

Figurative Language in Lana Del Rey's and Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes figurative language in two song albums: *Born to Die* (2012) by Lana Del Rey and *reputation* (2017) by Taylor Swift. Using Perrine's theoretical framework, this qualitative research examines figurative devices found in selected song lyrics. The data consists of lyrics from both albums. The findings reveal that both artists use various types of figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, overstatement, understatement, and irony. Lana Del Rey frequently uses symbolic and emotional imagery and often combines multiple figurative devices within a single line, while Taylor Swift emphasizes narrative clarity and emotional contrast. Apostrophe appears only in Lana Del Rey's lyrics. The study also identifies mixed figurative types, with seven combinations in Lana Del Rey's songs and six in Taylor Swift's. Overall, figurative language in both albums strengthens themes, emotions, and storytelling.

Keywords: figurative language, song lyrics, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a bridge that humans use to communicate with one another. Language allows communication and to express thoughts and feelings (Fajrin, 2021 as cited in Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). According to Firdaus (2013), language is a tool to express thoughts and ideas to others in both spoken and written forms. The use of language can be in both literal and non-literal ways, such as figurative language. According to Perrine (2017), figurative language is a language that the speaker uses to express their feelings and creativity in imaginative ways. Figurative language helps songwriters express meaning and emotion more effectively. According to Santika and Syafryadin (2023), songwriters often use figurative language to express their feelings, and that song lyrics can have various meanings depending on how listeners interpret them. Song lyrics can influence emotions, thoughts, and behaviour, showing that lyrics can build a connection and evoke emotions (Ruth & Schramm, 2020).

American singer-songwriter Lana Del Rey, born Elizabeth Woolridge Grant on June 21, 1985, is well known for her romantic and glamorous melancholy tone. Taylor Swift, born Taylor Allison Swift on December 13, 1989 is an American singer-songwriter known for her autobiographical, versatility, and cultural influence work. Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift were chosen because both are known for the use of complex and rich figurative language in their song lyrics. According to earlier studies, Lana Del Rey's *Born to Die* (2012) and Taylor Swift's *reputation* (2017) both feature multiple types of figurative language that give their song a more emotional depth and symbolic meaning. However, most of these studies analyzed one artist or one album at a time, without comparing both artists in a single analysis. These studies do not show how figurative language may differ or overlap within artists, even though they offer helpful insights into each artist's unique style. The previous study also didn't show the mixed type of figurative language that the artist may use in the song lyrics.

This study used Perrine's (2017) theory to find out how Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift use figurative language in their songs. This theory was chosen because it provides a clear and comprehensive list of figurative language forms, making it simpler to recognize and contrast how they are used in both albums. This theory was chosen because it provides a clear and comprehensive list of figurative language

forms, making it simpler to recognize and contrast how they are used in both albums. According to Perrine (2017) there are eleven types of figurative language, like (a) simile, (b) metaphor, (c) personification, (d) apostrophe, (e) metonymy, (f) symbol, (g) allegory, (h) paradox, (i) overstatement, (j) understatement, and (k) irony. Perrine's (2017) classification fits the study's goal to identify and compare all types of figurative language in the lyrics.

METHOD

For this study, the writer used a qualitative method. The data was collected from the eight chosen songs from *Born to Die* (2012) and *reputation* (2017), that have the same theme of love and relationship. The writer copied all the eight song lyrics and put them into one google document file for further reading. Then the writer then analyzed the lyrics using Perrine's (2017) framework from both albums that contain figurative language. The lyrics were analyzed per-line(s) to assure the accuracy, and the repeated line(s) like chorus were not analyzed again. Next the writer put the analyzed lyrics into a table and put on a checkmark based on the category of the figurative language found in the lyrics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the two findings: the type of figurative language found in Lana Del Rey's song lyrics and the type of figurative language found in Taylor Swift's song lyrics, the similarities and differences in the figurative language used between Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift.

No	Artist	Types of Figurative Language										
		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
1	Lana Del Rey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
2	Taylor Swift	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓

Types of figurative language found in Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift's song lyrics

The writer found simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, metonymy, symbol, paradox, overstatement, and irony in Lana Del Rey's song lyrics. In Taylor Swift's song lyrics, the writer found simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, and irony. The difference is that apostrophe appears only in Lana Del Rey's lyrics, as Taylor Swift's songs do not address or speak to someone who has passed away.

Simile

Example 1

“Telephone wires above **are sizzlin' like** a snare” (Lana)

The line from “*Summertime Sadness*” is a simile because it uses the word “*like*” to compare the sizzling sound of telephone wires to the sharp beat of a snare drum. This comparison helps create a vivid auditory image. In the context of the song, this line reflects the intensity and excitement of the narrator's emotions. The sizzling telephone wires can symbolize the electric tension and passion in her relationship, suggesting that even the surroundings seem to echo the narrator's feelings.

