Figurative Language Found in Lorde's "Virgin" Album

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Abstract
This study aims to analyze the use of figurative language in Lorde's song lyrics using Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) semantic theory. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method to identify and classify types of figurative language, including metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, paradox, and irony. A total of 13 data were found: 3 metaphors, 3 similes, 1 personification, 4 hyperboles, 1 paradox, and 1 irony. Each example was examined to understand its meaning and function in the lyrical context. The findings reveal that Lorde's lyrics utilize figurative language not only to enhance poetic expression but also to convey themes of alienation, identity, and emotional complexity. These figures of speech reflect the songwriter's inner conflicts and societal observations. The study concludes that figurative language analysis provides deeper insight into modern song lyrics and their semantic richness.

Keywords*: figurative language, semantics, Lorde, song lyrics*

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan bahasa figuratif dalam lirik lagu-lagu Lorde dengan menggunakan teori semantik dari Knickerbocker dan Reninger (1974). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengklasifikasikan jenis-jenis bahasa figuratif, seperti metafora, simile, personifikasi, hiperbola, paradoks, dan ironi. Terdapat total 13 data yang ditemukan: 3 metafora, 3 simile, 1 personifikasi, 4 hiperbola, 1 paradoks, dan 1 ironi. Setiap contoh dianalisis untuk memahami makna dan fungsinya dalam konteks lirik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lirik-lirik Lorde memanfaatkan bahasa figuratif tidak hanya untuk memperkuat ekspresi puitis, tetapi juga untuk menyampaikan tema keterasingan, identitas, dan kompleksitas emosi. Gaya bahasa ini mencerminkan konflik batin dan pengamatan sosial dari sang penulis lagu. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa analisis bahasa figuratif dapat memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam terhadap lirik lagu modern dan kekayaan semantiknya.

Kata kunci: *bahasa figuratif, semantik, Lorde, lirik lagu*

Introduction

Figurative language refers to expressions that convey meanings beyond their literal interpretation. Understanding such language often requires careful analysis to uncover the intended message behind the words. The use of figurative language enhances the depth, emotional weight, and imaginative quality of speech or writing. It

is commonly used to create a more dramatic effect. According to Perrine (1977), figurative language allows writers and speakers to communicate ideas in imaginative ways, often revealing insights that cannot be captured through literal language.

Figurative expressions are widely employed in various forms of literary media, such as drama, poetry, and song lyrics. Devices such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification enable writers and songwriters to craft meaningful works that resonate deeply with their audience. In the realm of music, figurative language plays a crucial role. Song lyrics are more than just words; they represent stories, emotional expressions, and messages. As Moore (2012) explains, the lyrical content of songs often mirrors poetic traditions and employs figurative devices to convey meanings that lie beneath the surface. The use of figurative language in lyrics not only beautifies the text but also creates a deeper connection with the listener, allowing them to grasp the songwriter's message on a more profound level.

In line with this, Abrams and Harpham (2012) emphasize that figurative language, especially metaphor and symbol, functions as a vehicle for layered meaning, where emotional and symbolic associations enrich a text beyond surface interpretation. Similarly, Leech (1969) asserts that stylistic devices in song lyrics are central to evoking affective responses, allowing language to fulfill both aesthetic and communicative functions in artistic expression.

One prominent artist known for her lyrical richness, poetic depth, and frequent use of figurative language is Lorde, a singer-songwriter from New Zealand. She rose to international fame with the release of her debut single "Royals" in 2013. Her lyrics often explore themes such as adolescence, fame, identity, heartbreak, and existential reflection—presented through symbolic and imaginative language. As an artist, Lorde is recognized for blending abstract concepts with emotional vulnerability, allowing her lyrics to resonate strongly with young audiences and music critics alike.

This article aims to examine the types of figurative language found in Lorde's song lyrics. By applying semantic theory to selected songs, the analysis seeks to identify how figurative expressions are used to convey emotions, articulate ideas, and deliver messages to the audience through music. The focus of this study is to categorize and analyze the figurative language employed in Lorde's lyrics.

Through this analysis, the article not only explores Lorde's stylistic choices but also highlights the important role of language in music as a tool for communication. This study contributes to the field of linguistics, particularly semantics, by demonstrating how abstract language functions in song lyrics. Moreover, it serves as a form of appreciation for contemporary songwriting and illustrates the relevance of linguistic analysis in understanding the deeper layers of musical expression.

