

A Critical Metaphor Analysis of Rap Lyrics: The Case of Kanye West

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UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB
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**A CRITICAL METAPHOR ANALYSIS OF RAP LYRICS: THE CASE OF KANYE
WEST**

Master's Thesis

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Zagreb, 2022

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Abstract

The study examines metaphorical realizations of the theme of self-aggrandizement in Kanye West's lyrics. The purpose of the study was to show how poetic metaphor serves a purpose and relays messages to the listener, relying on their background world and cultural knowledge. The songs analyzed are from West's 2010 album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. Given that linguistic research often focuses on conceptual metaphors, the analysis was done using a methodological approach called Critical Metaphor Analysis by Jonathan Charteris-Black (2004). It involved three steps, namely metaphor identification, according to a predetermined set of criteria, interpretation, and explanation. The analysis showed that, contrary to popular belief that poetic metaphors are ornamental, a wide array of both cultural and knowledge of the world is needed to understand them, and to comprehend the underlying message. Moreover, all identified instances were assigned their conceptual metaphors, which further showed that the realizations are based on conventionalized conceptual metaphors which are rooted in our knowledge, experience and culture.

1. Introduction

Even if you are not into rap music, and the whole hip-hop scene, chances are you have heard of Kanye West. And even if you are into rap, but not into Kanye, you've probably heard about his "God complex." It could very well be the reason for your not being into his music. To illustrate better what is meant by "God complex," take a look at the following quote:

[...] when someone comes up and says something like "I am a god", everybody says "Who does he think he is?" I just told you who I thought I was, a god! I just told you! That's who I think I am! (West, 2013)

The paragraph is an excerpt from Kanye West's 2013 interview¹ with Zane Lowe of BBC Radio 1. The line "I just told you who I thought I was, od!" has been reproduced numerous times and (even though taken out of context) it very well encapsulates (albeit a bit on steroids) Kanye's view of himself. On first glance, this just may seem like another rapper praising himself as the best in every aspect of themselves: career, financial success, abilities, fame, power, and so on. Though the aforementioned line is the most famous part of the interview, it is followed by:

Would have been better if I had a song that said, "I am a nigga"? or if I had song that said "I am a gangsta"? or if I had song that said "I am a pimp"? (West, 2013)

When saying "I am a god," the speaker applies certain characteristics relevant at the moment of speaking to the current situation. Given the context, "I am a god" can be understood as one describing themselves as having virtually unlimited power, perfect results, perfectly honed skills, etc., basically "I am the highest ideal in this particular situation." Explaining and understanding one thing in terms of another is the focal point of this paper – conceptual metaphor. As it will be shown below, conceptual metaphor is a mechanism of the brain, not merely a literary embellishment device. It is how the brain works, categorizes experiences and influences the way we speak and act.

Methodological procedure used was set by Jonathan Charteris-Black (2004) and termed Critical Metaphor Analysis. It entails an analysis of metaphorical expressions in a corpus by examining the expressions with regard to a set of criteria which further define the ways in which

¹ Full interview (transcription): <https://genius.com/Zane-lowe-kanye-west-zane-lowe-full-interview-annotated>

the expressions came to be and what their purpose is. This type of analysis allowed for the categorization of instances deemed metaphoric, which further allowed the examination of the specific types of instances this paper focuses on (i.e., instances of self-aggrandizement). A more detailed explanation of the process can be found in part 3. Furthermore, conceptual metaphors as mechanisms of the mind can open the backdoor into seeing how the brain works, what factors (personal, social, historical, political, etc.) contributed to their making and what their purpose is in a given context. The research was done using a corpus compiled of song lyrics from Kanye West's 2010 album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, and a selected body of metaphorical realizations was chosen for the analysis, as will be demonstrated below. The corpus was chosen because it is littered with examples pertaining to grandiosity and relies heavily on conventionalized conceptual metaphors which are expanded in creative ways to further persuade the listener to the message behind them. The aim of the paper is to analyze the metaphor pertaining to self-aggrandizement, identify them and group them to show that they serve a function other than just make the songs sound better. It is expected to show how these poetic metaphors convey meaning related to the knowledge of the world and a specific culture that the rapper comes from.

The study is divided into multiple sections. The theoretical framework covers conceptual metaphor, poetic metaphor, rap music and Kanye West in general. The methodology section explains the procedure used for the identification and analysis of metaphors in the corpus. The results in section 4 list all instances of conceptual metaphors identified in the corpus, and section 5, the discussion, further elaborates and explains the results. Section 6 is the Conclusion, followed by the Bibliography and Appendix.

2. Theoretical framework

For a better understanding of all the factors involved in creating certain conceptual metaphors and their realizations, it is necessary to provide background information about concepts which this study will be dealing with. Those include conceptual and poetic metaphors in general, a brief overview of rap music, and of course, a brief overview of Kanye West and his career.

2.1 Conceptual metaphor

Outside the linguistic world, metaphors are usually thought of as expressions used in poetry, literature, music, and so forth for creativity and embellishment of the meanings in a work of art. As Gibbs Jr. (1994: 120) puts it, a lot of expressions used daily are rooted in metaphors. The fact that figurative language is omnipresent in day-to-day speech speaks to its usefulness in relaying notions and knowledge already in our minds (Gibbs Jr., 1994: 121). Conceptual metaphor finds its roots in the brain's conceptual system, and the simplest way to understand conceptual metaphor is through the equation A IS B. Put simply, conceptual metaphor is another way of saying that you are describing, explaining, and understanding one thing in terms of another. You have, are, and will use conceptual metaphors intuitively and without even noticing – i.e., they are conventionalized. Conventional metaphors rely on conventional knowledge, and it is the knowledge of the source domain that enables us to understand the concept in the target domain using the terms from the source domain (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 60). Sometimes metaphorical expressions are used on purpose, with a conscious effort to better illustrate what is meant to the listener or reader, as is often the case with poetic metaphors, which will be dealt with below.

