

Ontological Metaphors in Selected Songs of MLTR's *Greatest Hits* Album: A Cognitive Semantic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to classify ontological metaphors and interpret the conceptual mappings found in four selected songs by Michael Learns to Rock (MLTR) from their *Greatest Hits* album. Using the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson, this qualitative research analyzed the lyrics to identify metaphorical expressions that conceptualize abstract experiences through concrete entities. The findings revealed that ontological metaphors are manifested in various forms, including personification (e.g., love is treated as a human entity), substance metaphors (e.g., feelings treated as tangible objects), and container metaphors (e.g., the heart as a space to hold emotions). The conceptual mapping identified source domains such as human, object, and space, which are mapped onto target domains such as emotion, love, loss, and time. These metaphors help listeners conceptualize intangible experiences more concretely and emotionally. The study concludes that ontological metaphors play a crucial role in shaping emotional resonance and poetic imagery in song lyrics.

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INTRODUCTION

Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a tool for humans to shape, understand, and interpret reality. Language is also the primary medium for representing human experience (Cook, 2012; Herzog, 2018; Wijaya & Nasution, 2018). In everyday communication, humans often use figurative language, such as metaphors, to express abstract ideas, emotions, and complex concepts in a more concrete and easily understandable way (Grensiding & Agung, 2023; Milana & Ardi, 2021).

In cognitive linguistics, language is a reflection of human cognitive structures and an important part in the process from conceptualization (Al-Tamimi 2022). One of the most effective methods of conceptualization, metaphor is not simply a rhetorical stylistic device; but actually serves as one of the primary tools to think and to understand human experience. By metaphorically mapping them into abstract processes, such as emotions, time or relationships can be represented so that they become more graspable for the human mind (Gibbs, 2017; Lakoff, 2014; Landau, 2016).

One of the most basic types of metaphor according to conceptual metaphor theory is the ontological metaphor. Lakoff & Johnson (2003) note how ontological metaphors are used to project abstract entities or experiences into the shape of physical objects,

substances or containers in order to communicate an individual's cognitive or emotional understanding and response. One common example includes the way love is conceptualized as "something one can own" or "something that can be lost" (Al-Khaza'leh & Alzubi, 2022; Rajeg, 2016; Shah et al., 2021).

In the realm of popular music, song lyrics play a significant role as a medium for expressing emotions, identity, and life narratives. Michael Learns to Rock (MLTR), a Danish pop-rock band that gained popularity during the 1990s and early 2000s, is known for their romantic, sentimental, and reflective songs. Their *Greatest Hits* album features a number of iconic tracks such as *25 Minutes*, *That's Why (You Go Away)*, and *Paint My Love*, whose lyrics are rich in the exploration of human emotions, particularly love, loss, and longing. These lyrics provide a valuable site for linguistic inquiry into the conceptual metaphors employed in the construction of emotional experience.

Previous studies have explored the use of conceptual metaphors across various medium. Wang (2022) investigated the construction of multimodal metaphors in educational cartoons by analyzing the relationship between text and visuals to clarify learning processes, with a focus on how ontological metaphors provide an educational conceptual context. Kozlova (2021) examined cognitive metaphors in business news related to the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating that the pandemic was often represented through metaphors of active or antagonistic entities (*COVID-19 as Enemy*), thereby enhancing public understanding of the global health threat. In addition, Krisdianti & Nugraha (2021) conducted a semantic analysis of metaphor use in South Korean online news, such as lyrics-based reports on the Burning Sun scandal, revealing the dominance of ontological and orientational metaphors in framing sensational events and social conflicts.

Although the three aforementioned studies demonstrate the power of conceptual metaphors in visual, news, and urban media contexts, the use of ontological metaphors in popular song lyrics—particularly systematic analyses of source domain and target domain mappings—remains significantly underexplored. None of these studies have examined the patterns of ontological metaphor in popular music as a mediating tool for shaping abstract emotional experiences. This study seeks to address that gap by focusing on songs by MLTR from their *Greatest Hits* album. The analytical approach involves classifying ontological metaphors into subcategories such as personification, substance, and container, as well as conceptually interpreting the mappings from source domains to emotional target domains.

Based on this background, the present study aims to identify and analyze ontological metaphors found in selected song lyrics from MLTR's *Greatest Hits* album. Based on cognitive semantic analysis, the article aims to demonstrate how these lyrics transfer abstract notions onto ontological forms and how this process conveys attitudes that are both universally shared and context-sensitive in popular culture.

