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¹⁸
A Critical Discourse Analysis of song “Look What You Made Me Do” by Taylor Swift

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Abstract. The aim of this study was to reveal on how the intended meaning of any figurative expressions delivered through the lyrics and also symbolic signs and gestures which delivered on a popular video clip of Taylor Swift “Look What You Made Me Do” in order to figure out its implication toward language learning as one of the most-watched music videos on YouTube. The data of this study were the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s song “Look What You Made Me Do” and the official video clip on YouTube uploaded by VIVO on August 27th, 2017. Both the lyrics and the symbolic cues shown on the video clip were analyzed through Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis by categorizing any kinds of figurative expressions delivered to reveal the intended meaning of the song and interpret its symbolic expressions through semiotic study as research method. Thus the context is intervening the writing of the song. The results showed that there are many repetitions found to emphasize the message delivered which can be considered as something that viewed as highly really matter for the author or the singer of the song then based on the symbolic or semiotic analysis, most of the clues delivered are trying to express the singers’ transformation regarding to her new reputation as a more powerful and tough person from her past image as an innocent sweet girl. The clues are delivered through the symbols in the forms of animals such as snakes and raven which belief as the symbols of transformation.

Keywords: *Figurative Expressions, Discourse Analysis, Song, Lyrics, Language Learning.*

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<https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua>



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INTRODUCTION

Unleashed on August, 24th 2017, one of the most popular song of a Grammy Award winner musician, Taylor Swift, “Look What You Made Me Do” attained the most viewed video in its first 24 hours of release for 43.2 million times viewed, the record which never been breakthrough by any other superstars (McIntyre, 2017). Presenting the new image as the “villain” character of the pop culture on music industry by symbolically showing the real conflicts she faced during her career, Taylor Swift has been successfully teased her fans’ curiosity of what her actual intention behind the lyrics and the clip and to whom it was all directed. Leaving her fans being puzzled through her surprising yet entertaining act, which is indicated it as the most-watched video particularly among the teenagers this year. This fact also confirms that Taylor Swift’s fascinating works in writing and delivering the song have been legitimated as the most influencing musician among the teenagers who idolize her. This phenomenon is quite exciting to be explored, moreover, the implication of the booming of pop culture among teenagers also should be revealed in order to avoid any unexpected effect towards the teenagers’ behavior.

Many types of research have been conducted to investigate the socio-cultural phenomenon happened among the society by revealing the intentions behind the lyrics of a song since it mostly represents the songwriter’s thoughts, beliefs, and feelings which have a strong tendency to affect its listeners culturally and psychologically as well. An investigation to the context of a highly viral song “Baby Shark” through critical discourse analysis was connecting the lyrics to the purpose of the marketing strategy and the condition of the society. The findings showed the song is about the community perception of hard working culture among the Korean people, and the shark used in the song as a metaphor of Korean mindset of hard working. Impressively, the composer could implicitly describe their intention through simple word choices on the lyrics and memorable repetitions (Arif and Triyono, 2018). A study of the social and political values of Iwan Fals’s song was using sociological approach. The result of the study discovered the composer’s thoughts and awareness of the social, political, educational and nationalism conditions and issues in Indonesia (Firmansyah, 2016). Another study concerning the intended meaning behind the song of Teun A. van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis model which aimed to discover the community understanding and the local setting of a society in the humanity song entitled *We Shall Overcome*, they found that the composer of the song was trying to describe his concerns of the social and political conflicts between Palestinians and Israeli government (Putri and Triyono, 2018).

Regarding to the semantic analysis on song lyrics, another study focuses on the descriptive analysis of figurative expressions utilized in lyrics of Taylor Swift’s 1989 album. The study explained that figurative expressions can be used by the songwriter in order to make the songs more alive so that the listeners can feel the condition that the songwriter tries to deliver through the songs. The use of the contextual meaning in this study also opens up all the meanings and possible interpretations of song lyrics by Taylor Swift in the album investigated (Isa et al., 2017).

