



# Unveiling Figurative Meaning: In-Depth Investigation into Taylor Swift's Song 'Cruel Summer'

Nabila Mahdafiqa<sup>1</sup>, Anita Dewi Ekawati<sup>2</sup>

[nabilamahdafiqa05@gmail.com](mailto:nabilamahdafiqa05@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [anita.dewieka@uhamka.ac.id](mailto:anita.dewieka@uhamka.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Prof. Dr. Hamka Muhammadiyah University, Jakarta

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## Abstract

Taylor Swift's works have been known to have lyrics that are rich in meaning and have hidden figurative meanings, therefore many listeners have difficulty understanding the meaning in the lyrics of her songs and some even interpret them incorrectly. This research is to uncover the hidden figurative meanings in Taylor Swift's "Cruel Summer" lyrics and explore the use of figurative language and emotional expressions to convey deeper meanings. A qualitative descriptive method was used to analyze the song lyrics, with an approach based on Perrine's (1969) theory of figurative language. Data collection is based on observation of the lyrics of the song 'Cruel Summer'. The results of the analysis show that there are 19 figurative data with 7 different types of figurative language: 2 similes (10.53%), 8 metaphors (42.11%), 2 personifications (10.53%), 1 synecdoche (5.26%), 3 symbols (15.79%), 2 hyperboles (10.53%), and 1 irony (5.26%). The dominant figurative language in the lyrics of "Cruel Summer" is a metaphor with the largest percentage (42.11%). Taylor Swift uses metaphors to convey her message directly using other terms with more beautiful language.

**Keywords:** *Figurative language; Meaning; Song; Lyrics;*

## **Introduction**

Language is one of the most important things in human life. Humans as social beings interact with each other by expressing opinions, exchanging information, and knowledge using language. This is in line with the statement of E. N. F. Dewi et al. (2020) that humans need language to share, help, find, and provide ideas and useful information to others. Furthermore, Wiguna et al. (2022) emphasized that by using language humans can connect their ideas and communicate about various topics, such as historical, social, political, or other topics. Communication can be done in a verbal or nonverbal way. Communication can provide an accurate understanding and interpretation of the message conveyed by the speaker or writer to the listener or reader. Communication can be done using literary works such as novels, poems, and songs.

Songs are one of the most popular literary works today. Songs can be heard through media that we often access such as radio, YouTube, Spotify, etc. Lyrics in the songs are a powerful form of artistic expression that can be used as a means of conveying complex emotions, experiences, and messages from the poet or singer to the listener. Therefore, songs can be said to be the art of storytelling and communication. Song as one of the communication media (Sumigar et al., 2021), a media used by singers to convey messages and interact with their listeners (Ketaren et al., 2021). In song lyrics, songwriters speak to convey messages through their lyrics, either when sad or happy as an expression of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Songs have various types of themes that have several characteristics such as love songs or romance, religion, politics, traditional, and others (Parren Tiarama Queenta et al., 2022).

Lyrics are an important part of a song, consisting of a collection of words consisting of verses, chorus, and chorus that are combined to produce a song (Nainggolan & Elfrida, (2022), Grensideng & Agung, (2023). The verses in song lyrics usually contain a story, message, or series of words that express certain ideas or emotions. Meanwhile, the chorus is the part of the song that is repeated regularly and is the part that leaves the most impression. The chorus forms the structure of the song, so that listeners can follow the flow or message that the songwriter wants to convey. Beautiful song lyrics can attract the attention of people who hear it to listen to the song and sing along with the lyrics. Lyrics to songs are words used to express the songwriter's personal feelings imaginatively with strong emotions (Putu Yoga Jelantik Palguna et al., 2021). The meaning in song lyrics can be conveyed by the poet clearly (implicit) and abstractly (explicit).

Taylor Swift is one poet and singer who has mastered the art of storytelling through her songs. Her works are known for their meaningful lyrics, where she often uses figurative language. Such figurative language can make it difficult for the

listener to understand or interpret the lyrics. Some songs are written with figurative language in order to appeal to music lovers. Songwriters do not use common words or words used in everyday communication (Muhammad et al., 2021). Songwriters use figurative language to create more interesting, unique, and artistic songs (Gustsa Fitshafa & Laili, 2022).

