

การวิเคราะห์ภาษาเชิงโวหารในเพลงฮิปฮอปของเทรวิส สกอตต์

ด้วยคลังข้อมูลภาษา (2556-2566)

A Corpus-Based Analysis of Figurative Language

in Travis Scott's Hip-Hop Lyrics (2013–2023)

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษาความถี่และหน้าที่ของการใช้ภาษาเชิงโวหาร รวมถึงแนวโน้มพลวัตตามกาลเวลาในเพลงของเทรวิส สกอตต์ ศิลปินชั้นนำในวงการฮิปฮอปร่วมสมัย โดยใช้วิธีวิเคราะห์ด้วยคลังข้อมูลภาษาจากเพลงจำนวน 132 เพลง (รวม 65,841 คำ) ที่เผยแพร่ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2556–2566 ซึ่งรวบรวมจากเว็บไซต์ AZLyrics.com การวิเคราะห์ดำเนินการโดยการติดป้ายกำกับด้วยตนเอง บนพื้นฐานของทฤษฎีเชิงปริชานและเชิงวาทปฏิบัติ ได้แก่ Lakoff และ Johnson (1980) Grice (1975) และ Black (1962) พบว่า มีภาษาเชิงโวหาร 10 ประเภท อุปลักษณ์ คิดเป็น 21.99% อติพจน์ 15.86% และสัญลักษณ์ 12.26% เป็นประเภทที่พบบ่อยที่สุด ในขณะที่อุปมาเชิงประตดประชัน (2.74%) เป็นประเภทที่พบน้อยที่สุด ในเชิงหน้าที่ โวหารเหล่านี้ทำงานร่วมกันเพื่อสร้าง "การรับรู้เชิงนามธรรม" ซึ่งก้าวข้ามการเล่าเรื่องแบบดั้งเดิมไปสู่สุนทรียภาพหลักของไซเคิเดลิคฮิปฮอป นอกจากนี้ ผลการวิเคราะห์ตามช่วงเวลาเผยว่า แม้อุปลักษณ์และอติพจน์จะเป็นแกนหลักที่คงที่ตลอดทศวรรษ แต่ความซับซ้อนทางภาษาได้พัฒนาขึ้น โดยมีการใช้คำกำกวมเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่องสะท้อนถึงวุฒิภาวะทางภาษา และมีการใช้สัทพจน์สูงสุดในช่วงปี พ.ศ. 2559–2560 สอดรับกับการปรับเปลี่ยนพลวัตทางดนตรีอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ ข้อค้นพบระบุว่าสไตล์เนื้อเพลงเน้นการสร้างภาพเชิงประสาทสัมผัสและการสะท้อนอารมณ์มากกว่าการเล่าเรื่องแบบฮิปฮอปดั้งเดิม งานวิจัยมีความน่าเชื่อถือจากการตรวจสอบความสอดคล้องระหว่างผู้ทรงรหัส โดยมีค่า Cohen's kappa มากกว่า 0.80 จากการสุ่มตรวจ 13 เพลง และช่วยขยายองค์ความรู้ด้านการวิเคราะห์คลังข้อมูลภาษาในบริบทดนตรี

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Abstract

This study investigated the frequency and function of figurative language, as well as its temporal developmental trends, in the lyrics of Travis Scott, a prominent figure in contemporary hip-hop. A corpus-based analysis was conducted on 132 songs (65,841 words) released between 2013 and 2023, sourced from AZLyrics.com. Using manual annotation grounded in cognitive and pragmatic theories (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Grice, 1975; Black, 1962), ten types of figurative language were identified and quantified: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, allusion, onomatopoeia, irony, double entendre, paradox, and symbolism. Results indicated that metaphor (21.99%), hyperbole (15.86%), and symbolism (12.26%) were the most frequently used devices, while irony (2.74%) was the least frequently used. Functionally, these rhetorical devices work together to create an abstract mode of perception, moving beyond traditional narrative structures toward the central aesthetics of psychedelic hip hop. Temporal analysis further shows that while metaphor and hyperbole remained stable core features throughout the decade, linguistic complexity increased. The growing use of ambiguity reflects linguistic maturation, and the highest frequency of onomatopoeia appeared during 2016–2017, aligning with a significant shift in musical dynamics. The findings indicate that the lyrical style emphasizes sensory imagery and emotional reflection rather than the sequential storytelling typical of traditional hip hop. The study also demonstrates reliability through inter-coder agreement, with a Cohen's kappa value above 0.80 based on a random sample of 13 songs, and contributes to the expansion of corpus-based linguistic analysis in the context of music.