The usefulness of metaphors in language is evident from several of its aspects. Firstly, metaphors provide the user with the ability to express ideas which are difficult to convey using literal language (such as aspects of life and death). It also lies in their ability to provide compactness in communication, allowing the speaker/writer to encompass multiple notions in a single instance (such as in *love is a battlefield*). Finally, metaphors allow the speaker/writer to encapsulate the intensity of their experiences by invoking a large spectrum of mental images which vividly paint the picture of the experience. (Gibbs Jr., 1994: 124-125)

In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980: 13), Lakoff and Johnson pose that our conceptual systems are to a large extent metaphorical and we do not even realize it. What is meant

by that statement is that our brain sees similarities and differences between different experiences and applies one to the other automatically and that is reflected in language. The brain is like a huge Excel sheet with characteristics of experiences listed. There are thousands of entries, and in communication, in a split second, certain characteristics are matched to that which we want to express, while the ones inconsistent with the expression will be hidden (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 19). Given that our experiences mold the concepts in the brain, they reflect certain pervasive characteristics of a given situation, culture, personal background, time period, etc. Like people, conceptual metaphors are a product of their time, culture, history, state of the world, state of the speaker/writer, and reflect values. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 17) illustrate this by giving an example of the TIME IS MONEY conceptual metaphor. “I *spent* six months writing this thesis.” Money is a valuable resource in many cultures (including ours), and we think of time the same way – there is usually never enough of it. Therefore, time = money and we *spend* it, *buy* it, *waste* it, etc.

Another example is the title “His/Her Highness.” Though monarchies have (to a large extent) been replaced by republics in most of the world, there are still some and official titles are still in use. Unlike TIME IS MONEY, which is a structural metaphor, “His/Her Highness” employs a different one – an orientational metaphor. Unlike structural, in which “one concept is structured in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 22), orientational metaphor “organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 22) and they usually follow spatial relations such as up-down, in-out, above-below, etc. The one present in the given example is GOOD IS UP. Since kings and queens were always viewed as the ideal for the people, the supreme military commander, in many cases god’s representative on earth, and also physically sitting on the throne which is always put in a higher position relative to the subjects, or those below them, the GOOD IS UP metaphor finds its place here as well. It is important to note that orientational metaphors are rooted in people’s physical and cultural experience, and will vary from one culture to another, depending on that culture’s perception of certain concepts.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 29) envelop the role of culture in the creation of metaphors in the following sentence: “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.”

In other words, cognitive models (through which we make sense of and reason about our experiences), which are constituted of cognitive schemas, organize our knowledge, and one of the ways in which we acquire them is through culture (the others being by direct experience and knowledge). Therefore, those models acquired through culture are those that have been present in the culture for a substantial amount of time. (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 65-66)

To exemplify, they pose certain cultural values for up-down spatialization metaphors such as “more is better” being coherent with more/good is up, whereas “less is better” is not. Priority given to MORE IS UP over GOOD IS UP is evident from statements that reflect a negative value rising such as *inflation* and *crime rate*. The explanation for the prioritization of MORE IS UP lays in the fact that “it has the clearest physical basis” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 30). When you put objects on top of one another, they go towards the sky, not down into the ground (unless you are standing in quicksand). They also note, in a nature vs. nurture argument, that different (sub)cultures value concepts differently. For a culture that values material possessions the most (MORE IS BETTER), there will be one where the emphasis is not on the material, rather on the spiritual (LESS IS BETTER). Apart from culture, individual values also (may) differ from person to person, and that is also reflected in the choice and creation of conceptual metaphors.

2.1.1 Metaphor-culture relation

Kövecses (2010: 198) ties in to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980: 29) claim that all speakers use metaphors in their communication, and that they vary from culture to culture. Given the variation, the author poses the question of whether universal metaphors exist. Furthermore, he claims, that many conceptual metaphors are recurring in different cultures in different parts of the world. For an example of a (near-)universal metaphor he quotes Hoyt Alverson (1994 in Kövecses: 198) who found TIME IS SPACE in languages such as English, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi and Sesotho.

Kövecses (2010: 199) furthermore enumerates the possible reasons for the existence of (near-)universal conceptual metaphors: *somehow* all languages developed the same metaphors for certain (esp. bodily) experiences (e.g., happiness, anger); borrowing from one language into another may have been present; and maybe there exists a common basis for the development of the same conceptual metaphors in different languages. Even though a person’s inner workings of the mind are deeply subjective and impossible to fully penetrate, physical sensations are common

and shared among the great majority of human beings. The explanation for the existence of metaphors such as HAPPY IS UP can be traced to the actual physical reactions of the body to happiness – excitement makes the heart rate go up, mood is *elevated*, smiling physically makes the corners of the mouth go *up* (and *down* when experiencing sadness), also implies activity rather than inactivity, and so forth. Though universal bodily experiences are in fact, general and provide fertile ground for the emergence of shared conceptual metaphors, that does not suggest that all linguistic realizations of the conceptual metaphor will be the same in all languages that employ it.

The explanation for this lies in what Kövecses (2010: 203) calls “different experiential focus.” That is, embodiment (the role of the human body in assigning meaning to concepts) is made up of several components and different cultures emphasize either of those. In other words, physical reactions to emotions such as anger and happiness are universal and can be measured in any person (such as heart rate, sweating, blood pressure), but cultures differ in prioritization of different aspects. Whereas English emphasizes the rising bodily temperature and blood pressure, Chinese features prominently only the pressure. Different experiential focus explains that even though there are common physical experiences around the world, different emphasis is given to different parts of them, thereby creating partly universal and partly culture-specific instances of conceptual metaphors.

For the impact of culture on metaphors, i.e., the variation found in metaphors in different cultures, Kövecses (2010: 204) offers the following explanation. Metaphorical conceptualizations come about as a result of two forces – embodiment and context (similar to Lakoff and Turner’s (1989: 66) view that cognitive models are acquired through direct experience and culture). Both of these underlie our effort to be coherent with universal embodiment and culture-specificity of local culture. While in some cases this is achieved, in others either of the two forces plays the more important role.

