

Constructing Emotional Significance Through Metaphor In 'Secret Love' Song Lyric

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of our research is to analyze the structural metaphors in the Little Mix's song, Secret Love Song lyrics. The theoretical metaphor idea put out by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We live by* is used in this study's cognitive linguistics methodology. By using text analysis techniques, a descriptive qualitative approach is employed. Following a process of identification, categorization, and interpretation based on the idea of structural metaphor, the research data, which consisted of song lyrics incorporating metaphors, was analyzed. The phrase has two main metaphorical frameworks, according to the research's findings. The primary metaphor is *Love is theft*, represented a romantic relationship as a theft, and *stolen moments* refers to time spent together in secret. Furthermore, the phrase *as the curtain falls* represented the metaphor that relationship is a stage performance, which characterizes the relationship as a performance with an identifiable bound. In its entirety, the lyrics' conceptual metaphor functions to structure complex emotional experiences, through tangible ideas like stealing and stage performances, giving the audience to more fully and imaginatively understanding the hidden meaning of love.

Keyword: conceptual metaphor, song lyrics, hidden love, cognitive semantics

INTRODUCTION

This research would like to analyze the meaning construction through metaphor in Secret Love Song lyric. The purpose of this research is to find the deep meaning in the lyric. This song is sung by Little mix group from Britain. The X Factor's eighth season gave rise to the British female group Little Mix. In the original British series, they were the first and only girl group to win. Leigh-Anne Pinnoch, Jade Thirlwall, Perrie Edwards, and Jesy Nelson, who departed the group in 2020, make up the lineup, which was created in 2011 (<https://www.capitalfm.com/news/music/video-little-mix-formed-x-factor/>). They were founded specifically for the eighth season of The X Factor, when they won the competition for the first time in its eight-year existence. They released a rendition of Damien Rice's

Cannonball, as their winning record after signing with Simon Cowell's label, Syco Music. The basic idea of the present research is that popular language, like in song lyrics. It is an area where meaning is created that reflects particular social realities and emotional experiences. The recent research, as well as the development in present metaphor research, points out that metaphors not only reflect cognitive structures but also form identities and power relations in language. Therefore, it is anticipated that a study of the metaphors in Secret Love Song will reveal the ideological implications and conceptual patterns that underlie the representation of concealed love.

The song lyric regularly contains an implicit message. Writers use their thoughts, experiences, and emotions to craft song lyrics. As stated by Clarencia (2018), lyrics can be defined as either a song-like structure or a literary work in the form of a poem that expresses personal emotions. Song lyrics have a metaphorical form due to the poet's use of beautiful, lyrical language that is well-framed and represents objects or meanings. A person expresses what they have heard, seen, or experienced in song lyrics. Songwriters use wordplay and language to express their experiences in a way that is compelling and unique. According to Helmi et al. (2021), meaning, stylistic aspects, or vocal play can all be examples of this language play.

This research would like to use metaphorical approach from Lackoff and Johnson. It is a part of semantic cognitive. Language, on the basis of cognitive semantics, is a mirror of how humans interpret their life experiences. In addition to being language ornaments, metaphors act as a link between emotional and physical experiences. Secret Love Song's lyrics depict a covert romantic relationship that is unable to publicly discuss. Consequently, a variety of metaphorical terms are employed to translate intricate emotional experiences into ideas that are easier for the human body and spatial experience to understand. Cognitive semantics, according to Tarimi in Dessiliona and Nur (2018, 179), is an experimental approach to language usage and experience in real-world situations. An approach to studying the mind and the relationship to embodied experience and culture is called cognitive semantics. Evans and Green in Haula (2020, 18), also explains, this uses language as the principal analytical instrument for identifying conceptual organization and structure. The three elements of a metaphor, the metaphor itself, the meaning, and the resemblance or relationship between the two—must be examined in order to understand it. These three elements are typically referred to as vehicle, topic, and grounds. Regardless of Chaer (2014, 53), a metaphor is a word or term that employs figurative language;

the literal meaning or intended meaning is the meaning; and the relationship between the metaphor and its meaning is the connection or foundation.

