

## Deconstructing Taylor Swift's '1989 (Taylor's Version)': A Stylistic Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the stylistic devices employed in Taylor Swift's '1989 (Taylor's Version)' songs, focusing on the top three tracks in the Billboard Hot 100: "Is it Over Now? (Taylor's Version)," "Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)," and "Slut! (Taylor's Version)." Utilizing content analysis within the framework of morphological-lexical parallelisms and figurative languages, the research explored word, phrase, and morphemes repetition. The analysis underwent rigorous validation through inter-coding by three experts. The results revealed a rich tapestry of stylistic devices. Repetitions in words and phrases anchored to morphological-lexical parallelisms were noted. However, the researcher didn't spot morphemes repetition in the songs, "Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)," and "Slut! (Taylor's Version)." Furthermore, the top five prevalent figurative languages across the songs include metaphor, imagery, repetition, irony, and hyperbole. These artistic expressions weave intricate storylines, portraying themes of love, transformation, and self-development. The continuous evolution of figurative language in songs enriches the interpretive experiences for music fans and listeners.

**Keywords:** *1989 (Taylor's Version); Morphological-Lexical Parallelisms; Stylistic analysis*

### INTRODUCTION

The songs and current music are vibrant images of changing world culture, society, and technology. The music industry has been shaken by major transformations in the making, disseminating, and consumption of music in recent times (Shuker, 2016). With the advancement of digital technology and the emergence of streaming platforms, many artists can reach out to global audiences. This further has led to various mixed music scenes whereby a mix of different genres emerge, and new sounds constantly appear. There is also a hallmark of modern music that genre-fluid. The boundaries between traditional genres are becoming more and more porous, leading to a new world of hybrid styles that draw on an eclectic mix of influences. This combination of genres has produced a form of music that is difficult to classify since artists combine bits taken from pop, hip-hop, rock, and electronica, among others. It is this age when bands have defied these categories to create very diverse sonic experimentation.

Technology and its presence in modern-day music cannot be avoided (Wilson, 2023). The advent of powerful music creation software, as well as digital recordings has allowed musicians to craft elaborate sonic environments within the walls of their studio. Furthermore, the advent of the internet and social media has revolutionized artist-audience relations, creating a more intimate form of interaction. Apart from being advertising avenues, social platforms are places where artists can interact with their followers, reveal what happens behind the scenes, and even receive some inspiration from their audience. Such interlocking has created a feeling of unity and a spirit of camaraderie among musicians regardless of location.

Furthermore, Taylor Swift stands out as one of the brightest stars in current music and poetry study – from a simple singer and composer up to a significant trend phenomenon. In fact, how Swift captures the essence of being an American through her music demonstrates why she is a living monument representing the characteristics that are synonymous with Americans (Fogarty & Arnold, 2021). One of the key reasons that have made Swift one of the

most renowned singers of this generation is her skillfulness in songwriting (Sloan, N., & Harding, C. 2019). Her use of lyrical agility, by writing songs that speak to the universal feelings and experiences of most people within her audience, further illustrates her work as a facilitator for these shared ideas or sentiments. The mutual relationship between the artist and her audience demonstrates that music can bridge personal stories of life into a universal message about the fate of humankind (Nietzsche, 2023). Taylor Swift transcends the limits of music making and emerges as a cultural representative and change maker. More importantly, she stood up for other artists' rights and used her popularity and influence to address relevant social issues that would bring about positive changes. Such activities encourage a probe into the ability of musicians as social changers with their complex artistic role in society.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Taylor Swift's persistence in the ever-evolving music world demonstrates an impressive ability to continually reinvent her brand with each new album. The ability to change without sacrificing the authenticity of her vision reflects her strength, as well as the impact Swift has made on contemporary culture. This shows that Swift remained forever in the history of American music as an artist who sang well and composed songs that left a long mark on the cultural tradition.

This study delves into the intricacies of the recently launched album, '1989 (Taylor's Version),' spotlighting the songwriter and composer's creative nuances. While numerous studies have scrutinized various artists' songwriting techniques and lyric assessments, a noticeable gap exists in the literature regarding the specific stylistic devices utilized in the songs of '1989 (Taylor's Version).' Despite the wealth of research on songwriting approaches, there is a dearth of analysis on the distinctive elements characterizing the selected tracks from this album. This research seeks to fill this void, exploring the unique stylistic choices made by the songwriter and composer in '1989 (Taylor's Version),' contributing valuable insights to the broader understanding of musical composition and expression.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study determined the various stylistic devices in the selected Taylor Swift's '1989' (Taylor's Version) songs. The researcher has gathered local and foreign literature and studies that support the undertaking. These are presented thematically.