Personification

Example 2

“After the storm, **somethin’ was born on the 4th of July**” (Taylor)

This line from “*End Game*” is a metaphor that symbolizes renewal and emotional rebirth after conflict. In “*End Game*”, Taylor Swift sings about a relationship that survives through chaos, rumors, and emotional “storms.” Here, the “storm” represents the relationship’s problems or misunderstandings, while “the Fourth of July,” is a day of celebration and independence, represents a fresh start and freedom from the past. Taylor Swift means that the relationship finds a new beginning, full of confidence even after hardship. The song’s message of endurance in love in the face of social pressure and personal trauma is strengthened by the metaphor.

Personification

Example 3

“**Love is mean and love hurts**” (Lana)

This line from “*Blue Jeans*” is a personification because it shows the abstract concept of love by showing it as something that can be cruel and painful. In the context of “*Blue Jeans*” the line expresses the narrator’s mixed feelings about a difficult and passionate love. The song shows her love has given both happiness and pain by representing love as something that “hurts”. This personification reflects the toxic and intense nature of the narrator’s relationship with her partner, capturing the darker side of love in the song, a love that feels alive but destructive.

Apostrophe

Example 4

“But I can feel **you touchin’ me**” (Lana)

This line from “*Dark Paradise*” is an example of apostrophe because it reflects apostrophe, Lana Del Rey expresses a direct, intimate sensation toward someone who is no longer physically present. In “*Dark Paradise*,” the singer mourns a lover who has died, yet she continues to address him as if he were still beside her. The lyric “But I can feel you touchin’ me” shows apostrophe through this emotional address toward an absent or even unreachable figure, allowing her grief to manifest as an imagined interaction.

Metonymy

Example 5

“If you’re **the toast** of the town” (Taylor)

This line from “*New Year’s Day*” is an example of metonymy because the word “toast” is used to represent social admiration or fame, rather than its literal meaning of a drink raised in celebration. In the context of “*New Year’s Day*,” Taylor Swift uses this expression to describe a person who is publicly admired or celebrated “the toast of the town.” However, within the song’s larger message, this line carries a contrast: even if someone is loved and praised by everyone, what truly matters is the private, enduring connection shared with one person once the excitement fades. The song’s message of true love over temporary attention or fame is strengthened by figurative language.

Symbol

Example 6

“Dancin’ in the dark, in the pale moonlight” (Lana)

This line from *“Summertime Sadness”* is symbolic because “dark” and “pale moonlight” go beyond their literal meanings to reflect the mood and emotion of the song. In the context of *“Summertime Sadness”*, the scene of dancing in the dark under the moonlight symbolizes a fleeting moment of passion and freedom shared between lovers before separation or loss. The contrast between darkness and moonlight captures the bittersweet tone of the song love that feels beautiful yet shadowed by sadness. Through this imagery, Lana Del Rey expresses how even moments of joy can carry a quiet sense of melancholy.

Paradox

Example 7

“You make me so happy it turns back to sad” (Taylor)

This line from *“Gorgeous”* is a paradox because it shows two opposite emotions, happiness and sadness that happen at the same time. In *“Gorgeous,”* Taylor Swift expresses the confusing emotional experience of loving someone who gives both happiness and sadness. Apparently because love seems one-sided, the lyrics show that her happiness becomes overwhelming and it spirals back into sadness. The bittersweet quality of passion is captured in this contradiction: being around the person makes her happy, but it also acts as a reminder of what she cannot have. The song’s emotional complexity is enhanced by the paradox, which shows how love can be both lovely and tragic.

Overstatement

Example 8

“You like your girls insane” (Lana)

This line from *“Born to Die”* is an overstatement, or hyperbole, because it exaggerates the idea that the speaker is drawn to “crazy” women, which is an overstatement. When someone is called “crazy,” it indicates a serious condition. However, the word is not intended to be understood literally in the context of the song. Instead, it captures the passion, recklessness, and mental chaos of the relationship in discussion. Lana Del Rey emphasizes the narrator’s awareness of being drawn into an emotionally toxic relationship by using this exaggeration to depict an unhealthy and unbalanced relationship. The song’s theme obsession, danger, and doomed love which are important to the depressing and fatalistic tone of *“Born to Die”* are amplified by this exaggeration.

Irony

Example 9

“Cause us traitors never win” (Taylor)

This line from *“Getaway Car”* is an example of irony because it presents an unexpected contradiction between the singer’s actions and their outcome. In *“Getaway Car,”* Taylor Swift tells the story of escaping one relationship to start another, an act of betrayal that initially feels thrilling and freeing. However, the ironic twist is revealed in the line “Cause us traitors never win”: despite her belief that she could escape and find happiness, her actions eventually end in regret and loss. The realization that lying, which at one point appeared to be a route to freedom, only has emotional consequences is where the irony resides. Through this line, Taylor highlights the moral and emotional cost of disloyalty, reinforcing the song’s theme of guilt and inevitable downfall.

