



Conceptual Metaphors in The Album *Folklore* By Taylor Swift

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Abstract. *The undergraduate thesis entitled “Conceptual Metaphors in the Album Folklore by Taylor Swift” aims to analyze the conceptual metaphors in the Folklore album and analyze what are the meanings of the conceptual metaphors found. Metaphors are widely used in human life to create easier understanding of the form of communication. Metaphors are not merely ornamentals but they also take the roles of fundamental cognitive tools that develop how human beings understand and explore the world. This study was conducted by using a qualitative method. The Album Folklore was used as the data source. The data were collected using documentation technique analyzed through a descriptive-qualitative approach. The theory used for this study was Conceptual Metaphor Theory by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. The findings show that there are three types of conceptual metaphor in the album. Firstly, five structural metaphors were found in the album specifically in the songs namely “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Mirrorball”, “This Is Me Trying”, “Illicit Affair”, and “Betty”. Secondly, five orientational metaphors were found in the album, specifically in the songs namely “Cardigan”, “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Exile ft. Bon Iver”, and “Epiphany”. Thirdly, five ontological metaphors were found in the album specifically in the songs namely “Cardigan”, “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Exile. Ft. Bon Iver”, “Mirrorball”, and “Invisible String”.*

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphors, Folklore, Taylor Swift*

1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphors are widely used in human life to create easier understanding of the form of communication. A real-world phenomenon of the use of metaphors that has been very familiar in daily life is that people often use the term “time is money”. The word “time” is an abstract concept, meanwhile on the other hand, the term “money” is a concrete concept. To give a strong understanding of time, metaphor helps by illustrating the term “time” as “money”. The understanding that the term “time” is seen as important as “money” means that people should spend their time as wisely as they spend their money or in consequence they will lose it. From that instance, it reflects that metaphors are used as a powerful tool for understanding a complex concept.

Metaphors are not merely ornamentals but they also take the roles of fundamental cognitive tools that develop how human beings understand and explore the world (Geary, 2011). Metaphors are essential, asserted by Geary (2011), because they influence the thought processes of human beings, helping them create abstract concepts to be understood by corresponding them to the concrete experiences in which metaphors function as the link to facilitate the ideas. By that, metaphors work the same way as analogies. It is found widely in literary works including songs. In that case, metaphors help the songwriters to express and

convey the meaning of the songs aesthetically through creating abstract concepts in the song lyrics.

Taylor Swift, born in Pennsylvania on December 13, 1989, is a singer and songwriter from the United States. She started her career at the age of 14 by writing her country music album. The album's third single, "Our Song", made her the youngest artist to write and perform a number-one song on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart. Swift's eighth album, *Folklore*, was a surprise release on July 24, 2020. *Folklore* sold two million units worldwide in less than a week and broke the record for the most-streamed album by a female artist on Spotify. *Folklore* reflects themes of isolation, introspection, and storytelling, making it stand out in Swift's discography for its mature and poetic lyrical production.

Based on Musicians on Musicians: Taylor Swift & Paul McCartney interview in *Rolling Stone* on 13th of November 2020, Taylor said “*I was wondering about lyrics, and where you were lyrically when you were making this record. Because when I was making Folklore, I went lyrically in a total direction of escapism and romanticism. And I wrote songs imagining I was, like, a pioneer woman in a forbidden love affair.*”. In summary, it can be concluded that the themes of the *Folklore* album are escapism, romanticism, and love affair.

The motivation for this research came from a strong interest in how language, thought, and music connect, especially in the way metaphors are used in song lyrics to express complex emotions and stories. Taylor Swift's *Folklore* album offered an ideal example for this exploration, as her lyrics are well-known for their use of metaphor to communicate both personal and relatable themes. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory in this study would help uncover how these metaphors influence listeners' understanding and emotional reactions, providing insight into how language shapes the way people think and interpret meaning.

2. METHOD

Data Source

This study analyzes the lyrics from Taylor Swift's *Folklore* album, released on July 24, 2020. Comprising 16 songs, including *Cardigan*, *Exile*, and *Betty*, the album features songwriting contributions from Swift, Aaron Dessner, Jack Antonoff, and Justin Vernon. Rich in narrative and lyrical depth, *Folklore* blends indie folk, alternative rock, and electro-folk genres, making it an ideal corpus for exploring metaphorical expressions and conceptual meanings in contemporary music.

Method of Collecting and Analyzing Data

The data were collected through documentation, involving systematic examination of the official lyrics sourced from Genius.com. The analysis focused on identifying metaphorical expressions based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). After isolating relevant metaphors, the data were classified into source and target domains and further examined to determine recurring themes and their functions in shaping song meanings.

