

AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN LORDE'S SELECTED SONG AND ITS CONNOTATIVE MEANING

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Abstract

This study investigated the figurative language in Lorde's selected song entitled "Royals" and its connotative meaning. This study was descriptive qualitative research. The source of the data was Lorde's selected song entitled "Royals". The data were word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the song expressing figurative language. The finding indicated that there were 16 figurative languages found in "Royals" lyrics. They were simile, personification, metaphor, symbolism, metonymy, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. The most frequent figurative language found in "Royals" lyrics was symbolism since it symbolized materialism in American society. The connotative meaning of the whole figurative language is negative because it shows the rejection of materialism in American society.

Keywords: Connotative Meaning; Figurative Language; Lorde; Song

1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication and interaction. As a means of communication and interaction, the most important function of the language itself is a tool to communicate and interact to the other (Gea et al., 2025). Language is a very important source of human life because language conveys thoughts, ideas, concepts or feelings of each human being to others. Language is a way of conveying our ideas to the minds of others (Ma'rifa & Astutik, 2021). Language is not only used for daily communication but also for conveying expressions and emotions through literature, poetry, and music. Language can be implemented in two ways, literal and nonliteral. It depends on the situations when the language is used. While the literal conveys a direct and unambiguous meaning, the non-literal doesn't. The non-literal way that the language is used is in a lyric of music. Language plays a crucial role in music, not only as the medium of communication but also the tool for artistic expressions. In music, the non-literal ways dominantly used to convey the expressions is in the form of figurative language.

Figurative language is a meaning that has a different meaning from the original meaning. Figurative language as comparative language that is used excessively or modified at a certain linguistic point. There are lots of literary works that use figurative language in them, such as prose, poetry, novels, novellas, songs, and others (Kurniati et al., 2024). Figurative language is a linguistic technique that deviates from the literal meaning of words to create more vivid, imaginative, and expressive descriptions. Figurative language encompasses a range of linguistic devices, including metaphors, similes, idioms, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism, all of which contribute to making language more expressive and evocative. As stated by Dancygier and Sweetser, figurative language is thought related to one aspect of what

gives a text in expressing the idea in particular language and a poetic text-special aesthetic value (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). Figurative language is not merely a decorative element of speech; it plays a crucial role in shaping perception and understanding. It is widely used in literature, poetry, music, and everyday communication to enhance meaning, evoke emotions, and create striking imagery. Instead of stating facts directly, figurative language allows writers and speakers to convey deeper meanings through comparisons, exaggerations, or symbolic expressions. Therefore, the purpose of using figurative language in literature is to devote an artistic and aesthetic meaning to the literary work.

Music has long been recognized as a storytelling medium, and figurative language plays a crucial role in deepening lyrical content, making it more impactful and memorable. Song lyrics can be used as a description of the song's writer's expression to commit his or her feeling, idea, and willingness. Through the use of figurative language, songwriters transform ordinary words into poetic expressions, enabling listeners to connect with the emotions and themes embedded in the lyrics.

Song is considered as the reflection of the society and culture where they were produced. Song lyrics are often used to help understand the culture and the nature of society. It often expresses judgement about lifestyle, values, and events. Moreover, the song lyrics can portray the political situation in a certain place or country. For example, a song entitled *Surat Buat Wakil Rakyat*, which is sung by Iwan Fals, an Indonesian singer, shows the portrayal of the house of representative members in Indonesia. Considering the fact that the song can also be the portrayal of a social situation in a country, the writer would like to conduct a study about figurative language in a song. The song that the writer is going to analyze is "Royals" sung by Lorde, which shows a portrayal of social situations in the United States of America.

Ella Marija Lani Yelich-O'Connor, born 7 November 1996, known professionally as Lorde, is a New Zealand singer and songwriter. She is known for her unconventional style of pop music and introspective songwriting, and has been referred to as the Queen of Alternative. Lorde first gained recognition as a teenager during a talent show performance. She signed with Universal Music Group (UMG) in 2009 and began collaborating with producer Joel Little in 2011. "Royals", the EP's single, helped Lorde rise to prominence after it became a critical and commercial success, selling more than 10 million units worldwide. It peaked at number one on the Billboard Hot 100, making Lorde, then aged 16, the youngest artist to earn a number-one single in the United States since Tiffany in 1987, and has since been certified diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) (Lorde - Wikipedia, n.d.)

