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Original Research Article

**An Analysis of Figurative Language Elements upon an American Short Story, The Monkey's Paw**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article describes the study of semantic in a specified domain of figurative language upon a selected work of American English literature, in form of short story written by a renowned writer and author, William Wymark Jacobs, entitled as The Monkey's Paw. Several objectives were deduced by the researcher in quest of finding the forms of this figurative language within the passage. Briefly, figurative language itself is a feature of every languages, which emphasizes the use of expression to symbolize a different meaning from the usual literal interpretation. In our analysis of The Monkey's Paw, the varieties of figurative language: Metaphor, Personification, Hyperbole, Symbolism, also another terms used to represent unusual words construction or combination such as Onomatopoeia, Idiom, and even Imagery, were discussed in order in relation with true meaning discovery behind each figurative language property.

**Keywords:** figurative language; semantic study; American English literature

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**1. Introduction**

The study of figurative language, which is widely known as a branch of a bigger semantical discourse, refers to the contextual usage of speech's figure in creating a more efficient, purposeful, influential literal meaning of the words towards its readers or listeners. Merriam Webster's Encyclopaedia emphasizes that figurative language can emerges in multiple different forms by the help of distinctive literary and rhetorical strategies, reprinted as follow: understatement or emphasis, resemblance or relationship, figure of sounds, errors, or even verbal games. Meanwhile, Abrams (1996: pp. 96) also

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signifies that the figurative language itself is a noticeable disappearance from by what every language users recognize as standard meaning of words, in quest of achieving some special intended effect or meaning in delivering information. It is also worth noted that the use of figurative language heavily intersects with the study of literature instead of the regarded linguistic discipline. In this study, researchers took a theoretical concept of figurative language from two prominent linguists, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1994), in their book entitled "Understanding Figurative Language". It is worth noted that researcher also cited several experts' notions towards some of the aforementioned figurative elements. Figurative language, by all means, is also known as figure of speeches.

Metaphor became the most common kind of figurative language that we found almost every utterance in a language, though its usage is restricted by several prerequisite context such the existence of comparative expression towards two dissimilar things as emphasized by Davidson (2001).

Furthermore, there are also several prior studies experimenting upon the figurative language within the domain of English literature. One of the example is shown in the journal entitled "Figurative Language: 'Meaning' is More Often than Just a Sum of the Parts" proposed by collaboration of five students from University of Colorado (2008). Another is exemplified by a dissertation by Sakadolskis (2003) under the title of "The Use of Figurative Language in the Construction of Musical Meaning: A Case Study of Three Sixth Grade General Classes." Both also specifically concern with the expanse of English literature (and art) as the main headline. The first title, however, outlines the functional and neural base of figurative language over a combination of corpus analysis, theoretical work and experimental technique. While the second one investigates on how musical meaning is constructed by implementing the figurative language during the creation process. Both give impressions that figures of speeches are disparate towards any kind of discipline as long as it involves human and language sense within.

The writer of Monkey's Paw uses the figurative language as an attempt to convey his sense of artistry and emboldening the dreadful atmosphere portrayed within the passage of the short story. The short story itself revolves around a typical familial situation happened in the early of 20<sup>th</sup> century during the European industrial revolution era (or during the First World War). The story itself conveys a message of wisdom related with irresponsible deeds that interrupt the will fate. The author himself is an English author of

many comedic short stories and novels despite that his most praiseworthy masterpiece is his horror The Monkey's Paw (1910).

## 2. Method

Researcher are fully aware that within this case, a thorough textual analysis is the most favourable investigation approach by considering the task and medium of the research, compared to the other methodologies. The outcomes are expected to be generalizable, valid, and steadfast by scientific perspective. In order to conduct the research, researcher first will have to read the whole passage as an effort of 'figurative-language scanning' that later will ease researcher in identifying which types used and which are not. As a careful attempt, a second read by using extensive reading will do the work of optimizing the accuracy of the previous highlights. Then, researchers validate the reasoning in selecting the highlighted figurative languages with the existing theory from the previously mentioned major reference. In the end, the findings will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

During the investigation, researchers found some of figurative language elements within the short story. Later in this sub-chapter, researcher will describe in detail regarding on the reason in choosing the specified sentence, phrase, or even a word as the representative of the particular elements mentioned in the previous sub-chapter. In order to strengthen the finding, researcher will also cites the related expert along with their assertion regarding with the result, if necessary. Here is the detail:

Metaphor is a kind of speech figure that directly denotes one item of discussion by declaring another in aims of creating the pretentious effect. Data 1 until 3 below are the result of analysis of **metaphor** in Monkey's Paw:

Data 1 :

*"... a hush fell upon the ground. Such condition is impossible for an abstract (a serenity) entity to fall into something".*

From this metaphor the researchers can deduce that for a hush to fall is another way to express that a sudden silence is occurred prior to the previous background activity. The researchers found some metaphor in the Monkey's Paw. It can be seen in the first

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example above, the writer of Monkey's Paw use metaphor to emphasize the comparison between the silence and the activity happen before.

Data 2 :

*"...motioned his friend to the table. That is actually an expression and form of permission to let someone ask into the place".*

This metaphor Since it is obviously bizarre to motion (create a movement) towards animate object, specifically a human being (Sergeant-Major Morris). The second example shows that the comparison between the bizarre to motion towards animate object, which is human being.

Data 3 :

*"He was caught in the machinery,"*

In which the word caught, embodying a subtle yet tremendous symbolizing of what we perceive of its sadistic counterparts, as milled, minced and shredded to pieces. In this data, despite of this metaphor, Jacob puts a word 'mutilated son' into the story to strengthen what was meant as caught in this part. The writer of Monkey's Paw also use personification in delivering the message in the story. Here are the slight examples of **personification** found in the text (data 4-7).

Data 4 :

*"The words died away on his lips"*

Form this data, it can be seen that the specific traits of animate object, 'died' happened to be attached into 'words'. Such attempt is to deliver the bizarre oddity of muteness experienced by the character.

Data 5 :

*"...a guilty grin"*

The same as the previous analysis, an adjective of 'guilty' is attached with an inanimate object 'grin'. In another sense, this phrase also seemed to be related with another kind of figurative language.

Data 6 :

*"...stood a small copper kettle"*

From the data, as easily distinguished, stood is a past form of verb owned by living being. Just because a kettle is there, does not mean that it stands by its own will, so it is called personification.

Data 7 :

*"...t twisted in my hand like a snake."*

As vividly presented that it is certainly impossible for a mummified paw to twist someone's hand. Therefore, to support the dreary atmosphere, the author uses snake instead of many other movement from animate being. Simply to define, it is an attempt to attach personal characteristic and natures of animate or human being into something inhuman and to some extends inanimate objects. Cristina and Glucksberg (1994) also point that this kind of figurative language is an art of portrayal in which the aim is none other than to evoke reader or listener's emotion.

Sometimes in expressing the meaning thw writer also need to use **hyperbole**, the examples of hyperbole will be presented in data 8-10:

Data 8 :

*"...such sharp and unnecessary perils"*

The data above shows the figure of speech just now is used as an emphasizing on how futile an attempt could be, so it is one of the example of the use hyperbole in the story to emphasize meaning

Data 9 :

*"was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it"*

The hyperbole use in this statement means the emphasize in eager, keen, and somehow impatient feeling. The feeling is expressing more than usual. The purpose is to give the reader deep feeling about the writer feeling.

Data 10 :

*"balled Mr. White with sudden and unlooked-for-violence"*

From the data, the reader can see that this phrase is simply just another depiction of reaction or response deliverance. The sole point of having a hyperbole is none other than to create an extravagant sense of interpretation induced towards the reader or listener. This is also comes as an effort to magnify as well as minimize 'something' beyond the normal boundary as clarified by Claridge (2011). The amount of hyperbole in certain literary works sometimes depended onto the type of literary work an author working with, including with its unique characteristic. Genre such as humour and satire favours a lot of hyperbole over all figure of speeches. The researcher also found some example of imagery, as in data 11-14.



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Data 11 :

*"The night was cold and wet,"*

Form the data above the night was cold and wet, the reader can understand the the meaning of cold and wet represent our sense of feeling.

Data 12 :

*"...the blinds were drawn..."*

The statements of the blinds were drawn means that triggers our sense of touch that is also called as tactile imagery.

Data 13 :

*"...the fire burned brightly."*

The statement of the fire burned brightly have meaning which portray human's visual imagery.