Keywords: Corpus-Based Analysis, Figurative Language, Travis Scott, Lyrical Style, Psychedelic Lyricism

Introduction

Hip-hop lyrics serve as a linguistically rich domain in which figurative devices such as metaphor and hyperbole function as vehicles for cultural commentary and artistic expression (Alfiyani, 2021). Recent scholarship has further explored these elements in contemporary music, including quantitative analyses of figurative language in hit songs and computational frameworks for linguistic complexity in hip-hop, highlighting evolving patterns in rhetorical devices across genres (Aras et al., 2024). The genre is characterized by its intensive use of wordplay, exaggeration, and symbolic imagery to achieve both emotional and intellectual impact. Among contemporary hip-hop artists, Travis Scott has emerged as a distinctive figure whose lyrical style departs from conventional genre norms. Unlike Kendrick Lamar, whose work is grounded in sociopolitical critique, or Kanye West, whose lyrics foreground personal introspection, Scott employs a style that integrates surreal imagery with vernacular language. His commercial prominence is well documented: his album *Astroworld* debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 and accumulated over 349 million streams in its first week (Caulfield, 2018). This sustained digital engagement positions him as a significant case in the study of modern music consumption, with industry-verified reports indicating that his discography surpassed 10 billion total streams on Spotify by early 2025, reflecting his ongoing influence within the global streaming economy (IFPI, 2025). Despite this cultural prominence, Scott's lyrics have received limited scholarly attention in linguistic research. While existing studies have examined figurative language in hip-hop more broadly (Dewi, 2020), the figurative dimensions of Scott's work remain largely unexamined, particularly regarding the tonal and symbolic complexity that defines his lyrical output. For instance, analyses of identity construction through figurative language in rap, such as in Eminem's lyrics, underscore the need for similar focused studies on artists like Scott who blend psychedelic aesthetics with cultural symbolism (Budiman & Dwijayanti, 2025).

Although figurative language has been extensively studied from cognitive and pragmatic perspectives, its application within hip-hop lyrics remains underexplored in the academic literature. According to the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff

and Johnson (1980), metaphors function as cognitive structures that organize human thought and experience. As illustrated in the following lyric by Scott, where he uses an extended metaphor to connect identity with addiction: "I love who I am but not the drugs that I use." Despite his distinctive style, there has not been any research to quantify how often metaphors appear in hip-hop or to compare Scott's choices with those of his peers. Black's interaction theory (1962) suggests that the metaphors in Scott's lyrics significantly alter the meaning for listeners. By examining how often Scott employs figurative elements, we can gain valuable insights into his artistic prowess and the evolving styles within hip-hop. The absence of a systematic analysis of his figurative language is a notable gap, hindering a deeper understanding of his contributions and the shifting trends in the genre.

With respect to metaphor use, Scott's lyrical style is notable for its thematic diversity. His lyrics integrate personal experience, social observation, and cultural commentary within a narrative framework that is simultaneously unified and fragmented. His use of symbolism is particularly prominent; for instance, he employs the image "the throne" to represent power and ambition, tapping into hip-hop's ongoing fascination with status. Yet, he does so from a psychedelic perspective that feels distinctly his own. This uniqueness is further highlighted by his production style, where the imaginative language often mirrors adventurous sound choices, resulting in a richly layered experience for the listener. Unfortunately, most academic studies of hip-hop lyrics tend to overlook these interdisciplinary aspects, concentrating mainly on the text itself (Alfiyani, 2021). By adopting a corpus-based approach to Scott's lyrics, the present study aims to address this gap by examining how figurative language interacts with thematic and sonic elements to shape his artistic identity.

The scholarly significance of this study is underscored by Travis Scott's considerable influence on contemporary hip-hop. His ability to integrate colloquial language with complex metaphorical imagery has generated broad appeal across diverse audiences, from mainstream listeners to members of niche subcultures. His work prioritizes sensory immersion and mood over clear narrative messaging. This shift poses a challenge to traditional hip-hop analyses that typically favor coherent narratives or social critique (Dewi, 2020). By examining the figurative language in Scott's work and

charting its development from 2013 to 2023, this study not only highlights his stylistic evolution but also explores how his linguistic choices mirror broader trends in hip-hop's artistic and cultural landscape. Emerging computational and stylistic approaches to rap lyrics further emphasize the timeliness of this research, as they reveal socio-cultural patterns and emotional identity through figurative elements, yet leave room for artist-specific corpus analyses like this one (Budiman & Dwijayanti, 2025).

