ARE WE OUT OF THE WOODS YET?
AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONS UTILIZED IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S *1989* ALBUM

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Abstract

The study focuses on the descriptive analysis of figurative expressions utilized in lyrics of Taylor Swift's 1989 album. According to Carroll (2008), the use of language where the semantic features of the lexicon do not literally relate to the context is known as figurative language. Figurative expressions can often be found in lyrics and is an interesting aspect of a language to discuss. Although previous studies reveal various significant aspects of figurative expressions in pop songs, in particular, there has not been substantial examination of the use of connotation, the device that conveys non-literal or indirect meanings in different dimensions, emotions, and attitudes in these songs. Using the language figuratively is a technique of creating connotative meaning and gives meaningful message to certain audience with the need of interpretation (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013). Hence, it is the interest of this study to focus on the types of figurative expressions and further explore the connotations expressed through figurative expressions in her songs. To conduct this study, all the lyrics of thirteen songs in the 1989 album were identified and classified according to each figurative expressions. A qualitative research with descriptive analysis was used as the method of data analysis. This paper utilizes the 11 types of figure of speech proposed by Kennedy (1979) which are metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, metonymy, irony, oxymoron, litotes, paradox, and symbol. This study concludes with recommendations for future research and is expected to make a contribution to the literature of figurative expressions especially for but not limited to pop songs.

Keywords: Figurative expressions, descriptive analysis, connotations.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Language, as means of communication is essential for human beings, because without it, ideas, knowledge, and emotions cannot be expressed. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017), language can be defined as the "method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way". There are many aspects of a language that can be studied, and one of the ways to look at it is in its use of figurative expressions. Figurative expressions differ from the ordinary form of expression as it is used to produce a greater effect (Wren and Martin, 1981); it expresses ideas, feelings, and emotions in a way that the ordinary form of expression could not.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although previous studies reveal various significant aspects of figurative expressions in pop songs, in particular, there has not been substantial examination of the use of connotation, the device that conveys non-literal or indirect meanings in different dimensions, emotions, and attitudes in these songs. Using the language figuratively is a technique of creating connotative meaning and gives meaningful message to certain audience with the need of interpretation (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013). Hence, it is the interest of this study to focus on the types of figurative expressions and further explore the connotations expressed through figurative expressions in Taylor Swift's *1989* album.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

I.   To identify the types of figurative expressions found in the lyrics of *1989* album.
II.   To analyze and describe the connotations of the figurative expressions used.

1.4 Significances of the Study

It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial in the following ways:

I.   Language researchers or language learners who are interested in the role of figurative expressions can have better insight into the use of different types of figurative expressions that promote the non-literal or indirect meanings, including the sense of connotations. In particular, this study explains how Taylor Swift has successfully employed figurative expressions to connote meanings that can be understood.
II.   Audiences and novice songwriters can gain perception and understanding about the types and ways in which figurative expressions are used to convey non-literal and indirect meanings in song lyrics.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Figurative Language and Connotation

According to Carroll (2008), the use of language where the semantic features of the lexicon do not literally relate to the context is known as figurative language. Given the fact that there is relatively no literal relation between semantic features of the lexicon and the given context, the intended audience has to make use of their knowledge and experiences to interpret the meaning of lexicon or utterances within the given context. Figure of speech can be defined as "forms of expressions used to convey meaning or heighten effect, often comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a connotation familiar to the audience or listener (Merriam-Webster, 2017). In addition, figure of speech is a way of saying something which has a different meaning than its literal meaning and often occur whenever a speaker or writer departs from the usual meaning of the words, for the sake of freshness or emphasis (Kennedy, 1979; Heny Listani, 2015). In figurative language, 'figures of speech' is used to convey the connotative meaning in a given context (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013). Using the language figuratively is a technique of creating connotative meaning and gives meaningful message to certain audience with the need of interpretation (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013).

