

The Sense of Love and Heartbreak in Tyler, the Creator's Album "Igor": Figurative Language Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how figurative language was used to convey emotions of love and heartbreak in the song lyrics of IGOR, an album by Tyler, the Creator. As a contemporary artist known for emotional depth and creative expression, Tyler's work provided rich material for literary analysis. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, applying Kennedy and Gioia's (1995) theory to identify figurative language and Leech's (1981) framework to analyze types of meaning. Data were collected through documentation of official song lyrics and textual analysis, which involved close reading, identification of figurative expressions, and interpretation of their underlying meanings. The findings showed that Tyler frequently employed metaphors, personification, and hyperbole, which intensified the portrayal of emotional struggles and deepened the listener's engagement with the themes of longing, love, and heartbreak. The analysis also revealed the presence of connotative, affective, and reflected meanings that enriched the emotional resonance of the songs. In conclusion, this study demonstrated the literary value of song lyrics and affirmed the relevance of applying literary theories to music as a form of modern literature.

Keywords: figurative language, meanings, love, heartbreak, Tyler, the Creator, song lyrics

1. Introduction

Figurative language plays an important role in both literature and music, helping artists express emotions and ideas that go beyond the literal meaning of words. According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995), devices like simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and paradox allow writers and lyricists to add depth, emotion, and imagination to their work. In song lyrics, especially in genres like hip-hop and R&B helps capture powerful experiences, such as falling in love, dealing with heartbreak, or exploring one's identity.

Tyler, the Creator's 2019 album IGOR is a strong example of how music can tell an emotional story through figurative language. Known for its unique production style and honest storytelling, IGOR follows a journey through romantic infatuation, emotional conflict, heartbreak, and letting go. Through poetic and expressive lyrics, Tyler gives listeners a window into the emotional highs and lows of love, something many people can relate to. The album not

only showcases his creativity but also highlights how music and literature can overlap through language.

This study looks closely at how figurative language is used in the lyrics of IGOR to express feelings of love and heartbreak. By analyzing the lyrics and exploring the meanings behind the words, the research aims to understand how Tyler, the Creator turns personal emotions into a relatable, artistic experience.

While previous studies, such as those by Ladisa (2023) on Billie Eilish's figurative language, or Wahyuda et al. (2022) on metaphor in Coldplay's lyrics, have focused on identifying types of figurative language or analyzing metaphors in select songs, many lack a comprehensive exploration of how such devices work together to convey layered emotional meanings within an entire album. Moreover, few address how these expressions are interpreted through semantic frameworks that allow for emotional, associative, or symbolic interpretations.

This study is grounded in Kennedy and Gioia's (1995) theory of figurative language and Leech's (1981) semantic theory, which together provide a framework for examining how metaphors, personification, hyperbole, and other figurative devices convey emotional meaning. The semantic analysis focuses specifically on three meaning types: connotative, affective, and reflected meanings, which guide the interpretation of how Tyler, the Creator's lyrical techniques in IGOR articulate themes of love, heartbreak, and emotional transformation.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enable listeners and readers to engage more critically with song lyrics as literary texts. By analyzing the figurative devices throughout the IGOR album, this research reveals the interpretive richness of contemporary music and demonstrates how semantic theory can illuminate deeper emotional realities embedded in lyrics. It also contributes to literary and linguistic scholarship by extending the application of established theories to modern musical discourse.

The research is guided by the following questions: (1) What types of figurative language are used in IGOR to express themes of love and heartbreak? and (2) What meanings, specifically connotative, affective, and reflected meanings, are conveyed through these figurative expressions? Addressing these questions aims to refine interpretative strategies for both academic inquiry and casual listening, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of lyrical storytelling in contemporary music.

2. Methods

The data for this research were drawn from the song lyrics in IGOR, a 2019 studio album by Tyler, the Creator. The album was selected due to its cohesive and emotional narrative centered on love and heartbreak, as well as its expressive and carefully crafted lyrics, which provide a rich source for analyzing figurative language. To ensure accuracy, the lyrics were

obtained from the Genius website, a widely cited platform known for user-verified and, in many cases, artist-approved transcriptions.

Data collection was conducted using the documentation method, with note-taking employed to identify and organize figurative expressions that reflect the album's emotional progression. The study followed Creswell's (2023) descriptive qualitative research design.

