

An Analysis of Figurative Language on Online English Memes

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Abstract

The phenomenon of memes has been quite popular among internet users in recent years. Various types of memes have become a new culture for the audience on the internet. This research will analyze the figurative language that is often used by meme creators and the reasons. This research is descriptive qualitative research. The data in this study are words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in Online English Memes. The sampling technique is purposive sampling technique. The data documentation technique is to search for Online English Memes on several provider sites on the internet (Reddit, 9GAG, Facebook). Data analysis techniques are data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The researcher used data triangulation to validate the data based on sources, methods, researcher, and theory. The research findings show figurative language that there were 23 data include words phrases, clauses, and sentences in 11 different types. The types with the highest number of occurrences are Alliteration, Hyperbole, Irony, and Metonymy, with 3 data. Meanwhile, the types with the lowest number of occurrences are Allusion, Metaphor, and Repetition, with 1 data. Personification, Sarcasm, Simile, and Symbol have 2 data. The reasons for using figurative language in memes are to create humour, to express emotions, to convey ideas, and to grab attention.

Keywords: Figurative Language, Online English Memes, Internet Memes, Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a critical aspect in our existence. Humans will communicate with different humans via language. In sending a message, a sender does not simply use a specific message or direct expression, but also he uses an implicit message or indirect expressions, in which the meaning of the message is not the same as the original message. According to Pradopo (1994: 26), a literary work is an explanation of the world and human life, and the main criterion outlined in a literary work is "truth" or whatever the creator wants to explain. Language in literature no longer rely on grammatical order. It is extra complicated and a long way eliminated from day-by-day communications. It approaches that from time to time, literature does not comply with

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language regulations. It contains esthetic language, fine questioning, and deep messages. The creator commonly uses top diction in his literature merchandise to make readers or listeners experience it through heart, no longer handiest in their eyes or ears together with figurative language. Figurative language is a language that has more than one means.

Figurative language has been extensively examined by linguists in the look at literature in recent years. It's miles because the figurative language has the essence of flavor and beauty. Figurative language frequently provides a more powerful approach to announcing what we imply than direct declaration. In this particular experience, figurative language might also take the form of figures of speech. Figurative is not only used in literary languages, such as play, poetry, or prose but also lives in linguistic studies or are common use in lyric writing on songs and colloquial speech. The most familiar figurative languages that will be analyzed in this study are several types including metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, personification, and others.

With the development of literary works now, many mediums as intermediaries to pour the literary works themselves. One of those new media we can refer to now is Memes. In the development of Memes, the existence of social media has a big hand in the role of intermediary in its spread, which is certainly inseparable from the role of language, allowing us to communicate with each other and communicate their intentions and goals. This suggests that language is not a collection of words or phrases without rules, but rather a continuum that occurs in structures or rules in the act of communication. Davision (2012) claims that "internet memes are part of the culture, usually jokes, and attract attention through online broadcasts. " Memes are part of the culture and can be jokes that appear on the internet and are broadcast online (Nasrullah, 2015: 73). Nasrullah himself said that the meme reflects the offline reality presented in an interesting picture.

Up to now, there have been some interesting studies on text analysis of kind of figurative language of poems, songs, and movie dialogues. Nana Nurdiana (2015) and Dwi Astuti (2022) analyzed the figurative language of Katty Perry songs and the movie *Raya And The Last Dragon*, respectively. Some of the studies mentioned have research objects that are common in figurative language research, which focuses on complex narratives. As a result, the object of research is typically limited to fairly common sources, such as poetry, songs, films, and novels. Until now, figurative language research has only used data sources from some of the previously mentioned sources. Therefore, this research analyzes the object of research differently. The researchers want to analyze the figurative language and the meaning of Online English Memes. By doing this research, the researchers hope that this research will help readers understand that online memes do not only have humor value, but also complex linguistic value. Hence, it can be used as an object of research in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several types of figurative language that have different characteristics, namely:

a) Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant in two or more words. This is an intentional phonological device. It is also largely related to literature, especially poetic, but is also found in popular idioms, twisters, and advertising languages.

