

Metaphors in the Lyrics of “Chandelier” by Sia

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ABSTRACT

The findings reveal four distinct types of metaphors employed in the song's lyrics: dead metaphors, creative metaphors, dormant metaphors, and implicit metaphors. For instance, the phrase "holding on for dear life" represents a dead metaphor that effectively conveys the narrator's desperation. The phrase "swing from the chandelier" exemplifies a creative metaphor, vividly illustrating a reckless escape and celebration of freedom from reality. The dormant metaphor "party girls don't get hurt" highlights the ironic contrast between outward appearances and inner suffering. Lastly, "sun is up, I'm a mess" serves as an implicit metaphor, signaling the shift from temporary escape to harsh reality. Collectively, these metaphors enhance the aesthetic appeal and emotional resonance of the song, ultimately reinforcing its core message about addiction, escapism, and vulnerability. This study contributes to the linguistic understanding of metaphor's role in artistic communication through song lyrics and offers value to scholars, educators, and music enthusiasts alike.

Keywords: Chandelier, Metaphor, Lyrics, Semantics, Sia..

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INTRODUCTION.

As social beings, humans use language as the primary means of communication—to express ideas, emotions, and to build relationships with others. Language is not merely a tool, but a complex symbolic system that enables individuals to express and reflect upon their life experiences. (Sapir 2011) in his book *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, emphasizes that language is

"a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols." This underscores that language lies at the core of human cognition and social interaction.

"Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts." (Sweet 2025)

Thus, language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for expressing and reflecting on human experience.

One of the most universal forms of linguistic expression is song. Songs function not only as entertainment but also as a means of conveying messages, emotions, and cultural values through their lyrics. According to (Gujarati and Porter 2010), songs are defined as musical works produced vocally and carrying linguistic meaning, making song lyrics an essential medium for expressing thoughts and feelings.

Metaphor is a figure of speech that implicitly compares two different things, without using connecting words such as "like" or "as." (Lakoff and Johnson 2008), in *Metaphors We Live By*, explain that metaphor is not merely a matter of language—that is, not just a matter of ordinary words. Rather, our ordinary conceptual system, by which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

This view is reinforced by (Ning 1998), a cognitive linguist, who in his article *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor and Its Application in Chinese Linguistics*, states:

"Everyday life is full of metaphor, not only in speech but also in ideas and behavior. It is a notion rather than just a language phenomenon."

Similarly, (Yu 2013) affirms:

"Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action."

According to (Połowniak-Wawrzonek 2014):

"Metaphors are common. They are rooted in experience, important in the perception of the world, in thinking and acting, as revealed in language. The metaphor of language is a reflection of a conceptual metaphor."

Through metaphors, abstract experiences such as love, sadness, or struggle can be understood in concrete and imaginative ways.

Zoltán Kövecses, a prominent figure in cognitive linguistics, has further elaborated on the conceptual metaphor theory by discussing various types of metaphors (e.g., structural, orientational, ontological) and their roles in understanding emotions, morality, and culture.

"Metaphor is a fundamental cognitive tool by which we understand the world and ourselves." (Kövecses, 2010)

One popular song that is rich in metaphorical language is "Chandelier" by Sia. Released in 2014, the song is a prominent example of metaphor use in popular music. It explores themes of personal struggle with addiction and the desire to escape from life's pressures. The lyrics are not conveyed directly but through powerful and poignant metaphors, such as the phrase "swing from the chandelier," which symbolizes escapism and destructive behavior. As described in one review:

"The lyrics paint a picture of someone caught in a cycle of partying and self-destruction, using fleeting moments of joy to mask deeper issues"(ChandeliersLife 2025)

The conceptual metaphor theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) in *Metaphors We Live By* serves as a foundational framework in metaphor studies. This theory posits that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device, but a fundamental mode of thought in which one abstract concept is understood through another, more concrete concept. Lakoff and Johnson explain:

"The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

This process involves a source domain and a target domain, where the concrete source domain aids in conceptualizing the more abstract target domain. A common example includes metaphors such as *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* or *ARGUMENT IS WAR*, which shape how we perceive and interact with those concepts.