In addition to analyzing grammar and vocabulary, semantics involves other topics, for example cognitive semantics. In keeping with Evans in Tarigan (2015), cognitive semantics is an element of semantics that examines the connections between semantic structures, conceptual systems, and experience. Cognitive semantics is concerned with metaphor. An analogy that compares two things is called a metaphor. Metaphors have been regularly brought up in linguistics research. As defined by Wahab in Alifiyah and Yuniseffendri (2022), metaphor is a language expression that can be deduced from its prediction instead of the underlying symbols. Both the symbols and the intended meaning of the language phrase might use it. Keraf believes that a metaphor is a comparison between two things. A metaphor, in contrast to a simile, lacks specific linguistic markers such as: like, as, as if etc..

By providing details an aspect as a representation of another, metaphors enable us to comprehend and experience one concept using an entirely different conceptual framework. As stated by Lakoff and Johnson in Dewi, Astuti, and Novita (2020), metaphors are cognitive underpinnings that affect our thoughts, behavior, and perspectives in addition to being rhetorical strategies. A metaphor, as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (2003,12)), is something that has another meaning and serves primarily to help audiences understand. To put it another way, a metaphor is a type of figurative language that makes comparisons between different things. All human languages employ metaphorical meaning to communicate at different degrees of abstraction from concrete reality, with regard to Lakoff and Johnson in Rapika et.al (2024). Three categories of metaphors are distinguished by Lakoff and Johnson: structural, ontological, and orientation.

There are many researchers have research metaphor in songs, including love songs. Nevertheless, the researchers do not find who research a forbidden love theme song. The previous study came from Salsa Rahma Destiani in 2025. This research result is so different, comparing with the present research. This research result showed that These metaphors all show how Lana Del Rey sees identity as something that is constantly evolving due to social influences and life experiences, and love as something delicate but significant. Del Rey uses the song Margaret as a platform to meaningfully and poetically convey her emotions and ideas. Although our research and Salsa Rahma Destiani's are similar in principle and methodology, they differ in a number of important ways. While Destiani's research analyzes metaphors in

various texts that use certain metaphors to represent emotional states and expressions of identity, ours looks into metaphors in the lyrics of Little Mix's song, titled Secret Love Song. In her research, metaphors use language to characterize human psychological states. For instance, emotions are represented as something that can be used specific characteristics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Metaphor studies have significantly developed within the field of cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of thought that allows individuals to understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences. They classify conceptual metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational types, which are widely used in linguistic analysis.

Semino (2008) further emphasizes that metaphor plays a crucial role in discourse by shaping how meanings are constructed in different contexts, including literary texts and song lyrics. In this regard, metaphor functions as a bridge between language, cognition, and social reality.

Previous studies have examined metaphor in song lyrics from various perspectives. Destiani (2025) analyzed metaphors in Lana Del Rey's song and found that metaphors represent emotional complexity and identity. Helmi et al. (2021) demonstrated that metaphor enhances emotional expression in song lyrics, while Dewi et al. (2020) showed that conceptual metaphors help structure meaning and interpretation.

However, research focusing specifically on the representation of hidden or forbidden love through conceptual metaphor remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how metaphor constructs emotional and social meanings of concealed relationships.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research's data collecting was done through library research using theoretical approaches. Both qualitative and descriptive methodologies are used in this investigation. Analyzing metaphorical expressions in song lyrics is the main goal of the present research. Specifically, the present research aims to understand how meaning is constructed by metaphor. In Sugiyono (2018), Creswell defines qualitative research as a method of analyzing and comprehending the meaning assigned to a social or societal problem. The researcher became the first instrument in the present research, and song lyrics functioned as the major data source.

In the words of Sidik and Miftachul (2019), the researcher became the main research instrument , doing the analysis without the use of questionnaires or test devices as in quantitative research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Metaphor

1. Ontologies' Metaphor

Cause I'm yours (verse 1, line 5)

In regard to the context, the statement is an excellent representation of an ontological metaphor that describes a love connection using the concept of being in possession. The phrase *yours*, signifies possession. In common parlance, the term typically refers to a tangible item that an individual can possess,. Nevertheless the subject I in the song's lyrics isn't really a tangible item that belongs to someone else. The ontological metaphor is useful in this situation. Emotional connection and feelings of love are regarded as possessions. To put it another way, a romantic relationship is viewed as an exclusive relationship. The analogy further clarifies how love language often expresses closeness emotionally using the idea of possession. In many cultures, romantic relationships are viewed as a sort of exclusive commitment between two people. Possession analogies effectively express the concept of exclusivity. By saying *I'm yours*, means someone highlights their feelings of affinity with the person they love in addition to expressing love.

