

**AN ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF SELF-IDENTITY AND
EMOTIONAL PAIN IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S THE TORTURED POETS
DEPARTMENT ALBUM**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates conceptual metaphors related to self-identity and emotional pain in The Tortured Poets Department Album by Taylor Swift. The study aims to identify the types of conceptual metaphors used in the album's lyrics and explain how they represent emotional experiences and identity construction. Song lyrics were chosen because they contain figurative language that reflects complex emotional and psychological meanings. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method using Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which classifies metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. The data consisted of metaphorical expressions found in sixteen selected songs from the album. Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed through identification, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed 121 occurrences of conceptual metaphors related to self-identity and emotional pain. Structural metaphors appeared most frequently with 70 occurrences (58%), followed by ontological metaphors with 40 occurrences (33%), and orientational metaphors with 11 occurrences (9%). These findings suggest that the representation of self-identity and emotional pain in the album relied more on structured and object-based conceptualizations rather than purely spatial representations.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor, Self-Identity, Emotional Pain, Song Lyrics, Taylor Swift

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji metafora konseptual yang berkaitan dengan identitas diri dan penderitaan emosional dalam album The Tortured Poets Department karya Taylor Swift. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis metafora konseptual yang digunakan dalam lirik album tersebut serta menjelaskan bagaimana metafora-metafora tersebut merepresentasikan pengalaman emosional dan pembentukan identitas. Lirik lagu dipilih karena mengandung bahasa kiasan yang mencerminkan makna emosional dan psikologis yang kompleks. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan mengacu pada Teori Metafora Konseptual Lakoff dan Johnson (2003), yang mengklasifikasikan metafora menjadi metafora struktural, orientasional, dan ontologis. Data terdiri dari ekspresi metaforis yang ditemukan dalam enam belas lagu terpilih dari album tersebut. Data dikumpulkan

melalui teknik dokumentasi dan dianalisis melalui identifikasi, klasifikasi, interpretasi, serta penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan 121 kemunculan metafora konseptual yang berkaitan dengan identitas diri dan rasa sakit emosional. Metafora struktural muncul paling sering dengan 70 kemunculan (58%), diikuti oleh metafora ontologis dengan 40 kemunculan (33%), dan metafora orientasional dengan 11 kemunculan (9%). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penggambaran identitas diri dan rasa sakit emosional dalam album tersebut lebih mengandalkan konseptualisasi yang terstruktur dan berbasis objek daripada sekadar representasi spasial semata.

Kata Kunci: Metafora Konseptual, Identitas Diri, Rasa Sakit Emosional, Lirik Lagu, Taylor Swift

A. Introduction

Conceptual metaphor is a cognitive mechanism that enables people to understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). In cognitive linguistics, metaphors are viewed as conceptual mappings between source and target domains that shape how individuals understand experiences and interpret the world (Kövecses, 2023).

The use of conceptual metaphors is particularly evident in song lyrics, where abstract emotions are often expressed through vivid and relatable imagery. Music provides a powerful medium for representing complex emotional states, allowing listeners to connect personal experiences with artistic expressions. As noted by Fadhila and Juanda (2023), metaphorical language in song

lyrics enhances emotional resonance and enables audiences to interpret meanings beyond literal expressions. This supports the argument that metaphors function not only as stylistic devices but also as cognitive tools that facilitate understanding of abstract emotional experiences (Beknazarova et al., 2021).

Among contemporary musicians, Taylor Swift stands out as an artist whose songwriting is rich in metaphorical expressions. Her lyrics often explore themes of love, heartbreak, self-identity, and personal growth, making her work a valuable subject for linguistic and literary analysis. In songs such as *All Too Well*, Swift employs evocative imagery and metaphor to represent emotional memories, demonstrating her ability to transform personal experiences into universally relatable narratives

(Sofian, 2022). Her recent album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, offers a particularly compelling context for examining conceptual metaphors. The album explores complex emotional states, including inner conflict, identity struggles, and emotional pain, providing rich material for analyzing how conceptual metaphors are used to articulate nuanced emotional and psychological experiences.

