The Use of Figurative Language in Feminist Songs

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ABSTRACT

Songs employ figurative language to convey messages, capturing listeners' attention with captivating melodies. Listeners generate several interpretations by depending on personal observations to infer intended meanings in different settings. The primary objective of this research is to identify figurative language in Taylor Swift's feminist songs: 'The Man,' 'long story short,' and 'I Did Something Bad.' The framework applied in this research is based on Perrine's (1977) theory of figurative language. The data analysis procedure is based on Alan Bryman's (2012) four phases of analysis. This research demonstrates that feminist principles can be effectively expressed through music, utilising figurative language as a compelling instrument for communicating feminism in musical compositions. Singers can use figurative language to advocate for and reinforce shared feminist beliefs while constructing a bridge of connection and a beautiful symphony. Lyrics enhanced by figurative language, successfully deliver feminist ideals, making them a powerful means for women to empower themselves through listening to feminist music.

Keywords: feminism, figurative language, gender, lyrics, songwriter

INTRODUCTION

Songs convey a multitude of messages and meanings, and one effective method for expressing these messages is using figurative language. Figurative language serves as a tool for conveying ideas indirectly by employing symbolic terms within a context. This approach allows authors to construct numerous interpretations, requiring readers to rely on their observations to discern the intended meanings of various situations.

In song lyrics, figurative language is crucial in depicting diverse ideas, with feminism being one prominent theme. 'Feminism,' a set of views and ideals stemming from the societal issue of gender inequality, continues to evolve and significantly impact people's lives, particularly those of women (Setiawati & Maryani, 2018; Lusiana & Qomariana, 2017; Arp & Johnson, 2009).

Taylor Swift is one of the many popular feminist singer-songwriters who skillfully employs various forms of figurative language to convey her messages in her songs. Her unique songwriting style distinguishes her as one of the foremost representatives of female songwriters who adeptly use figurative language. Moreover, she is a prominent feminist figure, consistently advocating for feminism in most of her songs.

The lyrics in Taylor Swift's feminist songs are particularly intriguing to study due to the diverse use of figurative language, employed both directly and indirectly to convey messages. Consequently, this research aims to identify figurative language in portraying feminism by examining the lyrics of three selected Taylor Swift feminist songs. The three selected songs are 'The Man,' 'long story short,' and 'I Did Something Bad.'

Problem Statement

Feminist icons such as Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, and Demi Lovato stand out among several artists who skilfully employ figurative language to create songs that resonate with and empower women. They have embraced the concept of spreading feminist beliefs through their music. Feminism, an ideology stemming from

the societal issue of inequality between men and women, has continuously evolved, significantly influencing people's lifestyles, particularly those of women.

However, difficulties arise when comprehending figurative language, especially in everyday conversations. By its nature, figurative language employs double meanings, introducing inherent ambiguity that poses a constant risk of misunderstanding, confusion, or indirect communication. Understanding figurative language necessitates a complex interplay of metalinguistic and cognitive abilities. It is worth noting that many artists deliberately incorporate a myriad of figurative language elements into their songs to craft captivating and thought-provoking lyrics. Therefore, the researcher will analyse how feminism is depicted in Taylor Swift's songs using figurative language. The research will explore various types of figurative language, applying Perrine's (1977) theory, and will focus specifically on three feminist songs by Taylor Swift: 'The Man,' 'long story short,' and 'I Did Something Bad.'

METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilised content analysis to collect data for this research. Laurence Perrine's (1977) theory of figurative language served as the framework for identifying figurative language in the selected songs. Perrine (1977) categorises figurative language into twelve types: simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. The data analysis procedure is based on Alan Bryman's four phases of analysis (Bryman, 2012). This analysis aims to identify the types of figurative language that depict feminism in Taylor Swift's songs. Data samples were directly collected from three of Taylor Swift's feminist songs: 'The Man,' 'long story short,' and 'I Did Something Bad.' The lyrics from the selected songs were obtained from the lyric's website, www.azlyrics.com.

Table II illustrates the data analysis based on Byrman's (2012). The researcher will share the data findings according to the coding guidelines and themes.

