

Applying Figurative Tools to Seek Romanticism in American Lyrics

Abhinan Wongkittiporn

English Language Department, Rangsit University

Email: abhinanwong@gmail.com

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Abstract

Semantics is an important linguistic branch for the system of communication. However, the meaning in figurative language cannot be always checked from dictionaries. The receivers need experiences and undertraining of the target culture to understand figurative language. The objective of this study is to examine figurative language in American love songs. As a pilot study, the data collection in this study is from American singers, Arina Grande, Post Malone and Talor Swift, whose songs were written with the theme of romanticism. Grande's two successful albums, Position and Thank U, Next were gathered to examine figurative language. Malone's songs come from his Hollywood's Bleeding album. There were 119 extracted tokens of figurative language in this study. The data analysis of figurative language in this study follows Closton. The results in this study show that the frequent use of figurative devices in love songs are metaphor. For women, love relates to materialistic entities, such as Christian Louboutin shoes. The discussion in this study shows that love is abstract and women want to hear how much the men love them. Saying I love you is not as emotionally as saying that you are Chistian Louboutin high heels or Ferrari. The researcher expected that the results of this study will be useful for learners of English as a Foreign Language in order to use figurative language appropriately.

Keywords: American Love Songs; Figurative Language; Metaphor; Romanticism

Introduction

Romanticism is the theme of arts and literature originated in the 18 centuries. Romanticism emphasizes on individualism, emotion, feeling and nature (Ostas, 2022). To say that a person is romantic, it is rather abstract and intangible what it means. So, this current study seeks to understand the concepts of romanticism in written lyrics via figurative tools,



or the tools to understand metaphoric expressions.

When hearing a person said you are a chicken, it does not mean you are your appearances look beautifully like the chicken. Unlike literal meaning, figurative language refers to the speakers' expression of deviated meaning from the conventional one (Closton, 2015). Accordingly, chicken figuratively means being coward.

Even though love is the feeling that everyone has, different people who come from different culture and ethics express love differently physically and verbally. When uttering love is a rose, the speaker metaphorically compares the abstract idea of love with the tangible object a rose. Saying that love is a rose is a universal concept. However, if someone said love is a smash, what this mean.

The advantages of learning figurative language is that the expressions of meaning we makes into the text become vivid, colorful and emotional. In addition, it increases clarity and reduces the complicatedness of the text. Those who gain the knowledge of figurative language could master their writing into a more advanced level.

Closton (2015) further addressed that figurative language is the combination of words, phrases, clauses and structures from human cognitive phenomena. Moreover, it is a reflection of society and culture through language expressions. Various factors and contexts are used for figurative comparison. There are different techniques applied in figurative language, via sound device and meaning. The current study focuses on meaning only, such as simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and metonymy. Simile derived from the Latin word refers to two or more identities that have resemblance or likenesses. In other words, two entities share some similarities. The sameness between the two objects is required to have overt references between sources and the target entities. For example, the whiteness of snow is compared with a woman's skin. When making a comparison between two entities, the linguistic expressions that are used for simile are as, like and as if. For example, he eats like a pig. The comparison is socio-culturally dependent. The compared entities depend upon the denotations of entities in certain societies. For example, Buffalo in Thai denotes stupidity, but it has different meaning in other contexts.

Metaphor is the common device of figurative language that conveys the comparison between two entities either objects or people. Although the metaphoric expression is similar to the concept of simile, there are some differences. One of them is the process of seeking