Local culture determines the context, and can be characterized by aspects such as physical, social, discourse, etc. The factors at play in a context include the setting, topic, audience, and medium. The choice of a metaphor in a situation therefore depends on the availability of metaphors but also on the setting and topic of a particular situation in which the conceptualization takes place (Kövecses, 2010: 204). It cannot be omitted that along the listed attributes, the choice is also going to depend on the person using it. Personal history, interests, values, knowledge of the world all

play a part in choosing source domains in a given situation. All of these factors should be kept in mind when trying to understand and explain the motivations for choosing a certain metaphorical realization, as well as understanding the metaphor itself.

2.2 Poetic metaphor

Because the study exclusively deals with metaphorical conceptions in lyrics, and songs are usually taken to be made up of figurative language, it is crucial to elaborate on figurative language and the purpose of its analysis. Figurative language has long been regarded in the same way as decorations on a Christmas tree – purely ornamental and with the purpose of embellishing. Lakoff and Turner (1989) have argued (quite successfully, in their book *More than Cool Reason*) that it is in fact not only ornamental, but it is rather the very branches on which ornaments are put. In this case, the metaphors analyzed come from the poetic imagination, which may seem counterintuitive with regard to the previous sentence, but Lakoff and Turner (1989) put it very nicely:

... great poets, ... use basically the same tools we use; ... using the capacities we all share, poets can illuminate our experience, explore the consequences of our beliefs, challenge the ways we think, and criticize our ideologies. (xi)

Though poetic language is more often than not regarded as ambiguous, unclear, and not fully understandable, Lakoff and Turner (1989: 5) hold that despite that, we understand the metaphorical conceptions in poetic works because “we know unconsciously and automatically many basic metaphors for understanding life.”

Metaphors encountered in poetic works are understandable because they had already been there at the time of writing, the author merely expanded and gave them linguistic life through novel forms. In other words, conventionalized conceptual metaphors are parts of how members of a culture or community experience and rationalize their shared world (Lakoff and Turner, 1989). In fact, it is because poets use conventionalized metaphors in novel ways that we can understand them, because we understand the basic concepts behind the novel linguistic realizations.

CMs become conventionalized and go unnoticed because firstly, metaphors are an integral part of our conceptual systems. Once we learn one, there is no need to re-learn it – it stays in the brain (i.e., becomes conventionalized) and becomes a useful tool. Much like breathing, conceptual metaphors are parts of the system that we use automatically, unconsciously, and effortlessly.

Lakoff and Turner (1989: 63) further elaborate on the persuasive power of conventionalized metaphors. They hold that we give a CM validity because we use it and accept it when we hear it coming from someone else because we are predisposed to do so.

The reason why poetic metaphors in fact are understood lies in the ways in which authors mold existing conventional metaphors. These are extending, elaborating, questioning, and combining. When Shakespeare included dreaming in the conventional DEATH IS SLEEP conceptual metaphor, he extended its scope to involve another aspect of actual sleeping, and therefore extended the conceptualization of death. Elaborating a metaphor includes filling in the slots of that metaphor in novel ways (in contrast to extending in which new slots are mapped). The actual person doing the elaborating is not the poet, rather the reader, who does so by following the mode suggested by a poem. Horace referred to death as the “eternal exile of the raft.” In that case, the conventional DEATH IS DEPARTURE is elaborated by providing a mode of transport – a raft. Using the knowledge of the world, the reader knows that *exile* presupposes unwantedness and banishment, while *raft* is not steered by a captain, rather it moves with the tide. *Exile + raft =* forever floating to nowhere, which again provides the reader with a novel conceptualization of death. By filling in the slots in different ways, elaborating enables the reader to come to new conclusions and views of a concept. Sometimes an author will feel as if the existing conceptual metaphors do not wholly illustrate the point wanting to be made, and therefore resort to questioning it, criticizing it, and offering an alternative. An example comes from a poet in the Sanskrit tradition when he uses the concept of release, which is usually understood as the absence of emotion, and suggests that the act of letting go is better than a void as a metaphor for release. Finally, composing is arguably the most powerful way in which metaphors are manipulated. This process results in the formation of composite metaphors, as in cases where two or more metaphors are used at the same time in a text, and even in a sentence. It is these processes which allow the use of the ordinary in extraordinary ways. (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 67-71)

The internal structure of conceptual metaphors is what gives them their persuasiveness. The structure is composed of the following components which get mapped from source to target domain: slots (such as in the paragraph above – CMs (source domain) as tools (target domain)); relations; properties; knowledge of a domain which allows the user to draw conclusions about it. (Lakoff and Turner, 1989: 63-64)

As for the sources of power of metaphors, the authors list the following: the power of structure (esp. in cases of abstract notions such as life and death which do not have a physical structure in the real world); the power of options (referring to the generality of metaphors to be able to cover a wide range of instantiations); the power of reason (patterns of reasoning from the source domain can be used to reason about a target domain); the power of evaluation (the same way entities are mapped from one domain to another, so is the way of evaluating the said entities); the power of being there (this relates to the very existence of conceptual metaphors, which provides them their effectiveness, and the fact that their use is unconscious and automatic makes them hard to even question them – e.g., seeing a result of an action as being positive or negative) (Lakoff and Turner, 1989: 64-65).

2.3 Critical Metaphor Analysis

The starting point for the study was Charteris-Black's 2004 *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. In the book, the author lays out the tenets of critical metaphor analysis, which are the following:

- by integrating corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis it aims to uncover language user's intentions
- following in the footsteps of Cameron and Low (1999 in Charteris-Black, 2004), the three stages make up the methodology of analysis: identification, interpretation, and explanation.