In summary, this study examines figurative language across Travis Scott's entire lyrical corpus, comprising 132 songs and a total of 65,841 words, from 2013 to 2023. The central research question concerns the frequency and function of figurative devices—including metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolism—in Scott's lyrics, and how these elements contribute to his thematic and artistic identity. To address this question, the study employs a corpus-based analytical framework grounded in cognitive and pragmatic theories. The analysis focuses on the ways in which Scott's figurative choices construct a distinctive lyrical style within contemporary hip-hop, with implications for corpus-based research in the domain of popular music.

Objective

1. To examine the types and functions of figurative language in Travis Scott's 132 songs (2013–2023) in order to uncover the creative and thematic depth of his lyrical style.
2. To examine the temporal distribution and developmental trends of figurative language usage across the ten-year timeframe (2013–2023).

Research Methodology

Population and Sampling

This corpus analysis explored Travis Scott's full lyrical repertoire from 2013 to 2023, sourced from AZLyrics (<https://www.azlyrics.com>). The dataset comprised 132 songs (65,841 words) from 5 studio albums, 3 mixtapes, and 1 compilation.

Tools and Equipment

Figurative language was identified and manually coded with reference to the theories of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Grice's (1975) principle of quantity, and Black's (1962) interactional model. The following rhetorical devices were identified:

(1) Simile: comparisons made using words such as “like” or “as” (i.e., “*like Q-Dogs*”).

(2) Metaphor: a conceptual mapping between two domains in which one concept is understood and experienced in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), wherein language subtly hints at underlying conceptual connections (as in “*Molly in my Fanta*”).

(3) Personification: a figure of speech that attributes human qualities to non-human or inanimate entities (e.g., “*diamonds dancing*”).

(4) Hyperbole: the use of exaggerated statements not meant to be taken literally (e.g., *he ran 12 red lights*).

(5) Allusion: proper nouns that point to people, culture or historical events or periods (e.g., “*Michael Jordan*”).

(6) Onomatopoeia: onomatopoeic words which can be defined as the words that mimic the sounds that the things they refer to produce (e.g., “*skrrt*”).

(7) Irony: a literary device in which the intended meaning differs from, or is contrary to, the literal meaning, often used for humorous or critical effect (e.g., “*No mistakes, yeah, I’m flawless*”).

(8) Double entendre: a phrase or expression that can be interpreted in two different ways, one of which is often indirect or suggestive (e.g., “*move on the drop*”).

(9) Paradox: a statement that appears self-contradictory or logically impossible, yet reveals a deeper truth (e.g., “*I don’t want to cop it, but I had to*”).

(10) Symbolism: the use of symbols to represent abstract ideas, qualities, or concepts beyond their literal meaning (e.g., “*throne*”).

Patterns of figurative language use were measured using Excel, which allowed for systematic tracking and quantification of recurring themes and stylistic tendencies. This approach supported a more comprehensive assessment of Travis Scott’s lyrical style and thematic engagement in his corpus.

Data Collection

The data collection and processing workflow included directly copying the text content from AZLyrics. A stringent quality control process ensued, which included hand-evaluating a 5% random sample of the words (9 songs). During preparation, web-specific features (such as adverts and hyperlinks) and formatting errors were deleted and

documented. All texts were then converted to UTF-8 encoded plain text using Notepad to ensure compatibility with future analysis tools.

Data Analysis

In the study, researchers manually measured the level of figurative language devices in Travis Scott's lyrics using Microsoft Excel. The process included:

(1) Removing non-lyrical elements, such as advertisements and navigation links, and converting the text into UTF-8 plain text format.

(2) Annotation of the identified figurative devices according to the theoretical definitions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Grice, 1975; Black, 1962).

(3) Turning to the second research question, each lyric was analyzed in order to point out whether and in what way it employed figures of speech (metaphor, hyperbole, etc.).

(4) A tabular summary of the works, together with Excel functions (such as COUNTIF and pivot tables), was prepared to determine: The frequency of each device per song or album.

- Distribution trends over time (2013–2023).

- Intercoder reliability: The researchers pilot tested the methodology with 10% of the corpus (i.e., the researchers used two inter-raters with expertise in linguistics and figurative language analysis, and both inter-rater reliability coefficients exceed Cohen's $K = 0.80$ for 13 songs).

- Cross-verification: 9 songs were selected randomly for manual execution to compare the Excel counts with the human coding done for analysis.

