



Exploring Figurative Language in Rupi Kaur's Selected Poems

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Abstract: This study explored figurative language or figures of speech used in the seven poems entitled *Home*, *Time*, *Self-love*, *Self-hate*, *The Construction Site of Our Future*, *Long-distance*, and *It Is So Full Here in Myself* by Rupi Kaur. The researchers used a descriptive qualitative method. Library research was used as the technique in collecting the data. The data were collected from Kaur's poem book entitled *The Sun and Her Flowers* and analysed using the figurative language or figures of speech proposed by Abrams and Harpham (2015). Results showed four types of figurative language used in Kaur's selected poems: personification, nine instances; simile, six occurrences; hyperbole, six occurrences; and metaphor, three examples.

Keywords: Rupi Kaur's poems; figurative language; simile; personification; hyperbole; metaphor

A. INTRODUCTION

Human beings create various forms to interact and declare their feelings to others through conversation and written form using language. Language is one of the human beings' needs to live their lives, and we use language to communicate and exchange information. Can you visualize if there is no language? How can we interact with others? Harmer (2007) states that people from different places tend to speak different languages; thus, they use language to connect and communicate. Language has a significant role in forming relationships with others; therefore, we need to communicate, interact, and get information (Hariyanto, 2017). Bonvillain (2019) argues that someone uses language to speak daily conversation with someone else. Even if we can communicate with others, we still encounter intricacies in expressing and understanding ideas, thoughts, and feelings through a language (Dewi, Hidayat, & Alek, 2020). A case like this occurs because of the use of figurative language.



Creating a literary work is one of the ways people use language. Kennedy and Gioia (2013) mentioned, “literature is often described as written work and has many definitions.” Literature is premediated as a representation of people's lives in the form of words. Consistently, literature is interpreted as an imitation of humans’ lives that represent life's reflection over a society consisting of conflict and achievement. Thus, the literature contains many aspects of the most profound human desires. Literature is one of the beautiful things people made. It has many interpretations and aphorism values of life that folks savor by enjoying literature, humankind experience the distinctive concepts of humans’ attributes, attempts, senses, and passions. Novels, short stories, poetry, song lyrics, essays, and dramas are literary works.

Terminologically, a poem is a literary work that is difficult to understand because of figurative language. The power of language arranged in a poem contains profound meaning. Wordsworth states, “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, expression of emotion and it is always concerned with ordinary human concerns, with the daily matters of one’s life” (cited in Robinson (2010)). It means that a poem is a tool the author uses to express their feelings, moods, and expression in natural and spontaneous expression in written language. A poem usually uses figurative language to beautify the lines. Sometimes, the use of figurative language makes the readers confuse because their lines are too unreal. Figurative language is not meant to confuse the readers; however, to make it clear. It also sharpens the readers’ perceptions, allows a complete understanding of a pleasure poem, and creates form and meaning.

Figurative language is a branch of semantics that makes use of various forms of language. This language style uses phrases of a sentence with meaning distinct from the apparent meaning (Wibowo & Akbar, 2017), and it is usually found in literary works; one of them is in the poem. Wibowo and Akbar (2017) mention that poems denote thoughts, feelings, ideas, and action in figurative language. The utterance or phrase has a different meaning depending on the individual. According to Padni (2012), sometimes people are difficult to understand the thought and message of a poem. Each individual has a specific interpretation of a poem. Figurative language is used to make the poem more dramatic and magnificent. Tjahjono (2011) mentions that figurative language plays an essential role in poetry.

There are ten kinds of figurative language (Abrams & Harpham, 2015; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014; Kennedy & Gioia, 2013; Knickerbocker, Reninger, & Leggett, 1963). Figurative language has been portrayed in terms of types: allegory, paradox, metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, synecdoche, personification, and irony. Previously, Syafitri and Marlinton (2018) discussed the figurative language used in Edgar Allan Poe's poems and showed that there are 96 uses of figurative language in his poems, including personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, paradox, metonymy, and symbol. Wibowo and Akbar (2017) explored the figurative language in The Room of Life poem by Anne Sexton and Still, I Rise's poem by Maya Angelou and found that the dominant figurative language used in the poems are personification, simile, and metaphor. In their study, Nuraeni and Peron (2017) revealed several kinds of figurative language in Kelly Darrow's poems, such as hyperbole, irony, personification, metaphor, and simile.