Considering the effectiveness of the songs used in enhancing language learning has been acknowledged by many language teachers and educational researchers. Most teachers decided to use songs both delivered through audio-only or audio visually to engage students on their instructions as it has been proven that song could effectively help students in internalizing the vocabulary contained on the lyrics along with how it is pronounced, providing intonation, and the structure of the new language which assisted by the rhymes and melody (Shin, 2017). Another study, the mnemonic device such as rhymes of the song could help our brain to hold a lot of information (Razak and Yunus, 2016).

Regarding to teaching English to adolescence students, most language teachers prefer to choose the latest song from the most popular singer to attract the students in the learning process (Cardinal et al., 2015; Hughes, 2015; Richard, 2015; Filardo-Llamas, 2015; Halperin, 2020). Sometimes, they also ask the students to find and hear the song from their favorite musicians in order to enhance their engagement to the language learning process (Leap, 2015). However, both teachers and students sometimes not really aware of what the song is really about. Most of them are less selective when deciding to use song on their class regarding to the appropriateness of the song with their age and their sociocultural background.

Concerning on the recent explosion of pop culture among teenage students and its effects along with the implications toward students cultural background regarding to the use of song on language learning, the present study is trying to investigate on how a songwriter or composer deliver their messages through a song (Rymes, 2015; Monson et al., 2016; Motschenbacher, 2016; . This study is also trying to reveal any idioms or figurative expressions on the lyrics and the symbolic expressions show in form of gestures or things shown on the video in order to make teachers more aware of any discourse markers shown on the video before they decided to choose it as learning media (Wu and Hou, 2015; Zhang, 2015; Zahoor and Janjua, 2016).

Figurative expressions, semiotics or symbols, lyrics, and the mixture of them were used as the main data for the present study since all of those aspects are served as “one package” entertaining discourse. Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis were used to conduct the present study and considered as the most appropriate guidance since the data provided on the video clip meet all the criteria of text in Fairclough’s CDA which can be found in form of speech, writings, images, and the mixture of all those three features (Hassen, 2015). Fairclough’s CDA also deemed as the most suitable approach to investigate the appropriateness aspect on the video clip toward the norm and value believed on the students’ society, and how language could stimulate changes among society, particularly teenagers, as a tool to change behavior, and gaining power. The following questions derive the present study: 1) How the writer of the “Look What You Made Me Do” lyrics deliver her intended messages through the video clip? 2) What messages did the writer of the song intended to deliver?

RESEARCH METHOD

The data of this study were the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song "Look What You Made Me Do" and the official video clip on YouTube uploaded by VIVO on August 27th, 2017. The research method used in this study was critical discourse analysis in analyzing the lyrics through Fairclough's Critical Discourse analysis by categorizing any kinds of figurative expressions delivered to reveal the intended meaning of the song and the symbolic cues shown on the video clip were interpreted based on semiotic approach along with the nature of the socio-cultural background of the origin of the symbols shown on the video clip (Wu and Hou, 2015; Rymes, 2015; Monson et al., 2016). Semiotic approach is the study of sign process, which is any form of activity, conduct, or any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. The semiotic tradition explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communications.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Followings are findings that are collected from the song lyrics and Video of "Look What You Made Me Do" by Taylor Swift. Based on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the findings revealed how the messages were delivered through the video clip which contains both aural and visual cues in forms of lyrics, images which covering the symbols shown on the video, and action covering certain meaningful gestures done by the singer. From the video clip there are also some literal and figurative expressions that combined by the author of the song to convey the intended meaning of the song and also the visual cues covering the symbolic images and gestures convey meaningful messages which intended to deliver.