Recent studies have increasingly examined the role of conceptual metaphors in song lyrics. Azizah et al. (2025) identified metaphors in the song *Cough Syrup* that conceptualize life as a journey. Similarly, Lin (2024) emphasizes that conceptual metaphors are deeply embedded in cognitive processes. Studies published in the *Celtic Journal*, such as Inayah and Amalia (2023) and Haliza (2025), have also explored metaphorical language in song lyrics. However, these studies tend to focus on limited songs or general metaphor usage rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of specific thematic domains across an entire album.

Despite the growing body of research on conceptual metaphors in song lyrics (Inayah and Amalia, 2023;

Azizah et al., 2025), limited research has focused on the systematic analysis of conceptual metaphors related to self-identity and emotional pain within a single cohesive body of work. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of conceptual metaphors in *The Tortured Poets Department*, focusing specifically on themes of self-identity and emotional pain. The objective of this research is to identify and classify the types of conceptual metaphors related to self-identity and emotional pain found in the song lyrics of the album. The findings are expected to contribute to linguistic and literary studies as well as interdisciplinary discussions on language, cognition, and popular culture.

B. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing linguistic phenomena, particularly conceptual metaphors, as it focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and patterns within textual data. This research aimed to analyze conceptual metaphors related

to self-identity and emotional pain found in the song lyrics of The Tortured Poets Department album by Taylor Swift. Content analysis was applied to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret metaphorical expressions based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003).

The data source consisted of song lyrics from The Tortured Poets Department album (2024) by Taylor Swift, which includes sixteen songs.

Tabel 1 Songs From The Tortured Poets Departments Album

No.	Code	Title
1.	S1	Fortnight
2.	S2	The Tortured Poets Department
3.	S3	My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toy
4.	S4	Down Bad
5.	S5	So Long, London
6.	S6	But Daddy I Love You
7.	S7	Fresh Out The Slammer
8.	S8	Florida!!!
9.	S9	Guilty as Sin?

10.	S10	Who's Afraid of Little Old Me
11.	S11	I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)
12.	S12	loml
13.	S13	I Can Do It With a Broken Heart
14.	S14	The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived
15	S15	The Alchemy
16.	S16	Clara Bow

These lyrics were selected as they contain rich metaphorical expressions representing themes of self-identity and emotional pain.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting and analyzing the data. Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) was used as the analytical framework for identifying and classifying metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological types.

Data were collected through document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The researcher compiled the official

lyrics of sixteen selected songs, identified metaphorical expressions related to self-identity and emotional pain, and organized them for analysis.

Data analysis involved identifying metaphorical expressions, classifying them into structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors based on Lakoff and Johnson (2003), and interpreting the relationship between source and target domains to explain representations of self-identity and emotional pain.

C.Results and Discussions

The analysis identified a total of 121 conceptual metaphor expressions of self-identity and emotional pain across *The Tortured Poets Department* Album. Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors classified into three types: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Among these, structural metaphors were the most dominant, accounting for (58%) indicating that Taylor Swift often framed self-identity and emotional pain as a concrete and experience-based domain, such as emotional pain is exile, identity is an appearance,

identity is a comparison, emotional pain is physical damage, emotional pain is burden, and emotional pain is physical injury. These highlighted how self-identity, emotional pain are conceptualized as something that can be entered, inhabited, and left behind, reflecting emotional states as structured experiences. This was followed by ontological metaphors (33%), conceptualizing abstract emotions and aspects of self-identity as entities, substances, or bounded objects, such as emotions are contained objects and self-identity is a possession which frames emotional and social experiences as tangible entities that are subject to possession, damage, exchange, or loss. while orientational metaphors appeared least frequently (9%), they provided spatial orientation to abstract emotional experiences, with emotional pain is submersion frame recovery as a gradual movement from a state of confinement toward freedom, which suggests emotional progress and personal transformation.

Structural Metaphors

Selected examples of structural metaphors identified in the album are presented below:

1. Identity is a comparison

The lyric “you’re not Dylan Thomas, i’m not Patti Smith” (S2, L13) reflects the structural metaphor identity is a comparison, where the speaker defines self and other by measuring them against culturally iconic figures.

