

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Metaphors have always been important for people to communicate with each other. They do more than just make things sound better; they also help us understand the world around us (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are powerful tools for expressing complicated feelings and experiences, especially the many-sided idea of love, in art forms like song lyrics. They help songwriters turn vague feelings into clear, relatable images, which helps the listener connect with the song on a deeper level. Because of this natural ability of metaphor to connect the abstract and the concrete, it is an essential tool for exploring the complex emotional landscapes that music presents.

The main idea behind this study is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson first introduced in their groundbreaking book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). CMT changed how we view metaphors by saying that they are not just a way of using language but a basic way that people think, see, and interact with each other every day. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) say that the way we think and act is based on a metaphorical conceptual system. This means that we can systematically understand and think about abstract ideas like emotions, time, and ideas by mapping structures from more concrete, real-life source domains. The conceptual metaphor “**Argument is War**” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) shows how we not only talk about arguments in terms of war (for example, “He attacked every weak point”), but we also act out arguments as battles, with opponents, attacks, defences, and strategies. Therefore, looking at metaphors in

song lyrics provides us a unique look at how artists and listeners alike understand and express complicated emotional realities. This approach helps us understand the album's emotional depth and the human mind itself more fully.

This metaphorical system extends into how we contemplate and experience emotions, particularly love. Love is one of the most frequently metaphorical and emotionally complex domains of human experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), love, being abstract, invisible, and dynamic, requires metaphorical structuring to be meaningfully understood and communicated. This is why conceptual metaphors like **“Love is a Journey,” “Love is Madness,”** or **“Love is a Physical Force”** are commonly found across languages and cultures. These metaphors help people navigate their emotional lives by mapping the structure of physical, social, or experiential domains (like journeys, illness, or force) onto the domain of love.

Studying metaphors of love is particularly important because love is not only a deeply personal emotion but also a central theme in literature, music, and culture. The way love is conceptualised metaphorically often reflects societal norms, emotional values, and even psychological realities. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain, the metaphors we live by shape what we perceive as real or normal within relationships. For instance, viewing love as a journey emphasises mutual progress and shared goals, while framing love as a battlefield may highlight struggle and emotional damage. In this sense, metaphors are not neutral, they structure experience and shape how individuals relate to others.

A lot of previous research has looked at metaphors in music, which presents this analysis a lot of contexts for comparison. In a study of John Lennon's music, V.H. Vinh (2024) shows how metaphors like **Sorrow is Drowning** and **Darkness is Isolation** make grief easier to understand. When someone says, “I’m drowning in tears,” they are talking about sadness as an overwhelming, unavoidable force. Coldness and darkness are also used to show how numb and detached someone is emotionally. Vinh says that these metaphors show Lennon’s sadness and the loneliness that his audience felt during the political unrest of the 1960s and 1970s. Metaphors here don't just describe feelings; they make them universal, which is in line with CMT's claim that metaphors come from real-life experiences.

Vu and Nguyen (2020) look at how love is talked about in late 20th-century English songs. They point out important metaphorical structures like **Love is a Journey**, **Love is a Container**, and **Love is a Force**. These metaphors show love as a changing process, a space of fulfilment or emptiness, or an overwhelming force. They are ways for people to understand and talk about their feelings. For example, **Love is a Journey** sees romantic relationships as journeys through problems, choices, and destinations. On the other hand, **Love is a Container** shows how full or empty love can make someone feel, and **Love is a Force** shows how love can change how someone thinks and acts.

Climent and Coll-Florit (2021) also look at how love metaphors have changed over time in Billboard number-one songs from 1946 to 2016. Their study looks at both old metaphors like **Love is Unity** and new ones like **Love is a Game** and **Love is Possession**. The change shows how cultural values have changed over time. In the middle of the 20th century, people thought love was about stability and

helping each other. In the 21st century, people think love is about competition and ownership. For instance, Amy Winehouse's line "Love is a losing game" makes love sound like a bad idea, while lines like "You belong to me" show themes of ownership and emotional control.

This change isn't just happening in Western pop music. In their 2018 study, Akuno et al. look at love metaphors in Kenyan Dholuo Benga music. For example, the metaphors **Love is Honey** and **Love is Milk** illustrate how people in that culture perceive food and care. These metaphors imply that love is as important for mental health as food is for staying alive. The study also criticises how these kinds of metaphors can reinforce gendered representations since women are often seen as things that can be consumed or enjoyed (for example, "**Woman is a Dessert**").

Lucas (2018) looks at how metaphors can be used to show love and ambition in *La La Land*. The song "**Love is a Journey**" on the movie's soundtrack shows how the characters' emotions and careers change over time. The phrase "We've come so far" illustrates how love is akin to a shared path that requires effort and frequently diverges to pursue individual aspirations.

The lyrics of Taylor Swift also provide us an idea of what personal storytelling is all about. Kha et al. (2024) look at metaphors like "**Emotional Intimacy is Physical Closeness**" and "**Emotional Self is a Brittle Object.**" These metaphors show how fragile love and vulnerability are, especially in lines like "He broke my heart" or "Jump, then fall into me," which use spatial and tactile imagery to stress emotional risk and trust.

These studies show how love metaphors are different and rich in different cultures, genres, and times. Metaphorical language is often used in art, but it is also a powerful way to process emotions and express culture.