Technique of Presenting Analysis

The identified metaphors were presented with direct lyrical references and analyzed using CMT frameworks. Interpretation focused on the conceptual mapping between abstract and concrete domains, aligning with the idea that metaphor reflects human cognition. This method provided a structured lens to reveal how metaphors in *Folklore* express emotional experiences and cultural narratives.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS FOUND IN THE ALBUM “FOLKLORE” BY TAYLOR SWIFT

Types of Conceptual Metaphors Found in the Album *Folklore*

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphors are not only ornamental but also fundamental to human thought and understanding. As explained by Lakoff and Johnson in their Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphors shape human perception and help structure abstract concepts by linking them to familiar experiences. This is why metaphors are often found in poetic imagination and stylized speech contexts where language is expected to go beyond the literal and evoke more nuanced or imaginative meanings. Metaphors are used as a device for most people in the poetic imagination and the stylized speech in which language matters to be extraordinary rather than just ordinary to add depth, emotion, and creativity to their expression. In this way, metaphor becomes a key tool in making language more impactful and meaningful, especially in artistic or expressive forms of communication.

The conceptual metaphors found through the album carried different meanings which depend on the theme and context of the songs. The metaphors in Taylor Swift's *Folklore* play an important role in shaping the emotional and narrative depth of each song in which the metaphors offer the listeners a way to connect with complex themes through relatable concepts. While every track on the album stands on its own with unique contexts, characters, and emotional tones, these differences create a range of interpretations that reflect the

personal experiences of each listener. Despite this variability, Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson provides a consistent framework for understanding how metaphors work across the album. According to the theory, metaphors are not just artistic choices, but cognitive tools that help us make sense of abstract ideas namely heartbreak, memory, or identity by linking them to more concrete experiences. In *Folklore*, this theory helps uncover how metaphors shape meaning in each song, showing that while interpretations may differ, the metaphorical structure guiding them remains rooted in shared patterns of human thought.

Taylor Swift, as a singer and songwriter, used metaphors as a key tool in making language more impactful and meaningful therefore it made the *Folklore* album as rich of poetic expression as the artistic form. Based on Musicians on Musicians: Taylor Swift & Paul McCartney interview in *Rolling Stone* on 13th of November 2020, Taylor said, “*I always thought, that’ll never be recorded on pop radio, but when I was making ‘Folklore,’ I thought, ‘Nothing makes sense anymore. If there’s chaos everywhere, why not just use the damn word I want to use in the song?’*”. The themes of Album “*Folklore*” which were escapism and romanticism and the speech that Taylor rolled herself as a pioneer woman in a forbidden love affair made *Folklore* rich in metaphorical expression.

Structural Metaphors Found in the Album Folklore and Their Meanings

As this study mentioned in the previous chapter, structural metaphors involve understanding one concept through the lens of another. The concept is metaphorically structured and consequently, the language is metaphorically structured. The usage of this type of metaphors is to form the language to be poetic, fanciful, and rhetorical. Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated about structural metaphors:

“The most important claim we have made so far is that metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined.”

This study found several structural metaphors in the *Folklore* album by Taylor Swift. The structural metaphors found were useful to understand many abstract concepts which were difficult to be pictured. The results were found through the album in the songs namely The Last Great American Dynasty, Mirrorball, This Is Me Trying, Illicit Affair, and Betty as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Structural Metaphors Found in the Album *Folklore*

NO	Structural Metaphors	Source
	“And they said, “There goes <i>the last great American dynasty.</i> ”	<i>The Last Great American Dynasty</i> , line 11
	“And they called off <i>the circus, burned the disco down</i> ”	<i>Mirrorball</i> , line 29
	“I was so ahead of <i>the curve, the curve became a sphere</i> ”	<i>This Is Me Trying</i> , line 15
	“What started in <i>beautiful rooms, ends with meetings in parking lots</i> ”	<i>Illicit Affair</i> , line 7
	“If I told you it was just a <i>summer thing?</i> ”	<i>Betty</i> , line 17

Firstly, for data 1, this study found a structural metaphor in the song “The last Great American Dynasty”, namely “And they said, “There goes ***the last great American dynasty.***” In those lyrics, the phrase “*the last great American dynasty*” is a structural metaphor. It is considered a structural metaphor since the abstract concept *family legacy* is understood through the lens of another which is *dynasty*. However, in literal meaning, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the term “dynasty” is associated with a powerful group, family, or rulers therefore the metaphor helps to frame the idea of family legacy which is structured with wealth and powerfulness to the concrete concept of dynasty.