Table II: Coding Guidelines Adopted from Byrman s (2012)

Songs	Lines from lyrics	Types of Figurative Language by Perrine's Theory (1977)
The Man	S1	Coding theme
Long story short	S2	Coding theme
I Did Something Bad	S3	Coding theme

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism encompasses a set of perspectives and ideals developed in response to the pervasive issue of gender inequality, evolving and significantly impacting lives, especially those of women (Setiawati & Maryani, 2018). In exploring figurative language in Taylor Swift's song lyrics, Setiawati and Maryani (2018) adopted Kennedy's theory on figurative language (1983). They analysed two songs from Taylor Swift's 'Red' album, uncovering the utilisation of seven types of figurative language. Hyperbole and simile emerged as the most prevalent ways to amplify feelings of heartbreak and pain within a negative lyrical context. Similarly, Lusiana and Qomariana (2017) identified numerous instances of figurative language in Taylor Swift's songs.

Areerasada and Tapinta (2015) utilised the theory of 'The Four Major Perspectives of Third Wave Feminism' by Mann and Huffman (2005) in their study. This study aimed to discern the manifestation of feminist values in contemporary American songs penned by lyricists of the "third wave" of feminism. The study included songs from Madonna, Pink, Beyonce, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, and Kesha, concluding that individualism was the most expressed feminist value in the selected artists' songs.

In their analysis, Rahmawati and Suyudi (2023) share a perspective with Areerasada and Tapinta (2015). They examined Ariana Grande's 'God Is a Woman' music video using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). The findings unveiled the representation of postmodern feminist philosophy in the music video. The

video conveys an extreme feminist philosophy of female dominance over males. Ariana's words, reflecting postmodern feminist and radical feminist concepts, exert influence over audiences, using music videos as a platform to shape their perspectives.

This research used the conceptual framework of Laurence Perrine's (1977) figurative language**.** Perrine (1977) classifies figurative language into twelve categories: simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. Table I illustrates the figurative language by Laurence Perrine (1977).

Table I: Types Of Figurative Language Adopted from Perrine's (1977)

Types of Figurative Language	Functions
Simile	A simile is an apt comparison between dissimilar items that uses "like" or "as."
Metaphor	Without the use of "like" or "as," a comparison of unrelated concepts is called a metaphor.
Personification	When a human quality is ascribed to something that is not human, such as an item or an animal.
Apostrophe	The practice of speaking to an inanimate object or person as though they were alive and able to respond.
Synecdoche	The use of a symbol or component to represent the whole is called a synecdoche.
Metonymy	The use of a word or phrase that is metaphorical in nature.
Symbol	A symbol is anything that represents more than it really is.
Allegory	Allegory is a figure of speech that conceals an additional meaning behind its apparent one.
Paradox	A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself or run counter to conventional wisdom but includes an underlying truth.
Hyperbole	Hyperbole is an obvious exaggeration.
Understatement	Understatement is the opposite of overstatement.
Irony	Irony is the opposite of what it means.

RESULTS

By applying Perrine's (1977) framework on figurative language, the researcher ascertains that the three songs contain an array of eight distinct figurative language types: understatement, synecdoche, allegory, symbolism, irony, personification, metonymy, and apostrophe.

I) Understatement

They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to

And that would be ok

For me to do

-The Man- lines 3 until 5

The lyrics address the challenges faced by women in lower socioeconomic standings as they strive for a better quality of life. The use of understatement suggests that females might be viewed as subordinate to males, especially until they marry or reach childbearing age, at which point societal expectations may confine them to traditional roles as housewives. The feminist theme embedded in these lines reflects women's ongoing struggle against societal oppression.

They say I did something bad

Then why's it feel so good?

-I Did Something Bad- lines 32 until 33

In 'I Did Something Bad,' a casual tone implies a sense of newfound freedom. The feminist theme woven into these lines encourages women to pursue their dreams. Through understatement, the lyrics subtly allude to actions that might be viewed as unconventional or unacceptable by traditional male-centric societal standards.

II) Synecdoche

I'd be an alpha type

-The Man- line 8

A noteworthy literary device is evident in line 8 of the song, where synecdoche is employed. The expression *'I'd be an alpha type'* in this line symbolizes women in society assuming leadership roles, thereby challenging and defying the established cultural norms of patriarchy. This subtle linguistic choice emphasises the commentary on gender dynamics and societal expectations.

III) Allegory

I'm so sick of running as fast as I can

Wondering if I'd get there quicker

If I was a man

-The Man- lines 11 until 13

Lines 11 to 13 use allegory to communicate the feminist theme of women contending with oppression from men. The allegorical portrayal implies that women must strive harder to achieve equivalent recognition than their male counterparts. This imagery emphasises the inherent struggle women experience in surmounting societal challenges and aspiring for equality.