Results

1. The types and functions of figurative language in Travis Scott's 132 songs (2013–2023)

Table 1 Frequency and Percentage of Figurative Language Devices in Travis Scott's Lyrics (2013–2023)

No.	Figurative Language	Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Metaphor	617	21.99%
2.	Hyperbole	445	15.86%
3.	Symbolism	344	12.26%
4.	Allusion	331	11.80%
5.	Double Entendre	304	10.83%
6.	Simile	221	7.87%
7.	Onomatopoeia	203	7.23%
8.	Personification	160	5.70%
9.	Paradox	104	3.71%
10.	Irony	77	2.74%
Total		2,806	100%

Note: Based on manual annotation of 132 songs (65,841 words).

Table 1 revealed that Metaphor was the most frequently used figurative language in Travis Scott's song lyrics, accounting for 21.99% of all occurrences with 617 instances. This was followed by Hyperbole (15.86%, 445 occurrences) and Symbolism (12.26%, 344 occurrences). Conversely, Irony was the least common, making up only 2.74% with 77 occurrences. Personification and Paradox also represented smaller proportions at 5.70% and 3.71%, respectively. The total number of figurative language instances identified across all categories was 2,806.

Simile

In the lyrics of Travis Scott, similes—a figure of speech that draws comparisons between two different things using "like" or "as"—are used 221 times in the 2,806 instances analyzed. These comparisons enhance visual imagery and storytelling, making his words come alive. For instance, he says, "*Barking loud like Q-Dogs*," and "*Moving Wpeople like U-Hauls*" (Uptown – 2013 mix). Other memorable similes include "kick it like sushi" and "built like Cam Newton" (Too Many Options – 2014 mix), as well as "*big blood like Freddy in dreams*" and "*lay up like planks*" (Maria I'm Drunk – 2015). Additionally, there's "*Work it like a stripper*" and "*Driving to the venue like she's seeing no signs*" (Wonderful – 2016), along with "*Shake it real fast like Hot Sauce*" and "*Ballin' on 'em like Calvin Cambridge*" (Hot Sauce – 2016 mix). These similes forge strong,

relatable connections, contributing to Travis Scott's vibrant and captivating lyrical style. Functionally, these similes serve to anchor Scott's often abstract themes in recognizable cultural and physical realities, providing a sense of grounding and immediate accessibility to the listener while maintaining a high-energy lyrical pace.

Metaphor

Travis Scott's lyrics incorporate metaphors—figures of speech that describe one thing by asserting it is another—617 times out of the 2,806 analyzed, enriching his storytelling with depth and abstract imagery. These metaphors create striking, sometimes surreal associations that enhance the emotional and thematic layers of his music. For example, he reflects, "*Picture being locked in a box*" and "*my fifteen seconds last a little longer*" (Never Catch Me – 2015). Other notable metaphors include "I hope I wake up in another place" and "Lit like my wrist is" (Guidance – 2016), "*Molly and codeine in my Fanta*" and "*It's a lot of dreams in my Phantom*" (Raw Raw – 2016 mix). Further examples are "*Pull up with a broom, do a street-sweep*" and "*Swag on repeat, it's like a whole different world*" (Saint Laurent Mask – 2017), as well as "*I'm just bad, bad news*" and "*Back on the coffee bean*" (Coffee Bean – 2018). These metaphors are crucial to Travis Scott's unique style, blending introspection, luxury, and a dreamlike quality throughout his lyrics. From a functional perspective, these metaphors act as the primary cognitive vehicle for Scott's "psychedelic" aesthetic, transforming mundane objects into symbolic representations of altered states of consciousness and sensory abstraction.

Personification

In his lyrics, Travis Scott employs personification—a figure of speech that attributes human qualities to non-human entities—160 times across the 2,806 analyzed. This technique adds emotional richness and depth to his narratives, making inanimate objects feel more alive. For instance, he uses phrases like "*diamonds dancin'*" and "*numbers been killin'*" (Mo City Flexologist – 2014 mix), along with "*the vibe, it's immortal*" and "*this love won't grow*" (First Take – 2016), and "*sins controlling me*" and "*halos over me*" (Astrothunder – 2018). Other examples are "*Buddha bless this beat*" and "*her mouth kick it slick*" (Out West – 2019), in addition to "*I hear the demons clear when they callin',*" "*diamonds dancing on me,*" and "*streets stepped in and raised me*" (Telekinesis – 2023). Such instances inject energy and emotion into his lyrics, enhancing the surreal and immersive quality of his music. This technique functions to