The storytelling in the song builds on this metaphor by showing how Rebekah’s life was full of bold choices and freedom, yet constantly criticized. The metaphor of a “dynasty” makes her story seem like the rise and fall of a royal figure, which adds drama and weight to what was really a woman living on her own terms. As the song continues, Taylor Swift connects Rebekah’s experiences to her own, suggesting that she too is seen as someone who disrupts expectations. By placing herself in the same house and in the same line of judgment, Swift shows that the idea of a “dynasty” continues through her. In this way, the structural metaphor helps shape the theme: how powerful women are often remembered more for being disruptive than for being strong, and how their legacies are shaped by the people around them.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor, specifically a structural metaphor in the song “The Last Great American Dynasty”, has a significant role in helping Taylor Swift as a songwriter to express the deeper meaning of “*The Last Great American Dynasty*” in a poetic and artistic way. She framed Rebekah Harkness’s life as a “dynasty”, she transformed a personal life into something symbolic. The metaphor gave structure to the narrative which allowed Taylor to highlight the themes of legacy, wealth and powerfulness. It also helps draw a clear connection between past and present, between Rebekah and herself, showing how both women are part of a continuing story of misunderstood and independent women. Through this metaphor, Swift transforms real-life experiences into a layered and meaningful piece of art that speaks to the listener on both emotional and imaginative levels.

Secondly, for data 2, the structural metaphor found in the song “mirrorball” was in the lyrics “*And they called off **the circus**, burned **the disco** down*”. In that line, the terms “*circus*” and “*disco*” are structural metaphors. Those terms are considered as structural metaphors since “the circus” conceptualizes the abstract idea of theatrical public image of relationship and the term “disco” conceptualizes the abstract idea of joy. In literal meaning, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the term “circus” is associated with a public spectacle or a large arena enclosed by tiers of seats on three or all four sides and used especially for sports or spectacles, on the other hand, the term “disco” is associated with popular dance music characterized by hypnotic rhythm, repetitive lyrics, and electronically produced sounds.

Taylor Swift reveals that “Mirrorball” is one of her most emotionally transparent songs on *Folklore*. The track is rich in metaphor and serves as a reflection of vulnerability, performance, and identity both as a public figure and as a human being. She also expresses the mirrorball as:

“It was a metaphor for celebrity but it’s also a metaphor for so many people who have to feel like everybody else feels like they have to be on for certain people for you have to be different versions of yourself for different people different versions that work different versions around friends different versions of yourself around different friends um different version of yourself around family around you know you just everybody has to be duplicitous”

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor, specifically the structural metaphor in the song “Mirrorball”, has a significant role in helping Taylor Swift as a songwriter to express the deeper feeling of fragile, reflective, and always spinning to keep people entertained in a poetic and artistic way. She framed *so many people who have to feel like everybody else and certain people or have to be different people* as the idea of mirrorball. The metaphor doesn’t just decorate the lyrics, it frames the way the listener understands the emotional weight of

constantly performing, adapting, and being seen. Through this layered metaphor, *mirrorball* becomes more than just a song about fame or sadness but it's a reflection of the human tendency to hide vulnerability behind sparkle, and the exhaustion that comes from never stepping out of the spotlight. The structural metaphor allows Taylor to express not only the personal impact of isolation during the pandemic, but also a deeper, more universal experience of emotional fragility behind performance.

Thirdly, for data 3, the structural metaphor found in the song *This Is Me Trying* was in the line "*I was so ahead of **the curve**, the curve became **a sphere***". In that line, the words "curve" and "sphere" are structural metaphors. Those terms are considered as structural metaphors since the word "curve" symbolizes the abstract concept of a non-linear personal path which leads to "sphere" as the transformation which is structured with something with no clear beginning, end, or direction. In literal meaning, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word "curve" is associated as a line defined by an equation so that the coordinates of its points are functions of a single independent variable or parameter, on the other hand, the word "sphere" is associated as a the apparent surface of the heavens of which half forms the dome of the visible sky or any of the concentric and eccentric revolving spherical transparent shells in which according to ancient astronomy stars, sun, planets, and moon are set.

"*This Is Me Trying*" is a deep emotional song that explores themes like vulnerability, regret, and the quiet strength in which it takes us to keep going when you feel like you've already failed. It reflects the hidden struggles which people often carry whether it's with mental health, addiction, or just the weight of past mistakes and how hard it can be to try to make things right when no one really sees the effort. With soft, haunting production and honest lyrics, Taylor Swift gives a voice to those unspoken battles, showing that even the smallest step forward is still trying, and that matters. Based from the *This Is Me Trying* interview (Folklore: the long studio session) in Disney+, Taylor reveals;

"I'd been thinking about addiction and I've been thinking about people who if they're either suffering through mental illness or they're suffering through addiction or they have an everyday struggle no one Pats them on the back every day but every day they are actively fighting something but there are so many days that nobody gives them credit for that yeah and so how often must somebody who's in that sort of internal struggle must want to say to everyone in the room you have no idea how close I am to going back to a dark place"

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor, especially the structural metaphor in the song "*This Is Me Trying*" in the line "*I was so ahead of the curve, the curve became a sphere,*"

helps Taylor Swift explain complicated feelings in a way that's easier for listeners to understand. By using familiar ideas like shapes and movement to talk about things like struggle and confusion, she makes something abstract feel more clear and real. This way, people can relate to the song even if they haven't been through the exact same thing. It shows how metaphors are useful tools for turning personal emotions into something everyone can connect with.