Some previous studies about figurative language have been conducted by some researchers. Gunawan in his study investigated how figurative language features carry and influence the meaning in Blackpink-Selena Gomez's song Ice Cream. The findings showed that metaphor was the most frequent figurative language found in that song, followed by simile, hyperbole, and repetition (Gunawan et al., 2021). Saidah in her study analyzed the types and the functions of figurative language in the Four (Deluxe) album using theory of Johnson and Arp. The findings concluded that types of figurative language found in the album were hyperbole, simile, symbolic, personification, and allegory. Hyperbole was the most dominant one. The functions of figurative language found in the album where to provide imaginative pleasure, to talk a lot in a short compass, and to add emotional intensity (Sa'idah & Permatasari, 2024).

Wijayana in his study which specified one of the figurative language, hyperbole, investigated construction types and categories of hyperbolic expressions found in various Indonesian song lyrics, comprising the genres of "kroncong," "dangdut," and other popular songs. The findings revealed that hyperbole was constructed in either positive or negative sentences, metaphors, superlative, and serial adjectival constructions (Wijana, 2025). Alfaruq in his study analyzed the figurative language in the Prestige movie. The findings showed that there were seven categories of figurative language identified by the study's findings. Seven kinds of figurative languages were found, they were personification, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, and paradox. Hyperbole was the most frequent figurative language found in the study (Al-Faruq & Putra, 2024).

Santika investigated the figurative language and its meaning in the song lyrics used in the "Midnights" album. The data included the lyrics of all songs (13 songs) from Taylor Swift's "Midnights" album. The findings revealed that eight types of figurative language were used in the "Midnights" album's song lyrics: personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, litotes, metonymy, and oxymoron. It was found that metaphor is the most frequent type of figurative language used in the song lyrics of the "Midnights" album (Santika & Syafryadin, 2023).

Salsabila and Setyowati analysed the figurative language found in LANY's song lyrics in the "gg bb xx" album. The objectives of this study are to analyze the types and meaning of figurative language, to explain the function of figurative language, and to find out the most dominant of figurative language. The research data consisted of 12 song lyrics from LANY the album "gg bb xx". This research used Perrine theories. The results revealed that 36 types of figurative language were detected in the song lyrics, namely: 5 personification, 3 simile, 6 hyperbole, 7 metaphor, 2 irony, 2 understatement, 3 paradox, 1 apostrophe, 1 metonymy, 1 allegory, and 5 symbols. The data clearly show that metaphor was the most dominant type of figurative language in this result (Salsabila & Setyowati, 2024).

Puspitorini and Hamdani investigated the kinds of figurative language used in selected lyrics of Coldplay songs. Based on research, some figurative languages were found in Coldplay's selected songs. Most figurative language used in lyrics of Coldplay's selected songs is "Hyperbole" that has a great exaggeration used to emphasize a point, and used for expressive or comic effect. (Puspitorini & Hamdani, 2021).

This study was different from the previous studies. The previous studies analyzed the figurative language by using Perrine and Leech theory, while this study analyzed the figurative language by using M.H. Abrams theory. Furthermore, this study was also conducted to find out its connotative meaning. So, this study was conducted to find out the types of figurative languages found in Lorde's song entitled Royal and its connotative meaning.

2. Theories and Methods

There are some experts who give some definitions about figurative language. According to Perrine, figurative language is a figure of speech used to give words additional dimensions (Perrine, 1992). According to Dancygier and Sweetser (2014:1), figurative language is thought related to one aspect of what gives a text in expressing the idea in particular language and a poetic text-special aesthetic value. M.H Abrams defines figurative language as a conspicuous departure from what users of language apprehend as the standard meaning of

words, or else the standard order of words in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Abrams in his book classifies several types of figurative languages. They are metaphors, personification, hyperbole, simile, paradox, allusion, irony, alliteration, metonymy, antithesis, synecdoche, allegory, symbolism, and onomatopoeia (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Metaphor is an implied comparison between two things. Personification, 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. Hyperbole is used to exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect. Abrams stated that hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility. Abrams stated that in simile, a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or "as". A paradox is a statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes a good sense. Allusion is a reference, explicit or indirect to a person, place, or an event or to another literary work or passage.

Irony is a condition of using a word in a way to convey the opposite meaning to the true meaning of the word. Alliteration is the repetition of a speech sound in a sequence nearby. Metonymy is the literal term for one thing applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experiences. Antithesis is a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases or clauses that manifest parallelism – that is, a similar word order and structure in their syntax. Synecdoche is a part of something used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part.