To enrich and confirm the findings of previous studies, the researchers would, therefore, explore figurative language or figures of speech, such as simile, personification, metaphor, and hyperbole used in Kaur's poems, focusing on figurative language in poems that reveal a story about sexual abuse and women's point of view of intrigue. The researchers aim to find out Kaur's types of figurative language in seven poems, published the book entitled *The Sun and Her Flowers* written by Kaur (2017). The research question is formulated as follows: What figurative language is used in Kaur's selected poems?

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the descriptive qualitative method. According to Moleong (2009), descriptive qualitative be fraught with sentences or confession of one object and does not exhibit the arithmetic calculation and statistic details. The objects of this study were the seven selected poems entitled *Home*, *Long-distance*, *Time*, *Self-hate*, *Self-love*, *It Is So Full Here in Myself*, and *The Construction Site of Our Future*, written by Rupi Kaur, an Indian Canadian poet, illustrator, and author. The poems used in this study are from Kaur's (2017) second book entitled *The Sun and Her Flowers*. It was published by Andrews McMcEl Publishing (USA) and by Simon and Schuster (UK) in 2017. Her poems delve into liaison, immigrant experiences, and sexual abuse.



In this study, library research was used to collect the data. The researchers took some steps to answer the research question: What figurative language is used in Kaur's selected poems? First, the researchers repeatedly read the book and chose some poems to explore, read the selected poems repeatedly, and highlighted the lines which contain figurative language. Third, the researchers applied the related theory to classify and analyze the types of figurative language. Fourth, the researchers wrote the result and concluded the research. Based on Abrams and Harpham's (2015) categories of figurative language or figures of speech, the researchers explored types of figurative language, particularly personification, metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. The reasons for exploring the four kinds of figurative language seemed to occur frequently in Kaur's poems, and they appeared to be expected in daily lives.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

After analyzing the seven poems, the researchers identified four kinds of figurative language, namely the personification, simile, hyperbole, and metaphor, in Kaur's poems entitled *Home*, *Self-love*, *Self-hate*, *Long-distance*, *Time*, *The Construction Site of Our Future*, and *It Is So Full Here in Myself*. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Figurative Language

No.	Figurative Language	Occurrence
1	personification	9
2	simile	6
3	hyperbole	6
4	metaphor	3
Total		24

Datum 1: Poem 1: *Home*: Sunlight kissed my eyelids good morning

The researchers classified the line as **personification** because the author describes the word 'sunlight,' a non-human thing with a role as a human being that gives a morning kiss to someone. Abrams (1999) states that personification is where inanimate objects or abstract concepts are portrayed as endowed with life, human attributes, and feelings.

Datum 2: Poem 1: *Home*: I was a hundred and ten pounds of fresh meat

This line above is categorized as a **metaphor**. The author describes herself as a hundred and ten pounds of fresh meat. The word '*fresh meat*' refers to her body in the literal meaning.



Datum 3: Poem 1: *Home*: You skinned and gutted with your fingers

Like you were scraping the inside of cantaloupe clean

The author wants to show a comparison or a **simile** between the two lines. It is implicit because the author uses the word 'like' to compare those two things.

Datum 4: Poem 1: *Home*: You nailed my wrists to the ground

Turned my breasts into bruised fruit

The food is rotten

From head to foot I am layered in dust

The researchers classified the lines into **hyperbole** because the author exaggerates the facts or possibilities. It is stated above that from head to foot I am layered in dust. It is impossible if someone is covered by dust that much.

Datum 5: Poem 1: *Home*: The truth comes like sunlight

The author uses a **simile** to express the message. The author compares the fact that comes like sunlight, or we can say that the truth appears like sunlight in a cloudy.

Datum 6: Poem 1: *Home*: I decorated myself like the walls of my home were decorated

Here, the author shows that the actor has decorated herself like the walls. The author uses a **simile** to compare two things.

Datum 7: Poem 1: *Home*: Eyes glinting with starvation

Like you hadn't eaten in weeks

The second line above is classified as **hyperbole** because the author uses the phrase *hadn't eaten in weeks*. The author overstates the situation. It is rare if someone can survive without eating something for a long time.