Figurative language expresses connotations (non-literal or indirect meanings). Linguistic devices often used for these expressions are referred to as figures of speech. According to Partington (1998), connotations is the added meaning aside from the core or literal meaning of a lexical item. Considering that connotative meanings deviates from its lexical meanings, the meaning is generally understood differently amongst individuals who have dissimilar background knowledge. Due to this, connotation has been perceived as interpretive meanings which rests on an individual's judgments. Connotation conveys emotions and feelings in textual meanings that are shared between the senders and receivers, and this is especially vital in communication. Words and phrases can connote either positive or negative meanings depending on the contexts (Partington, 1998). Songwriters often use the technique of figurative language in order to make the songs more meaningful and interesting. The result of utilizing this technique is the creation of interesting images and the emphasis of the meaning of the words and phrases used. In figurative language, there are devices of utilizing language to convey connotative meaning in a given context (Suriyawongpaisal, 2013). These devices are known as figure of speech. Figure of speech, according to Merriam-Webster (2017) is defined as "forms of expression used to convey meaning or create heighten effect, often comprising or identifying one thing with another that has a connotation familiar to the audience or listener". Suriyawongpaisal (2013) summarizes that "figure of speech are tools of figurative language that connote the intended meaning in a context by heightening the intended messages with different methods that link the background knowledge of the target audience to the meaning" (p. 8).

2.2 Types of Figurative Language

There are various types of figures of speech, some are more commonly known and widely used as opposed to others in certain literary genres and/or texts. Knickerbocker and Reninger (as cited in Kadek Agus, 2015) states that figurative language, which is sometimes known as metaphorical language or metaphor, carries meaning beyond its literal meanings. However, this paper utilizes the 11 types of figure of speech proposed by Kennedy (1979) which are metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, metonymy, irony, oxymoron, litotes, paradox and symbol. The following are definitions and linguistic roles of the common types of figures that will be employed in the paper.

I. Metaphor:

Metaphor is an implicit comparison with the omission of "like" or "as" (Kennedy, 1979). For example, "Life's but a walking shadow" instead of "Life is *like* a walking shadow". The aforementioned sentence implicitly compares two things, life and shadow, however, the comparison is done without the use of "like" and "as".

II. Simile:

According to Kennedy (1979), a simile compares two different things in an interesting way as the objective of a simile is to spark an interesting connection in a reader's or listener's mind. It is also used to produce a more vivid and powerful piece of writing and it can convey meaning quickly and effectively as many commonly used expressions are similes (Kennedy, 1979). The function of simile is similar to metaphor, however, the differences between a simile and a metaphor is that in simile, "like" or "as" are often used. Examples of similes are "As cute as a kitten"; comparing something (more often a person) to the adorableness of a kitten.

III. Personification:

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing (ideas, inanimate objects), an animal, or an abstract term (truth or nature) is given human characteristics (Kennedy, 1979). The use of personification can affect the way the reader or listener imagines things. Illustrations of personifications are "The sun played hide and seek with the clouds"; the static sun (the sun does not move from its position) is given the characteristic of a human (playing hide and seek) with the clouds.

IV. Hyperbole:

Hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration which is often utilized to make a point (Kennedy, 1983). Hyperbole is the opposite of an "understatement". The use of hyperbole adds colour and depth to a character and/or elements of ridiculousness and humor to a story. However, hyperbole are not meant to be taken literally. For example, "I am so hungry, I could eat a horse" and "I have a million things to do".

V.   Synecdoche:

According to Kennedy (1979), synecdoche may use a part of something to represent the entire whole or it may use an entire whole thing to represent a part of it. Synecdoche is utilized to add visual imagery to a piece of writing in order to enhance the reader's experience. In the English language, it is not uncommon for part of something to be used to represent the whole. For example, the word "bread" represents food in general or money, i.e. breadwinner. In the case of a whole representing a part can be seen in the instances whereby at the Commonwealth Games for example, when we say Malaysia won a gold medal in an event, it actually means that the team from Malaysia won, not the country as a whole.

VI.   Metonymy:

Metonymy is a figure of speech which represents the conceptual meaning of a word as opposed to its literal meaning. According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (as cited in Kadek Agus, 2015), metonymy is a word or phrase that is used to stand in for another word. Sometimes, a metonymy is chosen because the characteristic of the word is well-known. For example, in the saying "The pen is mightier than the sword", there are two instances of metonymy; the "pen" stands in for "the written word" and the "sword" stands in for "military aggression and force".