Previous studies looked at metaphorical language in music from certain times, styles, or cultural settings, like Western pop, Kenyan Benga, or movie soundtracks. This study, on the other hand, looks at Frank Ocean's *Blonde* (2016), an introspective, genre-defying R&B album known for its poetic depth and emotional vulnerability. This study looks at how *Blonde* builds a personal and nonlinear metaphorical landscape of love that weaves together themes of identity and longing. This study is different from earlier research that often groups metaphors together in broad categories (for example, **Love is a Journey**). This study fills a gap in current research by using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to look at Ocean's lyrics. It looks at how modern, alternative R&B music changes and reflects metaphorical ideas of love in ways that go against traditional stories and images.

1.2 Research Questions

These questions are the issues that are analysed and discussed within the topic of study.

1. What types of conceptual metaphors of love are found in the lyrics of Frank Ocean's *Blonde*, and which type of conceptual metaphor of love appears most dominantly in the album?
2. How do these conceptual metaphors express the emotional experiences and themes of love in the album?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine all the different ways Frank Ocean used conceptual metaphors for love in his critically acclaimed album *Blonde* (2016). A further significant objective is to find out which type of metaphor is used the most often, which will show the artist's most common ways of thinking. At the same time, the study wants to look at how these metaphors change and deepen the listener's understanding of love as it is expressed in eight songs from the album. In the end, this study aims to show how metaphorical language can be a powerful artistic tool that shows the complexity, deep vulnerability, and changing nature of romantic experience in modern music.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

This study, despite its focused approach, is constrained by specific intrinsic limitations. The focus is exclusively limited to the lyrical substance of eight chosen songs from Frank Ocean's *Blonde* (2016). This indicates that the study thoroughly explores the conceptual metaphors of love articulated through language, but it does not cover the entirety of the album. Moreover, it does not thoroughly examine alternative metaphor types (e.g., solely orientational or structural metaphors unrelated to love or other rhetorical devices) unless they directly bolster the primary analysis of love metaphors.

Secondly, the study is inherently constrained to textual analysis. This indicates that it fails to consider essential non-linguistic factors that substantially influence the overall meaning and emotional resonance of the music. This encompasses, but is not restricted to, musical arrangement (melody, harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation), vocal delivery (tone, inflection, and emotion),

performance elements, and the wider context of audience reception and interpretation. The lack of these multimodal elements indicates that the findings, although strong within the language realm, may not entirely encompass the comprehensive experience of interacting with *Blonde* as a complete artistic entity.

As a result of these limitations, the results and conclusions derived from this research may not be directly applicable to other artists, musical genres, or varied cultural contexts. This intentional restriction facilitates a concentrated and nuanced analysis of metaphor within this specific creative piece, enabling an in-depth exploration of the cognitive processes involved in meaning-making within a particular context. It also underscores potential routes for future research that could enhance our findings through the integration of multimodal analysis or more extensive comparison studies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offers significant contributions to the field of cognitive linguistics. For cognitive linguistics, it provides a contemporary application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to modern song lyrics, thereby enriching the empirical base of the theory and demonstrating its continued relevance in analysing real-world language use. By meticulously examining the metaphorical structures within *Blonde*, the study enhances our understanding of the intricate ways in which metaphors communicate complex emotions in contemporary music. It reinforces the principles of embodied cognition and image schemas by illustrating how abstract emotional concepts are grounded in fundamental bodily experiences, as articulated by Evans and Green (2006).

1.6 State of the Art

The study of metaphor in song lyrics is a well-established area within cognitive linguistics, largely shaped by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). A substantial body of research has focused on identifying and categorising common metaphorical patterns in popular music. For example, studies have explored ontological metaphors in English-language songs from the late 20th century, such as **"Love is a Journey"** or **"Love is a Container."** Others have traced the evolution of love metaphors across decades of popular music, highlighting a shift from traditional metaphors like **"Love is Unity"** to more contemporary expressions, such as **"Love is a Game."** These studies consistently demonstrate that metaphors are not merely decorative language but function as essential cognitive tools for both songwriters and listeners.

CMT has also been applied in more specific contexts, including the works of individual artists and songs from non-Western cultures. For instance, metaphor analysis in Taylor Swift's lyrics has revealed conceptual patterns like **"The Emotional Self is a Brittle Object,"** which convey vulnerability and emotional fracture. Similarly, studies on Kenyan Dholuo Benga music uncovered culturally grounded metaphors, such as **"Love is Honey,"** reflecting communal values and socio-emotional norms. Together, these examples highlight how metaphor serves as a universal yet flexible mode of thought, adapting to different cultural, emotional, and artistic environments.

However, there remains a significant gap in the metaphorical analysis of contemporary alternative R&B music, particularly in works that break away from traditional genre conventions and explore themes of identity, vulnerability, and

nonlinear emotion. Most research has focused on mainstream pop or historically significant trends, while less attention has been given to deeply personal, introspective albums that resist easy categorisation.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on *Blonde* (2016), the critically acclaimed second studio album by Frank Ocean. Ocean is an artist widely recognised for his lyrical subtlety, emotional honesty, and genre-defying sound. Unlike many pop artists, Ocean constructs intricate narratives of identity, queerness, memory, and love that blur the lines between autobiography and abstraction. His music occupies a distinct cultural and emotional space, often prioritising internal vulnerability and poetic ambiguity over conventional structure or radio-orientated hooks.

Blonde is a compelling subject for metaphorical analysis due to its fragmented storytelling, impressionistic language, and rich emotional palette. The album weaves themes of intimacy, heartbreak, nostalgia, spiritual growth, and personal transformation through lyrics that are deeply metaphorical yet grounded in lived experience. Ocean's work challenges dominant metaphorical frameworks about love, not simply reinforcing familiar metaphors, but reimagining them in ways that are emotionally raw and conceptually complex.

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