

The Representation of Emotional Experience through Structural Metaphors in Taylor Swift's The Fate of Ophelia

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ABSTRACT

Beyond its role as stylistic ornamentation, metaphor in song lyrics serves as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract emotional experiences are conceptualized and communicated. This research examines how structural metaphors represent emotional experiences in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia*, with particular attention to the conceptual mappings between source and target domains. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research applies Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyze metaphorical expressions identified through close reading of the lyrics. The data collected through document analysis and close textual reading. The collected data were analyzed by identifying metaphorical expressions, determining their source and target domains, mapping the conceptual correspondences between domains and interpreting how these mappings construct representation of emotional experiences. The findings demonstrate that structural metaphors in the song do not operate in isolation but form a coherent metaphorical network in which love is simultaneously conceptualized as rescue, entrapment, light, and fire, a semantic ambivalence grounded in the Shakespearean intertextual frame of Ophelia's fate. These findings contribute to the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the analysis of literary and musical discourse by showing how interconnected structural metaphors represent emotional complexity within a single song. The study also provides insights into the relationship between conceptual metaphor and literary intertextuality in contemporary popular music.

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Conceptual metaphor;
Emotional experience;
Semantics;
Structural metaphor;
Taylor swift

Article History:

Received: 7 July 2026
Revised: 19 July 2026
Accepted: 20 July 2026
Published: 6 August 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Pratiwi, A. (2026). The Representation of Emotional Experience through Structural Metaphors in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia*. *Lexeme: Journal of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 447-462. <https://doi.org/10.32493/ljal.v8i2.62126>

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor has long been recognized as a fundamental cognitive mechanism rather than a mere ornamental feature of language. Peng and Khatin-Zadeh (2023) demonstrate that metaphor research has expanded significantly over five decades, with conceptual mapping and figurative language emerging as dominant research concerns across disciplines. Building on this trajectory, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) established that metaphor is not simply a stylistic device but a conceptual structure through which humans understand and experience abstract phenomena. This cognitive function is particularly evident in literary and artistic discourse. Figurative language in such contexts is systematically employed to construct meaning that transcends literal expression (Musolff, 2019; Kalinin & Ignatenko, 2024). Song lyrics, as a form of literary discourse, represent a rich site for such metaphorical construction, as songwriters regularly deploy figurative language

to communicate emotional experiences that resist straightforward articulation.

Some researchers have examined conceptual metaphors and figurative language across various literary and musical texts, consistently demonstrating that metaphorical expressions reflect cognitive and cultural patterns through which emotional experiences are structured and communicated. Such research has identified recurring source domains, including nature, physical sensation, and spatial orientation, mapped onto abstract emotional target domains such as love, sadness, and personal struggle (Kövecses, 2000; Semino, 2008). In the context of song lyrics, studies have shown that metaphors serve as important conceptual tools for expressing identity, social experience, and emotional meaning. For example, Putri et al. (2022) examined animal metaphors in Kendrick Lamar's song lyrics from an ecolinguistic perspective and demonstrated how metaphorical representations contribute to broader symbolic and cultural interpretations. Similarly, recent studies have analyzed metaphorical meanings in contemporary songs and literary texts, highlighting the significance of conceptual metaphor in shaping thematic and emotional expression (Rahayu et al., 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025; Winora et al., 2025). Despite these contributions, the predominant analytical focus has remained on discrete metaphorical expressions in isolation rather than on the coherent metaphorical networks that operate across an entire lyrical text. Furthermore, prior research has seldom examined how intertextual literary references interact with conceptual metaphors to produce layered emotional meaning in contemporary popular music (Deignan et al., 2023). This gap is particularly significant in songs that engage explicitly with canonical literary figures. In such texts, the metaphorical architecture extends beyond conventional cognitive mappings into intertextual semantic territory. Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia* exemplifies this phenomenon and thus warrants focused metaphorical analysis.

This research aims to analyze the structural metaphors in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia* and to examine how these metaphors represent emotional experiences through conceptual mapping between source and target domains. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on conceptual metaphor in musical discourse by demonstrating that structural metaphors in song lyrics operate as interconnected networks rather than isolated figurative expression. The findings are expected to enrich analysis of contemporary popular music and provide a methodological reference for future research on metaphor and intertextuality in literary and musical text. Based on these objectives, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What structural metaphors are identified in the song lyrics?
2. How do these structural metaphors construct a coherent metaphorical network that represents emotional experience within the Shakespearean intertextual frame of *Ophelia* narrative?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several previous studies have examined the use of metaphor in both literary work and song lyrics. Although these studies consistently demonstrate the importance of metaphor in conveying meaning and emotion, they differ in their theoretical frameworks, analytical focus and research objectives. The following review compares these studies to highlight the gap addressed by the present research.

Rahayu et al. (2025) examined the metaphors used in Anne Bradstreet's poem *To My Dear Loving Husband*. Using a descriptive qualitative method and drawing on Parera's (2004) theory of metaphor, the study aimed to identify the types and meanings of metaphors present in the poem. The findings showed that the poem contains five metaphorical expressions, consisting of one anthropomorphic metaphor and four abstract to concrete metaphors. Rahayu et al. (2025) concluded that abstract to concrete metaphor is the most dominant type found in the poem, and that metaphor plays significant role in expressing the poet's emotions while helping readers grasp the implicit meaning embedded within it. This study primarily focused on classifying metaphor types in literary text rather than examining conceptual relationships among metaphor.