According to Fauzan (2014), in literature and song lyrics, metaphors enrich meaning, convey emotion, and produce aesthetic effects. This aligns with Jakobson's (1960) theory, which states that the poetic function of language emphasizes beauty and creativity in linguistic expression, including metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson categorize metaphors into three main types:

1. Structural Metaphor: where an abstract concept is understood through the structure of another, more concrete concept (e.g., *ARGUMENT IS WAR*).
2. Orientational Metaphor: metaphors that are linked to spatial orientation and human physical experience (e.g., *HAPPY IS UP*, *SAD IS DOWN*).
3. Ontological Metaphor: metaphors that assign identity or boundaries to abstract experiences (e.g., *EMOTIONS AS OBJECTS*) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

(Mayzeryah 2016) conducted a study entitled "An Analysis of the Meaning of Metaphorical Figures of Speech in A9 Song Lyrics." This research highlights the use of figurative language in song lyrics, which commonly appears in the form of idioms or figures of speech that function to convey meaning in a more expressive and communicative manner to the listener. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection techniques including listening to the songs, transcribing and translating the lyrics, and identifying texts containing metaphorical elements.

The results revealed a total of 30 metaphorical expressions found across 11 songs by A9. Specifically, the song Fajar contains 2 metaphors, Blueflame 2 metaphors, Ruri no Ame 1 metaphor, Subete E 2 metaphors, Namida ga Aru Basho 2 metaphors, Mirrorball 4 metaphors, Tsubasa 1 metaphor, Fantasi 2 metaphors, Sleepwalker 5 metaphors, and Niji no Yuki 3 metaphors.

The similarity between this study and the present research lies in the focus on the analysis of metaphorical figures of speech in song lyrics. However, Mayzeryah's (2016) research specifically employed Gorys Keraf's theoretical framework and examined Japanese-language song lyrics, whereas the current study will focus on metaphors found in the lyrics of *Chandelier* by Sia.

(Annisa 2019) A study entitled "Metaphors in the Lyrics of Tulus' Songs in the Album Monokrom" was conducted with a primary focus on two research problems: (1) the types of cognitive metaphorical expressions used in the lyrics of Tulus' songs in the Monokrom album, and (2) the meanings of those metaphorical expressions. The objective of this research is to describe the forms of metaphorical expressions and to reveal their meanings throughout the Monokrom album.

Based on the results of the analysis, the study concludes that:

(1) The most dominant type of metaphor found in the album is structural metaphor, represented by one instance. In addition, one instance of orientational metaphor and two types of ontological metaphors—specifically, the container metaphor and personification, each represented by one instance—were also identified.

(2) In terms of meaning, three interrelated metaphorical meanings were found. Generally, each line of lyrics contains a single metaphorical meaning. However, in some cases, interconnected meanings are found across two lines within a single stanza. This indicates that in the Monokrom album, metaphorical meanings tend to appear individually within each line of lyrics.

The relevance of this study to previous research lies in its focus on metaphor as the central object of analysis.

(Nirmala 2022) A study entitled "Metaphors in the Lyrics of Nadin Amizah's Album 'Selamat Ulang Tahun' and Their Relevance to Poetry Writing Instruction for Grade X Students" was conducted to analyze metaphors based on identified instances in the lyrics of the song Happy Birthday from Nadin Amizah's album.

The analysis revealed 12 instances of anthropomorphic metaphors, 1 instance of animal metaphor, 33 instances of abstraction metaphors, and 5 instances of synesthetic metaphors. Additionally, 20 metaphorical functions were identified, consisting of 7 emotive functions, 4 referential functions, 3 poetic functions, and 6 phatic functions.

The findings of this study are relevant to poetry instruction in the classroom. The elements used in composing poetry include both the inner elements (emotional and conceptual content) and the physical elements (form and structure) of poetry.