THEORY AND METHOD

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The conceptual metaphor approach was developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) in their important work, *Metaphors We Live By*. According to this theory, metaphor is not just a way to style language or a rhetorical adornment. Instead, it is a key part of how people think, feel, and behave. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is a cognitive process that involves mapping between two conceptual domains: the source domain and the target domain. From this mapping, abstract and complex concepts (target) can be interpreted by means of more concrete and familiar ones (source).

For instance, in the conceptual metaphor “*LOVE IS A JOURNEY*,” elements from the domain of journey, such as goals, obstacles, and vehicles are employed to comprehend and explain the concept of love (Jannah & Istiqomah, 2021; Nugraha, 2023). This process occurs systematically and consistently within both language and human cognition. Conceptual metaphors are productive and deeply embedded in the structure of everyday language; they are not confined to literary expression, but also appear in conversation, media discourse, and song lyrics.

Ontological Metaphors in the Perspective of Lakoff and Johnson

One of the primary categories in conceptual metaphor theory is ontological metaphor, which enables individuals to understand non-physical or abstract experiences as concrete entities that can be referred to, possessed, shared, or contained within something. Lakoff & Johnson (2003) explain that such metaphors function to provide ontological structure to experience, for example, by organizing abstract experiences in terms of entities, substances, or containers.

There are several subtypes of ontological metaphors, including:

1. Personification, in which abstract entities are treated as living beings with will or emotion. Example: “*Fear grabbed me.*”
2. Substance metaphor, where abstract concepts are treated as substances or materials. Example: “*There is too much sadness in this room.*”
3. Container metaphor, understands concepts as having boundaries, content, and capacity. Examples include: “*He is in love.*” and “*I’m out of ideas.*”

In song lyrics, ontological metaphors are important for expressing emotions clearly and concretely. They help listeners connect their personal experiences with the meaning of the lyrics in a deep and natural way.

Cognitive Semantics and the Language–Mind Relationship

In the last thirteen years, cognitive linguistics has become a key area of study. This is shown by the release of many helpful handbooks focused on the topic (Dancygier, 2017; Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2012; Littlemore & Taylor, 2014). A major area within this field is cognitive semantics, which has significantly influenced this growth by providing insights into how we create meaning through our experiences, thought patterns, and mental images.

Cognitive semantics is a branch of linguistics that looks at how human thinking shapes linguistic meaning. Unlike traditional semantics, which sees meaning as fixed and objective, cognitive semantics points out that meaning comes from how linguistic structures interact with concepts in the human mind (Evans & Green, 2018; Winter & Perek, 2023).

In this view, linguistic meaning is tied to human experiences, perception, and emotions. Therefore, metaphor is seen as a way of mapping concepts that is both universal and shaped by cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Jawad & Noori, 2021; Khan & Ali, 2016). Analyzing metaphor in song lyrics shows not just linguistic features but also reveals the thought patterns and emotional experiences that are part of popular culture.

The cognitive semantic approach is important for studying ontological metaphors. It helps researchers link the forms of metaphors to the cognitive structures behind them (Haeran, 2021; Haula, 2020). This approach connects language studies with fields like psychology, culture, and music, leading to a better understanding of language in social and emotional settings.

Method

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach within cognitive semantics. This method allows the researcher to examine how meaning is represented in language in a deep and contextual way. The main goal of this research is to identify and analyze ontological metaphors in song lyrics. It looks at how abstract experiences like love, loss, and hope are expressed through metaphorical language.

The focus of this study is the use of ontological metaphors in the lyrics of four selected songs from Michael Learns to Rock's Greatest Hits album. The songs are "Paint My Love," "That's Why (You Go Away)," "Sleeping Child," and "25 Minutes." The main data source consists of the official lyrics of these songs, obtained from MLTR's official website or other trustworthy online sources that provide correct lyric texts. These songs were chosen based on their popularity, the emotional depth of their themes, and how well they meet the study's goals.

Collected the data by taking notes and closely reading the song lyrics multiple times to find linguistic units that show the use of metaphor. Analyzed the lyrics to pinpoint phrases or sentences that turn abstract experiences into concrete forms, as explained in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff & Johnson (2003). The data analysis followed these steps:

1. Identification: Marking of the linguistic elements in the lyrics of songs that contain metaphorical expressions such as love, loss, hope or other emotions.
2. Classification: Examining the defined metaphorical components and grouping them according to subcategories of ontological metaphors, such as personification, container metaphor or substance metaphor.
3. Conceptual Interpretation: Analyzing the relationship between source and target domains to understand how metaphors are used to frame the emotional implications of songs. Conceptual mapping principles are addressed in cognitive semantics through this analysis.
4. Elaboration of Contextual Meaning: Exploring the significance of metaphors in relation to the musical context and their impact on emotional experiences.