A number of relevant previous studies have also investigated figurative language in song lyrics. For instance, Yunanda et al. (2021) analyzed three songs by Idina Menzel and found hyperbole as the most dominant, highlighting its role in emotional emphasis. Milana and Ardi (2020) examined 13 songs by Saif Adam using Perrine's theory, identifying metaphor as most frequent, particularly in religious-themed lyrics. Teja et al. (2022), using Knickerbocker and Reninger's and Leech's frameworks, found that Alec Benjamin's lyrics often used hyperbole and simile to convey symbolic meaning. Meanwhile, Rahmat and Dianita (2024) analyzed metaphors in Lana Del Rey's Born to Die album using conceptual metaphor theory, concluding that her lyrics

serve both stylistic and cognitive functions. Theodora and Setiawan (2024) examined Billie Eilish's lyrics and emphasized how figurative language conveys deep emotional themes like anxiety and identity, linking artistic expression to mental health awareness.

Although these studies provide important insights into the role of figurative language in music, few focus specifically on Lorde, whose lyrics are rich in symbolism and poetic style. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by analyzing the figurative language in her songs and exploring how these devices contribute to lyrical meaning and emotional resonance.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the use of figurative language in selected songs by Lorde's "Virgin" Album. The data were derived from the lyrics of three songs: The selected songs from the album are: Hammer, Favorite Daughter, and Man of the Year. These songs were chosen due to their richness in figurative expressions and their thematic depth, which reflects the emotional complexity of Lorde's songwriting. The lyrics were obtained from official and verified sources to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Data were collected using a note-taking technique. The lyrics were carefully read and examined to identify lines or phrases that potentially contain figurative language. Each figurative expression found in the lyrics was noted and categorized. For the analysis, a semantic approach was applied, using the theory of figurative language classification proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974). Each identified figurative expression was classified according to its type, such as metaphor, simile, or personification. The findings were then interpreted to explore how figurative language contributes to the emotional expression, thematic construction, and overall message of the songs.

Result and Discussion

After reading and analyzing the three selected songs, a total of 13 figurative language were identified in the song lyrics. The process of analyzing figurative language in the song lyrics was conducted using the Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974) theory. The following table presents the detailed data of figurative language devices identified in Lorde song's lyrics.

Table 1. The Results of Figurative Language in Lorde's song lyrics

Types	Occurence	Percentage
Simile	3	23.08%
Metaphor	3	23.08%
Personification	1	7.69%

Hyperbole	4	30.77%
Paradox	1	7.69%
Irony	1	7.69%
Total	13	100%

The table above shows that the most frequently used figurative language type in the song lyrics is hyperbole, with a total of four instances. This indicates the songwriter's strong reliance on exaggeration to express intense emotions and emphasize certain ideas. Hyperbole is commonly used in lyrics to dramatize feelings such as love, pain, or admiration, allowing the audience to connect with the emotional weight of the message.

Metaphor and simile appear three times and serve as the second most frequently used type. Metaphors enrich the lyrics by comparing abstract emotions to concrete images, helping listeners grasp complex ideas in a more vivid and imaginative way. Simile provides direct comparisons that clarify meaning and create strong imagery.

Although personification, paradox, and irony only appear once, their inclusion adds depth and literary nuance to the lyrics. Personification plays a significant role in humanizing non-human elements, making emotions and concepts more relatable to the audience. Paradox reflects statements that appear self-contradictory or logically impossible, yet contain an underlying truth, while irony conveys a meaning that contrasts with the literal expression, often creating humor or highlighting contradictions.

Overall, the varied use of figurative language demonstrates the songwriter's stylistic richness and creativity. These devices not only beautify the lyrics but also function as essential tools for conveying emotional depth, enhancing the listener's engagement, and reinforcing the underlying themes of the songs.

1. Simile

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974: 283), a simile is a direct comparison between two unlike things using words such as like, as, or resemble. It aims to clarify something unfamiliar by relating it to something more familiar. For example, in the sentence "My love is like a red rose," the word *like* signals a comparison between *love* and *a red rose*.

Data 1: There's a heat in the pavement, my mercury's raising
Don't know if it's love or if it's ovulation
When you're holding a hammer, everything looks like a nail

(Hammer- Line 3)

The line *"When you're holding a hammer, everything looks like a nail"* is a clear example of a simile, as it contains the word *"like"* which explicitly signals a comparison. The comparison is made between *"everything"*—which may symbolize all possible objects, situations, or experiences in the world—and a *"nail,"* a tool

commonly used in construction that requires a hammer to be driven into another surface.

In this context, the simile illustrates how the speaker perceives the world through a narrow perspective: once equipped with a hammer, all things appear to be nails, and thus all problems seem solvable by the same method—by striking. Figuratively, this reflects the tendency of human beings to approach diverse situations with a single perspective or solution, often oversimplifying complex realities. Through this simile, Lorde conveys the feeling of being trapped in a mindset where everything is reduced to a uniform, almost mechanical response, reinforcing the thematic depth of the lyric.