### *Stylistics in Songs*

The language use and the actual melody are essential stylistic dimensions which help define the general artistic effect and feeling of a song. Songwriters use a choice of linguistic, poetic, and rhetoric to make stories understandable by listeners (Smith, 2018). In addition, it is worth noting that the relationship between linguistic selections and musical arrangements also contributes to the complex experience of listening to a song. Such elements as rhythm, rhyme, and melody combine to form multiple levels of meaning which intensify the ability of music to convey messages. Every song style is significant about how the respective genre represents itself (Moore, 2016). The stylistic choices used to write songs range from complex wordplays, rhythms and rhyme schemes used in hip hop, to simple words in folk and country music. Stylistics analysis enables one to perceive how artists use words and music to express themselves, elicit feelings as well as reflect on culture (Alexander, 2020). Consequently, stylistics in songs give a clear view on the challenging linkage among language, music, and emotions. In essence, through an examination of language choice, rhetorical strategies as well as music choices, researchers/enthusiasts acquire new awareness about what makes songs great tools for artistic expression and cultural commentary into the bigger context of songwriting.

In addition, the contribution of stylistic is not limited to a particular song but it also makes impacts on general trend as well as movement in musical industry (Lomax, 2017). Experimentation by the artists on linguistic and musical styles leads to the growth in genres

and emergence of new ways of expressing themselves. However, stylistic changes such as new lyrics and arrangement may create a way for revolutions in society and art (Reed, 2019). The emergence of spoken word poetry within some musical genres demonstrates a crossing of stylistic borders as it reveals that artists are never satisfied with the norms in linguistic usage, and they always search for something new both expressive and effective.

Moreover, the fact that music is worldwide gives an opportunity to discover unique style within different nations and languages. Various linguistics traditions put different twists on the way of selecting metaphors or idioms as well as culture references in a songwriting process. Artists break through language, time, and place to reach the hearts of their audience across cultures. The cross-fertilization of these styles enriches the world's musical fabric to enhance our understanding of how language and music are interconnected to produce compelling and meaningful songs. Primarily, stylistics determine an individual song (Sa'idah, 2023) but also shapes the diversity and the dynamic nature of the global musical landscape.

### ***Taylor Swift's Music***

The modern-day music fraternity has a great name in Taylor Swift who is indeed one of the pioneer artists in the current arena cutting across various genres of art. In 2006, she started her career in country music with her self-titled debut. Her move onto pop music in 2014 was indicative of an impressive ability to adapt creatively (Cook, 2018). Swift's trademark is in her mastery of using autobiographical storytelling in her songs, an approach that is grounded in lived experience and relationships and has proven commercially successful and critically sound (James, n.d)

Apart from music, Swift has shown diversity by going into acting and philanthropy which reveals an element of multi-faceted involvement. This is a clear example of her contemporary status as a cultural maven, moving beyond traditional musician categorization due to her adoption of the modern sociotechnical approach. Despite her efforts in art, Swift has become an outspoken character in the music world (Junes, 2023). Thematic transition that is evident on "Lover", shows Swift's trajectory, which marks another phase that takes her back to the intensive personal narration about love, self-actualization, and social commentaries. The reason why Taylor Swift will always be a force in the music industry is because she is an artist that adapts, works as the CEO of her business, engages in philanthropy, and fights for the rights of artists. Therefore, Swift keeps remaining a subject of academic discussion with respect to everything that surrounds art-music, entertainment, society and politics.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

This study focused on the question:

1. What are the occurring stylistic devices in the selected Taylor Swift's '1989 (Taylor's Version)' songs?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study employed a qualitative research design. The researcher utilized the Billboard Hot 100 as the platform for choosing the necessary subjects/corpus. Upon evaluation, it has been found out that the three topmost songs as of first week of November 2023 are: *Is it Over Now? (Taylor's Version)*, *Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)*, and *Slut! (Taylor's Version)*. All these songs are written and sung by Taylor Swift.

