Conceptual Metaphor in Music: Making Love A Destination

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**Project Scope**

For this project, I will analysis the conceptual metaphors in a song by a current artist in order to analyze the human cognitive capabilities that are presented when humans listen to music. This includes the audio being provided through the lyric, as well as sensory imagery which can be written through the lyrics of the song. I will use these capabilities in order to prove that conceptual metaphors do exist in music. I will then turn the sensory images into signs. Along with this written document, I will provide a video to the song chosen, which will again hold some explanation to the conceptual metaphors in the song as well as display images of the signs in the song.

**Definitions**

A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. For example, a sign can be a light switch, which stands for turning something on or off.

A metaphor,

“The word metaphor was defined as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept.” - George Lakoff, 1993

A conceptual metaphor then, refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. Conceptual metaphors include a target domain and a source domain. The source domain is the word that is more known. The target domain is the word that is more
abstract. For example, in the metaphor, “love is a journey”. The source domain would be journey and the target domain would therefore be love. This is because love is more abstract however, there is a better-known sense of what a journey is than what love means. (Lakoff, 1993)

**Honeymoon Avenue**

The featured track for this project is “Honeymoon Avenue”, a song written by American recording artist Arianna Grande off of her debut album *Yours Truly*. The song and album was released last year. The song’s premise is, two people are in a relationship, however, it’s not heading in the right “direction”. Instead of progressing in this relationship, the two lovers are stuck in one place, and their relationship is not where it used to be.

**Notable Signs In the Song**

Rearview mirror-

In a car, a rear view mirror is a mirror inside of the car that the driver uses to see behind their car. The singer mentions the rearview mirror in this line:

“I looked in my rear view mirror and

It seemed to make a lot more sense

Than what I see ahead of us, ahead of us, yeah.”

This could be interpreted as, by the singer looking out of their rear view mirror, they are looking towards their past. So, the source domain here would be, rearview mirror, and the target domain could be, the past. Therefore, the meaning behind this sign, in relation to the metaphor can be quite ambiguous. One interpretation could be, that the relationship was better in the past than it is
currently. Also, it could mean that, getting into a relationship with this person made sense in the past, but now it doesn’t make much sense. The rearview mirror is also the first indication of the singer being instead of a car.

Rain-
The weather occurrence of rain can be defined as precipitation or water falling from the sky. Rain is used in many songs and poems to describe pain, or sadness. Therefore “driving in rain” can be seen as a sign meaning perseverance or working hard. The meaning behind “driving in rain” can then be interpreted as working through something. This sign was mentioned in the song as:

“You know how to drive in rain”

Here the singer is noting that, they aren’t comfortable with something. Meaning that, their partner in the relationship is fine with “working hard” to get through the rain, however, the singer on the other hand is not. The source domain here would be actual rain while the target domain is struggle or pain.

Lane-
A lane is a section of the road, which are usually divided by lines and separated according to direction and speed. The singer uses lane in the song in this line:

“And you decided not to make a change

Stuck in the same old lane

Going the wrong way home”
Here in the song, the word lane holds a more expressive meaning. The singer is saying that she is stuck in a lane. In regards to this song, the singer can mean that she’s stuck in the same, predicament or situation. In this lane (or situation), her relationship is not going to its proper destination. In other words, the relationship is not where it should be. So, here the source domain would be a driving lane while the target domain would be a curtain bad situation.

Bumper-to-bumper traffic-

The singer uses the term “bumper-to-bumper traffic” in this line of the song:

“I feel like my heart is stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic,
I’m under pressure
Cause I can't have you the way that I want
Let's just go back to the way it was”

The “bumper-to-bumper traffic, is something that the singer’s heart is going through. Therefore, the heart can be seen as a sign for the car that the two passengers are in. In bumper-to-bumper traffic, the driver and passengers usually feel trapped, or stuck. The drive may feel confused due to not knowing how to get out of the traffic. Also, the car is at a greater chance of being hit by another car or vehicle in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Therefore, by the singer relating the car to her heart, she is saying that her heart is trapped and confused, and vulnerable. Here the singer denotes the bumper-to-bumper traffic as the source domain and being stuck as the target domain.
Stop sign-

One of the most primary signs in driving is the stop sign. The sign speaks for itself, whenever a driver reaches a stop sign, they are supposed to make a complete stop. In the song, the singer uses the idea of a stop sign with this line:

“Hey, what happened to the butterflies?
Guess they encountered that stop sign”

By using the idea of a stop sign in the song, once again, the singer is referencing to something that once used to be ongoing, however it recently stop. The singer states that there used to be butterflies. This is a metaphor for excitement and nervousness. When butterflies fly, they do not have a specific pattern or space to fly in. They fly free without any styles or limits in spacing, so they flutter. For butterflies to stop at a stop sign is preposterous and will probably never happen in reality. However, through the metaphor in the song, the singer is really trying to say that her excitement for her partner or the relationship itself is no longer there. Here the stop sign is the source domain while not feeling, happy or excited is the target domain.

