Analysis of the Metaphors in the Song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift as a Tool for Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Language is used by humans to communicate and express their ideas as well as feelings, which can be done through literary works such as a song. A song conveys an idea and/or a feeling through its lyrics. In a song, the lyrics may contain various metaphors that carry contextual meaning in order to convey a feeling and emotion. Thus, people may have different interpretation of a song. This applies to all kinds of songs, such as the longer version of Taylor Swift's song, "All Too Well". Therefore, this research will discuss 1) the meaning of the metaphors in the song to help create a better storytelling and 2) the type of metaphors used in the song. The metaphors found in this song will be analysed using Ullman's theory on metaphors. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method because this research will describe the results of this research instead of depict them through numbers. The data in this research is the metaphors found in the song, and the sampling technique for this data is purposive sampling. This technique is chosen because this technique help supplies the data needed to answer the problems of this research. In relations to the aims of this research, there are 26 metaphors found to be used in this song; 3 anthropomorphic metaphors, 1 animal metaphor, 19 concrete to abstract metaphors, and 3 synesthetic metaphors. The use of these metaphors is intended not only so the story in the song can be better delivered to the listeners to make it more captivating, but also for the listeners to be able to understand the depths of emotions the song-writer wished to convey in the song. Therefore, the metaphors have significant influences in the act of storytelling through the lyrics of the song.

Keywords: metaphor; songs; lyrics; semantics; All Too Well; Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Language is used by humans to communicate and express their ideas as well as feelings (Effendi, 1985). It is tool that can be used to convey people's emotion, their thought, ideas, feeling, as well as reactions over certain situations. A song is one of the many ways to achieve those goals. According to Sitorus and Herman (2019), song is a one of the ways for humans to communicate through sounds, and a song may also express a feeling, sense, idea, emotions or thought. Dallin (1994) states that music consists of two elements, sounds and lyrics. Lyrics carry a message for

the listeners of the songs, and they may contain the song-writer's experiences and ideas. This message is reflected from the use of metaphorical language (Macmillan, 1995). Thus, people may have different interpretation of a song, and in order to interpret the meaning of a song, semantics skill is needed.

Semantics is the systematic study of meaning, through learning how language organizes and expresses meaning (Kreidler, 2022). Through a semantics analysis, people will learn and understand the meanings of words, phrases or sentences are communicated by speakers and interpreted by listeners. According to Yule (2010), semantics is related to the aspects of meaning in a language. Saeed (2009) states that there are two types of meaning, literal and non-literal meaning. Literal words carry the actual meanings of the words, while non-literal words do not. There are two ways words may express their non-literal meanings, the first way is through idioms and the other way is through figurative languages. An example of figurative language is metaphor,

The general idea is that metaphor is similar to simile because both stylistic forms involve identification of resemblances to compare or contrast something (Saeed, 2009). The difference, however, lies in the way how metaphor transfers the properties from one concept to another. It is a word or expression with a meaning that is figurative and not literal because the purpose of metaphor is to explain a concept. In a way, metaphor works the same way as an analogy. Metaphors are widely found in literary works such as songs. In work of literary, metaphor makes the meaning of a word more aesthetic by explaining a concept with other concepts. According to Ullman (1972), there are four categories of metaphors: anthropomorphic, animal, concrete to abstract, and synesthetic.

Anthropomorphic metaphor transfers the characteristics of human life, which include the behaviour, nature, and human characteristics, to inanimate objects when comparing one concept to another. For example, the use of 'waving' in *'Palm tree waving',* means it is an anthropomorphic metaphor because 'waving' is something a human does, and a palm tree is not human. Animal metaphor, on the other hand, transfers the characteristics of animals when comparing once comparing concepts. The example is calling someone *"You weasel!"* when that person exhibits a sly behaviour like the animal weasel. The third category arises during the transference of a concrete concept to an abstract concept, or vice versa. Basically, this type of metaphor turns something real into unreal, or the opposite, in order to give an easier explanation to understand. An example for this category is *"a star student"* because this refers to the abstract concept that a student is highly intelligent, not that they are made of stars. The last category, synesthetic metaphor, transfers the

responses of a concept to another based on the experiences. For example, "*His eyes are cold*" refers to how gives an unfriendly look, not that they are physically cold to touch.