Similarly, Rahmah et al. (2025) also examined the use of metaphor, this time in the lyrics

of Tiara Andini's song *Kupu-Kupu* and explored students' responses to those metaphors. While Rahayu et al. (2025) focused on metaphors within a literary poem, Rahmah et al. shifted analysis to song lyrics, aiming to identify, classify and analyze the meaning and functions behind the metaphor used. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and Ullmann's theory of metaphor classification, the researchers identified four types of metaphor in the song, with concrete to abstract metaphors appearing most often, followed by anthropomorphic, synaesthetic and animal metaphor. They concluded that these metaphors help convey complex emotions, add aesthetic value to the lyrics and make abstract ideas easier to understand through more concrete, imaginative language. Although the study demonstrates the expressive function of metaphors, its emphasis remains on metaphor classification rather than conceptual mapping.

Likewise, Winora et al. (2025) who investigated the metaphors found in Olivia Rodrigo's song *Good 4 U*. Using a qualitative approach, the writers analyzed the metaphorical expressions in the lyrics and identified six categories: absolute (or paralogical), dead, extended, indirect, contextual and root metaphors. Out of the 27 metaphorical expressions found, root metaphor is the dominant category. The finding also showed that these metaphors capture the breakdown of a relationship, the warmth of what it once was, and the sadness the singer feel after being ignored by her former partner. The study concluded that metaphors play a key role in conveying emotion and meaning, helping listeners better understand the message the songwriter intended to express. However, like the previous studies, the analysis concentrated on categorizing metaphorical expressions rather than examining how they collectively construct a broader conceptual system.

Unlike the previous studies, which relied primarily on metaphor classification theories, Dewi (2025) adopted a cognitive semantic perspective by combining Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Croft and Cruse's (2004) Image Schema Theory. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the researcher identified two types of conceptual metaphor in Coldplay's song *Fix You*: ontological and orientational metaphor. The analysis also revealed nine image schemata, including two related to space, one to identify and six to existence. This study concluded that song portrays emotional hardship alongside hope and healing, demonstrating that conceptual metaphors and image schemas work together to represent abstract emotional experiences. Nevertheless, the study did not investigate structural metaphors or the relationships among different conceptual metaphors within the song.

A study most related to the present research was conducted by Adawiyah et al. (2025). The research examined how conceptual metaphors are used to capture emotional depth and lived experience throughout the song lyrics from Taylor Swift's album *The Tortured Poets Department*. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the researchers employed a descriptive approach to analyze the official lyrics from all sixteen tracks and classified the metaphorical expressions into structural, orientational and ontological metaphors. The findings showed that these conceptual metaphors represent abstract themes such as heartbreak, vulnerability, self-image, and emotional transformation. Structural metaphors drew on familiar conceptual frameworks to explain personal experiences, orientational metaphors represented emotional states through spatial orientation, and ontological metaphors conceptualized intangible emotions as concrete entities. The study concluded that conceptual metaphors create vivid imagery and enable listeners to understand complex emotions more concretely. Although this study shares the same theoretical framework as the present research, it examined all three conceptual metaphor types across an entire album. It did not specifically investigate how structural metaphor interact to construct an integrated conceptual network within a single song.

Overall, previous studies consistently demonstrate that metaphor is an effective linguistic device for expressing emotions and representing abstract experiences in both literary works and song lyrics. However, they differ in their theoretical approaches and analytical focus. Studies by Rahayu et al. (2025), Rahmah et al. (2025) and Winora et al. (2025) primarily emphasize metaphor classification, whereas Dewi (2025) and Adawiyah et al (2025) employ Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyze conceptual mappings. Despite these contributions, little attention has been paid

to how structural metaphors function collectively as an interconnected conceptual system within an individual song. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by focusing exclusively on structural metaphors in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia* and examining how their interaction constructs a coherent conceptual representation of emotional suffering, love and isolation rather than treating metaphorical expression as independent linguistic unites.

METHOD

The data source for this research is the lyrics of *The Fate of Ophelia* by Taylor Swift, retrieved from Musixmatch (Swift, 2025). The lyrics were selected as the primary data source because they contain a dense network of figurative expressions related to emotional suffering, vulnerability, and relational conflict, making them particularly suitable for structural metaphor analysis. The unit of analysis comprised words, phrases, and lyric lines that encode metaphorical mappings between concrete source domains and abstract emotional target domains.

The data were collected through document analysis and close reading of the lyrics and followed three sequential procedures. First, the lyrics were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the text and its figurative dimension. Second, metaphorical expressions were identified through close reading, guided by the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Expressions were identified as metaphorical when they represented an abstract concept through another conceptual domain, indicating a systematic mapping between a source domain and a target domain (Deignan, 2005). This study focused exclusively on structural metaphor because its objective was to examine systematic conceptual mapping between source and target domains. Accordingly, the analysis was limited to metaphorical expressions that fulfilled the characteristics of structural metaphors as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Third, each identified metaphorical expressions was recorded in a classification table containing the lyric line, the metaphorical expression, and its preliminary conceptual mapping. A total of twelve metaphorical expressions were identified and selected for analysis.

Data analysis followed the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Each identified metaphorical expression was analyzed in three stages. First, the source and target domains were identified. Second, the conceptual metaphor was formulated using the conventional notation TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. During this stage, the identified metaphors were interpreted as structural metaphors based on their systematic mappings between source and target domains, distinguishing them from ontological metaphor, which conceptualize abstract concepts as entities or substances, and orientational metaphors, which structure concept through spatial orientation. Third, the conceptual metaphors were examined to identify their interrelationships and determine whether they formed a coherent metaphorical network across the song lyrics. Rather than treating metaphors as isolated linguistic expressions, the analysis focused on how multiple structural metaphors interact to construct a unified representation of emotional experience. This perspective addresses a gap in previous research, which has predominantly analyzed metaphorical expressions as discrete units rather than as components of an integrated conceptual structure (Deignan et al., 2023)

