

# STUDENTS' FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN CREATIVE WRITING: A STUDY ON EFL WRITING IN STATE UNIVERSITY OF GORONTALO

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the tendency of English Department students to employ figurative language in creative writing. The study also delves into the generic structure of such language, aiming to understand the nuances within the creative writing produced by the students. Recognizing creative writing as a vital tool for comprehending language characteristics and fostering creativity, this research seeks to address students' challenges in composition arising from a lack of understanding and assumptions about its similarity to conventional writing. A preliminary study revealing insufficient creativity among English Department students in producing figurative language (Juliandini, 2013), this research adopts semantic analysis (Jackson, 2000) as the theoretical framework. Employing a qualitative method, the study analyzes creative writing from eight students. Componential analysis is employed to explore the deep structure of words, unraveling semantic interrelations between components to reveal meanings at the surface level. The results indicate a propensity among students to generate figurative language, with metaphor emerging most frequently in participants' creative writing. Simile, personification, and the less frequent hyperbole follow in occurrence. These findings contribute valuable insights into the creative writing abilities of English Department students, informing strategies to enhance their language proficiency and creative expression. The research underscores the significance of mastering creative writing skills as a means to enrich language capabilities and foster creativity among students.

**Keywords:** Figurative language, creative writing

## INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to analyze the English Department students' language dominant particularly the used of figurative language and non-figurative language in EFL creative writing. This research was conducted in State University of Gorontalo, Indonesia. It is inevitable to disregard the fact that creative writing playing a significant role as it affords the models of life that Morley (2007) divides it into imagination, passion and experience. In addition, it is also can be one of tools in order

to measure students' tendency in using language whether they tend to produce figurative language or non-figurative language.

Surprisingly, a contrary scholarly contribution in analyzing the EFL learners in producing figurative language conducted by Juliandini (2013) in State University of Gorontalo, Indonesia found that English Department students have insufficient creativity to produce figurative language. With major changes happening in the world of linguistics, many things changed or let us say

evolved with the developments that are taking place. Therefore, analyzing EFL students' language in creative writing is particularly important. It is beneficial to be aware if creative writing is developing the students' way in producing figurative language.

Based on the phenomenon above, then it is interesting to identify language dominant of English Department students, particularly the used of figurative language and non-figurative language in creative writing. Creative writing is one type of writing that is defined as the act of writing to express thoughts and feelings in the form of imaginative, spontaneous, and original (Gerrard, 1996).

For instance, to clarify this point, the following data are viewed below.

*"The rainbow is an arc of colored light in the sky caused by refraction of the sun's rays by rain"*

*"The rainbow is a promise in the sky".*  
(Reyes, 2012, p. 19)

At the data (1), the intention is to define what a rainbow is, whereas at the (2), the intention is to portray a veiled meaning or contains figurative language; metaphor. Thus, in the example (1), the communicative success is based on creating a certain description of a rainbow, each word in this context is very clear in terms of their linguistic feature or semantic meaning, whereas in the example (2), is contain the characteristic of literary language; figurative language, in this case, metaphor meaning, it can be seen from the correlation between the word rainbow and promise. Moreover, this is the focus of this study is to analyze English students' language, they are more likely to produce non-figurative language or figurative language.

Having semantic analysis as theoretical framework, English Department students' creative writing were deeply explored its generic structure and meaning that surrounding it by paying attention to the theory of figure of speech (Abrams, 1999), theory of componential analysis (Jackson and Nida, 1975), and theory of semantic role (Aarts, 2001), as well as the context in which it occurs. Following (Poedjosoedarmo, 2001), context associated with the word. The higher the frequency use of a word, the context also

tend in which it occurs or the more tendency for words to have meaning/significance of different.

This analysis showed how these pieces of creative writing created by the students allow them to create language, i.e., figurative and non-figurative language. As a result, the focus of the research was "what figurative language tend to be produced by EFL students in creative writing". Furthermore, this paper was point out that thematic/semantic role also needs to be examined in analyzing the meaning of figurative language and non-figurative language.