An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the literal, or primary, level of signification and at the same time to signify second, correlated order of signification. Symbolism is only applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something or has a range of reference, beyond itself. Onomatopoeia is a word, or a combination of words, whose sound seems to closely resemble the sound it denotes. Understatement is the contrary figure which deliberately represents something as very much less in magnitude or importance than it really is, or is ordinarily considered to be. The effect is usually ironic.

The figurative language is strongly associated with the connotative meaning. There are three types of connotative meaning in linguistics (Cruse, 1997). They are as follows.

1. Positive

Positive or pleasant connotative meaning is also honorific, or words that make people feel good. People often use a form of speech called euphemism to try and buy the same thing in a more positive or pleasant way. And do not offend someone's feelings. For instance: instead of saying "you're tired", you say "we're downsizing". Positive means creates confidence in someone, laudable, hopeful, shows beneficial progress, good thinking, always sure and not in doubt.

2. Negative

Negative of connotative meaning is often pejorative, words that provoke a denotative emotional response. This type is reversible to positive one. Negative means lacking

helpfulness, optimism. It shows disadvantages of something, disagreement. Expressing, containing, refusal or denial, unpleasant, gloomy and pessimistic. It shows a contradiction, bad thinking, and doubt about showing something.

3. Neutral

Neutral or connotative meaning is words that cause no emotional reaction.

This study used a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups a scribe to a social or human problem(Creswell J. David & Creswell and John W., 2018). While Bogdan and Biklen said that qualitative research is a research picture rather than number(Bogdan et al., 2007). Descriptive research describes the object of research by making a description of a number of variables studied systematically. So, qualitative descriptive research is a research method that utilizes qualitative data and is described descriptively.

The source of data of this study was Lorde’s selected song entitled “Royals”. The data of this study were word, phrase, clause and sentence expressing figurative language in “Royals” song. The main instrument in this study was the researcher himself since the researcher who conducted the whole process of this study. The data were collected from accessing the “Royals” song lyric at www.azlyrics.com (Lorde - Royals Lyrics | AZLyrics.Com, n.d.)

In analyzing the data, the researcher used the data analysis model initiated by Miles and Huberman which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The first step was data reduction. Data reduction means the process of simplifying large and complex data so that later it is easy to understand and process. The second step was data presentation. It refers to compiling and displaying the data that has been reduced in a clear and structured form. The data presentation in this study was in the form of a table. The last step was conclusion drawing. After conducting the two previous steps, the conclusion of the analysis was drawn.

3. Results and Discussion

After analyzing the whole data, it was found that there were 17 figurative languages found in “Royals” lyrics. They were simile, personification, metaphor, symbolism, hyperbole, understatement, irony. The findings can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Findings of Figurative Language

Types of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
Simile	2	12,5
Personification	3	18,75
Metaphor	2	12,5
Symbolism	4	25
Metonymy	2	12,5
Hyperbole	1	6,25
Understatement	1	6,25
Irony	1	6,25
Total	16	100

Simile

Simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things that is explicitly indicated by the word “like” or “as”. The following below is the simile found in “Royals” lyrics.

1. *But every song's **like gold teeth**, Grey Goose, trippin' in the bathroom*
2. *But everybody's **like Cristal, Maybach, diamonds** on your timepiece*

Data 1:

*“But every song's **like gold teeth**, Grey Goose, trippin' in the bathroom”*

The above lyric can be regarded as simile because it uses the word “like”. In the lyrics above, the song writer would like to compare a *song* to *gold teeth* which are regarded as a symbol of wealth. It means that the song is as valuable as gold.

Data 2:

*“But everybody's **like Cristal, Maybach, diamonds** on your timepiece”*

It is similar to Data 1. The lyric above also expresses simile since it uses the word like. The song writer would like to compare *everybody* to *Cristal, Maybach, diamonds*. It means that *everybody* has the same characteristic with *Cristal, Maybach, diamonds* which symbolize wealth.

Personification

Personification describes a thing that non-human is doing something that is humanlike. The following below is the personification found in “Royals” lyrics.

1. *But every song's like gold teeth, Grey Goose, **trippin'** in the bathroom*
2. *Bloodstains, ball gowns, **trashin'** the hotel room*
3. *It don't **run** in our blood*

Data 3:

*“Bloodstains, ball gowns, **trashin'** the hotel room”*

As we know that personification expresses a non-human object which acts as if it were a human being. From the lyrics above, it can be seen that the word *bloodstains* and *ball gowns* are non-human objects which are given human property *trashin' (trashing)*. *Trashin' (trashing)* can only be done by human beings. So, the lyric above shows personification.