breathe life into the material world of luxury and vice, granting agency to inanimate objects and thereby intensifying the surreal, immersive, and emotionally resonant quality of the musical experience.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole—the use of exaggerated statements not intended to be taken literally—appears 445 times in Travis Scott’s lyrics out of the 2,806 analyzed, highlighting emotions, achievements, and surreal imagery. His reliance on hyperbole intensifies storytelling, infusing his lyrics with dramatic flair. Examples include “*Thought I was in over my head*” and “*all my people are dead*” (Hell Of A Night – 2013 mix), “*Ran 12 red lights*” and “*Closet the mall*” (Moon Rock – 2017), and “*Wedding bands on my fist, shit is freezing*” alongside “*I’ve been locked in for so long, I done got dreads*” (Houstonfornication – 2018). Additional examples include “*all my cars inside tomato*” and “*I’m the one they say don’t play with*” (Highest in the Room (Remix) – 2019), as well as “*Every part of it is part of me*” and “*So much that I’m flyin’, unnaturally breathin’*” (Circus Maximus – 2023). These exaggerated expressions amplify the intensity of his lyrics, reinforcing the larger-than-life persona and dreamlike world often depicted in his songs. Functionally, hyperbole serves to amplify the artist’s “larger-than-life” persona, creating a heightened sense of drama that reinforces central themes of extreme success, rebellion, and the dreamlike intensity of his world.

Allusion

Allusions—references to notable people, places, or events—are present 331 times in Travis Scott’s lyrics out of 2,806 analyzed, enriching his music with connections to culture, history, and popular references. These nods create deeper meaning and relatability, often tying his lifestyle to iconic figures and brands. For instance, he mentions “*Tommy Hil, Bentley truck, Lambo or just with the Benz*” (Outside – 2016), “*Kyla Pratin’, Mick Jagger, Hidden Hills*” (Black Mass – 2016 mix), and “*ATL, this shit ludicrous*” (a nod to rapper Ludacris), alongside “*Montana and Rice*” (NFL players) and “*Michael Jordan*” (Dubai Shit – 2017). Other examples include “*Saint Nick, the Grinch, Mo Bamba*” (Who What – 2018) and “*Spike Lee, do the right thing, Chanel*” (Had Enough – 2019). These allusions enhance the narrative in his lyrics, grounding his themes in widely recognized cultural symbols. By invoking these symbols, Scott functionally positions his own lifestyle

and artistry within a global cultural hierarchy, using shared social knowledge to validate his status and create a deeper sense of relatability for a diverse audience.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia—words that phonetically imitate sounds—appears 203 times in Travis Scott's lyrics out of the 2,806 analyzed, injecting energy, rhythm, and emphasis into his music. These sound effects enliven the auditory experience, making his lyrics feel more dynamic and immersive. Examples include “*skrrt, brtt, wah*” (Sloppy Toppy – 2014 mix), “*Woo!, Oah!*” (3500 – 2015), and “*Pop it, Yeah*” (Wake Up – 2018). Other notable instances are “*Grr, Bah, Haha*” (GATTI – 2019) and “*Squeak, Squirt*” (I Know – 2023). These sounds contribute to the atmosphere of his tracks, heightening emotions, actions, and the overall intensity of his music. They play a crucial role in creating a visceral, auditory-focused experience that prioritizes mood and sensory immersion over linear narrative messaging.

Irony

Irony—a literary device where words or situations convey meanings that contrast with their literal interpretation—appears 77 times in Travis Scott's lyrics out of the 2,806 analyzed, adding depth and nuance to his storytelling. His use of irony frequently highlights contradictions in emotions, relationships, and success. For instance, he expresses, “*looked so good outside*” and “*Pops never gave me shit, but Pops ain't raised no bitch*” (Grey – 2014.mix), “*it was never love, I can tell now*” and “*ain't gon' lie, I remember how it feels*” (Impossible – 2015). Additionally, lines like “*what's mine is yours, what's yours is yours*” as well as “*I got love for you, but I'm not in love*” (First Take – 2016) present ironic contrasts. Other examples include “*fuck the money, never leave your people behind*” and “*it's never love, no matter what you try*” (Stop Trying To Be God – 2018), along with “*I might still eat McDonald's, but don't think I'm a Ronald*” (Circus Maximus – 2023). Such irony adds complexity to his lyrics, reflecting themes of success, love, and self-awareness. Functionally, irony adds a layer of psychological complexity, revealing the underlying contradictions, internal conflicts, and self-awareness that exist behind the rapper's public image of success.