Data 2: I'm a good actress, look at the medals I won for ya
So you could imagine being a favourite daughter
Everywhere I run, I'm always runnin' to ya
Breaking my back *just to be as brave as my mother*

(Favorite Daughter- Line 36)

This line can be classified as an example of simile, as it contains an explicit comparison using the word "as". The singer equates her own courage (*brave*) with that of her mother, employing the comparative structure *"as…as."* Here, "brave" is used to emphasize the quality of fearlessness and resilience, which is directly attributed to her mother.

Through this simile, the songwriter illustrates how she perceives her mother as a figure of remarkable bravery—someone who is unwavering and steadfast in the face of challenges. The use of her mother as a point of comparison conveys admiration and establishes her as a role model. Thus, the simile not only intensifies the description of bravery but also reflects the singer's aspiration to embody the same strength that she associates with her mother.

2. Metaphor

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974:283) define metaphor as an implicit comparison without using *like* or *as*. Unlike a simile, a metaphor compares two things directly by highlighting their similarities. For example, "Life is but a walking shadow" equates life with a shadow to suggest its fleeting and insubstantial nature.

Data 3: Now I know you don't deal much in love and affection
But I really do think there could be a connection
I burn, and I sing, and I scheme, and I dance
Some days, I'm a woman, some days, I'm a man, oh

(Hammer- Line 10)

The line *"Some days, I'm a woman, some days, I'm a man"* can be interpreted as a metaphor because it establishes an implicit comparison between the speaker (*I*) and two contrasting identities—"woman" and "man", without the use of explicit comparison markers such as *like* or *as*. The lyric does not describe a literal change of

gender; rather, it figuratively expresses the shifting moods and emotional states of the speaker.

By identifying herself at times as a woman and at other times as a man, the singer highlights the duality of character and the fluctuation of inner experience. The metaphor illustrates how different emotional qualities are embodied through these two identities: some days are associated with traits or feelings commonly linked with womanhood, such as sensitivity or tenderness, while other days carry qualities associated with manhood, such as strength or firmness. This variation reflects the dynamic nature of the human psyche, where one's emotions and outlook can change depending on circumstances.

Data 4: Everywhere I run, I'm always runnin' to ya
Breaking my back *just hoping you'll say I'm a star*

(Favorite Daughter- Line 16)

The line *"Just hoping you'll say I'm a star"* can be identified as a metaphor, since it draws a comparison between two distinct entities—namely the speaker and a "star"—without employing comparative markers such as *like* or *as*. In this context, the word *star* does not literally refer to a celestial body, but rather functions as a figurative symbol of something extraordinary, radiant, and admirable.

By using this metaphor, the songwriter conveys the speaker's deep longing for validation and recognition. The imagery of a star, known for its brilliance and beauty, reflects the speaker's hope to be perceived as special, remarkable, and worthy of admiration in the eyes of the person they value. This metaphor thus underscores the theme of aspiration for acknowledgment and the emotional weight placed on the desire to be appreciated.

3. Personification

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974:283) explain personification as attributing human traits to animals, objects, or abstract ideas. For instance, in "My little horse must think it queer," the horse is described as capable of thought, illustrating personification by assigning it human-like awareness.

Data 5: *The mist from the fountain is kissing my neck*
The liquid crystal is in my grip
Anyone with a snake tongue, I show 'em the chambers of my heart

(Hammer- Line 4)

The line *"the mist from the fountain is kissing my neck"* is a clear example of personification because it attributes the human action of "kissing" to an inanimate element, namely the mist. By assigning such a distinctly human quality to a natural phenomenon, the lyric creates a vivid image that makes the scene more intimate and emotionally resonant.

The use of personification here not only animates the environment but also enhances the romantic and sensual atmosphere of the song. It suggests a moment in which nature itself interacts with the human body in a tender, almost affectionate manner. This stylistic choice strengthens the lyric's emotional impact by blurring the boundary between the human and the natural world, allowing listeners to experience the setting as something alive and responsive rather than static.

4. Hyperbole

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974:284) define hyperbole as the use of deliberate exaggeration for emphasis. For example, "Go and catch the falling stars" expresses an impossible action to highlight a figurative meaning rather than a literal one.

Data 6: Let it break me down till I'm just a wreck
   Till I'm just a voice living in your head

(Hammer- Line 17)

The line *"Till I'm just a voice living in your head"* is an example of hyperbole because it contains an exaggerated statement. Literally, it is impossible for a person to exist solely as "a voice" in someone's mind. However, through this hyperbolic expression, the singer conveys a deeper emotional meaning. She expresses a desire to always be remembered, to live on in someone's thoughts and memories even if she is no longer physically present.