VII.   Irony:

Irony is a middle ground between what is said and what is meant, or others' understanding of what was said and what was meant (Diyyani, 2004). It can be rather confusing, but can be amusing at the same time. For example, in "A man who is a traffic cop gets his license suspended for unpaid parking tickets". The aforementioned sentence is an irony because the man is a traffic cop, and for that reason he is the last person expected to be suspended of his driving license due to unpaid parking tickets because he should have known better.

VIII.   Oxymoron:

Murthy (as cited in Heny Listani, 2015) states that oxymoron is "a figure of speech which is used to express two contradictory qualities of the same thing". Heny Listani (2015) further explains oxymoron as putting together two words that contradicts (opposes) each other. For example, "same difference", "great depression", "deafening silence" and "pretty ugly".

IX.   Litotes:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017), litotes understates to emphasize a point and is the opposite of hyperbole. Hornby (2000) remarks that litotes is an expression of one's meaning by saying something that is the direct opposite of one's thought. It is often used to make someone's remarks forceful. Examples of litotes include,

"That is not the worst idea", "She is not the most attractive person", "It was not an easy matter" and "I am not a happy camper".

X.   Paradox

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017), a paradox is a "person or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities". Paradox is a statement which is self-contradictory because it often contains two statements that are both true, but in general, cannot be true at the same time, but upon reflection, make sense" (Kennedy, 1979). Examples of paradox is "You have to be cruel to be kind" in which the act of being cruel and kind are contradictory features. Another example is "It is the beginning of the end for their relationship" in which the beginning and the end are contradictory to each other.

XI.   Symbol:

Diyyani (2004) states that symbol is any object or object that represents something beyond its literal self. Oxford English Dictionary (2017) illustrates symbol as "A thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract". As an example, the "limousine" is a symbol of wealth and authority. The "darkness" is a symbol of evil whereas the "light" is a symbol of good.

2.3 Previous Studies

The last decade or so has witnessed the steady rise in research on figurative language found in pop songs. In 2003, Ifonilla Yeniati studies the figurative language used in Westlife's songs. Through the method of descriptive analysis, she found that there are instances of metonymy, hyperbole, personification, paradox, metaphor, simile and apostrophe in Westlife's songs. Mochamat (2004), in his study on the figurative language used in Celine Dion's songs, found the presence of simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy and hyperbole in her through descriptive analysis. A figurative language study of Adele's songs was conducted by Putu Ayu Retnayanthi (2012) and she found personification, metaphor, synecdoche, hyperbole, allusion, paradox, symbol and dead metaphors in the lyrics from Adele's albums entitled *19* and *21*. Andrika Agus (2014) looks into the figurative language occurring in song lyrics of the band, Coldplay. The quantitative research revealed the presence of metaphor (80%), simile (4%), hyperbole (7%), personification (7%) and onomatopoeia (2%). Heny Listani (2015), on the other hand, conducts a research on the figurative language present in Taylor Swift's song lyrics in her third studio album, *Speak Now*. She found seven figurative languages in Taylor Swift's songs which are personification, hyperbole, simile, metaphor, symbol, and synecdoche, and oxymoron.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data were taken from all 13 song lyrics from Taylor Swift's *1989* album which was released in October 2014. The song titles are as follows:

I.	Welcome to New York
II.	Blank space
III.	Style
IV.	Out of the woods
V.	All you had to do was stay
VI.	Shake it off
VII.	I wish you would
VIII.	Bad blood
IX.	Wildest dreams
X.	How you get the girl
XI.	This love
XII.	I know places
XIII.	Clean

3.2 Data Analysis

To conduct this study, the lyrics of 13 songs in the *1989* album as mentioned above were identified. This album was chosen because it is just the fifth album to spend its first 52 weeks of release in the top 10, after Bruce Springsteen, Fleetwood Mac, Adele, and Celine Dion (Caulfield, 2015). Furthermore, Taylor Swift had written many hits throughout her years and it is worth to research that the figurative of speech contain in her lyrics might be the catalyst of her success and how her lyrics could attract millions of fans worldwide.