A suitable method of analysis of the song lyrics is being observed. Content analysis was employed to identify the most occurring stylistic devices in the selected Taylor Swift's '1989 (Taylor's Version)' song lyrics. The researcher has set the limitation to Morphological-Lexical Parallelisms and Figurative Languages. To ensure that the analysis presents thick descriptions,

the researcher asked three (3) experts to confirm the emerging analysis in the process of inter-coding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study revolves around uncovering the stylistic devices employed in the topmost songs found in Billboard Hot 100 – Is it Over Now? (Taylor’s Version), Now That We Don’t Talk (Taylor’s Version), and Slut! (Taylor’s Version). All these songs are written and sung by Taylor Swift. The researcher focused on morphological-lexical parallelisms and figurative languages.

### *Morphological and Lexical Parallelisms*

Morphological and lexical parallelisms refer to linguistic patterns and similarities in the structure and content of words or morphemes within a given context, often observed in literature, poetry, or language analysis. The researcher navigated word repetition, phrase repetition, and morphemes repetition.

#### *1.1 Is it Over Now? (Taylor’s Version)*

This presents the first song lyrics of Is it Over Now? (Taylor’s Version) highlighting the word repetition, phrase repetition, as well as the repetition of morphemes.

*“Let’s fast forward to 300 takeout coffees **later**”*

*“Let’s fast forward to 300 awkward blind dates **later**”*

*“(Flashing lights, oh Lord) Let’s fast forward to 300 takeout coffees **later**”*

In the song lyrics of *Is it Over Now? (Taylor’s Version)*, the songwriter employs various linguistic devices to convey thematic elements and evoke emotional resonance. Word repetition is evident in instances such as *“later,”* emphasizing the passage of time, and the possessive pronoun *“my,”* reinforcing a sense of personal ownership.

*“Let’s fast forward to 300 takeout coffees later”*

*“Let’s fast forward to 300 awkward blind dates later”*

*“(Flashing lights, oh Lord) Let’s fast forward to 300 takeout coffees later”*

*“Oh Lord, I think about jumping”*

*“Baby, was it over when she laid down on your couch?”*

*“Was it over when he unbuttoned my blouse?”*

Phrase repetition is strategically used to underscore uncertainty, as seen in the questioning structure of *“Baby, was it over when she laid down on your couch? / Was it over when he unbuttoned my blouse?”* This repetition serves to accentuate the ambiguity surrounding pivotal moments. Also, the phrase, *“Let’s fast forward to 300...”* has been noted to be repeatedly appearing in the lyrics. The recurrence of this phrase functions as a rhetorical device, structuring the lyrics to mark significant transitions in time. Through the repetition of *“fast forward”* and the specific numerical reference *“300,”* the songwriter creates a rhythmic and anticipatory effect, drawing attention to the unfolding events in a stylized manner. This repetition not only serves a practical purpose in signaling temporal shifts but also contributes to the overall thematic resonance of the song. Furthermore, the recurrence of *“Oh Lord, I think about jumping”* not only emphasizes the contemplative nature of the lyrical content but also establishes a poignant rhythm that resonates throughout the composition. This phrase repetition acts as a refrain, reinforcing the introspective and emotionally charged theme of the lyrics (Sun,

2011 as per cited Gao & Karin, 2023). It provides a consistent thread through the narrative, creating a sense of continuity and reflection.

*“And did you think I didn't see you? There were flashing lights”*  
*“Think I didn't see you? There were flashing lights”*  
*“Oh Lord, I think about jumping”*

Furthermore, morpheme repetition, exemplified by *“Flashing lights”* and *“jump,”* creates vivid and recurring images, contributing to the song's evocative nature. These deliberate repetitions serve as powerful tools, enhancing rhythm, emphasis, and thematic cohesion, ultimately elevating the overall impact and coherence of the song's narrative.

### 1.2 Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)

This captures the songwriter employing a strategic use of repetition, both in terms of words, phrases, and morphemes, to convey an expressive narrative theme.

*“I guess I'll never, ever know”*  
*“But I guess I don't have a say”*  
*“Guess maybe I am better off”*  
*“Guess this is how it has to be”*

The repetition of the word *“guess”* in the song lyrics serves as a linguistic device that encapsulates the speaker's internal conflict and uncertainty within the narrative. This repetition, notably in the phrase *“I guess,”* implies a lack of definitive knowledge or clarity in the speaker's reflections. Through the repetition of *“guess,”* the songwriter conveys a sense of hesitancy and introspection, suggesting that the speaker is grappling with complex emotions or situations.