The analytical process was carried out inductively. It considered the lyrical context, emotional nuances, and the cognitive structures behind metaphorical constructions. To ensure the data was valid, the researcher used theoretical triangulation (Hayashi et al., 2019). This involved comparing the analytical findings with relevant theories of conceptual metaphor and cognitive semantics. Peer checking further strengthened the validity. This process included verifying the analysis with colleagues who have backgrounds in linguistics or semantic studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Ontological Metaphors in Selected Songs

This section examines the ontological metaphors found in the lyrics of four MLTR songs from the Greatest Hits album, using Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003). Ontological metaphor is analyzed to determine the forms of ontological metaphors and divide them into sub-categories such as personification, container metaphor or substance metaphor. The table 1 illustrates the ontological metaphors present in the four songs by MLTR from the Greatest Hits album.

Table 1. Classification of Ontological Metaphor Forms

Song Title	Personification	Container	Substance
<i>Paint My Love</i>	2	2	1
<i>That's Why (You Go Away)</i>	3	2	2
<i>Sleeping Child</i>	3	3	2
<i>25 Minutes</i>	2	2	2
Total	10	9	7

All four MLTR songs from the Greatest Hits album were identified as having ontological metaphors based on the analysis. Peopleification accounted for the most common subtypes, with personification surpassing both container and substance metaphors. This indicates that the songs' ontological metaphors tend to focus on linking human attributes to non-living entities or abstract ideas, thereby creating an emotional connection between the listener and the song lyrics.

Ontological Metaphors in the Song *Paint My Love*

The song *Paint My Love*, popularized by MLTR, conveys a profound expression of love through the use of rich and meaningful figurative language. The lyrics depict an intense and deep emotional experience, as if the feeling of love could be visualized in the form of a painting. The use of metaphor in this song not only enhances the delivery of emotional messages but also reflects the complexity of love as an experience, conveyed through various visual and symbolic imagery.

a. Personification

This type of metaphor occurs when an abstract concept or inanimate object is attributed with human characteristics, such as the ability to act, feel, or experience like a human being. This type of metaphor occurs when an abstract concept or inanimate object is attributed with human characteristics—such as the ability to act, feel, or experience like a human being.

“Freedom of a thousand doves”

Freedom is an abstract concept that is personified as a living being, represented metaphorically by doves flying freely. The metaphor attributes life-like qualities to *freedom*, portraying it as something capable of “flying.” Doves, being living creatures, serve as a symbolic extension of freedom, making the concept more tangible and emotionally resonant.

“The days before all fade to black and white”

Phrase “the days before” someone’s arrival are described as if they can *fade*, which is a human-like or animate action attributed to *time*, an abstract concept. The metaphor treats “days” as if they were capable of changing color, akin to a photograph or painting, thereby humanizing time and evoking a sense of emotional transformation.

b. Substance Metaphor

This type of metaphor conceptualizes intangible experiences or emotions as tangible substances, something perceivable through sight or touch.

“Paint my love”

Love is portrayed as something that can be painted—implying that love is a substance with a visual or physical form. In this metaphor, *love* is conceptualized as a tangible object that can be depicted or preserved through a painting.

"It's the picture of a thousand sunsets"

Love is described as a painting of a thousand sunsets, a visual representation of emotion. Here, *love* becomes a visual object, as if it can be captured and perceived through an image.

c. Container Metaphor

This metaphor involves the concept of something being inside or outside a container, either physically or conceptually.

"Since you came into my life"

Life is conceptualized as a container, and the person (a lover) is depicted as entering into it. In this metaphor, *life* is treated as a bounded space or container that can be "entered," suggesting that one's presence can occupy and influence the internal space of another's life.

Ontological Metaphors in the Song *That's Why (You Go Away)*

The song *That's Why (You Go Away)* is a pop ballad that conveys deep emotional nuances of loss and separation within a romantic relationship. With lyrics filled with sorrow and reflection, the song portrays the inner turmoil of someone who has been left by their beloved. Through the use of simple yet meaningful diction, it creates a melancholic atmosphere that resonates with listeners.