The use of metaphors can be seen in the song 'All Too Well' by the American singer and song-writer, Taylor Swift. There are two versions of the song 'All Too Well'. The version discussed in this research is the re-recorded and uncut 10-minute version of the song, released in 2021. This version of the song contains original verses and melodies that had been removed in old, 5-minutes version of the song when it was first released in 2014. The 10-minute version was an international commercial success, topping the charts in various countries, breaking the Guinness World Record for the longest song ever to reach number one on the Billboard Hot 100, and is named one of the best songs of 2021.

The song received rave reviews from music critics, who praised Swift's songwriting for the "epic" songcraft, song structure, and the extended storytelling for providing more context and perspective than the old version. The story contained in the song makes the song an stellar example that a song can tell a story—just literary works such as a novel. The song 'All Too Well' tell the story of a young woman who remembers how her first ever serious relationship started out a fairytale before it ended in tragedy. In the song, the woman expresses how she devastated she was when her then-boyfriend led her teen-self to believe that they were going to be together forever, only for him to end their end their relationship when she no longer allowed him to manipulate her into becoming the type of woman he wanted. The story conveyed in the song not only through words that have literal meanings, but also figuratively, through the means of metaphors.

In this research, the song 'All Too Well' will be studied in order to find out what kinds of metaphors are used in the lyrics of the song. This research will also discuss what messages are conveyed by the use of metaphors in the song. It is hoped that the results of this research will show how metaphors affect the aesthetic aspect of a song, and the storytelling delivered through the lyrics of a song. The use of metaphors in the song 'All Too Well' has been chosen to be studied in this research in order to find out what me how exactly metaphors can both deliver a story and make it more aesthetic. This study will also discuss the types of metaphors and how they affect the storytelling delivered through the lyrics of the song. There were some researches who conducted studies related to the topic of this research. They are chosen as references because, like this study, they are the most recent researches that discussed the metaphors used in just the one song.

The studies carried out by Saragih (2013), Sholichati (2013), Rettob (2015), Garing (2016), Yusuf and Amelia (2018), Jata, (2017), Savitri (2017), Lukmana et al. (2019), Jati (2020), Pratiwi et al. (2020), Zain (2021), Septiani et al. (2022), Vikri & Nurcholis (2022), examined the types of metaphors found in song lyrics. Meanwhile Ndraha (2018) studied the meanings delivered through

the metaphors used in song lyrics. Jata, Jati, Lukmana et al., as well as Yusuf & Amelia also discussed this in their studies. Meanwhile, Fitria (2013), Kamaliaj (2013), and Relawati et al., (2018) examined the forms of metaphorical speech song lyrics in terms of form and type, as well as the expressiveness contained in the lyrics of the song.

There are several things that distinguish this study from the previous ones mentioned. The first difference between this research and other metaphor research lies in the object studied and the metaphor used. The song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift was studied because the song had never been researched before. The genre of the songs used for the researches are also different. The genre of the song 'All Too Well' is power ballad, while the songs used in other studies were traditional songs, pop songs, jazz songs and rock songs. Therefore, the metaphors used in the songs are expected to affect the songs in different ways. The last and most important difference about this study compared to the previous ones is that this study will discuss how the song writer's personal experience affects the songs strongly through the use of metaphors. With these differences found between this study and the previous ones, it is hoped that the results of this study will be able to enrich the literature regarding the study of metaphors in songs and can also become a reference for similar researches in the future.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The focus of this study is types of metaphors used in the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift, based on Stephen Ullman's theory (1972) about the categories of metaphors. This is a single case study, since there is only one source of data, which is the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift. The study's approach is semantics, and it used qualitative research with descriptive methods to fulfill the objectives of this study (Hadi, 1981). Qualitative research is usually in the form of descriptive, and the data collected for this type of research is in the form of words, with the results presented presented in the form of quotations. Descriptive method aims to describe a phenomenon accurately based on the characteristics of the research. For this research, descriptive method will be used to identify, describe, analyse and classify the various types of Ullman's metaphors used in the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift.

