

The playground of a poem: Exploring metaphors in El poeta Halley

El patio de un poema: Explorando las metáforas en *El poeta Halley*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the use of metaphors in the song *El poeta Halley* by the Spanish indie rock band Love of Lesbian. The study focuses on how metaphorical language represents the creative process of writing, especially the author's struggle to find inspiration and transform abstract ideas into poetic expression. Drawing on concepts from metaphor theory and rhetorical figures, the lyrics were examined as textual data and the identified metaphors were classified into four thematic categories: intangible into tangible, inspiration, personal and cultural background and beliefs, and Spanish as a rhetorical figure. The analysis shows that the song presents writing as a complex emotional and linguistic journey in which words become living entities, inspiration is personified, and the poet's identity is reflected in his creations. Overall, the report argues that metaphors in *El poeta Halley* allow listeners to understand the difficulties, attachments, and transformations involved in poetic creation.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Metaphors; Rethorical figures; Poem; El poeta Halley.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza el uso de metáforas en la canción *El poeta Halley* de la banda española de indie rock Love of Lesbian. El estudio se centra en cómo el lenguaje metafórico representa el proceso creativo de la escritura, especialmente la dificultad del autor para encontrar inspiración y transformar ideas abstractas en expresión poética. A partir de conceptos relacionados con la teoría de la metáfora y las figuras retóricas, la letra de la canción fue examinada como dato textual y las metáforas identificadas fueron clasificadas en cuatro categorías temáticas: lo intangible convertido en tangible, la inspiración, el contexto personal y cultural y las creencias, y el español como figura retórica. El análisis muestra que la canción presenta la escritura como un viaje emocional y lingüístico complejo, en el que las palabras se convierten en entidades vivas, la inspiración es personificada y la identidad del poeta se refleja en sus creaciones. En general, el informe sostiene que las metáforas en *El poeta Halley* permiten a los oyentes comprender las dificultades, los vínculos afectivos y las transformaciones que forman parte de la creación poética.

Palabras clave: Análisis del discurso; Metáforas; Figuras retóricas; Poema; El poeta Halley.



Introduction

Metaphor is a central resource in poetic and musical discourse because it allows abstract experiences, such as inspiration, identity, doubt, and creativity, to be represented through concrete images. The song uses metaphors to guide the listener through the songwriter's journey of creating, trying to exemplify his own struggles, fears or the lack of trust in himself to communicate what he pretends to say. The representations of these issues rely on the use of Spanish language features as the path that will finally lead the author to their final creation. The objective of this paper was to identify and classify the different metaphors used into the themes that can be interpreted in terms of meaning.

Literature review

Metaphor as a conceptual tool

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003) metaphors are not merely poetic decorations to communicate someone's thoughts. They help people to picture their thoughts or how they may represent their ideas through meaningful symbols, making it easier to understand elements that could be complex to express otherwise. For example, the song represents these ideas in how a poem is the last step in a creation journey. Now the words play harmoniously in the poem as their playground. Metaphor theory helps to identify and later analyze how the author's perceptions will be represented to the audience.

Lakoff (2006) mentions that in traditional views metaphors are tied to false assumptions. These views tend to assume that everyday language is literal, because everything can be understood without metaphors. They also assume that truth and definitions belong only to literal language, because definitions in lexicon language are not metaphorical. Lakoff (2006) challenges this by arguing that metaphors are part of ordinary thoughts and communication, and not only as decorative words that any author may use. The author of the song uses this resource to exemplify the very beginning of his writing, providing the listeners with a better 'picture' of it.

Rhetorical figures in discourse

Rhetorical figures are linguistic strategies that help to create a deeper understanding and meaning beyond literal expression. Van Enschoot et al. (2008) explain that a rhetorical figure is often used as this artful deviation from a straightforward expression to communicate more effectively. Besides this, rhetorical figures also provide the audience with a simpler set of words to remember. This connection is used most of the time in songs or poems as emotions can be represented easier, and the listeners can find themselves in those situations. Mitrović et al. (2017) proposes that in rhetorical figures tropes and schemes arise as main figures. "Tropes are figures of speech with an unexpected twist in the meaning of words" (p. 267). While schemes deal with patterns of the words, for example word order, syntax, letters, etc. (Mitrović et al., 2017).



Connecting theory and this study

Metaphors will be guiding the audience in the journey of the author about his own issues while he creates a poem. The representations may facilitate the listeners' understanding and sympathize with him, creating the link between what he intended to express and how everyone else may adapt it to themselves. Rhetorical figures will materialize the concepts, to obtain the final representation which will be also under audience's perception. Lakoff and Johnson's theory offer help to frame metaphor as conceptual meaning-making, while rhetorical figures help to identify how the lyrics create poetic and discursive effects.