In its lyrics, the singer expresses emotional struggles following a painful separation. The song is rich in metaphors that represent emotions, memories, and a relationship that has come to an end. The following is an analysis based on the three subtypes of ontological metaphor.

a. Personification

Personification in this song is evident in the way love, memories, and the sense of loss are treated as entities capable of action.

"Love is one big illusion I should try to forget"

In this line, *love* is personified as an illusion that can be forgotten, similar to someone who deceives or disguises themselves. Literally, love is not an entity that can actively deceive or be "forgotten" in the same way a person or physical object can. This metaphor attributes human-like qualities to an abstract emotion, reinforcing the emotional intensity and complexity of the speaker's experience.

"There is something left in my head"

This phrase attributes human-like qualities to "something," suggesting it can remain or reside in the speaker's head. In this context, "something" refers to a memory or a feeling, which is treated as though it possesses physical presence and agency. The metaphor personifies the abstract, implying that the memory or emotion has the ability to stay, linger, or occupy mental space on its own.

"You're the one who set it up, now you're the one to make it stop"

The relationship or love is personified as something that can be set up and actively stopped. Love is positioned like a machine or a game that can be turned on and off.

b. Container Metaphor

The container metaphor in this song appears in the imagery of sadness residing in the eyes or memories lingering in the mind.

"There is sadness in your eyes"

The eyes are metaphorically portrayed as containers holding sadness. Sadness, as an abstract emotion, is imagined as filling a space within the eyes. This reflects the use of a container metaphor: emotions are conceptualized as substances that can fill the human body.

"There is something left in my head"

The head is conceptualized as a container for thoughts or memories. The 'something' (a memory or feeling) is perceived as an object that exists spatially inside the head. This is a typical example of an ontological metaphor.

c. Substance Metaphor

The substance metaphor in this song represents emotions as something strong, enduring, and capable of diminishing.

"The feeling's so strong, were lasting for so long"

"Feeling" is an abstract experience, yet it is treated as a substance or a tangible entity that can possess strength ("so strong") and duration ("lasting"). This reflects how emotions are substantiated into objects whose intensity and duration can be measured.

"There ain't so much for you / There ain't so much for me anymore"

"So much" here refers to the contents of the relationship or emotions that once existed. This implies that love or a relationship is treated as an entity filled with a 'substance' that can diminish or be depleted. It clearly illustrates the substance metaphor.

Ontological Metaphor in the Song *Sleeping Child*

The song *Sleeping Child* evokes a gentle and hopeful atmosphere through the depiction of a peacefully sleeping child amidst a chaotic world. Through lyrics that describe the stillness of the night and the protection of a sleeping child, the song conveys a message of hope, innocence, and the potential for changing the world through the purity of a child's soul.

a. Personification

Personification is used to create a gentle and loving atmosphere, portraying the universe as if it, too, is caring for the child.

"The Milky Way upon the heavens is twinkling just for you"

The Milky Way is personified as an entity that shines especially for the child. This gives the impression that the universe is aware of the child's presence and treats them with love.

"And Mr. Moon, he came by to say goodnight to you"

The moon is given a human identity ("Mr. Moon") who comes to say good night. This reinforces the impression that the child is so precious that even the elements of the sky show gentleness toward them.

"They would hold the Earth in their arms"

World leaders are personified as being able to embrace the Earth like a human embraces a baby. This is a poetic way to express the hope that they can be gentle and loving, just like toward children.

b. Container Metaphor

The container metaphor in this song often appears in the context of protection and comfort.

"I'll cover you, sleeping child"

Covering the sleeping child is depicted as a form of protection, as if the child is placed inside a protective container such as a blanket, an embrace, or a safe space.

"Cover my child... keep you away from the world"

Here, the child is meant to be kept away from the world and placed inside a safe space (container) that protects them from the harshness of life outside. The outside world is portrayed as something threatening that must be prevented from entering the child's "container."

"They would hold the Earth in their arms"

This phrase combines the container metaphor and personification. Embracing the Earth in their arms means creating a safe space for the entire world, as if the world itself becomes the contents of a loving container.

c. Substance Metaphor

The substance metaphor in this song involves treating abstract concepts such as peace, innocence, or love as concrete objects that can be built, possessed, or protected.

"You've built your own paradise"

The word "built" implies that paradise (heaven/peace) is a concrete object or structure that can be designed and created. Paradise is positioned not merely as a spiritual idea, but as something real and attainable by the child. This reflects the hope that a child's sincerity and innocence can concretely shape a better world.

