
**REPRESENTATION OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH CONCEPTUAL
METAPHORS IN MITSKI LAYCOCK'S SONG LYRICS: A QUALITATIVE
ANALYSIS BASED ON CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY**

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Abstrak: Dalam budaya digital kontemporer, lirik lagu tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ekspresi artistik tetapi juga sebagai media di mana pengalaman emosional yang kompleks diartikulasikan dan dinegosiasikan secara sosial. Meningkatnya konsumsi musik melalui platform digital telah mengintensifkan keterlibatan interpretatif dengan konten lirik, khususnya dalam karya-karya yang dicirikan oleh kepadatan metafora. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti representasi pengalaman emosional melalui metafora konseptual dalam lagu-lagu pilihan karya Mitski, dengan fokus pada bagaimana emosi abstrak seperti cinta, kehilangan, kerentanan, dan kecemasan relasional dikonstruksi secara linguistik. Dengan menggunakan desain analisis tekstual kualitatif yang berlandaskan Teori Metafora Konseptual, penelitian ini menganalisis lima lagu sebagai data primer melalui analisis dokumen sistematis. Data tersebut terdiri dari ekspresi metafora yang diidentifikasi dalam lirik, yang dikategorikan dan diinterpretasikan menggunakan pemetaan konseptual antara domain sumber dan target. Analisis tersebut mengungkapkan pola metafora dominan seperti CINTA ADALAH KEPEMILIKAN, CINTA ADALAH MESIN, CINTA ADALAH PERJUDIAN, HUBUNGAN ADALAH LOKASI, dan HIDUP ADALAH PERJALANAN. Pola-pola ini menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman emosional secara konsisten dibingkai melalui domain konkret termasuk objek, ruang, gerakan, dan risiko. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa metafora beroperasi sebagai struktur kognitif yang membentuk bagaimana emosi dikonseptualisasikan, bukan sekadar memperindah bahasa. Studi ini berkontribusi secara teoritis dengan memperkuat penerapan Teori Metafora Konseptual dalam wacana musik populer dan secara praktis dengan memperkaya diskusi interdisipliner dalam linguistik, studi budaya, dan representasi emosional dalam media kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Metafora, Analisis Semantik, Teori Metafora Konseptual, Lirik Lagu, Penelitian Kualitatif.

Abstract: In contemporary digital culture, song lyrics function not only as artistic expression but also as a medium through which complex emotional experiences are articulated and socially negotiated. The increasing consumption of music through digital platforms has intensified interpretative engagement with lyrical content, particularly in works characterized by metaphorical density. This study aims to examine the representation of emotional

experience through conceptual metaphors in selected songs by Mitski, focusing on how abstract emotions such as love, loss, vulnerability, and relational anxiety are constructed linguistically. Employing a qualitative textual analysis design grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research analyzes five songs as primary data through systematic document analysis. The data consist of metaphorical expressions identified within the lyrics, which are categorized and interpreted using conceptual mapping between source and target domains. The analysis reveals dominant metaphorical patterns such as LOVE IS POSSESSION, LOVE IS A MACHINE, LOVE IS GAMBLING, RELATIONSHIP IS A LOCATION, and LIFE IS A JOURNEY. These patterns demonstrate that emotional experiences are consistently framed through concrete domains including objects, space, movement, and risk. The findings suggest that metaphor operates as a cognitive structure shaping how emotions are conceptualized rather than merely embellishing language. The study contributes theoretically by reinforcing the applicability of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in popular music discourse and practically by enriching interdisciplinary discussions in linguistics, cultural studies, and emotional representation in contemporary media.

Keywords: *Metafora, Analisis Semantik, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lirik Lagu, Penelitian Kualitatif.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and social media has transformed the way people consume and interpret music. Songs are no longer perceived merely as entertainment; rather, they function as a medium of emotional expression and a reflection of personal experiences that are shared and collectively discussed within digital spaces. In this context, song lyrics frequently serve as a means of representing emotional experiences, particularly through the use of figurative language such as metaphor. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in the works of singers such as Mitski Laycock, whose lyrics are widely recognized for their poetic quality and dense metaphorical expressions depicting loneliness, vulnerability, relationships, and the search for identity. The use of conceptual metaphors in her lyrics not only enhances aesthetic expression but also shapes how listeners understand and emotionally engage with these experiences.