Metaphor identification consists of identifying whether metaphors are present in the first place and if there is semantic tension between a literal source domain and a metaphorical target domain. In the scope of this, the author (2004: 35) also states that any word can be a metaphor if the context is right and the speaker/writer intended it as such. The identification process is further divided into two stages: (1) close reading of the texts to identify candidate metaphors in relation to a set of criteria, upon which words commonly used with a metaphoric sense are classified as metaphor keywords; (2) qualitative phase in which corpus contexts are examined to determine whether each use of a keyword is metaphoric or literal.

Metaphor interpretation involves establishing a relationship between metaphors and their determining factors, as well as the identification of conceptual metaphors and where/if possible,

conceptual keys. In Charteris-Black's (2004: 22) words, conceptual keys are "statements that resolve the semantic tension of a set of conceptual metaphors by showing them to be related."

The third and final step, metaphor explanation involves identifying the social agency involved in their production, social role in persuasion, and by identifying the discourse function of each metaphor determining their ideological and rhetorical motivation.

To fully identify and interpret given metaphors, it is necessary to consider individual and social resources that influence the choice of a particular metaphor. Individual resources therefore are: cognitive and affective (thoughts, feelings, experiences of the world); pragmatic (knowing what will be effective and when); and linguistic (knowledge of the linguistic system). As for social ones, those are: ideological outlook and historical and cultural knowledge.

2.3.1 Criteria for the definition of metaphor

As mentioned previously, defining a metaphor involves determining whether or not there is semantic tension present in a given text on one or all of the following levels: linguistic, pragmatic, and cognitive.

Charteris-Black (2004: 21) explains as follows. On the linguistic level, a shift in domain use can occur by reification, personification, or depersonification of a concept. On the pragmatic level, the linguistic representation will have the underlying purpose of influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion. Shifts on this level reflect the author's intentions in a particular context. Finally, the cognitive level tension may be caused by shifts in the conceptual system for which the basis is the association between the attributes of the referent (of an expression) in its source context and the referent in the novel target context.

2.4 Rap and Kanye West

Put simply, rap "consists of the aesthetic placement of verbal rhymes over musical beats," with the first track being recorded in 1979 (Sugar Hill Gang's *Rapper's Delight*) (Alim, 2006: 4). As Price-Styles (2015: 31) notes, rap can be seen as a progression of the African American oral tradition which includes the talking blues and oral storytelling.

Rap is known for its linguistic creativity, and Kautny (2015: 157) enumerates a few rhetorical devices frequently employed in rap to get a message across: signifyin' which can be realized through metaphor, simile, irony, allusions or quotations; the Dozens, which is connected to battling, boasting, and undermining the opponent; and rhyme ("the repetition of the same or similar sounds between two words").

In his analysis of common metaphorical conceptions in rap, Crossley (2005: 502) refers to Sperber's law² – what is salient in a culture will feature predominantly in its linguistic realizations. Sperber's law means that language users use the knowledge of concepts from familiar domains to illustrate new subjects and suggests that "the principal concerns of a historical era or discourse community will likely be reflected in the chief metaphors of the time period" (Crossley, 2005: 205), which will also be shown in the analysis part of this paper. Furthermore Crossley (2005: 503) states that rap as an art form confronts and subverts deeply rooted social and cultural beliefs and is a response to ailments experienced by the whole of the African American community. The general point Crossley (2005) makes is that metaphors found in rap music shed light on the collective plight that still exists and help identify and understand obstacles still to be overcome by many in the community.

2.4.1 Kanye West

Arguably one of the most controversial artists on the planet today, one cannot dismiss Kanye's impact and influence on the genre. An artist of African American origin, West has become one of the most recognized faces on the globe and has 21 Grammy Awards to confirm it. During his presence on the global stage, Kanye's songs have frequently dealt with many collective experiences of the African American community, and often offer criticism of the state of the world in which him and his fellow citizens find themselves in.

The focus of this paper is on his fifth studio album released in 2010, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. Upon its release, *MBDTF* was critically acclaimed by various publications and fans, along with winning the Grammy for Best Rap Album.

² This is based on the work of Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson originally published in their book on Relevance theory (1986)

Comprised of 12 songs, plus a bonus one, thematically the album is “a genre-bending masterpiece that explores the darker sides of celebrity, fame, and love” (My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy, n.d.). Materialism, skills, self-aggrandization, self-consciousness, sex, power, and criticism of the cultural context are all intertwined and present in what Pitchfork’s³ Ryan Dombal calls “a hedonistic exploration into a rich and famous American id” (2010). The main focus of the research of this paper is the theme of self-aggrandizement in the construction of identity, and metaphorical conceptualizations through which it is realized.

³ Pitchfork is an American online music publication, accessible at: <https://pitchfork.com/>

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach

The first step of the research was compiling the corpus using song lyrics extracted from [genius.com](https://www.genius.com) (further explained below). This was followed by metaphor identification process, which entailed a close reading of the lyrics with regard to the criteria for the definition of metaphor for songs. First, the realizations were marked by the type of tension present. Out of all identified metaphors, those relating to the topic of self-aggrandizement were singled out. The result of that process is presented in table 1, with 39 identified metaphorical realizations.

As can be seen in table 1, all identified instances were then divided according to their thematic domains. The metaphors chosen for analysis were taken from the cognitive tension domain, since instances of that tension cover all thematic domains involved. The process also involved an examination of the context in order to establish whether a metaphorical connection existed in the first place.

Metaphor identification was followed by metaphor interpretation, which resulted in the grouping of each instance under their assigned conceptual metaphors. Upon further examination, some (no. 2-5) were assigned the conceptual key ARTIST IS SUPERIOR and were categorized as such.

The final step of the analysis was metaphor explanation. This step elaborated on the background of the identified metaphorical realizations, and showed the meaning, implications, and knowledge of the world and the culture which motivated their creation. For this part to yield results it was essential to point out the connections to the culture and history that shaped the artist's view of the world, which in turn helped create these metaphorical realizations.

3.2 The corpus

The corpus was compiled as a Word document using lyrics for all 12 songs from *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* retrieved from [genius.com](https://www.genius.com). Omitted from the texts were all instances of lyrics from contributing and featured artists. As for songs, the only omitted recording is *All of the lights (interlude)* since it contains no lyrics.