## METHOD

The method applied in this research was descriptive qualitative research. Like the other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be observed and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Rapley, 2007) as cited in Bowen. Documents contain text (words) and images have been recorded without a researcher's intervention. In addition, this research used document analysis as the instrument in collecting the data. The documents were gained from English Department students' creative writing in State University of Gorontalo, Indonesia who have GPA minimally 3.5 as the requirements. The unit of analysis of the study is the sentences from the students' creative writing. The research focuses on sentences that used the figurative language to be analyzed.

In qualitative methodology, the main focus is not on the number of participants, but on the depth and complexity of data that can be obtained from each participant. By selecting a relatively small number of participants, the authors aimed to pay intensive attention to the experiences and views of each individual, enabling us to detail and understand the nuances and variations that may emerge.

The authors believe that in qualitative research, significant value lies in the wealth of information that can be discovered through in-depth analysis of documents. It is hoped that,

through this approach, the authors can explore a deeper and more contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study, in line with the aim of qualitative research which considers meaning, context and social construction in the interpretation of results.

English Department students as the research participants were chosen because they already have talent and vocation of English language. It can be seen, by several requirements of being the participants of this research are they have passed some courses such as introduction to linguistics, introduction to literature, poetry out loud, cross cultural understanding, and writing skill subjects also they are students who have high GPA minimally 3.5. Therefore, the creative writing was used to know what figurative language tend to be produce by students. Moreover, the EFL students were asked to write maximally 500 words of writing. Besides, there is no specific topic was given to them. In fact, they free to choose their own topic as free writing so that it will be easy for them in order to produce their writing creatively. As Bernard (1981) acknowledges "Creative writing can be defined as free writing which means you can write about everything that you want to write and it is a creative language".

Additionally, creative writing is an object of the study as a source of data from documentation. In this study, creative writing was chosen not only because regarding the objectivity of this study is to analysis students' language in producing creative writing but also because there are no previous studies that use creative writing as an object of research.

Once the creative writing was read several times, the figure of speech, componential analysis and the semantic role as well as the context were applied in order to observe the language and the meanings that students was trying to express by their own language which will be categorized as figurative language or non-figurative language. There is likewise a strong relationship amongst language and context such that language can be understood as a tool for creating any meaning in this case, figurative meaning or non-figurative meaning.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research is aimed at observing what language tend to be produced by English Department students in creative writing. In addition, whether the English Department students are tending to produced figurative language or non- figurative language in creative writing, thus, the data from documents are processed and presented. Moreover, the students' creative writing consists of maximally 500 words, and it is analyzed by using the indicators of creative writing theory which is considered the aspects of originality, spontaneous, and imaginative. Therefore, from 8 participants, the authors found there were 6 participants' writing which are categorized as creative writing, 2 participants' writing were not categorized as creative writing because based on the indicators of creative writing their writing is not including as creative writing as well.

The analysis of the linguistic features in the form of word, phrase, clause or sentence of the students' creative writing is presented based on each type of the figure of speech. The data of this study were sorted out into word/lexeme according to their types of figures of speech on the first step. The analysis also presents the contextual meaning of figurative language and non-figurative language of each data. Furthermore, the data are sentences which are sorted out in the form of words or phrases to determine the keyword as a marker of figurative language and non-figurative language, the data are analyzed based on the linguistic features. Therefore, in analyzing the data, there will be a literal meaning and lexical meaning of each data. The lexical meaning of each data is based on the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th Edition. Oxford dictionary is used because the dictionary is eligible one to explain the lexical meaning of the words.

Going by (Abrams, 1999) classification of figurative language at first phase of analysis, this paper has found out that the types of figures of speech contained in the students' creative writing are metaphor, simile, personification and hyperbole. Based on the analysis, there are 23 data are categorized as figurative language found in participants'

creative writing and 6 data are categorized as non-figurative language.