From a linguistic perspective, metaphor is no longer understood solely as a rhetorical device but as an integral component of the human cognitive conceptual system. Lakoff and Johnson, through Conceptual Metaphor Theory, argue that metaphor represents a mode of thinking that maps abstract experiences onto more concrete concepts. Kövecses (2020) further

emphasizes that emotions such as love, loss, and sadness are frequently represented through metaphors grounded in bodily and spatial experiences. Similarly, Liu and Hsieh (2020) demonstrate that metaphorical awareness plays a significant role in uncovering deeper meanings within linguistic texts. Therefore, analyzing metaphor in song lyrics becomes relevant for revealing how emotional experiences are constructed and understood through language.

Several previous studies have examined metaphor in song lyrics using qualitative approaches. Sofian (2022) analyzed metaphors in Taylor Swift's songs and found that metaphor functions as a storytelling device that strengthens emotional narratives. Zulfadhina et al. (2022) identified structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors in poetry based on Lakoff and Johnson's classification. Putra, Al Anwar, and Istama (2024) conducted a semantic analysis of metaphors in James Arthur's songs and found a dominance of ontological metaphors in representing experiences of love and loss. However, these studies primarily focus on the classification of metaphor types and textual interpretation without deeply exploring how metaphors represent emotional experiences within broader conceptual constructions.

Based on this review, a research gap remains concerning how conceptual metaphors in song lyrics systematically shape the representation of a singer's emotional experiences, particularly in the works of Mitski Laycock, whose lyrics are characterized by reflective and existential qualities. Furthermore, limited research has specifically integrated semantic analysis with the expanded framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Kövecses (2020) in the study of contemporary song lyrics. Therefore, this study seeks to offer a new perspective by positioning metaphor not merely as a linguistic category but as a conceptual structure that frames emotional experience within song texts.

This study aims to analyze the representation of emotional experiences through conceptual metaphors in Mitski Laycock's song lyrics using a qualitative approach grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of cognitive semantic studies and metaphor analysis within popular music discourse. Practically, the findings may assist readers and listeners in understanding the emotional meanings embedded within song lyrics and serve as a reference for language educators in utilizing songs as a medium for teaching figurative language. Thus, this study holds both academic and social relevance in bridging linguistic studies, music, and emotional

experience in the digital era.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), originally introduced by Lakoff and Johnson and further developed by Kövecses (2020). The theory views metaphor not merely as a rhetorical linguistic device but as a fundamental cognitive mechanism that shapes how humans think and understand abstract experiences through more concrete concepts. Within this framework, metaphor operates through conceptual mapping between a source domain (a concrete experiential domain) and a target domain (an abstract conceptual domain). Emotional experiences such as love, loss, loneliness, and alienation are frequently understood through metaphors derived from physical experiences, spatial orientation, journeys, or material objects.

According to Kövecses (2020), emotion constitutes one of the most productive domains in the use of conceptual metaphors. Because emotions are abstract and subjective, they are often represented through ontological metaphors (for instance, emotions conceptualized as entities or spaces), structural metaphors (emotions understood as journeys or struggles), and orientational metaphors (emotions mapped through spatial orientations such as up–down or in–out). This classification is also employed in the studies of Zulfadhlina et al. (2022) and Putra et al. (2024), which categorize metaphors in song lyrics into three primary types: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. This framework serves as the analytical foundation of the present study in identifying and categorizing metaphors within Mitski Laycock’s song lyrics.

Furthermore, the understanding of metaphor as a process of meaning construction is reinforced by Liu and Hsieh (2020), who emphasize that metaphorical awareness plays a crucial role in textual interpretation. Metaphor enables readers or listeners to construct deeper meanings from experiences expressed through language. In the context of song lyrics, metaphor functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as a mechanism that shapes how emotional experiences are represented and perceived. This perspective aligns with Sofian’s (2022) findings, which demonstrate that metaphor in songs operates as a narrative device that strengthens emotional expression and storytelling.