2. Emotional pain is deity

Emotional pain is conceptualized as a deity through the metaphor emotional pain is deity. The phrase “sacrificed us to the gods” (S5, L25) frames suffering as a powerful, almost sacred force that demands offerings.

3. Self-destruction is fire

Self-destruction is conceptualized as fire through the metaphor self-destruction is fire. The phrase “burn my whole life down” (S6, L19) evokes imagery of flames consuming everything familiar, symbolizing a desire for total annihilation of one’s existing life.

Tabel 2 Structural Metaphors of Self-Identity and Emotional Pain Identified in The Tortured Poets Department Album

Structural Metaphors		
No.	Theme	Metaphorical Expressions
1.	Emotional Pain	Exile (2), routine burden (1), physical damage (2), destruction (1), insanity (1), abandonment (1), deity (1), burden (2), physical injury (2), noise (1), punishment (1), disaster (1), captivity (1)
2.	Pain	Neglect (1), moral debt (1), habit (1), masker performance (1), physical force (1)
3.	Emotion	Reality (1), fire (1), contained force (1), chemical force (1)
4.	Emotional	Conflict is duality (1), suppression is physical restraint (1), closure is departure (1), desire is a crime (1), expression is permission (1), expression is madness (1), detachment is cold (1), tension is physical restraint (1), suffering is journey (1), damage is breakage (1), harm is a crime (1), erasure is death (1), distance is physical distance (1), struggle is task (1), healing is medical treatment (1), overwhelm is drowning (1), isolation is imprisonment (1)
5.	Self Identity	Shared taste (1), castle (1),

		wholeness (1), self definition (1), certainty (1), weather (1), disaster (1)
6.	Identity	Appearance (2), comparison (2), performance (1), social (1), unique value (1), performance (1), value (1), trend (1), novelty (1)
7.	Self	Member of an institution (1), machine (1), destruction is fire (1), threat (1), domesticated animal (1), dangerous animal (1), monster (1), persuasion (1), toy (1)
Total		70

Orientational Metaphors

Selected examples of orientational metaphors identified in the album are presented below:

1. Emotional pain is downward

The phrase “down bad” (S4, L9) clearly reflects the orientational metaphor emotional pain is downward, where intense negative emotions are associated with a low physical position.

2. Emotional independence is separation

The phrase, “I don’t need your sympathy” (S10, L1) the speaker positions themselves as emotionally

self-sufficient, no longer reliant on external validation or consolation.

Tabel 3 Orientational Metaphors of Self-Identity and Emotional Pain Identified in The Tortured Poets Department Album

Orientational Metaphors		
No.	Theme	Metaphorical Expressions
1.	Emotional pain	Not moved past (1), downward (1), down (1), submersion (2)
2.	Emotional	Defense is distance (1), state is location (1), independence is separation (1), defeat is down (1), decline is a fall (1)
3.	Identity	Comparative scale (1)
Total		11

Ontological Metaphors

Selected examples of ontological metaphors identified in the album are presented below:

1. Self is a broken object

Self is conceptualized as something damaged that can be repaired in this phrase. The phrase “fix me” (S3, L8) reflects the conceptual metaphor self is a broken object.

2. Identity is a label

The phrase “we’re modern idiots” (S2, L8) assigns a collective label to the speaker and others, reducing complex individuals to a simple descriptive category.

3. Self is a strong object

The phrase “i’m a real tough kid” (S13, L7) conceptualizes the self is a strong object. By framing the self as “tough,” the speaker presents personal identity as something solid, resilient, and capable of withstanding external pressures.

