

Conceptual Metaphors in Contemporary Song Lyrics: A Semantic Analysis of Dancing with Your Ghost

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ABSTRACT

The main purposes of the study are to identify the types of metaphors contained in Sasha's song lyrics and to interpret the meaning of these metaphors. Further, the researchers employed a qualitative method to analyze the metaphor in the "Dancing with your Ghost" music. The researchers offer two important research questions: What types of conceptual metaphors are found in the *Dancing with Your Ghost* song lyrics, and how do the metaphors contribute to the construction and interpretation of meaning within the song? Moreover, the present study involved a case study approach to gather all information. Then, the researchers specifically analyzed the data using the framework of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). As a result, the finding suggested that the dominant metaphor in Sasha's song lyrics was an orientation metaphor, while the ontological metaphor showed the least common type of metaphor. It revealed that the song generally emphasized the sadness in the lovers' relationship. Thus, the research pointed to a comprehensive understanding of metaphorical concepts, which allowed individuals in interpreting emotions in the real life, and enhanced linguistic awareness in metaphorical expression.

I. Introduction

In recent years, music has been beneficial for several purposes. It serves as one of the primary platforms for various metaphorical expressions to convey emotions, acknowledge personal identity, and contribute to expansive cultural conversations. Furthermore, individuals can express emotional states figuratively, which allow others to simplify the meanings profoundly and emotionally based on life experiences and social phenomena. Therefore, music is attentively associated to metaphor concept that transform words into more imaginative languages. Moreover, music represents artistic expressions that complements with numerous tones, lyrics and rhythms and integrates them into beautiful sounds and meanings [1]. To be more specific, it provides structures, emotional depth, and motivational energies that empower songwriters' performances and experiences. Similarly, Sanseverino et.al [2] stated that music can be used as a practical tool in human daily life. For the examples, relaxing, working, and studying. Thus, it enhances individuals' concentration, elevates mood, and reduces stress. Likewise, music also proposes beauty values either through melody or dynamics to rhythmic activities, such as dance, gymnastics and dancing. Therefore, the usefulness of music does not only provide an artistic and emotional articulation, but it also contributes to empower emotional well-being, reinforce daily routines, and strengthen human movement and cultural practice.

Further on, music is widely recognized in various communities, including children, teenagers, adults, and older people [3]. Each of them shows interest in music in different ways and appeals to various genres, such as pop, country, and hip-hop. Another key point is that music can be exciting for both domestic and international artists to compose meaningful and pleasant lyrics. Importantly, it has been widely circulated on digital platforms such as YouTube Channel, Instagram, and Spotify. As a result, music broadens people with diverse age groups, social status, and cultural backgrounds. In the same vein, Aguiar's research [4] confirmed that music is a fruitful tool for enriching human

intelligence. It stimulates brain functions and physical brain activities, improves cognitive functions, enhances associative processes, expands memory's storehouse, and supports language development.

In light of the importance of music, songwriters have composed a range of songs, considering the objectives, including to entertain, motivate, and evoke emotions in listeners. Among the songs, *Dancing with your Ghost* by Sasha Sloan has attracted everyone's attention with its uniqueness and fascinating melody. Moreover, it has accumulated more than 3.5 million viewers and over 130,000 likes, with audiences worldwide. Hence, it reflects the songwriter's capacity to transfer emotional experiences to purposeful song lyrics by pointing to unresolved grief, loss, and longing.

Based on a linguistic view, the study of metaphor seems still relevant to conduct in the present research due to some rationales. First, metaphors are commonly found in the music that individuals listen to in everyday life. Yustanti & Susilawati [5] noted that music comprises figurative language, which shifts the literal meaning to the abstract meaning. It presents diverse perspectives depending on how listeners interpret the meaning of the lyrics. Furthermore, Jawad [6] asserted that metaphors can be analysed through Lakoff & Johnson [7] theory, which classified metaphors into three types: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. To be more specific, a structural metaphor was generated from individuals' feelings in their daily lives and then transformed into words of song. On the other hand, orientation metaphors effectively translated abstract feelings of loss and emotional distance into more concrete spatial experiences within the lyrics. Besides, ontological has complex emotional expressions by incorporating visualization to enrich various expressive effects. Secondly, metaphor aims to express grief, longing, and hope more meaningfully by elaborating metaphorical expressions in song lyrics. It also conceptualizes abstract emotions and intricate life experiences that interplay between culture, cognition, and language in harmonious songs [8]. Therefore, the research focuses on investigating the key features of metaphors in the song lyrics entitled *Dancing with your Ghost* and their usefulness in the song lyrics.