common patterns, such as shape, taste, smell, color, size, and texture. Usually, metaphorical expression is expressed via subjective complements, or the structure to report factual information, such as a rumor is virus or a virus is rumor. Personification refers to the expression of a non-human entity as a human being (Closton, 2015). Non-human or inanimate objects are entities without life, such as a bridge, a building, the sun, the moon and tables. The authors use human beings' actions added into these subjects to make them act as if they are a person. For example, the tables dance at Christmas. The verb dance is activity and it has the theta-role of agent that is assigned to the table. Idiomatically, the sentence is anomalous. However, figurative language accepts this as non-human entities given life as if a person. The sentence is interpreted that Christmas is the happiest moment of the year and even the tables want to celebrate this event. Hyperbole, sometimes called hyperbolic expression, refers to an exaggeration of information. Although hyperbole is usually used to create a sense of humor, it is sometimes used to give emphasis or highlight information to attract audiences. There are three main elements of hyperbole. The first one is known as exaggeration, which creates a shift from the actual proposition to extreme overstatement (Carston & Wearing, 2015). The second one is to place emphasis on the importance of some elements (Norasetkosol, Timyam & Sriussadaporn, 2012). The third element of hyperbole is untrue statement where the speakers provide unrealistic information. Metonymy is a figurative device in which the entity is referred to by another name. The other name is used for its association. One of the classic examples of metonymy is the White House. The White House is the metonymy of the American government administration.

To sum up this section, love in different cultures seems to be interpreted differently and represented by different entities, referring to objects. In one romantic tragedy movie called Titanic, the main protagonist names Rose denote love that she had with the other male protagonist (Branston & Stafford, 2010). So when one expresses their love, various words or phrases is likely to be used to the world love become more valuable. The significance of this study is that when a person learn language, they do not only learn the literal meaning of a language. However, they need to understand the figurative language in order to help them understand a certain language accurately and appropriately. This is important because the meaning of figurative language cannot be checked with general dictionaries. A students need to accumulate these skills by their own experience, such as reading novels, watching English



movies and listening to English music frequently.

Regarding related previous studies, Sondakh, Samola, and Damopolii (2023), employed Demi Lovato's album called *Dancing with the Devil* to study figurative language. The researchers gathered a total of 56 tokens of figurative language from the album. The results show that the most frequent use of figurative language is metaphor at 48.21 percent. The hyperbolic expression is 33.92 percent. The uses of simile and personification are about nine percent each. The example of personification is I tried to talk to my piano. The musical instrument, the piano is inanimate which cannot have the conversation with human beings. Therefore, the piano is personified. Thu (2019) paid attention to the study of metaphor in figurative language related to how expressions of love in the late 20th century were given. The researchers created a corpus of 60 songs where the structures of metaphor were selected to be studied. The results show various aspects of love via figurative language, such as magic. For example, love is magic referring to something unnatural and breaking the laws of nature. Ithop and Sugiyartati (2022) studied figurative language in Sam Smith's album. This study focuses on the analysis of figurative language and imagery in Sam Smith's songs lyrics from the Album called *The Lonely Hour*. The results show that simile was frequently found as in, it's like walking in the heat all day with no water. The utterance is interpreted as simile as the figurative language is used with the linguistic expression like. Jati (2020) used Horizon's song lyrics to study the figurative language of metaphor. The concept of death was metaphorically expressed. The researchers show that death is lonely, depressed and frustrated. Datul and Agung (2023) studied figurative language in Jamie Miller's song lyrics. The figurative language of personification was used frequently in sad songs as in when the silence sings. The silence performs the human action of singing. This study uses figurative devices, including simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and metonymy because they are common devices for the study of meaning. These devices are used to analyze love songs. Although the study of figurative language in love songs is not something new in this field, this study innovatively seeks the figurative language of love in American societies what mean love by American people.

Objective of the Study

To examine romanticism in American lyrics via figurative tools



Methodology

In order to comply with the objective in this study, the research design in this study is qualitative. A qualitative design is suitable for the study that seek insightful information with a specific data collection.

Data Collection

The singers in this study are American singers. The first one is Ariana Grande whose songs are presented with the theme of romanticism. Grande is a feminine American singer who was born in Florida, the United States of America. This young singer has received many awards from famous singing institutes, such as Grammy Awards, Billboard Music Awards, and American Music Awards not to mention 36 world Guinness Book records. Due to this reputation, studying her songs would be beneficial to us in order to answer why Grande's songs were accepted and popular among American society. This study purposively collected 48 extracted tokens from Ariana Grande's song lyrics from two albums called Position and Thank U, Next. The theme of the album Position is romanticism. How You Touch My Soul from the Outside, is about a girl falling in love with a man. I'm Just Gon' Make You Home is about a girl who feels comfortable living with a man. You're Like a Whole Constellation refers to the singer as the girl and an anonymous man with a romantic relationship. How'd We Get Here So Damn Fast refers to a girl who is involved in a romantic relationship. All My Love, All My Love is Free is about a girl who told a boy that all her love is for him. The data collection in this study was given in Table 1.

