

## Metaphors in Selected Lyrics on Taylor Swift's Album "Folklore": A Semiotics Approach

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the selected lyrics from Taylor Swift's album "folklore." The data for this study was obtained from the ten most frequently listened-to songs (YouTube, 2020). The primary objective is to identify various metaphors and explore the semiotic meanings within the denotative and connotative of the selected lyrics. This descriptive qualitative research employs data collection through reading and listening analysis of song lyrics, focusing on the identification of metaphors and their meanings. Following the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), the data analysis involves data reduction, data perspective, and verification. The researchers categorized the metaphors identified in the lyrics into three groups: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Utilizing structural metaphors facilitates the comprehension and expression of one idea in terms of another, ensuring a well-defined and organized conceptual framework. Orientational metaphors do not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organize "a whole system with respect to one another." An ontological metaphor is a way of describing abstract or difficult ideas by relating them to more familiar and tangible contexts. The kind of metaphor that is most frequently found in certain songs is the structural metaphor. Next, the meanings of 21 chosen song lyrics are examined using the denotation and connotation meaning. A sign is said to be denotative if there is a high degree of agreement between its signifier and actual meaning. Roland Barthes defined connotation as a system consisting of signifier, signified, and the action that connects the first to the second.

Keywords: metaphor, semiotics, song, lyrics, folklore album

### Introduction

Literature includes writings that use words to express the author's personality and interpret the meaning of nature and life in enduring artistic forms (Henry Van Dyke :1999). Literature, according to Wellek and Warren (1993), is a complete creation that expresses emotion and creative ideas using language as a medium. Depending on their interests, backgrounds, and research trends, literary experts often investigate different kinds of literary works. However, several types of literary works that are often studied include poetry, novels, drama, and short stories. Nowadays, not only classic literary works are being studied, but also other contemporary works such as films and songs. Song lyrics are similar to poetry because they contain several stanzas that convey the author's thoughts, ideas and feelings. Semi (1988:106) states that song lyrics are a form of short poetry expressing emotions. Song lyrics can be considered literary works due to their inclusion of poetic elements. This perspective aligns with Jan van Luxemburg's (1989), states that the definition of song lyrics or poetry can be considered poetry and vice versa. The lyrics of a song can be considered poetic because they can arouse feelings, attract attention, evoke a clear response, and generate emotions (Pradopo, 2009, p. 31).

According to Riffaterre (1978), poetry is a language activity; they speak indirectly, so their language differs from everyday language. Additionally, they say something that isn't accurate. In this context, Riffaterre distinguishes between two kinds of hypograms: actual hypograms, which are composed of prior text or discourse that can serve as a reference or referent for the poem, and potential hypograms, which include the meaning of figures of speech or figures of speech, prepositions, and descriptive systems. Knowing a song's lyrics is nearly the same as knowing poetry in the context of poetry. Several studies have been conducted on metaphors in poetry. Tasya and Putri (2022) discovered that the poetry selected by Atticus contains structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors, with ontological metaphors emerging as the most common type. Then, according to research by Sinthya, Dahnilsyah, and Erni (2022), William Blake's ten great works of poetry had ninety-five metaphorical lyrics. Ontological metaphors were the kind of metaphors that were discovered throughout this research.

Lakoff and Johnson (2013) explain that the word "metaphor" originates from the Greek words "meta," meaning "above," and "phrein," meaning "to carry." When combined, "metaphor" can be understood as a form of displacement or relocation. Tarigan (2013) defines metaphor as the use of words that do not have a literal meaning but are employed as vivid comparisons or concise equations to convey a different meaning. In their book "Metaphors We Live By," Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also point out that metaphors are commonly used to express imaginative ideas using rhetorical and

figurative language. They further divide metaphors into three categories: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. A structural metaphor makes it possible to comprehend and articulate one idea in terms of another that is precisely defined and organized. With the help of the structural metaphor, we can use the terminology related to one idea to talk about another. "Spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment," propose Lakoff & Johnson (1980:14). Orientational metaphors, on the other hand, organize "a whole system with respect to one another" rather than structuring one concept via another. Cognitive linguists have advocated the concept of ontological metaphors, most notably in "Metaphors We Live By." These metaphors describe abstract or complex concepts by mapping them onto more concrete and familiar domains. They make abstract concepts easier for people to understand by relating them to something more concrete and easily understood.

