

Love as sacrifice: Metaphor and romantic ideology in José José's Amar y querer

Amor y sacrificio: Las metáforas e ideología romántica en *Amar y querer* de José José

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the metaphors used in the song *Amar y querer*, performed by José José in order to examine how they construct and reinforce a traditional ideology of romantic love in late twentieth-century Latin American culture. Based on the theory of Conceptual Metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the study identifies structural and ontological metaphors that represent love as suffering, sacrifice, service, devotion, and loss of rationality. Through the analysis of selected expressions from the lyrics, such as “amar es sufrir,” “el que ama pretende servir,” and “el que ama no puede pensar,” the paper shows how romantic love is framed as total surrender and emotional intensity, while “querer” is associated with pleasure, self-care, and well-being. The findings suggest that these metaphors do not function merely as poetic language, but as cultural and ideological tools that shape how love is understood and normalized. Ultimately, the study argues that *Amar y querer* reflects a traditional Latin American view of romantic love in which true love is idealized through pain, devotion, and self-denial.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Ideology; Metaphor; Love; Latin American culture.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza las metáforas utilizadas en la canción *Amar y querer*, interpretada por José José, con el propósito de examinar cómo construyen y refuerzan una ideología tradicional del amor romántico en la cultura latinoamericana de finales del siglo XX. Con base en la teoría de la Metáfora Conceptual propuesta por Lakoff y Johnson (1980), el estudio identifica metáforas estructurales y ontológicas que representan el amor como sufrimiento, sacrificio, servicio, devoción y pérdida de racionalidad. A través del análisis de expresiones seleccionadas de la letra, como “amar es sufrir,” “el que ama pretende servir” y “el que ama no puede pensar,” el trabajo muestra cómo el amor romántico se presenta como entrega total e intensidad emocional, mientras que el “querer” se asocia con el placer, el autocuidado y el bienestar. Los hallazgos sugieren que estas metáforas no funcionan únicamente como lenguaje poético, sino como herramientas culturales e ideológicas que moldean la forma en que el amor se entiende y se normaliza. Finalmente, el estudio sostiene que *Amar y querer* refleja una visión tradicional latinoamericana del amor romántico en la que el amor verdadero se idealiza mediante el dolor, la devoción y la renuncia personal.

Palabras clave: Análisis del discurso; Ideología; Metáfora; Amor; Cultura latinoamericana.



Introduction

Love is not only a feeling; it is culturally and socially constructed through beliefs, experiences, and language features that help shape each person's perspective. Metaphors help us understand romantic relationships from a figurative but also a deep perspective because "a metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 1). In this sense, metaphors are not only decorative elements in texts; they are the way reality is perceived and interpreted. In the song *Amar y querer*, performed by José José and written by Manuel Álvarez-Beigbeder Pérez (known artistically as Manuel Alejandro), love is represented as total surrender, leading to suffering, service, and loss of control.

This paper analyzes the song "Amar y querer" focusing on the types of metaphors that are used to describe love and its deep meaning. The purpose of this paper is to identify how these metaphors help construct and reinforce the ideology of traditional Latin American romantic love during the 1970s and 1980s. In this paper the song is treated not only as a musical text, but also as a cultural discourse that helps normalize a specific model of romantic love. By contrasting *amar* with *querer*, the lyrics present true love as suffering, devotion, and self-denial, while desire or affection is associated with pleasure, self-care, and well-being.

This analysis is based on the theory of Conceptual Metaphor proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), as well as on the cultural context of traditional love during the 1970s and 1980s. First, the paper will identify and categorize the metaphors found in the song. Then, it will explain how these metaphors represent love through suffering, sacrifice, service, devotion, and loss of rationality. Finally, it will discuss how these types of metaphors influence the way love is understood and normalized within a traditional romantic ideology.

Literature review

Metaphors have been widely studied as cognitive tools that play an important role in the construction of human thought. According to Lakoff (1993), "a metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (p. 1). This means that metaphors go beyond language because they are a form of conceptual thought. They allow people to understand abstract ideas, such as feelings, emotions, and experiences, by connecting them to more concrete concepts. In this case, the song *Amar y querer* goes beyond poetic phrases because it reflects an ideology of love in which true love is perceived as suffering, sacrifice, and total surrender. It can be observed that this perception is not only formed from an individual perspective, but also involves a broader cultural perspective. Therefore, metaphorical thought should be understood as a cognitive phenomenon and not only as a linguistic one. Lakoff (2014) explains that "Metaphorical thought and the metaphorical understanding of situations arises independent of language" (Lakoff, 2014, p. 1). It is not only about producing meaning through words, but about thinking metaphorically to express thoughts and transmit them in a deep way.