Example: *I found a long love letter in my locker several years ago.*

b) Allusion

According to Peter (2002), Allusion is the process of referring to something else and a specific figure, event, etc., poetry is also called allusion. In other words, allusion is another word reference. Many poets refer to other poets and their poems and this is always a figurative case sometimes one of the biggest puzzles for analysts is trying to find what is meant by allusion.

Example: *I wish that I can recover from my injury just like **Wolverine**.*

c) Antithesis

Antithesis results when pairs or more highly contrasting terms are presented together (Mhiwaki: 2004). If words, ideas, or clauses are very different but present together, there is a resulting amount of tension that makes the lines very provocative. In the antithesis, there is usually a grammatical balance, as well as a contrast in meaning. The antithesis is the figurative language of the opposite word or their group, which contains contrasting ideas.

Example: *Float like a **butterfly**, sting like a **bee**.*

d) Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a term used to exaggerate. This meaning is used by a person who has a desire and expectation of what happens to make the object larger than the actual object. Shaw (1972:189) emphasizes that there is a danger of deception in sensational reporting hyperbole. Poets need to exaggerate what will be compared in order to get the right attention from the reader.

Example: *I am so hungry; I could eat everything.*

e) Irony

In most modern critical uses of the term irony there remains the root meaning of hiding or hiding what is really happening not to deceive, but to achieve a special rhetorical or artistic effect. Irony is a way of speaking or writing by saying something while the meaning is different. It refers to situations in which reality differs from appearance. It occurs in sentences or words when they imply contrast or opposite meanings.

Example: *You smell so good; I have to hold my breath.*

f) Metaphor

The word metaphor comes from the Greek word meaning "to carry". Metaphors are used to explain emotions, feelings, and relationships of other elements that cannot be explained in ordinary language. Metaphor is the process of comparing two different things as if they were one. Metaphors are figurative utterances, which compare one thing to another directly (Peter, 2002:12). They may reveal A is B, as opposed to a simile only in comparison it is implied rather than explicit. It should be read in the same way as parables, but it is often more difficult to recognize because the comparison can be reduced to a phrase or a single word. When the poet uses metaphors, he transfers qualities and associations from one subject to another to make them clearer in our minds.

Example: *The alligator's teeth are **white daggers** (Mean: the alligator's teeth are very sharp)*

g) Metonymy

Metonymy is an alternative to name, using one word for any other, the use of an idea by using means of phrases regarding the association. It additionally approximately element-whole relationship, the sort which lets in the identical phrase for use in lots of languages.

Example: ***The white house** has announced its new cabinet. (Mean: The white house – represents the entirety of the American presidency)*

h) Oxymoron

According to Murthy (2003:507) asserting oxymoron is a figurative language used to express two opposite properties of the same thing. An oxymoron uses

together a pair of opposing or conflicting terms (Reaske: 1966). An oxymoron is when two words are put together that contradict each other.

Example: *He was shot by **friendly fire** from his teammates*

i) Paradox

The term paradox comes from the Greek word "paradoxon" which means contrary to expectations, existing beliefs, or perceived opinions. Shaw (1972:275) states that the reader must investigate beyond the literal meaning to find a deeper, usually more philosophical meaning that will reconcile the apparent absurdity. A paradox is a figurative language that conveys two opposites but this figure reveals real facts that make sense even if the speaker or creator uses an absurd word. But an important part of the paradox is that they at least sound reasonable.

Example: *The **beginning** of the **end***

j) Parallelism

Parallelism is the repetition of sounds, meanings, and structures that serve to organize, emphasize, and show relationships. The simplest form of parallelism consists of one word that has little variation in the meaning of "ordian and establishes". Shaw (1972:275) shows that sometimes three or more parallel units. Parallelism can be reversed for a stronger emphasis.

Example: *What you say is what you pray.*

k) Personification

Kennedy (1983: 487) states that personification is the attribution of personal traits or dispositions to inanimate objects or abstract notions, especially as rhetorical figures. Personification is a figurative language that describes something that is not human as if it can feel, think, act, live or die in the same way as a human being.