Several studies on metaphors in album lyrics have been conducted by Anggraini, Sumardiyani, and Hawa (2017). In their analysis of five Linkin Park songs, the researchers identified a total of 38 metaphorical symbols in the lyrics, with Numb featuring four, Hands Held High containing fourteen, What I've Done having five, New Divide comprising five, and Final Masquerade containing ten symbols. Seven distinct categories of meaning were discerned in the data through Yusuf and Amelia's (2018) study: conceptual, connotative, social, emotive, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings. Vikri and Nurholis (2022) reported a comprehensive count of 14 metaphors, encompassing 6 synesthetic metaphors, 2 animal metaphors, 2 concrete-to-abstract metaphors, and 5 anthropomorphic metaphors. The most common metaphors were found to be synthetic and animal metaphors and metaphors from concrete to abstract. According to a study by Ndraha (2018), Westlife attempted to discuss human social life, which included love, despair, happiness, and enthusiasm, in every metaphor found in the song lyrics. Rahmadhanti, Simanjuntak, and Sihombing (2022) delved into the song "Different World," revealing the use of metaphors to depict the detrimental impact of environmental factors like pollution, waste, and rubbish, alongside global warming, leading to the ageing and deterioration of the planet. The metaphor employed in the song serves as a vivid illustration of the potential worst-case scenario if no corrective actions are taken. Another study by Frida and Zuraida (2022) focused on Taylor Swift's "folklore" album, discovering 35 metaphorical instances in 8 song lyrics. These comprised 13 instances of structural metaphors, 12 instances of orientational metaphors, and 10 instances of ontological metaphors.

In addition to rhythm in music, the structure of words in lyrics also acts as a means to convey the message. The communicator carries out the relationship between musical elements and song lyrics to the communicator (Wellek & Warren, 1989). Lyrics are short poems that contain expressions of emotion. That expression is manifested in the form of words and sounds. There have been several studies conducted regarding the lyrics of songs on albums, such as Rosita, Purwanto and Rosyidi (2019), there were five different types of symbols in the lyrics: twelve symbols for color, nineteen symbols for things, eighteen symbols for situations, five symbols for sound, and seven symbols for creative. Next, according to study by Lestari (2017), all different kinds of metaphors can be found in Green Day's lyrics, with the ontological metaphor being the most commonly utilized kind in accordance with Lakoff and Johnson's theory.

In a song, the metaphorical content has quite an influence on the meaning as well as aesthetics. This influence arises from the metaphors' capacity to enhance the pre-existing significance of the song, endowing it with layers of both literal and metaphorical interpretations. A song that contains metaphors gives birth to many different interpretations among listeners. The difference will be the value added to the song because it will reach a fairly wide audience. In the process of expressing feelings and thoughts, a songwriter such as Taylor Swift uses the lyrics of her songs to express her thoughts and feelings about romantic relationships, social issues, family and friendships. Taylor Swift uses metaphor to make the lyrics of her songs more beautiful and have a deeper meaning.

