

Conceptual Metaphors in *Mylo Xyloto* Album by Coldplay

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates Conceptual Metaphor (CM) used in song lyrics. The study uses the song lyrics of Coldplay's album entitled Mylo Xyloto as data. In analyzing the data, the qualitative method especially a case study is used. Furthermore, the data are analyzed using the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980a, 1980b; Kovesces, 2002, 2010). The study found that the dominant conceptual metaphors used are about life, love, changes and conditions, namely LIFE IS JOURNEY, CHANGES ARE MOVEMENT, PURPOSES ARE DESTINATION, LOVE IS A UNITY, LOVE IS WAR, LOVE IS STRUGGLE, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, and LESS IS DOWN.

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), song lyrics, Coldplay.*

INTRODUCTION

Language has several functions in daily life. One of the functions of the language is to express thought (Finegan *et al.*, 1992). It means language is used to communicate wills or feelings with others. Here the language serves an expressive or emotive function (Jakobson, 1960). The expressive function can be found, for instance, in song lyrics. In the song lyrics, the composers can freely express their feelings with their hearers – It is reflected from the use of metaphorical language.

Metaphors for some people are a device to create poetic languages. It means metaphors are the device used to make extraordinary languages. In this sense, metaphors closely relate to literary works. For others, however, metaphors do not only refer to stylistic features of languages. Lakoff and Johnson (1980a, 1980b), for instance, argue that metaphors are also a part of everyday life. Moreover, they state that metaphors

are a vehicle in which people represent, feel, and think about one thing with respect to other things.

Metaphors especially conceptual metaphors (CM) have been investigated with regard to various semiotic resources. In this case, CM has been applied to images like cartoons (Bounegru and Forciville, 2011). Bounegru and Forciville (2011) found that the cartoons that they investigated rooted from CM. In addition, several researchers have investigated CM in new sentences such as political texts (Zinken, 2003; McEntee-Atalianis, 2011). For instance, McEntee-Atalianis (2011) conducted a study to investigate identity in the speeches of the United Nations delivered by Secretary-General (SG). She found that the organizational identity is considered as “family”.

Furthermore, some researchers investigated CM in song lyrics (Alvarez *et al.* 2009; Cardoso and Vieira, 2006). Cardoso and Vieira (2006), for instance, investigated CM in Dido’s song

lyrics *White Flag*. The focus of their study was the process of co-construction of meaning of metaphorical expression in the lyrics by EFL students. They found that students could identify CM underlying metaphorical expression when the students discussed the lyric in the group.

Similar to the previous research, the present study investigates CM in Coldplay's album entitled *Mylo Xyloto*. By focusing on analysis song lyrics the study investigates the form of conceptual metaphors in the song lyrics of *Mylo Xyloto* album. Through investigating conceptual metaphor it can help understand the song writer since CM has become the basis of how people think and how feel (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980a).

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS THEORY (CMT)

Conceptual metaphors theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a), is driven by the notion that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life. In this theory, how

people think and act is metaphorical in nature. Thus, the metaphor can be found not only in language but also in thought and action. In other words, language is only one of the realizations of conceptual metaphor.

Therefore, for cognitive linguists (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980a, 1980b; Gibbs, 2008; Kosvaces, 2000, 2010) metaphors are classified into two types, namely linguistic and conceptual metaphors. According to Kosvaces (2010: 4), linguistic metaphors are words or other linguistic expressions deriving from the language or "terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain". By contrast, conceptual metaphors are conceptual systems that govern how people experience world and how they act and think (Picken, 2007; Kosvaces, 2010). The conceptual metaphors can be also realized in other than linguistics ways like myth (Kosvaces, 2010).

The CM is formulated into conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B or *A IS B* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980a; Knowles and Moon, 2006; Kosvaces, 2010). Here the

target domain represented by *A* is understood through a source domain represented by *B*. The understanding, as Kosvaces (2010: 33) explains, is based on “a set of mappings that exist between elements of *A* and elements *B*”. For example, people may think about love in terms of journey as reflected in the everyday language like “we’ll just have to *go our separate ways*” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980a).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study primarily used a qualitative method to achieve the aims of the study. Since the study was located within a qualitative approach, the present study employed a case study as its design. The case study is considered suitable since it focuses on single entity (Yin, 2003) and analyzes the phenomenon in-depth (Cresswell, 1998; Duff, 2008). The data used in this study were the fifth album of Coldplay entitled *Mylo Xyloto*. The album was chosen since it contained a large amount of metaphorical expressions in its lyrics. The collected data were

analyzed using Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980a, 1980b) Conceptual Metaphor (CM). In analyzing the data, there were several steps, namely doing close reading before analysis, identifying lyrics that contain metaphor, classifying or categorizing the song lyrics into the types of metaphor, describing the results of analysis.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN *MYLO XYLOTO* ALBUM

The findings suggest that there are eight conceptual metaphors (CMs) which are dominantly found in Coldplay’s lyrics. The CMs are as follows.