Example: *The moon **smiles** at the stars.*

l) Repetition

Repetition is a literary device that repeats the same word or phrase several times to make the idea clearer and easier to remember. There are several types of repetition commonly used in both prose and poetry. As a rhetorical device, it can be a complete word, phrase or sentence, or a line of poetry repeated to emphasize its significance throughout the text. Repetition is not distinguished solely as a metaphor, but rather as a device of rhetoric.

Example: *If you think you can do it, you can do it*

m) Sarcasm

Sarcasm is the use of caustic or cruel remarks frequently presented by way of ironical statement, Reaske (1966:40). Sarcasm is a harsh satire of someone who has the meaning of bitterness and reproach to show anger or criticism. Sarcasm also contains ridicule in it, there are often even jokes and harsh words which are very unpleasant if the person being addressed knows them.

Example: *saying "**they're really on top of things**" to describe a group of people who are very disorganized*

n) Simile

The simile is a figure that makes the comparison between two different things, just like a metaphor but in simile usually using the word as, than, like, seem, so, appear, and more than. According to Shaw (1972:344) the common heritage of similes in everyday speech usually reflects simple comparisons based on the natural world or familiar domestic objects. This characteristic is intended to express a similar thing to another directly.

Example:

a. *My skin is as dry as the Sahara Desert.*

b. *She is as innocent as an angel.*

o) Symbol

Symbolism is a kind determine speech that uses images of animals, flowers, or things to substitute something. in keeping with Diyanni (2004:569) image is any object or motion that represents something past its literal self. Symbolism is established from the result of personal experience or fantasies. Many poets have used the rose as a symbol of youngsters and beauty a flag is a symbol of a kingdom. which means plays a completely crucial role in the communique. There might be no language without meaning. Language is a device for delivering the which means. by paying attention to the definition above, the word which means has various specific notions and types for the reason that poets use a word to intend something different from what it denotes in expressing their feeling, minds and ideas

Example: *She is so beautiful like a rose.*

3. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method of description. According to Sugiyono (2016: 9), qualitative description is a research method based on the philosophy of post-positivity, and the researcher studies the state of natural objects (not experiments), which is the main means of data collection. Methods carried out by triangulation (combination), and data analysis, are inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize importance rather than generalization. Qualitative descriptive research aims to explain and answer in more detail the problem under investigation by investigating as many research objects, groups, or events as possible. In qualitative research, one of them is the object of study, and the results are written in the form of words and statements reflecting the actual state of affairs. In this case, the researcher wants to explore more deeply what is contained in the use of language styles used in Online English Memes, including words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. According to Arikunto (2002:107) source of the data refers to the subject from which all data of research are obtained. The source data of this study researcher took from various sources on the Internet including, Facebook, 9GAG, and Reddit.

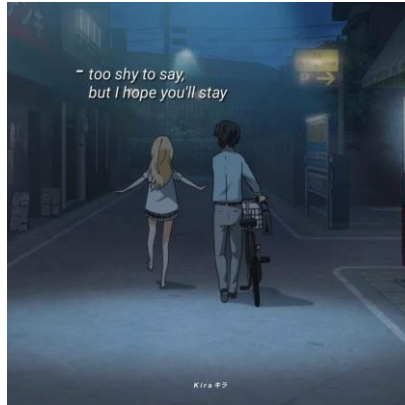
The sampling technique used in this study used a purposive sampling technique. According to Arikunto (2010:183), purposive sampling is the process of selecting a sample by taking a subject that is not based on the level or area, but it is taken based on the specific purpose. The sample in this study is figurative language contained in Online English Memes. Documentation is the method used in scientific research in an effort to collect data through the use of documents. From the data collection technique, the researcher use this method to get the results needed by the researcher. In this research, the researcher uses the triangulation as the data validation technique. Based on Denzim in HeidNokleby (2011:144-146) 25 states that there are four types of triangulation: data, researcher, theory, and method.

4. RESULTS

According to the theory of Reaske (1966:25-42), figurative languages are alliteration, allusion, antithesis, hyperbola, irony, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, parallelism, personification, repetition, simile, symbol, and sarcasm. Then, the researcher will observe and analyse the data using these figurative language in Online English Memes.