As the interpretation of conceptual metaphor is inherently qualitative, the analysis was conducted consistently using the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Although peer checking or expert validation was not undertaken in the present study, future research may strengthen the credibility of metaphor interpretation through peer checking, expert validation or inter-rater agreement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the metaphorical analysis conducted on the lyrics of Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia* and discusses the conceptual mappings identified therein. The analysis identified twelve structural metaphorical expressions that collectively form a coherent metaphorical network representing emotional experience (Table 1). These expressions were

categorized based on their source domains, target domains, and conceptual metaphors following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

It should be noted that expression in Datum 8: *wrap around me like a chain, a crown, a vine, takes the surface form of a simile*; however, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, both similes and metaphors can serve as linguistic manifestations of the same underlying conceptual metaphor. The distinction lies in the degree of linguistic explicitness rather than in the cognitive structure itself. This expression is therefore retained in the analysis as it encodes a rare case of multiple simultaneous conceptual mappings within a single lyric line. Table 1 presents an overview of the findings.

Table 1. Structural Metaphors in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia*

No.	Metaphorical Expression	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Metaphor
1	<i>drowned in the melancholy</i>	Water/Drowning	Emotional suffering	EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS DROWNING
2	<i>the venom stole her sanity</i>	Venom/Poison	Emotional pain and psychological destruction	EMOTIONAL PAIN IS POISON
3	<i>lingered in purgatory</i>	Purgatory/Spiritual suffering	Emotional suffering	EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS PURGATORY
4	<i>lit my sky up</i>	Light/Brightness	Love and hope	LOVE IS LIGHT
5	<i>saved my heart from the fate of Ophelia</i>	Rescue/Salvation	Emotional protection and recovery	LOVE IS RESCUE
6	<i>love was a cold bed full of scorpions</i>	Dangerous creature (Scorpion)	Toxic love	LOVE IS A DANGEROUS CREATURE
7	<i>pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes</i>	Political allegiance	Romantic commitment	ROMANTIC COMMITMENT IS POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE
8	<i>wrap around me like a chain, a crown, a vine</i>	Imprisonment/ Empowerment/ Organic Growth	Love and attachment	LOVE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY CONSTRAINING AND EMPOWERING
9	<i>pulling me into the fire</i>	Fire	Passionate and destructive love	LOVE IS FIRE
10	<i>sat alone in my tower</i>	Tower/Confinement	Emotional isolation	EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IS CONFINEMENT
11	<i>'tis locked inside my memory</i>	Locked container	Memory	MEMORY IS A LOCKED CONTAINER
12	<i>only you possess the key</i>	Key/Access	Emotional intimacy and self-access	LOVE IS ACCESS TO THE SELF

Although all twelve expressions are classified as structural metaphors in this analysis, this classification requires justification, since several expressions might, on initial inspection, be categorized instead as ontological metaphors. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), ontological metaphors conceptualize abstract experience as a bounded entity or substance (e.g., the mind as a container) without necessarily specifying a systematic set of correspondences between source and target domains. Structural metaphors, by contrast, involve a richer mapping in which multiple elements of the source domain correspond systematically to multiple elements of the target domain, such that one concept is substantially structured in terms of another. Each datum in this analysis is classified as structural rather than ontological on the basis of this criterion: the presence of multiple, internally consistent correspondences between source and target elements, rather than a single bounded-entity mapping. Where this boundary is less clear-cut, as in Datum 10 and Datum 11, this is addressed directly in the relevant discussion below.

As shown in Table 1, the twelve structural metaphorical expressions are distributed across four dominant target domains: emotional suffering (Datum 1, 3), emotional pain and psychological destruction (Datum 2), love and relational experience (Data 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12), and emotional isolation (Data 10). Memory as a conceptual domain also emerges in No. 11, functioning as a transitional element that bridges emotional suffering and relational intimacy within the metaphorical network. The source domains predominantly draw from physical, embodied, and sociopolitical experiences, including water, poison, spiritual confinement, light, salvation, dangerous creatures, political allegiance, entrapment, fire, spatial confinement, and locked containment. This pattern is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) foundational claim that abstract experiences are systematically understood through concrete bodily, environmental, and cultural domains.

Notably, the target domain of love is conceptualized through six distinct source domains: light (Datum 4), rescue (Datum 5), danger (Datum 6), political allegiance (No. 7), simultaneous constraint and empowerment (Datum 8), and fire (Datum 9). This multiplicity reveals a semantic ambivalence that constitutes the central metaphorical argument of the song, aligning with Kövecses’s (2000) observation that complex emotional concepts frequently generate multiple and at times contradictory metaphorical mappings. Datum 8 is particularly significant in this regard, as it encodes three simultaneous source domains, i.e., *chain*, *crown*, and *vine*, within a single lyric line, representing an instance of metaphorical blending in which love is conceptualized as constraining, elevating, and organically entangling at once. This simultaneous multiplicity of mappings within a single expression has seldom been documented in prior analyses of popular song lyrics.

Furthermore, Datum 10: *sat alone in my tower*, warrants specific attention as it extends beyond a conventional orientational reading of isolation. The tower as source domain encodes not merely physical distance but spatial confinement with intertextual resonance, evoking the archetypal figure of the imprisoned woman in literary and folkloric tradition, a resonance directly relevant to the song’s Shakespearean intertextual frame. The co-occurrence of these twelve mappings across the lyrical text further suggests that the metaphors do not operate as isolated figurative expressions but form an interconnected network, a phenomenon that has seldom been examined systematically in prior research on popular music (Deignan et al., 2023).

Figure 1 illustrates the metaphorical network identified in the song, visualizing the relational structure among the twelve expressions across three conceptual clusters: emotional suffering, love, and emotional isolation.