The analysis was carried out in two main stages. First, figurative language was identified and categorized according to Kennedy and Gioia's (1995) framework, which includes simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, paradox, and other figures of speech. Second, the meanings behind these expressions were examined using Leech's (1981) semantic theory, with a focus on connotative, affective, and reflected meanings.

The process involved manually reading each lyric, marking the figurative elements, and grouping them based on their type and emotional significance. This approach enabled a detailed understanding of how the lyrics convey complex emotions and experiences associated with love and heartbreak.

3. Findings and Discussion

This part presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of figurative language in Tyler, The Creator's *IGOR* album. It discusses the types of figurative language found in the lyrics and how they convey the sense of love and heartbreak. Each example is examined in its lyrical context to highlight how Tyler expresses emotional depth, vulnerability, and complex relationship dynamics through non-literal language. The discussion also links the findings to the theoretical frameworks of figurative language (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995) and semantic meaning (Leech, 1981).

A. Simile

According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 680), a simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things using "like" or "as" to highlight a shared quality or emotion. Similes help clarify ideas by drawing parallels between familiar concepts and more abstract ones, making them easier to understand or visualize.

Data 1

From the song "*I THINK*"

You drive me cuckoo and not car (Skate)

'Cause I want you like Leon Ware

In the line "*I want you like Leon Ware*," Tyler employs a simile by directly comparing his desire for someone to the romantic style and emotional depth characteristic of Leon Ware's music. Leon Ware, a celebrated R&B artist, is known for creating soulful love songs that evoke intimacy, passion, and tenderness. By invoking this cultural reference, Tyler enriches the

expression of desire beyond its literal meaning, suggesting an affection that is nostalgic and emotionally profound rather than casual attraction.

According to Kennedy and Gioia's (1995) framework, similes create vivid imagery by linking two distinct ideas through explicit comparison. In this lyric, the simile draws on the listener's familiarity with Leon Ware's artistry to convey a layered emotional state, one that blends longing, vulnerability, and romantic intensity. This also reflects Leech's (1981) concept of connotative meaning, as the emotional impact arises from shared cultural associations with Leon Ware's music.

Data 2

From the song "*GONE, GONE / THANK YOU*"

Felt like summer to my December

Was it my August? Shit, I don't remember

In this line, Tyler uses a simile to compare the warmth and happiness brought by someone to the coldness and loneliness he was feeling. "*Summer*" typically symbolizes warmth, joy, and life, while "*December*" is often associated with cold, endings, and emotional stillness. By saying someone "*felt like summer to my December*," Tyler shows how that person brought light into a dark period of his life. This lyric carries connotative meaning because it goes beyond the literal comparison of seasons. It taps into the emotional associations we have with summer and winter, turning the seasons into symbols for emotional states, love bringing warmth into heartbreak. The line subtly reveals how deeply this relationship affected him, even if it was only temporary.

B. Metaphor

A metaphor, according to Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 680), is a figure of speech in which one thing is directly compared to another, unrelated thing, suggesting that they are the same in some way. It does not use "like" or "as" for comparison, instead presenting one thing as if it were the other.

Data 3

From the "*EARTHQUAKE*"

'Cause you make my earth quake

Oh, you make my earth quake

In this data, Tyler, the Creator describes the emotional effect of love through a metaphor, comparing his feelings to an "*earthquake*." He is not talking about a physical tremor, but rather how someone shakes him up emotionally. Just like an earthquake disrupts everything in its path, this person's presence causes emotional chaos and instability. This lyric carries affective meaning because it captures the depth of Tyler's feelings, he is overwhelmed, emotionally

shaken, and possibly scared by how powerful the connection is. The metaphor highlights how love, for him, is not soft or gentle but intense and uncontrollable.

Data 4

From the “*A BOY IS A GUN**”

[3-6] How come you're the best to me? I know you're the worst for me

Boy, you're sweet as sugar, diabetic to the first degree

This Data uses a metaphor to describe a love that is both irresistible and harmful. Calling someone “*sweet as sugar*” suggests charm, affection, and attraction, but pairing it with “*diabetic to the first degree*” adds a sharp twist, implying that the sweetness is too much, even dangerous. This contrast reveals how something that feels good can also cause emotional damage. The lyric carries reflected meaning, because it holds a double edge, sweetness and sickness, love and pain, allowing listeners to feel both the joy and the toxicity wrapped up in the relationship. It reflects the kind of love that feels addictive, but ultimately overwhelming and emotionally draining.