If the shoe fits, walk in it 'til your high heels break

-long story short- line 8

In line 8, *'If the shoe fits, walk in it 'til it breaks,'* conveys the message that women should disregard societal expectations regarding their attire and instead dress in a manner that aligns with their personal preferences and desires. The metaphor of 'the shoe fitting' implies finding one's comfort and style, and the notion of walking 'til it breaks' suggests persisting in this choice despite external pressures. This line encapsulates the broader theme of the song, encouraging women to assert their individuality and challenge societal expectations, even if it means defying conventional norms.

Pushed from the precipice

Climbed right back up the cliff

Long story short, I survived

-long story short- lines 58 until 60

In the song 'long story short,' the application of allegory is evident in lines 58 to 60. This literary device conveys feminist values by captivating listeners with a narrative. The creative story unfolds, illustrating moments where women may have faced adversity and stumbled. Through this allegorical tale, the song becomes a vehicle for spreading feminist beliefs, urging listeners to navigate and overcome life's challenges with strength and determination.

This is how the world works

You gotta leave before you get left

-I Did Something Bad- lines 26 until 27

In lines 26 to 27 of 'I Did Something Bad,' the lyrics suggest that women should be empowered to leave a partner who engages in unacceptable behaviour, even if societal norms dictate otherwise. This allegorical representation challenges the conventional wisdom that demands unquestioning submission to a partner by highlighting the significance of self-care and putting oneself first.

IV) Symbol

And they would toast to me, oh Let the players play

I'd be just like Leo in Saint-Tropez

-The Man- lines 25 until 28

In the song 'The Man,' the lines 25 to 28 employ a symbol to convey the feminist value of pride. The lyrics suggest celebrating the woman, with 'they' referring to the male population. Consequently, the woman experiences a sense of pride, finally breaking away from the oppression caused by men.

I was in the alley, surrounded on all sides The knife cuts both ways

-long story short- lines 6 until 7

In the song 'long story short,' feminist struggle is depicted through symbolic language. In lines 6 to 7, the lyrics suggest a sense of being surrounded, symbolising the challenges faced when grappling with traditional beliefs.

They're burning all the witches, even if you aren't one They got their pitchforks and proof

Their receipts and reasons

-I Did Something Bad- lines 40 until 42

In the song 'I Did Something Bad,' lines 40 to 42 use symbolism to express the notion that women may endure suffering even when they are blameless. This artistic choice effectively depicts the feminist struggle, highlighting the challenges faced against conventional beliefs.

V) Irony

If I was out flashing my dollars I'd be a bitch, not a baller

They paint me out to be bad

-The Man- lines 42 until 44

Between lines 42 and 44 in the song 'The Man,' irony is employed. The lyrics suggest that if a woman were to emulate the behaviour of men, such as flaunting her wealth, the media would inevitably find a way to tarnish her reputation. The song portrays the feminist theme of women's inferior social status because of the oppressive roles that the media assigns to them.

Actually

I always felt I must look better in the rear view

-long story short- lines 20 until 21

In the song 'long story short,' an implied feminist value emerges between lines 20 and 21 through the use of irony, depicting a woman's desire for an unconventional lifestyle. The lyrics subtly suggest the oppressive influence of men, hindering women from freely showcasing their beauty. Consequently, the song effectively conveys the feminist value of women aspiring to unconventional lifestyles, including the freedom to wear whatever they choose.

VI) Personification

I tried to pick my battles 'til the battle picked me

-long story short, line 2

In the song 'long story short,' in line 2, the word 'battle' is personified, as it is described as having the human trait of 'picking.' This implies that the battle has chosen the woman, who must fight to survive. Through this personification, the song conveys feminist values, specifically the theme of survival. In a broader sense, it represents women's ongoing struggle against social oppression for a better quality of life. The personification of 'battle' suggests that the struggle is not something the woman actively sought; instead, it is an external force that she must confront. This effectively illustrates the feminist theme of women persistently contending with social oppression, even when they may not desire such conflicts.

VII) Metonymy

At the golden gates, they once held the keys to

When I dropped my sword

I threw it in the bushes and knocked on your door

And we live in peace

But if someone comes at us T

his time, I'm ready

-long story short- lines 23 until 28

In lines 23 to 28 of the song 'long story short,' the figurative language used is metonymy. In employing metonymy, the songwriter implies women's empowerment to break free from conventional beliefs. Within these lines, metonymy indicates the ability to live in peace while remaining prepared in case of potential threats. This use of metonymy effectively portrays feminist values, emphasising women's strength and their capacity to challenge traditional expectations.