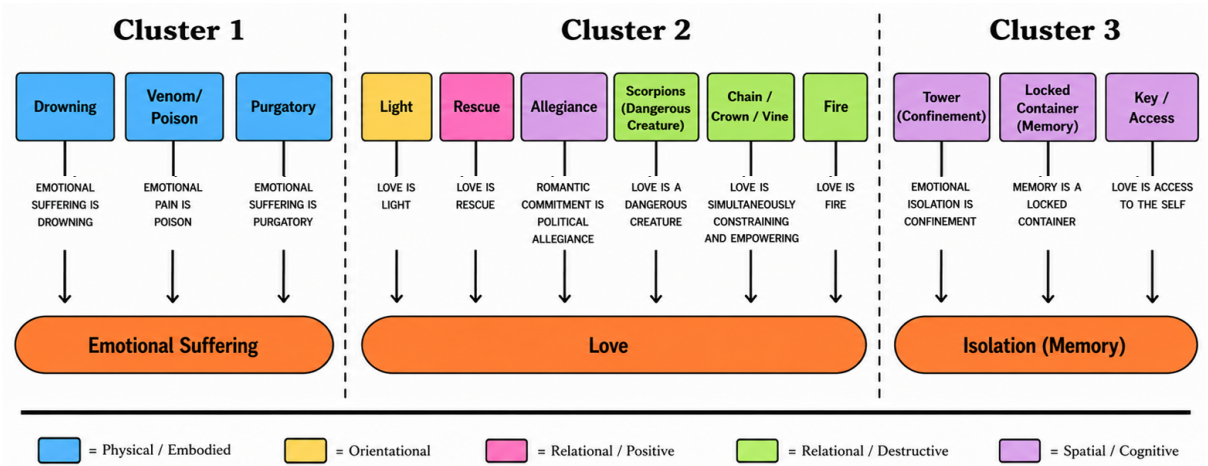


Figure 1. Metaphorical Network in Taylor Swift’s *The Fate of Ophelia*

Cluster 1: Emotional Suffering

The first cluster comprises three metaphorical expressions that collectively construct emotional suffering as a physically overwhelming, psychologically destructive, and spiritually immobilizing experience. Each expression draws from a distinct source domain, i.e., *water*, *poison*, and *spiritual confinement*, but all three converge on the same target domain of emotional suffering, forming a semantically coherent sub-network within the broader metaphorical architecture of the song.

Datum 1			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>drowned in the melancholy</i>	EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS DROWNING	Water/Drowning	Emotional suffering

The expression *drowned in the melancholy* maps the physical experience of drowning onto the abstract experience of emotional suffering. The mapping is structurally rich and systematic: water corresponds to the weight of melancholy, submersion corresponds to the total loss of emotional function, and the inability to surface corresponds to the absence of recovery. This systematic correspondence qualifies the expression as a structural metaphor in the Lakoffian sense, wherein one conceptual domain is comprehensively organized through another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The use of the past conditional "*might've drowned*" is analytically significant, as it positions the singer at the threshold between submersion and survival, indicating that emotional destruction was imminent but ultimately averted. This conditionality intensifies the representation of suffering as a force with lethal potential while simultaneously introducing the narrative possibility of rescue; a trajectory that anticipates the relational metaphors developed in Cluster 2. Kövecses (2000) observes that water-based metaphors for emotion are cross-culturally recurrent, reflecting the embodied universality of drowning as a source domain for overwhelming negative affect. This cross-cultural prevalence suggests that the metaphor operates not merely as a poetic device but as a cognitive structure through which the singer's emotional condition is rendered accessible and intelligible to the listener.

Datum 2			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>the venom stole her sanity</i>	EMOTIONAL PAIN IS POISON	Venom/Poison	Emotional pain and psychological destruction

The expression *the venom stole her sanity* maps the biological process of venom acting on a living organism onto the psychological process of emotional pain destroying mental stability. The structural mapping is precise and systematic: venom corresponds to emotional pain, the organism corresponds to the singer's psychological self, and the progressive biological destruction caused by venom corresponds to the gradual erosion of sanity. The verb *stole* is particularly significant, as it encodes emotional pain as an agentive force, one that acts deliberately and irreversibly upon its target. This agentive construction amplifies the sense of helplessness encoded in the target domain, representing the subject not as an active agent but as a passive recipient of destruction. Semino (2008) notes that poison metaphors in literary discourse consistently encode harm as covert, progressive, and systemic rather than sudden and visible, a set of entailments that maps precisely onto the psychological deterioration described in this lyric. This datum also introduces the intertextual dimension of the song explicitly, as the expression refers directly to Ophelia's narrative and positioning her psychological destruction as the cautionary fate from which the singer seeks escape.

Datum 3			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>lingered in purgatory</i>	EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS PURGATORY	Purgatory/Spiritual suffering	Emotional stasis and suffering

The expression *lingered in purgatory* maps the theological concept of purgatory onto the psychological experience of emotional stasis. In its source domain, purgatory denotes a liminal state between salvation and damnation, a condition of suspended existence characterized by neither resolution nor finality. These structural features are systematically transferred onto the target domain: emotional suffering is conceptualized not as acute pain but as an unresolved, suspended condition in which the singer exists between psychological destruction and recovery. The verb *lingered* reinforces this structural mapping by encoding temporal extension where the singer did not merely pass through this state but remained within it, suggesting that emotional stasis is an enduring condition rather than a transient experience. It is important to note that the source domain here is purgatory rather than hell, a distinction that carries significant analytical weight. As Kövecses (2000) argues, the precise selection of source domain determines the conceptual entailments available for mapping. Hell encodes finality and irreversibility, whereas purgatory encodes liminality, suspension, and the structural possibility of eventual release, entailments that align far more precisely with the emotional trajectory described in the song.