Based on the results from documents, this study found 23 data are classified into 4 types of figurative language. 10 data are classified as metaphor, 7 data are classified as simile, 3 data are classified as personification, and 3 data are classified as hyperbole. Here are the complete findings:

### Metaphor

Abrams (1999, p.97) explained that metaphor is a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison. In the other words, metaphor is implied simile. It does not like the simile; state thing is like another or acts as another. It takes that for granted and proceed as if two things were one. There are some ways to identify the metaphor in the specific sense. The simplest way to is the use of copula be (is, am, are) and the metaphor is comparing two unlike things which become the same.

These are the data found on EFL students' creative writing. Each data (D) represents each participant (P).

- We are an analogy to a giant rock that holds the river flow in times of drought (D1.P1)
- This unrequited love is funny (D2.P2)
- I was blinded by the sun (D3.P2)
- She is an angel (D4.P3)
- Moonlight slowly penetrates the foliage of trees where I sit alone (D5.P4)
- Spruce roots become a witness where we sit together (D6.P4)
- Moonlight had been witness of my sadness, become a witness of my (D7.P4)
- Wisye's family lost their sunshine (D8.P5)
- I thought that the sky will always be blue (D9.P5)
- He is my superhero (D10.P6)

### Simile

Simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or "as".

- Love could carve out the moon just like what Will smith did in one of his movies (D11.P1)
- Called from someone this morning like a bomb in my heart (D12.P3)
- Everything that can delivered of her mind, that sometimes I think those are impossible, but she makes it like a magic (D13.P3)
- She takes care of me like a baby (D14.P3)
- If you see my eyes, like punched by somebody (D15.P3)
- Her new life in Gorontalo was like the air for her (D16.P5)
- Her mom was like the water (D17.P5)

### Personification

Personification is an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings.

- Love can create songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians (D18.P1)
- Love can help architects to constructs the best of monuments like Taj Mahal (D19.P1)
- The world does not want to see me in the dumps (D20.P4)

### Hyperbole

Hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility. It may be used either for serious or ironic.

- But honestly this lie cannot be covered it with my thousands false smile (D21.P4)
- He was able to make my eyes hypnotized (D22.P4)
- There is a real prince and made me fly to the sky with the gulls (D23.P4)

Additionally, there are 6 data found as **non-figurative language**:

Non-figurative language is not perceived as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole or other figurative language. The term of non-figurative language denotes the real/ actual meaning based on the context. According to Lyons (1984, p. 140) contextual meaning is the meaning of words according to the situations in which they are used. These

are non-figurative language found on EFL students' writing:

- I wanted to tell you that our friendship is torturing me! (D24.P2)
- Why can't our friendship turns into something sweeter like love relationship? This is a stupid question, so don't answer it (D25.P2)
- You know what would be makes my day? When you look me as someone that you loved (D26.P2)
- Someone who always make me laugh, like a best friend, I never feel worry about my study, my new clothes, new gadgets, money, or anything (D27.P3)
- Tell your mother that I was happy when she treated me like her daughter (D28.P5)

- She had any rights to choose what kind of way she will take just like me, Wisye was also in difficult situation, even more (D29.P3)

Following componential analysis theory proposed by (Jackson, 2000, Nida, 1975) as cited in Widyastuti (2010) the following analysis using two types of components such as common component and distinctive domain, it was found that not all of the data can be analyzed by using one type of component only, because, there are several data that need to be analyzed by using the distinctive domain. For example, to clarify this point.

Data: *"I was blinded by the sun."*

#### Componential analysis:

**Table 1.** Common component

<b>Data \ Component</b>	Human	Man	Woman	Boy	Girl	Nature
<b>Eyes</b>	+	+	+	+	+	-
<b>The Sun</b>	-	-	-	-	-	+

Based on the table, it clearly shown the difference between the word Eyes and the Sun. the difference can be viewed from [+] and [-] signs. The Eyes has the features [+

Human], [+ Man], [+ Woman], [+ Boy], [+ Girl], and [- Nature], whereas the word The Sun has the features [- Human], [- Man], [- Woman], [- Boy], [- Girl], and [+ Nature].