"That's one reason why I'll cover you, sleeping child"

The phrase "cover you" presents a metaphor where protection is a physical object, like a blanket or a cover, that can be used to shield the child from the world. A sense of security is treated as something material.

Ontological Metaphor in the Song 25 Minutes

The song "25 Minutes" depicts the regret of a man who is late in expressing his love to someone who is now married. The lyrics are filled with feelings of loss, nostalgia, and deep emotional conflict. In this song, ontological metaphors are used to concretely portray the character's internal experience, making emotions something that can be "seen," "touched," and even "chased".

a. Personification

Personification occurs when non-human entities are treated or described as if they have human characteristics. In this song, emotions and time are attributed with human qualities.

"She looks so happy in her wedding dress / But she's crying while she's saying this"

Happiness and sadness are directly expressed through human actions. These emotions are not only felt but also manifested in real actions like "crying" and "saying," which literally can only be done by humans. This emphasizes the complex and painful emotional duality of the female character in the song.

"Still, I can hear the words she said"

The words are personified as living entities within the protagonist's mind. *"Hear the words"* indicates that the words are not only spoken but have the power to continue living in the mind, as if they keep speaking even though the event has passed.

b. Container Metaphor

This metaphor treats concepts or entities as containers that can be entered or filled. Concepts such as time, space, and even emotions can be conceptualized as containers.

"Wishing me back to the time when we were more than friends"

Time is depicted as a container or space that can be re-entered, like a room or vessel that someone can step into. *"To the time"* implies that the past is a physical place, and the character wishes to go back inside it—an understanding commonly supported by this ontological metaphor.

"Places where hungry hearts have nothing to eat"

This phrase uses *"places"* as containers for *"hungry hearts,"* where the feeling of hunger is metaphorically something that can be filled or left empty by love. Hearts are depicted as entities that are hungry and serve as spaces for love. This implies that the heart is an emotional container, and love is something that can fill its emptiness.

c. Substance Metaphor

In this metaphor, abstract experiences or concepts are conceptualized as substances, things that can be seen, touched, or physically felt.

"I've missed your kisses all the time"

Kisses, as expressions of love, are treated as substances or concrete entities that can be *"missed"* or not received. By conceptualizing kisses as tangible things that can be absent or lost, the song transforms love into something material and object-like.

"25 minutes too late"

The time that has passed is conceptualized as a concrete entity—*25 minutes*—with defined boundaries and measurable quantity that can be *"too late."* Time is treated like a substance that can be quantified and even act as a physical barrier in a relationship.

Ontological Metaphor Mapping

The mapping of ontological metaphors in this study aims to identify and analyze the relationship between the source domain and the target domain in song lyrics. By mapping these two domains, it becomes possible to understand how abstract concepts (such as feelings, thoughts, or experiences) are comprehended and explained through the depiction of concrete objects or more tangible entities.

Mapping of the Song *Paint My Love*

In the song *Paint My Love*, there is a conceptual mapping present within the lyrics, as evidenced by a clear relationship between the source domain and the target domain. The abstract feelings of love and longing (target domain) are depicted through concrete elements such as colors and painting (source domain). In this manner, the song employs ontological metaphors to visually convey emotional meaning, thereby facilitating the listener's comprehension of the essence of the emotions expressed.

a. "LOVE IS ART"

"It's the picture of a thousand sunsets"

"It's the freedom of a thousand doves"

Table 2. Conceptual Mapping of "LOVE IS ART"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Painting	Expressing or manifesting love
Beautiful painting	Beautiful, enchanting love
A thousand sunsets	The eternal beauty of love
Freedom of a dove	The emotional freedom brought by love
Colors and images	The nuances of feelings conveyed by the relationship

Table 2 presents the conceptual mapping of the metaphor "LOVE IS ART," illustrating the relationship between the source domain of art and the target domain of love through symbolic expressions found in the song lyrics. The mapping demonstrates how artistic elements such as painting, color, and visual imagery are used to conceptualize emotional experiences and romantic expression. The singer metaphorically likens love to a work of art painted with emotions, where the metaphor "paint my love" signifies a plea to capture the essence of love in an enduring visual form. "A thousand sunsets" and "a thousand doves" create a visual and emotional representation of the intensity and freedom inherent in love. Love is not merely a feeling, but something that can be depicted, displayed, and appreciated much like a piece of art.

b. "LOVE IS HOME"

"Been around the world, then I met you, girl. It's like coming home to a place I've known."