The data for this research are the metaphors found in the lyrics of the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift. The data are collected using documentation technique. According to Sudaryono (2006), this technique obtain the data relevant to the object of the research directly from the document that acts as the place of research. Therefore, the sampling technique used is purposive

sampling in order to fulfill the purpose of this research, which is to determine and analyse the categories of metaphors used in the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift. The steps related to this technique include reading the object of the research, taking notes, and identifying the data. After the data are collected, they are analysed to find whether they are in accordance to what is needed to answer the aims of the research. The method used to analyse the data is content analysis. This method is chosen for this research because it allows the research to study the content of the source of data, which is the song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift, by observing and analysing it. This method helps determine not only the categories of metaphors used in the song, but also how the use of those metaphors according to the categories affect the message delivered in the song.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

From the lyrics of the song, there are 16 data found that are suitable for the research. All of these data were deemed suitable because they are lines from the lyrics that have metaphors. These data were then analysed based on the Ullman's theory (1972) on metaphors to determine which category of metaphors they fell into.

Table 1. Metaphors Used in the Song 'All Too Well'

No.	Category of Metaphors	Number of Data
1	Anthropomorphic	3
2	Animal	1
3	Concrete to abstract	9
4	Synesthetic	3
	Total	**16**

Anthropomorphic metaphors

There are 3 data that fall under the anthropomorphic category. This type of metaphor transfers human characteristics (behaviour, body parts) when describing something else. Another name for this metaphor is personification, which can be a separate form of figurative language on its own. There are three data for this type of metaphor. The first datum is *"your Brooklyn broke my skin and bones"*. The subject in this datum is 'your Brooklyn', with 'Brooklyn' referring to the borough in New York City as the place where the character 'your', which is the song writer's (in this case, the song writer is Taylor Swift) boyfriend, lived at one point. Therefore, the subject that has done a human action in the datum is not a person, and cannot do human actions, such as breaking one's skin and bones. In the case of this song lyrics, it is the song writer's skin and bones

that are have been broken. This means that the first datum falls under the category of anthropomorphic metaphor.

The second datum is *"did twin flame bruise paint you blue"*. 'Twin flame' in the datum refers to the term relationship therapists use to describe two people who have deep soul connection. This connection can be familiar connection, platonic or romantic. In the context of this song, the twin flame refers to Taylor Swift as the song writer and the boyfriend she talked about in the song. Since 'twin flame' here is not a human person with human characteristics, it is possible that it could do the act of 'paint'—as written in lyrics. Thus, this datum is included in the anthropomorphic metaphor category. As for the last datum*, "did the love affair maim you",* 'love affair' is also not a human that can do or have human characteristics. Therefore, it is not possible for it to 'maim' something, since the word 'maim' is an act that a human does. This means that the last datum is also another example of anthropomorphic metaphor.

All of these data show that there are words found in the data that can be attributed to human characteristics. The words used are *broke, paint* and *maim,* and they refer to activities that humans do. In the context of this song, all of these metaphors indicate that the romance between the young woman in the song and her boyfriend have hurt her so much, that the mental hurt feel like physical hurt to her.

Animal metaphors

There is only 1 datum found for animal metaphor category. This type of metaphor usually uses animal body parts or animal names or something related to animals to describe something. The datum for this type of metaphor is *"time will fly"*, and the word that indicates the phrase as an animal metaphor is *fly,* which is an activity that is mostly referred to as a characteristic of animals such as birds. The use of this metaphor indicates that time passes fast, because the idea of flying is usually related to the mode of transportation that takes less time. This idea refers to how flying on an airplane to go to a place takes less time than driving on a car.

Concrete to abstract metaphors

This category has the most data out of all categories, with 9 data in total. It occurs when a concrete experience is transferred into an abstract experience or vice versa, with the purpose to give not only better understanding but also more emotion to the meaning. In simple terms, this

type of metaphor turns an unreal concept into real, by treating an abstract concept as concrete concept by giving it characteristics of a concrete, animate object. An example of concrete to abstract metaphor found in the lyrics of this song is the phrase *"it felt like home"*. The word *it* in this phrase refers to *cold air,* which is mentioned in the previous line of the song. The metaphor is comparing how the cold air feels like home to the woman in the song. This indicates that the cold air makes her feel comfortable and safe, because those are the feelings one relates to their home. Cold air is considered an abstract concept because it can be seen or touched, while home is a concrete concept because one can see and touch it. Thus, the type of metaphor used here falls under the concrete to abstract category.