Data: *"Love can create songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians."*

#### Componential analysis:

**Table 2.** Distinctive domain/ features

<b>Data</b>	<b>Distinctive features</b>		
	Abstract noun	Feeling of affection	Sexual attraction
<b>Love</b>	+	+	+
<b>Creator</b>	-	-	-

On the table above, it shown there are three difference features between the word Love and Creator. The word Love has the features [+ abstract noun], [+ feeling of affection], and [+ sexual attraction] while the word Creator has all of [-] signs in those features. An appraisal of the use of figurative language and non-figurative language, by applying the theory of semantic role (Aarts, 2001), as the third phase of analyzing the data has revealed a number of things. First, it is hard to

determine whether the data categorize figurative language or not. Particularly in determining whether it classify into metaphor or personification. Otherwise, there is no difficulty found in categorizing hyperbole and simile. In order to do so, all of the data need deep analysis concerning the structure of its words. For instance,

#### Data I: Metaphor language

*"I was blinded by the sun."*

Lexically, the word eyes is defined as either of the two organs on the face that you see with, whereas, the word sun is the large bright yellow circular object that shines in the sky during the day, that gives us (human) light and heat, and around which the Earth moves.

Literally, sun is completely not eyes. The word sun is the ball of fire in the sky that the Earth goes around, and that gives human light and heat. Sun is for the most part gaseous, it is 90 million miles from the Earth. The common association of eyes is vision, shape, expression and color (it can be green, blue, brown, gray and hazel). The common association of sun is color, and the shape. From the explanation above, the authors know that the common ground (the similarities that can be shared) between two entities is the shape. The sun that is well known as source of energy and it is round shape that is similar to the shape of the eyes that is round.

Syntactically, the sentence above describes a situation in which something named the sun blinded a particular I. In this situation, The Sun is the agent and the I am the patient of the blinding event. This in turn means that in the case, a NP the Sun has the semantic role of agent (Agt), whereas the I have the semantic role of patient (pat). On the other hand, was blinded by serves as the predicate, the category is a VP (verb phrase) and its role is to explain condition both the subject and the object. Moreover, the sentence contains a metaphor.

Contextually, the word sun is the abstract noun is compared to the word eyes as the concrete noun. Implicitly, the Verb Phrase blinded by refers to a disease related to the eyes. In the context, the participant tried to compare the word sun and the eyes. The word eyes [Concrete noun] are implicitly compared with the word sun [Abstract noun] with the similar meaning that both words related to blindness. Both two entities are similar in certain ways. Literally, the sun is a source of light and life for man, the sun can also damage. The authors should not stare at the sun directly because light can blind our eyes. Based on the context that there is actually an implied meaning of the sentence I was blinded by the sun. The participant was symbolizing the sun to express the feelings felt by the

writer that she is actually too long keep her feelings to someone and it makes her get hurt and pain. She was blinded by the sun means the writer express that he (person who she loves most) is everything she see.

#### **Data II: Personification language**

“Love can create songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians.”

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 8th edition, the word love means a strong feeling of deep affection for somebody or something, especially a member of your family or a friend and the second definition is a strong feeling of affection for somebody that you are sexually attracted to, whereas the word creator means a person who has made someone or invented a particular thing. Creator is usually creating a masterpiece. The second definition of the word creator is defined as the God.

Literally, the word love means a strong feeling, meanwhile the word creator means someone who has the ability to create. Between the lexeme love and the lexeme creator have different mark. It can be viewed by the + and – sign of those component in the CA table above. The word love has the feature of [+Abstract noun], whereas the word creator has the feature of [-Abstract noun]. This sentence includes figurative language, because there are two different entities. The word love is totally not a creator. The participant used the personification to convey understanding about the presence of the love.

