



AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS

Adeliza Tiara Menrawari¹, Erni² Dahnilsyah³

^{1, 2, 3} Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

Email: ¹tiaraadeliza@gmail.com, ²erni@lecturer.unri.ac.id, ³dani1_71@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the majas or language styles used in poetry by emily dickinson. The theory used to analyze the majas in this research is Keraf (2011). The research method used is descriptive qualitative research with literature review to collect data and information about majas. Data analysis consists of three parts of activities, namely data condensation, data display, and data verification. The results of this study indicate that in the poem A Bird, came down the Walk there are 5 types of majas, in the poem Because I could not stop for Death there are 4 types of majas and in the poem Hope is the thing with feathers there are 3 types of majas. The most dominant type of majas used is personification. The use of majas in English learning is used in speaking, reading, writing, and listening learning activities because majas have various purposes to clarify meaning, provide clear examples, provide emphasis, stimulate emotions, give life to inanimate objects, entertain or ornament.

Keywords: *Figurative language, poetry, Emily dickinson*

ANALISIS MAJAS DALAM PUISI-PUISI KARYA EMILY DICKINSON

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui majas atau gaya Bahasa yang digunakan dalam puisi karya emily dickinson. Teori yang digunakan untuk menganalisis majas dalam penelitian ini adalah Keraf (2011). Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan kajian Pustaka untuk mengumpulkan data dan informasi mengenai majas. Analisa data terdiri dari tiga bagian kegiatan yaitu kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan verifikasi data. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dalam puisi A Bird, came down the Walk terdapat 5 jenis majas, dalam puisi Because I could not stop for Death terdapat 4 jenis majas dan pada puisi Hope is the thing with feathers terdapat 3 jenis majas. Majas yang paling dominan digunakan adalah personifikasi. Penggunaan majas dalam pembelajaran Bahasa inggris digunakan dalam kegiatan pembelajaran berbicara, membaca, menulis, dan mendengarkan karena majas memiliki berbagai tujuan untuk memperjelas makna, memberikan contoh yang jelas, memberikan penekanan, menstimulasi emosi, memberikan kehidupan pada benda mati, menghibur atau ornamen.

Kata kunci: Majas, puisi, Emily dickinson

Submitted	Accepted	Published
May 27 th 2025	May 30 th 2025	June 1 st 2025

Citation	:	Menrawari et al. (2025). AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS. <i>JOEEI (Journal of English Educational Issues)</i> , 1(1), 110-118.
----------	---	---

INTRODUCTION

The most significant aspect of human existence is language. Without language, humans not be able to function normally and consistently because, according to Suardi et al. (2019), language is a tool for communication that people learn from birth. Language can be used by humans to convey ideas, opinion, desires, feelings and experiences to others.

Linguistics is the field that studies language. The study of word form and structure is known as linguistics. Linguistics is a science of language whose model includes morphology, syntax, phonetics, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics (Aprianti & Parmawati, 2020). Linguistics is concerned with what people say, not with what they should or think. Semantics is a subfield of



linguistics. Semantics, according to Wijayanti et al. (2021), is the area of linguistics that focuses on meaning. Thus, researching language through semantics entails closely examining the meaning that a language contains. Two factors make semantics an important and valuable study. First, meaning is closely related to communication. Certain meanings can be conveyed in verbal exchanges. Verbal changes play an important role in our lives. Secondly, the use of logic and understanding as part of intellectual ability is a system through which people recognize the nature of communication.

When communicating in everyday life, we find that humans do not fully use conveying their feelings or opinions directly or called literal meaning, at some moments humans use tersira language, which is the delivery of meaning that requires interpretation. the use of such language is called non-literal meaning. Literal and non-literal meaning are studied in Semantics. Non-literal meaning usually uses figurative language to give the impression of beautifying in conveying meaning and exaggerating.

Figurative language is a form of language use, or we can call it part of a language that is usually similar to or parable. Figurative language is used to give a beauty in language and full of imaginative, inanimate objects are made as if it were alive and vice versa Fahas et al. (2021). One of the literary works that uses figurative language is Poetry. Compared to other literary works, poetry is more expressive (it use figurative language) and connotative (it employs nonliteral meaning). The author's or writer's skill with language and word choice has a significant impact on the attractiveness of literary works (Wahyuda, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Figurative Language

Figurative Language is one of the ways and styles of language in the form of expressions, figures of speech and parables with the aim of using this to provide aesthetic value or beauty from the meaning and message implied in the expression (Hakim et al, 2020). Figurative language is also a method and style used by authors to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in order to make their writing or work appear more effective and maximized, particularly when composing poetry.