Lyrics as Text

On the lyrics of the song, there are so many repetitions found literally *accusing* certain people like; "I don't like your..." or "I don't like you" are repeated for 6 times. The *blaming* and *determining attitude* on the sentences "Look what you made me do" were repeated for 30 times, and the lyrics containing *warning* and *threatening*, "I don't trust nobody and nobody trust me, I'll be the actress staring at your bad dreams" was repeated for 4 times. Regarding the figurative expressions, there are found 7 metaphors on the lyrics, 3 irony expressions, 2 paradox expressions, 1 euphemism, Hyperbole, personification, and reversed personification. Most of the figurative expressions on the lyrics used to describe the reason why Taylor blames someone she accused as "You" on the lyrics.

Images

Regarding the images shown on the video, the visual cues are classified into several dominant groups of symbols such as color scheme, animals, symbolic things, and gestures.

- The major color schemes that mostly appear and used on the video are black, red, and gold.
- The animals mostly appear on the video are snakes in the form of living snakes, chandelier, and jewelries (rings, and necklace) and raven.

- The symbolic things that dominantly shown on the video are Cemetery/ tombstones, 1 dollar surrounded by diamonds and jewelries, Golden throne, Golden car, Golden cage, Swing, Plastic mannequins, Feminine dancer men, and Golden Airplane with the word "Reputation" written on the side of it.

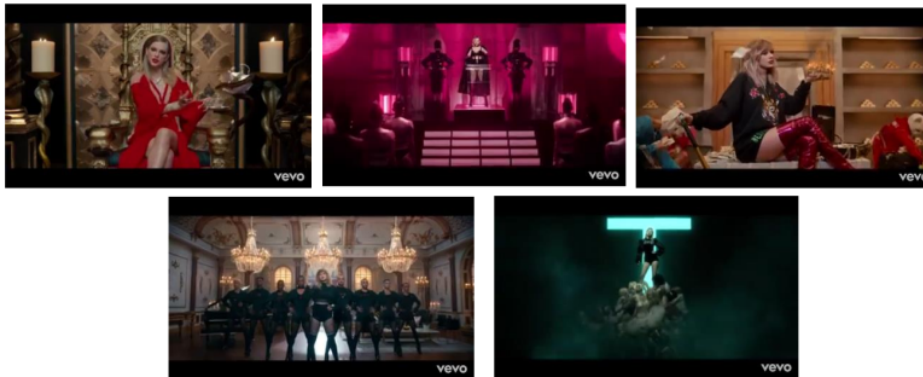
⁵ **The mixture of Lyrics and Images**

There are several meaningful scenes on the mixture between the lyrics and the images or gesture, the most dominant and symbolic gestures that can be found on the video ¹⁶ mentioned as follow:

1. Showing revenge, power, and hatred when she crawling up through her own grave and burying her older image while singing, "I don't like your little games, don't like your tilted stage, the role you made me play of a fool, no I don't like you!"



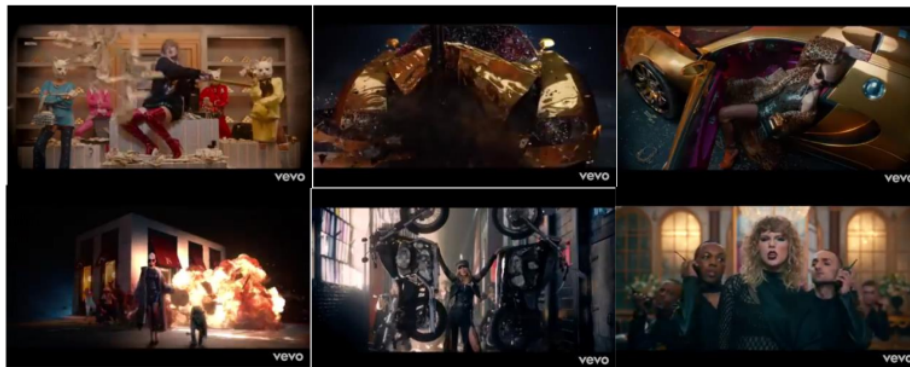
2. Showing dominance and power by standing or sitting on the highest position while singing the lyrics, and leading groups of people, for instance; 1) when she sitting on a throne among snakes and the scene that Taylor stands in front of lines of plastic mannequins and singing, "But I got smarter, I got harder in the nick of time, honey, I rose up from the dead I do it all the time, I got a list of name and your is in red underlined, I check it once then I check it twice", 2) act as the leader of a group of people robbing a bank and 3) act as a leader of a group of bikers while singing "The world moves on another day another drama, drama, but not for me, not for me all I think is karma..." , 4) dancing as a leader of eight feminine male dancers while singing "Ooh, look at what you made me do" repeatedly, 5) stands on the top of her own previous images or persona taken from the older her hit video clips and sing "I don't trust nobody and nobody trust me, I'll be the actress starring in your bad dream" repeatedly for 4 times.