C. Personification

Personification, as explained to Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 686), is a type of figurative language in which human qualities or characteristics are attributed to non-human objects, animals, or abstract ideas. It makes the inanimate or abstract seem alive and relatable by giving them human actions, emotions, or thoughts.

Data 5

From the song “*PUPPET*”

I'm your puppet

You control me

I'm your puppet

I don't know me

In this lyric, Tyler uses personification and metaphor to describe the loss of his identity in a controlling relationship. By calling himself a “*puppet*,” he suggests that he’s being manipulated, his actions, emotions, and decisions are no longer his own. The repetition emphasizes how deeply he feels trapped under someone else’s influence. The line “*I don't know me*” adds emotional weight, showing how this control has made him feel disconnected from himself. This lyric contains affective meaning, as it reflects Tyler’s emotional vulnerability, confusion, and sense of helplessness. It powerfully conveys how love, when imbalanced or obsessive, can take away a person’s sense of self.

Data 6

From the song “*GONE, GONE / THANK YOU*”

Whether it's rain or shine, I know I'm fine for now

My love's gone, my love's gone

My love's gone, oh, gone

Tyler expresses a deep sense of loss through personification, portraying love as something that has physically left him. Instead of simply saying he no longer feels love, he frames it as if “*love*” is a person who walked away, making the absence feel more vivid and emotionally personal. The repeated phrase “*my love’s gone*” reinforces the emptiness and finality of heartbreak. This lyric contains affective meaning, as it reveals Tyler’s emotional state, quiet sorrow, acceptance, and a lingering sadness that follows emotional separation. It’s a simple yet powerful way to show how love’s departure leaves a lasting emotional void.

D. Apostrophe

An apostrophe, according to Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 687), is a figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses an absent person, an inanimate object, or an abstract concept as if it were an apostrophe and capable of responding.

Data 7

From the song “*NEW MAGIC WAND*”

Please don't leave me now

Please don't leave me now (Don't leave)

Please don't leave me now

Please don't leave me now (Don't leave)

In this data, Tyler uses an apostrophe by directly addressing the absent lover with the repeated plea “*Please don’t leave me now,*” creating an intimate and urgent emotional appeal. This direct address highlights the speaker’s fear of abandonment and deep vulnerability. The repetition reflects the speaker’s inner turmoil and desperate need for connection, revealing a fragile emotional state where the threat of loss feels immediate and overwhelming. Through this apostrophe, the lyric conveys reflected meaning by showing the raw human experience of clinging to a relationship in crisis, emphasizing how emotional pain can drive one to plead aloud to someone who may no longer be present or willing to stay.

E. Hyperbole

Hyperbole, as defined by Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 687), is an exaggerated statement

or claim that is not meant to be taken literally but rather is used for emphasis or to create a dramatic effect. Hyperboles often create a sense of urgency, importance, or intensity around an idea or feeling.

Data 8

From the song “*EARFQUAKE*”

We ain't gotta ball, D-Rose, huh
I don't give a fuck 'bout nothin', huh
Breathin' like fuck my lungs, huh
Just might call my lawyer, huh

In this lyric, Tyler uses hyperbole to express intense emotional numbness and rebellion. The phrase “*I don't give a fuck 'bout nothin'*” exaggerates his indifference, suggesting a complete emotional shutdown or defiance toward everything around him. Similarly, “*Breathin' like fuck my lungs*” amplifies physical and emotional exhaustion, implying that even the basic act of breathing feels painful or burdensome. This hyperbolic language conveys affective meaning by reflecting Tyler's frustration, despair, and rejection of vulnerability. It powerfully illustrates how overwhelming emotions can lead to a state of detachment and self-destructive defiance.

Data 9

From the song “*RUNNING OUT OF TIME*”

Runnin' out of time, runnin' out of time, runnin' out of time
Runnin' out of time to make you love me
Runnin' out of time, runnin' out of time
To make you love me

In these lyrics, Tyler employs repetition and hyperbole to intensify the sense of urgency and fear of losing love. The repeated phrase “runnin' out of time” both exaggerates the perceived scarcity of opportunity and creates a rhythmic momentum that mirrors the speaker's emotional anxiety. This combination amplifies the emotional tension, illustrating the perception of love as a race against time where every moment feels critical.

