



A Comparative Cognitive and Rhetorical Analysis of Metaphors in “Rearrange My World”

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Abstract: Metaphor plays an important role in shaping emotional meaning in song lyrics; however, most previous studies examine metaphor using a single analytical framework, resulting in limited comparative perspectives on how metaphor operates cognitively and rhetorically. This study aims to identify metaphorical expressions in the song “Rearrange My World” by Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County and to compare their interpretations using Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Goatly’s rhetorical classification. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of the official song lyrics, in which metaphorical expressions are identified, categorized, and interpreted using the two theoretical frameworks. The findings reveal eight metaphorical expressions, including four ontological and four structural metaphors under Conceptual Metaphor Theory, while under Goatly’s classification they are categorized into three subjective, two active, one inactive, one asymmetric, and one dead metaphor. These findings suggest that metaphor in contemporary song lyrics functions both as a cognitive mechanism structuring abstract experience and as a rhetorical device shaping emotional expression. The study contributes to metaphor research by demonstrating the value of integrating cognitive and rhetorical approaches in the analysis of a song lyric.

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Contemporary music, Goatly’s Classification, Metaphors, Song lyrics*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary means of expressing ideas, emotions, and cultural identity, shaping how people interact with and understand the world. In literary contexts it functions not only to

convey information but also to create meaning through imagery and symbolism (Fromkin et al., 2003). In contemporary society, symbolic communication circulates widely through mass media, particularly music, with social media

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accelerating its reach and popularity (Chen & Tai, 2025). Digital platforms further influence the production, distribution, and accessibility of music worldwide (Hesmondhalgh, 2025). Because song lyrics are frequently heard and shared among audiences, they play a central role in framing emotions, relationships, and personal experiences. Consequently, the metaphorical patterns embedded in lyrics influence how emotional experiences are conceptualized, making metaphor in popular music a significant linguistic phenomenon to examine.

Song lyrics are a form of literary expression that reflects everyday experiences in modern society. Through carefully chosen words, songwriters express emotions, thoughts, and personal stories often relying on metaphor to transform abstract ideas into concrete representations. Metaphor is not merely a decorative feature of poetic language but a fundamental cognitive mechanism that enables individuals to understand abstract experiences through more familiar domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This perspective is further supported by research emphasizing the close relationship between metaphor, emotional experience, and everyday conceptualization (Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2010). Therefore, examining metaphor in widely consumed cultural texts such as song lyrics contributes not only to literary analysis but also to understanding how emotional meaning is constructed and interpreted within society.

In addition to its cognitive function, metaphor also operates as a communicative and rhetorical device within discourse. Goatly (1997) highlights how metaphor functions within specific communicative contexts, shaping interpretation through degrees of creativity, subjectivity, and conventionality. Together, cognitive and rhetorical perspectives indicate that metaphor plays a dual role: structuring conceptual understanding while simultaneously shaping expressive meaning in cultural communication.

A number of previous studies have examined metaphor use in song lyrics. Nasution et al.

(2024), for example, applied Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Lonestar's song 'I'm Already There' and found a balanced use of structural and ontological metaphors, suggesting that song lyrics can represent cognitive interpretations of emotion. Nugraheny & Yuwita (2023) analyzed metaphors in SZA's lyrics and showed how relationships between source and target domains influence listeners' understanding of meaning. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most rely on a single theoretical framework, either focusing on conceptual structure or on rhetorical function. Studies that comparatively apply both Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Goatly's rhetorical framework to the same set of song lyrics remain limited, leading to a lack of integrated explanations of how metaphor operates simultaneously across cognitive and rhetorical dimensions.

To address this gap, the present study examines metaphorical expressions in the song "Rearrange My World" by Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County. The song is selected through purposive sampling because its lyrical content addresses themes of emotion, identity, and interpersonal relationships that are central to the analysis of metaphorical expressions. By applying both Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Goatly's rhetorical framework (Goatly, 1997), the study integrates cognitive and rhetorical perspectives to provide a more comprehensive explanation of metaphorical meaning in song lyrics, thereby contributing to broader metaphor research.