Forth, for data 4, the structural metaphors found in the song "Illicit Affair" were in the line "*What started in beautiful rooms, ends with meetings in parking lots*". In that line, the phrases "beautiful rooms" and "parking lots" are the structural metaphors. Those are considered as structural metaphors since the abstract concept of the transformation of a relationship is understood through the lens of another which is *beautiful rooms* and *parking lots*. However, in literal meaning, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word "room" is associated as an extent of space occupied by or sufficient or available for something therefore the phrase "beautiful room" in literal means to an extent which has quality of beauty. On the other hand, the phrase "parking lots" is associated with an area used for the parking of motor vehicles.

According to Billboard in "*Every Song Ranked on Taylor Swift's 'Folklore': Critic's Picks*", it says that "Illicit Affair is a song about the emptiness of adultery contains the same sort of songwriting bravado that can navigate a tricky theme". It means that Taylor Swift is brave and shows a lot of confidence and honesty in the way she writes about a tough topic like adultery. Also she doesn't just focus on the romantic or dramatic side, but really shows the sadness and emptiness that come with being part of something secret and wrong. Even though the theme is complicated, she handles it in a way that feels real and emotional. The metaphor found in the line "*What started in beautiful rooms, ends with meetings in parking lots*" connects directly to the song's themes of guilt, betrayal, and the emptiness that follows an affair. It shows how something that once felt meaningful slowly becomes disappointing and degrading. By using this metaphor, Taylor Swift helps listeners visualize and understand the emotional cost of being involved in an affair without needing to explain it directly.

Lastly, for data 5, the structural metaphor found in the song "Betty" is in the line "*If I told you it was just a summer thing?*". In that line, the phrase "a summer thing" is a structural metaphor. The phrase "a summer thing" is considered a structural metaphor since the abstract concept of the emotional life cycle which is structured with youth, passion, and temporariness is conceptualized through the lens of *summer thing*. However, in the literal meaning, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word "*summer*" is the season between spring

and autumn comprising in the northern hemisphere usually the months of June, July, and August or as reckoned astronomically extending from the June solstice to the September equinox.

“Betty” is part of the so-called *Folklore* love triangle trilogy alongside “August” and “Cardigan” which tells the story of a teenage romance from three different perspectives. According to Billboard in “Every Song Ranked on Taylor Swift’s ‘Folklore’: Critic’s Picks”, it says that “Betty is a clear recollection of high school regret, “Betty” lets Swift weave a story of haphazard decision-making, the pain still felt years later, and an uncertain chance of public reconciliation.” It actually highlights the Taylor Swift's storytelling in the song "Betty". The storytelling captures the nature of teenage mistakes especially in high school which longing over time, as well the uncertain hope for forgiveness and reconciliation. The song portrays the perspective of James, a teenager who seeks forgiveness over his disloyalty to his girlfriend, Betty.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor, especially the structural metaphor in the song “Betty” in the line “If I told you it was just *a summer thing?*” helps Taylor Swift to express complex emotional experience in the perspective of James in a way that’s easier for listeners to understand by calling it as “a summer thing”. He’s not only sorry but also confused and scared of losing someone important. It shows how Taylor uses storytelling and metaphor together to turn personal emotions into universal messages, making the song more meaningful and impactful for her audience.

Oriental Metaphors Found in the Album Folklore and Their Meanings

As this study mentioned in the previous chapter, orientational metaphors organize our thinking around spatial orientation. When we talk about emotions or ideas using directions like “up” or “down,” we’re actually using something called orientational metaphors, a concept explained by Lakoff and Johnson in their theory of conceptual metaphor. These metaphors help us make sense of abstract experiences through physical direction, based on how we interact with the world around us. For instance, we often say someone is “feeling down” when they’re sad or “on top of the world” when they’re happy. That’s because we naturally associate up with positive feelings and down with negative ones, shaped by how our bodies react to different emotions, happiness makes us stand tall and energized, while sadness often brings slouched posture or fatigue. These kinds of metaphors aren’t just figures of speech; they reflect how our minds are deeply connected to our physical experiences.

