

An Analysis of Rhetorical Devices in Taylor Swift's All Too Well (10-minute version)

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Abstract: This study aims to identify the rhetorical devices used in Taylor Swift's single All Too Well (10 Minute Version). The theoretical framework by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1963) was adopted as the theoretical foundation of the study. A qualitative approach was employed in this research through the use of content analysis. Deductive coding was employed in the song analysis and this song was analysed for ten (10) types of rhetorical devices which are (1) simile, (2) personification, (3) hyperbole, (4) metaphor, (5) synecdoche, (6) metonymy, (7) irony, (8) allusion, (9) paradox, and (10) symbol. The analysis revealed that simile and metaphor were the primary rhetorical devices used in this song as four excerpts were identified from the song respectively. Synecdoche, irony, allusion, and paradox were least used in the song as only one excerpt for each rhetorical device. The findings derived from this current study are hoped to narrow the gap in the semantic literature due to the novelty of this song since it was recently released.

Keywords: Rhetorical Devices, Content Analysis, Lyrics, Simile, Metaphor

1. Introduction

Literature has become a creative way and process in human language to fulfil the desire of human beings to express their creativity (Johansen, 2010). According to Thomason (2012), semantics is the study of terms where the analysis focuses entirely on the meaning of words. Music is "one of the most difficult media to approach rhetorically" (Rasmussen, 1994; Lüders, 2010), in part, due to its combination of linguistic and nonlinguistic symbols. Although lyrics and music together create the impression of a song, it is typically the lyrics that receive critical attention (Gonzalez & Makay, 1983). Other than that, in a world where the creative industry has witnessed much genre-switching and lack of originality, writing songs serve such functions as becoming one of the ways to express feelings and thoughts (Thompson et al., 2010). Other than that, by writing a song, humans can enhance their cognitive skills and boost their emotions as mentioned by Aryanto (2016) in his case study. In general, the audience may have different interpretations of the lyrics sung. In order for them to understand well the actual meaning of the song lyrics, they must possess semantic skills especially when the lyrics

contain figurative speech. Therefore, semantics in songs surpass the literal meaning, whereby figurative meanings carry deeper interpretations and require more understanding from the listeners.

Rhetorical devices are crucial in ensuring the success of certain media platforms which require interaction between different parties such as advertisements (Chetia, 2015; Zulkipli & Ariffin, 2019). A study by Sroikudrua pointed out that rhymes are crucial in any speaking interaction with the audiences to help the audience retain the main points. According to Nataf et al. (2014), rhetorical devices, also known as stylistic devices or compelling devices, are a technique used in songs to convey or persuade an audience. These devices help writers to signal important ideas and help listeners remember them. Numerous devices are used for songs that exist in the current body of literature. Nataf et al. (2014) reiterated that there are more than thirty (30) rhetorical devices such as anaphora, climax, and personification. The correct usage of rhetorical devices varies according to the context. Rhetorical devices are mainly used to fulfil logos (appeal to logic), pathos (appeal to emotion), ethos (appeal to ethics), and kairos (appeal to time) as described by Nataf et al. (2014).

Ten (10) rhetorical devices are examined in this study which are (1) simile, (2) personification, (3) hyperbole, (4) metaphor, (5) synecdoche, (6) metonymy, (7) irony, (8) allusion, (9) paradox, and (10) symbol. The first rhetorical device is simile which is defined as a comparison of two things using the word such as “like, as” (Jay, 2003) and has been supported by Perrine (1963) who underlined that simile is present when a phrase or word like “than, like, as” is used in a sentence. The second rhetorical device is personification which is defined as a phenomenon when a non-living thing such as ideas or objects acting and receiving the characteristics like a living thing (Knickerbocker & Renninger, 1963). Correspondingly, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) said that personification provides attributes of a human being to an animal or other non-living thing. The third rhetorical device is hyperbole which is when a phrase is overly exaggerated Jay (2003) and this is in agreement with Colston (2015) who mentioned that hyperbole simply means an overstatement. Metaphor is the fourth rhetorical device examined in this study which is used to clarify and compare the similarities between two things (Colston, 2015) while Jay (2003) explains that metaphor compares abstract and concrete concepts.