Figurative language has several functions such as creating richer, more effective, and more suggestive effects in literary works. Figurative language has various purposes, namely to clarify meaning, provide clear examples, emphasize, stimulate emotions, give life to inanimate objects, entertain or ornament. Figurative language can also train skills in speaking, reading, practicing writing skills and can train thinking skills to know whether a word has the appropriate meaning or there are other hidden meanings in it.

Perrine (1969) explains that figurative language has several functions, which are as follows:

1. To give imaginative pleasure
Imaginative pleasure serves to provide a description of the reader or listener about the reading. So that the existence of figurative language makes it easier for readers or listeners to think about the topic or discussion told in a literary work. It also makes the reader's thinking ability increase.
2. To bring additional imagery
Using figurative language is a technique for adding imagery to verse, concretizing the abstract, and making poetry pleasurable. Through this function, a thing or abstract concept becomes concrete and encourages readers or listeners to use their imaginations and expand on their ideas.
3. To Increase emotional intensity
Figurative language may add emotional depth to a remark that would otherwise be purely informative and can be used to express sentiments as well as facts. The increased



emotional intensity is a natural consequence of the reader's imagination and fantasy coming to life in their head. Once they are fully immersed in their imagination, they may experience the emotions that the author or speaker intended for them to feel.

4. To say much in a brief compass

Figurative language is a focus strategy that allows one to express a lot in a short amount of time. The author uses this function to convey his thoughts and objectives without going into great depth. The writer only mentions one idea or more to say much briefly. It is used to assist readers or listeners in implicitly comprehending the meanings or concepts included within the text.

Keraf (2011) says that figurative language consists of two categories, namely rhetorical and figurative language. Rhetorical figurative language is used to clarify, emphasize and strengthen the meaning to be conveyed. Meanwhile, figurative language is used as an adornment that functions to beautify and provide aesthetic effects in discourse. Rhetorical figurative language consists of several types such as alliteration, assonance, asindenton, euphemismus, litotes, anticipation, hyperbole, paradox, and oxymoron. Figurative language consists of several types such as: simile, metaphor, personification, eponym, synecdoche, metonymy, antonomasia, irony, antiphrasis and anaphora.

Poetry

Poetry is a literary work that has a difference with several other works of fiction, because the language used is dense, and has a unified rhythm in the process of expressing the language (Laila, 2016). Poetry is a type of literary work that uses language as a means to express the nature of the author, which may contain a mandate or explanation of a physical or spiritual situation (Citraningrum, 2016). The beauty of poetry is not only seen from the rhyme and rhythm but also from the use of language. The use of language in poetry is commonly referred to as figurative language. Figurative language or language style is a way to get an impression on readers or listeners so that it can enliven a literary work, making a writer's characteristic in pouring and giving ideas, ideas, and feelings, both oral and written through the richness of language (Nafinuddin, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Research design is a design used in scientific activities with the aim of obtaining research data in accordance with the objectives and things to be achieved in the research (Sugiyono, 2014). In this research, the researcher used a design which is called descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive method is a fact-finding with a certain interpretation. The researcher used qualitative research to describe and interpret the poetry in this study. The study also belonged to library research.

Source of Data

In this study, the author took 3 poems as an object which will only assume and represent the typical poetry of Emily Dickinson. The selected poems include the following:

- a. A Bird came down the Walk
- b. Because I could not stop for Death
- c. Hope is the thing with feathers

The source of data taken in books offigurative language, and search for sources on the internet like related sources from several search engines and search databases.

Data Collection Technique

The method of data collection is one aspect that plays an important role in determining the



success or failure of a study. Researchers used library research to collect data and information. Library research is carried out to support poem analysis, and to collect some required data and information from relevant books or other sources. This study on teaching English is orderly and methodical research that explores several teaching and learning languages. The researcher plans what to do and systematically collects data to answer questions or problems.