Syntactically, the sentence love can create songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians above, contains a personification argument. The word love serves as a subject, category as a noun (abstract noun), and has a role as an actor/agent (the initiator of an action). Songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians serves as the object, or a noun phrase (NP) category, and has a role as theme (the entity that is moved by the action). On the other hand, the transitive verb can create serves as the core or predicate, the category is a verb phrase (VP) and its role is to describe human activity. Moreover, the predicate deemphasizes the figurative language, in this case, personification.

Contextually, the sentence “Love can create songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians” in the data above contained the figurative language. The verb phrase ‘can create’ which, in this case, refers to creator. According to dictionary definitions, the most suitable meaning for the word creator is someone who invented a particular thing. The word love as the abstract noun is personified to the word creator as the concrete noun. The word love and the word creator are comparable in some respects. The word love is an abstract noun is spoken of though it were endowed with human feeling to the word creator because they share the certain points, which is able to create the masterpiece; implicitly in the context are songs out of pop singers and jazz musicians. In the context, the word love as an abstract noun covers human feelings, experience, and interests. However, the participant regards both “love” and “creator” has the same function. Seeing from the context, the participant considers both the word ‘love’ and the word ‘creator’ have the similar meaning. Hence, both words love and creator are two things that can be compared. Moreover, in this case, the participant tried to explain that most of song lyrics are the romanticized version, feelings, experiences, and interests of their life story; Creator, therefore expressing their ideas in a creative and beautiful way that people may also enjoy.

The both data above looks similar but not exactly the same. At first analyzing the data II, it could be categorized as metaphor language if the data is analyzed till the second phase of analysis (till componential analysis theory) only. In fact, by using the generic structure analysis in depth, the data then more closely categorize as personification language.

### **Data III: Simile language**

“Her mom was like the water.”

The data above is a simile as it shows direct comparison with the use of word comparison “like”. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 8th edition, the word mom is defined as a female parent of a child or animal. The word water means the clear colorless liquid that falls as rain, forms

lakes and rivers, and is necessary for life to exist.

Literally, the word mom is not the water. Mom is a human. Mom is not a liquid. Mom is addresses to a woman who is the perfect human being of God and water is a transparent, odorless, tasteless liquid, a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, H<sub>2</sub>O that all human needs. All animals and people need water in order to live. The participant tried to compare her mom to the water to convey understanding about what the character of the mom looks like. The comparison is shown by using the term ‘like’ in the clause. The water literally has several characteristics such as flexible, necessary for life. The word water such that its character resembles the word mom.

Syntactically, the clause her mom was like the water above, contains a simile form. The phrase her mom serves as a subject, category as a noun phrase (NP), and has a role as an actor/agent (the initiator of an action). The water serves as an object, or a noun phrase (NP) category, and has a role as theme (the entity that is moved by the action). On the other hand, the word was like serves as the core or predicate, the category is a verb phrase (VP) and its role is to describe a comparison explicitly. Moreover, the predicate deemphasizes the figurative language, in this case, simile.

Contextually, the clause “Her mom was like the water” is categorized as simile because the participant tried to figure her mom is like the water. The concrete noun mom is compared to the abstract noun water. The word “like” in the clause point out that the two entities is different. Human need the water because the water is necessary for their life just like she needs her mom; the person who is important for her life is like the water which is necessary for human life to exist. Through this simile, the participant wants to express the reader about her mom characters such as flexible, care, adjustability, lovely, and important for her life.

### **Data IV: Hyperbole language**

“But honestly this lie cannot be covered it with my thousands false smile.”

Based on the lexical meaning, the word smile is defined as the expression that you have on your face when you are happy, amused, etc. in which the corners of your mouth turn upwards. The word lie means a statement made by somebody knowing that it is not true. False is defined as not genuine, but make to look real to cheat people. Thousands means a large number. (Oxford Learner's Dictionary 8th edition)

Literally, people especially women on average their smiles 62 times a day. The smile has a power. A smile exudes confidence. When someone smiles it is assumed that his/her facial expression indicating pleasure, favor, or amusement. It is believed that when people smile, the corners of the mouth curve up and sometimes show their teeth. People smile when they are pleased or amused, or when they are being friendly. When woman smiles a study have shown that smile signals that the person who smiles is healthy, smart, and financially secure. The smile is especially of a given kind.