This study focuses only on metaphorical expressions in the selected song and does not examine other forms of figurative language such as simile or personification. The analysis is limited to the theoretical frameworks proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Goatly (1997). Accordingly, the research addresses the following questions: (1) What metaphors are found in "Rearrange My World"? (2) What general meanings do these metaphors convey? (3) How do Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor



Theory and Goatly's rhetorical approach differ in interpreting the identified metaphors?

1. Metaphor in Language

Metaphor is a fundamental feature of human language and cognition. It is not merely a stylistic device used for artistic purposes, but a key mechanism through which people understand and communicate abstract ideas. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) argue that metaphor is deeply rooted in human thought, stating that people understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. Through this process, abstract concepts such as love, time, or emotion are explained using more concrete and familiar experiences.

Metaphor therefore plays an essential role in meaning-making. By linking abstract ideas to concrete domains, metaphor allows speakers and listeners to structure experiences and interpret meaning more effectively. This cognitive function makes metaphor particularly important in expressive forms of language, including literary texts and song lyrics.

In the context of music, metaphor enables songwriters to convey emotional experiences and personal narratives in a concise yet meaningful way. Through metaphorical language, complex feelings such as longing, hope, or emotional struggle can be expressed using concrete imagery that is accessible to listeners. As a result, metaphor contributes both to the aesthetic quality of song lyrics and to their communicative power.

2. Song Lyrics as Figurative and Expressive Texts

Song lyrics are widely recognised as expressive texts that combine poetic language, narrative elements, and emotional representation within popular cultural production (Frith, 1996). As creative works, lyrics employ figurative devices such as metaphor, symbolism, and imagery to convey complex emotional experiences in condensed textual form (Moore, 2012). Because of their aesthetic and expressive qualities, song lyrics are frequently examined in literary and cultural studies as texts that articulate themes of identity, relationships, and personal

transformation through stylistic and figurative language (Frith, 1996).

The figurative nature of song lyrics enables abstract emotional experiences to be represented through concrete images and symbolic expressions, allowing audiences to interpret meaning beyond literal language (Semino, 2008). Through widespread circulation in contemporary media and popular culture, these figurative expressions contribute to the formation of shared emotional narratives and cultural interpretations (Frith, 1996). Consequently, examining metaphor in song lyrics provides important insights into how expressive texts construct emotional meaning and communicate subjective experience, making them an appropriate and meaningful object of analysis within literary studies (Kövecses, 2010; Moore, 2012).

Because metaphor plays a central role in structuring emotional meaning in lyrical texts, theoretical approaches that examine both the conceptual organisation and rhetorical functioning of metaphor provide an appropriate analytical foundation for the study of song lyrics (Goatly, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These complementary perspectives allow metaphor to be examined not only as a cognitive mechanism that structures abstract experience but also as a communicative resource that shapes expressive and stylistic meaning within contemporary musical discourse.

3. Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in *Metaphors We Live By*. This theory proposes that metaphor is not only a linguistic expression but also a fundamental cognitive process. According to CMT, people understand abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete conceptual domains through systematic relationships known as conceptual metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) classify conceptual metaphors into three main types: structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and orientational metaphors. This classification

provides a useful framework for identifying and analyzing metaphorical expressions in language, particularly in texts that involve emotional and experiential content such as song lyrics.

4. Types of Metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) classify conceptual metaphors into three primary types: structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and orientational metaphors. These categories describe how abstract experiences are systematically understood through different conceptual mappings that shape everyday language and cognition.

Structural metaphors involve understanding one complex concept through the structure of another. A well-known example is the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, in which arguments are understood as battles involving attacks, defenses, and strategies. Through this mapping, structural metaphors influence not only linguistic expression but also how individuals think about and participate in social interaction.