Methodology

The analysis conducted for this work followed a qualitative approach because the objective was to interpret how metaphors are used to represent the creative process of writing a poem. The analysis was guided by the research question: *How are metaphors used in the song to discuss the author's difficulties in creating a poem?*

The material used for was the song *El poeta Halley*, which belongs to the homonymous album published in 2016 by the Spanish indie rock band Love of Lesbian. I decided to choose this song not only because I am a fan of the band, but also because I have always found interesting the way its metaphors represent the creative process of writing. In the song, the Spanish language is used to talk about its own intricacies. Punctuation marks, grammatical categories, and words are described as artistic elements that decorate the text or function as rhetorical figures. The song was written by Santi Balmes, leader of the band and main songwriter. Another relevant aspect is that, at the end of the song, a poem is narrated by the Spanish songwriter Joan Manuel Serrat.

The first step taken was to examine the whole song lyrics (Appendix I). After reading the complete lyrics, the metaphors were identified and provided with a possible interpretation based on Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The metaphors were then catalogued into codes according to their ideological background and thematic meaning. Coding was useful because it helped organize the selected fragments and create a map of the data. As Elliott (2018) explains, coding helps researchers manage large amounts of qualitative data and make sense of them in relation to their research questions. The interpretations were grouped into four themes: intangible into tangible, inspiration, personal and cultural background and beliefs, and Spanish as a rhetorical figure.

Findings and discussion

When discussing metaphors, tangible meanings are often used to represent, measure, or make sense of intangible experiences. This resource is useful because metaphors help shape abstract ideas into images that the audience can visualize and interpret (Ziemkiewicz & Kosara, 2008). In *El poeta Halley*, metaphors are used to represent the creative process of writing, especially the author's difficulty in finding inspiration, choosing words, and accepting the independence of his own creations. The findings were organized into four categories: intangible into tangible, inspiration, personal and cultural background and beliefs, and Spanish as a rhetorical figure.



Intangible into tangible

The author begins the problem statement by suggesting that something can be caught “in the air” but not fixed to a wall: “*Me atraparás al vuelo / y nunca a la pared.*” This image helps the audience understand something that is probably not physical but still exists, such as an idea, a word, or inspiration. The metaphor transforms an abstract experience into something that can almost be captured, while still keeping its unstable nature. This resource continues near the end of the song with the line “*de intermitente aparición como un ángel hallado en un ascensor.*” In this case, inspiration or the solution to the author’s struggle appears as something unexpected and not completely reliable. The comparison suggests that inspiration may arrive suddenly, but not necessarily when it is needed.

The author also presents his writing and his creations as if they were people or children. These creations have their own voice and can act beyond his own perspective. Slowly, he allows the audience to give meaning to his work, although he seems to do so reluctantly: “*y te alegras y te enojas contigo mismo como todo lo que amamos con cierto egoísmo.*” This line shows that the author is attached to his work, but he also understands that once the poem is shared, it no longer belongs only to him. At the end, the author comforts himself through the metaphor of life and death. Life can be understood as the creation of a new poem, while death can be interpreted as the moment when the poem is finished or published. In this way, the process of writing is represented as a cycle in which words are born, transformed, released, and finally separated from their creator.

Inspiration

Inspiration appears as a female figure who helps the author improve his work. She appears between the lines, but her absence is described through the expression “*baja maternal.*” This image personifies inspiration as a muse who is not available when the writer needs her.

The writer also looks for different sources of inspiration for his work: “*rebuscando en mi almacén esa palabra.*” The word “*almacén*” may represent old poems, past writings, memories, or previous ideas stored in his creative background. In this sense, the author does not only wait for inspiration; he also searches inside his own experience and previous work. Throughout the lyrics, the author expresses concern about inspiration. At some points, he fears that she may never return: “*si no aparece nunca.*” At other moments, he criticizes her absence or passivity: “*te quedarás dormida, menuda novedad.*” These lines show inspiration as unreliable and difficult to control.

As the song continues, the author tries to separate himself from inspiration and challenge her with his own ideas: “*ahora escúchame, ya he encontrado la palabra justa, mejor prepárate.*” This moment suggests that the writer begins to trust his own process. However, he also recognizes that inspiration has helped him in the past: “*qué bien funcionas como recuerdo.*” Therefore, inspiration is not completely rejected; it becomes a backup or memory that the writer can return to when necessary. This idea appears again in the poem section: “*acojo en mi hogar palabras que he encontrado abandonadas en mi palabrera.*” Here, the author welcomes abandoned words into his creative space. Inspiration is no longer only an external muse; it is also connected to memory, language, and the writer’s ability to reuse forgotten words.