4.1. Alliteration

001/01/OEM/FL/ALT



Picture 1 : Alliteration

“too shy to say, but I hope you’ll stay”

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 1 can be categorized as figurative language, namely alliteration. In the Online English Meme, there is a repetition of the consonant /s/ which makes the sentence alliterate. The Online English Meme explains how the emotional condition of the male character who is too shy to express his feelings to the woman he likes, so he prefers to hope to always be together without expressing his feelings. Online English Memes do not only have humor value, but also have moral messages that are often inserted in every sentence.

4.2. Allusion

004/01/OEM/FL/ALS

Fellas, if your girl



Picture 2 : Allusion

“Fellas if your girls has social anxiety, is always evolving into higher life forms, and is in constant pain. That’s not your girl that’s Shin Godzilla”

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 2 can be categorized as figurative language, namely Allusion. The word "Shin Godzilla" refers to the movie Godzilla Resurgence which was released in 2016. Shin Godzilla is the monster in the movie. The selection of the Shin Godzilla character in this Online English Meme is because it has the same characteristics as what is mentioned in the Online English Meme,

namely "has social anxiety, is always evolving into higher life forms, and is in constant pain" so using the depiction of fictional characters in a sentence categorizes the sentence as figurative language allusion.

4.3. Hyperbole

006/02/OEM/FL/HPR



Picture 3 : Hyperbole

"The popular kid telling a joke. Me who heard the joke 1 billion times already"

Analysis:

Online English Meme picture 3 which reads *"the popular kid telling a joke. Me who heard the joke 1 billion times already"* is also categorized as figurative language hyperbole. In the clause *"...heard the joke 1 billion times...."* It is a figurative language hyperbole, because it is impossible to hear the same joke 1 billion times already. Thus, exaggerating a sentence is needed to emphasize that the character in the Online English Meme has heard the same joke so many times that the character is bored and thinks he has heard it 1 billion times.

4.4. Irony

008/01/OEM/FL/IRN



Picture 4 : Irony

"How to politely tell someone they are stupid. Wisdom has been chasing you, but you have always been faster"

Analysis:

Based on the text in picture 4 can be categorized as figurative language, namely irony. "Wisdom has been chasing you, but you have always been faster" the whole sentence is an irony. The meaning of the sentence is how we tell someone who is stupid but without directly offending the person. then the selection of irony is needed in making this Online English Meme, besides not being shown directly, the use of irony is also effective in satirizing by using Online English Meme media.

4.5. Metaphor 011/01/OEM/FL/MTP



Picture 5 : Metaphor

“When your boss asks you to train the new coworker who has an IQ of a potato”

Analysis:

Based on the Online English Meme text contained in picture 5 can be categorized as figurative language, namely metaphor. Metaphors are figurative utterances, which compare one thing to another directly (Peter, 2002: 12). The word "potato" in the Online English Meme signifies figurative language metaphor, because the word "*potato*" contains explicit meaning which means it is not the real meaning of the word used in the sentence. The use of word "*potato*" means something that has substandard capabilities. Therefore, instead of using the word "stupid" it would be better to use the word "*potato*".

4.6. Metonymy 012/01/OEM/FL/MTN



Picture 6 : Metonymy

“Me seeing that weebz are no longer discriminated on r/meme”

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 6 can be categorized as figurative language, metonymy. In the sentence contained in the Online English Meme *written* "*Me seeing that weebz are no longer discriminated on r/meme*" there is the word "weebz". At first, the word describes a group of people who have an interest in Japanese culture, but most people misinterpret the word "weebz" as fanaticism for Japanese animated films called anime. This has given a negative connotation to the name "weebz" or this group. The Online English Meme also explains that the "weebz" group was once discriminated against in the community, represented by the sentence "...weebz are no longer discriminated against on r/meme".

