence (CC BY 4.0): <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
- Leech, G. N. (1974). *Semantics The Study of Meaning*. Penguin Books
- Wiersma. (1995). *Figurative Language in Rodes Fishburne's Going to See The Elephants*. Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta: English Language Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University.
- Widdowson. G. H. (1996). *Linguistics*. New York: Oxford University