As will be shown below, the notion of self-aggrandizement was found in 7 out of 12 (13) songs from the album, the songs being: *Dark Fantasy*, *Gorgeous*, *Monster*, *POWER*, *Devil in a New Dress*, *Blame Game*, and *See Me Now*. *Monster*, *POWER* and *See Me Now* are all connected by the fact that they all feature the artist boasting about his success, rapping abilities, wealth, possessions, etc., and were therefore expected to contain instances of self-aggrandizement. *Blame Game* and *Devil in a New Dress* deal with relationships and love, and the fact that metaphorical realizations pertaining to the topic at hand were found in those songs goes to show that the author intertwines a variety of metaphors to strengthen the main message and even send more than one to the listener with all the images invoked while listening. *Dark Fantasy* and *Gorgeous* each deal with most of the topics covered in the whole album, acting both as commentaries and critiques.

4. Results

Instances of self-aggrandizement were found in 7 out of 13 songs, or in 53,85% of the album.

Because the corpus is fairly limited, a close reading was conducted in order to establish how many instances of self-aggrandizement there were. Presence of semantic tension on the cognitive level was identified in 25 metaphorical realizations. Tension on the pragmatic level was identified in 14 realizations, followed by 3 instances of tension at the linguistic level.

Metaphor keywords were furthermore classified according to their thematic domains (Table 1) after an examination of corpus context as phase 2 of metaphor identification. Tension on the cognitive level has been found in all 4 domains, which will be further examined in part 5 of the study. Given that tension on the cognitive level has procured results in all 4 domains, and the spatial constriction of the paper, those tensions will be examined more closely in part 5.

Type of tension/thematic domain	Linguistic	Pragmatic	Cognitive
Superior/supernatural beings		Pharaoh; your highness; His Majesty	Kiss the ring; superhero; monster; phenomenon; aristocracy; throne
Sports			Olympics; belt in two classes; triple-double, no assists; LeBron of rhyme
Religion		The ones chosen; levitate; immaculate conception; abomination	Road to redemption; preachin' to the congregation; Lord; rap god
Other	Present; vertebrae; killed the fur	Killed the enemy; Jerome, Brandon;	Nas flow; anthems; fresh; Black Beatle;

		pimp; roach; cold; pageantries	ice; Lyor Cohen of Dior Homme; mogul; Socrates; elite
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Table 1. Classification of types of semantic tension and domains

The metaphor interpretation process involved the identification of conceptual metaphors as containers for individual metaphorical realizations. The following conceptual metaphors were identified (Appendix A):

1. ACHIEVEMENTS ARE FOOD
 2. ARTIST IS A PERSON OF AUTHORITY
 3. ARTIST IS AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON
 4. ARTIST IS ATHLETE/RAPPING IS A SPORT
 5. ARTIST IS SUPERNATURAL (BEING)
 6. IDEAS ARE VALUABLES
 7. JEWELRY IS FROZEN WATER
 8. MAKING MUSIC IS APOLOGIZING
 9. RAP SONGS ARE CELEBRATORY SONGS
 10. WORDS ARE STREAM/LIQUID
- } Conceptual key:
ARTIST IS SUPERIOR

A conceptual key was identified for all instances of conceptual metaphors in which the artist refers to himself directly, and those were grouped under the key ARTIST IS SUPERIOR. Given that *superior* itself means ‘higher in position,’ this conceptual key relates to the conventional conceptual metaphor GOOD/BETTER IS UP. A quantitative analysis found the most metaphorical expressions (6) in the bonus track, *See Me Now*. On the other hand, *Devil in a New Dress* is the only track that contains at least one instance of all conceptual metaphors found. The conceptual metaphor with the highest number of its realizations (6) was found to be the ARTIST IS AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON, followed by 5 realizations of ARTIST IS SUPERNATURAL. It should be mentioned that the line “the LeBron of rhyme” (West, 2010) was assigned to both ARTIST IS ATHLETE and ARTIST IS AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON since it refers to an influential person who is a professional athlete.

5. Discussion

This is the part where metaphor explanation process will be elaborated further, to show the motivations and implications behind the analyzed metaphorical realizations. The starting point for the discussion is the conceptual metaphor with the largest number of realizations – ARTIST IS AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON.

5.1 ARTIST IS AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON

The first encounter with this conceptual metaphor is found in track 2, *Gorgeous*. The song itself is a criticism of the social (in)justice of the US, with the title serving an ironic purpose, ultimately conveying a meaning the opposite of its conventional meaning. In the track, Kanye makes an analogy to the Beatles – a legendary 1960s English band whose songs are still being played and are regarded as classics. What the phrase implies is that Kanye’s level of music production and creation is on the same level as the Beatles’ and that his music will stand the test of time just like the Beatles’ did. But this is also one of the many examples of a double entendre – black Beatle sounds the same as black beetle, the insect. This implication is obvious upon the examination of the phrase context – “And what’s a Black Beatle anyway, a fuckin’ roach? / I guess that’s why they got me sittin’ in fuckin’ coach” (West, 2010). A realization of PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS conceptual metaphor, this wordplay and the rhyme serves to indicate that even though Kanye is as skilled as the Beatles, his skin color and the historical mistreatment are still the prevailing factors for the (in)justice lived not only by Kanye, but many of his fellow citizens.