Analyzing a song's lyric means aiming to understand and express the overall meaning contained within song lyrics. To analyze the meaning of song lyrics, researchers used a semiotic approach to understand the definition contained in the song's lyrics. Semiotics is an analytical method for studying signs or meaning. The definition of semiotics or semiotics is the science of signs (Pradopo in Jabrohim, 2003: 67). Signs in this case, can be words, movements, film structures, literary work structures, or songs that can be considered as signs (Sudjiman & Zoest, 1996). Several studies have been carried out by Jafar, Aso and Armstrong (2021). In this study, researchers used Roland Barthes' Semiotic theory to analyze how the lyrics convey the idea of an amazing chemistry, making the person feel God-like. Additionally, the study highlights how Ariana Grande promotes gender equality and showcases women's strength and independence. Then, Perangin-Angin, According to Andayani, Jalil, and Nurlela (2023), the song "Bertaut" depicts the author's life story, with his mother serving as both her mentor and a source of constant love. According to Amara and Kusuma (2022), the study's findings represent the denotative meaning of the Magic Shop song's lyrics, which include worry, unease, and other symptoms that can indicate mental health issues.

According to Roland Barthes (1968), semiotics aims to take in any system of signals whatever their contents and constraints like; images, gestures, musical sounds, and objects. Barthes created a sign of significance analysis model and

then divided it into denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation is a sign whose signifier has a high level of agreement which produces true meaning. There are two levels of signs: the level of denotation and the level of connotation (Rusmana, 2014: 200). Barthes defined a denotation as a sign whose signifier has a high degree of agreement and generates genuine meaning. Connotation, according to Roland Barthes, is a system made up of a signifier, signified, and the action that links the first to the second (Barthes, 1968). Myth symbols are tools used by authors to convey a message. Roland Barthes explained the theory of myth that myth is a second-level semiological system, so myths are able to express the meaning desired by the mythmaker.

This research is important to appreciate and explore the abilities of literature owned by a singer and a lyricist. Based on information from Lee on the Grammy website (2023) many of Swift's songs tell intricate stories or convey powerful narratives, making them engaging subjects for analysis to understand the characters, plot, and themes within her music. As reported by Rahman on The Hollywood Reporter website (2021), Taylor Swift is celebrated for her songwriting abilities, and analyzing her lyrics allows for an appreciation of her talent in crafting well-written and emotionally impactful songs. Based on information from Cohen on the Enews website (2019) her songs explore many themes, including love, heartbreak, empowerment, and self-discovery. Based on information from Polny on Her Campus website (2021) analyzing her lyrics can reveal the messages and lessons she conveys through her music. Some of Swift's songs contain elements of social and cultural commentary, and analyzing her lyrics can provide insights into her perspectives on issues like feminism, relationships, and societal norms.

The release date was July 24, 2020 of this unexpected album from Republic Records. There are 16 songs on this album plus one bonus track. With this album, Taylor Swift expands her storytelling beyond personal anecdotes. Swift coined the term "folklore" to describe "a collection of songs and stories that flow like a stream of consciousness" while she was isolated during the COVID-19 outbreak. After that, she worked electronically with producers Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessner. The lead single from the folklore album, "cardigan," is credited to Swift for bringing to life the romantic triangle tale that three creative youngsters would encounter. Several other songs believed not to be from Swift's personal life are the last great american dynasty, exile, august, illicit affairs, epiphany, and betty.

The results of Swift's imagination have various themes, ranging from stories about her own home, stories from her grandfather to fights between ex-lovers (Taylor's Instagram account, 2020). The folklore album contains tracks full of meaning from the singer. It is not just about how life "attacks" Taylor, but more deeply, this album contains questions about dreams, fears, reflections and desires. Therefore, it would be very interesting to investigate metaphors found in Taylor Swift's album. Based on these reasons, the researchers chose to examine the metaphors contained in selected lyrics of the album "folklore" with the title "Metaphors in Selected Lyrics on Taylor Swift's Album folklore: A Semiotics Approach" to find out: 1) the types of metaphor used in the lyrics of "folklore" album and 2) the denotative and connotative meanings of metaphor used in the "folklore" album from the Semiotic perspective.