(IHZA AZIZI 2024) A scholarly study entitled "Conceptual Metaphors in Three Songs by Memai Sirens" was conducted with the primary objective of describing the forms of conceptual metaphors identified in three selected songs: Sono Ato, Jenga, and Shuujin no Dilemma. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, grounded in the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, and further supported by the metaphor theories of Knowles and Moon.

The results of the analysis revealed a total of 29 structural metaphors, 3 orientational metaphors, and 25 ontological metaphors across the three songs. In Sono Ato, one of the structural metaphors identified is "regret as a stalker", while an ontological metaphor found is "memories as a sculptor". No orientational metaphors were identified in this particular song.

In Jenga, the data revealed structural metaphors representing regret in relation to the self, an orientational metaphor portraying the body as a container of emotions, and ontological metaphors such as "regret as a state or condition".

Meanwhile, in Shuujin no Dilemma, a structural metaphor found is "self-persuasion as a journey", an orientational metaphor describing motivation as a process of personal development, and an ontological metaphor such as "anxiety as someone else's pleasure", reflecting a nuanced expression of suffering from the poet's perspective.

This study aims to identify and analyze the metaphors found in the lyrics of Sia's "Chandelier", and to interpret their meanings and functions in conveying the song's emotional message. The analysis is expected to contribute to linguistic studies, particularly in understanding the role of metaphor as a medium of artistic communication in song lyrics. The findings are also expected to be valuable for academics, educators, and music enthusiasts in appreciating the richness of language in popular music.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What lines in the song “Chandelier” contain metaphors?
2. What types of metaphors are used in the lyrics?
3. How do the meanings and functions of these metaphors reinforce the song’s emotional and thematic messages?

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, aimed at providing a detailed and in-depth description of the metaphorical phenomena found in the lyrics of “Chandelier” by Sia. This approach allows the researcher to interpret metaphorical meanings in a contextual and comprehensive manner (Creswell, 2017), and is defined as an investigative process that seeks to understand social or human issues by constructing a complex and holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994).

A qualitative research method is particularly well-suited for analyzing figurative language, which is often subjective and symbolic in nature. The song “Chandelier” by Sia was chosen as the object of study for this research. The study focuses on a single song, “Chandelier”, and proceeds with content analysis to examine the lyrics and identify metaphorical expressions contained within them.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The song Chandelier by Sia Furler, released in 2014 as part of the album 1000 Forms of Fear, is rich in metaphorical expressions that enhance the emotional and narrative portrayal of inner struggles, addiction, and escapism through a hedonistic lifestyle. Based on the analysis of the lyrics, the metaphors identified can be categorized into four types: dead metaphors, creative metaphors, dormant metaphors, and implicit metaphors.

1) Dead Metaphors

Dead metaphors are metaphors that have become so commonly used in everyday language that their original figurative meanings have faded, and they are now perceived as ordinary literal expressions:

Table 1. Title of the Table

No	Type of Metaphor	Data
1	Dead Metaphor	“for a good time call”
2	Dead Metaphor	And I’m holding on for dear life, won’t look down won’t open my eyes

1. The phrase "for a good time call" is typically associated with a casual invitation to have fun. However, in the context of the song, it carries a much darker meaning. It suggests that this is not an appropriate or healthy time for someone to be reaching out to others. This metaphor implies the narrator's attempt to escape emotional pain by indulging in fleeting pleasures.
2. This metaphor portrays a desperate struggle to survive in the face of hardship. The phrase "holding on for dear life" symbolically conveys the effort to maintain emotional control or stability amidst chaos—specifically, through partying and alcohol in the context of the song. Although this expression is widely used in everyday English, its use here intensifies the sense of the narrator's despair.

2) Creative Metaphor

Creative metaphors are newly coined, unique expressions that are not commonly used, thus creating a strong artistic and imaginative effect. These metaphors often appear in literary works, poetry, and songs to convey meaning in a fresh and engaging way.

