

Metaphor in the Selected Song Lyrics of Lana Del Rey

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Abstract--This study analyzes the use of metaphors in Lana Del Rey's song lyrics with a focus on their types and meanings based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and Leech's (1981) meaning theory. The three main metaphor types identified are structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors, each of which conveys themes such as nostalgia, love, rebellion, and identity. Examples of metaphors found include images of life as art, nostalgia as an aging star, and love that transcends youth. This study highlights how Lana Del Rey uses metaphors to express complex emotions and cultural values, thus enriching the understanding of her lyrical themes. In addition, the use of ontological metaphors in the songs depicts deep emotional, spiritual, and psychological experiences through certain symbols such as heaven, favorite sweater, and red dress, which enriches the connotative meaning of the lyrics.

Keywords: *Metaphor, Meaning, Lana Del Rey*

Abstrak--Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan metafora dalam lirik lagu Lana Del Rey dengan fokus pada tipe dan maknanya berdasarkan teori metafora konseptual Lakoff dan Johnson (1980) serta teori makna Leech (1981). Tiga tipe metafora utama yang diidentifikasi adalah metafora struktural, orientasional, dan ontologis, yang masing-masing menyampaikan tema seperti nostalgia, cinta, pemberontakan, dan identitas. Contoh metafora yang ditemukan meliputi gambaran kehidupan sebagai seni, nostalgia sebagai bintang tua, dan cinta yang melampaui masa muda. Studi ini menyoroti bagaimana Lana Del Rey menggunakan metafora untuk mengekspresikan emosi kompleks dan nilai budaya, sehingga memperkaya pemahaman terhadap tema-tema liriknya. Selain itu, penggunaan metafora ontologis dalam lagu-lagu tersebut menggambarkan pengalaman emosional, spiritual, dan psikologis yang mendalam melalui simbol-simbol tertentu seperti surga, sweater favorit, dan gaun merah, yang memperkaya makna konotatif dari lirik.

Kata Kunci: *Metafora, Makna, Lana Del Rey*

1. Introduction

In classical theory, the use of metaphor was considered a special ability that only certain writers possessed (Lakoff, 1993: p. 1). However, this view has evolved. It is now understood as an essential part of everyday language that shapes the way humans think and understand the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The three main types of metaphors according to them are structural, orientational, and ontological (Kövecses, 2002: p. 9). In addition, Leech (1981) enriches the study of meaning by suggesting seven types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic.

From a linguistic perspective, metaphors are important because they bridge understanding between concrete experiences and abstract ideas, and reflect cultural and social values. Song lyrics, like poetry, also contain metaphors as a means of conveying ideas and emotions (Sudjiman, 1992: p. 64; Jacobson, 2020). Lana Del Rey is an example of an artist who uses metaphors to explore themes such as nostalgia, love and rebellion.

This study aims to identify the types of metaphors and their meanings in six selected songs of Lana Del Rey: Ride, Video Games, Born to Die, Young and Beautiful, Blue Jeans, and Summertime Sadness. The analysis was conducted using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and Leech's (1981) meaning theory to understand how metaphors work in song lyrics.

There are previous studies related to metaphors in song lyrics. To avoid a similar corpus and explanation, there should be a review of previous research. There were five studies reviewed, consisting of three undergraduate theses and two articles in an international journal. The thesis entitled "Metaphor in Selected Lyrics of Elvis Presley" (Winarta, 2020) aims to identify and analyze the types and meanings of metaphors in Elvis Presley's song lyrics using a qualitative approach and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory

of metaphor. The study found that all three types of metaphors-structural, orientational and ontological-appear in the lyrics, with ontological metaphors being the most dominant. The strength of this study lies in the systematic classification of metaphors, but the weakness is the lack of in-depth analysis of the meaning of metaphors in the context of individual lyrics. This study makes an initial contribution to the analysis of metaphors in song lyrics and serves as a reference for this study which emphasizes the analysis of meaning in Lana Del Rey's modern lyrics.