## Method

This type of study is qualitative descriptive. Descriptive qualitative research is used to describe events or circumstances in their literal sense (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The lyrics are analyzed using two different kinds of data sources. There are two types of objects in this research: material objects and formal objects. The metaphors found in song lyrics serve as the formal object of this study. Next, the material object is Taylor Swift's eighth studio album, "folklore." The purpose of this study is to examine various metaphors from a Semiotics perspective in order to comprehend the true meaning of music lyrics. The lyrics themselves would serve as the data source for examining the metaphors in Taylor Swift's songs. The data were derived from ten tracks from Taylor Swift's "folklore" album that were the most popular with listeners. The songs consist of the following ten tracks: 1) the 1, 2) cardigan, 3) the last great american dynasty, 4) exile ft. bon iver, 5) my tears ricochet, 6) mirrorball, 7) seven, 8) august, 9) this is me trying, and 10) illicit affairs. The information was gathered by carefully reading and listening to every word in the song lyrics. Using Roland Barthes' theory and Lakoff's theoretical framework, metaphors in the chosen song lyrics were found. A semiotic analysis of these metaphors was carried out afterwards. The data analysis was carried out using the methods that Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested. The metaphors and semiotics found in the song's lyrics are analyzed using this method.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Types of Metaphor Used in the Selected Lyrics of Taylor Swift Album “folklore”

This table shows the metaphors found in the lyrics of “folklore” album. The classification is structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

Table 1. Types of Metaphor Used in the Selected Lyrics of Taylor Swift Album “folklore”

No.	Song Title	Song Lyrics	Types of Metaphor		
			Structural	Orientalional	Ontological
1.	the 1	Roaring <i>twenties</i> , tossing <i>pennies</i> in the pool  You know the greatest loves of all time are <i>over now</i> .  Been saying <i>yes</i> instead of <i>no</i> .  I'm <i>doing good</i> , I'm on some <i>new shit</i> .  I <i>guess</i> you never know, never know.	✓  ✓	✓  ✓	✓
2.	cardigan	High heels on <i>cobblestones</i> .  You <i>drew stars</i> around <i>my scars</i> , but now I'm bleedin'.	✓  ✓		
3.	the last great american dynasty	They <i>picked out a home</i> and called it <i>Holiday House</i> .  Her saltbox house on the coast <i>took her mind</i> off St. Louis.	✓		✓
4.	exile ft. bon iver	I <i>think</i> I've seen this film before.			✓
5.	my tears ricochet	We gather here, we <i>line up weeping</i> in a sunlit room.  And you can aim for my <i>heart</i> , go for <i>blood</i> . But you would still miss me in your <i>bones</i> .	✓  ✓		
6.	mirrorball	I'm a <i>mirrorball</i>	✓		
7.	seven	I <i>think</i> your house is haunted.  Please picture me <i>in the trees</i> .	✓		✓

8.	august	And I can see <i>us lost in the memory.</i> <i>August sipped away...</i>	✓		
		<i>August slipped away</i> into a moment in time.			✓ ✓
9.	this is me trying	I had the <i>shiniest wheels</i> , now they're <i>rusting</i>	✓		
10.	illicit affairs	And you wanna scream, don't call me <i>kid</i> , don't call me <i>baby</i> .  Leave the <i>perfume</i> on the shelf.	✓ ✓		
Total			13	2	6

The data show that there are three types of metaphors found in “folklore” album. The total data found in the song lyrics are 13 structural metaphors, two orientational metaphors, and six ontological metaphors. The structural metaphor is found in nine songs. Structural metaphor is the most data found in the song lyrics on this album. The lyrics related to one concept talk about other concepts with the help of structural metaphors and other ideas. A structural metaphor allows for the understanding and expression of one concept in terms of another clearly defined, well-structured concept (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Researchers find a metaphor in the line of the 1 song “Roaring twenties, tossing pennies in the pool”, the twenties are considered a time when one has the freedom to explore, discover oneself, and create cherished memories. Then the term tossing pennies is throwing pennies in a pool while making a wish. When the two sentences are combined it will become the happier times when they were happy and hope it stays like that in the future. The line “You know the greatest loves of all time are over now” means that they have an iconic or great relationship but that love must be over now. The cardigan song “High heels on cobblestones” have meaning that when walking on rocks wearing high heels it will be difficult. In this context, it is used to describe an unstable relationship. Then, the line in “You drew stars around my scars, but now I’m bleedin” is someone enters your life and fixes things when you are feeling hopeless or have scars from traumatic situations.