A qualitative research with descriptive analysis was used as the method of data analysis. This paper utilizes the 11 types of figure of speech proposed by Kennedy (1979) which are metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, synecdoche, metonymy, irony, oxymoron, litotes, paradox, and symbol. Each song was separately analyzed and the background information related to the songs was obtained from reliable websites and presented to support the analyses of the connotative meaning of the figurative expressions found.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Taylor Swift's song lyrics in *1989* album

I.   Metaphor:

Many instances of metaphor such as "stolen kisses" can be found in the song "Blank Space" which describes a quick little kiss when someone is not expecting one. In the verse "I can make all the tables turn", "tables turn" refers to a changed situation in which someone has an advantage over a person who previously had an advantage over him/her. In the verse "rose gardens filled with thorns", the songwriter depicts that a relationship with her could and would be beautiful and perfect but it could also be flawed and even hurtful "filled with thorns". In the verse "Cause darling I'm a nightmare dressed like a daydream", the songwriter is saying that although she has been described as insane "they'll tell you I'm insane", the man that she dated or is currently dating will always come back to her because men are drawn to her beauty. The verse "love's a game" is another instance of a metaphor whereby love is being compared to a game.

A few instances of metaphor can also be found in the song "All you had to do was stay". For example, the verse "all I know is that you drove us off the road", the songwriter is saying that the man she used to date was to blame for their broken relationship. In the verse "then, why'd you had to go and lock me out when I let you in", the songwriter is describing the situation whereby a man is shutting her out of his life and pushing her away when she has opened up her heart for him. Lastly, the verse "had me in the palm of your hand", is a metaphor used to describe how a particular man has so much control over his girl that she will do whatever he wants her to do.

Finally, in the song "Welcome to New York", the verse "took our broken hearts and put them in a drawer" is a metaphor for putting off the feeling of being heartbroken because it is time to be happy and experience the new exciting life in the city of lights, New York.

II.   Simile:

In the song "Welcome to New York", the songwriter uses similes in verses "like any great love, it keeps you guessing, like any real love, it's ever-changing, like any true love, it drives you crazy". The songwriter compares New York to being a great love, a real love and a true love. It shows how fond the singer is of New York. From Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space", a lot of similes are used. The first instance is in the verse "I can read you like a magazine", she likens the man she is interested in to reading a magazine as if it is too easy for her to understand and comprehend this man, probably in terms of his intent and attitudes just like reading a magazine. In the verse "You look like my next mistake",

Taylor Swift is describing the man who is interested in her as her "next mistake" which implies that she knows that the man is a bad idea and might break her heart, just like all the other men she dated previously, and the relationship will not be a happy ending, but she is still interested to see how it plays out.

Other than that, similes can also be found in "How you get the girl". The verse "stand there like a ghost" explained the way of standing which was compared to a ghost. The word 'like' is used to suggest that the person was not moving or still.

III. Personification:

Personification, like other types of figurative languages plays an important role to beautify the lyrics. In "This love", there are many personifications presented such as in the verse "clear blue water, high tide came and brought you in", which shows the inanimate objects such as water and tide were given a human characteristic (brought you in) and in line "skies grew darker, currents swept you out again", the sky and currents were given a human movement (swept you out). Furthermore, the chorus of this lyrics shows the abstract object which is love, possesses many characteristics of human qualities such as in the verses "this love is alive back from the dead", and "and this love came back to me". Love is shown as something that is alive and can move.

IV. Hyperbole:

In the song "Blank Space" there is an instance of hyperbole. In the verse "I'm dying to see how this one ends", the songwriter cannot contain her exaggerated excitement "I'm dying" to see how the relationship with this new man is going to play out to the point that she is "dying".

V. Metonymy:

In the song "Blank Space", the words "players" and "game" in verses "'cause you know I love the players" and "and you love the game" are examples of metonymy whereby "players" refers to a womanizer and "game" refers to someone being evasive and deceptive with their intention towards someone else, especially in the context of a relationship. Another instances of metonymy are in the verses "so it's gonna be forever" and "or it's gonna go down in flames" as forever refers to a happy ending in which these two people will be together forever, whereas 'go down in flames' refers to an end to a relationship. It may also be viewed as a hyperbole as there are no in-betweens in her relationship with her potential new boyfriend, it could only either be good (forever) or bad (go down in flames).

Verses such as *"This love left a permanent mark"* from "This Love" lyrics, shows the used of metonymy where "love" is given a conceptual meaning as opposed to its literal meaning. "Love" is a concept of a mark which is never going to be faded (*permanent mark*). In "I know places" from line *"Love's a fragile little flame, it could burn out"*, love is given a concept like a little flame which can burn and fragile.