Taken together, the three expressions in Cluster 1 construct emotional suffering as a multi-dimensional experiential structure. EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS DROWNING encodes suffering as physically overwhelming and acutely lethal in potential. EMOTIONAL PAIN IS POISON encodes it as covert, progressive, and agentively destructive. EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS PURGATORY encodes it as temporally suspended and existentially unresolved. Rather than representing three isolated figurative choices, these mappings form a coherent sub-network in which the source domains of water, poison, and spiritual confinement collectively construct a portrait of suffering that is total, insidious, and enduring. This convergence of multiple source domains onto a single target domain exemplifies what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as the systematic nature of conceptual metaphor; wherein abstract experiences are not merely named but structurally organized through concrete experiential domains. The progressive intensification from acute drowning to covert poisoning to suspended liminality also establishes a narrative arc that prepares the conceptual ground for the relational rescue metaphors developed in Cluster 2.

Cluster 2: Love

The second cluster comprises seven metaphorical expressions that collectively construct love as a semantically ambivalent experiential domain. Unlike the relatively unified target domain of Cluster 1, love in this song is conceptualized through six distinct source domains, i.e., *light*, *rescue*, *danger*, *political allegiance*, *simultaneous constraint and empowerment*, and *fire*, producing a network of competing and at times contradictory mappings that resist reduction to a single conceptual structure. This multiplicity constitutes the central metaphorical argument of the song and is examined in detail below.

Datum 4			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>lit my sky up</i>	LOVE IS LIGHT	Light/Brightness	Love and hope

The expression *lit my sky up* conceptualizes love through the source domain of light. At its most basic level, this mapping participates in the orientational pattern GOOD IS LIGHT, which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify as grounded in the universal bodily experience of light as enabling perception and darkness as impeding it. However, the specific elaboration in this lyric extends beyond a simple orientational mapping into structural territory. The phrase does not

merely assert that love is positive; it encodes a structured scenario in which an agent (the beloved) performs a transformative action (ignition) upon a bounded spatial domain (the sky), producing a permanent change of state (illumination). This structural elaboration maps systematically onto the target domain: the beloved as the active source of transformation, love as the transformative event, and the singer's emotional landscape as the domain permanently altered. Musolff (2019) argues that creative extensions of orientational metaphors generate structural complexity when they introduce agentive and transformative elements that exceed the basic directional mapping. This expression exemplifies precisely such an extension. Accordingly, while the mapping retains orientational roots, its structural elaboration qualifies it as a structural metaphor in the Lakoffian sense, a theoretical boundary that itself reflects the gradient nature of metaphor categorization in natural language (Kövecses, 2000). The temporal marker *right before* also positions this metaphor in direct narrative contrast with the drowning metaphor in Datum 1, establishing a structural before-and-after emotional trajectory within the song.

Datum 5			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>saved my heart from the fate of Ophelia</i>	LOVE IS RESCUE	Rescue/Salvation	Emotional protection and recovery

The expression *saved my heart from the fate of Ophelia* maps the structured scenario of physical rescue onto the experience of emotional protection and recovery. The mapping is systematic and rich in entailments: the rescuer corresponds to the beloved, the person in danger corresponds to the singer, the danger itself corresponds to the fate of Ophelia (psychological destruction through love), and the act of rescue corresponds to the relational intervention that prevents that fate. The intertextual specificity of this expression is analytically significant, as the source domain of rescue is activated not in abstract terms but in direct opposition to a named literary precedent. Ophelia's fate, as established in Datum 2, is one of psychological destruction through toxic love; the rescue metaphor therefore derives its full structural meaning only in relation to that prior mapping. This intertextual dependency between Datum 2 and Datum 5 constitutes one of the clearest instances of inter-datum relational meaning within the metaphorical network. Deignan et al. (2023) observe that metaphorical meaning in extended discourse is frequently constructed through such cross-referential dependencies rather than through isolated expressions, a phenomenon this datum exemplifies with particular clarity.

Datum 6			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>love was a cold bed full of scorpions</i>	LOVE IS A DANGEROUS CREATURE	Dangerous creature/Scorpion	Toxic love

The expression *love was a cold bed full of scorpions* maps the physical danger of venomous creatures onto the experience of toxic love. The structural mapping encodes love as an environment that appears domestic and intimate (a bed) yet conceals lethal danger within it. The adjective *cold* contributes a further entailment: the absence of warmth in the source domain maps onto the absence of emotional nurture in the target domain, constructing toxic love as simultaneously physically threatening and affectively barren. This expression is analytically connected to Datum 2, as both share the semantic field of venom and biological danger. However, whereas Datum 2 focuses on the progressive psychological destruction caused by toxic love, Datum 6 focuses on the structural conditions that produce that destruction, namely the deceptive domesticity of a dangerous relational environment. Semino (2008) notes that danger metaphors in literary discourse frequently encode the coexistence of apparent safety and concealed threat, a double entailment that is precisely operative here. This datum also functions within the intertextual frame of the song as a direct characterization of Ophelia's relational experience, extending the source domain of biological danger across both the embedded narrative and the singer's own

emotional history.