The meaning of the song "They picked out a home and called it Holiday House" by the Last Great American Dynasty is that someone has selected a home and given it the name "holiday house" since it is a happy place for them. In the sentence "We gather here, we line up weeping in a sunlit room" a group of people were lining up and crying while attending a funeral. “And you can aim for my heart, go for blood. But you would still miss me in your bones” means that even after being harmed, one still misses them. In mirrorball, Taylor Swift uses structural metaphor in the line “I’m a mirrorball” to describe the capability of adjusting and fitting in with their surroundings expectations. In seven, the line “Please picture me in the trees” is like some request to someone to take their picture with the trees. Meanwhile in a song with the title august “And I can see us lost in the memory” have means that their memory is emphasizing past moments. The sentence “I had the shiniest wheels, now they’re rusting” in this is me trying. Shiniest wheels are the metaphor for a narrative of change over time, from a state of brilliance or success and rusting is a state of deterioration. In illicit affairs, the metaphor “And you wanna scream, don't call me kid, don't call me baby” is the speaker's boundaries and how they wish to be addressed.

## 2. The Connotative and Denotative Meanings of the Metaphors Used in the “folklore” Album

This table shows the metaphors found in “folklore” album. There are 21 metaphors found in this song and the classification is connotative and denotative meanings.

Table 2. The Connotative and Denotative Meanings of the Metaphors Used in the “folklore” Album

No.	Metaphor in Song Lyrics	Denotative	Connotative
1.	Roaring twenties, tossing pennies in the pool	The twenties are seen as a time when people are free to explore and make cherished memories while tossing pennies is act of throwing coin and	Happier times when they were happy together and hopeful for the future.

		making a wish in the pool.	
2.	You know the greatest loves of all time are over now	They used to have a good relationship but unfortunately it had to end.	Evoke a sense of idealized or iconic love stories.
3.	Been saying yes instead of no	Rather saying no, they have been choosing to say yes to giving affirmative answers.	The love she lost from the person she already thought of as her soulmate.
4.	I'm doing good, I'm on some new shit	The speaker is feeling good or well, and actively involved in something new or different.	Tells her ex-lover that she's doing well and learning to live her life to the fullest.
5.	I guess you never know, never know	Understanding thing is challenging and outcomes remains unknown.	Life and relationships can be full of surprises, and it's impossible to predict how things will turn out.
6.	High heels on cobblestones	Wearing a high heel and walking on a cobblestone.	Walking in high heels on cobblestone can be challenging and this is the image for unsteadiness of relationship.
7.	You drew stars around my scars, but now I'm bleedin'	Drew stars is comforting gesture but now the speaker experiencing pain.	When someone helps them transform their shortcomings into something valuable, the scars become stars.
8.	They picked out a home and called it Holiday House	The act of selecting or choosing a residence and the name of the house.	A place that can make comfortable with sense of festivity, celebration, or place associated with joy.
9.	Her saltbox house on the coast took her mind off St. Louis	Describing a saltbox house, located on the coast.	The coastal residence serves a distraction from a previous location.
10.	I think I've seen this film before	The feeling of having felt something similar before.	The speaker feels like they are going through a similar experience as they have in the past. This repetition might be associated with patterns in relationships or life events.
11.	We gather here, we line up weeping in a sunlit room	People coming together in a specific location and they weeping in a line.	These lines contribute to the theme of loss and mourning.
12.	And you can aim for my heart, go for blood. But you would still miss me in your bones	Even when someone has been hurt caused by someone else's behavior, they still miss that person.	A desire that causes significant emotional impact and aftermath of their relationship.
13.	I'm a mirrorball, I can change everything about me to fit in	Ability to adapt themselves with their surroundings.	Able to reflect to different situations or expectations.