Conceptually, this study positions song lyrics as a form of popular literary discourse that

represents emotional experiences through systems of conceptual metaphor. By applying the CMT framework, this research examines how metaphors in Mitski's lyrics frame particular emotions through mappings between physical experience and inner emotional states. For example, loneliness may be represented as empty space (emptiness as space), love as a journey (love as journey), or loss as physical absence (loss as physical absence). These mappings are analyzed to reveal consistent conceptual patterns within the lyrics.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study integrates three main aspects: (1) metaphor as a cognitive conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson; Kövecses, 2020), (2) the classification of metaphor types (structural, orientational, and ontological) as applied in previous studies (Zulfadhina et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2024), and (3) the function of metaphor in constructing representations of emotional experience within song texts (Liu & Hsieh, 2020; Sofian, 2022). This framework provides the analytical basis for identifying and interpreting how emotional experiences are represented through conceptual metaphors in Mitski Laycock's song lyrics

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a textual analysis design grounded in *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*. This approach was selected because the research focuses on exploring meanings and representations of emotional experiences constructed through conceptual metaphors in Mitski Laycock's song lyrics. In accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research, the analysis is conducted through an in-depth examination of texts to understand contextual and interpretative meanings. This model aligns with the studies conducted by Sofian (2022) and Putra, Al Anwar, and Istama (2024), which applied descriptive qualitative analysis in examining metaphors in song lyrics.

1) Data Source

The data source of this study consists of the lyric texts of selected songs by Mitski Laycock, chosen based on the intensity of metaphor usage representing emotional experiences such as loneliness, loss, relationships, and the search for identity. The lyrics were obtained from official platforms such as Spotify and publicly accessible sources that provide authentic lyric texts. This research does not involve human participants, as the object of analysis is entirely limited to textual data

2) Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through document analysis using the following procedures:

1. Identifying and selecting Mitski's songs that contain dominant emotional themes.
2. Downloading and closely reading the song lyrics.
3. Marking words, phrases, or clauses containing metaphorical expressions.
4. Recording metaphorical data into a classification table to facilitate the analysis process.

These procedures follow metaphor identification techniques applied in the studies of Zulfadhina et al. (2022) and Putra et al. (2024), which involve repeated reading and categorizing metaphors based on specific classifications.

3) Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis applies metaphor analysis based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson and further developed by Kövecses (2020). The stages of analysis include:

1. Identification of Linguistic Metaphors

Determining non-literal expressions in the lyrics that contain meaning mappings.
Classification of Metaphor Types.

2. Classification of Metaphor Types

Grouping metaphors into three categories:

- Structural metaphors
- Orientational metaphors
- Ontological metaphors

3. Conceptual Mapping

Identifying the source domain and target domain to understand how emotional experiences are represented through concrete concepts.

4. Interpretation of Emotional Representation

Analyzing how the metaphors frame emotional experiences such as sadness, loss, love, or alienation within particular conceptual structures.

The analysis is conducted descriptively and interpretatively by presenting lyric excerpts

as primary data supported by relevant theoretical frameworks..

4) Data Validity and Trustworthiness

The validity of the data is maintained through the following criteria:

- **Credibility:** Theoretical triangulation by comparing analytical findings based on Lakoff and Johnson's framework and Kövecses's (2020) development.
- **Dependability:** Systematic and transparent documentation of the analytical process.
- **Confirmability:** Interpretations are grounded in clear textual evidence and relevant theoretical foundations.
- **Transferability:** Detailed presentation of analytical descriptions to enable application in the study of other song lyrics.

5) Research Ethics

Since this study uses publicly available data in the form of song lyrics, participant consent is not required. Nevertheless, academic ethics are maintained by:

- Using official lyric sources.
- Providing complete references.
- Not altering or manipulating the original song texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. General Findings

Based on the analysis of five Mitski songs, namely *My Love Mine All Mine*, *Washing Machine Heart*, *I'll Change for You*, *I Bet on Losing Dogs*, and *If I Leave*, it was found that conceptual metaphors are predominantly used to represent emotional experiences such as love, vulnerability, loss, and uncertainty within relationships.

Overall, ontological metaphors appear most frequently, followed by structural and orientational metaphors. This finding is consistent with Putra et al. (2024), who argue that ontological metaphors tend to dominate song lyrics because they allow abstract emotions to be conceptualized as concrete entities. The metaphors within these songs construct particular conceptual patterns demonstrating how emotional experiences are understood through concrete domains such as objects, machines, games, and spatial environments.