Table 3. Conceptual Mapping of "LOVE IS HOME"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Returning home	Finding true love
A familiar and comfortable place	Intimacy and comfort within a relationship
Journeying to various places	The lifelong search for love

The experience of love is compared to returning home after a long journey, indicating that true love provides a sense of familiarity, safety, and tranquility, as if it has been known for a long time despite being newly discovered. This analogy reinforces the understanding of love as a refuge—a place to return to. Table 3 presents the conceptual mapping of the metaphor "LOVE IS HOME," illustrating how the characteristics of home, such as comfort, security, warmth, and belonging, are transferred to the concept of love. Through this mapping, the lyrics portray love not only as an emotional experience but also as a symbolic space that offers emotional shelter and personal connection. The experience of love is compared to returning home after a long journey, indicating that true love provides a sense of familiarity, safety, and tranquility, as if it has been known for a long time despite being newly discovered. This analogy reinforces the understanding of love as a refuge—a place to return to.

c. "LOVE ADDS COLOR TO LIFE"

"The days before all fade to black and white, since you came into my life, everything has changed."

Table 4. Conceptual Mapping of "LOVE ADDS COLOR TO LIFE"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Black and white	A life without love that feels dull and monotonous
Colorful	A life with love that is rich in meaning
Visual transformation	Emotional transformation

Table 4 presents the conceptual mapping of the metaphor "LOVE ADDS COLOR TO LIFE," demonstrating how elements associated with colorfulness, brightness, and visual beauty are mapped onto emotional experiences of love. The mapping illustrates that love is conceptualized as a transformative force capable of enriching life, enhancing emotional depth, and turning ordinary experiences into something more vivid and meaningful. This phrase implies that the presence of love brings color and meaning to life, which previously felt flat or dull. It supports a common metaphor within Conceptual Metaphors Theory, namely *EMOTIONAL STATES ARE COLORS*.

Mapping of the Song *That's Why (You Go Away)*

In the song *That's Why (You Go Away)*, there is a conceptual mapping within the lyrics, evidenced by a clear relationship between the source domain and the target domain. Emotional experiences such as loss, regret, and love (target domain) are depicted through concrete elements such as journey, distance, and departure (source domain). Through these ontological metaphors, abstract emotions are visualized in a more tangible form, allowing listeners to perceive and feel them more deeply.

a. "LOVE IS ILLUSION"

"Love is one big illusion"

Table 5. Conceptual Mapping of "LOVE IS ILLUSION"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Unreal	Unstable or deceptive
Temporary	Not lasting
Difficult to grasp	Unpredictable

Table 5 presents the conceptual mapping of the metaphor "LOVE IS ILLUSION," illustrating how characteristics associated with illusion—such as deception, unreality, uncertainty, and false appearance—are projected onto the concept of love. Through this mapping, love is portrayed as something emotionally misleading, where expectations and imagined happiness ultimately contrast with reality, reinforcing the theme of heartbreak and disillusionment conveyed in the song lyrics. The song employs the primary metaphor LOVE IS AN ILLUSION to convey deep disappointment resulting from a relationship that has ended. The notion of illusion suggests that the love experienced was not as beautiful as imagined, filled instead with false hopes.

b. "THE MIND IS OBJECT"

"There is something left in my head"

Table 6. Conceptual Mapping of "THE MIND IS OBJECT"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Stored	Remembered in memory
Left behind	Still lingers in the mind
Not gone	Difficult to forget

Table 6 presents the conceptual mapping of the metaphor “THE MIND IS OBJECT,” demonstrating how abstract mental experiences such as thoughts, memories, and emotions are conceptualized as physical objects that can be stored, carried, or remain within the mind. Through this mapping, the lyrics emphasize the enduring psychological impact of love and loss, portraying memories as concrete entities that continue to occupy emotional and cognitive space. Ontological metaphors such as “*something left in my head*” illustrate that thoughts and memories of a partner continue to exist as if they were tangible objects that cannot simply be discarded. This metaphor conveys the inner suffering experienced after being left behind.

c. “RELATIONSHIP AS A MECHANISM”

“You’re the one who set it up now you’re the one to make it stop”

Table 7. Conceptual Mapping of “RELATIONSHIP AS A MECHANISM”

Source Domain	Target Domain
Constructed	Initiated or started by someone
Stopped	Ended or terminated by someone
Not functioning	Not operating properly

Table 7 presents the concept of RELATIONSHIP AS A MECHANISM illustrates that love is not solely an emotional experience but also something that can be designed and terminated unilaterally, thereby portraying the helplessness of the abandoned party.

d. “LONELINESS IS LOST DIRECTION”

“Sitting here all alone in the middle of nowhere”

Table 8. Conceptual Mapping of “LONELINESS IS LOST DIRECTION”

Source Domain	Target Domain
Nowhere	Emotional emptiness
Not knowing the direction	Confusion and loss of meaning
Sitting alone	Feeling abandoned

Table 8 presents the phrase “*in the middle of nowhere*” spatially and geographically depicts sadness and emptiness, as if the loss of love leaves a person stranded and directionless within the emotional realm.