Another example of this category is the datum *"maybe this thing was a masterpiece"*. The word *thing* in that phrase refers to the relationship—the love—that the song writer (who is Taylor Swift) had with the boyfriend she talked about in this song. Love, however, is an abstract concept, and therefore cannot be physically seen or touched. But the phrase that datum describes it as a *masterpiece,* which means that it is a tangible object. Therefore, this indicates that the datum falls under the concrete to abstract category. The phrase *"I'm in a new Hell"* is also considered a datum that fits for this category because Hell is an abstract concept which refers to a horrible situation that the song writer was in because of the relationship problem she was having with her boyfriend. Relationship problem being a horrible situation the song writer was in also counts as an abstract concept. This is why this datum is also a good example for the concrete to abstract category.

Other data for this category found in the songs are *"'til we were dead and gone and buried"; "check the pulse and come back swearing it's the same"; "after three months in the grave"; "you kept me like a secret"; "I kept you like an oath"; "break me like a promise"; "I'm a crumpled up piece of paper lying here"; "a never-needy, ever-lovely jewel whose shine reflects on you";* and *"you lost the one real thing"*. All of these data give a concrete concept an abstract experience. In this song, the concrete object described is either Taylor Swift as the song writer of the song, or the boyfriend described in the song that she was in a relationship with. Meanwhile, the abstract experiences linked to the concrete object is always about the romantic love and the relationship, and in turn the relationship problems, that happened between the song writer and the boyfriend mentioned in the song.

The use of this type metaphor, such as in the examples mentioned before, is intended to make the listeners feel more the depth of emotion the song-writer wished to convey in the song. This purpose is related to the main topic of the story, which is the romantic love and the relationship the song writer, who is Taylor Swift, had with her boyfriend. Since love and relationship are both abstract concepts, this category of metaphor is the perfect fit to be used to not

only describe the experience of being in that romantic relationship, but also to ensure that listeners can personally relate with that experience themselves.

Synesthetic metaphors

The synesthetic metaphor category has 3 data. This category transfers one experience to another, or one response to another, or a combination of both. There is a displacement that occurs during the transfer, such as the experience of sound to the response of sight. There are three data for this category. The first datum is *"your sweet disposition"*. 'Disposition' means the particular type of character that a person naturally has. Meanwhile the word 'sweet' is normally used to describe the sweet taste of something edible, not someone's disposition or character. This means that a 'disposition' does not have a taste, and therefore cannot be 'sweet'. Thus, the first datum can be considered as an example of the synesthetic metaphor.

The next datum is *"you almost ran the red"*. In the second datum, the word 'ran' indicates the use of synesthetic metaphor. The word 'red' in the datum refers to the traffic lights, and the datum does not talk about someone literally running over the red light of traffic lights. Instead, the datum talks about how someone does not stop when the red light that signals stop comes. The last datum for this category is *"we were always skipping town"*. In the third datum, the word *skipping* also refers to synesthetic metaphor, because one does not literally skip or jump over town. This datum means that the characters in the song are going from one place of residence to another without warning. All of the metaphors in the data show that there is a transference of experiences from one concept to another. The metaphors from this category are used in this category with the purpose of giving the story a deeper feeling for the listeners to enjoy.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of this research, there are 27 metaphors found to be used in the song 'All Too Well' written and performed by Taylor Swift. These metaphors are classified into the four categories as proposed by Stephen Ullman (1972). From all of the categories of metaphors, the one used most often in the song is the concrete to abstract metaphor with 9 data found in the song. These metaphors are significantly more dominant than the others because love, like other feelings and emotions, is an abstract concept. Therefore, comparing it by giving it concrete attributes may assist the listeners in understanding the story conveyed in the song. On top of that, the listeners

may also be able to have a taste of the feelings and emotions the song-writer, in this case is Taylor Swift, wished to share with the listeners.

This research shows that the use of these metaphors in the song 'All Too Well' is intended to help the storytelling aspect of this song to be better delivered to the listeners, by making it more captivating for the listeners, but without forgetting the importance of ensuring that the story is clear to be understood. Metaphors also help the listeners to be able to understand the depths of emotions the song-writer wished to convey in the song, since not every may have the same experience as Taylor Swift, and therefore they might have difficulties in relating to her. Thus, the use of metaphors in this song has significant influences in the act of storytelling through the lyrics of the song.

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