Ontological metaphors allow abstract concepts to be understood as entities or substances. Through this type of metaphor, intangible experiences such as time, emotions, or thoughts are treated as objects that can be possessed, controlled, or affected. For example, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY conceptualizes time as a valuable resource that can be spent, saved, or wasted. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that ontological metaphors help simplify abstract experiences and shape how individuals respond to them in everyday life.

Oriental metaphors organize concepts through spatial orientations such as up–down, in–out, or front–back. Expressions such as “feeling down” or “high spirits” illustrate how emotional states are structured through spatial concepts. These metaphors are deeply embedded in everyday language and play an important role in shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and regulate emotional experience (Shen, 1999).

5. Socio-Rhetorical Metaphor (Goatly, 1997)

Goatly (1997), in *The Language of Metaphors*, approaches metaphor from a socio-rhetorical perspective. He argues that metaphor functions not only as a cognitive tool but also as a communicative strategy shaped by social context, ideology, and discourse. Metaphors can be used to persuade, emphasize particular viewpoints, or reflect cultural values.

This approach is especially relevant to song lyrics, which often combine personal emotion with broader social and cultural meanings. Unlike Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which focuses on internal conceptual mappings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Goatly’s framework emphasizes how metaphor operates in real communicative situations and how it affects audiences (Goatly, 1997).

6. Types of Metaphors According to Goatly (1997)

Goatly (1997) categorizes metaphors according to their rhetorical functions in discourse, emphasizing how different types of metaphors contribute to meaning construction and audience interpretation. Active metaphors refer to creative and novel expressions that require conscious interpretation and stimulate the listener’s imagination, often producing strong expressive or persuasive effects. In contrast, inactive metaphors are conventional expressions whose metaphorical meanings are so familiar that speakers and listeners no longer consciously recognize them as metaphorical.

Another category, asymmetric metaphors, involves an unequal relationship between the source and target domains, frequently carrying evaluative or ideological meanings that position one concept in relation to another. Subjective metaphors reflect the speaker’s personal attitudes, emotional judgments, or evaluative stance toward a particular experience or situation, thereby highlighting the interpersonal dimension of metaphor use. Mimetic metaphors imitate sensory experiences such as sight, sound, or physical sensation, enhancing vividness and emotional impact in communicative texts. Finally, dead metaphors are expressions that have become fully

conventionalized through repeated use and are no longer perceived as metaphorical in everyday language.

Together, these categories demonstrate how metaphor functions rhetorically within expressive texts such as song lyrics, not only conveying figurative meaning but also shaping evaluative, emotional, and persuasive effects in communication.

7. Previous Studies

Several studies have examined metaphor use in song lyrics using different theoretical perspectives. Nasution et al. (2024), for example, analyzed metaphorical expressions in Lonestar’s song “I’m Already There” and found dominant structural and ontological metaphors representing emotional attachment and relational distance. Nugraheny & Yuwita (2023) similarly demonstrate that conceptual mappings between source and target domains shape the interpretation of relational meaning in contemporary song lyrics. Additional semantic analyses of popular music albums also report consistent distributions of ontological and structural metaphors, suggesting relatively stable conceptual metaphor patterns across contemporary musical discourse (Rahmat & Dianita, 2024).

In addition to cognitive-semantic approaches, several studies have examined metaphor using Goatly’s (1997) socio-rhetorical classification, which emphasizes the communicative and stylistic functions of metaphor in discourse. (Elia et al., 2024), for instance, applies Goatly’s framework (1997) to analyze metaphor in contemporary pop songs and finds that subjective metaphors frequently dominate emotional themes, highlighting the interpersonal dimension of lyrical expression. Similarly, (Ndraha, 2018) demonstrates that active, inactive, and dead metaphors coexist within pop song lyrics,

showing how creative and conventional metaphorical expressions work together to create both interpretive engagement and communicative familiarity.

