



Figurative language in *The Greatest Showman* Movie

Nasywa Fairuz Shafiyya, A.A. Sagung Shanti Sari Dewi, I Nyoman Tri Ediwan

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

Abstrak

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The present undergraduate thesis entitled Figurative Language in The Greatest Showman Movie is focused on the analysis of the figurative language proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959) contained in the movie. In dealing with communication, whether in formal or informal settings, people express or use language that contains meanings beyond its real definition through metaphors, hyperbole and so forth. Figurative language is a figure of speech that implies more than the dictionary definition. Figurative language is also widely used by movie scriptwriters to convey deeper messages and enhance emotion. The study used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data with the movie called The Greatest Showman being the primary data. The data were collected using a note-taking technique and an informal method was used to present the analysis of the collected data by explaining descriptions of each data thoroughly. The result revealed the findings included all types of figurative language proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger. There were 29 data found with varying amounts for each type. Metaphor is the most predominant type found in the movie.

Kata Kunci: *Figurative Language, Semantics, The Greatest Showman Movie*

(*) Corresponding Author: fairuzshafiyya119@student.unud.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

The use of figurative language, whether consciously or unconsciously, can be found in everyday discourse in both formal and informal contexts. The phenomenon of figurative language is also often encountered in the world of cinema as scriptwriters often use figurative language to convey the meaning in a certain way and deepen the emotion. According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367-368), figurative language is usually referred to as metaphorical which implies the act of conveying meaning that extends its literal definitions. The use of figurative language is examined in this research in a movie entitled *The Greatest Showman*. The movie is an American musical period drama released in 2017 directed by Michael Gracey based on an original story written by Jenny Bicks. The movie portrays the life of P.T. Barnum went from a penniless dreamer to a wealthy man while establishing a circus with the help of his “oddities” and a nobleman. This research adopts Knickerbocker and Reninger’s (1959, p.367-368) framework to identify the ten types of figurative language namely, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, irony, synecdoche, dead metaphor, allusion, paradox, personification, and metonymy. Each type denotes how language could have different meanings by being compared, exaggerated, emphasized, and so forth.

Previous studies have examined the use of figurative language in movies and song lyrics. Mukti and Nugraha (2022) in their journal focused on identifying and explaining the types of figurative language used in the movie and exploring how these expressions affect specific dialogues using X. J. Kennedy’s framework. Nehe, Sinambela, and Pasaribu (2022) explored the use of figurative language in the dialogues of *Maleficent* to identify the types of figurative

language used in the conversations between the characters and to determine which type is the most dominant. Febriyanti, Za, and Qamariah (2022) focused on identifying and interpreting the figurative language used in *Aladdin* by adopting a qualitative method with a focus on hermeneutic analysis. Al-Faruq and Putra (2024) aimed to analyze the types of figurative language found in *The Prestige* and to determine which type is most frequently used. Meanwhile, Ardalinda (2022) in her study analyzed the chosen songs from Maher Zein's album entitled "One" to identify the types of figurative language, know the most dominant figurative language, and examine the contextual meaning of the figurative language. These studies show that the use of figurative language in movies with various genres and songs make the scripts and lyrics become more varied in conveying meaning. Previous studies have focused on one thing, either the dialogue in a movie or a song from an artist's album, therefore this study fills a gap in research by focusing on a movie that also has many soundtrack songs to analyze because it has a musical drama genre.

Based on the explanation above, this research was conducted to discover the answer about the types of figurative language found in the movie *The Greatest Showman*. The aims of this study are to analyze the types of figurative language and the most prominent type in *The Greatest Showman* movie. This movie was chosen since it takes place in the 1900s with a hint of historical context that comes within a form of drama musical genre. This research is focused on the dialogue and song lyrics from the movie as the primary source of data.