In addition, this repetition can be seen as a deliberate choice to emphasize the speaker's subjective experience and the challenges inherent in navigating the aftermath of a relationship. It adds a layer of authenticity to the lyrical content, capturing the nuanced and evolving nature of the speaker's thoughts. The repetition of *“guess”* becomes a linguistic marker, providing insight into the internal struggles and cognitive processes of the narrator, contributing to the overall depth and relatability of the song.

*“Now that we don't talk”*  
*“I called my mom, she said that it was for the best”*  
*“I called my mom, she said to get it off my chest (Off my chest)”*  
*“I cannot be your friend, so I pay the price of what I lost”*  
*“I cannot be your friend, so I pay the price of what I lost”*

The repetition of important phrases in the lyrics helps to tell stories efficiently (Low, 2016). An encompassing theme on which *“Now that we don't talk”* constantly reoccurs acts as an anchor on musical level; it underscores the eternal ramification between a couple who fail to communicate well. The recurrence highlights how deep-seated, far-reaching and unforgettable silence is in the emotional terrain. Moreover, *“I called my mom”* represents repetitive action to show that there's always the source for supporting and guiding. This repetition strengthens the importance of having outside views amidst emotional storms. Moreover, the different iterations of *“I cannot become your mate, I suffer for what I have lost”* emphasize how unwavering the narrator's boundaries.

The song writer uses these recurrent words to create a story layered emotionally and full of thematic resonance through which listeners will find their own narratives of loss, adaptation, and understanding.

### 1.3 Slut! (Taylor's Version)

This section explains the occurring words, phrases, and morphemes repetition in the song "Slut! (Taylor's Version)" that make the lyrics more appealing to the target audiences.

*"Got love-struck, went straight to my head"*

*"Got lovesick all over my bed"*

*"Love to think you'll never forget"*

*"Love thorns all over this rose"*

*"I might as well be drunk in love"*

*"You're not sayin' you're in love with me"*

The most used word is "love", which proves to be an important theme for exploring emotional and relationship issues. In addition, the deliberate repetition of "love" becomes variously expressed such as exhilaration "*in love-struck*", expressiveness "*lovesick*", and depth into self-reflection – "*drunk in love*". The first one is about symbolic imagery in which the phrase "*Love thorns all over this rose*" emphasizes on the double-edged feature of love that is both beautiful and challenging. Furthermore, the phrase "*You're not saying that you are in love with me*" utilizes double repetition of "love" as a way of provoking thought and creating uncertainty about what is going on in the song. The repeated saying of "love" is a methodological strategy, which runs as a sort of connecting theme, tying various experienced emotions into one complex study on psychological issues hidden in the lyrics.

*"Got love-struck, went straight to my head"*

*"Got love-struck, went straight to my head (Straight to my head)"*

*"But if I'm all dressed up"*

*"But if I'm all dressed up (If I'm all dressed up)"*

Repetition of phrases is significant in giving shape of thematic landscape as well as emotions associated with the analyzed song lyric (Fox, 2019). Such recurrent phrases as "*I got love – stricken, it went straight in my head*", "*I was lovesick all over my bed*" or "*love to think you'll never forget me*", provide to a rhythm and tune about love story that goes through many levels. The theme of love has been repeated throughout different perspectives—the idea of having "*love-struck*" or the vulnerability attached to the title "*lovesick*". The same goes for the phrase repetition in the lines, "*But if I'm all dressed up.*" Moreover, "*And if they call me a slut, then might be worth it*" means that there will be some resistance and defiance towards societal judgments on these subjects that adds even more layers of power into the story. It is through the lyrics that one finds a continuous idea of "*being drunk in love*", combining passion, fragility, and self-affirmation. These repeated sentences become part of the songs' story, developing an atmosphere that is suggestive and resonant with themes.