3. Pointing and accusing forming right hand as a gesture when the lyrics is saying “You”, pointing with the index finger when the lyrics sing “I’ve got the list of names and yours is in red underlined” and pointing her baseball bat when the lyrics is saying “but you all get yours”



4. Blaming someone for making her facing bad things on her career yet showing power on how she strong enough to going through it by repeatedly singing the “Ooh, look what you made me do” part on the car crashed scene, car explosion, hitting stacks of money, on the scene when she lifting two big motorcycles by herself, and overall on the scene when she dances with 8 feminine male dancers.



It is very interesting on how both the author and the singer deliver their messages through spoken language (lyrics of the song) and visual cues (video clip) they served. The lyrics deliver the message intensely by giving certain repetitive parts which show how that part is trying to tell some important things and the figurative expressions to present “the soul” of the feeling of the author or the singer through the lyrics interestingly. Based on the lyrics analysis, there are many repetition found to emphasize the message delivered which can be considered as something that viewed as highly really matter for the author or the singer of the song. One function of the repetition of words is beside to make the text cohesive and coherence, it also an effective way to strongly show how the repeated words or phrase or sentences is a matter for those who deliver the messages (Salkie, 2006). Based on the symbolic or semiotic analysis, most of the clues delivered are trying to express the singers’ transformation regarding to her new reputation as a more powerful and tough person from her past image as an innocent sweet girl. The clues are delivered through

the symbols in the forms of animals such as snakes and raven which belief as the symbols of transformation (Eason 2008, Mitford, 1996). The transformation based on the analysis of the lyrics might be caused by close people around her that have treated her wrong and use her for the sake of their own benefit. In other words, it can be said that the video is trying to tell about the anger and revenge of the singer or the author toward the people who are have betrayed her.

Regarding the marketing strategy in the music industry, most artists or musicians are trying to make some sensation in order to make her rate or rank higher on music industry in order to maintain their fame. On showbiz, the life of the celebrity as an individual is deemed as something which can be highly commercialized (Rupp, 2014). On the video, "Look What You Made Me Do" Taylor presented an interesting video which believed as the summary of her struggle on maintaining her career and success. Many admitted that they see the video is representing the rumors, scandals, achievements, and love life happened on Taylor's journey as a successful public figure and those things are very promising to be sold to get the fame yet entertaining for the fans to get the living narratives.

CONCLUSION

¹⁰ The song and video clip is trying to deliver the anger and revenge warning of the singer whom been betrayed by her closest people and she presented the messages through the combination of aural cues or text (lyrics) and visual symbols through the symbolic colors, images, gestures, and the mixtures of them and the lyrics. On deeper analysis based on the knowledge of the marketing strategy, it also found that all the entertaining aspects presented on the video clip not only served to deliver the intended messages but also in the sake of marketing strategy of the artist. However, due to the limitation of time, credible supporting or the previous journal to support this study and the article form requirement which have to be respected, the present article could not provide the investigation from broader, deeper and various perspectives. Therefore, the continuation study done from various angle should be done in order to reveal on how people could simply grab both the messages and the intended goals of certain entertaining product particularly song or video clip which recently widely used as learning media, especially for language learning.

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