The lyrics of Taylor Swift's songs contain rich meanings with various forms of figurative language such as similes, metaphors, and symbols. The use of figurative language in the lyrics of her songs has now influenced the culture. Teenagers who love pop music have started to use some of the words in the lyrics for communication. In addition, the figurative language has also become a motivation for her fans to express themselves creatively. One of the songs with lyrics that use figurative language is the song entitled "Cruel Summer". This song has complex lyrics that are rich in figurative language and has a unique musical structure.

Semantics is the science used to clarify the meaning of expressions, including the hidden meaning behind words or phrases (Pertiwi & Handayani, 2023). In semantic studies, one of the important branches of discussion is figurative language. Figurative meaning or figurative language is a term used to describe language that uses words or expressions with certain semantic properties (N. M. Y. S. Dewi & Dewi, 2022). Figurative language focuses on words or phrases that have hidden meanings and are used to emphasize the message and ideas of the writer or speaker (Iqbal et al., 2022). In addition, figurative language serves to express and communicate ideas that have meanings other than their literal interpretation (Girsang et al., 2023). People generally use figurative language to communicate messages indirectly (Nadeak, 2023). Figurative language is used to produce literal meaning (Gunawan et al., 2021). People often use figurative language to convey their ideas indirectly or implicitly rather than directly or explicitly.

In addition, figurative language is also often used for imaginary things because the words used are parables that have different meanings from their literal meanings. Figurative language can be found in novels, fairy tales or short stories, movies, and song lyrics. There are various kinds of figurative language used. According to Perrine, figurative language is divided into 12 types: simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony.

Here are some previous studies that write about figurative language. First, Ria Yuliasari, (2023) entitled "Figurative Language in the Lyrics of Taylor Swift's 'Red' Song". This research uses qualitative method by using Perrine and Rozakis' theory in data analysis. The researcher found 18 figurative languages categorized into several types with details of 9 similes, 5 symbols, 3 metaphors, and 1 hyperbole in the song 'Red'. Second, Ni Wayan Swarniti, (2022) research entitled "Analysis of Figurative Language in the Lyrics of the Song 'Easy On Me'". This research uses qualitative research methods.

The research data was collected using observation techniques, then the data was processed by referring to the theory of Miller and Greenberg (1981). From the data obtained, the researcher divides them into 3, namely comparative figurative language, contradictory figurative language, and correlative figurative language. From her research, the researcher found 4 data of Comparative Figurative Language in the form of personification.

In Contradictory Figurative Language, hyperbole (3 data), litotes (2 data), and paradox (1 data) were found. Correlative Figurative Language is found in the data sources, namely: allusion (1 data), ellipsis (2 data), metonymy (2 data), and symbol (8 data). The most dominating data is symbol. Third, Nainggolan & Elfrida, (2022) entitled "An Analysis of Figurative Language in The Song Lyrics of Map of The Soul: 7 Album".

This study found several types of figurative language used, namely: Synecdoche as much as 1 data (1.88%), Paradox as much as 1 data (1.88%), Sarcasm as much as 1 data (1.88%), Allusion as much as 1 data (1.88%), Apostrophe as much as 3 data (5.67%), 3 data Symbol (5.67%), 5 data Simile (9.44%), 5 data Antithesis (9.44%), 10 data Hyperbole (18.86%), 11 data Metaphor (20.76%), and 12 data Personification (22.64%). The most dominant type of figurative language in the data is Personification.

In this study, researchers used qualitative descriptive analysis in processing data, and in identifying figurative language, researchers used Abrams' theory (1999). Fourth, a study entitled "Figurative Language In Selected Songs Of 'Red' By Taylor Swift" by Fatikha & Masykuroh, (2022) found some figurative language from 8 songs in Taylor Swift's Red album and researchers hope that future researchers can analyze figurative language in more diverse song genres and from different language perspectives.

Taylor Swift's "Red" album has 8 songs, namely: "All Too Well (10-minute version)", "Red", "22", "Everything Has Changed", "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together", "I Knew You Were Trouble", "Begin Again", and "Starlight". From the analysis, there are 57 types of figurative language in the selected songs, namely hyperbole 31.5%, simile 19.3%, metaphor 17.5%, metonymy 5.3%, irony 3.5%, symbol 7.0%, personification 10.6%, paradox 3.5%, and synecdoche 1.8%. In the process of data analysis, the researcher used the figurative language theory of Knickerbocker & Reninger (1985).