Mapping of the Song *Sleeping Child*

In the song *Sleeping Child*, MLTR presents a series of powerful ontological metaphors that construct both emotional imagery and social critique within gentle and poetic lyrics. Metaphors in cognitive semantics enable humans to comprehend an abstract domain (target domain) through a concrete domain (source domain).

a. “SYMBOLS OF SAFETY AND HOPE”

“Oh my Sleeping child”

“But you’ve built your own paradise”

Table 9. Conceptual Mapping of “SYMBOLS OF SAFETY AND HOPE”

Source Domain	Target Domain
Sleeping child	Innocence, hope, and peace
Sleep	Tranquility, detachment from chaos
Paradise	A pure inner world, untouched by external destruction
Child’s mind	The ideal human consciousness, free from violence

Sleeping child is not merely literal but serves as a symbol of idealism that remains pure and untainted by the harsh realities of the world. Sleep represents a release from chaos, and the lyric *"You've built your own paradise"* suggests that the innocent mind of a child possesses the power to create a better world, something even adults and world leaders have failed to achieve. Table 9 presents the conceptual mapping of "SYMBOLS OF SAFETY AND HOPE," illustrating how elements such as a sleeping child, paradise, and innocence are associated with emotional security, peace, optimism, and the aspiration for a harmonious world. Through this mapping, the song conveys the idea that purity and innocence can function as powerful symbols of hope amid social conflict and uncertainty.

b. "THE WORLD IS WILD PLACE"

"The world's so wild"

Table 10. Conceptual Mapping of "THE WORLD IS WILD PLACE"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Untamed wilderness	The real world and its life
Uncertainty, chaos	Social conflict, war, violence
Celestial objects (moon, galaxy)	Silent witnesses to personal tranquility and global hope

The external world is depicted as "wild," a place full of threats, in stark contrast to the child's inner world, which is peaceful. This creates a clear dichotomy: the real world versus the ideal world. Table 10 presents the conceptual mapping of "THE WORLD IS WILD PLACE," illustrating how characteristics associated with wilderness—such as danger, chaos, unpredictability, and conflict—are mapped onto the concept of the world. Through this mapping, the lyrics portray reality as a harsh and unstable environment, thereby reinforcing the contrast between the turbulent external world and the child's imagined paradise characterized by safety, innocence, and harmony.

c. "PROTECTING = PRESERVING VALUES"

"That's one reason why I'll cover you, sleeping child"

Table 11. Conceptual Mapping of "PROTECTING = PRESERVING VALUES"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Covering the child	Protecting peace and innocence from external disturbances
Physical acts of protection	Moral efforts to preserve goodness and peace

Through these lyrics, the songwriter conveys the role of adults as protectors of the remaining values in a world filled with violence. Acts of protection are not merely physical, but represent efforts to safeguard principles and hope from destruction. Table 11 presents the conceptual mapping of "PROTECTING = PRESERVING VALUES," illustrating how the act of protection is metaphorically associated with maintaining moral principles, innocence, peace, and hope. Through this mapping, the lyrics emphasize that preserving human values in a chaotic world requires conscious care and responsibility, positioning protection as both a physical and symbolic effort to sustain humanity and social harmony.