VI.   Oxymoron

There is a few instances of oxymoron in the song "Blank Space" such as "pretty lies" and "perfect storm". Lies are often seen as a negative thing, however, the singer refers to a lies as something pretty which is the opposite to what a lie represents. At the same time, "pretty lies" can also act as personification as a lie is given a human like quality of being "pretty". In the verse "screaming, crying, perfect storm", a storm is chaotic, thus it cannot be perfect. These two qualities are at the opposing end of the spectrum which makes it an oxymoron.

Next, the song "This love" also contains an oxymoron such as in line "in silent screams" where this line putting the word "silent" together with "screams" which are contradict with each other.

VII.   Paradox:

The instance of paradox can be found in line "We're a crooked love in a straight line down" from "I wish you would" lyric where the "crooked love" combined with the "straight line" shows contradictory features or qualities.

VIII. Symbol:

In the song "Welcome to New York", the verse "the village is aglow" describes New York as a village. In a way this is actually a type of paradox, as New York is a global city and has been dubbed "the city that never sleeps". New York has also been described as the cultural and financial capital of the world and the world's most economically powerful city (Wikipedia, 2017). The songwriter might be describing New York as a village due to the city's nature of uniting people of diverse culture in one place and according to Bruning (2017), New York is the most linguistically diverse cities in the world. In the verse "heartbeats under coats" in the same song, heartbeats is used as a symbol for life, thus referring indirectly to human beings.

In the song "Blank Space", in the verse "but I've got a blank space baby", the songwriter utilized the phrase "blank space" as a symbol of a vacancy in the singer's life, in terms of a presence of a romantic partner and that she will write that person's name on the blank space if he decides to be with her.

In the verse "he can't keep his wild eyes on the road" in "Style", the phrase "wild eyes" is someone who is always looking out for someone new as opposed to focusing on the person that they are in a relationship with. In the verses "the rest of the world was black and white" and "but we were in screaming color" the songwriter is compares between the dullness "black and white" of other people's world to the colourful world of hers and her love interest which is described to be in "screaming color". There is also an element of

personification as colour is given a human quality "screaming". The use of "screaming" in this context might refer to the colours as being bold, bright and dazzling.

Next, in the song "Out of the woods", the verse "are we out of the woods" is a metaphor to which the singer is asking whether the turmoil in her relationship "woods" has ended or not. In another verse "but the monsters turned out to be just trees, "monsters" is a symbol for something frightening, scary, and cruel even, while "trees" depicts tranquility and calmness.

Finally, the songwriter symbolises paparazzi in her song "I know places" as vultures in line "see the vultures circling in dark cloud" and "they got their boxes, and guns" where boxes and guns to symbolise cameras and equipment for taking the photos, "they are the hunters, we are the foxes and we run" symbolise paparazzi as the hunters and the singer and her lover as the foxes who constantly tried to avoid their photos to be taken together. From these verses "lights flash on the run for the fences" suggested that the paparazzi were chasing and taking her photos wherever she goes, "let them say what they want, we won't hear it"; "they" may refer to the paparazzi, gossip columnist who write gossips about her and "we" refers that she and her lover will not care of the gossips about them. "lose lips, ships sink, all the damn time, not this time Just grab my hand and don't ever drop it" symbolise that people can talk anything regarding her relationship and the relationship may not be forever but she is convincing her lover that this time, their relationship will last and they will always stay together.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper utilizes the 11 types of figure of speech proposed by Kennedy (1979), however, only 8 types were found in song lyrics of Taylor Swift's *1989* album. The ones that are not found are synecdoche, irony, and litotes. In general, deeper analysis of these figurative expressions also show us that they are used by the songwriter in order to make the songs more alive so we can feel the condition that the songwriter tries to show in the songs. The use of the contextual meaning in this study also opens up all the meanings and possible interpretations of song lyrics by Taylor Swift in this album.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

In general, this study is expected to make a contribution to the literature of figurative expressions especially for but not limited to pop songs. For students of Applied Linguistics or researchers in other related fields, a similar analysis on other genre/texts can be done, because analyzing song lyrics based on types of figurative expressions can improve the students' ability in understanding of figures of speech.

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