The thesis "Metaphorical Expressions Found in Coldplay's Song Lyrics: A Semantic Analysis" by Suartika (2021) analyzed the form and meaning of metaphors in Coldplay's lyrics using a qualitative descriptive method, Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, and Pragglejaz's (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). The results show that structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors are found in the lyrics, each carrying a specific contextual meaning. The strength of this study lies in the systematic application of the metaphor identification method, although its scope is limited to Coldplay lyrics only. This research is in line with this study in terms of focus and theory, but differs in musical object and analytical method approach.

The thesis "Metaphors Expressing Emotions in Lisa Kleypas's Rainshadow Road Novel" by Ko and Winiharti (2014) used a literature study method with a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze emotional metaphors in the novel, based on Knowles and Moon's (2006) theory. The study found 33 metaphorical sentences expressing eleven types of emotions, with happy emotions being the most dominant. The strength of this study is its ability to reveal various emotions through metaphors, but its scope is limited to the number of metaphors analyzed. This study contributes to this research by showing how metaphors function in

revealing emotions, which is also a strength in Lana Del Rey's lyrics.

The international journal "Metaphors in Anggun C. Sasmi's Song Lyrics" by Baharuddin (2017) used a qualitative descriptive method with the Conceptual Metaphor approach from Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to analyze metaphors in Anggun's song lyrics. This study found the dominance of structural and ontological metaphors related to natural and cultural elements. The advantage lies in the disclosure of metaphors in the Indonesian cultural context, but it lacks in-depth social or gender aspects. This research contributes to the study of metaphors in Indonesian music, while this research extends it to the American cultural and social context, especially related to gender identity and Americana culture in Lana Del Rey's lyrics.

The international journal "Metaphor and Second Language Learning: The State of the Field" by Hoang (2018) is a comprehensive literature review that discusses the role of metaphor in second language (L2) learning based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor. The article highlights the cognitive and affective benefits of using metaphors in learning, and offers practical approaches for teachers. Its weakness is that it lacks focus on the empirical production of figurative language. While its contribution is important in education, this study focuses on analyzing the meaning of metaphors in a broader cultural and social context through contemporary song lyrics.

2. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative method aimed at understanding the meaning of song lyrics in depth through metaphor analysis. As a qualitative study, the data collected consists of non-numeric data such as words and phrases from the song lyrics, using techniques like documentation, note-taking, and recording. Documentation is carried out by analyzing the

lyrics of Lana Del Rey's songs taken from *genius.com* as written documents, while recording is used to capture auditory elements such as intonation and emphasis in the songs to enrich the understanding of meaning. Note-taking is done by recording key findings in the form of metaphorical phrases or sentences, which are then classified according to the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Leech's (1981) theory of meaning.

The data collection procedure includes: searching for song lyrics, reading them repeatedly, noting sections containing metaphors, and identifying the types of metaphors that appear. Data analysis is done descriptively as explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018), which involves identifying and classifying metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological types, as well as analyzing meaning based on Leech's seven types of meaning (1981): conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic. To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, triangulation is conducted through theoretical verification, comparison with previous literature, and re-examination through repeated reading of the lyrics. Data presentation follows Sudaryanto's (1993) informal method, which involves presenting the data in a narrative form to explain the types and meanings of metaphors in the context of song lyrics.

This approach aims to answer the research questions regarding the types and meanings of metaphors in Lana Del Rey's song lyrics and to provide an understanding of how metaphors are used to express themes of love, freedom, and identity.

3. Result and Discussion

1. Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphor is the systematic transformation of one concept into another. It is a type of metaphor in which one thought is figuratively organized about another. Source and

destination domains are the basis of this structural metaphor. Structural metaphors are built on systematic parallels in everyday life (Lakoff and Johnson, 1981: p. 61-68). Therefore, there are two concepts used to compare one thing to another to be interpreted.

Data 1

That's the way my father made his life an art"

2.07-2.15

(*Lana Del Rey – Ride*)

Target domain	Source domain
Life can be woven in unconventional ways, full of freedom and creativity.	Art is the result of individual expression that reflects one's unique feelings, thoughts, and perspectives.
Every decision made is part of self-expression, reflecting one's values, experiences, and emotional journey.	An artist has the freedom to create works, just as a person has the freedom to live his or her life.
Life is not just about existence but also has its meaning and aesthetics.	There are no fixed rules in art; each work can be beautiful in its own way, just like life has its own uniqueness.