This study found several orientational metaphors in the *Folklore* album by Taylor Swift. The orientational metaphors found were useful to understand many abstract concepts

by organizing the whole system of concept with spatial orientation. The results were found through the album in the songs namely Cardigan, The Last Great American Dynasty, Exile ft. Bon Iver, Mirrorball, and Epiphany as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Orientational Metaphors Found in the Album *Folklore*

NO	Orientational Metaphors	Source
	<i>“Under someone's bed”</i>	14 <i>Cardigan</i> , line
	<i>“Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set forever”</i>	<i>The Last Great American Dynasty</i> , line 16
	<i>“now I'm in exile seeing you out”</i>	<i>Exile ft. Bon Iver</i> , line 11
	<i>“You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes”</i>	8 <i>Mirrorball</i> , line
	<i>“With you I serve, with you I fall down, down”</i>	<i>Epiphany</i> , line 6

Firstly, for data 1, the orientational metaphor was found in the song “Cardigan” in the line ***“Under someone's bed”***. It is considered as an orientational metaphor since the word “under” adds spatial orientation which implies a low, hidden, secretive, or powerless position therefore the phrase metaphorically conveys a sense of being devalued, or reduced to a hidden memory.. Additionally, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word “bed” is a piece of furniture on or in which to lie and sleep which is associated with sex relations or marital relationship. The metaphor symbolizes loss of importance, emotional abandonment, or feeling unseen and unworthy.

The themes of Taylor Swift’s *“cardigan”* are nostalgia, lost love, and emotional vulnerability. “Cardigan” is a part of the *Folklore* love triangle trilogy within “August” and “Betty” which tells the story of a teenage romance from three different perspectives. In “Cardigan,” the story is narrated from the perspective of Betty, the girl who was hurt, being in a romance that once made her feel special but eventually left her feeling forgotten. The orientational metaphor ***“Under someone's bed”*** reflects Betty’s feelings through her relationship with James in the past. She feels like something worthless that she’s left and

forgotten by James, after he met August in the summer. It suggests that even though she might seem distant or forgotten, those emotions are still very much present and affecting her.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor in the song “Cardigan”, especially the orientational metaphor found in the line “*Under someone’s bed*” helps Taylor Swift express complex emotional experiences through more tangible and relatable images. By using spatial orientation, such as “**under**” She turns abstract feelings of abandonment, invisibility, and loss into something listeners can visualize and emotionally connect with. This kind of metaphor organizes our thinking by placing emotional states within familiar physical positions, allowing us to understand Betty’s sense of being devalued or forgotten not just emotionally, but spatially. It shows how conceptual metaphors can deepen storytelling by grounding personal experiences in everyday language, making the emotions in the song easier to grasp and more impactful for the audience.

Secondly, for data 2, this study found an orientational metaphor in the line “*Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set forever*”. The line is considered an orientational metaphor since the phrasal verb “give up” implies moving from being “in” (included) to “out” (excluded or separated). The phrase “gave up” might seem simple, but it actually shows a kind of downward motion. Even though “up” is in the phrase, it strangely represents a fall or a loss of position in this context. When Rebekah gives up on them, it feels like she’s stepping away from that high-status lifestyle. This could mean she was rejected, got tired of pretending, or just didn’t want to be part of it anymore. So, the words suggest she’s leaving a place of privilege and choosing something different. It’s interesting how a small phrase like “gave up” can hint at such big emotional or social changes just through the idea of direction.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor in the song “The Last Great American Dynasty”, especially the orientational metaphor in the line “*Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set forever*” helps Taylor Swift to express deeper meanings by turning abstract feelings into something more understandable. By using spatial direction, like “under” or “gave up,” she is able to show emotions like feeling abandoned, powerless, or stepping away from a high-status life. These metaphors guide the listener’s way of thinking, because we naturally connect “up” with power and “down” with loss or weakness.

Third, for data 3, the orientational metaphor was found in the song “Exile ft. Bon Iver” in the line “*now I’m in exile seeing you out*”. The clause “I’m in exile” and the phrase “seeing you out” are orientational metaphors. Those are considered as orientational metaphors since the clauses organize our thinking around spatial orientation, using concepts of “in” and “out”. The clause “I’m in exile” metaphorically means being cast out from a relationship or

emotional connection in which the speaker is no longer "inside" the emotional space they shared. Similarly, the phrase "seeing you out" metaphorically means watching someone leave, reinforcing the movement from "in" to "out". The metaphors help to frame the abstract concept of separation in relationship using spatial orientation.