LIFE IS JOURNEY

This metaphor is found in *U.F.O.*, exemplified [4a] below. In the example, the elements of JOURNEY are identified through the words *way* which literally denotes “a route, direction or path” and the word *go* or *going* means “to move or travel from one place to another” (Hornby, 2000: 573). Here those words indicate the JOURNEY domain since traveling and direction are part

of a journey. In relation to the concept of LIFE, the word *way* (JOURNEY DOMAIN) metaphorically symbolizes a possibility (LIFE DOMAIN) which can be interpreted as fate. Furthermore, the word *going* (JOURNEY DOMAIN) metaphorically symbolizes the process of experiencing (LIFE DOMAIN). Thus, the reconstruction of first line may become “I don’t know which fate I am experiencing.”

[4a] Lord, I don’t know
which *way* I am *going*

Thus, the conceptual metaphor underlying [4a] is LIFE IS JOURNEY. The LIFE domain is inferred from the words *way* and *river* which refer to the word “fate”. By contrast, the JOURNEY domain is directly signaled in the use of the words *way* and *going*. Thus the concept of LIFE is understood through the concept of JOURNEY.

PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS

This metaphor can be found in *U.F.O.* as exemplified in [4b] below. In [4b], the word *somewhere* literally denotes a place, meaning “in

or to some place” (Hornby, 2000; 1281) and metaphorically indicates a destination in which the persona “I” wants to be there.

[4b] I know I swear we
find *somewhere*

*The streets are paved
with gold*

Similarly, the words *the streets are paved with gold* meaning “a place where it is easy to get rich” (Cranz, 2008) also indicate a place. The words presuppose that the persona “I” has a purpose, namely to be a rich man. Overall, Example [4b] indicates that if someone wants to achieve a purpose, he or she needs go to find the place that can make his or her dreams come true. Thus, the concepts which are operated in [4b] are the element of DESTINATION reflected in *somewhere* and *the streets are paved with gold* and PURPOSE got from the inferences of the words *the streets are paved with gold*.

CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS

This metaphor can be seen in *Charlie Brown* as exemplified below.

The first line of [4d] indicates a bad condition indicated by the word *smash* which literally means “completely defeat” (Hornby, 2000; 1266). Thus, the reconstruction of the line may be “when they hurt or destroy my heart”.

[4d] When they smash my
heart into smithereens

...

Be a *cartoon heart*

...

We'll *run riot*

In next line, the song writer persuades people to do something. It is supported by the use of an imperative sentence which asks for doing something. The words *a cartoon heart* metaphorically means “something as being greater or better” (Hornby, 2000). The line may be reconstructed to be “be better”. Here those words imply a command to be better. Overall, the words in the line imply the element of CHANGES.

In the next lines, the song writer then tells about a movement, namely *we'll run riot*. The movement here of course is reached

through changes. In this case, the words *run riot* in the example above refer metaphorically to “behave without restraint or discipline”. The line may be reconstructed to be “we will be free”. In this context, these words are indication of the element of MOVEMENT since it signals a change of position.

Overall, [4d] suggests that movement is achieved through changes done by people. As can be seen in the example above, the changes lead to the movement. Thus, the conceptual metaphor underlying here is CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS, in which the CHANGES domain is understood through the MOVEMENTS domain.

LOVE IS A UNITY

This metaphor can be found in *Don't Let It Break Your Heart* which tells about lovers are in a difficult condition (*though we bled*), they should never be parted. The metaphor can be seen in the following metaphorical expressions.