The fifth rhetorical device is synecdoche which refers to the use of the part wholly. In another part, it means something that represents another thing entirely (Perrine, 1963). The sixth rhetorical device that will be examined in this study is metonymy refers to the use of a word that is closely related to the thing that it actually meant (Perrine, 1963). Irony is the seventh rhetorical device whereby Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that irony refers to saying the opposite of what one means. The eighth rhetorical device is allusion which is characterised as an indirect reference to some well-known place, event or person, but not a comparison in the exact sense (Knickerbocker & Renninger, 1963). Paradox is the ninth rhetorical device where Perrine (1963) defined paradox as a phrase of which the foundation is illogically unacceptable. The final rhetorical device is symbol which refers to a person, situation, object or action that stands for something bigger (Knickerbocker & Renninger, 1963).

The essentiality of rhetorical devices is unarguable as it functions as a bridge in conveying the intended purpose (Salajan, 2017). However, the literature on the usage of rhetorical devices in songs is notably minimal as stressed by Arifah (2016). Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap by analysing Taylor Swift’s *All Too Well* (10-minute version). A thorough analysis of the devices used in this song enriches the figurative language literature as it is a recently re-released song that has been rarely done in the entertainment industry. Thus, the first research objective of this study is to identify the types of rhetorical devices used in the *All Too Well* 10-minute version by Taylor Swift. The second research objective is to identify the frequency of the rhetorical devices used in *All Too Well*.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Content analysis was employed in this study as this method allows the researcher to interpret words and images depending on the scope of the study

and allows them to generate inferences (Crossman, 2020). This approach was deemed appropriate for small samples as this study analysed one song which was Taylor Swift’s single, All Too Well (10 Minute Version). This song was selected as it held the record for the longest song (10 minutes 13 seconds) that reached the number one spot on the Billboard Hot 100. Data collection began as the lyrics of the song were transcribed after listening various times. Subsequently, the transcribed lyrics were given to a transcriptionist for checking. The lyrics were also cross-checked with the lyrics found online to ensure that there was no discrepancy. The final count of words in this song was reported to be 462 words. Once the lyrics were deemed ready for analysis, the lyrics were then transferred and analysed in Atlas.ti thematically while deductive coding was employed in coding the rhetorical devices and supporting excerpts found in the song. Chandra and Shang (2019) defined deductive coding as a refers to a coding process that investigates whether data are consistent with prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses. The steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in executing the thematic analysis are illustrated in Figure 1. Microsoft Excel was also used for the tabulation of the rhetorical devices found in this song. The results from the analysis were cross-checked by an intercoder to ensure that the identified rhetorical devices were accurate and also to establish validity.

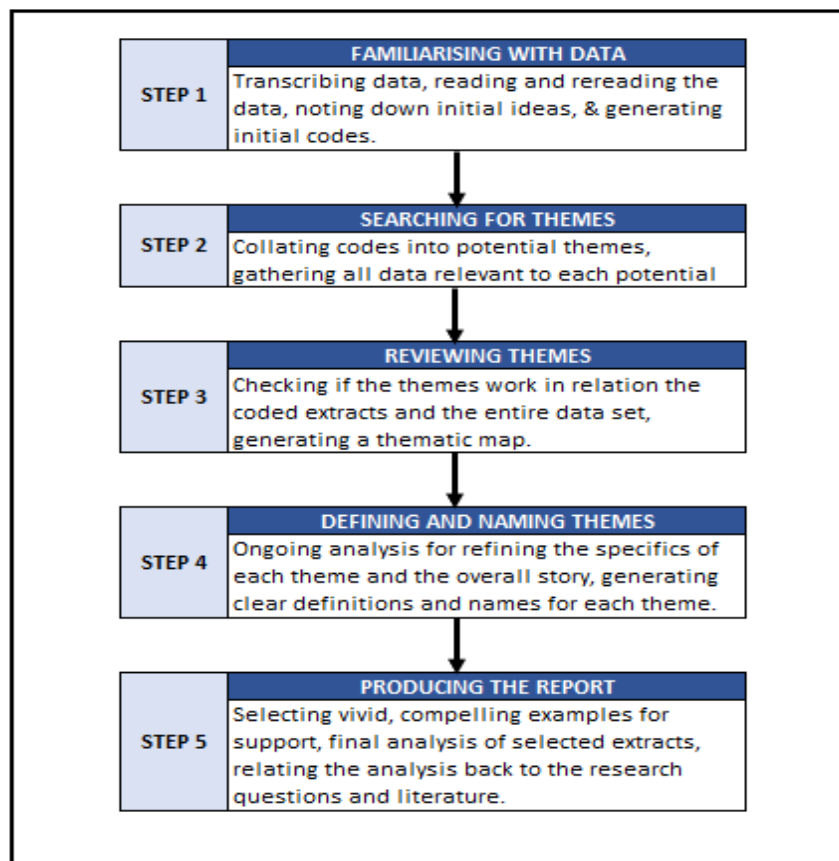


Figure 1: Steps in Thematic Analysis

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Research Objective 1

The first research objective of this study is to identify the types of rhetorical devices used in the All Too Well (ATW henceforth) 10-minute version by Taylor Swift. Table 1 presents the ten rhetorical

devices alongside the excerpts which employed the devices. A brief explanation was also provided in Table 1 to elaborate on the excerpts.

