

Figure of Speech

Definition of Figure of Speech

A figure of speech is a phrase or word having different meanings than its literal meanings. It conveys meaning by identifying or comparing one thing to another, which has [connotation](#) or meaning familiar to the [audience](#). That is why it is helpful in creating vivid rhetorical effect.

Types of figures of Speech

There are many types of figures of speech. Here are a few of them with detailed descriptions:

Personification

It occurs when a writer gives human traits to non-human or inanimate objects. It is similar to metaphors and similes that also use [comparison](#) between two objects. For instance,

“Hadn’t she felt it in every touch of the sunshine, as its golden finger-tips pressed her lids open and wound their way through her hair?”

(“*The Mother’s Recompense*” by Edith Wharton)

In the above lines, the [speaker](#) is personifying sunshine as it has finger tips that wound their way into her hair. This is trait of using finger-tips in hair is a human one.

Understatement and Hyperbole

These two figures of speech are opposite to each other. [Hyperbole](#) uses extreme [exaggeration](#). It exaggerates to lay emphasis on a certain quality or feature. It stirs up emotions among the readers, these emotions could be about happiness, [romance](#), inspiration, laughter or sadness.

I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street."
("*As I Walked Out One Evening*" by W.H. Auden)

In this poem, Auden has used hyperbole to stress on how long his love his beloved would last. Just imagine when China and Africa would meet and can river jump up over the mountains? How salmon can be intelligent enough so that it could sing and evolve enough and walk the streets?

Whereas [understatement](#) uses less than whatever is intended, such as,

"You killed my family. And I don't like that kind of thing."

("*The Chosen One*" by Boon Collins and Rob Schneider)

In this line, the speaker is using an understatement because someone has killed his family and he is just taking it very normal like nothing serious has happened.

Simile

It is a type of comparison between things or objects by using "as" or "like."
See the following example:

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
My heart is like a rainbow shell...

("*A Birthday*" by Christina Rossetti)

Rossetti has used [simile](#) thrice in this part of the poem, comparing her

makes comparison of heart to a happy bird in a nest, an apple tree full with fruits and a beautiful shell in the sea, full of peace and joy.

Metaphor

[Metaphor](#) is comparing two unlike objects or things, which may have some common qualities.

Presentiment – is that long shadow – on the lawn –
Indicative that Suns go down –
The notice to the startled Grass
That Darkness – is about to pass –

(*“Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn”* by Emily Dickinson)

In this example, Dickinson presents presentiment as a shadow. Presentiment actually means anxiety or foreboding, which she calls a shadow. In fact, she makes compares it with shadow to provide a better description of anxiety that could creep up in a person’s life and cause fear.

Pun

Pun is the manipulation of words that have more than one meanings. It brings [humor](#) in an expression.

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,
And Will to boot, and Will in overplus;

(*“[Sonnet 135](#)”* by William Shakespeare)

See the use of odd grammar rule, which is the capitalization of word “Will.” Usually in the middle of a line or sentence, writers capitalize a name. Here it is the first name of Shakespeare. It means he has created pun of his own name.

Function of Figure of Speech

Figure of speech is not only used to embellish the language, but also cause a moment of excitement when reading. It is used equally in writing as well as in speech. It, in fact, provides emphasis, clarity or freshness to expression. Clarity, however, may sometimes suffer because a figure of speech introduces double meanings such as connotative and denotative meanings. It also strengthens the creative expression and description along with making the language more graphic, pointed and vivid.