Although these studies provide important insights into metaphor use in song lyrics, most investigations rely on a single analytical framework, either focusing on conceptual metaphor structures or rhetorical classifications independently. Studies that comparatively integrate Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Goatly’s socio-rhetorical approach within the same analysis remain limited. Therefore, the present study contributes to metaphor research by applying both frameworks simultaneously to examine how metaphor operates cognitively and rhetorically in the song “Rearrange My World.”

8. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the socio-rhetorical approach proposed by Goatly (1997) to analyze metaphorical expressions in the song “Rearrange My World” by Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County. By combining a cognitive and rhetorical perspective, the study aims to explain both the conceptual structure and communicative function of metaphors in song lyrics.

The analysis involves identifying metaphorical expressions, classifying them according to CMT, and interpreting them using Goatly’s framework. This combined approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how metaphor functions in contemporary music, as integrating cognitive and discourse-rhetorical perspectives allows both conceptual structure and communicative effects to be examined simultaneously (Charteris-Black, 2004; Semino, 2008).

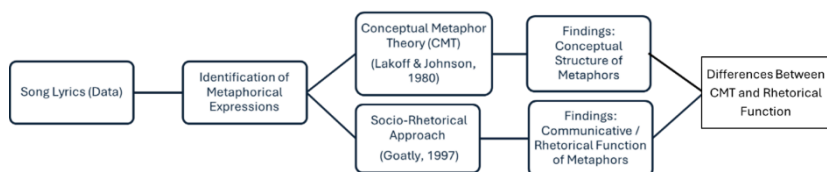


Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Framework

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze metaphorical expressions in the song “Rearrange My World” by Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County. A qualitative method is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meaning and language use rather than measuring numerical data. Qualitative research emphasizes close engagement with textual data and interpretive analysis, making it suitable for examining metaphor in song lyrics, where meaning is context-dependent and symbolically constructed (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Dörnyei, 2007).

1. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument in this study is the researcher, supported by an analytical framework derived from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Goatly’s socio-rhetorical metaphor theory (1997). An analysis table was used as a supporting instrument to record identified metaphorical expressions, classify them according to conceptual metaphor categories, and interpret their rhetorical functions.

2. Data Source

The primary data consist of the official lyrics of “Rearrange My World”, obtained from verified and reliable sources to ensure textual accuracy. The lyrics serve as the sole object of analysis.

Secondary sources, including academic books and journal articles related to metaphor theory and figurative language, are used to support the theoretical framework and guide interpretation.

3. Research Procedure

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic interpretive procedure aligned with the analytical framework presented in Figure 1. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the song by repeatedly listening to it and carefully reading the lyrics. Second, metaphorical expressions were identified based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), particularly instances in which abstract concepts are expressed through more concrete domains. Third, the identified metaphors were analyzed using two parallel frameworks. From the cognitive perspective, metaphors were classified into structural, ontological, and orientational types according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory to reveal their conceptual structures. From the socio-rhetorical perspective, the same metaphors were interpreted using Goatly’s (1997) framework to examine their communicative and rhetorical functions. Finally, the findings from both approaches were compared to identify the differences between the conceptual meanings and rhetorical functions of the metaphors in the song.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

1. Metaphors Found in “Rearrange My World”

1.1 Metaphors Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson)

No	Lyric Excerpt	Conceptual Metaphor Type	Conceptual Mapping
1	Rearrange my world the way you do	Ontological	Life is an object.
2	Can we walk until I know who I am?	Structural	Life is a journey
3	I think about you more than I can spend	Ontological	Thought is money
4	Something’s in the air	Ontological	Emotion is a substance
5	I’m catching up to what you know	Structural	Life is a journey
6	What burdens me	Ontological	Problems are physical burdens

7	Is there room on the road?	Structural	Relationship is a shared journey
8	The people keep moving farther	Structural	Social distance is physical distance

1.2 Metaphors Based on Goatly's Classification

No	Lyric Excerpt	Goatly's Type	Explanation
1	Rearrange my world the way you do	Subjective	Reflects personal emotional dependences.
2	Walk until I know who I am	Active	Imaginative and open-ended metaphor.
3	Think about you more than I can spend	Subjective	Expresses relational and emotional pursuit.
4	Something's in the air	Inactive	Clichéd or semi-conventional metaphor
5	Catching up to what you know	Active	Commonly used and emotionally subdued.
6	Burdens me	Dead	Familiar metaphor with residual emotional weight.
7	Room on the road	Subjective	Personal metaphor expressing desire for inclusion.
8	Keep moving farther	Asymmetric	General emotional expression widely used.