Table 2. Title of the Table

No	Type of Metaphor	Data
1	Creative Metaphor	I'm gonna swing from the chandelier
2	Creative Metaphor	I am gonna live like tomorrow doesn't exist

1. One of the most iconic and fundamental metaphors in this song is the image of the chandelier itself. The chandelier symbolizes a glamorous yet dangerous, reckless, and unstable lifestyle. Swinging from the chandelier portrays a daring act that reflects the narrator's behavior of living through parties and addiction.
2. This metaphor illustrates the narrator's attitude of escaping life without considering the consequences, as if unaware that tomorrow even exists. The song's theme of avoiding reality aligns with the depiction of an intense yet careless life conveyed through this phrase.

3) Dormant Metaphor

Dormant metaphors are metaphors whose figurative meanings are hidden and require deeper interpretation to understand their figurative connections.

Table 3. Title of the Table

No	Type of Metaphor	Data
1	Dormant Metaphor	Party girls don't get hurt

1. The metaphor in this lyric suggests that party girls, representing the narrator immersed in the party scene—are unaffected by emotional pain. However, this statement is ironic within the context of the song, as the narrator is evidently suffering due to her lifestyle. Because the figurative meaning of this metaphor is not immediately apparent, understanding the emotional context of the song becomes crucial. The metaphor portrays the narrator's attitude of escapism, living without regard for the consequences or the future, as if she is unaware that tomorrow exists. The song's theme of avoiding reality aligns with the depiction of an intense yet reckless life conveyed through this phrase.

4) Implicit Metaphor

Implicit metaphors are metaphors that are not explicitly stated, but rather implied or hidden within an expression. They borrow the name or attributes of something without directly stating the comparison, requiring the listener to interpret the figurative meaning implicitly.

Table 4. Title of the Table

No	Type of Metaphor	Data
1	Implicit Metaphor	Sun is up, I'm a mess

1. The phrase in these lyrics implicitly compares the rising of the sun (morning) to the return of reality after a night of partying. With the sun symbolizing clarity or an unavoidable truth, "I'm a mess" implies the narrator's physical and emotional turmoil.

CONCLUSION

Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study focuses its analysis on the lyrics of the song "Chandelier" as the main object of investigation. The aim of this research is to identify, classify, and interpret the meaning and function of metaphors in conveying the emotional message embedded within the song.

Based on the analysis, four main types of metaphors were identified in the lyrics of "Chandelier":

Dead Metaphors: Examples include "for a good time call" and "holding on for dear life." Although these metaphors have lost their figurative meaning in everyday usage, in the context of "Chandelier", they emphasize the narrator's desperation and escape into temporary pleasures as a means of avoiding emotional pain.

Creative Metaphors: Examples include "I'm gonna swing from the chandelier" and "I'm gonna live like tomorrow doesn't exist." These metaphors are unique and uncommon, creating strong visual imagery of a glamorous yet dangerous lifestyle. They reflect reckless behavior and escapism, with no regard for future consequences.

Dormant Metaphors: An example is "Party girls don't get hurt." This type of metaphor requires deeper interpretation due to its hidden figurative meaning. The statement is ironic, highlighting the contradiction between the narrator's seemingly invulnerable exterior and her inner suffering.

Implicit Metaphors: An example is "Sun is up, I'm a mess." These metaphors are not stated explicitly but are implied within the expression. This metaphor implicitly compares the arrival of morning (the sun) to the return of reality, indicating the narrator's physical and emotional chaos after a night of partying.

Overall, the message of "Chandelier", centered on inner struggle, addiction, and escapism—is powerfully reinforced through the use of metaphors. These metaphors not only make the lyrics more engaging and memorable but also evoke a profound emotional impact on the listener. Sia successfully portrays the duality between fleeting euphoria and self-destruction by using dead, creative, dormant, and implicit metaphors. This makes "Chandelier" a work that is both artistically and emotionally compelling.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to linguistic studies and enhance the understanding of the role of metaphor in the artistic communication of song lyrics, providing valuable insights for academics, educators, and music enthusiasts.

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