From some of these previous studies, researchers found novelty with the theme of figurative language in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song 'Cruel Summer'. The song 'Cruel Summer' was written and performed by Taylor Swift and released in 2019. Despite its widespread popularity since its release in 2019, this song has never been explored in previous research. The author will conduct research with

the title "Unveiling Figurative Meanings: An In-depth Investigation of Taylor Swift's Song 'Cruel Summer'". The purpose of the research is to uncover figurative meanings and explore how Taylor Swift uses language and emotions to convey deeper meanings. The questions in this research are: what are the elements of figurative language used in Taylor Swift's song 'Cruel Summer' and how does Taylor Swift's song 'Cruel Summer' contribute to the understanding and teaching of figurative language in an educational context?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative method is a research method used to research on natural object conditions and is based on post positivism (Ardhyanti & Supriyatiningih, 2020). Qualitative research is descriptive research and tends to use analyses based on data described by theory (Siagian & Englishtina, 2022). Descriptive qualitative research tends to use non-numerical data and focuses on meaning. Descriptive qualitative research is research related to context and meaning.

Therefore, the results of this descriptive qualitative method are usually in the form of a comprehensive summary and focus on meaning. The data sources to be studied are sentences, clauses, phrases, and words in the lyrics of the song 'Cruel Summer' by Taylor Swift. This song is included in the album 'Lover' which was first released in 2019. However, Swift re-recorded and then re-released this song into the album '1989 (Taylor's Version)' on 27 October 2023.

### **The Technique of Data Analysis**

The data collection technique used by researchers is observation. The researcher observed the data source and then analyzed the data by referring to Perrine's (1969) theory on figurative language and its types, such as simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. Then, the researcher explains the meaning implied in the words, phrases, or sentences found. In data collection, there are two types of data collection, namely primary data and secondary data. This research uses Taylor Swift's 'Cruel Summer' song lyrics as primary data. Articles, journals, and books are used as secondary data.

The following are the steps used by the researcher to collect and analyze the data; the researcher listens to Taylor Swift's song 'Cruel Summer' through Spotify and YouTube music platforms, the researcher searches for the complete lyrics of the song 'Cruel Summer' through web pages to read and observe, the researcher marks words, phrases, or sentences that contain figurative language in the lyrics of the song 'Cruel Summer', the researcher collects all the figurative language data obtained from the lyrics of the song 'Cruel Summer', the researcher categorizes the

data into several types of figurative language according to Perrine's theory. Researchers used Perrine's theory to analyze the data obtained because this theory is believed to have a more detailed explanation of each type of figurative language that exists. This research instrument is based on the book "Sound and Sense, a poetry introduction by Laurence Perrine in 1969". Then, researchers use triangulation techniques by comparing the findings with other sources in order to strengthen the results of data analysis.

**Results**

Taylor Swift's song "Cruel Summer" is the object of this research. Perrine's (1969) theory is used in this study to classify figurative language. There are 12 types of figurative language, namely: simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. However, in the song 'Cruel Summer', there are 7 types of figurative language, namely: simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, symbol, hyperbole, and irony.

*Table 1. Kinds of Figurative Language are found in 'Cruel Summer' song lyrics.*

Figurative Language	Number of Occurrences	Percentage %
Simile	2	10.53 %
Metaphor	8	42.11 %
Personification	2	10.53 %
Synecdoche	1	5.26 %
Symbol	3	15.79 %
Hyperbole	2	10.53 %
Irony	1	5.26 %
Total	19	100 %

**Simile**

Simile is a figurative language used to compare two things and is usually denoted by a conjunction such as 'like, as, then, similar to, resembling, or like'. Simile is a figurative language used to compare two things and is usually denoted by a conjunction such as 'like, as, then, similar to, and resembling' to state something explicitly or compare directly between two different things that have similar characteristics or traits or as a simile. Simile is a comparison of two objects that are not identical in every way, usually based on similarity in some way (Nursolihat & Kareviati, 2020).

#### **Data 1**

**"And I cried like a baby coming home from the bar."**

The sentence above contains similes because there is the word 'like' which is used as a comparison. In the sentence, the singer cries loudly like a baby to express her deep sadness.