THEORY

This section encompasses the concept and framework utilized to comprehend the figurative expression contained in *The Greatest Showman* movie. According to Perrine, in his book entitled *Sound and Sense: An Introduction To Poetry* (1956, p.57), a figure of speech is more specifically defined as a means to express one concept while implying another. One is able to convey more through figurative language than by expressing ideas directly. Similarly, additional layers of meanings can be communicated through figurative statements compared to literal ones. Abrams (2013, p.133) denotes that figurative language encompasses expressions that deliberately stray from standard language conventions, either by changing the typical meanings of words, which are known as figures of thought or tropes, or by adjusting their customary syntactic structure, called figures of speech or schemes, to create a rhetorical or stylistic impact.

Meanwhile this study adopts the framework from Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367-368) that introduces ten types of figurative language. The first type is simile, a stated comparison with the linking words "like" or "as" to compare two different things. Metaphor, a word or phrase used to refer to another thing without the use of linking words. Personification, the act of giving human attributes to inanimate objects. Synecdoche, a part of something used to represent the whole thing. Metonymy, a term used to refer to something that is closely related to it. Hyperbole, an exaggeration used to emphasize a point. Irony, the expectation that is different from what really happens. Paradox, a statement that is contradictory to itself. Allusion, a reference to a well-known person, place, or idea used to help readers comprehend something better. Last but not least, dead metaphor is when a figure of speech that people are so familiar with, loses its true definition. These frameworks are applied in this research to be the foundation to examine the types of figurative expression contained in the dialogue and the song lyrics to know what the author is trying to convey by using those figurative expressions through the characters.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the data. Qualitative research is an approach used for investigating and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. The data were collected from the movie that contains utterances by the characters and song that appeared in the movie as the primary data. Meanwhile the supporting data was from the script of the movie downloaded from *Scribd*.

The study adopted a note-taking method to collect the data. The data collecting process was done through several steps. The first step was to watch the entire movie with English subtitles. Followed by reading and observing the script, listing down the expressions that employ figurative expression, matching the data collected from the script to the utterances in the movie and transferring the collected data for further analysis. The analysis was done by classifying the data into the ten types of figurative language according to Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1959, p.367-368) framework. Each data was examined to know which type of figurative language it contains. The data that have been analyzed is presented using informal methods according to Sudaryanto (2015, p.14). This means that the study was conducted by explaining through words in a descriptive way to present the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented the result and provided the discussion about how figurative language is used in the movie to convey deeper meaning and enhance emotions. The ten types of figurative language are as follow: simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, irony, allusion, dead metaphor, paradox proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959)

A. Simile

“Let this promise in me start, like an anthem in my heart” (01.25.47-01.25.55)

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367) Simile is a figure of speech that explicitly compares two different things. To make a comparison, similes most typically employ the linking words "like" or "as," but can sometimes include other terms that suggest an explicit similarity. These lines are derived from the song From Now On. The song appears as a sign of resolution in the story after the main character feels the fruit of his own greed, the circus show burns down, his wife misunderstands, and the tour with Jenny Lind must end. This song is a sign for him to stop being down and start again from the beginning. The datum above can be categorized as a simile since there is “like” as a tool to compare two different things. In this line, Barnum made a promise not to do the previous action again, and he kept the promise in his heart like an anthem. Although in the scene, Barnum doesn't directly make the promise, the promise here can be associated with a commitment, and the anthem can be a symbol or representation of a strong emotion or a strong goal.

B. Metaphor

“Why don't we rewrite the stars? Changing the world to be ours” (01.06.45-01.06.52)

Metaphor is a form of figurative language in which a word or phrase for one thing is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar. Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367) denote metaphor as a figure of speech that describes objects using implied comparison. Unlike simile, the use of *like* or *as* in metaphor is omitted. This line is a famous part of the song called Rewrite the Stars. When talking about the expression “rewrite

the stars” from a figurative language perspective, it shall not contain the literal meaning. The phrase does not contain the literal meaning because “rewrite” means to write again to alter or improve something, which is usually writing, which means that altering celestial bodies is an impossible task. The phrase metaphorically represents changing fate or destiny as in many cultures stars are symbols of fate or destiny.