4.7. Personification

015/01/OEM/FL/PFC

My talents leaving my
body when someone is watching:



Picture 7: Personification

"My talents leaving my body when someone is watching"

Analysis:

Based on the text contained in Online English Meme picture 7 can be categorized as figurative language, namely human-like personification, the sentence **"my talents leaving my body..."** emphasizes that the abilities of the meme character are like living things that can leave the body of the meme character. In reality this is very unlikely because one's talent will not easily disappear just because someone is watching.

4.8. Repetition

017/01/OEM/FL/RPT



Picture 8 : Repetition

"You need therapy, and you need therapy, and you need it too! Everyone here needs therapy"

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 8 can be categorized as figurative language, namely repetition. The repetition of the word **"You need therapy"** is a form of repetition. This Online English Meme emphasizes how people who have mental problems are encouraged to do therapy, but the message in this Online English Meme is shown to members of the meme group found on Reddit.

4.9. Sarcasm

018/01/OEM/FL/SCM

Why waste money on
lawnmowers when you
can use vegans.



Picture 9 : Sarcasm

"Why waste money on lawnmowers when you can use vegans"

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 9 can be categorized as figurative language, namely sarcasm. In the sentence in the Online English Meme emphasizes how there is no need to spend money to buy a lawn mower, we can use vegans by being represented with a picture of a man carrying a woman who is allegedly a vegan to eat grass or other words to be a lawn mower. Vegans are people who do not consume animal meat and all kinds of processed foods derived from animals, meaning they only eat processed vegetables and fruits.

4.10. Simile

020/01/OEM/FL/SML



Picture 10 : Simile

“Find someone who loves you like AI loves fingers”

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 10 can be categorized as figurative language, simile. In the Online English Meme there is a delivery style in the form of a comparison of two different things but has the same meaning. The *sentence "find someone who loves you like AI loves fingers"* which means it is very difficult to find someone who loves you like AI's ability to draw fingers on humans. AI here is a computer system that can create illustrations of human objects that are almost similar to the original but there are still many shortcomings, one of which is in making human fingers, which often occur errors in the results of these images (as in meme objects). So the depiction of *"find someone who loves you like AI loves fingers"* is meant in terms of the difficulty itself.

4.11. Symbol

022/01/OEM/FL/SMB



Picture 11 : Symbol

“When you get the boss weapon in a souls game”

Analysis:

Based on Online English Meme picture 11 is also categorized as figurative language, namely symbol. Symbolism is a kind of determine speech that uses images of animals, flowers, or things to substitute something. The sentence in the Online English Meme reads "when you get the boss weapon in a souls game" the word "**souls game**" refers to a game made by Fromsoftware called Dark Souls, in this game it is famous for the difficulty level of how game players play it. So the use of the symbol "**souls game**" not only refers to the Dark Souls game but also several games that have the same level of difficulty as the Dark Souls game. Just because the difficulty level of this game is very abnormal, so the Online English Meme depicts a doll carrying a sword, which means that this game even though a player gets a very good weapon from the game boss it will not guarantee the game to be easy, because no matter how great the weapon the player manages to get, it is the ability of the player that determines the smooth play.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the research above, there are many kinds of figurative language used in writing Online English Memes so that the researcher can use them as data in this study. The researcher managed to analyze Online English Memes on several provider sites on the internet including *Reddit*, *9GAG* and *Facebook*. The researcher found 23 figurative language data that can be used as a reference in this research based on Reaske's theory.

The researcher found 11 out of 15 types of figurative language, namely; 3 data of Alliteration, 1 data of Allusion, 3 data of Hyperbole, 3 data of Irony, 1 data of Metaphor, 3 data of Metonymy, 2 data of Personification, 1 data of Repetition, 2 data of Sarcasm, 2 data of Simile and 2 data of Symbol. In total, there are 23 data of Online English Memes that can be analyzed in this research.