Devil in a New Dress introduces the listener to two more realizations of the metaphor. In those, the first is the cognitive similarity perceived by Kanye in regards to his rapping ability, a notion that pops out throughout the whole album. When he raps “the LeBron of rhyme,” he evokes images of LeBron James (this phrase was also classified under ARTIST IS ATHLETE conceptual metaphor). LeBron James is a highly praised basketball player, regarded by many as the best. In the same vein, Kanye wants to persuade the listener that he is the master of his craft – rapping. What is more, the fact here that “rhyme” was chosen as the representative term ties into the fact that rhyming, apart from being an essential part of rapping, is not there to merely make the words sound good with each other. In Bradley’s (2009) words:

It is rap's most obvious way of remaking language, of refashioning not simply sound, but meaning as well ... A new rhyme forges a mental pathway between distinct but sonically related words and carries with it both linguistic and cognitive meaning. It invites the listener to tease out the semantic threads embedded within the sonic fabric of the words. (53-54)

But it doesn't stop there – the following line “hard to be humble when you stuntin’ on a jumbotron” furthermore implies that Kanye himself knows how much he has achieved and that those achievements justify his boastful behavior. The second realization is with his evoking the image of “the Lyor Cohen of Dior Homme.” Lyor Cohen is an influential record executive (at one point being the head of Def Jam), being present in the hip hop industry for over 30 years and helping launch the careers of many. This kind of business gravitas is paired with fashion – Dior Homme⁴. Followed by “That's ‘Dior Homme,’ not ‘Dior, homie’” in what can be perceived as kind of a condescending/mocking comment to those that are not wealthy or lucky enough to have encountered high-end clothing. In all, Kanye is here illustrating to the listener that he's at the top of the game not only in music, but in fashion as well. His *G.O.O.D Music* production label and *Yeezy* clothing line further play into these notions, giving actual weight to his claims.

Blame Game, a track literally about shifting blame (hence *game*) from him to her and vice versa, sees Kanye explaining to his girl that “you ain't finna see a mogul get emotional.” *Mogul* stands for a person of distinction and power in a certain industry, and once again Kanye conceptualizes himself as such. What he is saying is that his business successes are more important than love, in what could be connected to one of Crossley's (2005: 508) noted conceptions – materialism as the highest ideal, and the metaphor MATERIALISM IS ESSENTIALISM.

See Me Now sees Kanye seeing himself as the Greek philosopher Socrates and as the elite. Socrates is renowned for his moral philosophy, the students that followed him and the lasting impact that has survived until present day. As the center of Socrates' work was based in the mind, and it is because of the working of his mind that he is held in such high esteem to this day, that is where the possible motivation for this conceptualization could lie. As raps also come from the mind of the rapper, Kanye puts his thoughts right next to Socrates' on the shelf. An important

⁴ Dior Homme is men's division of the French high-end clothing label Christian Dior

notion here is rhyme as well, because the previous line (“Now I’m a need you to kill the hypocrisy, this is an aristocracy”) is one of the realizations of ARTIST IS A PERSON OF AUTHORITY, further alluding to the fact of greatness, and helping in the creation of meaning that stems from the rhyme. Tying into Bradley’s (2009: 53) functions of rhyme as more than a stylistic device, the author invites the listener to see not only the words that sound good with each other, but look under the surface and explore why those particular words were chosen to be put together in such a way. *Elite* as the crème de la crème of a society, is a group of people wielding power, influence, and money – once again, Kanye reaffirming his position relative to others around him (add in the previous line, “Black excellence”).

5.2 ARTIST IS SUPERNATURAL

There are 5 found realizations of this CM in the corpus. The first appears in *Power* and sees Kanye rapping “I guess every *superhero* need his theme music.” Superheroes are known by their virtually unlimited powers and supernatural abilities. Given that the whole song revolves around power and influence, this conceptualization fits well into this puzzle. By portraying himself as having supernatural powers, he’s inviting the listener to recognize his musical abilities are his superpowers.

Monster is the second term given to himself by himself, in the song appropriately named *Monster*. Revolving around his rapping and producing skills, Kanye positions himself to the listener with the cognitive similarity of grandiosity. In their core, monsters are supernatural creatures, usually not bearing any good news and usually large in size (which makes them even more scary). It is the size that is the basis for the cognitive similarity – in the same way *monster* went through the process of generalization and now also means ‘a thing of extraordinary or daunting size,’ and ‘one that is highly successful’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) Kanye is showing the size of his success to the listener.

The line referring to LeBron is the same line which is the location of another metaphorical realization – *phenomenon*. An unexpected, supernatural occurrence, unexplainable scientifically. Circling back to Crossley (2005: 505), the *hood* refers to the neighborhood conceptualized as a place of injustice, low to no opportunities, and the streets. What is highlighted here is the fact that

Kanye is a phenomenon precisely because he comes from a background which more often than not swallows its inhabitants due to various historical, political, social, and cultural factors.

Finally, the last two realizations of this category are located in *See Me Now*. Both belong to the religious category of references, and the terms *Lord* and *god* denote the same thing and can therefore be used interchangeably. God is the supremest of beings, being omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. When paired with the adjective *rap*, Kanye implicates that rap is his kingdom of heaven, and he is the big boss there.

5.3 ARTIST IS A PERSON OF AUTHORITY

Realizations of this metaphor make 4 appearances in 3 tracks (*Gorgeous*, *Devil in a New Dress*, *See Me Now*), with 2 out of 4 referring to *king* (“kiss the ring,” “throne”), 1 referring to a system of government (“aristocracy”) and the fourth referring to *preacher* (“preachin’ to the congregation”). *Gorgeous* and *See Me Now* are the homes of the *king* realizations, while *preacher’s* church is *Devil in a New Dress*.

Kissing the ring was one of the ways of giving recognition and showing respect to the monarch, with the act being performed by the subject kneeling and the monarch extending their hand with the ring on the ring finger in order for the subject to kiss it. It was and remains (through metaphorical extension) a symbol of recognizing power and authority. In the same manner, Kanye is telling his haters that he is their ruler, sitting on his throne and they are his subjects. *Throne* in this context can be understood as meaning the charts, that is, Kanye’s high positioning on top of music charts. That is one of the ways that reflects the commercial success of a song or album, and the higher number of spots an artist racks, the more prominent they become.

Taken from the religious sphere, *preacher* is god’s messenger on Earth. Delivering god’s instructions and will, Kanye sees himself as a prophet, delivering god’s messages and doing god’s work through his music. His fans are his congregation, hereby illustrating that they believe in him and put their trust in him to convey and do god’s work.