The theme of Taylor Swift's song "Exile" is about a broken relationship and how two people who used to love each other have a hard time talking and understanding each other after they split up. It talks about feeling sorry and blaming each other for what went wrong. The line "now I'm in exile seeing you out" clearly shows the feeling of being left out after a breakup. The word "exile" doesn't just mean being far away in which it also means the person feels like they no longer belong in someone's life. It's like being pushed out of a place where they once felt at home. The clause "seeing you out" makes it feel even more final, like they're watching someone leave for good. In the song, both people in the relationship feel hurt, one feels ignored, and the other feels like they've tried enough and want to move on.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor in the song "Exile ft. Bon Iver", especially the orientational metaphor in the line "now I'm in exile seeing you out" helps Taylor Swift to express abstract emotional experiences through the use of spatial direction. The word "in" suggests isolation and being trapped, while "out" implies distance or separation. By framing the emotional pain of a breakup through this kind of spatial language, Taylor organizes the listeners' understanding around a clear physical concept, being inside versus outside.

Forth, for data 4, this study found an orientational metaphor in the song "Mirrorball" in the line "*You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes*". The phrase "on my tallest tiptoes" is an orientational metaphor. It is considered as an orientational metaphor since it organizes our thinking around spatial orientation, using concepts of "on". That phrase suggests an extreme physical effort to go upward, standing as tall as possible. Metaphorically, it expresses striving, reaching, or stretching oneself to meet expectations, be noticed, or succeed emotionally or socially. This creates a mapping of effort as upward movement, where trying harder or doing one's best is conceptualized as physically rising or elevating oneself. This metaphor aligns with Lakoff's idea that we conceptualize effort and emotional intensity through vertical bodily movement.

Based on the "mirrorball" interview (*Folklore: the long studio session*) in Disney+, Taylor Swift reveals that "mirrorball" is one of her most emotionally transparent songs on *Folklore*. She describes the mirrorball as a metaphor for people, especially performers. These people are "broken a million times," and that's what makes them shine, just like an actual mirrorball. The orientational metaphor "*You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes*" implies reaching

upward, which often symbolizes effort, aspiration, or a longing to be noticed. Being on one's "tallest tiptoes" suggests the speaker is stretching herself to her limit, trying her hardest to meet expectations and gain approval. This spatial metaphor reflects the emotional strain of constantly performing and pleasing others, even when it's exhausting. It shows how the speaker places herself in a heightened, vulnerable position, hoping that someone will see her worth.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor in the song "mirrorball", especially the orientational metaphor in the line "*You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes*" helps Taylor Swift to express a deep emotional struggle. By using this kind of conceptual metaphor, especially the orientational type, Taylor is able to organize our understanding of emotional pressure and insecurity through the idea of physical movement or position. It makes the emotional theme easier to connect with because it links a personal feeling to a common physical experience, helping listeners relate more clearly to the message. Lastly, for data 5, This study found an orientational metaphor in the song "Epiphany" in the line "*With you I serve, with you I fall down, down*". The clause "with you I fall down, down" is an orientational metaphor. It is considered as an orientational metaphor since it organizes our thinking around spatial orientation using the concept of "down". The metaphor uses the mapping of down is defeat to express the profound vulnerability and collapse experienced alongside others during intense service or sacrifice. The metaphor implies the sense of collapse, loss, or defeat. Additionally, the repetition of "down, down" emphasizes a deeper fall, not just physical but emotional, mental, and existential collapse.

According to Epiphany Interview (Long Pond Session) in Disney+, this song was inspired by the story of Taylor Swift's grandfather experiences during the World War II as she reveals;

"I had been doing really frequently up up until that point was I had been doing a lot of research on my grandfather who fought in World War II at Guadalcanal which was um an extremely bloody battle and you know he he never talked about it not with his sons not with his wife nobody got to hear about what happened there and so my dad had to do a lot of research and he and his brothers did a lot of digging in and found out that you know my granddad was exposed to some of the worst situations you could ever imagine as a human being and so I kind of tried to imagine what would happen in order to make you just never be able to speak about something"

The theme of sacrifice and struggle in "Epiphany" is connected to Taylor Swift's grandfather's story during World War II. The theme of sacrifice and struggle in "Epiphany"

is reflected in the orientational metaphor found in the line “With you I serve, with you I fall down, down.” The word “down” shows a downward movement that can represent feeling weak, tired, or overwhelmed. In the context of the song, it shows how people who sacrifice and serve others, like soldiers or healthcare workers, often face hard times and moments of falling or failing. This metaphor helps us understand the emotional weight of sacrifice by linking it to the idea of physically falling down, which makes the struggle feel more real and easier to imagine.