Tabel 4 Ontological Metaphors of Self-identity and Emotional Pain identified in The Tortured Poets Department Album

Ontological Metaphors		
No.	Theme	Metaphorical Expressions
1.	Cause of pain	Person (1)
2.	Emotional	Boundary is space (1), shock is loss of air (1), damage is emptying (1), chemical substance (1), control is stillness (1)
3.	Emotion	Contained objects (2), pressurized contents (1), containers (1), object to control (1), hidden

		objects (1), liquid (1)
4.	Emotional Pain	Invisible (1), temporary object (1), fragment (1), confinement (1), ghost (1), liquid (1)
5.	Pain	Buried object (1), physical force (1)
6.	Identity	Artifact (1), label (1), shell (1)
7.	Self	Broken object (1), contained object (1), divisible (1), boundaries are property (1), location (1), strong object (1), valuable object (1), structure (1), abstract object (2)
8.	Self Identity	Possession (3), damage (1), spirit (1), ownership (1)
Total		40

Tabel 5 The Types of Metaphor: Total Frequency and Percentage

No.	Types of Metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Structural	70	58%
2.	Orientalional	40	9%

3.	Ontological	11	33%	as emotions are contained objects and self-identity is a possession. These further illustrate how self-identity and emotional pain are described as tangible experiences that can be possessed or damaged.
	Total	311	100%	

The results show that a structural metaphors dominate with 70 instances (58%), indicating that Taylor Swift often frames self-identity and emotional pain as a concrete and experience-based domain, such as emotional pain is exile, identity is an appearance, identity is a comparison, emotional pain is physical damage, emotional pain is burden, and emotional pain is physical injury. These highlight how self-identity and emotional pain are conceptualized as something that can be entered, inhabited, and left behind, reflecting emotional states as structured experiences. Orientational metaphors, though less frequent, appear 11 times (9%) and provide spatial orientation to abstract emotional experiences, with emotional pain is submersion emerging most prominently, indicating a transition from being emotionally trapped to a gradual sense of release, healing, and recovery. Ontological metaphors with 40 instances (33%), conceptualizing abstract emotions and aspects of self-identity as entities, substances, or bounded objects, such

The findings of this study show that *The Tortured Poets Department* album contains three types of conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. This extensive use of metaphor demonstrates how the album's lyrics rely on figurative language to articulate complex emotional and psychological experiences. Recent studies have emphasized that contemporary song lyrics increasingly employ metaphor as a cognitive tool to express abstract emotional states, particularly those related to identity, vulnerability, and psychological distress (Littlemore, 2019). By mapping intangible emotions onto more concrete experiential domains, the lyrics transform emotional pain and identity struggles into experiences that listeners can easily conceptualize and relate to.

Compared with previous studies, the metaphors identified in The Tortured Poets Department reveal a rich and varied conceptualization of self-identity and emotional pain. Studies by Thu (2019), Handayani (2022), and Bora and Agung (2023) similarly reported the dominance of structural metaphors in emotional discourse and song lyrics. However, this study identifies a broader range of metaphorical mappings, including emotional pain is exile, emotional pain is burden, emotional pain is physical injury, identity is an appearance, and identity is a comparison. These findings indicate that Taylor Swift represents emotional pain and self-identity through multiple experiential domains, creating a more nuanced portrayal of psychological struggle. Thus, while the findings support previous research, they also demonstrate how contemporary songwriting expands conventional metaphorical patterns to represent increasingly complex emotional experiences.

Structural metaphors emerge as the most dominant type, accounting for 70 instances of the total data. This dominance indicates that self-identity and emotional pain are primarily

conceptualized through structured and experience-based domains that frame emotions as processes, situations, or systems. Metaphors such as emotional pain is exile, identity is an appearance, identity is a comparison, emotional pain is physical damage, emotional pain is burden, and emotional pain is physical injury conceptualize emotional experiences as states that can be entered, inhabited, and endured, emphasizing feelings of confinement, endurance, and emotional limitation. This finding is consistent with recent metaphor studies in music and emotional discourse, which report that structural metaphors are particularly effective in representing prolonged emotional states and identity crises (Thu, 2019; Handayani, 2022). Kövecses (2019) further argues that process-based metaphors remain dominant in contemporary emotional expression because they allow abstract psychological experiences to be organized into coherent narrative structures. Thus, the prevalence of structural metaphors in this album reflects the need to frame emotional pain and self-identity as lived, unfolding experiences rather than isolated feelings.