5.4 ARTIST IS ATHLETE/RAPPING IS A SPORT

Sports references are often featured in many rap songs, and Kanye's works are no exception. The analysis found four instances of sports-related metaphorical conceptions in *MBDTF*.

Gorgeous sees Kanye referring to "Olympics" and "a belt in two classes." *Olympics* is a term for the highest sports competition, held every four years at a different location. Having a tradition that reaches back to Ancient Greece (another connection to Socrates mentioned earlier), the Olympic Games are still the elite competition in the world of sports. Only top-tier athletes qualify for the Games, and Kanye proclaiming "ready for the world's games, this is my Olympics" he is triumphantly announcing to everyone listening that he is prepared for what is coming, especially when thinking back to the fact that this album came out after a turbulent time in Kanye's life. He has trained and is now fully prepared to take on the greatest challenge of all in his field, promptly dubbed his Olympics. An interesting notion here is the fact that a few lines before, Kanye raps "I thought I chose a field where they couldn't sack me/If a ni—a ain't shootin' a jumpshot, runnin' a track meet," whereby Kanye plays into the cultural stereotype of African Americans excelling at sports. He takes this notion here and uses his to his advantage by saying "yes, there is a reason why you think of us as great athletes, and that should extend to more than sports – we are more than our physical abilities, and in my sport, I am the best so just listen and learn."

Belt in two classes is a boxing metaphor. In the sport, fighters only fight others in their weight category, and they each have a term designating them. *Belt* refers to the award given to the winner to indicate the victory and the reign of the champion until a new challenge sprouts up. The two classes referred to here are music production and rapping. Having the belt means Kanye has fought his way to the top, not merely being given his high position. Furthermore, winning a belt in more than one class is a feat undertaken by many, but realized by few, which then gives even more weight to his claims, as it is his merit and persistence got him to where he is today. This ties in to a line in *Monster*, "do the rap and the track, triple-double, no assists." This metaphor comes from basketball, with *triple-double* meaning 'an instance in which a player accumulates a total of 10 or more in three statistical categories (usually points, assists, and rebounds) in one game' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and *no assists* meaning that he had no help in achieving this. *The rap and the track* again refer to his production and rap career, and this instance gives even more

information by its stating that there was no assistance in building his career. Finally, the fourth instance in this section, “the LeBron of rhyme” line has already been covered under section 5.1.

5.5 CM’s with singular realizations

The rest of identified conceptual metaphors belonging to the cognitive tension category have one instance each, but some were found to be complementary to others, and vice versa. Food and plant metaphors are commonly found in everyday speech (e.g., *rotten floorboards* and *the root of the problem*), and they have their realizations in the album as well. *Feeling fresh*, or feeling good about something, is echoed when Kanye contemplates his achievements. His *resume* would then include his awards, collaborations, critical acclaim, reach, and branching out. As *fresh* is seen as new and good, this lexeme attained that meaning and has been used widely not only in rap songs, but in regular communication of the day.

Gorgeous also houses instances of two more conceptual metaphors pertaining to rap songs in general, and the album itself. The line “but this is more than my road to redemption,” sees an originally religious term being used to explain Kanye’s own view of this particular work. As *road to redemption* stands to mean a way of someone fixing their mistakes, *MBDTF* can be heard as Kanye’s apology and a way of correcting his behavior through MAKING MUSIC IS APOLOGIZING conceptual metaphor. By redeeming himself with what he does best, he’s trying to gain acceptance and forgiveness from his listeners. The noun *road* implicates that it is the journey, not the destination that is the focus. It is the continuous effort that eventually leads to the destination of forgiveness, and this is something Kanye knows. He is not questioning whether he made something good enough to earn back the respect he had lost, but he is claiming that what he made is even more than that – this album exceeds the purpose of just being an apology.

Another reference to rap songs is the use of the word *anthem*, as a realization of RAP SONGS ARE CELEBRATORY SONGS conceptual metaphor. Though anthems are songs of praise, there is the juxtaposition with the word *tantrum* (a fit of bad and erratic behavior). What comes to light here is the fact that even though these songs hold value and are meant to be perceived as such, they are a product of grim circumstances. *Inner-city* refers to the concept of the inner city, which has long been perceived as a place of low income, no opportunities, crime, overall disadvantage. It is followed by another realization of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS conceptual metaphor – “based on the

way we was branded.” A direct reference to the era of slavery, people being branded like cattle, and the permanent psychological marks that has left. Even though they are anthems, these songs reflect a history marked by violence, exploitation, and permanent psychological consequences.

Power is the home of a highly conventionalized basic conceptual metaphor – THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, in opposition to another conventionalized one – IDEAS ARE VALUABLES. The former refers to the first part of the line, “Got treasures in my mind, but couldn’t open up my own vault,” while the latter refers to the second part. This is another instance of a juxtaposition of self-aggrandizement and self-doubt, or self-consciousness. Even though Kanye sees and recognizes his ideas as highly valuable objects, they seem inaccessible, locked away and the key is nowhere to be found. While the whole track is about having and wielding power, it also serves as Kanye’s reflection of his own mental state – evident by the lines that precede and follow this one.

It would not be a rap song if there was not a reference to material possessions. And indeed, *Power* again is where JEWELRY IS FROZEN WATER was found (“My furs is Mongolian, my ice brought the goalies in”). Again juxtaposed with another conceptual metaphor, IDEAS ARE SHORT PEOPLE (You small minded ni—as thoughts is Napoleon), and rhymed. *Ice* means ‘diamonds’, since both sparkle. Napoleon was a great military leader, but physically short, and having a complex named after him. The Napoleon complex, as defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) is “a domineering or aggressive attitude perceived as a form of overcompensation for being physically small or short.” What is also important to note here is that Kanye is talking to someone who has done wrong by him (in this instance, the cast of *Saturday Night Live*), and is indicating that he sees them as inferior when compared to him. To strengthen this thought, he states that the diamonds he owns are so important and expensive that he needs protection (hence the hockey metaphor, “brought the goalies in”), and he does not need to compensate for his shortcomings like the cast does.