Data 4:

*“It don't **run** in our blood”*

It is similar to Data 3. The lyric above is also personification because the word *it* which refers to *royal* which means aristocratic status, is given the human property *run*. As we know that

the action of *run* can only be done by human beings. Meanwhile, *It* which refers to *royal* which means aristocratic status is an abstract noun.

Metaphor

Metaphor is an implied comparison between two things. The following is the metaphor found in “Royals” lyric.

1. *You can call me **Queen Bee***
2. *And **we'll never be royals***

Data 5:

*“You can call me **Queen Bee**”*

The lyric above is metaphor because the song writer would like to compare one thing to another thing which usually has similar characteristics. In this lyric, the comparison is between the word *you* and *queen bee*. *You*, the person in the song, is regarded has the same characteristics to *queen*.

Symbolism

Symbolism is only applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something or has a range of reference, beyond itself. The following is the symbolism found in “Royals” lyric.

1. *But everybody's like Cristal, Maybach, **diamonds** on your timepiece*
2. ***Jet planes**, islands, tigers on a gold leash*
3. *Jet planes, **islands**, tigers on a gold leash*
4. *Jet planes, islands, **tigers** on a gold leash*

Data 6:

*“**Jet planes**, islands, tigers on a gold leash”*

The lyric above is symbolism because the word *Jet Planes, islands, tigers* symbolize the wealthy. The word *Jet Planes, islands, tigers* are regarded the luxurious properties usually owned by rich people. So, the lyrics express symbolism.

Metonymy

Metonymy is the literal term for one thing applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experiences. The following below is the metonymy found in “Royals” lyric.

1. *We don't care, we're driving **Cadillacs** in our dreams*
2. *But everybody's like Cristal, **Maybach**, diamonds on your timepiece*

Data 7:

*“We don't care, we're driving **Cadillacs** in our dreams”*

*"But everybody's like Cristal, **Maybach**, diamonds on your timepiece"*

The word *Cadillacs* and *Maybach* are a luxurious brand. *Cadillacs* is a luxury American car high mostly driven by rich people. And, *Maybach* is a brand which produces luxurious items such as accessories, eye wears, leather good etc. So, the two things above are used as metonymy which are strongly associated to rich people.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility. The following below is the hyperbole found in "Royals" lyric.

"I've never seen a diamond in the flesh"

Data 8:

From the lyric above, there is an exaggerated expression shows hyperbole. The lyric *I've never seen a diamond in the flesh* tend to be an excessive expression. Although it may be that a person doesn't own a diamond, she can see the diamond in jewelry. So, the clause *I have never seen a diamond* is an exaggeration. That's why, this lyric belongs to hyperbole.

Understatement

Understatement is the contrary figure which deliberately represents something as very much less in magnitude or importance than it really is, or is ordinarily considered to be. The effect is usually ironic. The following below is the understatement found in "Royals" lyric.

*"In a **torn-up town**, no postcode envy"*

Data 9:

The lyric above shows understatement. Understatement is the opposite of hyperbole. We can also say understatement as litotes. The phrase *a torn-up town* shows a situation which is different from reality. It could be the town is as bad as the situation imagined in the lyric.

Irony

Irony is a condition of using word in a way to convey the opposite meaning to the true meaning of the word. The following below is the understatement found in "Royals" lyric.

"Let me be your ruler"

Data 10:

The lyric above is irony because the lyric, *Let me be your ruler*, shows the opposite meaning to the real meaning. If it is connected to the previous lyric of that stanza, the lyric shows the rejection of the wealthy and aristocratic status which is symbolized by the word *ruler* (king or queen).

The connotative meaning of the figurative language found in "Royals" lyric is negative because the whole figurative languages of the lyric in this song show a rejection of the materialism in

American society. The materialism in this song is symbolized by luxurious things such as Cristal, Cadillac, Maybach etc.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing the data, it can be concluded that there were 16 figurative languages found in “Royals” lyric. They were simile, personification, metaphor, symbolism, metonymy, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. The most frequent figurative language found in “Royals” lyric was symbolism. The connotative meaning of the figurative language is negative because it shows the rejection of materialism in American society. From this study, it can also be concluded that the figurative language is commonly used in song not only to express the song writer’s feelings but also to portray the social situation of a country surrounding the song writer. Since the numerous studies about figurative language was mostly in literature or literary work, it is recommended to other researchers who are interested in figurative language to conduct the study in another field such as political discourse.

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