The explanation of the phrase beyond the literal meaning makes more sense considering that the people singing this song are 2 humans who want each other but are blocked by a big wall called social status, so one of them suggests rewriting the stars. In addition, the second phrase continues the previous metaphor that implies the desire to change the world, which figuratively means social conditions, into their own where circumstances can be aligned with their passion and dreams. From this explanation, it can be concluded that the expression above belongs to a metaphor.

C. Personification

“We light it up, we won’t come down, and the sun can’t stop us now” (01.51-02.02)

Based on Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367), personification is a sort of metaphorical language that assigns human characteristics to objects, animals, or abstract ideas. Personification is the process of speaking about an inanimate object or an abstract notion as if it were given with life or human attributes or sentiments. The phrase “the sun can’t stop us now” holds more than just literal meaning. The phrase gives a human-like ability as if the sun could stop someone by its own intention. In reality, the sun is a giant glowing ball of hot gas located at the center of the solar system. It is not possible for the sun to physically stop someone since the sun is an inanimate object that has neither will nor agency. The sun often symbolizes power and dominance, so saying “the sun can’t stop us now” implies that not even the ultimate force of nature can shut them down. Therefore, it is considered as personification.

D. Synecdoche

“A roof above your head” (08.24-08.26)

Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367) denote synecdoche as a figure of speech in which one part of something is used to allude to the entire thing. The sentence “a roof above your head” contained a synecdoche. By its literal meaning, a roof is a part of a house or shelter, but in this phrase it is used to represent the entire home or place to live. The line was said by an American railroad worker who was stopping in town to offer people to join the railroad. The line is one of the benefits given if someone wants to come to work. The phrase “a roof above your head” doesn’t just mean there is a roof above someone, but it stands in for the entire house. Hence, this datum is categorized as synecdoche.

E. Metonymy

“I wanna go after the carriage trade, present legitimate acts, expand our appeal, go after the snobs” (36.12-36.18)

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367), metonymy denotes the identification of a person, institution, or human trait through some objects or attributes with which it is clearly associated. P.T. Barnum approaches Carlyle to get acquainted and talk about business and at that moment he explains that he wants to widen the audience of his circus and target people with higher social status. At that moment Barnum explains to Carlyle that he wants to widen the audience of his circus and target people with higher social status. The phrase “carriage” is an old-fashioned term to refer to upper-class people, derived from the image of people who could afford horse-drawn carriages. So “go after the carriage trade” means to target the rich clients and enter the world of the rich’s trade. Since the term “carriage” represents the

aristocrats who use carriages as their transportation, which is a part of something represents the whole part, therefore this phrase is categorized as metonymy.

F. Hyperbole

“You will sing in the grandest theater with the finest orchestra in the greatest city on earth” (46.33-46.36)

Hyperbole, in interpreting literature by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367), is an exaggeration employed to provide special effect. This figure of speech cannot be taken literally since it uses an over-exaggeration to emphasize a point. P.T. Barnum stated the phrases when meeting Jenny Lind in Buckingham Palace to persuade her to join his show by saying the sentence above. Obviously, in an attempt to persuade her, Barnum employs exaggerated phrases that seem appealing to a singer like Lind. There are three superlatives implied in the datum. The first superlative is “the grandest theater” implying that there is no other theater bigger than this one, however, whether a place is good or not is an objective thing, so it cannot be subjectively said that the theater is the best, because people's views vary. Likewise with “finest orchestra”, the use of superlatives here is only for the sake of emphasizing the adjective used. Orchestras vary in talent and fame, but declaring an orchestra to be the best without any qualification or evidence is excessive. Lastly, “the greatest city in the world” is subjective as it assumes that there is only one best city in the world, while in reality, it is impossible to agree as everyone has their criteria for the best city. The superlatives are here to elevate the sentence to persuade or excite someone in an emphasized way. Hence these phrases are categorized as hyperbole.