Syntactically, the sentence this lie cannot be covered it with my thousands false smile above, contains a hyperbole argument. The word this lie serves as a subject, category as a noun phrase and has a role as a source (the one from which motion proceeds) subject of cannot be covered. Thousands false smile serves as an object, or a noun phrase category, and has a role as a theme to exaggerate a fact. On the other hand, the transitive verb cannot be covered serves as the core or predicator, the category is verb and its role is to describe a condition/situation. Moreover, the noun phrase thousands false smile deemphasize the figurative language; hyperbole.

Contextually, the participant used this phrasal hyperbole thousands false smile to describe the writer's feeling. When the participant refers to thousands of things or people, in this case; smile, means that she is emphasizing that there are very many of the smile. This clause exaggerates the statement to emphasis the writer's feeling. The participant wants to show how her feeling because of someone's lie, someone has done to her that he lied and betrayed her and trying to remember of what has happened to her. It has an implicit meaning in the sentence that the participant's

intention is to tell the reader that she is now showing bitterness from that fake smile.

The use of figurative language by English Department students appears to be relevant to their intended creative writing. The examples provided suggest that students employ figurative language as a tool to enhance the expressiveness and impact of their narratives. By incorporating metaphors, similes, and personification, students contribute to a richer and more immersive creative experience, aligning with the goals of creative writing. While figurative language adds depth and creativity to writing, it may pose challenges if not used judiciously. Some students might encounter issues related to overuse, inconsistency, or improper application of figurative language, leading to confusion or detracting from the clarity of their narratives. It is crucial for students to strike a balance, ensuring that figurative language enhances rather than hinders the reader's understanding and engagement with the creative work.

In conclusion, the prevalence of figurative language in the creative writing of English Department students underscores its importance as a stylistic choice. While generally relevant and beneficial, lecturers may need to address potential pitfalls and guide students in mastering the art of employing figurative language effectively within the context of their creative writing endeavors.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the EFL students' creative writing, it can be seen that from 8 students, the participants were mostly used figurative language in their creative writing. The participants were mostly used figurative language in their creative writing in order to describe the situation and to describe the students' feelings. The results of this research prove that EFL students in English Department, State University of Gorontalo tend to produce Figurative language in creative writing. Therefore, it is essential to look into way of enhancing creativity level for students in producing figurative language since it was stated by previous research that EFL students in State University of Gorontalo have insufficient creativity to produce



figurative language. On the contrary, after applying creative writing it turn students tend to produce figurative language which directly means that EFL students has creativity in producing language, i.e., figurative language.

As previously mentioned, this paper aimed at discovering the English foreign language in creative writing. The findings of this study have several contributions and implications for English language lecturers and learners, as well as English Department of State University of Gorontalo, Indonesia.

Due to the significance of learners' language, whether they tend to produce figurative language or not, the findings of this study might be helpful in order to rebuild their creative thinking and creative writing skill. Paying attention to the real needs of the students, not every student in English Department wants to be a scientist, novelist or even teacher. Some have another passion. By getting more actively involved in doing creative writing activity in their class and integrating creative writing in the curriculum

or syllabus of writing subject, improving their creativity and imagination thinking skill, and so forth are among the suggestions put forth here. Therefore, in line with theoretical review and research result, creative writing is highly important to enhance students' language.

For English Department, since in English Department has 3 major subjects, namely, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics, so that it is better to integrated creative writing among the three majors. For instance, in Literature major particularly in poem subject, English Department students not only being asked to create a poem, but also, they need to understand their poem deeply linguistically to understand the meaning beyond. See that English Department students have different characteristics, some students are great in producing figurative language meanwhile the others are not. Further, this recommendation is under Department's discussion.

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