This expression aligns with Leech's (1981) notion of affective meaning, as the repetition conveys heightened emotions such as desperation, longing, and apprehension. By embedding these feelings within the song's structure and rhythm, Tyler underscores the intense emotional stakes of attempting to secure another's love before it is irretrievably lost.

F. Understatement

Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 687) describe understatement as a figure of speech where the significance of a situation is deliberately minimized, often for ironic or humorous effect. It can also create a subtle or modest tone.

Data 10

From the song “*EARFQUAKE*”

And you don't want my conversation (I don't want no conversation)

I just need some confirmation on how you feel, for real (For real)

In this data, Tyler downplays his plea in the phrase “*I just need some confirmation on how you feel, for real,*” using understatement to convey a deep longing for reassurance and emotional clarity. By saying “*just need,*” he makes the request seem modest and simple, even though it holds significant emotional weight. This understatement conveys affective meaning by reflecting vulnerability and uncertainty, revealing how important and urgent this confirmation is to him despite the modest phrasing. It highlights the quiet desperation behind seeking genuine connection and honesty in a relationship.

G. Metonymy

According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 687), metonymy is a figure of speech where one thing is represented by something closely associated with it, offering a more symbolic or indirect way of referencing the subject.

Data 11

From the song “*PUPPET*”

After I start my vehicle

Drive to your city 'cause we live an hour apart

Land at your driveway and put it in park

In this lyric, Tyler uses metonymy in the phrase “*Drive to your city*” to represent the person he longs for through the mention of their location. Rather than naming the individual directly, he refers to “*your city,*” allowing the place to stand in for the person, which emphasizes how closely he associates them with that space. This metonymy conveys affective meaning by highlighting the emotional distance between them, not just physical but also relational. It reflects his effort and willingness to bridge that gap, showing how love can make someone chase a connection even when separated by space or circumstance.

H. Synecdoche

Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 688) define Synecdoche as a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole, or the whole is used to represent a part. It works by simplifying complex ideas, allowing for more vivid or concise communication.

Data 12

From the song "*GONE, GONE / THANK YOU*"

Thank you for the time

Thank you for your mind, mind

This data includes synecdoche in the phrase "*Thank you for your mind*" by letting "*mind*" represent the whole person, specifically their thoughts, personality, and inner self. The word "*mind*" carries connotative meaning, it suggests more than just intelligence, hinting at emotional depth, creativity, and the unique way the person thinks and feels. By expressing gratitude for this part of someone, Tyler shows that he values deeper, non-physical qualities, highlighting a meaningful and thoughtful connection. This connotation adds emotional richness, suggesting admiration for the person's essence rather than just their presence.

I. Paradox

Kennedy and Gioia (1995, p. 688) describe a paradox as a statement that seems contradictory at first but actually reveals a deeper emotional or philosophical truth. Paradoxes provoke thought by challenging conventional ideas.

Data 13

From the song "*ARE WE STILL FRIENDS*"

Are we still friends? Can we be friends?

Are we still friends? I've got to know—

Know

Throughout these lyrics, Tyler uses paradox in the line "*Are we still friends? Can we be friends?*" by placing two seemingly contradictory questions side by side. If they are still friends, the second question shouldn't need to be asked-but asking both suggests emotional uncertainty and conflict. This paradox highlights the blurred line between maintaining past relationships and trying to redefine them in the present. It has reflected meaning, as it shows Tyler's inner struggle between acceptance and hope, and his attempts to maintain some form of relationship after emotional damage. This contradiction is intentional, showing the confusion that occurs after heartbreak, where the past and future of a relationship feel unresolved at once.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that figurative language in Tyler, the Creator's album IGOR plays a central role in expressing themes of love, heartbreak, and emotional complexity. Literary devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, and paradox, among others, add depth and nuance to the lyrics, allowing the emotional shifts and evolving relationships in the album to be conveyed with greater intensity.

The analysis also examined the lyrics through Leech's (1981) framework of connotative, affective, and reflected meanings. This revealed how Tyler's word choices carry emotional weight, symbolic associations, and personal significance that extend beyond their literal sense. Such meanings not only shape the listener's interpretation but also heighten the emotional resonance of the album's narrative.

By combining varied figurative devices with layered meanings, IGOR presents a powerful and relatable emotional journey. This study affirms that music can function as more than entertainment; it can serve as a rich form of literary and cultural storytelling that speaks to universal human experiences.

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