In the process of collecting the data, the researcher did some steps, the first was observing the famous poem of Emily Dickinson. The second in your spare time, make observations on the poems that will be chosen earlier. Third, after making observations on the object to be studied, take notes of what you get from the observations made. Fourth, do 3-5 comparisons of observations on objects. Fifth, after doing the comparison, take notes of the list of comparisons that appear. Sixth, make it into a draft. And lastly, revise the draft until you find definite results.

In the second one, the researcher selected several poems that were considered interesting to be analyzed. Second, try using a variety of search terms to identify poetry that interests you like the keywords sadness, love, and religion. Third, read at least a few poems before deciding whether to stop or continue. Fourth, use the keyword poet on the website to find poets according to our criteria. Fifth, explore poetry from a diverse collection of poets. Sixth, read the poem several times to gain understanding. The steps taken in classifying poetry are dividing poetry into the figurative language to be studied. There are six types of figurative language that will be studied. Among them are hyperbole, irony, metaphor, paradox, personification, and simile. So later after doing research, whether each of the 3 poems, there are five types of figurative language, that's one of the bases and the holding of the division.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consists of three activities:

- a. Data Condensation, refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data collected from field notes, documents, or other empirical sources. It involves making the data more manageable and accessible by condensing it. At this stage, the researcher chooses relevant information, in this case, the stanza of the selected poems, and narrows down the focus to identify the types of figurative language present in the lyrics. The researcher will highlight words that contain figurative language and the interpret their meanings.
- b. Data display, involves organizing information in a structured way to facilitate decision making and further analysis. A clear presentation of the data enables researchers to better understand what is happening and determine next steps in the research process. After data condensation, data is presented in an organized format, which allows for informed decisions to be made. In this study, the researcher will display the types of figurative language identified in stanza in the selected poems in table, making it easier to visualize and analyze the findings and then explain about the meaning in a paragraph.
- c. Data verification, in the final stage, data verification involves drawing conclusions based on the analysis and comparing them with the evidence gathered. After analyzing the various figurative language found in the selected poems, the researcher reaches conclusions by verifying the consistency and validity of the findings against the empirical data collected during the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we explore the figurative language in Emily Dickinson's selected poems as Keraf's theory (2011). The following presentation of data derived from 3 poems by Emily Dickinson, namely:



1. **A Bird came down the Walk**

Emily Dickinson's poem "A Bird came down the Walk" was first written around 1862, a period known as the most prolific in her writing career. The poem reflects Dickinson's signature style: the use of concise language, unorthodox punctuation, and the selection of simple yet meaningful themes. In this poem, she describes the interaction between humans and nature through her encounter with a bird on the road, with the narrative moving from casual observation to deep reflection on the beauty and mystery of nature. In this poem the researcher found five types of figurative language. Here is an explanation of the types of figurative language found in the poem A bird came down the Walk, which is presented in alphabetical order for some practicality:

a. Hyperbole

That hurried all abroad —

- It shows how fast his eyes move as if exploring the world. (second line in third stanza).

b. Metafora

Too silver for a seam

- The surface of the sea or sky is so smooth and shiny like silver, not a seam in sight. (second line in fifth stanza).

c. Paradox

*Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon,
Leap, plashless as they swim*

- Because butterflies "swim" in the air, not in water, and this is impossible and goes against human logic - The surface of the sea or sky is so smooth and shiny like silver, no seams are visible. (second line of the fifth stanza).

d. Personification

A Bird came down the Walk

- Birds "come" like a human walking down the street. It gives the animal human behavior. (First line in first stanza)

And the he drank a dew

- birds are like humans who drink. (First line in second stanza).

And then hopped sidewise to the Wall

To let a Beetle pass

- The bird is polite, giving way to the beetle - polite human behavior. (fourth line in second stanza).

He glanced with rapid eyes

- A bird's eyes are described as being able to "peer quickly", like a vigilant human. (first line in third stanza).

He stirred his Velvet Head.

- Birds are likened to having their hair stirred like humans. (fourth line in third stanza).

e. Simile

They looked like frightened Beads, I thought

- Bird's eyes are compared to frightened beads. (third line in third stanza)

Like one in danger, Cautious,

- The narrator compares the bird to someone in danger, showing the bird's caution. (first line in fifth stanza)

Than Oars divide the Ocean

- The movement of a bird's flight is likened to an oar splitting the sea, emphasizing the softness and flexibility of the movement. (first line in fifth stanza)

Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon,

Leap, plashless as they swim.