G. Irony

“Cause I quite enjoy the life you say I’m trapped in” (37.59-38.05)

Based on Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367), Irony is a linguistic approach which demonstrates a contrast between the expectation and what really happens. It is an instance of a figure of speech, because what is figuratively conveyed contradicts the literal meaning. The line "cause I quite enjoy the life you say I'm trapped in" shows an irony since it highlights the difference between what others think and what the speaker actually feels. While others see Carlyle's life as limiting or unhappy, he says he enjoys it. This contrast creates situational irony because the expected emotion does not match the real one. This sentence also gently criticizes how people judge someone else's life without understanding it, showing that happiness is personal and not always based on outside opinions. Based on the definition of irony above, this sentence can be categorized as an Irony.

H. Paradox

“Impossible comes true, it’s taking over you” (01.42-01.48)

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367), A paradox is a figure expression in which a statement seems to contradict itself. This datum is derived from one of the soundtracks called *The Greatest Show*. The phrase “impossible come true” is categorized as a paradox. Paradox is a statement that seems contradictory by itself. By definition, impossible means incapable of occurring or unable to be done. Yet the sentence claims that the impossible does come true, which appears to be contradictory by itself. On the deeper meaning, this paradox is used to inspire or motivate the audience that things once thought impossible can actually happen if you work hard.

I. Dead Metaphor

“Teach me how to appeal the highbrows” (36.27-36.28)

The term ‘highbrow’ refers to people who possess superior intellectual interests and tastes—like classical music, orchestra, fine art, literature, and philosophy. A dead metaphor is a figure of speech that readers or listeners are so familiar with that it ceases to startle or evoke an image in their minds. In other words, dead metaphors are originally metaphors that have lost their value as common words. In that sense, the term highbrow is categorized as a dead metaphor. Back in the 19th century, there was a now-debunked belief system called phrenology. It claimed that the shape and size of someone’s skull could reveal someone’s personality and intelligence.

According to this theory, people with high foreheads or “high brows” were thought to be more intelligent and cultured than those with “low brows”. Although later the theory was discredited, the term came to address people who are into intellectual or refined things. In the case of highbrows, most people today don’t think about foreheads or skull shapes when using the word. It’s just a regular adjective that means cultured or intellectual. Therefore highbrow can be categorized as a dead metaphor.

J. Allusion

“May I present the Swedish nightingale” (48.50-48.58)

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.368), Allusion is a reference to a prominent person, character, location, or event that a writer uses to enrich the reader's comprehension of their work. This figure of speech refers to a significant event or person that everyone should be aware of. In this datum, the reference is the nightingale. It is a type of bird that is best known for its powerful and beautiful singing voice. The line was said when Barnum introduced Jenny Lind to the audience for her first show in America. The phrase “May I present the Swedish nightingale” does not introduce a bird from Sweden but, it alludes to Jenny Lind whose voice is as beautiful and extraordinary as the bird. Even in real life, the real Jenny Lind—a famous 19th-century Swedish opera singer, was given the predicate of the Swedish nightingale for her exceptional voice. Since the datum cannot be taken literally, it is categorized as an allusion.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This section contains the conclusion from the result and the discussion. Deriving from the previous section, there are a few things that should be addressed to conclude the discussion in this study in accordance with the objective of the study. The result of the analysis showed that the findings included all types of figurative language proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1959, p.367-368) which are simile, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, irony, paradox, allusion, and dead metaphors. Although it covered the ten types of figurative language the amount of the expression for each type varied. The result showed that among all types of figurative language, metaphor appeared the most, followed by hyperbole, personification and paradox. Meanwhile, other types such as metonymy, irony, dead metaphor, synecdoche, and allusion were the least number of types found in the film. Through the results and discussions, it can be seen that the use of figure of speech in the movie *The Greatest Showman* helps to convey deeper emotions by comparing seemingly unrelated things to make the descriptions oddly more relatable. The use of figurative language also helps in expressing complex feelings that may be difficult to explain with literal language sentences.

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