#### **Data 2**

**"He looks up, grinning like a devil."**

The sentence contains the word 'like' which is used as a comparison. The singer compares her lover's smile like a devil who has a cunning and cruel nature.

#### ***Metaphor***

The use of metaphor is similar to the use of simile which compares two objects but without using the words "like" or "as" (Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022). Metaphors are known to be similar to similes because both are comparisons between two things that are basically different. However, what distinguishes the two is that metaphor is an implied comparison or can be defined as a figurative term replaced by a literal term and metaphor does not require the conjunction of simile. Metaphor is figurative language that is intended to directly refer to a certain thing by saying another thing (Telaumbanua et al., 2021). Metaphors are used to describe.

#### **Data 1**

**"Fever dream high in the quiet of the night. You know that I caught it"**

The sentence contains implied meaning by replacing or identifying figurative terms with literal terms. In the lyrics, the singer explains her dark personal experience in a relationship like a high fever dream. The singer also realizes that she has been entangled in a bad relationship.

#### **Data 2**

**"Bad, bad boy, shiny toy with a price. You know that I bought it!"**

The sentence in data 2 contains the implied meaning of the actual words. In this sentence, the singer hints at a bad boy with a 'shiny toy with a price' to imply an attractive physical or emotional attraction that is dangerous and expensive. However, the singer still chooses to be in a relationship with the guy despite knowing the consequences.

#### **Data 3**

**"Summer's a knife."**

The sentence shown in data 3 contains metaphor. In the lyrics, the singer identifies 'summer' with 'knife' to describe the pain she is experiencing.

#### **Data 4**

##### **“Devils roll the dice; angels roll their eyes.”**

The singer uses metaphors in the lyrics above. The singer conveys the difference between bold and impulsive behavior ‘devil’ and a wiser attitude ‘angel’. The singer experiences a conflict within herself that leads to despair.

#### **Data 5**

##### **“The shape of your body.”**

The above lyric contains a metaphorical meaning. This sentence is not interpreted as a part of a person's body but has an implied meaning that a person's physical presence can affect their emotional state in maintaining their relationship even though it is sad.

#### **Data 6**

##### **“It’s blue, the feeling I've got.”**

The singer describes the sadness and emptiness felt with the color blue. So, this sentence contains metaphors.

#### **Data 7**

##### **“No rules in breakable heaven.”**

'Heaven' is usually used to define a place of perfection and peace. But the addition of the word 'breakable' affects the meaning. 'Breakable heaven' is a fragile and sad life but here it means a broken and unhealthy relationship. In the sentence, it can be concluded that what is meant by the lyric above is that there are no rules in this unhealthy relationship. This is a metaphor.

#### **Data 8**

##### **“I'm always waiting for you just to cut to the bone.”**

In this sentence, the singer uses a metaphor to convey her wishes. The singer has high hopes for her lover by waiting to "cut to the bone" but what is meant is not to cut the bone but to cut the unhealthy relationship by revealing the truth with honesty because a relationship will go well accompanied by honesty.

#### ***Personification***

This personification attempts to suggest that non-human beings can do the same things as human, which is impossible in reality (Nursolihat & Kareviati, 2020). The non-human objects in question can be animals, objects, or other ideas. In personification, an inanimate object seems to be alive like a human because it uses human adjectives such as thinking, doing things, or things commonly done by



human, and even involves the five human senses.

#### **Data 1**

##### **"It's a cruel summer."**

This sentence contains the meaning of personification. The singer describes summer as an entity that has a cruel nature like human nature.

#### **Data 2**

##### **"So cut the headlights, summer's a knife."**

This sentence can also be said to be personification because in it the singer describes summer like a living object or a human being who can cut.

### ***Synecdoche***

Synecdoche is a figurative definition based on the relationship of elements and overall context that is common in several languages (Parren Tiarama Queenta et al., 2022). Synecdoche usually uses a small part of something to represent a large part or refer to the whole, or vice versa. Synecdoche is an interesting expression that often uses a part of something to refer to the whole (Telaumbanua et al., 2021). From the statement, it can be concluded that synecdoche is called a part for the whole.

#### **Data 1**

##### **"And I snuck in through the garden gate."**

The sentence in the data above contains synecdoche. The singer mentioned 'Garden gate' as one part to represent the whole or represent a place, that is a house.