Datum 7			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes</i>	ROMANTIC COMMITMENT IS POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE	Political allegiance	Romantic commitment

The expression *pledge allegiance to your hands, your team, your vibes* map the formal structure of political allegiance onto the experience of romantic commitment. This datum warrants specific theoretical attention as it introduces a source domain of sociopolitical institution that is atypical within the established literature on emotion and love metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) predominantly identify source domains for love as drawn from physical, spatial, and natural experience; the deployment of a political and institutional source domain here represents a marked departure from that paradigm. The structural mapping is nonetheless systematic: the act of pledging allegiance corresponds to the declaration of romantic commitment, the political body (team) corresponds to the relational unit, and the objects of allegiance (hands, team, vibes) correspond to the embodied, social, and affective dimensions of the beloved. The specificity of *hands* as an object of allegiance is particularly significant, encoding the beloved's physical presence as the primary site of loyalty, a grounding of political abstraction in embodied intimacy. Kalinin and Ignatenko (2024) observe that metaphors drawing from institutional and political source domains encode commitment as binding, formal, and publicly accountable, entailments that introduce a register of deliberate agency into the target domain of romantic love. This stands in productive tension with the more passive and overwhelmed subject position encoded in Cluster 1, suggesting a relational transformation in the singer's affective agency across the arc of the song. The anomalous nature of this source domain itself is analytically significant, as it indicates that the song's metaphorical architecture draws from a broader range of experiential domains than prior research on love metaphors in popular music has typically documented.

Datum 8			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>wrap around me like a chain, a crown, a vine</i>	LOVE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY CONSTRAINING AND EMPOWERING	Imprisonment/Empowerment/ Organic growth	Love and attachment

The expression *wrap around me like a chain, a crown, a vine* encodes three simultaneous source domains within a single lyric line, representing an exceptional instance of metaphorical complexity. As noted in the preliminary findings, this expression takes the surface form of a simile; however, following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), both similes and metaphors can serve as linguistic manifestations of the same underlying conceptual structure, with the distinction lying in degree of linguistic explicitness rather than cognitive organization. The three source domains activate distinct and partially contradictory entailments: a chain encodes love as physically restrictive and agency-denying; a crown encodes love as elevating, dignifying, and publicly bestowing status; and a vine encodes love as organically entangling, growing without deliberate design, and binding through natural rather than institutional force. The simultaneous activation of these three mappings within a single expression produces a conceptual blend in which love is irreducibly complex, constraining and elevating and entangling at once. Kövecses (2000) identifies such instances of simultaneous and contradictory mapping as characteristic of emotionally complex concepts, arguing that the cognitive richness of love as a target domain frequently exceeds the capacity of any single source domain to capture it fully. This datum therefore functions as the structural center of Cluster 2, crystallizing the semantic ambivalence that the cluster as a whole construct.

Datum 9

Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>pulling me into the fire</i>	LOVE IS FIRE	Fire	Passionate and destructive love

The expression *pulling me into the fire* maps the physical properties of fire onto the experience of passionate and destructive love. Fire as a source domain carries a structured set of entailments: it consumes, transforms, generates intense sensation, and destroys the boundaries of whatever it engulfs. These entailments map systematically onto the target domain, constructing love as simultaneously intensely felt and inherently destructive. The verb *pulling* encodes an additional structural feature, namely that the movement toward the fire is not self-initiated but externally compelled, positioning the singer as drawn into destruction by the force of the beloved's presence rather than by autonomous choice. This expression functions in close structural proximity to Datum 8, as both appear within the same lyric passage and together construct love as a force that binds and then consumes. Musolff (2019) observes that fire metaphors in literary and musical discourse consistently encode passion as inseparable from danger, a double entailment that is fully operative here. The progression from binding (Datum 8) to consuming (Datum 9) within a single lyric passage constitutes a micro-level narrative of relational entrapment that mirrors the macro-level narrative of the song.

Datum 12

Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>only you possess the key</i>	LOVE IS ACCESS TO THE SELF	Key/Access	Emotional intimacy and self-access

The expression *only you possess the key* maps the physical act of possessing a key onto the relational experience of emotional intimacy and privileged access to the self. The structural mapping is systematic: the locked space corresponds to the singer's inner emotional world, the key corresponds to the relational capacity to access that world, and the exclusive possession of the key corresponds to the singular and irreplaceable nature of the beloved's intimacy. The adverb *only* is analytically significant, as it encodes exclusivity as a defining structural feature of the mapping: the beloved alone possesses access, constructing intimacy as both rare and non-transferable. This expression functions as a direct structural complement to Datum 11 (examined in Cluster 3), which establishes memory as a locked container. Together, Datum 11 and Datum 12 form a paired metaphorical unit in which the container and the means of access are distributed across two expressions, producing a coherent metaphorical sub-structure within the broader network. Deignan et al. (2023) observe that such paired or distributed metaphorical structures are characteristic of extended lyrical texts in which meaning is constructed cumulatively across expressions rather than locally within individual lines.

The seven expressions in Cluster 2 collectively construct love as a semantically ambivalent and experientially irreducible domain. The source domains of light and rescue encode love as transformative, protective, and agentively benevolent. The source domains of danger, fire, and simultaneous constraint encode love as threatening, consuming, and restrictive. The source domain of political allegiance encodes love as formally binding and institutionally deliberate. The source domain of key and access encodes love as the exclusive gateway to self-knowledge and emotional intimacy. No single source domain captures the full conceptual structure of love as it is constructed in this song; rather, the target domain is constituted through the accumulation and tension of all seven mappings. This finding aligns with Kövecses's (2000) observation that love is among the most conceptually complex target domains in human language, precisely because its experiential structure exceeds the representational capacity of any single concrete domain. The semantic ambivalence encoded in Cluster 2 is further amplified by its narrative positioning within the song: the destructive mappings (Datum 6, 8, 9) are associated with Ophelia's historical experience, while the restorative mappings (Datum 4, 5, 12) are associated with the singer's

present relational experience, producing a temporal and intertextual structure of contrast that organizes the cluster's internal coherence.

Cluster 3: Isolation (Memory)

The third cluster comprises three metaphorical expressions that construct emotional isolation, psychological depression, and memory as spatially bounded and structurally contained experiential domains. Unlike the dynamic and agentively charged mappings of Cluster 2, the expressions in this cluster encode states of stasis, enclosure, and interiority, collectively constructing the singer's pre-relational condition as one of profound spatial and psychological confinement. Datum 11 occupies a structurally distinctive position within this cluster, functioning as a bridging metaphor that connects the experiential domains of Cluster 3 to the relational intimacy encoded in Datum 12 of Cluster 2.