The existing studies provide strong evidence that the issue of metaphor remains a concerning topic in semantic analysis. Some researchers have established the importance of metaphor in song lyrics. For instance, in the research by Wahyuda [9], metaphor seeks to elevate aesthetic appeal by incorporating song melodies with figurative expressions and profound meanings. For that reason, the listeners feel greater enjoyment and emotional connection, which helps them interpret song lyrics beyond their literal meaning. Within this context, Fadhila & Juanda [10] suggested that the metaphor contributed to personal satisfaction by creating vivid, realistic, and memorable imagery in lyrics. In the same vein, Wicaksono et.al [11] also confirmed that metaphor emerges as a powerful symbol to express satisfaction through abstract emotions and physical states. As a result, metaphors can boost psychological happiness and self-esteem among listeners and strengthen positive impacts on internal motivation. Despite the fruitfulness of metaphors in boosting listeners' satisfaction, the exploration of metaphor still has not yet focused on how metaphorical expressions form emotional messages in individual song lyrics. In addition, there is a limited number of investigations about metaphor in contemporary songs, which express emotional depth in a detailed linguistic approach.

From the presented explanation, the researchers intend to carry out semantic analysis to solve the gaps by analyzing metaphorical expressions in a contemporary song. Specifically, this research aims to identify key features of metaphor in the lyrics of the *Dancing with your Ghost* song and interpret the meanings of these metaphors. These objectives are beneficial for the researchers in investigating how metaphors symbolize individuals' emotions in contemporary music. Moreover, the research can strengthen metaphor theory in semantics analysis by elaborating on abstract emotional experiences in song lyrics. It is noticeable that the research findings contribute to the development of figurative language and its objectives in conveying feelings implicitly. Therefore, exploring metaphors in the song lyrics of *Dancing with your Ghost* is interesting as it examines an uncovered issue in the contemporary song by elaborating on language, cognition, and emotion.

II. Method

The researchers offer two important research questions: What types of conceptual metaphors are found in the *Dancing with Your Ghost* song lyrics? And how do these metaphors contribute to the construction and interpretation of meaning within the song?

To gather comprehensive information on the research, the researchers employed a qualitative methodology to explore kinds of metaphors in the song "*Dancing with your Ghost*". Specifically, it

utilized interpretive and inductive approaches to forward the issue in a natural setting [12]. Further, qualitative methodology also allowed the researchers to reach more engagement with other people, sites, and institutions. Within this context, it accommodated a critical framework on the conceptual metaphors in the song lyrics by investigating abstract emotional experiences and dividing them into three metaphor categories, such as structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors, regarding Lakoff and Johnson's theory. As a result, it reinforced an in-depth investigation of metaphorical expressions in the song lyrics by considering the song themes, emotional conditions, and cultural importance.

Moreover, a case study approach was chosen to gain detailed information on how metaphors contributed to various song lyrics in structured components, including linguistic features, narrative items, and socio-cultural contexts. As confirmed by Lim [13], a case study emphasized to comprehensive and holistic data based on a contextual phenomenon in a certain case. As a result, a case study was beneficial for accommodating and interpreting analytical information in real-life circumstances. To be more specific, the researchers elaborated a case study with authentic contexts through in-depth observation and critical analysis of the song lyrics. It explored metaphors by examining each lyric and then interpreting the results using Lakoff & Johnson's theory.

Prior to data collection, the research additionally examined every lyric and stanza conveyed by Sasha Alex Sloan in the "*Dancing with your Ghost*" song uploaded on the YouTube channel on June 28th, 2019. Notably, the researchers collected all information over a period of approximately seven days, from October 11th to 17th 2025

In this research, the researchers followed several steps to collect data, adapted from Putra et al.'s research [14]. Firstly, the songs were listened to carefully on Instagram. Then, the lyrics of *Dancing with your Ghost* were searched on a YouTube channel to ensure the correctness. After that, each lyric in the music video was carefully watched and listened to observe some metaphorical expressions in the '*Dancing with Your Ghost*' song. Finally, the data were classified by type of metaphor.

Particularly, the data analysis process was adjusted from a research by Simanjuntak et.al [15] which was started with a repeated reading of the song lyrics of *Dancing with your Ghost* to explore the key features of metaphors and the use of metaphors in those song lyrics. After that, researchers gain the research data by comparing the literal and the substantial interpretation of metaphors from the song "*Dancing with your Ghost*". Following this treatment, the next procedure was identifying those selected metaphorical expressions into structural, orientational, and ontological categories based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory. In addition, the researchers classified and interpreted the metaphorical language through a qualitative content analysis. Therefore, the researchers concluded the dominant metaphor types and their significance within the song.