Orientational metaphors are the least frequent category, occurring in 11 instances. Nevertheless, they play a crucial role in providing spatial orientation to emotional experiences. Metaphors such as emotional pain is submersion frame recovery as a gradual movement from a state of confinement toward freedom, suggesting emotional progress and personal transformation. Recent studies have shown that spatial metaphors are commonly used in post-2018 song lyrics to express emotional fluctuation, closeness, and psychological transition (Sari and Hartono, 2020; Putri and Santoso, 2023). These findings support Kövecses' (2019) observation that bodily experience and spatial orientation remain central to how emotions are conceptualized in modern discourse. Although fewer in number, orientational metaphors enhance the emotional imagery of the album by mapping internal psychological states onto physical movement and direction, making emotional change more perceptible to listeners.

Ontological metaphors form the second most frequent category with 40 instances. These metaphors

function by conceptualizing abstract emotions and aspects of self-identity as concrete entities, substances, or objects. Metaphors such as emotions are contained objects and self-identity is a possession frame emotional and social experiences as tangible entities that are subject to possession, damage, exchange, or loss. This pattern aligns with recent research indicating that ontological metaphors are particularly prominent in texts dealing with emotional vulnerability and identity fragmentation (Widjaja, 2019; Rahmani and Lestari, 2021). By treating emotions and identity as objects, these metaphors allow complex psychological experiences to be discussed as manageable and observable entities, intensifying the sense of emotional exposure and fragility portrayed in the lyrics.

This study also provides a clearer explanation of why structural metaphors dominate. First, emotional pain and identity struggles often unfold over time, making process-based metaphors particularly suitable for representing psychological endurance and transformation. Second, these metaphors draw on shared human experiences, which enhances listener comprehension and emotional

resonance (Kövecses, 2019). Third, contemporary songwriting conventions favor narrative-driven expression, and structural metaphors provide an effective framework for conveying emotional trajectories in song lyrics (Bora and Agung, 2023). Therefore, the dominance of structural metaphors in this study reflects not only the thematic focus of the album but also broader trends in modern metaphor usage.

Another significant finding of this study is the way multiple metaphor types interact to represent self-identity and emotional pain. Rather than relying on a single conceptual framework, the album combines structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors to create layered emotional meanings. Emotional pain is portrayed not only as a process of exile, burden, or injury, but also as an object that can be possessed or lost and as a spatial experience involving movement and transformation. This interaction between metaphor types enables the lyrics to capture the complexity of psychological experiences and provides a deeper representation of identity struggles and emotional suffering.

The findings support a central claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), abstract experiences are understood through more concrete and embodied domains of experience. Metaphors such as emotional pain is exile, emotional pain is physical injury, emotions are contained objects, and emotional pain is submersion demonstrate how abstract psychological experiences are grounded in familiar experiential concepts. Through this process, the lyrics become both emotionally powerful and cognitively accessible. Therefore, metaphor does not merely function as a stylistic feature in *The Tortured Poets Department*. Instead, it structures the emotional meaning of the lyrics and enables listeners to engage more deeply with the experiences of self-identity and emotional pain portrayed throughout the album.

E. Conclusion

This study examined conceptual metaphors related to self-identity and emotional pain in Taylor Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department* and identified 121 metaphorical expressions across structural,

ontological, and orientational metaphors. Structural metaphors were the most dominant, indicating that self-identity and emotional pain are mainly conceptualized through structured domains such as exile, comparison, and destruction. Consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the findings show that metaphors function as cognitive tools for understanding abstract experiences. Ontological metaphors represent emotions and identity as concrete entities, while orientational metaphors conceptualize emotional states through spatial orientations. Overall, conceptual metaphors play an important role in expressing self-identity and emotional pain and reveal how emotional suffering contributes to identity construction.

Future research may examine a larger corpus of Taylor Swift's works or compare metaphorical patterns across different artists, genres, and cultural contexts. Further studies could also explore the use of metaphor-rich song lyrics in teaching figurative language and applied linguistics.

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