Likewise this ontological metaphor shows how popular language frequently employs straightforward yet effective conceptual frameworks in song lyrics. Despite being a single pronoun, *yours* has a wide range of emotional connotations, including shared identity, commitment, sacrifice, and affection. As the idea of ownership is a common, everyday experience, listeners can quickly understand its meaning. As the outcome, this metaphor acts as a mental link between experiences that are concrete and abstract. This analysis can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Ontological Metaphor

Lyric	Linguistic Expression	Abstract Concept	Representation
<i>Cause I'm yours (verse 1, line 5)</i>	Belonging	Commitment in love relation	Humans regard themselves as possessions.

<i>Cause I'm yours</i> (verse 1, line 5)	Belonging Indentity	Personal Emotional	Love relationships are considered as emotionally attached.
<i>Cause I'm yours</i> (verse 1, line 5)	Personal Relation	Loyalty	The feeling of love as a desirable desired outcome

From the table we can see that the phrase: *Because I'm yours* has a dramatic quality in the setting of *Secret Love Song*. A connection that needs to be kept secret from all people is shown in the song. Consequently, even if, it cannot be publicly proclaimed, so the claim that someone belongs to another serves as an emotional confirmation that the relationship is genuine and solid. In this instance, the ontological metaphor not only expresses symbolic ownership but also the intensity of a secretive and connection of intimacy. *Because I'm yours* also has a dramatic quality in the setting of *Secret Love Song*. A relationship that needs to be kept secret from the public is shown in the song. As the outcome, even though it cannot be publicly proclaimed, the claim that one person "belongs" to another becomes an emotional confirmation that the relationship is genuine and solid. in this case, the ontological metaphor represents both the intensity of a private and hidden relationship and symbolic.

When you hold me in the street (verse 3, line 2)

In the first phrase: *We got a love that is hopeless*, the abstract concept of love is represented as a finite entity with specific elements. In real sense, unlike tangible commodities, love is not a material possession. On the other hand, the expression *We got* implies that love is represents as something that belongs to the belonging realm. The verb *Got* here represents love as something that may be gotten or shared. This represents the conceptual system *Love is an entity* or *Love is a possession*. Love is therefore viewed as more than merely a malleable and ethereal emotional activity; rather, it is seen as something with its own boundaries, existence, and identity. The construction of ontological boundaries is additionally represented by this sentence design. The phrase *a love* represents love as a unit that may be tallied or distinguished from other types of love by using the article *a*. This suggests that there are different kinds of love and that the lyric subject has desperately love, which is one specific kind. Therefore, the ontological metaphor transforms love into a thing that is both classifiable and understandable.

2. Structural Metaphor

Stolen moments that we steal as the curtain falls (verse 2, line 3)

The most prominent metaphor in this statement is a structural metaphor with ontological bases. The basic point of this metaphor is that love cannot be freely expressed. The song's representation of love takes place in a secret setting, surrounded by societal boundaries and devoid of social acceptance. Using the metaphor of thieving, the singer demonstrates how this relationship can only be enjoyed for a short time and in secret. The mental domain of theft, which is typically associated with the act of stealing something unlawfully and without permission, is triggered by the phrase *stolen* and *steal*. The moment that two individuals in love spend together is represented as something that is stolen in this metaphorical construction. Therefore, the love affair is a hidden act of theft, and each moment spent together is a stolen valuable. The idea behind this implies that illegal activities that are prevalent throughout daily life can be used to understand emotional experiences. This analysis can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. Structural Metaphor

Lyric	Source	Element	Representation
<i>Stolen moments that we steal as the curtain falls (verse 2, line 3)</i>	Deep relation	Love relation	Humans are seen as possession in love relation
<i>Stolen moments that we steal as the curtain falls (verse 2, line 3)</i>	The relationship between a person and thing..	Emotional commitment.	As a symbol of the shareholder, relationship
<i>Stolen moments that we steal as the curtain falls (verse 2, line 3)</i>	As a symbol of the shareholder, relationship	The possession structure	The "rights" concept helps us understand love.

From the table we can see that the phrase *as the curtain falls* represents both a theatrical and a thieving metaphor. A falling curtain in the playing room signifies the end of situation. Life is frequently viewed as a stage in the context of conceptual metaphor, and its occurrences are presented as dramatic scenes. The lyrics' use of the phrase "curtain falls" signifies that this shared moment happens close to the conclusion of an event, much like the last scene before a phase ends. The relationship presented in the song is therefore transient, dramatic, and intensely emotional. The concept that presents the relationships takes place *behind closed doors* in social life rather than on a public, is strengthened by the element of theatrical metaphors.