III. Results and Discussion

Results

After analysing the lyrics of the "*Dancing with your Ghost*" song, the researchers identified several key points related to the types of metaphors used in the song lyrics by adopting Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory. Further on, it is divided into three parts, including structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Regarding the research findings, it is notable that the song lyrics contain the key features of metaphors and the usefulness of the categorizations, as follows:

Based on an in-depth investigation of metaphorical expressions in the song lyrics of "*Dancing with your Ghost*," the findings revealed numerous key features in the song. Notably, the table below indicates the number of each type of metaphor.

Table 1. Types of Metaphors in *Dancing with your Ghost* song lyrics

No	Types of Metaphor	Frequency
1	Structural Metaphor	3
2	Orientation Metaphor	1
3	Ontological Metaphor	2
TOTAL		6

Table 1 presents the classification of metaphor types in the “*Dancing with your Ghost*” song. Based on the data shown, all metaphorical expressions represented Lakoff and Johnson's theory that consisted of three structural metaphors, one orientation metaphors, and two ontological metaphors. In fact, the orientation metaphor appeared more frequently than structural metaphors and ontological metaphors in the song lyrics.

a. *The Use of Metaphors in “Dancing with your Ghost” Song Lyrics*

1. **Structural Metaphor**

Table 2. Structural Metaphor in *Dancing with your Ghost* song lyrics

Structural Metaphor	Yelling at the sky
	Screaming at the world
	Flying high in the clouds

Overall, the researchers discovered several song lyrics that indicated a structural metaphor. It was generated from an individual's feelings in daily life experiences and then transformed into words of song [16]. Based on the result of the research, there were at least four types of structural metaphor in the “*Dancing with your Ghost*” song lyrics. For example, *yelling at the sky*, *screaming at the world*, and *flying high in the clouds*. Specifically, in the first stanza, the songwriter wrote the phrase *yelling at the sky* to express feelings of frustration related to a love story. Furthermore, it is notable that the sky was considered an appropriate object for conveying intense emotions, and yelling was interpreted as a natural response to the desperation of a love journey [17]. Ultimately, this lyric evoked a profound sense of emotion. Besides, the song's lyrics, *which scream at the world*, demonstrate an emotional conflict between the singer and external life pressures, viewing life as the most formidable enemy. On the other hand, the song lyric *head up in the clouds* used vertical spatial elements to plot an imaginative perspective into the ideas. Hence, these structural metaphors portrayed some evidence that the song lyrics were created based on the songwriters' experiences and physiological conditions [18].

2. **Orientation Metaphor**

Table 3. Orientation Metaphor in *Dancing with your Ghost* song lyrics

Orientation Metaphor	Heaven only knows where you are now
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Another type of metaphorical expression found in the “*Dancing with your Ghost*” song lyrics was an orientation metaphor. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory in Jawad [6], the orientation metaphor emphasized spatial concepts in social life, which expressed several physical and cultural phenomena, such as up-down, in-out, front-back, and near-far.

Concerning the research findings, the researchers found one orientation metaphor, such as *Heaven only knows where you are now*. To be more specific, Mahmel [19] confirmed that the word “heaven” referred to transcendence, separation from earthly life, and the existence of a higher realm. In fact, it revealed an uncertain condition in someone's real life. Hence, this metaphorical expression demonstrated how the orientation metaphor effectively translated abstract feelings of loss and emotional distance into more concrete spatial experiences within the lyrics, in line with Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

3. **Ontological Metaphor**

Table 4. Ontological Metaphor in *Dancing with your Ghost* song lyrics

Orientation Metaphor	Every night, I'm dancing with your ghost;
Metaphor	I've got to move on

In the final part of the data findings, the researchers identified two ontological metaphors in the lyrics of the “*Dancing with your Ghost*” song. They were *every night, I'm dancing with your ghost*, and *I've got to move on*. Lakoff and Johnson in Jawad [6] noted that ontological metaphors were concerned with personification meaning, which also treated abstract phenomena as concrete objects. The first lyric, “*Every night, I'm dancing with your ghost*,” marked the word *ghost* as a

physical entity. Importantly, the songwriter expressed emotion through a lifeless component, which transformed grief and remembrance expressions into a tangible spirit [20]. Another key point was the lyric *I gotta move on* that portrayed the emotional challenges as intentional action. It attempted to change the psychological struggle to be more expressive and visualized in society [21]. As a result, these song lyrics represented a variety of complicated emotional expressions by allocating visualization to enrich expressive impacts.

Discussion

In general, metaphorical expressions can be acknowledged in a number of song lyrics across various music genres, such as pop, hip-hop, rock, and others. It particularly transforms literal words into figurative meaning to deliver messages, emotions, and expressions in a specific song [22]. To be more specific, metaphor broadens the language varieties in song lyrics by integrating impressive conceptual salience and substantive consequence. Thus, metaphor is not only considered as artistic element in literary texts, but it also contributes as a powerful expressive device in song lyrics.