2. General Meaning of the Metaphors

The overall meanings conveyed by the metaphors in *Rearrange My World* reflect a symbolic narrative of love, self-identity, emotional struggle, and interpersonal relationships. Journey-related metaphors such as 'Can we walk until I know who I am?' and 'Catching up to what you know' represent processes of self-discovery and movement within a relationship. Metaphors that conceptualise life and emotions as objects, including 'Rearrange my world the way you do' and 'What burdens me,' portray emotions as tangible experiences that can be reshaped or carried.

The metaphor of money in 'I think about you more than I can spend' expresses the intensity of thought and affection as if they were limited resources. Spatial and atmospheric metaphors such as 'Room on the road,' 'The people keep moving farther,' and 'Something's in the air' highlight themes of closeness, separation, and unspoken emotional states. Overall, these metaphors function as important tools for conveying emotional depth and personal experience in the song.

3. Differences Between Lakoff and Johnson's CMT and Goatly's Rhetorical Approach in Interpreting the Identified Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are

understood using more concrete domains. Within this framework, metaphors function as systematic conceptual mappings that structure how experiences such as love, identity, and emotional struggle are conceptualized. In this study, the theory helps explain the underlying conceptual patterns found in the song lyrics.

In contrast, Goatly's (1997) approach treats metaphor as a rhetorical and communicative device that operates within discourse. Rather than focusing on conceptual structure, this framework emphasizes how metaphors function in language use, including their degree of creativity, subjectivity, and conventionality. While Lakoff and Johnson's theory accounts for how meaning is organized cognitively, Goatly's classification highlights how metaphors contribute to emotional expression and stylistic effect in the lyrics.

Together, these approaches offer complementary perspectives. Lakoff and Johnson's framework clarifies the conceptual basis of metaphorical meaning, whereas Goatly's approach explains how metaphors function rhetorically to shape interpretation and emotional impact.

Discussion

1. Metaphors Found in Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County's "Rearrange My World"

The presence of both structural and ontological metaphors suggests that the song

conceptualizes emotional experience through experiential domains that emphasize movement and objectification. Rather than functioning merely as stylistic devices, these metaphor types reflect broader cognitive tendencies in emotional discourse, where identity formation, relational development, and psychological struggle are structured through embodied experiences such as journeys and physical burdens (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). The diversity of rhetorical categories identified through Goatly's framework further indicates that the song does not rely on a single expressive strategy but combines varying degrees of creativity, subjectivity, and conventionality to shape emotional interpretation. This pattern highlights how contemporary song lyrics integrate conceptual and stylistic variation to enhance expressive depth.

2. General Meaning of the Metaphors in Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County's "Rearrange My World"

The metaphorical patterns collectively construct a narrative of emotional development characterized by uncertainty, relational negotiation, and the gradual formation of self-identity. Journey-based metaphors frame personal growth and relationships as ongoing processes rather than fixed conditions, reinforcing the cognitive role of metaphor in organizing experiential meaning. At the same time, ontological metaphors allow internal emotional states to be externalized and treated as tangible entities, making abstract experiences more communicable and emotionally accessible to listeners. From a discourse perspective, the rhetorical variation of these metaphors contributes to how emotional meaning is perceived, as subjective and active metaphors invite interpretive engagement while conventionalized metaphors establish emotional familiarity and shared understanding (Goatly, 1997; Semino, 2008). Together, these findings suggest that metaphor in song lyrics functions not only to represent emotion but also to shape how emotional experiences are narratively constructed and interpreted within popular cultural discourse.