Double Entendre

In Travis Scott's lyrics, double entendre—a figure of speech with dual meanings, often one innocent and one suggestive—occurs 304 times in the 2,806 analyzed, adding

layers of wordplay and deeper insights to his music. These clever ambiguities enhance the lyrical complexity and creativity. For instance, he says, “*checking out, never checking in*” and “*Rest In Peace’d a homie*” (Outside – 2016), along with “*I might just let you pour that for real*” and “*You know what you wearin’*” (Pour Up – 2016.mix), and “*Walk around with two drums, call that Under Arm*” (Where U From – 2017), which cleverly plays on both firearms and Under Armour. Other examples include “*move on the drop, flippin’ of paint, grippin’ the grain*” (No Bystanders – 2018) and “*Got mob ties, duckin’ boys in the blue*” (Gang Gang – 2019.com), referencing both law enforcement and gang affiliations. These double entendres heighten the depth and wordplay of his music, making his lyrics more captivating and thought-provoking. These ambiguities function to demonstrate Scott's linguistic prowess, engaging the listener in a "decoding" process that rewards cognitive attention and adds intellectual depth to the creative output.

Paradox

In Travis Scott's lyrics, paradox, contradictory statements revealing deeper truths, appears 104 times in the 2,806 analyzed, adding complexity and introspection to his music. These paradoxical phrases challenge conventional thinking and highlight conflicting emotions or situations. For example, he reflects, “*Missed existence, I don’t miss it, it’s not a secret*” (Chaz Interlude – 2013.mix), “*I don’t wanna cop it, but I had to cop it*” (Hold On – 2014.mix), and “*If he falls, will he fly? We’re in the same spot; how could you judge?*” (Wasted – 2015). Other instances include “*I feel like I’m chosen, I’m covered in gold, took nothing but five minutes*” (Yosemite – 2018) and “*Explorer, are you out there? What makes you say this isn’t utopia?*” (Sirens – 2023). These paradoxes create thought-provoking contrasts within his lyrics, reflecting themes of success, identity, and existential pondering. Paradoxes function to highlight existential pondering and inner turmoil, reflecting the mental toll and conflicting emotions associated with Scott's identity and status.

Symbolism

In his lyrics, Travis Scott employs symbolism—a literary device where objects, actions, or phrases embody deeper meanings—344 times out of the 2,806 analyzed, enriching his music with layered interpretations. His use of symbols conveys themes of success, wealth, struggle, and identity. For instance, he references “*the throne*” (symbolising power) and “*locks and chains*” (representing wealth/status), as well as

“white powers in position” (contextually touching on systemic racism) in Pray 4 Love (2015). Other examples include “green light” (indicating permission) and “top floor” (signifying success) in Goosebumps (2016), along with “Uber” (depicting convenience/luxury) and “Backwood” (symbolising relaxation) in Uber Everywhere (Remix) (2016 mix). Further symbolic references appear in Wake Up (2018) with “Ghost in the Lambo” (reflecting luxury/loss) and “Lucid dreaming” (pertaining to emotional control), while FeIn (2023) hints at secrecy and violence with “can’t give the zip code up” and “get rolled up.” These symbolic elements deepen his storytelling, allowing listeners to engage with his lyrics on multiple levels. Functionally, symbolism deepens the storytelling by providing layered interpretations, enabling listeners to engage with themes of success, struggle, and identity on multiple conceptual levels.

2. The temporal distribution and developmental trends of figurative language usage across the ten-year timeframe (2013–2023)

Table 2 Temporal Distribution of Figurative Language by Year (2013–2023) (%)

Year	Meta-phor	Hyper-bole	Symbo-lism	Double Entendre	Allu-sion	Simile	Onoma-topoeia	Person-ification	Para-dox	Irony
2013	26.82	15.91	8.18	9.09	10.45	9.09	4.09	8.18	4.09	4.09
2014	23.18	16.64	15.51	10.09	11.59	6.92	5.98	5.42	2.62	2.06
2015	23.67	17.46	12.43	10.95	10.06	5.33	6.21	6.80	4.44	2.66
2016	22.67	14.32	10.98	10.50	13.60	9.07	8.83	3.82	3.34	2.86
2017	19.93	14.59	11.39	11.39	17.44	8.19	11.03	3.20	1.78	1.07
2018	18.53	12.59	13.30	12.35	10.45	10.45	6.18	6.65	4.99	4.51
2019	19.59	18.92	10.81	12.16	10.14	6.76	9.46	4.73	4.05	3.38
2023	21.52	17.94	11.43							

Table 2 presents the evolution of Travis Scott's lyricism through a temporal analysis across the ten-year span of the corpus. The data reveals both stylistic consistencies and notable developmental shifts. Metaphor and hyperbole remained the foundational pillars of his style throughout the decade. Metaphors established his early sound (peaking at 26.82% in 2013) and remained highly prevalent through the release of Utopia (21.52% in 2023). However, a shift towards greater linguistic complexity is evident over time. The use of double entendre saw a steady increase, growing from 9.09% in

2013 to 12.35% during the Astroworld era in 2018, reflecting a more layered approach to his songwriting. Additionally, onomatopoeia experienced a significant surge during 2016–2017, peaking at 11.03% in 2017. This correlates directly with his heavy integration of vocal ad-libs to construct the highly atmospheric, trap-heavy soundscapes that defined his mid-career releases.