The metaphor “made his life an art” in *Lana Del Rey’s Ride* reflects a structural metaphor that likens life to artistic expression—free, unique, and deeply personal. It portrays the singer’s father as someone who lives unconventionally, embracing both the beauty and chaos of a creative life. This metaphor suggests that life, like art, doesn’t follow fixed rules and can hold different meanings depending on how it’s lived. According to Leech’s theory, it carries connotative meaning,

emphasizing that life itself can be an expressive, meaningful work of art.

Data 2

Singin' in the old bars, swingin' with the old stars

1.45-1.49

(*Lana Del Rey – Video Games*)

Target domain	Source domain
Glamorous and nostalgic memories of the past.	Old stars

Singing in an old bar uses an experience that has passed but is still valuable.

“Swingin’ with the old stars” symbolizes interaction with something iconic and historic.

“Star” is often used as a symbol of glory and fame, especially in the world of entertainment.

An aging star can represent a past idol, a legendary figure, or a symbol of fading glory.

The lyrics “Singin’ in the old bars, swingin’ with the old stars” use a structural metaphor that likens the glamorous past to “old stars,” symbolizing nostalgia and faded glory. This metaphor reflects a longing for memorable times filled with glamor and bohemian life, now gone. While evoking a romanticized view of the past, it also carries a melancholic tone—highlighting how people often idealize what’s lost, even when reality may not have been as beautiful. According to Leech’s theory, the lyric is connotative meaning it emphasizes the emotional weight of nostalgia and the passage of time.

Data 3

Come and take a walk on the wild side

1.31-1.34

(*Lana Del Rey – Born to Die*)

Target domain	Source domain
A life full of freedom and challenges.	Walking on the wild side.
Taking risks in life and relationships.	Exploring unknown territory.
Leaving behind comfort and security.	Choosing a dangerous or adventurous path.
An unconventional lifestyle.	The “wild side” is often associated with rebellion and freedom.

The lyric “Come and take a walk on the wild side” uses a structural metaphor equating a life of freedom and risk with walking on the “wild side.” It symbolizes leaving behind the ordinary to embrace a daring, unconventional lifestyle. The phrase reflects themes of passion, rebellion, and risk found throughout *Born to Die*. According to Leech’s theory, it carries both connotative meaning—symbolizing freedom and danger—and affective meaning, evoking feelings of courage and adventure. It’s not just an invitation to walk, but a call to boldly embrace life’s challenges beyond the comfort zone.

2. Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors are a type of metaphor in which the system of ideas is organized through spatial relationships, such as top-bottom, inside-outside, front-back, inside-shallow, or center or periphery (Lakoff and Johnson, 1981: p.14-21). The data below shows the orientation metaphors found in the lyrics of the selected *Lana Del Rey* songs.

Data 1

Will you still love me when I'm no longer young and beautiful?

0.49-0.57

(*Lana Del Rey – Young and Beautiful*)

Target domain	Source domain
Fear of losing love.	Loss of youth and beauty.
Self-value in relationships.	Beauty standards are upheld in popular culture.
Fragility in romance.	The transience of beauty cannot be maintained forever.
Hope for love that lasts.	The question of the sustainability of love beyond the physical aspect.

The lyric “Will you still love me when I’m no longer young and beautiful?” uses an orientational metaphor, associating youth and beauty with self-worth and the fear of losing love. According to Leech’s theory, it carries connotative meaning, reflecting anxiety about whether love will endure as physical attractiveness fades. Rooted in cultural beauty standards—especially in the glamorous world *Lana Del Rey* often depicts—the lyric also expresses a longing for deeper, unconditional love. Beyond vulnerability, it critiques societal norms that tie a woman’s value to her appearance.

Data 2

Don't make me sad, don't make me cry”

1.08-1.15

(*Lana Del Rey – Born to Die*)

Target domain	Source domain

Emotional wounds are caused by relationships or life experiences.	Sadness and crying.
Sadness is a negative state to be avoided.	Crying is a physical manifestation of emotional suffering.
Desire to remain happy or emotionally stable.	Asking someone not to cause sadness.
Sadness is seen as something that can be forced or controlled by others	“Don't make me” implies that others have power over the singer's emotions.