### ***Symbols***

Symbols can be involved in various domains of human life (Suhendar et al., 2023). Symbols refer to individuals, objects, things, activities, locations, or other entities that represent a concept or something else (Pande et al., 2023). Hence, it can be concluded that symbols have hidden meanings from the words used. Words cannot be interpreted directly or briefly but must be understood more deeply to know the meaning of the sentence. A symbol is a word or phrase that has more than one meaning. In short, a symbol is something that signifies something, be it an object, event, or movement.

#### **Data 1**

##### **"It's blue."**

This sentence can also be said to be a symbol. Blue means sad. If you have an unhealthy relationship then people will feel sad. So, the singer uses the symbol 'blue' to describe sadness.

**Data 2**  
**“Shiny toy.”**

The meaning in the sentence is not a shining toy but the physical beauty of a man who manages to captivate the heart. This is a sentence that belongs to the symbol.

**Data 3**  
**“Breakable heaven.”**

‘Breakable heaven’ is a romantic relationship between a man and a woman that is not healthy.

***Hyperbole***

Hyperbole is a term used to describe exaggeration for various purposes, such as humor or seriousness, depression, self-doubt, and persuasive/not persuasive (Pande et al., 2023). It just emphasizes what you want to say. It can be funny or serious, imaginative or simple, convincing or unconvincing. Hyperbole or overstatement is used by someone to express an idea with an exaggeration of its true meaning or to describe something exaggeratedly, usually used to emphasize ideas and for the sake of truth.

**Data 1**  
**“Killing me slow.”**

The sentence in data 1 is an exaggerated sentence or can be said to be hyperbole. The singer expresses that her suffering is so painful that it feels like it's killing her slowly.

**Data 2**  
**“And if I bleed, you'll be the last to know.”**

Having a bad or even uncaring partner makes the singer feel so lonely that she argues that even when she is hurt, her lover will be the last person to know because of her indifference. This is hyperbole.

***Irony***

An irony is a form of figurative expression that involves the use of words to convey a meaning opposite to what is explicitly stated (Nainggolan & Elfrida, 2022). Irony is one type of figurative that explains something in the opposite sense with a bit of satire (E. N. F. Dewi et al., 2020). Irony comes from the Greek 'eironeia' which means "to pretend or deceive".

Irony is usually confused with sarcasm and satire, but they are different things. In short, irony is an expression that is not the same as reality.

### **Data 1**

**And I scream, "For whatever it's worth I love you, ain't that the worst thing you ever heard?"**

The sentence from the data above contains irony where the singer said something that has the opposite meaning. The singer reveals that she would keep loving her lover even at any risk, when in reality she is tired of the relationship she is in.

### **Discussion**

In this research, two main points are found, the first is the types of figurative language used by Taylor Swift in the song 'Cruel Summer', and the second is the analysis of the meaning of figurative language that has been found based on Perrine's theory. The song 'Cruel Summer' is known to contain a lot of figurative language so that it can be a way to enrich the vocabulary of figurative language. In addition, this research proves that the song 'Cruel Summer' is suitable for literary and linguistic learning for students. Students at the senior high school level can use this song for "Song and Lyric" lesson in English subject and figurative language lesson in Indonesian subject. Students in universities can use this song for the Introduction to Linguistics course, especially in the semantic branch. This can help students to develop their knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

The data obtained from the singer Taylor Swift in her song 'Cruel Summer' has been analyzed and described in detail through an exploration of the use of figurative language used. The results obtained from the research; the song Cruel Summer contains 19 data that have 7 figurative meanings. Among them are 2 simile data (10.53%), 8 metaphor data (42.11%), 2 personification data (10.53%), 1 synecdoche data (5.26%), 3 symbol data (15.79), 2 hyperbole data (10.53%), and 1 irony data (5.26%). The dominating figurative language in Cruel Summer songs is metaphor with the largest percentage of 42.11%.

Based on the above conclusions, the results of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the use of figurative meaning in the context of education and music. In addition, this research is also expected to provide new insights for music lovers and other researchers regarding the analysis of figurative meaning in song lyrics. Suggestions for future research are to compare the use of figurative language in various types of music genres so as to explore variations in the use of figurative language according to the cultural context in certain music genres.

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