This literature review first explains conceptual metaphor theory as the theoretical basis of the analysis. It then presents the three main types of conceptual metaphors used in this paper and reviews previous studies on love metaphors across linguistic and cultural contexts. Together, these sources show that romantic love is often conceptualized through intensity, suffering, loss of control, and cultural expectations, which provides a foundation for analyzing *Amar y querer* as a discourse of traditional romantic love.



Taking this perspective into account, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed three classifications of conceptual metaphor: structural, ontological, and orientational. Each type will be briefly defined and illustrated with an example:

- Structural metaphors: In this kind of conceptual metaphor, complicated and abstract experiences are conceptualized based on simpler and more specific experiences (Nguyen, 2017). Example: "Love is a journey," which reflects how love is perceived and describes relationships from the perspective of a path in which there are obstacles, different routes, and destinations that may not always be the same.
- Orientational metaphors: In orientational conceptual metaphors, a system of ideas is organized through spatial relations such as up-down, inside-out, front-behind, shallow-deep, and center-periphery (Nguyen, 2017). Example: "Happy is up, sad is down," where happiness is associated with an upward orientation and sadness with a downward orientation.
- Ontological metaphors: People understand abstract experiences by conceptualizing them as objects, substances, or concrete entities (Nguyen, 2017). Example: "the mind is a machine," where the mind is understood as something that stores, processes, and can fail.

Based on these three types of metaphors, the following analysis examines how metaphors are used in three studies related to the song *Amar y querer*.

Aksan and Aksan (2010) analyzed metaphors of love in English based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory. Their study examines 22 metaphors through corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), identifying several metaphorical patterns used to express romantic love. The study reveals that love can be conceptualized through ideas such as fire, desire, and journey, which reflect intensity, loss of control, and the dynamics involved in romantic relationships. Additionally, it mentions how the use of these metaphors may vary depending on culture. This supports the present analysis because *Amar y querer* also uses metaphor to represent love as sacrifice, suffering, and total surrender.

Li and Chi's article *A Sweet and Painful Emotional Experience: Love Metaphors* (2020) focuses on conceptualizing love in both a positive way, as something beautiful, and a negative way, as something painful. Their analysis is useful for this paper because it shows that love metaphors often contain contradictions: love may be represented as desirable and meaningful, but also as intense, painful, and difficult to control. This is similar to *Amar y querer*, where expressions such as "amar es sufrir" and "es darlo todo" present love as both emotionally valuable and self-sacrificial.

Finally, Perović and Vuković-Stamatović (2021) analyze romantic love through culture by studying students from Montenegro in order to identify whether the ideology of love is universal or culturally specific. Their findings include metaphors such as love as suffering, a drug, a dream, and something insane. This indicates that the way people give meaning to love may be connected to both general conceptual patterns and specific cultural contexts. For this reason, their study supports the idea that *Amar y querer* can be analyzed not only as an individual artistic expression, but also as part of a broader cultural understanding of romantic love.



Overall, these studies demonstrate that love metaphors are not isolated poetic expressions but recurring conceptual patterns shaped by language, emotion, and culture. Aksan and Aksan (2010) show how English corpora reveal common metaphorical models of love, Li and Chi (2020) emphasize the coexistence of positive and painful conceptualizations, and Perović and Vuković-Stamatović (2021) highlight the role of cultural variation. However, these studies do not focus specifically on Latin American romantic music or on the contrast between *amar* and *querer*. This gap justifies the present analysis of José José's song as a cultural text that reflects a traditional ideology of romantic love.

Methodology

In order to conduct the analysis, the following research question was established: *How do the metaphors in the song Amar y querer construct and reinforce a traditional ideology of romantic love in the late twentieth century?*

This study follows a qualitative discourse analysis approach. The analysis focuses on selected lyrics from *Amar y querer* and examines how metaphorical expressions construct meanings of love, suffering, sacrifice, devotion, and rationality. The method is interpretive because it does not measure frequency; rather, it explains how the selected expressions contribute to a broader cultural ideology of romantic love.

Material used

The material used was the written lyrics of the song *Amar y querer*, performed by José José. This song was chosen because it contains several metaphors through which the ideology of traditional love is described. Likewise, it reflects a cultural interpretation of love in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, giving love a sense of sacrifice, total surrender, and devotion. In addition, the song provides a contrast between what it means to *amar* and *querer*, making it a significant text to analyze because of the way love is conceptualized.