1. My Love Mine All Mine

a. “Moon, a hole of light” Type: Ontological Metaphor

Mapping: MOON IS AN OPENING / LIGHT IS HOPE

The moon is conceptualized as a “hole of light” rather than a literal celestial object. Light is commonly associated with hope or eternity. Feelings of loss and longing are projected onto a cosmic symbol, representing the desire for love to remain eternal even beyond death.

b. “Send up my heart to you” Type: Orientational Metaphor

Mapping: LOVE IS AN OBJECT THAT MOVES UPWARD

The heart is treated as an object that can be sent upward, symbolically toward the moon. Upward movement in orientational metaphors is often associated with spirituality or transcendence. This metaphor reflects the desire for love to surpass physical limitations and mortality.

c. “My love is mine, all mine” Type: Ontological Metaphor

Mapping: LOVE IS POSSESSION

Love is understood as an entity that can be owned. An abstract emotion is concretized as an object of possession, representing the need for control and self-identity through love.

2. Washing Machine Heart

a. “Washing machine heart” Type: Structural Metaphor

Mapping: HEART IS A MACHINE

The operational system of a machine is used to conceptualize emotional processes. The heart is presented as something that rotates, processes experiences, and may eventually break down. This metaphor illustrates emotional exhaustion and repetitive relational patterns.

b. “Toss your dirty shoes in my washing machine heart” Type: Ontological + Structural Metaphor

Mapping: EMOTIONAL BURDEN IS DIRT

“Dirty shoes” symbolize emotional burdens or personal problems. The speaker willingly accepts and metaphorically “cleans” the partner’s emotional weight, representing an emotionally unbalanced relationship.

- c. “I know who you pretend I am” Type: Structural Metaphor Mapping: IDENTITY IS A ROLE

Identity is conceptualized as something that can be performed or fabricated. The emotion expressed here reflects an identity crisis within the relationship, where the self is shaped by another person’s expectations rather than authentic self-understanding.

3. I’ll Change For You

- a. “How do I let our love die” Type: Ontological Metaphor

Mapping: LOVE IS A LIVING BEING

Love is personified as a living entity capable of dying. This represents an ontological metaphor because an abstract emotion is assigned biological characteristics. The expression reflects fear of relational loss and emotional separation.

- b. “I will change for you” Type: Structural Metaphor

Mapping: IDENTITY IS A MALLEABLE OBJECT

The self is conceptualized as something whose form can be altered. This metaphor conveys emotional sacrifice and dependency, suggesting a willingness to reshape personal identity in order to maintain a relationship.

- c. “Bars such magic places” Type: Ontological Metaphor

Mapping: SOCIAL SPACE IS ESCAPE

Bars are conceptualized as spaces of emotional escape. Feelings of loneliness are projected onto a social environment, portraying physical space as a temporary refuge from emotional distress.

4. I Bet On Losing Dogs

a. "I bet on losing dogs"

Jenis: Type: Structural Metaphor Mapping: LOVE IS GAMBLING

Relationships are understood through the conceptual framework of gambling. The speaker remains aware of inevitable loss yet continues to place the bet, illustrating destructive relational patterns and emotional self-sabotage.

b. "By the ring"

Type: Structural Metaphor

Mapping: RELATIONSHIP IS A FIGHT ARENA

The ring, referring to a fighting arena, maps relationships onto the domain of competition or combat. Emotional interaction is therefore conceptualized as conflict and struggle.

c. "Someone to watch me die" Type: Ontological Metaphor

Mapping: EMOTIONAL PAIN IS DEATH

Death is used metaphorically to represent emotional collapse or extreme psychological suffering, emphasizing the intensity of pain experienced within the relationship.

5. If I Leave

a. "If I leave"

Type: Orientational Metaphor

Mapping: RELATIONSHIP IS A LOCATION

A relationship is conceptualized as a place that can be exited. Physical distance metaphorically represents emotional separation and detachment.

b. "I ride through a tunnel / It's dark the whole way"

Type: Structural Metaphor

Mapping: LIFE/RELATIONSHIP IS A JOURNEY DARKNESS IS DESPAIR

The tunnel symbolizes the journey of life or a relationship, while darkness represents emotional confusion, uncertainty, and depression experienced throughout that journey.

- c. “Nobody else could see me quite as clearly as you” Type: Ontological Metaphor
Mapping: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING

Understanding is conceptualized as the act of seeing. This reflects a classical cognitive metaphor in which KNOWING IS SEEING, suggesting emotional intimacy through deep recognition and perception by another person.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that emotional experiences in the five selected Mitski songs are constructed through a consistent and recurring system of conceptual metaphors. Based on the analysis, metaphor functions not merely as a linguistic ornament but as a cognitive structure shaping how emotions are understood. In line with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson), abstract emotions such as love, loss, dependency, and anxiety are represented through concrete domains including objects, spaces, journeys, machines, and gambling activities.