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor, especially the orientational metaphor in the song “Epiphany” in the line “With you I serve, with you I fall down, down.” helps Taylor Swift express deep emotional experiences through the idea of spatial orientation. The repeated use of the word “down” creates a mental image of falling, which symbolizes pain, and emotional burden. By using this metaphor, Taylor is able to turn abstract feelings of sacrifice and suffering into something more concrete and understandable. This shows how conceptual metaphors, especially orientational ones, help organize our thoughts by organizing our thinking around spatial orientation using the concept of “down”, making the message of the song easier for listeners to feel and relate to.

Ontological Metaphors Found in the Album Folklore and Their Meanings

As this study mentioned in the previous chapter, ontological metaphor refers to the way abstract concepts, emotions, and experiences are understood in terms of concrete objects or substances. By giving form and boundaries to intangible ideas, ontological metaphors make complex experiences easier to conceptualize and discuss. For instance, emotions such as anger are often described through metaphors of containment, as in the expression "bottling up anger," or as transferable objects, as in "giving someone grief." Through this process, abstract experiences are structured in a way that makes them more accessible to human understanding and communication.

This study found several ontological metaphors in the *Folklore* album by Taylor Swift. The ontological metaphors found were useful to understand many abstract ideas by organizing the concept by giving form and boundaries to intangible ideas. The results were found through the album in the songs namely Cardigan, The Last Great American Dynasty, Exile ft. Bon Iver, Mirrorball, and Invisible String as shown in the table below.

Table 3. Ontological Metaphors Found in the Album *Folklore*

NO	Ontological Metaphors	Source

	<i>“And when I felt like I was an old cardigan”</i>	Cardigan, line 13
	<i>“Filled the pool with champagne and swam with the big names”</i>	The Last Great American Dynasty, line 18
	<i>“We always walked a very thin line”</i>	Exile ft. Bon Iver, line 29
	<i>And when I break, it's in a million pieces</i>	Mirrorball, line 6
	<i>Time, curious time</i>	Invisible String, line 7

Firstly, for data 1, this study found an ontological metaphor found in the song “Cardigan” In the line “I was an old cardigan”. It is considered as an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of the abstract concept of being forgotten by turning it into something we can visualize and interact with which is *cardigan*. However, in literal, according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word “cardigan” means a collarless sweater or jacket that opens the full length of the center front. Eventually, the phrase “old cardigan” conceptualizes the abstract concept of emotional state as a physical object. The metaphor helps the speaker to express the abstract feeling of not only being forgotten but also loved and used again.

The themes of Taylor Swift’s *“cardigan”* are nostalgia, lost love, and emotional vulnerability. “Cardigan” is a part of the *Folklore* love triangle trilogy within “August” and “Betty” which tells the story of a teenage romance from three different perspectives. In “Cardigan,” the story is narrated from the perspective of Betty, the girl who was hurt, being in a romance that once made her feel special but eventually left her feeling forgotten. The metaphor “I was an old cardigan” gives shape to an abstract feeling of being forgotten or cast aside by comparing the self to a worn piece of clothing. Ontological metaphors help us understand intangible experiences by turning them into physical objects we can visualize and relate to. In this case, the “old cardigan” becomes a symbol of how the speaker feels in a relationship: once loved, useful, maybe even comforting, but eventually left behind.

Secondly, for data 2, in the line “Filled the pool with champagne and swam with the big names”, there are two ontological metaphors found. Firstly, “Filled the pool with

champagne”, is considered as an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of the abstract concept of something luxury by turning it into something we can visualize and interact with which is *champagne*. The *champagne* is seen as something we could fill the pool as we can read in the line. Secondly, “Swam with the big names”, is considered as an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of the abstract concept of famous people by turning it into something we can visualize and interact with which is *big names*. Meanwhile, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, champagne means as a white sparkling wine made in the old province of Champagne, France. On the other hand, the noun phrase “*big names*” means as a performer or personage of top rank in popular recognition.

Through the context of the song, “Filled the pool with champagne” turns the idea of extreme luxury into something you can picture and almost feel, highlighting the character’s lavish and carefree lifestyle. “Swam with the big names” gives the abstract idea of fame and social status a physical form, making it seem like she was literally surrounded by powerful, well-known people. These metaphors connect to the song’s context, which tells the story of Rebekah Harkness, a woman criticized for living boldly and not following society’s rules. By using clear, physical imagery, Taylor helps us understand how Rebekah (and later, Swift herself) was seen as disruptive simply for owning her identity and breaking expectations in a world ruled by wealth and reputation.

Thirdly, for data 3, in the song “Exile ft. Bon Iver” in the line “We always walked in a very thin line”, the noun phrase “a very thin line” is an ontological metaphor. It is considered as an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of the abstract experience of a fragile relationship by turning it into something we can visualize and interact with which is *a very thin line*. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the term “line” means as a narrow elongated mark drawn or projected. However, “thin line”, that can be “walked” on, allows the listeners to visualize and reason about the fragility and tension as if it were a literal, spatial experience.