Datum 10			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>sat alone in my tower</i>	EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IS CONFINEMENT	Tower/Physical confinement	Emotional isolation

The expression *sat alone in my tower* maps the physical experience of spatial confinement onto the psychological experience of emotional isolation. This datum warrants careful theoretical positioning, as confinement metaphors in some analytical frameworks are categorized as ontological rather than structural, insofar as they treat abstract states as bounded physical entities without activating a fully systematic inter-domain mapping. However, the tower as source domain in this expression encodes a structured set of entailments that exceeds ontological categorization. The tower's vertical elevation maps onto social and emotional distance from others; its enclosing walls map onto the self-reinforcing nature of prolonged isolation; its singular and static occupancy maps onto the singer's experience of solitude as total and enduring; and the temporal frame *all that time* maps onto the structural persistence of the isolated condition. Semino (2008) observes that architectural confinement metaphors in literary discourse consistently encode not only physical containment but also the systematic restriction of agency, perception, and relational access, all of which are operative in this expression. The boundary between ontological and structural metaphor is therefore gradient rather than absolute in this case, and this expression represents a productive site of theoretical intersection between the two categories, a co-occurrence that Kövecses (2000) recognizes as characteristic of metaphorical expressions in literary texts.

Beyond its structural mapping, this datum activates a significant intertextual resonance. The image of a woman alone in a tower evokes the archetypal figure of the imprisoned or isolated woman in literary and folkloric tradition, a resonance directly relevant to the song's Shakespearean intertextual frame. Ophelia herself is a figure defined by confinement within patriarchal structures that deny her agency and relational autonomy. The singer's self-positioning within a tower therefore aligns her pre-relational condition with Ophelia's structural situation, reinforcing the intertextual parallelism that organizes the song's broader metaphorical architecture. Musolff (2019) notes that intertextually activated metaphors derive additional semantic depth from the narrative and cultural associations of the source domain beyond its purely structural entailments, a dynamic that is fully operative in this datum.

Datum 11			
Lyric	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain
<i>'tis locked inside my memory</i>	MEMORY IS A LOCKED CONTAINER	Locked container	Memory

The expression *'tis locked inside my memory* maps the physical structure of a locked container onto the cognitive domain of memory. As with Datum 10, this expression warrants careful theoretical positioning, as container-based expressions are often categorized in the

literature as ontological rather than structural, given their grounding in the basic MIND IS A CONTAINER schema (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, the mapping in this expression exceeds a simple ontological boundary, encoding a systematic, multi-element correspondence between source and target domains, elaborated below. The structural mapping is systematic: the container corresponds to the bounded space of memory as an interior cognitive domain, the locking mechanism corresponds to the inaccessibility of certain memories without an appropriate relational key, and the contents of the container correspond to the emotionally significant experiences stored within memory. This expression occupies a structurally distinctive position within the overall metaphorical network, functioning as a bridging metaphor between Cluster 3 and Datum 12 of Cluster 2. As a bridging metaphor, it simultaneously belongs to the spatial and containment logic of Cluster 3 and activates the key-and-access structure of Datum 12, wherein the beloved's exclusive possession of the key grants privileged access to the singer's locked interior world. The container established in Datum 11 is precisely the space that the key in Datum 12 unlocks, producing a paired metaphorical unit that distributes a single coherent mapping across two expressions and two analytical clusters. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify the MIND IS A CONTAINER schema as among the most fundamental cognitive metaphors in human language, grounded in the basic bodily experience of interiority and the distinction between inside and outside. This datum instantiates that schema in a specifically relational context, wherein the container of memory becomes the site of emotional vulnerability and intimacy rather than merely cognitive storage. Deignan et al. (2023) observe that container metaphors in extended lyrical discourse frequently encode the interior self as a bounded and protected space whose accessibility is regulated through relational trust, an observation that captures precisely the structural logic operative in this expression.

The three expressions in Cluster 3 collectively construct the singer's pre-relational and interior condition as one of spatial enclosure and inaccessibility. EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IS CONFINEMENT encodes isolation as an architectural and enduring structural condition that restricts agency and relational access, while MEMORY IS A LOCKED CONTAINER encodes the singer's interior emotional world as bounded, protected, and accessible only through the relational key provided by the beloved.

Together, these mappings establish the spatial and structural logic of interiority that underpins the song's relational narrative: the singer is enclosed, buried, and locked before the beloved's intervention, and it is precisely the spatial and structural nature of that enclosure that makes the rescue, illumination, and access metaphors of Cluster 2 conceptually necessary. Cluster 3 therefore functions not merely as a descriptive account of isolation and depression but as the structural precondition for the relational metaphors that constitute the song's central emotional argument. The bridging function of Datum 11 is particularly significant in this regard, as it ensures that the transition from Cluster 3 to Cluster 2 is not merely narrative but conceptually motivated in which the locked container of memory requires the key of love, and it is this structural dependency that binds the two clusters into a unified metaphorical network.

Emotional Experience in "The Fate of Ophelia"

The analysis reveals that the structural metaphors identified in *The Fate of Ophelia* are not isolated figurative expressions but form an interconnected conceptual system that represents the speaker's emotional journey. The metaphors can be organized into three major clusters: Emotional Suffering, Love, and Isolation and Inner Self. Together, these clusters construct a coherent narrative trajectory that moves from emotional distress and isolation toward emotional recovery through love.