Personal and cultural background beliefs

The author recognizes that his work contains his own fingerprint: "*verías mi cara en el papel*." This metaphor suggests that writing reflects the author's identity, inner voice, and personal history. In this sense, the poem is not only a product of language but also a representation of the writer himself. This idea can be connected to Chenoweth and Hayes' (2003) concept of the inner voice in writing.

The author also presents himself as someone who depends on an external influential source, especially inspiration. His success or failure seems to be connected to whether inspiration appears or disappears. However, the lyrics also show that personal experience, memory, and belief are part of the creative process. One of the clearest examples of this category appears in the line "*en la autopista de la vida, si te saltas la salida hay que esperar*." Here, life is represented as a highway. The metaphor suggests that life follows certain paths and that, even when someone misses an opportunity or disagrees with the route, they must continue until another possibility appears. This image connects the creative process with a broader view of life, timing, and consequence.

The author's position toward religion also appears in the lines "*que escuadrones de moral judeocristiana con su culpabilidad nos seguirán por tierra, por el aire y sobre todo por amar*." These lines suggest that the author is familiar with Judeo-Christian moral values, even if he does not necessarily practice them. The metaphor of "squadrons" presents guilt as a force that follows and pressures people. In particular, the author seems to question rules that judge love or restrict how people should love. Finally, the author wraps his intention to write in the word "hope": "*pronunciaré esperanza, la gritaré por dentro si es lo que hace falta*." Hope becomes both a word and an emotional resource. He shares it with the audience, but he also seems to remind himself of it as many times as he needs. In this way, the metaphor connects writing with emotional resistance and self-encouragement.

Spanish as a rhetorical figure

The author's narrative allows the audience to visualize and sympathize with his struggles. This happens through several rhetorical resources, especially personification. Inspiration is represented as another person who can decide, speak, sleep, disappear, or influence the writer's process.

Following this path, the author does not only use his knowledge of Spanish to polish his writing; he also uses Spanish itself as a rhetorical figure. In the poem section, grammar and language become part of the metaphorical world of the song. Words are no longer passive elements; they become living creatures. This transformation is clear in the line "*examino cada jaula y allí ladrando vocales y consonantes*." The author captures the essence of trying to create a sentence from its most basic form: letters and sounds. Vowels and consonants are imagined as creatures in cages, which suggests that language is alive but also waiting to be selected and organized.

The song also represents grammatical categories as figures with their own conflicts. In the line "*por un sujeto que un día fue su amo y de tan creído que era prescindió del predicado*," the subject may be interpreted both



grammatically and personally. On one level, the line refers to the structure of a sentence. On another level, the “subject” may represent the author himself, whose ego makes him believe that he does not need a predicate, or perhaps that he does not need to complete the poem. The author continues exploring different options to keep writing, including adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns. However, he seems reluctant to repeat words or ideas that have already been used: “*señalo entonces a las palabras que llevan más días abandonadas y me las llevo a casa.*” This line suggests that the writer wants to recover forgotten words and give them a new function in his text.

The process of polishing language appears in the line “*las vacuno de la rabia y las peino a mi manera.*” Here, words are treated as living beings that need care, discipline, and transformation. The author removes the anger or roughness he does not want to include and prepares the words for the final poem. Finally, the words become part of the finished work and play outside the author’s mind: “*y yo sólo observo como juegan en el patio de un poema.*” This image is one of the most meaningful metaphors in the song because it shows that words, once selected and shaped, gain independence. They no longer remain only inside the writer; they become part of a poetic space where they can interact, move, and be interpreted by others.

Conclusions

Metaphors not only help writers express ideas through different concepts; they also help the audience or readers feel closer to the ideas that the author intends to communicate. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) suggest, metaphor is not only a poetic resource, but also a way of understanding and organizing experience. In *El poeta Halley*, the author addresses the problem of not finding inspiration to write and describes the journey he goes through during the creation of a poem.

The analysis showed the metaphors in the song as the representation of the author’s journey to write his poems. But the different representations of these steps offer the public a visualization of the process, even if you are not familiar with the process or poetry. The author guides the listeners of the song through the metaphors narrating his problems and how eventually he may solve them.

Understanding someone else’s values, perception, or narrative through metaphorical language changes the experience of how we perceive and value our surroundings. The capacity to adapt a piece of art and make it our own is one of the most interesting parts of our pragmatic competence. For this reason, *El poeta Halley* demonstrates how metaphors can transform a personal struggle with writing into a shared experience that listeners can interpret from their own perspective.



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