The researcher will give an example of the common types of figurative language used in the data. First, Alliteration is a sentence in which some words have the same consonant in one sentence such as *shy, say, stay* which show repetition of the consonant /s/. Second, Irony is used to satirize someone such as "*Wisdom has been chasing you, but you have always been faster*". It explains someone that he is stupid but without offending him directly, the speaker told the Irony sentence. Third, hyperbole is a sentence used to express an exaggerated thing such as "*The popular kid telling a joke. Me who heard the joke 1 billion times already*". The sentence "heard the joke **1 billion** times", explains the phrase is only used to express how often someone hears a familiar joke or story. Fourth, Metonymy is an alternative to name, using one word for any other, such as "*Me seeing that **weebs** are no longer discriminated on r/meme*", there is a word "*weebs*" usually used as a substitute word for a community that is obsessed with Japanese culture.

The lowest data in the research were found for Repetition, Metaphor, and Allusion. The difficulty in applying these types of figurative language to meme objects and the free nature of memes are reasons why figurative language is rarely found in memes. In addition, creators who do not have a linguistic background tend to prefer using language styles that are easier to understand.

The researcher will give an example of the lowest types of figurative language used in the data. First, Repetition is a literary device that repeats the same word or phrase several times to make the idea clearer such as "You need therapy, and you need therapy, and you need it too! Everyone here needs therapy". There is a repetition of the phrase "you need therapy" in the sentence. This repetition is used as an emphasis

in the sentence, thus it is repeated several times to convince the readers. Second, Metaphor is figurative utterances that compare one thing to another directly such as, "*when your boss asks you to train the new coworker who has an IQ of a **potato***". The word "potato" as a replacement is often used when referring to something considered substandard or inferior. Third, Allusion is the process of referring to something else and a specific figure, event, etc such as, "*Fellas if your girls has social anxiety, is always evolving into higher life forms, and is in constant pain. That's not your girl that's **Shin Godzilla***". The word "Shin Godzilla" is a fictional character used as a parameter to mention several human traits that are present in the meme.

In the above study, the researcher found the most figurative language usage data are Alliteration, Irony, Hyperbole, and Metonymy which each have 3 data and the lowest data are Repetition, Metaphor, and Allusion which each only have 1 data. Several factors that determine the discovery of the most data by the researcher are, First, the ease of meme creators in applying figurative languages such as alliteration, irony, hyperbole, and metonymy in online English memes. Second, the level of readability for readers is quite high, making them quite popular on several provider sites. Third, the themes used can be more varied. On the other hand, some factors that determine the discovery of the lowest amount of data are, First, the lack of popularity of figurative language such as allusion, metaphor, and repetition on some provider sites. Second, figurative language allusion is rarely found because the mention of fictional characters is more often directly represented by meme objects rather than mentioned directly in the meme text. Third, figurative language repetition is less effective in meme media where the number of sentences is quite limited and to minimize excessive text. Fourth, the use of figurative language metaphor is very difficult. The creator must find an equivalent replacement word to be used, which of course, must be partially known to readers or already become common language.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the utilization of figurative language in online English memes is influenced by both the language proficiency of the meme creators and the flexibility of the figurative language in being understood by both meme creators and readers. Furthermore, the presence of memes also impacts the use of figurative language, as some figurative language is more commonly conveyed through meme objects rather than text (such as allusion, personification, etc.). Thus, the implementation of figurative language in memes is not only determined by the language proficiency of the meme creator, but also by the meme itself.

6. CONCLUSION

In this research, the researcher focused on Reaske's theory-based types of figurative language in online English memes from various websites (9GAG, Facebook, and Reddit). In the study, the researcher found 23 data of figurative language across 11 different types. The types with the highest number of instances were Alliteration, Hyperbole, Irony, and Metonymy, each with 3 data. Meanwhile, the types with the lowest number of instances were Allusion, Metaphor, and Repetition, each with only 1 data. Personification, Sarcasm, Simile, and Symbol had 2 data each. After analyzing the data on the types of figurative language and the reasons why creators of online English memes use figurative language, the researcher drew conclusions and provided suggestions. The study found that Alliteration, Hyperbole, Irony, and Metonymy were the most frequently used types of figurative language in online English memes. The reasons for using figurative language in memes included to create humor, express emotions, convey ideas, and grab attention. The researcher suggested that further studies could explore the impact of figurative language on the effectiveness and reception of online memes.

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