Table 1: Analysis of Rhetorical Devices and Lyrics Excerpts

No.	Rhetorical Device	Lyric Excerpts (Timestamp)	Discussion
1	Simile	You kept me like a secret (3.34-3.36)	This line contains the word “like” which compares the existence of the protagonist to a hidden secret.
		I kept you like an oath (3:37 - 3:39)	This line contained the word “like” which compared how the girl kept the guy to an oath which portrayed how the girl was really serious and faithful toward the guy in their relationship just like a person keeps and vows to their words.
		And you call me up again just to break me like a promise (4:25 - 4:31)	This line used “like” to compare how he tried to call her just to end the relationship which made her downhearted as it was being compared to how others would feel when someone breaks promises.
		5:33 - 5:37: Sipping coffee like you were on a late-night show (5:33 - 5:37)	The lyricists compared the similarity using “like” to make a comparison between how the guy casually sips his coffee and jokes around with her father just like when someone is being invited to a late-night show where the scene is humorous, free and easy.
2	Personification	Time won't fly it's like I'm paralyzed by it (6:02 - 6:06)	In this line, the lyricists gave time, which is a non- living thing, a human characteristic which is “fly” to indicate how the time felt like stopping that she had not changed and gotten to move on at all.
		And did the twin flame bruise paint you blue (7:44 - 7:49)	This line gave life to “twin flame bruise”, a non-living thing with a human characteristic which was to “paint”. Twin flame refers to two lovers that have very deep soul connections with each other. She used bruise to show that the breakup left a mark to her and asked whether it turned blue and did it hurt him the same way.
3	Hyperbole	Till we were dead and gone and buried, check the pulse and come back swearing, it's the same (2:32 - 2:37)	This line excessively how much the girl wanted the guy to tell her what they were having was real, but indeed he did not, even until after they split.
		And that made me want to die (5:04 - 5:07)	This line came up after the line where he said the age gap made them split and how the excuse hurt her so much that she felt like dying.

4	Metaphor	Autumn leaves falling down like pieces into place (1:05 - 1:09)	Metaphor was used as the lyricists described how the autumn leaves which was a concrete concept, fell down like pieces, which is a concept or abstract. It told how the relationship was great and wonderful in the beginning, but it was destroyed by what happened between them just like when autumn leaves fell which represented the death of the relationship.
		I'm a crumpled up piece of paper lying here (4:36 - 4:40)	“I” in this line represented the concrete while “a crumpled up piece of paper” referred to the idea of the girl, herself. She compared herself to a crumpled up paper just like when an artist doesn’t want his work, he will crump the paper and throw it to the side with his writing still on it just like a breakup, when someone is left alone with the memories of the relationship, just like a crumpled paper, once it has formed into a ball shape, it will never be perfect again.
		A never-needy, ever-lovely jewel whose shine reflects on you (5:10 - 5:17)	This metaphor line referred to how the guy symbolised the girl as a shiny pretty thing that he could wear as an arm- candy and how he would only love her when she made him look good that he got a girl that was way younger than him.
		I'm a soldier who's returning half her weight (7:39 - 7:44)	When she went into the relationship, she was healthy and fit. However, after the relationship, she experienced terrible hurt until she lost weight, as well as lost herself from the exertion.
5	Synecdoche	After three months in the grave (2:39 - 2:41)	This line referred to being in a three-month painful relationship, but she generalised it by including even all the happy moments she had.
6	Metonymy	That magic's not here no more (1:18 - 1:20)	The word “magic” here referred to the love and happiness they felt and had while in the relationship that was described as magical, showing how it felt like a dream, unreal and wonderful, but it was no longer there at the end of their relationship.
		Just between us, did the love affair maim you, too? (7:50 - 7:54)	The word “maim” in the line did not directly refer to a body part that is permanently damaged due to a wound or injury, but instead, the lyricists were asking whether the breakup they had hurt the guy as much as it hurt her.