Table 1 Data Collection

34+35	NASA
bad idea	nasty
bloodline	needy
break up with your girlfriend, I'm bored	obvious
fake smile	off the table
ghostin	positions
imagine	pov
in my head	7 rings



just like magic	six thirty
love language	thank u, next
make up	shut up
motive	west side
my hair	

The second American singer is Post Malone. His songs used in this study were collected from his album "Hollywood's Bleeding" in 2019 as in Table 2.

Table 2 Data Collection in Post Malone's Songs

Allergic	I'm gonna
A thousand bad times	Internet
Be	Myself
Circles	On the road
Die for me	Saint-tropez
Enemies	Staring at the sun
Goodbyes	sunflower
Hollywood's bleeding	Take what you want
I know	Wow

The third American singer is Taylor Swift. Among popular English singers, Taylor Swift, an American singer, was chosen as she has achieved remarkable success. 27.8 million copies of her albums have been sold in the USA. This makes Swift receive recognition from esteemed institutions and she is recorded in the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Table 3 The Data Collection in Talor Swift's Songs

I Forgot That You Existed	Death by a Thousand Cuts	The Archer
False God	Cornelia Street	London Boy
ME!	Lover	Cruel Summer
Afterglow	Daylight	The Man
Soon You'll Get Better	Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince	



Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study follows Closton (2015). The data analysis in this study covers five types of figurative language including simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and metonymy. The way the data were analyzed is explained in Table 4.

Table 4 Data Analysis

Figurative Devices	Definitions	Example
Simile	Comparisons of two or more entities using like, as, as if, similar to	Like a house of cards
Hyperbole	Exaggeration	One blow from caving in
Personification	Becoming a person	After a hurricane comes a rainbow
Metonymy	Giving a different name to represent the original entity	The White House
Metaphor	Comparisons of two or more entities without using like, as & as if	you are my happiness

The Results

Table 5 present frequencies and percentages of figurative language in love songs in this study. Despite having five categories of figurative language in this study, only four types were found.

Table 5 Frequencies and Percentage of Figurative Language

Figurative Devices	Frequency	Percentage
Metaphor	62	52.10
Hyperbole	33	27.73
Simile	15	12.60
Personification	9	7.5



Metonymy	0	0
Total	119	100

Table 5 represents figurative devices used in love songs. A total of 119 tokens were found in this study. The highest percentage is metaphor at 52.10 percent. The figurative devices of hyperbole are at approximately 12.60 percent. This is followed by simile at 12.60 percent. However, personification occurs the least at only 7.05 percent. The following presentation is the qualitative analysis of the figurative language found in this study.

(1)

- (a) In every conversation, we are **stars**. (Metaphor)
- (b) Even though we are going through it like **a hundred miles an hour**. (Hyperbole)
- (c) Happiness is the same price **as red bottoms**. (Simile)
- (d) **Heaven** sent you to me. (Personification)

Example (1a) is interpreted as the figurative language of metaphor. This lyric highlight that they become stars in every conversation. This metaphor adds a romantic imagery to convey the special relationship between the two loves. Example (1b) is interpreted as the figurative language of hyperbole. The comparison between the lovers' relationship develops as fast as a hundred miles per hours. Example (1c) is interpreted as the figurative language of simile. Red bottoms refer to Christian Louboutin shoes which are well-known for their distinctive red lacquered soles. Happiness is derived from a high cost with a price tag similar to luxury brand-named products. Examples (1d) is interpreted as the figurative language of personification. Heaven is personified as a person who sent the most special person to me. This is similarly found in the second American singer by Post Malone.