- Butterflies are compared to creatures that swim plashlessly, showing the beauty and stillness of nature's movements. (third and fourth line in fifth stanza).



2. Because i could not stop for Death

Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death" was written around 1863, during the height of her creativity known as the intensive period of poetry writing. Dickinson, who was known for her solitary lifestyle and profound views on life and death, presents Death in this poem as a polite and calm, rather than sinister, figure. Using a ballad form and a gentle yet meaningful language style, Dickinson explores the journey to death as a natural, almost romantic experience, rather than something frightening. The poem demonstrates her distinctive approach to addressing existential themes in a subtle yet powerful way. In this poem the researcher found four types of figurative language. Here is an explanation of the types of figurative language found in the poem A bird came down the Walk, which is presented in alphabetical order for some practicality:

a. Irony

He kindly stopped for me –

- Death is portrayed as benevolent, a contrast to the common view of death as frightening. (second line in first stanza)

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

- Death is described as patient and calm, unhurried. It is different from the sudden death that is usually imagined. (first line second stanza)

Or rather – He passed Us –

Changing the perspective that it is now the sun that passes instead of them symbolizes that life has passed. (first line in fourth stanza)

b. Metaphor

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

- "Carriage" symbolizes the journey to death or the afterlife. (third line in first stanza).

We passed the Setting Sun –

- Sunset symbolizes old age or nearing the end of life. (fourth line in this stanza)

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

- The house here symbolizes a tomb or grave, described vaguely as a mound of earth. (first and second line in fifth stanza)

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity –

- The horse's head points to "eternity" - suggesting that the carriage is taking the narrator to the afterlife.

c. Paradox

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

- Despite the centuries, time seems short - illustrating the timelessness and timelessness of death. (first and second lines in sixth stanza)

d. Personification

He kindly stopped for me –

- Death is portrayed as a benevolent, human-like figure. (second line in first stanza)

And Immortality.

- "Immortality" joins the train, illustrating that death is not the end, but the gateway to immortality. (fourth line in first stanza)

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

- Death is described as having a sense of patience and calm, unhurried. It is different from the sudden death that is usually imagined. (first line second stanza)

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –



- The writer leaves the life of the world (work and leisure) because of the “courtesy” of Death, which means humanizing death. (second, third and fourth lines in second stanza)

3. Hope is the thing with feathers

Emily Dickinson's poem “Hope is the thing with feathers” is believed to have been written around 1861, during the most productive period of her life, often referred to as her “Annus Mirabilis”. At that time, Dickinson began writing with great intensity, producing hundreds of poems that were profound and full of imagination. In this poem, she uses the central metaphor of a bird to represent hope - a creature small and light, yet full of power. The writing style reflects Dickinson's trademarks: dense use of language, unconventional punctuation, and the depiction of abstract concepts in a concrete and beautiful way. In this poem the researcher found three types of figurative language. Here is an explanation of the types of figurative language found in the poem A bird came down the Walk, which is presented in alphabetical order for some practicality:

A. Hiperbole

*And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –*

- It shows that hope is always present, continuing to sing without stopping, even in times of trouble. (fourth line in first stanza)

B. Methapor

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –

- Hope is likened to a little bird with feathers. This is not a simile, as it does not use the words “like” or “as” - but a direct metaphor. Birds represent something light, free, and always present in the human heart. (first line in first stanza)

And sore must be the storm –

- Storms represent sadness, suffering, or great difficulties in life. (second line in second stanza)

That kept so many warm –

- The bird of hope gives “warmth” to many people, symbolizing comfort and calmness in facing life. (fourth line in second stanza)

C. Personification

That perches in the soul –

- The bird (hope) is described as “dwelling” in the human soul, as if it were a living creature that lives in our hearts. (second line in first stanza)

That could abash the little Bird

- The storm is described as being able to “shame” or “silence” the bird (hope). This shows that hope is powerful - only a very severe storm can silence it. (third line in second stanza)

Yet – never – in Extremity,

It asked a crumb – of Me.