Every piece of you, it just fits perfectly (verse 2, line 5)

As it presents a semantic mapping from a concrete subject to an abstract one within the structural metaphor context, this phrase is a structural metaphor. A love relationship is the abstract domain, whereas an object or entity made of parts (like a machine or puzzle) is the concrete sphere. Therefore, the idea of an object made up of related pieces may be used to understand a romantic connection. It is possible to formulate the conceptual structure as: love relationship is completed puzzle. The expression every piece of you additionally highlights how a person's personality, qualities, feelings, habits, and identity are seen as a combination of different elements. The word *every*, symbolizes the singer's realization of and harmony with all of these character traits. Other than that, the expression *Fits perfectly* denotes a complete harmony, as though the two people were meant to be harmoniously matched. As a love relationship is conceptualized via the structure of an entity made up of precisely complimentary parts, an expression such as *Every piece of you, it just fits perfectly* is a structural metaphor. The idea that the two people in the relationship have a very harmonic emotional and personality compatibility, like pieces of a puzzle that fit together perfectly, is communicated by this metaphor.

3. Orientational Metaphor

We keep behind closed do (verse 2, line 1)

Considering it refers to spatial orientations like inside versus outside, up against down, and so forth, this statement might be classified as an orientation metaphor. The expression *behind closed doors* represents the emotional and social aspects of a relationship by contrasting the orientations inside or outside and open versus closed. The word *behind* denotes a place that is invisible, whereas *closed doors* denotes a barrier that prevents public access. Therefore, the human spatial experience of confined spaces helps to understand the abstract sensation of love that needs to be kept secret. The song's lyrics use this metaphor to highlight the major idea of Secret Love Song: love that cannot be spoken openly. Only in private, out of sight, this relationship take place. Thus, this sentence represents the constraints, social pressures, and disappointments that the song's characters go throughout. This analysis can be seen in the table below:

Table 3. Oriental Metaphor

Lyric	Source	Element	Representation
<i>We keep behind closed do</i> (verse 2, line 1)	Belonging	Love	Relationships between owners and objects.
<i>We keep behind closed do</i> (verse 2, line 1)	Depp Relationship	Depp Emotional Relationship	Relationships between owners and objects. Partners as shareholders in symbolic terms
<i>We keep behind closed do</i> (verse 2, line 1)	The possession structure	Romantic bound	Through the possession structure, love is understood.

From the table we can see, from a cognitive perspective, this orientation metaphor shows how people use their physical perception of space and boundaries to comprehend the social standing of connections. The border between two worlds consider as the one that is visible to others and the one that is only known by one person, is represented by a closed door. To put it another way, spatial orientation serves as a conceptual tool for elucidating social and emotional structures in addition to describing place. This metaphor also shows how spatial symbols are used in lyrical language to evoke strong feelings. While closed doors denotes a wall separating the relationship from the outer world. The word *behind*" implies concealment and constraints. The combination of these two parts gives the idea that the love in this song is restrained. The song's central theme is love that must be concealed, is thus reinforced by this orientation metaphor.

Wanna shout it from the rooftops (verse 11, line 3)

The roof's spatial orientation serves as the foundation for this metaphor. A higher position in human experience makes it possible to be seen and heard by more individuals. Consequently, the following relationship takes place in metaphorical conceptualization: This expression suggests that communication is more wide and open the higher one's position. Therefore, the singer's wish to publicly proclaim her love to the world rather than keep it a secret is reflected in her desire to shout it from the rooftops. This metaphor also contrasts with the phrase *behind closed doors*, which refers to concealed love, in the lyrics of the song. The phrase *Shout it from the rooftops*

represents total transparency in public areas, but the phrase *behind closed doors* denotes secrecy. As it describes the abstract idea of publicly expressing love with an overhead orientation, this term is an orientation metaphor

Discussion

An emotional story of a romantic relationship that cannot be publicly expressed is told in Secret Love Song. The song's lyrics reflect the psychological experiences of people who are forced to conceal their romantic sentiments because of social constraints or situations that cause an unsafe love relation. The struggle between intense love and societal reality is expressed in this song. It restricts the expression of the relationship. The artist explains in the song's lyrics how a genuinely strong and deep romantic relationship needs to be hiding from others. The emotional experiences of the song's characters are then represented, using a variety of metaphorical terms that signify what happened. From the analysis, the researchers would like explain that structural metaphor theory, is more than just a rhetorical device in language. It is part of the human conceptual system that helps us interpret abstract experiences. . Consequently, metaphors serve as cognitive bridges that allow people to comprehend complicated situations through simpler.