Finally, in *Dark Fantasy* he raps “I’m just a Chi-Town ni—a with a Nas flow.” *Flow* is one of the most important elements of rap, being the thing MCs are remembered by and acclaimed by. Bradley (2009) describes it as “rhythm over time,” and is “an MC’s distinctive lyrical cadence.” Nas, on the other hand, is a prominent and esteemed New York rapper, and references to his skills can be heard in numerous other songs. There are two main points Kanye wants the listener to see here – firstly, his flow is on the same level as that of an established MC; secondly, he hails from

Chicago. This is important since in the beginning, rap was predominantly divided between two coasts – the East and the West, while little to no attention was being given to rappers coming from other areas of the US.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that, among the majority of the conceptual metaphors found, the most prevailing ones can be categorized under the conceptual key ARTIST IS SUPERIOR. All of the identified instances grouped under this conceptual key show just how pervasive this conceptual metaphor is, and how the artist expands and elaborates it by providing novel metaphorical expressions based on his knowledge, culture, and relying on the listener's knowledge. Most metaphorical realizations come in the form of the artist framing himself as a person or even an occurrence which is above reality. What is more, some instances were reinforced by juxtaposing them to inherently negative conceptualizations, such as in *Black Beatle* vs. *roach*. Another example hides in the lines “the LeBron of rhyme,” as opposed to “if a ni—a ain’t shootin’ a jumpshoot, runnin’ a track meet” (though in a different song, but the theme is recurring). Both conceptualizations pose the Black person as an athlete – the difference lays in the fact that the cultural stereotype (i.e., Black people excel at sports) gets subverted and used to make a point for the artist's side. By framing himself as an athlete, king, phenomenon, or a monster, the artist is convincing the listener that he is those things, usually with a reference to his area of expertise. The linguistic creativity of hip hop language allows the thoughts to be raised to a higher level, providing the words with more weight and impact than regular communication would. By employing the main devices of hip hop language such as rhyme, the artist makes the listener see the links cognitively, which is where the power of poetic metaphors lies. In other words, the rapper's linguistic creativity allowed for the expansion of conventionalized conceptual metaphors, which are understood by the listener because the rapper himself relies on the listener's background knowledge to receive and understand the underlying message. In other words, these lyrics are more than just rhymed words over a beat.

It can also be seen that many metaphorical realizations analyzed carry a lot of history and cultural differences perceived by the artist, and probably many in the community (a notion he relies on). The fact that the products (rap songs) are conceptualized as anthems, themselves products of disadvantageous circumstances, and an even more disadvantageous and unfair historical treatment, reveal deeply rooted traumas that are passed on from generation to generation, and require collective healing treatments.

As a cultural critic, Kanye uses familiar terms from the present culture, as well as historical terms to illustrate his power, achievements, impact, and influence. This can all be interpreted to conclude that by positioning himself as a superior being in comparison to others, he's breaking the chains of historical marginalization and rising above the stereotypes plaguing his community while at the same time blowing up his apparently infinite ego.

This study was aimed at showing how various different realizations of a central topic interact and send a message, while also carrying hidden implications. An even more detailed study could be conducted to cover all instances of semantic tension found to provide even more insight. This could be done by analyzing all instances identified on all levels, as well as by using other approaches, such as the one detailed by the Praggeljaz group. A study can also be conducted in line with quantitative corpus approaches in which themes and metaphors can be looked for by identifying keywords from either or both domains in an electronic corpus. Studies such as these can provide more insight into the amount of background and cultural knowledge of the author and the audience to explore the level of persuasiveness in the metaphors, as well as to further show that poetic language is more than just decoration on a work of art.

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Appendix A

Identified metaphorical realizations grouped under conceptual metaphors

ACHIEVEMENTS ARE FOOD:

Gorgeous:

- I was looking at my resume, feeling real fresh today

ARTIST IS ATHLETE/RAPPING IS A SPORT:

Gorgeous:

- Ready for the world's games, this is my Olympics
- Act like I ain't had a belt in two classes

Monster:

- Do the rap and the track, triple-double, no assists

Devil in a New Dress:

- Hood phenomenon, the LeBron of rhyme

ARTIST IS INFLUENTIAL PERSON

Gorgeous:

- And what's a Black Beatle anyway, a fuckin' roach?

Devil in a New Dress:

- Hood phenomenon, the LeBron of rhyme
- The Lyor Cohen of Dior Homme

Blame Game:

- And you ain't finna see a mogul get emotional

See Me Now:

- I'm Socrates, but my skin more chocolatey
- This is the elite

ARTIST IS A PERSON OF AUTHORITY

Gorgeous:

- And kiss the ring while they at it, do my thing while I got it

Devil in a New Dress:

- I know I'm preachin' to the congregation

See Me Now:

- Now I'ma need you to kill the hypocrisy, this is an aristocracy
- Now go get my throne, 'cause I don't wanna stop

ARTIST IS SUPERNATURAL (BEING)

Power:

- I guess every superhero need his theme music

Monster:

- Everybody know I'm a motherfu-kin' monster

Devil in a New Dress:

- Hood phenomenon, the LeBron of rhyme

See Me Now:

- All my homies GDs, but I am Lord
- Rap god, Greek mythology

JEWELRY IS FROZEN WATER:

Power:

- My furs is Mongolian, my ice brought the goalies in

MAKING MUSIC IS APOLOGIZING:

Gorgeous:

- But this is more than just my road to redemption

RAP SONGS ARE CELEBRATORY SONGS:

Gorgeous:

- Inter-century anthems based off inner-city tantrums

IDEAS ARE VALUABLES/THE MIND IS A CONTAINER

Power:

- Got treasures in my mind, but couldn't open up my own vault

WORDS ARE STREAM/LIQUID:

Dark Fantasy:

- I'm just a Chi-Town ni--a with a Nas flow