Mapping of the Song *25 Minutes*

The song *25 Minutes* tells the story of a man's regret for arriving too late to confess his love. Several metaphors are employed to represent time, the feeling of loss, and deep remorse.

a. "LOVE IS A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME"

"25 Minutes too late"

Table 12. Conceptual Mapping of "LOVE IS A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Journey	A romantic relationship
Time	Longing or yearning
Tardiness	A decision made too late

This song metaphorically represents love as a journey that has a starting point, a process, and the potential for delay. The phrase "25 minutes too late" illustrates that love—like a physical journey—must be timely in order to reach its destination. Tardiness becomes a symbol of failure in sustaining the relationship. The concept of "being late" is not only literal, but also emotional and existential, suggesting that an untimely presence can render everything meaningless. Table 12 presents the conceptual mapping of "LOVE IS A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME," illustrating how elements of travel and temporal movement—such as departure, delay, destination, and missed timing—are mapped onto the experience of love. Through this mapping, the lyrics portray romantic relationships as journeys that require proper timing, commitment, and emotional presence in order to succeed, while delays symbolize regret, loss, and the inability to maintain emotional connection.

b. "A MEETING IS A SEARCH IN THE CITY"

"I'm searching everywhere to find her again" dan

"I find her standing in front of the church The only place in town where I didn't search"

Table 13. Conceptual Mapping of "A MEETING IS A SEARCH IN THE CITY"

Source Domain	Target Domain
City	The search for true love
Public places	The search for forgiveness
Searching for a location	The effort to make amends

In the lines "I'm searching everywhere to find her again" and "the only place in town where I didn't search," the metaphor of urban space is used to represent an emotional quest. Table 13 presents the city becomes a map of feelings wherein the protagonist explores various locations to rediscover lost love. The church, as the one place he did not search, symbolizes a moment of spiritual enlightenment and irony, as he ultimately finds his beloved there—but in a state from which there is no return.

c. "LOSS IS HUNGER"

"Out in the streets, places where hungry hearts have nothing to eat"

Table 14. Conceptual Mapping of "LOSS IS HUNGER"

Source Domain	Target Domain
Hunger	Longing
Physical emptiness	Emotional emptiness
Loneliness	Loss of meaning

In the lyrics, feelings of loss and longing are expressed through the metaphor of hunger. Table 14 shows a hungry heart symbolizes inner emptiness and an unmet yearning for affection. Love is likened to emotional nourishment, and when love is absent, the heart experiences hunger, dryness, and suffering.

Discussion

This study has identified and classified ontological metaphors in four MLTR songs—*Sleeping Child*, *Paint My Love*, *That's Why (You Go Away)*, and *25 Minutes*—and explored the conceptual mappings between the source domains and target domains in each metaphor. The results indicate that the primary metaphors in each song typically represent love or emotional experiences as concrete entities (for example: love as art, love as a journey, the inner world as the child's "bedroom"). Meanwhile, other metaphors (such as the personification of the moon, the hunger of the heart, delayed time, and the protection of the child) add layers of moral and emotional meaning.

This analysis enriches the study of conceptual metaphors in songs, a field previously dominated by literary or general lyric contexts. A comparable study by Thu (2019) found that in 68 late 20th-century English pop songs, ontological metaphors appeared dominantly alongside structural and orientational metaphors with similar distribution patterns; namely, ontological metaphors were used to provide concrete explanations for abstract experiences such as love and memory. Similarly, research by Putra et al. (2024) on the lyrics of James Arthur's songs revealed that ontological metaphors are the most frequently occurring type in depicting emotions and interpersonal relationships. This finding aligns with the metaphor usage patterns observed in the analyzed MLTR lyrics.

The distinction of this study from previous ones lies in its focus on the extraction of conceptual mappings: specifically, how components of the source domain (e.g., journey, painting, food, time) are systematically mapped onto emotional target domains (love, loss, hope). This focus reveals a more layered and systematic nature of the mappings, rather than merely identifying structural metaphors.

The significance of the findings in this study lies in expanding the understanding of ontological metaphors within the popular music genre. The results demonstrate that conceptual metaphor structures play a crucial role in connecting sensory imagery with psychological experiences in pop songs. Furthermore, they provide a theoretical basis for the use of metaphors in creating emotional resonance. MLTR uses conceptual metaphors in songs such as *Paint My Love*, which blend visual imagery and the experience of love, and *Sleeping Child* to create a contrast between calming children's lives and adult conflicts. The album contains twelve tracks that include both spoken and written words. Using metaphors can create a powerful emotional connection with the audience, as demonstrated by these instances.

CONCLUSION

Based on this analysis, it is concluded that the ontological metaphors identified in the chosen MLTR song lyrics demonstrate how abstract concepts like love are conceptualized through personification, containerization, and substance. These conceptual mappings in the lyrics show not only how metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday speech but also how popular music uses metaphor as a tool to convey abstract experiences. The outcomes aid in the development of metaphor theory by providing a thorough classification and description of ontological metaphors within essentially an artistic medium, widening the scope of analysis of metaphysics beyond just political or scientific debate.

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