One dominant pattern identified is LOVE IS POSSESSION, as reflected in the lyric “My love is mine, all mine.” Love is constructed as an entity that can be owned and claimed. Within the framework of ontological metaphor, emotions are given boundaries and object-like status, allowing them to be conceptually controlled. This representation suggests that the lyrical subject attempts to preserve identity through claiming ownership of love, even when the external world is portrayed as offering no sense of possession. This finding extends the work of Putra et al. (2024), who identified the dominance of ontological metaphors in popular songs, by demonstrating that such metaphors also function as mechanisms for emotional identity construction.

Furthermore, the metaphor HEART IS A MACHINE in “Washing Machine Heart” illustrates how emotional relationships are understood as repetitive and exhausting mechanical processes. In this structural metaphor, the operational system of a machine—spinning, processing, and cleaning—is used to conceptualize emotional functioning. This representation reflects unstable and repetitive relational dynamics, in which the subject absorbs the partner’s

emotional burdens (“toss your dirty shoes”). Conceptually, this suggests that love is not always perceived as organic but may instead be experienced as an automatic system that can become damaging over time.

The metaphor LOVE IS GAMBLING in “I Bet on Losing Dogs” reveals another significant conceptual pattern. Relationships are mapped onto the domain of gambling, where the subject remains aware of probable defeat yet continues to take the risk. This reflects emotional risk awareness alongside tendencies toward self-sabotage within intimate relationships. The finding aligns with Kövecses (2020), who argues that emotional metaphors often reflect embodied experiences, in which concrete activities such as playing, betting, or fighting are used to understand internal emotional states.

Additionally, orientational metaphors such as RELATIONSHIP IS A LOCATION and LIFE IS A JOURNEY, as illustrated in the lyrics “If I leave” and “I ride through a tunnel / It’s dark the whole way,” demonstrate that relationships and life are conceptualized as spatial environments or journeys. Darkness within the tunnel represents confusion, depression, and uncertainty. In these metaphors, emotional experience is constructed through spatial orientation (in–out, light–dark, near–far), which Lakoff and Johnson describe as orientational metaphors grounded in human bodily experience.

Compared with the studies conducted by Sofian (2022) and Zulfadhlina et al. (2022), this research not only classifies types of metaphor but also illustrates how these metaphors form consistent conceptual patterns representing women’s emotional experiences within intimate relationships. Mitski’s songs tend to portray love as risky, fragile, and emotionally imbalanced. Thus, metaphor functions not only as an aesthetic device but also as a reflection of psychological and social conditions.

Overall, this discussion confirms that conceptual metaphors in Mitski’s lyrics construct a particular framework for understanding love and relationships: love as possession, as a machine, as gambling, as a journey, and as a space that can be abandoned. This metaphorical system demonstrates that language does not merely represent emotional experience but actively shapes it. The findings reinforce the relevance of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the study of popular music and show that metaphor analysis can reveal the conceptual structures underlying emotional experience in contemporary culture.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the representation of emotional experiences through conceptual metaphors in five songs by Mitski; *My Love Mine All Mine*, *Washing Machine Heart*, *I'll Change for You*, *I Bet on Losing Dogs*, and *If I Leave* by applying the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The findings indicate that metaphors in these lyrics function as conceptual structures that shape how emotions are understood, rather than merely serving as aesthetic linguistic devices.

The results reveal that ontological and structural metaphors dominate the representation of emotional experience. Love and relationships are constructed through conceptual patterns such as **LOVE IS POSSESSION**, **LOVE IS A MACHINE**, **LOVE IS GAMBLING**, **RELATIONSHIP IS A LOCATION**, and **LIFE IS A JOURNEY**. These mappings

demonstrate that abstract emotions; including love, loss, dependency, and anxiety are understood through concrete domains such as objects, machines, gambling, space, and journeys. In this way, metaphor enables complex emotional experiences to be communicated in more concrete and comprehensible forms.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the analysis of contemporary popular music. Metaphors in Mitski's songs do not merely classify types of figurative expression but establish a consistent conceptual system that frames relational experiences and emotional identity. Practically, the study suggests that metaphor analysis in song lyrics can serve as an effective approach for understanding the construction of emotion within modern digital culture.

This research is limited by the number of songs analyzed and by its focus on textual data without considering musical elements or audience reception. Future studies may expand the scope by examining entire albums or integrating listener reception perspectives in order to enrich the understanding of emotional representation in music.

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