Discussion

A study of 132 song lyrics by Travis Scott highlights his sophisticated use of figurative language, which adds both creative flair and thematic richness to his music, with a total of 2,806 instances identified. Leading the way are metaphors, making up 21.99% (n = 617), followed closely by hyperbole at 15.86% (n = 445), symbolism at 12.26% (n = 344), and allusion at 11.80% (n = 331). Other significant forms include double entendre (10.83%, n = 304), simile (7.87%, n = 221), onomatopoeia (7.23%, n = 203), personification (5.70%, n = 160), paradox (3.71%, n = 104), and irony (2.74%, n = 77). Drawing on the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Grice (1975), and Black (1962), these findings underscore Scott's talent for crafting a rich linguistic landscape that elevates his artistry. This dominance of metaphor and hyperbole resonates with findings from Budiman and Dwijayanti (2025), whose analysis of Eminem's lyrics similarly identified these two devices as the most prevalent figurative forms, suggesting a genre-wide preference for conceptual and affective exaggeration in rap music.

Notable metaphors like *"Molly and codeine in my Fanta"* and *"Swag on repeat, it's like a whole different world"* paint vivid, abstract images that enhance the emotional impact of his lyrics and contribute to a surreal, extravagant persona. Strictly speaking, these devices perform a macro-function of "Sensory Abstraction," shifting the focus from the linear storytelling found in traditional hip-hop to a more fragmented, mood-based experience. By prioritizing metaphor and symbolism over narrative realism, Scott's lyrics function as a linguistic mirror to his psychedelic production style, where meaning is conveyed through atmospheric resonance rather than literal plot progression.

Lines filled with hyperbole, such as *"Ran 12 red lights"* and *"all my cars inside tomato,"* amplify the intensity of his storytelling and reinforce a larger-than-life narrative. The symbolic references, like *"the throne"* (representing power) and *"Ghost in the Lambo"* (suggesting luxury and loss), add layers of meaning, while allusions to figures

like “*Michael Jordan*” and “*Saint Nick*” connect his themes to widely recognized cultural references, enhancing their relatability. These devices function to construct a “Linguistic Identity” that balances high-status commercial success with niche subcultural depth. While hyperbole establishes his dominant public persona, the use of irony and paradox functions to provide “Conceptual Insight”—highlighting the inner turmoil and existential contradictions that accompany global fame, thus humanizing the larger-than-life figure.

Additionally, the clever wordplay found in double entendres (e.g., “*move on the drop, flippin’ of paint*”) and similes (“*Barking loud like Q-Dogs*”) injects vibrancy and depth, drawing listeners in. Less frequently seen devices, such as onomatopoeia (“*skrrt, brrt, wah*”), personification (“*diamonds dancin’*”), paradox (“*I don’t wanna cop it, but I had to cop it*”), and irony (“*I might still eat McDonald’s, but don’t think I’m a Ronald*”), each add their unique flavor. The onomatopoeic expressions enhance the beat, while personification breathes life into concepts; paradox reveals inner turmoil, and irony highlights contradictions, all of which deepen the complex themes surrounding success, identity, and excess. This dense variety of devices suggests that the “New Subgenre” of psychedelic lyricism is defined not by a lack of clarity, but by a functional commitment to ambiguity, allowing the artist to navigate multiple layers of meaning simultaneously.

From a temporal perspective, the ten-year trajectory (2013–2023) strongly supports the maturation of Scott’s “Psychedelic Lyricism.” While his baseline reliance on metaphor has continuously provided sensory abstraction, the longitudinal data highlights a structural evolution. The noticeable increase in double entendres in his post-2018 work suggests a transition from purely mood-based imagery towards deliberate semantic ambiguity, challenging listeners to decode overlapping themes of wealth, trauma, and status. Furthermore, the peak usage of onomatopoeia between 2016 and 2017 underscores a specific era where Scott effectively weaponized phonetics over traditional semantics, utilizing vocalizations as rhythmic instruments. This chronological development demonstrates that Scott’s figurative language is not static; rather, it has dynamically adapted to complement his increasingly complex and multi-layered musical production over the decade.

