Conference Paper

Figurative Language and Messages in Poems About COVID-19

Sri Rezeki

Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), Medan, Indonesia

ORCID:
Ssri Rezeki: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8820-5040

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the types of figurative language used in poems about COVID-19 and to explain the messages of these poems. This research was conducted by using descriptive qualitative methods. The data were taken from five poems about COVID-19 on the Internet. The data were analyzed by using Leech's theory to identify the types of figurative language and Nurgiyantoro's theory to explain the meanings of the figurative language. There were eight types of figurative language found in the poems: metaphor (14.5 %), personification (13.3 %), simile (16.9%), hyperbole (13.3%), irony (8.5%), litotes (1.2%), metonymy (28.9%), and oxymoron (3.7%). The dominant type of figurative language used was therefore metonymy. There were two kinds of messages found, namely social messages and moral messages.

Keywords: Figurative Language, Poems, COVID-19.

Corresponding Author:
Sri Rezeki
kikirizki800@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Human and language cannot be separated each other; humans need language as a media to communicate and to express their feeling both spoken and written. Spoken communication can be expressed through conversation, speech, singing, debate, and so on. While some other people do not have a good way in speaking ability, then the written communication can be an alternative. Written language is categorized as a literary work commonly found in novel, newspaper, poem, and magazine, etc. This statement is supported by Gleason and Ratner (1998) stating that language is basic need to human existence and life without words is difficult to envision.

On 30th January 2020, WHO declared the Chinese outbreak of COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern posing a high risk to countries with vulnerable health systems (WHO, 2020). Pandemic Covid-19 gives a big effect of human interactions. All the people around the world should stay at home, to prevent

the spread of COVID-19; people do social distancing in society, and this restricts human social interaction in spoken communication, and nowadays people express their idea on written communication or literary work especially in poem. Poem is one of the media to present emotions, experience, and even account of Covid-19. This statement is supported by Cipollone and Vasishth (1998) stating that language communicates information about the world around us. Perrine (1982) then states that poetry is different from other kinds of writing as poetry is concrete and specific. Poetry shows experiences, emotions, attitudes, and proposition dealing with a particular situation or event that implicitly embodies abstract generalization.

The use of figurative language in the poem makes the poem more interesting and wonderful; the message will be transferred well to the reader. Figurative languages are important aspects in explaining the meaning of poems. Figurative language is a language with certain devices called figure of speech, most of which contain techniques to compare dissimilar objects and to achieve effects beyond the range of literal language. According to Sari (2018) many authors use figurative language to transfer their impressions about something in their literary works to give special effects and unique understanding in every sentence of their works, and according to Sumarno (2018) figurative language expresses an idea or experience vividly, forcefully, and briefly. Sometimes figurative language may seem even more direct than literal language because it helps the listener grasp important ideas immediately. Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this research is to find out the types of figurative language used in the poems about Covid-19 and to explain the message of the poems about Covid-19.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Poetry

Poem is known as a kind of literary work rather difficult to understand because a poem is creative art using a special language. A poem has words used as message to produce illusion and imagination. According to Perrine (1982) poetry is a kind of language that says something intensely with ordinary language. Poetry tries to exit our imagination. Like short stories and novels expressing truth, poetry expresses truth through imagination. The thought in poetry is not hidden, but we grasp it through imagination, which is often more pleasurable than that of reason.

2.2. Figurative Language

Leech (1969) classifies figurative language into eight types. The figurative language would be explained related to this study and it will be used in analyzing the findings. The eight types of figurative language are below:

2.2.1. Irony

Irony is one type of figurative language that declare the opposite meaning and contradiction with the fact. Etymologically, the word irony derives from Greek word *eironia* meaning deception or trick. There is some argument about what qualities are needed as ironic, but all senses of irony revolve around the perceived notion, an incongruity between what is said and what is meant, or between an understanding or expectation of a reality and what actually happens. For examples:

   - He still feels lonely in the crowded city

   - In this prison we are happy, actually.

2.2.2. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is expression of exaggeration used by a writer depicted as being better or worse, or larger or smaller. It deliberates overstatement not intended to be taken literally. It is used as a means of emphasizing the truth of the statement. It tells more than the truth about the size, number, or degree of something without intending to deceive. Etymologically, the word hyperbole derives from the Greek word. It is from two words: 'hyper' means 'over' and 'ballein' means 'to throw'. It may be used to evoke strong feeling or to create a strong impression, but it is rarely meant to be taken literally. For examples:

   - He loves her for thousand years

   - He was so hungry, he ate that whole cornfield for lunch.

2.2.3. Metaphor

Metaphor is a kind of figurative language, an implicit comparison in which two unlike objects are compared by identifying or substituting one with other. Metaphor is of a word or phrase denoting kind of idea or object in place of another word or phrase for the purpose of suggesting a likeness between the two. For examples:

- A view of a geode crystal is like the mind probing the universe.

- The stages of love are stepping stones to death.