7	Irony	And I might be okay, but I'm not fine at all (1:20 - 1:30)	This line had the essence of irony when the lyricists used the modal verb “might” to show that she was trying to forget him although it brought a sense of unsure. However, the opposite occurred in the next line. When the lyricists were trying to prove that she would be okay one day, she was actually not fine at all.
8	Allusion	From when your Brooklyn broke my skin and bones (7:34 - 7:38)	This line contained the name “Brooklyn” as it is the place in New York City, where the guy's sister's house was located, and where they ended their relationship.
9	Paradox	But maybe this thing was a masterpiece, ‘till you tore it all up (4:10 - 4:15)	This line in the song carried the word “masterpiece” that represented the wonderful relationship they had, but it then contrasted with the next line when the lyricists thought it was the reason why the guy ended it.
10	Symbol	I walked through the door with you, the air was cold, but something 'bout it felt like home somehow (0:24 - 0:32)	The protagonist described how she felt comfortable and safe when entering through a door with the man although she felt the place was slightly ominous by describing “the air was cold”.
		After three months in the grave (2:39 - 2:41)	This line stipulated being in 3 months of lull, dark, restrictive, alone and painful relationship by symbolising it as being in a grave, which referred to a hole where it is only you alone suffering in it without being able to move.

3.2 Research Objective 2

The second research objective of this study was to determine the frequency and percentage of the rhetorical devices used in All Too Well. The analysis in Table 2 reported that simile and metaphor were primarily used (20%) compared to other rhetorical devices. In contrast, synecdoche, irony, allusion, and paradox were only used once (5%) in All Too Well. Personification, hyperbole, and metonymy were also identified to have been utilized twice (10%) in the song. A summary of the analysis is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Rhetorical Devices

No	Rhetorical Device	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Simile	4	20
2	Personification	2	10
3	Hyperbole	2	10
4	Metaphor	4	20
5	Synecdoche	1	5
6	Metonymy	2	10
7	Irony	1	5
8	Allusion	1	5
9	Paradox	1	5

10	Symbol	2	10
	TOTAL	20	100

4. Conclusion

The first research objective of this study is to identify the types of rhetorical devices used in the All Too Well 10-minute version by Taylor Swift. The second research objective is to identify the frequency of the rhetorical devices used in ATW. This study identified that simile and metaphor were the most commonly used rhetorical devices in Taylor Swift's All Too Well. This contradicts a study by Tikham (2022) who reported that simile is least used in his analysis of pageant speeches. However, Tikham's (2022) highlighted that synecdoche was also the least popular which is in harmony with our results as synecdoche was used only once in All Too Well. In this study, hyperbole was used twice (10%) which is quite extensive and this corresponds to a study by Zulkipli and Ariffin (2019) which reported that hyperbole is a prominent rhetorical device used in attracting audiences. Therefore, this study demonstrated differences from previous results reported by other scholars.

The finding of this study is hoped to have extended the knowledge of the use of rhetorical devices in writings such as song lyrics to make it more meaningful and how the meanings are contrasted with the lexical meaning interpreted by some audiences. The finding of this study could be useful mainly for three parties. The first one is the general audience where the findings could benefit the audience who may be interested in finding out how figurative language is used creatively in song lyrics. Other than that, it also could serve as a guide for those who have trouble understanding the proper use of rhetorical devices. Lastly, scholars in the language and linguistics context could benefit the academicians who study formal language learning by making them more aware of the language they are learning, which can assist them to evolve their skills.

Nevertheless, several limitations were experienced by this study which can be investigated by future studies. As the scope of this study was only limited to ten (10) rhetorical devices, an analysis of other rhetorical devices such as alliteration would provide more comprehensive results in understanding the use of these stylistic devices in songs. Another potential avenue for future research is to examine the effectiveness of WH-questions as recommended by Neitsch and Niebuhr (2022). The use of WH-questions as a rhetorical device in songs as this may trigger the audience to not only question their existing assumptions but also lead to higher quality connection with the song itself. Scholars are also recommended to quantitatively measure the extent of influence rhetorical devices has on listeners' emotions by quantifying the emotional state before and after listening to songs. An examination of the use of rhetorical devices in political speeches will also enrich the body of literature as suggested by Anuar (2021). Therefore, it is hoped that this study will spark more interest in this field which will elevate the recognition of the importance of rhetorical devices in media.

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