14.	And I've been meaning to tell you. I think your house is haunted. Your dad is always mad and that must be why	The father was an angry man. The house is said to be haunted because it was scary.	The physical house in which her friend lives possessed a haunted presence, which is the logical explanation for the father's troubles.
15.	Please picture me in the trees	Making a request for someone to visualize them located in the trees.	Showing them being together in nature.
16.	And I can see us lost in <i>the memory</i>	Nostalgia and recalling past memories.	The memory holds emotional significance and that the speaker is emotionally invested in the recollection of that particular moment.
17.	August <i>sipped away</i> ...	Visualize and imagine where they are lost in memory.	It actually the enjoyment of the time being together.
18.	August <i>slipped away</i> into a moment in time	Implies a gradual passage of time.	Implied how fast their relationship passed.
19.	I had the <i>shiniest wheels</i> , now they're <i>rusting</i>	Once someone had a shining wheel, but now it's rusty	She is on top of success but now become worse
20.	And you wanna scream, don't call me <i>kid</i> , don't call me <i>baby</i>	Direct request or preference regarding how the speaker wants to be addressed.	Desire to avoid being referred to as "kid" or "baby" to the need for emotional distance and detachment in an affair.
21.	Leave the <i>perfume</i> on the shelf	Suggestion to leave the perfume.	A desire to preserve or avoid altering the memories associated with a particular scent and "on the shelf" could signify a choice not to revisit or disturb those memories.

The denotative aspects of the lyrics provide a straightforward understanding of the words and phrases used. For instance, phrases like "roaring twenties," "tossing pennies in the pool," "high heels on cobblestones," and "saltbox house on the coast" convey concrete images and actions with clear, literal meanings. Denotation helps establish the basic narrative and visual elements of the lyrics. On the other hand, connotative elements add layers of emotional depth and subjective interpretation to the lyrics. For example, "roaring twenties" connotes a sense of nostalgia and carefree joy, while "tossing pennies in the pool" implies hopeful wishes. Similarly, phrases like "greatest loves of all time are over now" evoke a sense of loss and idealized love stories. Connotation is crucial in conveying the emotional nuances, abstract feelings, and personal experiences embedded in the lyrics. The interplay between denotation and connotation in these song lyrics creates a rich tapestry of meaning. The denotative aspects provide a foundation of tangible imagery and actions, while connotation infuses the lyrics with emotions, memories, and subjective interpretations. This blending of denotation and connotation is a common technique in songwriting, allowing artists to convey complex ideas and evoke varied emotional responses from their audience.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Taylor Swift's "folklore" album reveals a predominant use of structural metaphors in the lyrics, with nine songs employing this technique. A structural metaphor allows for the expression of one concept in terms of another, providing a clear and well-structured way to convey meaning. Each song's lyrics draw connections between different concepts, using metaphorical language to convey complex emotions and experiences. The examination of specific song lyrics demonstrates the diversity of structural metaphors employed in the album. From the exploration of the carefree and nostalgic aspects of the "roaring twenties" to the depiction of an unstable relationship through the metaphor of "high heels on cobblestones," Swift skilfully weaves metaphorical language to convey nuanced meanings. The lyrics delve into themes of love, loss, resilience, and personal boundaries, showcasing the versatility of structural metaphors in expressing a range of emotions and experiences. Additionally, the denotative and connotative analysis emphasizes the

importance of both literal meanings and emotional associations in understanding the depth of the lyrics. While denotation provides a straightforward understanding of the concrete images and actions described in the songs, connotation adds layers of emotional depth, subjective interpretation, and personal experiences. This interplay between denotation and connotation contributes to the richness and complexity of the album's lyrical content. In essence, Taylor Swift's use of structural metaphors, combined with a careful balance of denotation and connotation, creates a compelling and evocative narrative throughout the "folklore" album. The blending of these elements showcases Swift's mastery of language and storytelling, allowing listeners to engage with the music on multiple levels, both intellectually and emotionally.

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