[4e] Still, *we never gonna part*

In [4e], the pronoun *we* indicates more than one person, referring to the lovers who make a relationship. The pronoun is indication of element of LOVE. Furthermore, the word *never* means not any time while the word *part* means “a pieces which combines with other pieces to form the whole of something” (Cranz, 2000). Here the words *never gonna part* evoke a meaning that something cannot be separated. Therefore, the reconstruction of the line may be “we are always together”. The words *never gonna part* signal the domain of UNITY while the domain of LOVE is understood through the word *we* signaling the lovers.

LOVE IS WAR

The metaphor is found in *Princess of China* which specifically tells about a relationship in which two lovers seem to fight each other, as exemplified [4f] below. In the example, the pronoun *we* in first line is used to refer to “one or more other people considered together”

(Hornby, 2000: 1524), suggesting lovers. The word indicates the domain of LOVE. Meanwhile, the words *burned bright* metaphorically means clash or fight. Here the expression indicates the domain of WAR. Thus, the reconstruction of the first line may be “Once upon the time we fought”.

[4f] Once upon the time
we burned bright
 Now all *we* ever seem
 to do is *fight*

Similarly, in the second line the pronoun *we* indicates lovers and the concept of LOVE. In this line the domain of WAR is directly realized through the word *fight* meaning “engage in (a war or battle)” (Hornby, 2000: 493). Here, the reconstruction of the first line may be “now all we ever seem to do is to do war”. It can be concluded that the metaphor underlying in [4f] is LOVE IS WAR. The concept of WAR is realized through the expression such as *burned bright* and *fight*. By contrast, the target domain of LOVE is inferred from the pronoun *we* suggesting the lovers.

LOVE IS A STRUGGLE

This metaphor can be found in *Don't Let It Break Your Heart* as exemplified in [4g] below. In the first line, the word *though* signals a concession. Here the word is used together with the expressions *heavily we bled*. As explained earlier, the pronoun *we* indicates lovers and the elements of LOVE. Furthermore, the word *bled*—if it is read together with the following line—suggests the domain of STRUGGLE. The word *bled* means “to lose blood” (Cranz, 2000). The reconstruction of the first line may therefore be “though heavily we lose our blood”.

[4g] Though *heavily we
bled*
Still on we crawl

In the second line, the word *still* signals that something is “continuing to happen”. The word is followed by the pronoun *we* indicating lovers (LOVE domain) and the word *crawl* meaning “to move slowly or with difficulty” (Cranz, 2000). The word clearly shows the

concept of a struggle. In this case, the second line may be reconstructed to be “still we move slowly”. The first and second lines can be paraphrased that although the persona *we* lose their blood, *we* continue to move. It is clear that those lines indicate a struggle especially a struggle in a relationship (love). Here the lovers struggle for their love. The metaphor underlying here is LOVE IS A STRUGGLE in which the LOVE domain is understood from “we” and the STRUGGLE domain is realized through *still on we crawl*.

STATES ARE LOCATIONS

The metaphor can be seen in *Every Teardrop Is Waterfall* which tells about a struggle. During explaining it, the writer describes a condition of the persona “I” when doing a struggle. Here he associates the condition of the persona with location as shown below.

[4k] Maybe I'm *in the gap
between the two trapezes*

In [4k], the word *in* is an indication of a location so that it associates with the LOCATION domain. By contrast, the words *in the gap between the two trapezes* can be interpreted as a states the persona “T” experiences. The words refer to the STATES domain. Here the state of the persona is like in the gap between trapezes—the confusing situation. The writer associates the STATES domain with the LOCATIONS domain. Thus the conceptual metaphor underlying in this example is STATES ARE LOCATIONS.

LESS IS DOWN

The metaphor can be found in *Us Against the World* which tells about finding a destination. In some part of the song, the song writer describes something which is going to decrease during finding the place as shown in [4l] below.

[4l] Saying *slow it down*

In [4l], the word *slow* is followed by the spatial orientation, namely *down*. The word *slow* indicates something which is less so

that word is associated with the LESS domain. Here the song writer applies the concept of LESS to spatial orientation down.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings discussed previously, it can be drawn that the conceptual metaphors used in the *Mylo Xyloto* are dominantly about life, changes, and love. Those include LIFE IS JOURNEY, CHANGES ARE MOVEMENT, PURPOSES ARE DESTINATION, LOVE IS A UNITY, LOVE IS WAR, LOVE IS STRUGGLE, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, and LESS IS DOWN. Furthermore, it can be concluded from the discussion that associating (in metaphors) is part of human cognitive system since basically humans like relating something with other things.

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