Data coding and analysis

First, the lyrics were analyzed in order to identify expressions that describe romantic love. The selected expressions were chosen because they explicitly contrast *amar* and *querer* or because they represent love through suffering, service, sacrifice, loss of rationality, pleasure, self-care, or well-being. The following expressions were identified:



Tabla 1. Classification of metaphors found in the song lyrics

Lyric fragment	Metaphor type	Analysis
"Amar es sufrir, querer es gozar"	Structural	Amar es visto como sufrir o sacrificarse (el amor implica entregarse totalmente). El querer se percibe como placer o posesión.
"El que ama pretende servir"	Structural	Su rol es servir a quien amas.
"El que ama su vida la da"	Ontological	El amor entrega la vida. No es visto como morir literalmente, pero es renunciar a uno mismo, el no ponerse a uno mismo como prioridad.
"Y el que quiere pretende vivir y nunca sufrir"	Structural	El querer es visto como la búsqueda del bienestar, de comodidad, no sufrir emocionalmente. No es visto como el amor, que es sacrificarse.
"El que ama no puede pensar, todo lo da"	Ontological	El amor es perder el control, no pensar lógicamente y este domina la mente.

Findings and discussion

The analysis of the song *Amar y querer* shows that romantic love is conceptualized mainly through suffering, sacrifice, service, devotion, and loss of rationality. These metaphors reinforce a traditional ideology of love associated with pain, total surrender, and emotional intensity during the 1970s and 1980s. The findings are organized into three main metaphorical patterns: love as sacrifice and suffering, love as service and devotion, and love as loss of rationality.

Love as sacrifice and suffering

Most of the song represents love as suffering and sacrifice through expressions such as "amar es sufrir" and "el que ama su vida la da." These expressions suggest that true love requires pain, self-renunciation, and the willingness to give everything to another person. In this sense, love is not presented as emotional balance or mutual care, but as total surrender. This metaphorical construction reflects a traditional Latin American view of love present in boleros and romantic ballads, where "la renuncia al ser amado se asocia con la muerte, al igual que cualquier desviación de la norma matrimonial, mientras que la unión se describe como realización y dicha absoluta" (Hernández Salgar, 2024, p. 144). Therefore, the song reinforces the idea that authentic love is measured through sacrifice and emotional suffering.



Love as service and devotion

The song also represents love as service and devotion through expressions such as “todo lo da” and “el que ama pretende servir.” These lines suggest that loving involves dedicating oneself to another person and placing that person’s needs above one’s own. This reflects an ideological construction of love in Latin American culture. As Sánchez Osuna et al. (2021) explain, “la noción del amor romántico atraviesa no sólo al género, sino categorías de clase, etnia, parentesco y sexualidad. Es decir, conserva la institución familiar como unidad central del estado protegiendo matrimonios” (p. 73). This means that romantic love is not only related to individual emotion or gender roles, but also to broader social expectations such as family, marriage, and sexuality. In this way, the song maintains the concept of traditional love by presenting devotion and service as essential characteristics of loving.

Love as loss of rationality

Although *Amar y querer* does not literally define love as fire, the song represents love as an intense force that can dominate reason. Kövecses (1986) explains that “since intensity plays a very marked role in the way we think of love, the fire metaphor has a central role in the concept of love as a whole” (as cited in Aksan and Aksan, 2010, p.86). In this sense, expressions such as “el que ama no puede pensar” suggest that love is conceptualized as an emotion strong enough to suspend rational thought. Therefore, the song reinforces an ideology in which true love is associated with emotional intensity, loss of control, and the domination of reason.

Conclusions

In this study, structural and ontological metaphors were analyzed in the song *Amar y querer*, performed by José José, based on Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of Conceptual Metaphor (1980). This study showed how the ideology of love is viewed through sacrifice, suffering, service, devotion, and loss of control. Expressions such as “pretende servir,” “su vida la da,” and “no puede pensar” reinforce the idea that true love requires total surrender and emotional intensity.

This shows that metaphors are not only decorative words or poetic expressions. Rather, they function as cognitive and linguistic tools that establish cultural perspectives on how love is perceived, valued, and normalized. Therefore, the metaphors in *Amar y querer* construct and reinforce a traditional ideology of romantic love by presenting painful, self-sacrificial, and irrational love as more authentic than pleasure, self-care, or emotional well-being.

Additionally, this analysis implies what that Latin American romantic music during the 1970s and 1980s potentially reflected about cultural expectations about love. In this context, true love was traditionally idealized through an altruistic perspective in which devotion, sacrifice, and emotional intensity were presented as desirable. Therefore, the song reflects not only individual feelings, but also cultural beliefs, gender expectations, and social behaviors related to romantic love.



Finally, as previously mentioned, metaphors are not only language; they also show how language is shaped by culture, beliefs, ideologies, and different perceptions. In *Amar y querer*, love is normalized through devotion, sacrifice, suffering, and loss of rationality. For this reason, the song demonstrates that metaphors shape not only the way people speak about love, but also the way people perceive and understand the world.

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