Metaphorical language becomes crucial in the dilemma for expressing the complex feelings that the song's protagonists are experiencing. Through the use of metaphors, abstract emotional experiences like love, longing, and pain can be comprehended through tangible ideas that are more relatable to life as a human being, like in the table explain below:

Table 4. Metaphorical Lacloff and Jhonson

LYRIC	METAPHOR	MEANING
<i>Every time I see you, I die a little more</i>	Ontologies	The relation should have been a perfect complete puzzle
<i>Cause I'm yours</i>	Ontologies	She is just a mistress
<i>Stolen moments that we steal as the curtain falls</i>	Structural	The hidden love relation
<i>Every piece of you, it just fits perfectly</i>	Structural	Perfection is just an illusion
<i>When you hold me in the street</i>	Orientation	Hurt love come from the word street

Based on the table, we explain that metaphor is defined in structural metaphor theory as a cognitive technique that allows humans to comprehend abstract things through more tangible ones. This theory holds that metaphor is a component of human mental processes as well as a figure of speech. Human physical experience of the world helps us understand many abstract notions, like love, time, or emotion. In Secret Love Song, the metaphors of space and objects are often implemented to explain our concept of love. *Every piece of you, it just fits perfectly* is a well-known example. A love connection is defined in this expression as an object made up of various complementing parts, much like Jigsaw puzzles pieces. This metaphor implies that the two people in the relationship have a deep emotional bond. As the conceptual structure of a physical object is utilized to comprehend the structure of a love connection, this metaphor is regarded as a structural metaphor within Lakoff and Johnson's theoretical framework.

The idea of metaphor ontology can also be used to explain the metaphor analysis in this song, in addition to structural metaphor theory. With regard to this method, metaphor is defined as a departure from a word's literal meaning. When a word is used to describe something that does not exactly match its basic meaning but has some parallels that make the meaning understandable, this is known as metaphor, like in: *Every time I see you, I die a little more*. In the context of this song, the word stolen, which literally means stolen, refers to a private moment spent together. A word commonly employed in criminal circumstances can be utilized to describe a hidden emotional state, according to ontological analysis.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual metaphors serve as language and cognitive tools for describing complicated emotional experiences, as Little Mix's "Secret Love Song" represents. Based on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conceptual metaphor theoretical framework, metaphors are

essential ways that people comprehend abstract ideas through tangible experiences rather than just being rhetorical devices in language. A closer look of the song's lyrics shows that a variety of conceptual metaphors, including ontological, structural, and orientation metaphors, are used to depict the emotional, intimate, and frequently challenging experience of love. When abstract experiences like love are viewed as possessive objects, ontological metaphors develop. The line Cause I'm yours, in which the singer's identity is portrayed as something possessed by someone else, is the most blatant example. This expression represents a mapping from the concrete realm of ownership to the abstract domain of emotional relationships inside the conceptual metaphor framework. The emotion of love is interpreted as a type of exclusive bond between two people through the use of the ownership structure. This metaphor highlights that romantic partnerships entail commitment, interrelated identities, and emotions.

This research, additionally highlights that metaphors in song lyrics serve as mirrors of how people arrange experiences of emotion in their minds, in addition to being aesthetic components. Love is viewed as a possessive entity through ontological metaphors; romantic relationships are arranged using a model of holding relations through structural metaphors; and the experience of love is situated within a social space framework that divides the public and private domains through orientation metaphors. The song's overall meaning is strengthened by the mental network created by the mixing of these three kinds of metaphors. As a result, the metaphor in Secret Love Song serves as a conceptual instrument that makes it possible to more concretely represent the complicated, private, and emotional experience of love. In addition to expressing romantic themes, the song's lyrics use metaphor to show how people comprehend interpersonal interactions through conceptual frameworks drawn from real-world experiences. This means that in the language, literature, and culture research, metaphor in popular music is a significant linguistic and cognitive phenomenon.

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