Symbol and Overstatement

This is a combination that occurs when a lyric uses a symbol to represent a deeper meaning while also exaggerating the emotion or situation for dramatic effect. For example, in Lana Del Rey's song "*Video Games*", where the lyrics "They say that the world was built for two" here the "world" symbolizes an idealized relationship while the suggestion that "it was built for two" is an exaggeration that intensifies the romantic tone.

Metaphor and Symbol

This combination appears when a lyric uses metaphor to compare one thing to another indirectly, while also embedding symbols that represent emotional states, relationships, or transformation. The example of this can be seen in Taylor Swift's song "*Look What You Made Me Do*" where the lyrics "I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time", "Rose up from the dead" is a metaphor for personal comeback, while symbolizing renewal, reputation, and transformation in the broader narrative of the album.

Personification and Symbol

This combination happens when a lyric gives human-like qualities to a non-human concept while also using an image or object as a symbol representing an emotional or thematic idea. The example of this can be seen in Lana Del Rey's song "*Born to Die*", where the lyric "The road is long, we carry on", here "road" symbolizes life or a journey, and "carry on" personifies the abstract idea of endurance.

Overstatement and Irony

The lyrics exaggerate a feeling while also expressing a contrasting or unexpected meaning. The example of this can be seen in Lana Del Rey's song "*Born to Die*", where the lyrics "You like your girls insane" the exaggeration highlights emotional intensity, while the irony reflects unhealthy attraction.

Simile and Overstatement

A comparison using "like/as" (simile) is combined with an exaggerated emotional description. For example, in Lana Del Rey's song "*Dark Paradise*", the lyric "It's like a dark paradise", the simile compares love to a "dark paradise," while the phrase exaggerates the contradiction between beauty and pain.

Symbol and Irony

Symbol gives a representative meaning, while irony gives the opposite meaning. This combination shows the conflict between hope and reality. For example, in Taylor Swift's song "*End Game*", the lyric "I bury hatchets, but I keep maps of where I put 'em", this shows symbol (hatchet=conflict) and irony (buried but still remembers).

Symbol and Paradox

A symbol represents an idea while paradox highlights conflicting emotional meaning. The example for this can be found in Taylor Swift's song "*New Year's Day*", where the lyric "I want your midnights/But I'll be cleanin' up bottles with you on New Year's Day" has an excitement symbol (midnights), while the paradox contrast glamor with ordinary intimacy.

Paradox and Irony

A paradox expresses a contradiction, while irony adds an additional layer of unexpected meaning. The example of this can be found in Lana Del Rey's song "*Diet Mountain Dew*", where the lyric "You're no good for me but, baby I want you", here the paradox shows conflicting feelings, and the irony lies in desiring something harmful.

Similarities and differences in the Figurative Language used between Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift

Overall, both Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift use various types of figurative language, such as simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, paradox, overstatement, and irony, to express emotions in their song lyrics. Both artists use similes and metaphors to describe feelings and experiences, but Lana Del Rey often creates a sad and cinematic atmosphere, while Taylor Swift prefers a clearer and more narrative style. Personification is also used by both artists, with Lana Del Rey expressing darker or obsessive emotions and Taylor Swift using it in a lighter or ironic way. One clear difference is the use of apostrophe, which appears only in Lana Del Rey's lyrics and shows her tendency to address absent or unreachable figures, emphasizing themes of longing and loss. In addition, both artists combine several figurative devices to create deeper meanings. Lana Del Rey focuses on emotional intensity and nostalgia, while Taylor Swift highlights transformation and storytelling, showing different styles despite using similar figurative techniques.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the types of figurative language found in Lana Del Rey's *Born to Die* (2012) and Taylor Swift's *reputation* (2017) based on Perrine's (2017) theory. Using a qualitative method, the study identified and compared figurative devices in selected song lyrics to explain how both artists create meaning, emotion, and imagery. The findings show that Lana Del Rey employs metaphors, simile, personification, apostrophe, symbol, paradox, overstatement, and irony, often using figurative language in a symbolic and emotional manner and combining multiple devices within a single line. In contrast, Taylor Swift uses metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, paradox, overstatement, and irony with a stronger focus on narrative clarity and emotional contrast. Apostrophe appears only in Lana Del Rey's lyrics, reflecting themes of longing for absent or deceased figures. Both artists also use mixed figurative types, although the combinations differ, highlighting distinct stylistic patterns. Overall, the results indicate that while both artists rely heavily on figurative language, Lana Del Rey's lyrics are more atmospheric and symbolic, whereas Taylor Swift's are more narrative-driven, demonstrating how figurative language strengthens themes and messages in different ways.

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