Data 14 :

*"...stretched out his hand."*

The meaning of the statement of stretched out his hand is utilizes the sense of our perception. Imagery is the only element of figurative language, which has full authority of situational portrayal in every literary arts. This type utilizes the major senses of human being in bringing utterance into a liven condition. Jacobs indeed make use of this feature well in order to build up the suspense effect. There are many of imagery type found in the short story, which is supported by Provost (1988) theory of writing technique. The figure of speeches' type found as many as four **onomatopoeia**, mentioned in data 15-18.

Data 15 :

*"Tut, tut!"*

The specific word tut tut is such greeting identified as a mimicking sound of a steam trains, which obviously popular during author's age.

Data 16 :

*"...hush..."*

The word hush is as the replacement of the usual word of silence. It is also used to represents the sweeping sound of winds, gushing away the surface.

Data 17 :

*"Check!"*

The word check have similar sound of a chess pawns clashing against their board. Hence the name.

Data 18 :

*"A stair creaked"*

The meaning of the statement a stair creaked is such past form of verb is derived from the old wooden instrument, showing its old ages. The researchers found one idiom within the passage, which represented by the following example 19.

Data 19 :

*"Path's a bog, and the road's a torrent."*

This idiom represent on how worrisome someone against their own disappointment, as uttered by one of the speaker due to their surrounding living environment. Idiom is a kind of figurative language that consisted as a whole phrase or some even a sentence. It conveys a contextual meaning in a denotative-way of expressing an information as explained by Cacciari (2001). One discrete feature that separate both idiom and metaphor is under the concept of unit comparison. For which unlike the contrasting attempt in metaphor, idiom stands as a standalone expression where its meaning is not immediately recognisable.

The researcher found example of **alliteration** within the Monkey's Paw passage as in data 20-24:

Data 20 :

*"Of all the beastly, slushy..."*

From the Monkey's Paw short story, researchers found no specified meaning except for the rhyme play mentioned before. The same example in this data found below.

Data 21 :

*"and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard"*

This is also the same as the previous example. No hidden intended message but only a words play. Alliteration is a kind of word play that relies majorly into the head rhyme, initial rhyme or front rhyme. The researchers found a peculiar item suite with the theme and vibe brought upon the short story.

Data 22 :

*"A candle"*

Researchers deduce that the use of word 'candle' is intended by the author as a depiction of darkness and despair as happened throughout the whole story in three parts. Candle in positive perspective also represent the spark of hope as adapted in the 3 wishes within the short story.



Data 23 :

*"The fire"*

This elemental nature found in quite of repetitive parts within the story. Researchers presume that this kind of symbol was meant to portray the beginning of the catastrophe befall upon Herbert family.

Data 24 :

*"The Monkey's Paw"*

The hand of a mammal, identically clever enough, compared to the other animal. Hand also used to illustrates a desperate desire and greed in retrospect of negativism. As clearly defined within the story that finally, the family wished for something insensible. Some experts regard symbolism as an act of a singular representation of the whole work through a word or phrase that is often used repeatedly both conscious or unintendedly. There are also surprisingly numerous of other imagery found within the short story as discovered by the previous researcher. Among them are the number three which exemplified by the amount of wishes and the member of Herbert family. Then is also a chess game, which the author put it into highlight in the very opening of the story. Both contains each own meaningful message respectively, either by researcher or the author perspective itself. Kennedy (1979: pp. 187) stated that figurative language is a figure of speech that figurative language is a figure of speech that is another way to say something non-literally. Abrams (1999) said figure of speech is word that used in an inventive rather than in a usual sense in the same manner. Further, figurative language has explicit meaning. The major goal of the use of figurative language to create an exceptional feeling by making some type of interesting comparison. Also, figurative language can help audiences to get description about what is happening explicitly. Beside that figurative language o can help readers to convince the meaning of the Monkey's Paw.

#### **4. Conclusion**

After several examination upon the short story in regard with the actuality of figurative language, researchers hereby deduce that the work composed by the renowned literalist, Jacobs, indeed contains several attributes known as the items of figurative language within the study of semantic, as mentioned in the previous sub-chapters. These features indeed enrich the depth of the plot by involving human's imaginative and surrealistic sense of artistry through a supernatural and otherworldly phenomenon uttered

within the passage. Metaphor, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, onomatopoeia, idiom, and even imagery are identified occurred within the passage. It is none to be wondered since researchers are dealing with a renowned work of neo-renaissance poetry.

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