In comparison to Yunos and Francis’s (2023) analysis of Taylor Swift’s “Folklore”, which also featured metaphor (31.40%) and hyperbole (25.58%) at the forefront but lacked irony, Scott’s extensive range of styles—including irony and double entendres—

reflects a hip-hop emphasis on wordplay and contrast. Mahakaew's (2020) examination of speeches at the Golden Globes, where hyperbole takes precedence and similes are eschewed, contrasts with Scott's more balanced approach, hinting at genre-specific priorities: speeches tend to favor hyperbole, while Scott's lyrics intertwine rich imagery and cultural references. Furthermore, Aras et al. (2024), in their corpus analysis of twenty-five Spotify global hit songs of 2023, similarly found metaphor (38%) and hyperbole (20%) to be the two most dominant figurative devices across multiple genres, reinforcing the view that these forms carry particular expressive power in contemporary popular music, regardless of genre.

Theoretically, these findings align with Lakoff and Johnson's concept of metaphor as a cognitive tool, Grice's notions of implicature in irony and paradox, and Black's focus on the evocative strength of symbolism, illustrating how figurative language conveys meaning that transcends the literal. From a practical standpoint, this research could provide songwriters with a valuable framework for employing a diverse range of figurative language to create compelling narratives, and it may serve as a useful resource for music education or the study of song lyrics.

This study demonstrates that Travis Scott's lyrical style is characterized by a dense and diverse use of figurative language, particularly metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolism. These devices contribute to a psychedelic, emotionally immersive aesthetic that redefines hip-hop's expressive norms. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that corpus-based lyric analysis can be a valuable tool in music education, stylistics, and creative writing.

Limitations include the single-artist focus, which restricts generalizability to other hip-hop artists or genres. Future research should expand the corpus to include cross-genre or cross-artist comparisons, and explore listener interpretation of figurative language using reception-based methods.

Suggestions

Future research could extend this corpus-based approach to other music genres such as rock and pop to enable cross-genre comparisons of figurative language use, and broaden the theoretical scope beyond Lakoff and Johnson's framework to incorporate perspectives from diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

Body of New Knowledge

Based on the quantitative findings and qualitative analysis, this research proposes a new conceptual framework, visualized in Figure 1, that captures the essence of Scott's lyrical innovation.

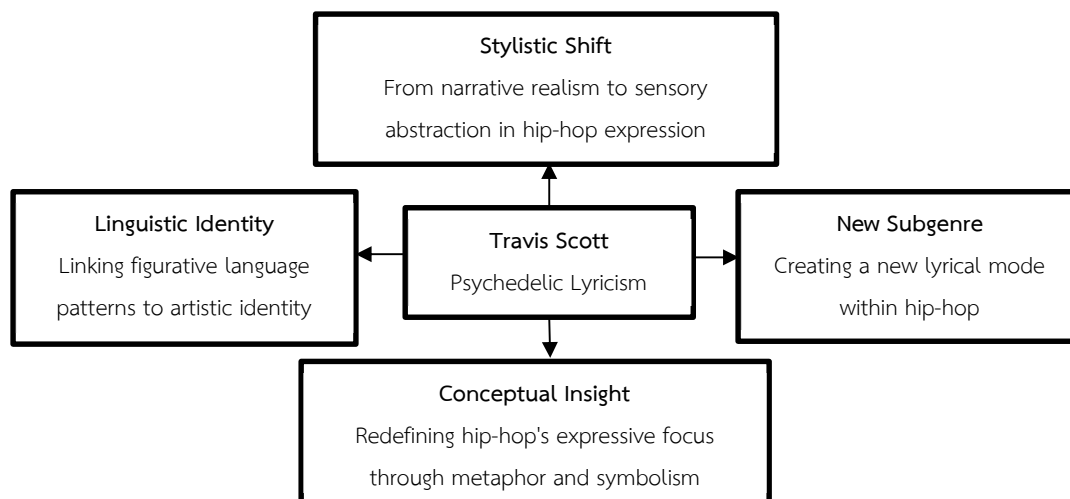


Figure 1 Travis Scott's Psychedelic Lyricism: Redefining Hip-Hop's Expressive Focus

Source : Synthesized by the author

Travis Scott's figurative language creates a psychedelic, emotionally-driven lyrical identity that redefines hip-hop's use of metaphor and symbolism, shifting the genre's expressive focus from narrative realism to sensory abstraction.

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