- Hope is described as very generous; it “never asks for a drop” from the speaker, even in the most extreme circumstances. This shows that hope comes unconditionally, without demanding anything in return. (third and fourth line in third stanza)

Discussion

The three poems by Emily Dickinson - Hope is the thing with feathers, Because I could not stop for Death, and A Bird came down the Walk - show the rich use of figurative language that is typical in her poetry. In Hope is the thing with feathers, Dickinson used a central metaphor that compares hope to a small bird that “perches on the soul.” Personification also appears when the bird seems to have the ability to give warmth and sing, emphasizing the nature of hope as a loyal inner friend.

Meanwhile, in Because I could not stop for Death, Dickinson uses strong personification to portray Death as a polite and well-mannered male figure, driving a carriage and picking up the



narrator for her final journey. Paradox is also used in the last stanza when time seems short despite the passing of centuries, showing how death takes the narrator beyond the limits of earthly time.

In *A Bird came down the Walk*, Dickinson combines visual imagery, simile, and personification to describe her encounter with a bird. This use of figurative language not only embellishes the narrative, but also shows the relationship between humans and nature and the tension between human observation and intervention in the natural world. Taken together, these three poems show how Dickinson uses figurative language to deepen themes of life, death, hope, and the seemingly simple beauty of the world.

The use of figurative language in English teaching language are students are taught how to develop strategies to guess the meaning of figurative language in depth according to context in reading. As with writing, students tend to benefit from instructions on how to understand figurative language. Next to listening, the learner may have to be assisted by the teacher in identifying the types of signaling devices that are usually used to signal figurative language. Deep learning is a type of intonation pattern that shows the use of idioms or proverbs. They may need help finding the evaluative component of ideas conveyed through figurative language. And lastly, in speaking, students organize their thoughts about concepts. This helps their debating skills. In this section, they present their ideas. Of course, learning is focused on language, especially figurative language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers focused on three selected poems by Emily Dickinson based on Keraf's (2009) theory. After analyzing the selected poems, the researchers found kinds of five figurative languages, the highest frequency of figurative language is personification, secondly is metaphor. Figurative language is used in English Teaching Language in speaking, reading, listening and writing lessons. In Reading, students are taught how to develop strategies to guess the meaning of figurative language in depth according to context. As with writing, students tend to benefit from instructions on how to understand figurative language. Next to listening, the learner may have to be assisted by the teacher in identifying the types of signaling devices that are usually used to signal figurative language. And lastly, in speaking, students organize their thoughts about concepts. This helps their debating skills.

REFERENCES

- Aprianti, I. N., & Parmawati, A. (2020). Derivational and Inflectional Morpheme Analysis On The Song Lyrics Of Lady Gaga 'A Star is Born' Album. *Professional Journal of English Education*, 3(3), 322–328.
- Citraningrum, D. M. (2016). Menulis Puisi Dengan Teknik Pembelajaran Yang Kreatif. *BELAJAR BAHASA: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 1(1), 82-90.
- Fahas, Rida., Rizqi Husaini., Puput Jianggimahastu L.S., Dedy Richi R. (2021). Linguistic Analysis: Figurative Language Used in Robert Frost's Poem. *Jurnal Pariwisata dan Budaya*, 2(1). 1-12.
- Laila, M. P. (2016). Gaya Bahasa Perbandingan dalam kumpulan Puisi Melihat Api Bekerja Karya M Aan Mansyur (Tinjauan Stilistika). *Jurnal Gramatika*, 2(2), 79994.
- Nafinuddin, S. (2020). Majas (Majas Perbandingan, Majas Pertentangan, Majas Perulangan, Majas Pertautan). <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/a8rwt>
- Suardi, I. P., Ramadhan, S., & Asri, Y. (2019). Pemerolehan Bahasa Pertama pada Anak Usia Dini. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 3(1), 265. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v3i1.160>
- Wijayanti Beti., Chindyana Laurica and Khoirun Nisa. 2021. Semantik dan Aplikasinya Pada Struktur Kalimat dalam Bahasa Jawa di Desa Srimulyo Kecamatan Belitang Mulya. *Seulas Pinang: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 3(1), 33-43.
- Wirawan, G. (2017). Analisis Struktural Antologi Puisi Hujan Lolos di Sela Jari Karya Yudhiswara.



JOEEI Journal of English Educational Issues

Volume 1 Nomor 1 June 2025 | ISSN Cetak : xxxx - xxxx |

ISSN Online : xxxx - xxxx DOI : <https://doi.org/10.31258/>

JP-BSI (Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia), 1(2), 39–44.