VIII) Apostrophe

I never trust a playboy

But they love me

So I fly him all around the world

And I let them think they saved me

They never see it comin'

-I Did Something Bad- lines 20 until 24

In lines 20 to 24 of 'I Did Something Bad,' the use of the apostrophe implies employing others for personal enjoyment, aligning with feminist values. This communicates the idea that women should feel empowered to have fun and pursue their desires without the fear of societal judgement, even if it entails consequences for the other party.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research contribute to the expanding body of literature that sheds light on Taylor Swift's feminist views and aspirations using figurative language. Based on the classified data, it was discovered that eight types of figurative language are present in the selected feminist songs by Taylor Swift. The identified types include allegory, understatement, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, symbol, irony, and apostrophe. Allegory was identified as the most frequently used form of figurative language, while synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, and irony were the least used in the three selected songs. This finding closely aligns with the work of Setiawati and Maryani (2018), who identified seven types of figurative language, with hyperbole and simile being the most dominant.

Swift's adeptly employed allegory in the three compositions, 'The Man' and 'long story short,' 'I Did Something Bad.' Through this literary technique, Swift emphasises the need for women to intensify efforts for equal recognition and underscores women's confidence in expressing their unique identities within society. The use of allegories is a powerful tool for the songwriter to communicate the importance she attributes to these ideas.

The use of understatement serves to emphasise rebellion against societal norms. Swift diminishes the act of rebellion while emphasising the personal freedom and empowerment that women experience when they defy traditional expectations. Feminist themes emerge as women are encouraged to reclaim autonomy over their lives and choices, regardless of societal judgment. This message aligns with feminist ideologies that advocate for women's rights to personal freedom and independence, free from the confines of patriarchal expectations.

Similarly, symbolism portrays the struggle of navigating gender norms in male-dominated society. The utilisation of symbols conveys feminist concepts regarding the expenses that women incur in patriarchal societies, where they are expected to conform to roles that frequently restrict their personal autonomy and identity. Symbolism in Swift's work is consistent with feminist literary criticism, which regards symbols as potent instruments for investigating the ways in which women navigate societal constraints. This symbolic representation of power and inequality is consistent with the work by Rahmawati and Suyudi (2023).

The utilisation of synecdoche resonates with feminist goals to enable women to become leaders in society. At this point, Swift is challenging the conventional idea that power and leadership are inherently male domains. Through this literary technique, Swift emphasises the need for women to step into leadership roles. As noted by Areerasada and Tapinta (2015), such feminist values are often expressed in modern songs as part of the third-wave feminist movement, which particularly emphasises women's empowerment.

Additionally, irony is implemented in Swift's songs to emphasise the dichotomy of societal expectations that exists between men and women. It is exemplified that societal double standards influence women who adopt

behaviours that are traditionally associated with men, thereby generating underlying tensions between feminist values and social expectations. As previously noted by Lusiana and Qomariana (2017), this discovery is in accordance with feminist discourse regarding the disparities in the standards that society imposes on men and women.

Employing a range of figurative language techniques acts as a powerful tool for Taylor Swift to convey her feminist values. The message is clear: women should embrace self-confidence, carry themselves proudly, and disregard external opinions while striving for equal recognition. These compositions vividly depict the challenges faced by women oppressed by men, underscoring the importance of women working towards equal recognition.

This research enhances the ongoing discourse on feminism in popular music by illustrating how Taylor Swift's lyrics utilise figurative language to both subtly and overtly challenge patriarchal norms. It also adds depth to the discussions initiated by Rahmawati and Suyudi (2023), who examined feminist representations in music videos. Swift's lyrics achieve similar goals through linguistic and poetic devices, underscoring the versatility of figurative language in feminist expression. The subtle use of figurative language provides a unique way to discuss feminism without overtly confronting listeners, making the messages more accessible and relatable. The outcome indicates that feminist beliefs can be effectively communicated through song lyrics, highlighting the crucial role of figurative language in disseminating feminism and facilitating the communication of feminist concepts.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the findings indicated that feminist beliefs can be effectively conveyed through song lyrics, emphasising the crucial role of figurative language. It emphasises the effectiveness of expressing feminist ideas in music for creative and effective communication, conveying diverse thoughts and emotions. This suggests that figurative language is a universal tool that singers use worldwide, fostering a harmonious communication bridge across cultures.

The discovery highlights the potential of spreading feminist beliefs not solely through song videos but also through the lyrics. It serves as a valuable reference for linguistic learners and future researchers, urging them to explore multiple artists rather than restricting themselves to one, fostering diverse findings, and expanding their discoveries.

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