Yellow light-

A yellow light is a sign in driving meaning to slow down or to drive with caution. Usually in driving, a yellow light happens before a red light, which signals the driver to stop. So, a yellow light (or slowing down) can be seen as a precursor to a red light (or stopping). In the song, the singer mentions a yellow light in these lines:

“Hey, what happened to the butterflies?
Guess they encountered that stop sign
And my heart is at a yellow light, a yellow light”

With this line, once again, the singer is mentioning her heart being the car, since it is at a yellow light. This can then mean that the singer’s heart has slowed down for the person she used to love. Also, by using the expression “yellow light” the singer is also mentioning that there used to be a “green light”, meaning go. Which then in turn means that after the yellow light, there will soon be a “red light”. Here the yellow light is the source domain while, slowing down in a relationship can be seen as the target domain.

**Main Conceptual Metaphors Throughout the Song**

**Driving-**

The overall conceptual metaphor of driving throughout the song is what gives the listener the sensory image that they need. Driving means that the singer and her partner is trying to drive to get somewhere. The destination the singer wants to go to is honeymoon avenue. However, the driver is constantly making so many wrong turns. Also the driver believes that they know where they are going, although they do not since they still make wrong turns. This could lead to the idea that the driver and passenger simply got lost in their relationship. This could be why the singer keeps hinting to the driver to just go back.

**Honeymoon Avenue-**

The term “Honeymoon Avenue” suggests two things. First, it is the listeners priority to understand the definition of the word honeymoon. In American culture (and probably others) it is tradition for newly married couples to go on a honeymoon, which is a romantic time the couple
could spend together, for some duration of time, isolated from others. Therefore the song
suggests that this couple have reached a honeymoon stage. They’ve been together for a time and
had a great “honeymoon” time period. Secondly it suggests that this “honeymoon experience” is
located at a certain place. Throughout the song the singer keeps referencing to “Honeymoon
Avenue” and is constantly suggesting to go back there. The listener would see “Honeymoon
Avenue” as a location since the term is given the avenue suffix. Although, the listener is slowly
revealed that “Honeymoon Avenue” is a place but, not a location, but more of like a section or
period in time. More specifically, a section of the singer’s relationship.

**Video Description**

With the video I’ve created, I tried to add certain signs or images appropriately in time with the
song lyrics. The images were to show what signs I saw in my head while listening to the song.
Certain signs were revolved around a driving theme. Therefore there were signs that included the
stop sign, yellow light, u-turn, danger and wrong way. These are signs that the singer also uses
for conceptual metaphors throughout the song, or that can be added to the song to show
conceptual metaphors as well. For example, the singer never mentions a u-turn throughout her
song. However, the singer did constantly mention that she wanted to just go back. When a person
is driving, the quickest way to go back is to make a u-turn. Also, the song hints at going the
wrong way multiple times so, I thought the wrong way sign would fit into the song nicely while
still under the theme of driving. Another sign I used for the video was being stuck in traffic. This
shows the frustration that takes place when it doesn’t seem like there is anyway out of the traffic
and there is no telling what happened to make the traffic so congested.
**Conclusion**

Throughout life, there are many signs and metaphors which can be very ambiguous because it gives a mapping to more abstract or unconventional concepts. That is why certain metaphors can be taken the wrong way or is still being discussed because there is still no proper way to define or interpret these metaphors in the English language. Songs and poems are both two mediums that are used to express metaphors. Music more importantly discusses metaphors and signs through lyrics and also rhythmic patterns. The song Honeymoon Avenue by Arianna Grande is a great example of this process, because it uses a theme of driving to express a relationship’s unique situation. The song using the descriptive language of metaphors to give the listener sensory images of what is happening. This way, the listener can further relate to the context of the song. The song denotes conceptual mappings from driving to relationships. The song overall can be seen as a network whose signs and metaphors (elements) connect (links) to different emotions and expressions.
References