This exaggeration highlights the intensity of the singer's longing for permanence in another person's life. The phrase suggests that memory and emotional connection can be so strong that her presence transforms into something intangible yet unforgettable. In this way, hyperbole functions not only as an artistic embellishment, but also as a way to emphasize the depth of emotional attachment and the human need to be remembered beyond physical existence.

Data 7: *It's a fucked-up world, been to hell and back*
   But I've sent you a postcard from the edge

(Hammer- Line 18)

The line *"It's a fucked-up world, been to hell and back"* exemplifies hyperbole, as it contains an exaggerated statement that is logically impossible, the notion of someone literally going to hell and then returning to life on earth. Such an expression cannot be taken literally; rather, it intensifies the emotional weight of the lyric.

By employing this hyperbolic imagery, the singer underscores the extent of their suffering and turmoil, portraying life as chaotic, painful, and almost unbearable. This figurative exaggeration functions to communicate the overwhelming struggles the persona has endured, allowing listeners to grasp the severity of their emotional and psychological state in a more dramatic way.

5. Paradox

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974: 284), paradox is a statement whose surface, obvious meaning seems to be illogical, even absurd, but which makes good sense upon closer examination. For **e**xample, "he couldn't find it because he knew where it was." This instance is considered paradox due to its contradictory claim.

Data 8: I might have been born again
I'm ready to feel like I don't have the answers
There's peace in the madness over our heads

(Hammer-Line 12)

The line *"There's a peace in the madness in our heads"* exemplifies a paradox because it combines two seemingly contradictory concepts—*peace* and *madness*—within the same statement. While *peace* suggests a state of calmness, harmony, and order, *madness* refers to chaos, confusion, and mental turbulence. At first glance, these two conditions appear incompatible; however, when considered figuratively, the line conveys a deeper meaning.

Through this paradox, the singer highlights the complex coexistence of opposing states within the human mind. It suggests that even amidst overwhelming chaos, one can still discover moments of calm, and that sometimes true peace emerges precisely through the acceptance of madness. This stylistic device not only enriches the lyric's imagery but also reflects the psychological reality of living with inner contradictions.

6. Irony

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1974: 284), irony is a literary device in which the intended meaning contrasts sharply with the literal statement. For instance, the claim *"the czar is the voice of God and shall live forever"* is ironic because, as a mere human, the czar cannot literally live eternally.

Data 9: You met me at a really strange time in my life
Take my knife and I cut the cord
My babe can't believe I've become someone else
Someone more like myself

(Man of the Year – Line 6)

The line *"My babe can't believe I've become someone else, someone more like myself"* exemplifies the use of irony. In this lyric, there is an apparent contradiction: the singer claims to have become "someone else," which logically suggests losing one's true identity and transforming into a different version of oneself. However, this statement is immediately juxtaposed with the claim that this transformation has, paradoxically, made the singer "more like myself."

Ordinarily, becoming "someone else" would signify a detachment from the self, yet in this lyric the opposite occurs. The change actually brings the singer closer to their authentic identity. The irony emerges from this tension between the literal

meaning of "someone else" and the deeper reality expressed in "more like myself," where what seems like estrangement is instead a rediscovery of the self

Conclusion

This study has explored the use of figurative language in Lorde's song lyrics through a semantic analysis based on the theoretical framework proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger in 1974. The analysis shows that Lorde frequently uses various types of figurative language, such as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, paradox, and irony. These elements are not used merely for artistic effect, but rather to convey complex emotional and psychological experiences. Each example analyzed in this study reveals a deeper meaning that reflects themes of identity, alienation, vulnerability, and emotional conflict.

Through these figurative expressions, Lorde is able to articulate abstract feelings and social commentary in a way that is both poetic and relatable. This confirms that figurative language in contemporary music, especially in Lorde's lyrics, functions as a meaningful literary device that enriches the listener's understanding and emotional engagement. In conclusion, the use of figurative language in Lorde's lyrics is an essential element that not only enhances the aesthetic value of her songs but also deepens their semantic content. This study highlights the importance of analyzing figurative language to fully appreciate the layers of meaning embedded in modern song lyrics.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of analysis by including a larger selection of songs or entire albums to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Lorde's figurative language patterns. Comparative studies between Lorde and other contemporary artists may also provide valuable insights into stylistic similarities, differences, and the evolution of figurative expression in modern music. Additionally, future studies could employ other linguistic approaches—such as pragmatics, discourse analysis, or cognitive semantics—to examine how figurative language influences listener interpretation and emotional resonance. Researchers may also explore how social, cultural, or contextual factors shape the use and reception of figurative language in popular music.

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