2.2.4. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figurative language in which the name of one object or idea is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. Metonymy derives from Greek word 'meta' means 'to change' and only means 'name'. Metonymy is a change of name, the use of the one word for another, the use of an idea by means of terms involving association. Metonymy is a figure of speech that uses a concept closely related to the thing actually meant. Metonymy is figure of speech consisting of using the name of one thing for something else with which it is associated. For examples:

- I spent the night reading Shakespeare

- Hollywood (The American film industry)

2.2.5. Litotes

Litotes is a figure of speech making a certain statement directly. A speaker expresses it even more effectively, or achieves emphasis, by denying its opposite. By its nature, litotes is a form of understatement, always deliberating and with the intention of subtle emphasis. However, the interpretation of litotes can depend on context, including cultural context. In speech, it may also depend on intonation and emphasis. Using litotes appeals specifically to certain cultures including the northern Europeans and is popular with the British. It is a feature of Old English poetry and of the Icelandic sagas and a means of much stoical restraint. For examples:

- This tea is not hot

- It is not bad.

2.2.6. Simile

Simile is a kind of figurative language comparing two essentially unlike things. Simile expresses a direct comparison between things, which have one or more points in common and recognized by the words 'like' and 'as'. The word simile comes from the same Latin word 'simile' which means 'like'. For examples:

- Busy as a bee

- They fight like dogs and cats

- We ran as if to meet the star.

2.2.7. Personification

Personification consists of giving human characteristics to an object. Personification originally comes from Latin word 'persona' meaning 'person', 'actor' or 'mask' used in the theater meaning to make. Personification is representation of inanimate objects or abstract ideas as living beings. This can really affect the way the reader imagines things. This is used in children's books, poetry, and fictional literature.

For examples:

- My teddy bear gives me a hug

- The radio stopped singing and stared at me

- The sky was full of dancing stars.

2.2.8. Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms. Oxymoron appears in a variety of contexts, including inadvertent errors such as ground pilot and literary work crafted to reveal a paradox. The most common form of oxymoron involves an adjective-noun, combination of two words. For examples:

Merry and tragical! tedious and brief!

That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

How shall we find the concord of this discord?

2.3. Message

Nurgiyantoro (1995) states that message is a lesson which is delivered by the author to the readers about the main meaning of the literary work through a story. Based on that explanation, message means lesson that the author writes through his or her literary works. The writer writes message to influence the listener or the reader and hope they can be better after understanding the lesson implied by the message.

2.4. Kind of Message

Nurgiyantoro (1995) says that there are three kinds of message, they are:

1. Religous Message: based on interaction between God and human. It focuses on human characteristic, deep feeling, morality, and human freedom. This means that religious message is advice from God to human in this world.

2. Social Message is based on human interaction with social environment. Social message here means social critics because most of the contents are full of critics in social life.

3. Moral Message is the message that focuses on behavior, attitude, obligation and kindness in life to God, people and society.

3. Research Method

This study is conducted by applying descriptive qualitative research. According to Kothari (2004) qualitative approach in research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitude, opinion and behavior. The findings of this research are to find out the figurative language used in the five poems about Covid-19. The researcher uses the internet to search for the five poems then analyzes every poems while choosing the relevant theory and the previous research to support the analysis. The main theory used is the one proposed by Leech (1969).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Types of figurative language

Based on the analysis of the data, there are 83 sentences of figurative language in the poems about Covid-19 and the data are shown in the tables below:

In this part the researcher explains the sentences which contain the figurative language. The researcher only provides two sentences for each type of figurative language as the data representative to be described in this section. For Litotes, the researcher only gives one sentence because there is only one found. These figurative languages are listed and classified based on Leech's theory about the types of figurative language.

Types of figurative language	Frequency	Percentage
Irony	7	8,5%
Hyperbole	11	13,3%
Metaphor	12	14,5 %
Metonymy	24	28,9%
Litotes	1	1,2%
Simile	14	16,9%
Personification	11	13,3 %
Oxymoron	3	3,7%
Total	83	100 %

4.1.1. Irony

Irony expresses a meaning directly contrary to that suggested by the words.

"The human race shall always overcome," said Jommo Kenyatta

The sentence is categorized as Irony because it is contradictory to the reality. In this Covid-19 Pandemic situation humans still fight and struggle to face and find the best solution to find the vaccine of this disease to recover the people who have been infected by corona virus. The reality is human race shall not always overcome.

1. "You claim that your hands are clean, then sanitize"

It is irony because this statement is contrary to fact. It is impossible that humans hands are clean, in fact corona virus is transferred from our hands.

4.1.2. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech, an exaggeration. Such statements are not literally true, but people make them sound impressive to emphasize something, such as a feeling, effort, or reaction. Below are two sentences using hyperbole

1. "My presence brings fear and anarchy"

   Based on the meaning of the sentence, it is stated as hyperbole because the sentence emphasizes nowadays situation of the presence of Covid-19, a threat to human race. People's fear of corona virus causes the anarchy.

2. "Once they kill me, they forgot my wrath and once again I'll strike"

It is hyperbole because the meaning of the sentence represents the condition of Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing spread of the corona virus around the world.

4.1.3. Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech which makes an implicit or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some common characteristics.