Datum 8: Poem 1: *Self-love*: I went for my words, The *I can'ts*—the *I won'ts*. Then

I'm not good enough. I line them up and shot them dead

Personification is a figurative language that gives inanimate things an attribute or feeling like they are humans. In this poem, the author supposes that the words could shoot. Nevertheless, the one who could shoot is an animate thing, in this case, is human. The semantic feature must be (+animate), but the word is (-animate). Thus, in the literal meaning, the word must not be able to shoot. The author uses this **personification** to give a profound effect to the readers.



Datum 9: Poem 2: *Self-love*: I wove a linen cloth out of my hair

Metaphor tends to provoke thought and feeling to a greater extent than literal descriptions do (Griffiths, 2006). Here, the author uses “hair” as a **metaphor**. The word ‘hair means any of the fine threadlike strands growing from the skin of humans, mammals, and some other animals. However, in this poem, hair means vigor. Hair is skinny, but a lot equals vigor. Sometimes, human only has vigors in life, but they could gain another vigor elsewhere. Thus, in the end, they would gather that vigor into great strength. It is made from fragile yarn like a cloth, but after passing a long process, including weaving, that thin yarn would transform into a cloth.

Datum 10: Poem 2: *Self-love*: Carried it in my knees I began to wipe my mind clean

The researchers concluded this line as a **personification** because the mind is not a thing like a room or something which can be wiped.

Datum 11: Poem 3: *Self-hate*: I peeled my skin off just to feel awake, wore it inside
out sprinkled it with salt to punish myself

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that emphasis something by exaggerated ideas or utterances. Hyperbole is used in the poem effectively to emphasize the feeling of I, how depressed he/she is. He/she thinks her/his life is useless.

Datum 12: Poem 3: *Self-hate*: But the dirt recoiled *you have already rooted* it said,
there is nothing left for me to do

Personification is a figure of speech in which an idea or thing is given human attributes or feelings as if it were a human. The semantic feature of dirt is (-movement) and (-animate) it means the dirt could not move by itself and is a non-living entity. It means the semantic feature of humans is (+movement) and (+animate).

Datum 13: Poem 4: *Time*: Rise said the moon

And the new day came

The show must go on, said the sun

As we can see in the lines above, the author imagines the moon and the sun could talk to each other; meanwhile, they are (-animate) things. The poet uses **personification**.

Datum 14: Poem 4: *Time*: Life does not stop for anybody

It drags you by the legs

Whether you want to move forward or not



According to Tairako (2018) and Ko (2018), **personification** is an attribution of human characteristics and/or emotions to non-humans, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas. In the lines, life is portrayed as a human being that could drag someone by the legs. The author use personification to create dramatic lines.

Datum 15: Poem 4: Time: Your skin will shed till there is not

A single part of you left they've touched your eyes
finally just your eyes

Hyperbole is used to overstate something. The author said your skin would shed till there is not a single part of you left in this line. The author exaggerated the lines to compose a dramatic story.

Datum 16: Poem 5: Long-distance: If I had a walk to get to you

It would take a hundred and twenty-six hours

The lines above contain **hyperbole** because the author illustrates I, which walk for a long time. In real life, no one could take a walk that long. The author dramatizes the line to profound the readers. This hyperbole figure is used by someone who desires and hopes for something that happens to make an object more remarkable than the actual object (Alm-Arvius, 2003; Wood, 2017).

Datum 17: Poem 5: Long-distance: It feels like being stuck in the train station

The line above uses a **simile** because the author compares two things using the word 'like.' She makes a parallel between those phrases. No intimacy is described as being stuck in the train station.

Datum 18: Poem 5: Long-distance: But the sun still burns shamelessly on yours

The line above is classified as **personification** because the author describes the sun, a non-human thing that feels like having human attributes, saying that it burns shamelessly.

Datum 19: Poem 5: Long-distance: I crumble knowing even our skies are different

In this universe, we have only one sky. In this line, the author mentions our skies, which means more than one sky in this world. The researchers classify this line as **hyperbole** because it overstates something which is actually not.