### Figurative Languages in Songs

This section magnifies the top five most used figurative languages in the selected songs of Taylor Swift that are included in '1989 (Taylor's Version)' album. Figurative languages have been significant in both literary and non-literary genres. Artists, poets, writers, and the like typically make use of these for the text to be more appealing to the readers. In line with literary genres, songwriters and even composers have started incorporating both tropes and schemes to

express deep thoughts and opinion regarding a particular topic. Contemporary singers such as Taylor Swift have employed numerous figurative languages. The researcher presented the prevalent figurative languages in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Top 5 Most Prevalent Figurative Languages

<b>Figurative Language</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Metaphor	6	32
Imagery	5	26
Repetition	3	16
Irony	3	16
Hyperbole	2	10
<b>Total = 19</b>		<b>100</b>

The top five prevalent figurative languages in the three sets of song lyrics of Taylor Swift namely, *Is it Over Now? (Taylor's Version)*, *Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)*, and *Slut! (Taylor's Version)* reveals a rich embroidery of artistic expression.

Metaphor, a dominant element with six (6) instances, is employed to convey nuanced meanings and evoke vivid imagery. One notable metaphor is found in the line "*With the wilt of the rose,*" where the wilting rose serves as an emotional metaphor for the decline or end of a romantic relationship. The use of metaphor extends to colors in another instance, "*Red blood, white snow, Blue dress on a boat,*" symbolically capturing emotional and visual elements associated with a significant event or change.

Meanwhile, imagery emerges as the second most prevalent literary device, with five (5) frequency counts across the lyrics. This figurative device creates visually evocative scenes, as exemplified in "*I see your profile and your smile on unsuspecting waiters,*" where the speaker observes the subject in various situations, painting a detailed mental picture. The incorporation of vivid imagery serves to enhance the listener's immersive experience and emotional connection to the narrative. Repetition, present in three (3) times, contributes to a rhythmic cadence and serves as a narrative device emphasizing the passage of time. In the line "*Let's fast forward to 300 takeout coffees later,*" repetition serves as a powerful mechanism to underscore the extended duration and significance of time passing, providing a sense of temporal progression. Furthermore, irony, as equally evident for three (3) orders, introduces a layer of complexity to the lyrics. In the line "*You dream of my mouth before it called you a lying traitor,*" irony lies in the contrast between dreamy idealization and the harsh reality of being labeled a traitor. This creates a subtle tension and adds depth to the thematic exploration. Lastly, hyperbole, with two (2) frequency counts, is employed to emphasize the extent of change. In "*300 takeout coffees later,*" hyperbolic expression underscores the extended duration and significance of time passing, suggesting a prolonged period of reflection or transformation.

These figurative languages show that the artists intended to weave an intricate storyline with multiple themes revolving around love, transformation, and self-development. Also, figurative languages in songs have been continuously painting different impressions and interpretations to music fans and listeners.

## CONCLUSION

The present study centered on morphological-lexical parallelisms and figurative languages, offering an in-depth understanding of the linguistic richness in these compositions. All throughout the examination, the researcher noted that Taylor Swift employs a sophisticated blend of morphological-lexical parallelisms and figurative language to craft compelling

narratives in her songs. The repeated linguistic elements serve as powerful tools for conveying emotion, emphasizing thematic nuances, and creating a multi-layered and resonant musical experience for listeners. The intricate interplay of these stylistic devices contributes to the enduring appeal and interpretive depth of Taylor Swift's songwriting particularly in '1989 (*Taylor's Version*)' song album.

The study of morphological and lexical parallelisms delves into linguistic patterns and similarities within the song lyrics. In "*Is it Over Now? (Taylor's Version)*," the repetition of phrases like "*Let's fast forward to 300 takeout coffees later*" serves as a rhetorical device, marking significant transitions in time and contributing to the thematic resonance. In "*Now That We Don't Talk (Taylor's Version)*," the deliberate use of repetition, particularly the word "*guess*," encapsulates internal conflict and uncertainty, providing insight into the speaker's evolving thoughts. The strategic repetition of phrases in "*Slut! (Taylor's Version)*" not only adds rhythm and tune to the love story but also emphasizes various perspectives on the theme of love.

Figurative languages like metaphors, imagery, repetitions, ironies, and hyperboles also make the storyline of this song more vivid and fuller. Metaphor used 6 times provides space for different meanings and picturesque images. The wilting rose in "*Is It Over Now*" is one example. With five instances of imagery, Taylor's version evokes visual experiences for the listener making listening even more immersive. Three-time repetition is responsible for rhythmic cadence and makes clear that time proceeds. The irony which comes in thrice makes it very difficult to understand and interprets the songs as dreams versus reality. "*300 take out coffees later*" highlights this using hyperbole with two occasions.

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