Uncertainty in the relationship.	The concept of time that keeps moving.
The belief that there is still a chance.	Optimism is waiting for something to happen.

The lyrics “Later's better than never” use an orientational metaphor with connotative meaning according to Leech's theory, describing hope in the midst of separation. The word “later” symbolizes the possibility of being reunited, while “never” reflects permanent loss. Despite the sadness, this expression reflects optimism that love or relationships can continue in the future. In typical Lana Del Rey style, these lyrics combine sorrow and hope, emphasizing that not all breakups are final.

3. Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphors are ways we understand abstract concepts by describing them as something more concrete. For example, in “She was trapped in sadness,” we treat the feeling of sadness as if it were something that could trap a person. Ontological metaphors allow us to understand our experiences in terms of objects and substances. These metaphors help us conceptualize our feelings and thoughts as if they were real entities. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: p. 25). By using more tangible images, these metaphors help us to more easily understand and share experiences that are difficult to explain.

Data 1

Heaven is a place on earth with you

1.03-1.07

(Lana Del Rey – Video Games)

Target domain	Source domain
Hope amid separation.	Time is something continuous.
The possibility of reuniting.	“Later” is better than “not at all.”

Target domain	Source domain
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Happiness in a relationship. Feeling comfortable, safe, and happy with your partner. Love is something transcendental and gives meaning to life.	Heaven Heaven is a place of eternal peace and happiness. Heaven is a perfect final destination.
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The lyrics “Heaven is a place on earth with you” use an ontological metaphor with connotative meaning according to Leech's theory. The spiritual concept of “heaven” which is usually associated with eternal happiness in the afterlife is given a physical form through the presence of a partner. This metaphor illustrates that deep love can bring perfect happiness in the real world. In popular culture, romantic love is often seen as the ultimate source of happiness, beyond material achievements. Thus, the presence of a partner becomes a symbol of absolute and transcendental happiness that is usually only associated with heaven.

Data 2

You fit me better than my favorite sweater

0.29-0.32

(*Lana Del Rey – Blue Jeans*)

Target domain	Source domain
Deep emotional connection.	Favorite sweater.
Feelings of comfort and complete acceptance.	Clothing that fits the body well.
Warmth in the relationship.	Sweater that protects from the cold.
A close bond filled	A sweater that has

with nostalgia.	sentimental value.
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The lyrics “You fit me better than my favorite sweater” use an ontological metaphor with connotative meaning according to Leech's theory. A deep emotional connection is described as being like a favorite comfortable, fitting, and full of warmth. This metaphor suggests that a partner provides a sense of security and acceptance, like a much-loved piece of clothing. The sweater also has sentimental value, reflecting the importance of the partner in the singer's life. However, just like a sweater can be lost or damaged, this relationship is vulnerable. Thus, the lyrics express emotional closeness, comfort, and an awareness of the possibility of losing something precious.

Data 3

Got my red dress on tonight

0.33-0.37

(*Lana Del Rey – Summertime Sadness*)

Target domain	Source domain
Passion and courage.	Red color & clothing.
Readiness for something big.	Wearing a red dress.
Bold, dramatic, and intense feelings.	The color red is striking.
Emotional appeal and strength.	The red dress is a symbol of confidence and passion.

The metaphor used in the lyrics of “Got my red dress on tonight” is an ontological metaphor, where the red dress and the color red symbolize passion and strong emotions. In this case, the red dress is not just a piece of clothing, but also reflects the singer's emotional state which is full of intense feelings, such as passion, courage, and a burning sense of love. This metaphor shows how

clothing, especially red, becomes a symbol of an emotional moment filled with passion, determination, and deep desire, which seems to give a physical complexion to the singer's inner feelings.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Lana Del Rey's song lyrics, it can be concluded that the use of metaphors in her songs is instrumental in expressing complex emotions and cultural values. The types of metaphors found include structural, orientational and ontological metaphors, each of which conveys themes such as nostalgia, love, rebellion and identity. Examples of ontological metaphors such as the image of life as a favorite dress indicate emotional and sentimental closeness, while orientational metaphors describe hope and uncertainty in relationships. This research shows that metaphors serve as a tool to convey deep emotional and symbolic experiences, enriching the connotative meaning of Lana Del Rey's song lyrics.

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