The metaphor gives physical form to the fragile, unspoken tension between the two people in the song, turning their emotional uncertainty into something narrow and unstable that they must carefully balance on. This metaphor helps express how their relationship was always on edge, too delicate to support them for long. In the broader context of *Exile*, which explores the pain of disconnection and the feeling of being emotionally exiled from someone you once knew, the “thin line” represents the invisible boundary between staying together and falling apart. It makes the abstract feeling of growing apart feel real and visual, deepening the song’s emotional weight.

Forth, for data 4, in the song “Mirrorball” in the line “*And when I break, it's in a million pieces*”, the clause “it’s a million pieces” is an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of the abstract experience of emotional vulnerability by turning it into something we can experience which is “break in a million pieces”. Taylor Swift expresses emotional vulnerability by describing herself as something that can “break.” Of course, a person can’t literally shatter, but by comparing an emotional breakdown to the breaking of a fragile object, she gives shape to a feeling that’s otherwise invisible. The phrase “a million pieces” brings to mind shattered glass or, fittingly, a mirrorball, something beautiful but delicate, which reflects light for others yet falls apart easily. This metaphor allows the listener to understand the depth of emotional pain and instability by imagining it as a physical, almost tangible, event. It’s not just poetic, it’s a way of making internal struggle visible and relatable.

The line “it’s in a million pieces” is an ontological metaphor that connects strongly to the main themes in “*Mirrorball*” which are emotional fragility, identity, and the pressure to always be what others want. In the song, Swift compares herself to a mirrorball: shiny, spinning, and reflecting everything around her. It’s a way of showing how she tries to please everyone by constantly changing and performing. When she says she breaks “in a million pieces,” it turns the feeling of emotional pain into something we can picture. It helps us understand how hard it is to keep up that performance without falling apart. This line adds to the story by showing that underneath all the sparkle is someone who feels deeply and can easily be broken.

Lastly, for data 5, this study found an ontological metaphor in the song “Invisible String” in the line “Time, curious time”. It is considered as an ontological metaphor since it helps us make sense of concepts like emotions, ideas, or time itself as if they were concrete entities or objects, giving them qualities or behaviors typically associated with physical beings. In this case, Swift describes time as “curious,” a word we typically use to describe people, not concepts. Time doesn’t literally have thoughts or feelings, but by giving it a personality, she turns it into something we can relate to.

The phrase acts as an ontological metaphor that gives the abstract concept of time a human-like quality, suggesting it has the ability to wonder or guide. In the context of the song, which reflects on the invisible thread that connects two people across different places and moments, this metaphor highlights time as an almost sentient force, one that gently shapes their paths toward each other. Rather than seeing time as something passive that simply passes, Swift presents it as “curious,” as if it plays an active role in the unfolding of her story. This ties directly into the song’s themes of fate, connection, and the quiet beauty of timing. The

metaphor helps express the idea that every experience, no matter how small or distant, was part of a larger plan, woven together by time itself to lead her exactly where she was meant to be.

4. CONCLUSION

This study implemented the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their influential work *Metaphors We Live By* in the year of 1980. Through a qualitative method, this study the lyrics on the Album *Folklore* were examined to discover the underlying metaphorical expressions. The finding revealed that *Folklore* contains a rich variety of conceptual metaphors. It can be found that the Album *Folklore* contains the types of metaphors based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory namely structural, orientational, and ontological metaphor.

According to the types of metaphors, firstly, five structural metaphors were found in the album specifically in the songs namely “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Mirrorball”, “This Is Me Trying”, “Illicit Affair”, and “Betty”. Secondly, five orientational metaphors were found in the album, specifically in the songs namely “Cardigan”, “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Exile ft. Bon Iver”, and “Epiphany”. Thirdly, five ontological metaphors were found in the album specifically in the songs namely “Cardigan”, “The Last Great American Dynasty”, “Exile. Ft. Bon Iver”, “Mirrorball”, and “Invisible String”.

The meaning behind the conceptual metaphors found in the Album *Folklore* show how Taylor Swift uses language to express her deep message to the listener. For example, in the song “Mirrorball”, structural metaphor was used to frame the abstract concept of people who hide their vulnerability as a mirrorball. Also, in the song “Cardigan”, orientational metaphor was used to frame the abstract concept of forgotten feelings in the spatial orientation of “under someone’s bed”. Lastly, in the song “Exile ft. Bon Iver”, ontological metaphor was used to frame the abstract concept of fragile relationship as a “very thin line”.

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