1. "I am Stronger than Samson"

   The sentence is metaphor because the poet shows the Power of Covid-19 like Samson's power.

2. No authority is higher than me

The sentence is categorized as metaphor because the effect of Covid-19 is compared with the higher authority like the authority of a government in certain countries.

4.1.4. Metonymy

Metonymy is also the rhetorical strategy of describing something indirectly by referring to thing around it, such as describing someone's clothing to characterize the individual.

1. "Working from home using Face time or Zoom"

   The sentence is categorized as Metonymy because it describes the video conference using Zoom. To decrease the spread of Corona virus, the government asks the people to do everything from home through online platform. \

2. "milk, eggs and veggies we order online"

The sentence is stated as metonymy because the meaning of food is represented by milk, eggs and veggies, as we know that in this Covid-19 pandemic people prefer to buy their need by online.

4.1.5. Litotes

Litotes is figure of speech which employs an understatement by using double negatives or in other words, positive statement is expressed by negative, its opposite expressions.

1. "for the racism you show only strengthens me"

The sentence is litotes because the racism of human beings or the humans' greed will increase the spread of Corona virus.

4.1.6. Simile

Simile is a comparison that often uses the words like or as and it is a direct comparison between things, which are not similar in their essence particular.

"A cure to end the pandemic of Covid 19 Which has killed a many like Ebola did in 15"

The sentence above is simile because the disease of Covid-19 in 2019 is compared with the disease of Ebola which happened in 2015.

1. "Stay alert for like an assassin; you never know my target"

The sentence is simile because the Covid-19 is a murderer and people should be aware and stay alert of corona virus.

4.1.7. Personification

Personification is a kind of figure of speech that describes things like alive or having human characteristic. It shows an analogy to draw a thing as if a human.

1. "the earth began heal"

   The sentence is personification because it considers earth as an inanimate thing which can do human activity like healing someonel from the disease of Corona virus.

2. "the world that feels broken"

The sentence is personification because *the world* has human characteristic that is *Feel.* As we know that feeling is one of human characteristics.

4.1.8. Oxymoron

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms. Oxymoron appears in a variety of contexts, including inadvertent errors such as ground pilot and literary text crafted to reveal a paradox.

1. `the poor and the rich both feel my wrath"

   The sentence is oxymoron because in this sentences the writer combines *Poor* and Rich to explain the feeling.

2. "for I break the unbreakable"

The phrase is oxymoron because the Covid-19 will break all the things that we consider unbreakable such as economy and faith.

4.2. Message of the Five Poems

4.2.1. The first poem

The first poem describes the strength of Covid-19. The poem tells that Covid-19 is the real enemy so human beings around the world should work together to solve and break this outbreak. The first poem has social message which telsl about human interaction.

4.2.2. The second poem

The second poem describes human activity during the Pandemic. People do the activities from home and help each other to heal the world from corona virus. The second poem has moral message; it is about human behavior and attitude towards Covid-19.

4.2.3. The third poem

The third poem describes the comparison between situation before Covid-19 and after Covid-19, and reminds everyone to beware of Corona virus. And it is categorized as social message.

4.2.4. The fourth poem

The fourth poem represents hope for the cure of Covid-19, and the poem belongs to moral Message.

4.2.5. The fifth poem

The last poem entitled *Covid-19* written by Audrey Chuang, the poem describe about the terrible condition during Covid-19 and people should avoid Corona virus, and the poem has **Social message.**

5. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis above, the researcher find eighty three forms of figurative language in five poems namely irony, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, litotes, simile, personification and oxymoron. There are 7 forms of irony (8,5 %), 11 Hyperbole (13,3%), 12 metaphor (14,5%), 12 metonymy (28,9 %), 1 litotes (1,2 %), 14 simile (16,9%), 11 personification (13,3%), and 3 oxymoron (3,7 %) and the most dominant type used in Covid-19 poems is metonymy (28,9%). From the five poems about Covid-19, there are two kinds of message found namely social message and moral message.

References

[1] Cipollone, N., Keiser, S. H. and Vasisth, S. (1998). *Languages Files, Material for an Introduction to Language & Linguistic*. Ohio States: University press.

[2] Gleason, N. B. R. (1998). *Psycholinguistic*. New York: Wadsworth.

[3] Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.

[4] Leech, G. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. New York: Longman Inc.

[5] Nurgiyantoro, B. (1995). *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.

[6] Perrine, L. (1982). *Sound and Sense. An Introduction to Poetry*. New York: Harcourt Brave Jovanovich.

[7] Sari, Y., *et al*. (2018, April). Figurative Language used in the Lyrics of Ayu Ting-ting's Song. Presented at *1st Annual International Conference on Language and Literature*. Indonesia, Medan: Fakultas Sastra UISU, pp. 147-152.

[8] Sumarno, *et al*. (2018). Figurative Language in Evanescence's Album Anywhere but Home. Presented at *1st Annual International Conference on Language and Literature*. Indonesia, Medan: Fakultas Sastra UISU, pp. 433-441.

[9] World Health Organization. (2020). *Situation Report*. New York: WHO.