Datum 20: Poem 6: The Construction Site of Our Future: The bricks will grow
tired of waiting and crumble

If something can grow, it refers to an animate thing. Bricks are used as a material to construct a building. In this line, the author considers the brick as an animate thing that can feel tired – as **personification**.

Datum 21: Poem 6: *The Construction Site of Our Future*: The planks of wood are stiff in their boxes

Using **personification**, the author portrays the planks as an animate thing that needs to be nailed as soon as possible. They can express their feelings like living things.

Datum 22: Poem 7: *It Is So Full Here in Myself*: Have your eyes ever fallen upon a beast like me

In the line above, the actor calls himself a beast. The author uses a type of figurative language known as a **simile** to beautify the line of the poem.

Datum 23: Poem 7: *It Is So Full Here in Myself*: I have the spine of a mulberry tree

The neck of a sunflower
Sometimes I am the desert
At times the rainforest
But always the wild

It is evident in the lines, and the author portrays the word *I* as a desert and a rain forest. The author used a **metaphor** to compare the two things without using ‘like’ and ‘as.’

Datum 24: Poem 7: *It Is So Full Here in Myself*: Each strand of hair frizzing out like a lifeline

The line in datum 24 is a **simile**, as shown in the word ‘like’ to show a comparison. Abrams (1999) and Prasetyo (2017) say that “in a simile, a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word ‘like’ or ‘as.’” The author imagines the strand of hair frizzing is like a lifeline.

Discussion

From the findings data above, it can be seen the researchers identified four kinds of figurative language in Kaur’s selected poems. The researchers used seven poems to be analyzed. In poem 1, entitled *home*, the researchers elaborated on seven data containing various selected types of figurative language such as personification (1), simile (3), metaphor (1), and hyperbole (2). In the second poem entitled *self-love*, the researchers

identified two types of figurative language: personification (2) and metaphor (1). The following poem designates *self-hate*; it consists of two figurative languages known as hyperbole (1) and personification (1). Then, in the fourth poem, baptized *time*, the researchers found two categories of figurative language. They are personification (2) and hyperbole (1). The fifth poem is *long distance*, and it encompasses three types of figurative language known as hyperbole (2), simile (1), and personification (1). The following poem, entitled the construction site of our future, encloses a figurative language such as personification (2). Lastly, the poem named *it is so packed here in myself* has two kinds of figurative language known as a simile (2) and metaphor (1).

Based on the findings, the researchers found examples of simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole in Kaur's selected poems. Personification figure of speech is the most frequently used in the selected poems. Wibowo and Akbar (2017), in their research, also found that personification was more dominant than other types. In addition, Budiargo and Haryanto (2020) discovered that personification got a higher percentage among other figures of speech in Alan Poe's poems. However, this study also has differences from Budiargo and Haryanto's (2020) analysis of the figurative language used in 'The Raven' by Edgar Alan Poe. Their study identified eight types of figurative language from one poem: imagery, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, alliteration, allusion, onomatopoeia, and simile. On the other hand, this study only focused on four kinds of figurative language, namely personification, hyperbole, simile, and metaphor. The objects of the study are seven poems written by Kaur.

Alm-Arvius (2003) stated that the author uses figurative language because it influences how they can determine the ingenuity of language. The data analysis covered the characteristics of the understanding of the types of figurative language. From the data analysis, which refers to Abrams's (1999) theory, it can be understood that the seven poems used in this study utilize phrases that are complicated to recognize; hence the readers must be seen them from the context of the sentences and poem theme.

D. CONCLUSION

Figurative language is used to beautify a poem. The researchers analyzed figurative language in Kaur's selected poems from *The Sun and Her Flowers* in this study. The researchers discovered that four types of figurative language, namely a simile,



personification, metaphor, and hyperbole, were used in Kaur's poems. Personification is the most common figurative language used in Kaur's poems, followed by simile and hyperbole, and the last is a metaphor. Kaur used figurative language in her poems to presuppose her experiences of sexual abuse. The poet used figurative language to convey the allusion meaning of the message that she wants the readers to know. Even though her poems were primarily about affairs and sexual contexts, many harsh phrases should be used. However, she used figurative language to beautify the harsh phrases to present a positive atmosphere among the readers. As this research has many limitations, future researchers can investigate more poems in the book and cover all types of figurative language.

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