Unconsciously, songwriters have applied various metaphors in the process of creating song lyrics. As conceptualized by Lakoff and Johnson [7], metaphors can be classified into several key features, such as structural, orientation, and ontological metaphors. As a further point, each of them possesses slight differences, but it holds certain characteristics that distinguish one from another.

Furthermore, the song lyrics of “Dancing with your Ghost” by Sasha Alex Sloan contained 6 metaphorical expressions. In particular, the structural metaphor was the dominant metaphor in this song's lyrics. Specifically, the structural metaphor demonstrated grief, despair, and longing based on someone's emotional experiences [23]. Likewise, research by Fajar and Hakim [21] indicated that structural metaphor is also a major finding in Adele's album 21. Furthermore, it contained several abstract emotions such as heartbreak, regret, and longing, and transformed them into more concrete domains. Therefore, the high frequency of structural metaphors in *Dancing with Your Ghost* demonstrates that the songwriter predominantly relied on conceptual mappings to transform deeply personal emotions into vivid and relatable lyrical expressions.

In addition, the orientation metaphor accounted for the less significant proportion in the song lyrics. This evidence showed that the songwriter less frequently elaborated on multiple emotional domains to express feelings, thoughts, and emotions by employing spatial and directional schemas [23]. Besides, the songwriter less encompassed orientational shift, physical detachment, and visual recognition to disclose emotional distress, desire, and emotional imbalance. In the same vein, the orientation metaphors were less common in traditional songs, which stress to local cultural wisdom. Saragih [24] also confirmed that the songwriter attached 28.57% orientation metaphors in the Batak Toba song lyrics (Mother's love theme), while Lukmana [25] only found 36% of orientation metaphors in Minangkabau songs. In another finding, Nasution al. al [26] provided evidence that the orientation metaphor also existed in only 14% in a Western traditional song entitled *I'm Already There* by Lonestar. In fact, these findings showed that structural and ontological metaphors foregrounded the traditional melodies. Traditional songs prioritize socio-cultural and daily routine values rather than spatial representation in creating song lyrics. By contrast, Sari & Sutami [27] revealed that the orientation metaphors dominated in an English pop song by Nikki in the Buzz album. The empirical data showed the emotional disorientation in the song lyrics, which reflected the spatial disorientation, personal instability, and psychological struggles.

II. Conclusion

This research investigated the types and meanings of metaphorical expressions in Sasha Alex Sloan's *Dancing with Your Ghost* by employing Lakoff and Johnson's [7] conceptual metaphor theory. The song expresses structural, orientation, and ontological metaphors. There are three expressions of structural metaphor, four expressions of orientation metaphor, and two expressions of ontological metaphors. Furthermore, orientation metaphors appeared as the dominant category, indicating that the songwriter relied heavily on spatial and directional schemas to articulate emotional disorientation, psychological imbalance, and relational distance. By contrast, structural metaphors contributed to depicting internal struggles and personal frustrations, while ontological metaphors offered concrete visualization to abstract emotions such as grief and longing. Overall, the findings

demonstrate that the metaphors effectively conceptualize emotional turmoil and unresolved loss, allowing listeners to grasp the complexity of the songwriter's inner experiences [28].

Notably, the findings offer several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the research reinforces the relevance of conceptual metaphor theory in contemporary music discourse, particularly in revealing how the emotional meaning is encoded through figurative language. The results deepen linguistic understanding of how spatial, experiential, and ontological schemas shape the expression of grief and relational tension in modern song lyrics. Practically, the study provides some meaningful insights for educators, learners, and practitioners, such as authentic materials for teaching semantics, pragmatics, and figurative language. It also evokes students' awareness of the metaphorical structures in music. For songwriting and cultural studies, the research highlights how metaphors enable artists to convey psychological depth in ways that resonate with diverse audiences.

Despite its contributions, the present research has several limitations. Firstly, it focused on a single contemporary song, which restricts the generalizability of the results across genres, artists, and cultural contexts. Secondly, the in-depth analysis relied solely on the linguistic interpretation without incorporating listeners' perceptions or cultural background, which may influence metaphor comprehension. Third, the study employed qualitative analysis only, without quantitative validation of metaphor frequency or distribution across a broader dataset. Future studies may address these limitations by analysing multiple songs, comparing metaphor use across genres or languages, or integrating mixed-methods approaches to capture listeners' interpretation and emotional resonance. Researchers may also explore cross-cultural differences between metaphors in contemporary and traditional songs to understand how socio-cultural contexts shape figurative meaning construction.

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