The first cluster consists of *EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS DROWNING*, *EMOTIONAL PAIN IS POISON*, and *EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS PURGATORY*. These metaphors conceptualize emotional distress as a condition that overwhelms, damages, and traps the individual. The metaphor *EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS DROWNING* portrays sadness as an

engulfing force capable of submerging the self, emphasizing loss of control and helplessness. Similarly, *EMOTIONAL PAIN IS POISON* conceptualizes emotional damage as a toxic substance that gradually destroys psychological stability. Meanwhile, *EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IS PURGATORY* frames emotional distress as a prolonged state of liminality in which the sufferer remains suspended between recovery and destruction. These metaphors depict emotional suffering not as a temporary feeling but as an existential condition. The speaker is represented as trapped in an emotionally destructive environment from which escape appears impossible without external intervention.

The second cluster contains the largest number of metaphors and represents the central conceptual domain of the song. The metaphors *LOVE IS LIGHT*, *LOVE IS RESCUE*, *LOVE IS A DANGEROUS CREATURE*, *ROMANTIC COMMITMENT IS POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE*, *LOVE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY CONSTRAINING AND EMPOWERING*, and *LOVE IS FIRE* reveal that love is conceptualized as a multidimensional force. On one hand, love functions as a positive and restorative experience. Through *LOVE IS LIGHT* and *LOVE IS RESCUE*, love is portrayed as a source of hope, guidance, and salvation capable of liberating the speaker from emotional suffering. These metaphors position the beloved as a transformative agent who reverses the destructive conditions represented in the first cluster. On the other hand, love is not represented as purely beneficial. The metaphor *LOVE IS A DANGEROUS CREATURE* introduces risk and vulnerability, while *LOVE IS FIRE* suggests both passion and potential destruction. Likewise, *LOVE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY CONSTRAINING AND EMPOWERING* reflects the paradoxical nature of intimacy. The images of a chain, a crown, and a vine simultaneously evoke restriction, status, support, attachment, and growth. Consequently, love emerges as an ambivalent force capable of both empowering and consuming the individual. This dual representation indicates that the song does not construct a simplistic romantic narrative. Instead, love is portrayed as a complex emotional experience that contains both restorative and destructive potential.

The third cluster consists of *EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IS CONFINEMENT*, *MEMORY IS A LOCKED CONTAINER*, and *LOVE IS ACCESS TO THE SELF*. These metaphors conceptualize the self as a spatially bounded entity that is separated from others. The image of the tower represents emotional isolation as confinement, suggesting withdrawal from interpersonal connection. Similarly, the metaphor *MEMORY IS A LOCKED CONTAINER* portrays the inner world as a closed cognitive space that protects personal experiences from external access. The accompanying metaphor *LOVE IS ACCESS TO THE SELF* introduces the beloved as the only individual capable of unlocking this protected domain. Unlike the first cluster, which emphasizes emotional pain, this cluster focuses on emotional distance and psychological boundaries. The metaphors collectively suggest that isolation is not merely a physical condition but a cognitive and emotional state that restricts access to one's authentic self.

Although the three clusters are analytically distinct, they form a unified conceptual structure. The progression of metaphors follows a narrative movement from isolation and suffering toward emotional connection and recovery. The singer initially occupies a state characterized by confinement, drowning, poison, and purgatory. These metaphors collectively construct a condition of emotional vulnerability and separation. Love then enters as a transformative force that illuminates, rescues, and reconnects the speaker to both the beloved and the self. Consequently, the song represents emotional healing not as an internal process alone but as an interpersonal experience facilitated through romantic attachment. This conceptual progression can be represented as:



Figure 2. Conceptual Progression in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia*

Thus, the three metaphorical clusters do not function independently but operate as interconnected stages within a broader conceptual narrative of emotional transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study identified twelve structural metaphors in Taylor Swift's *The Fate of Ophelia*, which are organized into three major conceptual clusters: Emotional Suffering, Love, and Isolation and Inner Self. These clusters collectively represent the speaker's emotional journey from psychological distress and isolation toward emotional recovery and intimacy. The findings demonstrate that emotional experiences are systematically conceptualized through concrete source domains such as drowning, poison, purgatory, light, rescue, fire, confinement, and locked spaces. Through these metaphorical mappings, abstract emotional states become more comprehensible and experientially grounded. Furthermore, the study reveals that love occupies a central role in the song's metaphorical system. Love is not only represented as a positive force through metaphors of light and rescue but also as a potentially dangerous and transformative force through metaphors of fire, dangerous creatures, and constraint. This dual representation highlights the complexity of emotional experience in the song and demonstrates how structural metaphors are used to construct a nuanced emotional narrative.

An additional finding is the presence of the metaphor SELF-DEVELOPMENT IS WEAPON PREPARATION, which does not fit neatly into the three clusters. Instead, it functions as a bridging metaphor that connects emotional suffering and isolation with the possibility of emotional recovery through love. This finding suggests that structural metaphors may operate not only as representations of emotional states but also as conceptual mechanisms that organize emotional transitions within a narrative.

This study focuses on a single song; therefore, future research may expand the scope by examining structural metaphors across multiple songs within the same album or across Taylor Swift's broader discography to identify recurring metaphorical patterns in the representation of emotional experiences. Future studies may also compare the use of emotional metaphors across different artists, genres, or cultural contexts to explore similarities and differences in metaphorical conceptualization. Such comparative analyses may provide broader insights into how emotional experiences are linguistically and culturally constructed.

In addition, future research may integrate Conceptual Metaphor Theory with other cognitive linguistic approaches, such as Conceptual Blending Theory, Image Schema Theory, or Narrative Metaphor Analysis, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how metaphors interact within lyrical narratives. Finally, the bridging metaphor identified in this study warrants further investigation, as it may reveal a distinct function of structural metaphors in connecting emotional states and shaping narrative development within song lyrics.

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