(2)

- (a) You're **the sunflower**. (Metaphor)
- (b) Abs **like** Abercrombie Fitch. (simile)
- (c) Give a hundred million reasons [...] (Hyperbole)

Example (2a) is interpreted as metaphor. The sunflower is interpreted as a source of warmth, positivity, or stability in a couple's relationship. In example (2b), the singer makes a comparison of his abdominal muscles to the popular American outfit, emphasizing their fitness. Example (2c) is interpreted as hyperbole as it seems exaggerated to give that many reasons. With the example (3a), the singers compared herself as the season of summer, which



is warm and sunshine. Example (3b) is interpreted as personification as the traffic lights is not a person, so it cannot understand what you said. Example (3c) is obviously clear that it is simile as the singer compared oneself with Leo. In addition, Demi Lomato's Lyrics used with figurative tools are presents below.

(3)

- (a) Baby, you're **the moon** tonight. (Metaphor)
- (b) You're **like a fire**" (Simile)
- (c) My heart's racing **like a Formula One**. (Hyperbole)
- (d) "**The streets** ignite, shadows come alive". (Personification)

Example (3a) is interpreted as metaphor. The lover is compared with the moon. It is the only thing in the world. It is romantic as the lover is compared with the nature. The lover is viewed as if they were a source of light and guidance in the darkness. Example (3b) is interpreted as simile. this sentence compares the singer's "lover" as "fire" via the word like communication the feeling of strong passionate and desire. Example (3c) is hyperbole. This sentence overstated that the singer's heart is racing as if it is a Formula One car. This shows the singer's feeling of excitement and adrenaline. Example (4d) is personification. The streets is personified with the action of igniting which conveys the feeling of excitement. In addition, the results in Talor Swift's love songs are given below.

(4)

- (a) Livin' in winter, I am **your summer**. (Metaphor)
- (b) I ask **the traffic lights** if it'll be all right. They say, "I don't know". (Personification)
- (c) I'd be just like Leo in Saint-Tropez. (Simile)
- (d) I've been sleeping so long in a 20-year dark night. (Hyperbole)

In example (4a), the singer compared herself to the season of summer, which is warm and full of sunshine. Example (4b) is interpreted as personification as traffic lights are not people, so they cannot participate in conversation. Example (4c) is simile as the singer likens herself to Leo.

Discussion

Figurative language is a method to express people's ideas or message indirectly. This study contributes to the theory in the way that morphological devices are the important tool



in expressing love in figurative language (Closton, 2015). Love is abstract. When the concept of love is addressed in songs, it is difficult to see. The quality and quantity of love cannot be measured. So the writer needs to seek tangible objects existing in the real world to compare with love, lovers and a loving couple. For example, our love is as valuable as a star in the sky, or our love was sent from heaven. This research study complies with previous studies studying figurative language in love song lyrics where it was found that the most dominant type of figurative language is metaphor (Nursolihat & Kareviati, 2020). In a deeper comparison with previous studies, the results in this study go along the same lines as Sondakh, Samola, and Damopolii (2023) using Demi Lovato's album to analyze figurative language. With approximately the same amount of data collection, the top two results of their study were the figurative language of metaphor and hyperbole at 48.21 percent and 33.92 percent, respectively. The results of this study go along the same lines as Thu (2019) who paid attention to the study of metaphor in figurative language expressions of love in the late 20th century. The researchers found that the song writers compare love with something special as in love is magic. Unlike this study, Ithop and Sugiyartati (2022) studied figurative language in Sam Smith's album called the Lonely Hour. The results show that simile was frequently found to express love. Actually, metaphor and simile are similar as they make a comparison of one thing with the other, but simile is normally used with the linguistic expressions as and like.

Conclusion

This study investigated figurative language used in loves songs in order to answer the following questions.

What are figurative tools to depict romanticism in American lyrics?

The results shows that the top two figurative devices in Ariana Grande' love songs are metaphor and hyperbolic expression. The total frequency of the two devices is approximately 60 percent. The results of this study came from a women American singer. It is true that the results in this study absolutely cannot be generalized to gain external validity. It can be noticed that love in this society can be compared with heaven, stars and luxurious materialistic items. The results of the love songs in this study reflects the nature in romanticism in that the concept of love in American societies is referred to nature, such as the moon and stars. This truly reflects American society that it is direct and individualistic.



Recommendations for Future Studies

For future study, it is recommended that using other themes of songs in addition to romanticism, such as country songs, could contribute something new to the field.

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