3. Differences between Lakoff and Johnson's CMT and Goatly's Rhetorical Approach in Interpreting the Identified Metaphors

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the two frameworks address different but complementary dimensions of metaphor. Conceptual Metaphor Theory explains what

conceptual structures underlie metaphorical expressions, revealing the experiential domains that organize emotional meaning through systematic conceptual mappings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In contrast, Goatly's socio-rhetorical framework explains how those metaphors function in discourse, examining how metaphorical expressions influence interpretive emphasis, emotional tone, and communicative positioning (Goatly, 1997). This distinction highlights that understanding metaphor solely at the conceptual level may overlook important communicative dynamics that shape how meaning is experienced by audiences.

These findings are also consistent with previous studies employing Goatly's rhetorical classification, which report that subjective, active, and conventionalized metaphors frequently co-occur in song lyrics to balance interpretive creativity and communicative familiarity (Elia et al., 2024; Ndraha, 2018).

Previous studies such as Nasution et al. (2024) and Nugraheny and Yuwita (2023), which relied primarily on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, successfully identified conceptual metaphor patterns but did not comparatively examine their rhetorical functions. By integrating cognitive and socio-rhetorical perspectives, the present study demonstrates that metaphor analysis benefits from examining both conceptual organization and communicative operation simultaneously, supporting broader discourse-metaphor research emphasizing the multi-level nature of metaphor interpretation (Semino, 2008; Charteris-Black, 2004). Overall, the findings indicate that metaphor in contemporary song lyrics operates at both cognitive and communicative levels, structuring emotional understanding while shaping how that understanding is expressed and interpreted in discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined metaphorical expressions in the song "Rearrange My World" by Daniel Caesar and Rex Orange County using two complementary frameworks: the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Goatly's socio-rhetorical classification of metaphor (1997). The analysis identified eight metaphorical expressions, which were categorised as structural and ontological metaphors under Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and as active, inactive, subjective, asymmetric, and dead metaphors under Goatly's framework.



The application of Lakoff and Johnson's theory demonstrates how metaphors organise abstract experiences such as love, identity, thought, and emotional struggle through concrete conceptual domains including journeys, objects, money, and space. These mappings show how the song structures emotional experience in ways that are cognitively accessible and relatable. In contrast, Goatly's framework highlights how the same metaphors function rhetorically by shaping emotional tone, personal perspective, and stylistic impact through varying degrees of creativity, subjectivity, and conventionality.

By integrating both perspectives, this study shows that metaphor in "Rearrange My World" operates on more than one level. Metaphors play a central role in meaning making by mapping abstract emotional experience onto concrete conceptual domains. Not only do metaphors function as cognitive tools that structure understanding, but they also function as expressive devices that convey emotional depth and relational nuance. Rather than serving as decorative language, metaphors play a central role in articulating inner experience and guiding listener interpretation.

Overall, this study reinforces the view that metaphor in music is a key mechanism of meaning making. Through the combined use of cognitive and rhetorical approaches, the analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary song lyrics communicate complex emotional realities and maintain their cultural and emotional resonance within popular music.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses on a single song, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader musical discourse. Second, the interpretation relies solely on qualitative textual analysis conducted by the researchers, which may involve a degree of subjective interpretation despite the use of established theoretical frameworks. Third, the study applies only two theoretical perspectives—Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Goatly's socio-rhetorical classification—so other analytical approaches to metaphor were not explored.

Future research is recommended to examine a larger corpus of song lyrics across different genres and artists in order to identify broader metaphorical patterns in contemporary music. Further studies may also integrate additional metaphor theories or employ corpus-based and mixed-method approaches to strengthen analytical reliability and expand comparative

insights into the cognitive and rhetorical functions of metaphor in popular discourse.

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