

An Analysis of Figurative Language in Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the figurative language found in Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech on January 20th, 2025. The aim of this study was to analyze the types of figurative languages and their meanings. The method of this study was descriptive qualitative. The source of data of this study was the inaugural speech of Donald Trump. The data analyzed in this study were the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences containing figurative language. The theory used in this study was M.H. Abrams figurative language theory, and pragmatic and expressive approach to describe the meaning. The finding of this study indicated that there were 23 figurative languages found in the speech. They were personification, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, simile and symbolism. Personification was the most frequent figurative language. This study showed that the figurative language used in the speech was to convey ideological messages, appeal emotionally to the audience, and build persuasive narratives. This study will possibly help to enrich learning and understanding of figurative language meaning especially in political discourse.

I. Introduction

Language is a means of communication and interaction. As a means of communication and interaction, the most important function of the language itself is a tool to communicate and interact to the other [1]. Without language, we cannot communicate and interact to other people in our daily life. The people don't merely use language to communicate in their daily life. Moreover, the people use language to convey their ideas, thoughts, feelings, expressions and cultural values both written and spoken. The written form of language is usually in form of book, email, newspaper, essay, and report. While, spoken form of language is commonly in form of speech, conversation, and interview.

Talking about language means talking about meaning. The branch of linguistics which talks about meaning is semantics. One of the part of semantics study is figurative language [2]. Figurative language is a style of language that uses different meanings from the basic meaning that can express interesting ideas by only using language that is usually used to explain something that doesn't make sense in order to get a more special meaning [3]. Figurative language is usually used in literature, such as song, poetry, and even prose (novel). The purpose of using figurative language in literature is to devote an artistic and aesthetic meaning of the literary work. As stated by Dancygier and Sweetser, figurative language is thought related to one aspect of what gives a text in expressing the idea in particular language and a poetic text-special aesthetic value [4]. By using figurative language, the writer can invite the readers to imagine in order to understand the meaning conveyed and build the storyline. Figurative language can also illustrate the meaning to be conveyed in a way that is easier to understand in language [5].

Figurative language is typically used in literary work to make the literary work sounds more beautiful. However, it is not only used in literature but also used in speech, particularly in making messages more engaging, polite, emotionally resonant, and easier for audiences to visualize and understand. Speech is the vocalized form of human communication involving the articulation of

words, sounds, and language to express thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions. It is a fundamental aspect of social interaction allowing individual to share information, persuade, or influence others. Based on its context, one of the types of the speech is political speech. Political speech is a specialized form of communication used in context of politics, governance, and public affairs. The politician uses speech as a strategic and persuasive practice in shaping public opinion, mobilizing support, and influencing policy outcomes. Among the many rhetorical tools employed by politician, figurative language, such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and irony, stands out for its capacity to simplify complex ideas, stir emotions, and forge connections with audiences. Through vivid imagery and symbolic expression, figurative language enhances the memorability and impact of political messages. The use of figurative language in speech is very important because through figurative language people will be able to express their intention with more style with beautiful language and clear so the listener will easily remember and understand the messages from the speech [6].

There are some experts postulate the theory about figurative language. According to Perrine, figurative language refers to figures of speech that go beyond the literal meanings of words to give them additional dimensions of meaning, emotion, and imagery figurative language is a figure of speech used to give words additional dimensions [7]. M.H Abrams defines figurative language as a conspicuous departure from what users of language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. From my viewpoint, figurative language is used to express ideas in more imaginative and impactful ways. It helps convey emotions, emphasize messages, and create vivid mental images that make language more engaging. Abrams in his book classifies several types of figurative languages. They are metaphors, personification, hyperbole, simile, paradox, allusion, irony, alliteration, metonymy, antithesis, synecdoche, allegory, symbolism, and onomatopoeia[8]. Metaphor is an implied comparison between two things.

Personification, in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings. Hyperbole is use to exaggerated terms for the purpose to emphasis or heightened effect. Abrams stated that hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility. Abrams stated that in simile, a comparison between two distinctly different thing is explicitly indicated by the word “like” or as”. A paradox is a statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes a good sense. Allusion is a reference, explicit or indirect to a person, place, or an event or to another literary work or passage.

Irony is a condition of using word in a way to convey the opposite meaning to the true meaning of the word. Alliteration is the repetition of a speech sound in a sequence of nearby. Metonymy is the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experiences. Antithesis is a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases or clauses that manifest parallelism – that is, a similar word order and structure in their syntax. Synecdoche is a part of something used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part.

An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the literal, or primary, level of signification and at the same time to signify second, correlated order of signification. Symbolism is only applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something or has a range of reference, beyond itself. Onomatopoeia is a word, or a combination of words, whose sound seems to resemble closely the sound it denotes.

Some studies have been conducted to analyze figurative language. Gunawan in his study investigated how figurative language features carry and influence the meaning in Blackpink-Selena Gomez's song Ice Cream. The findings showed that metaphor was the most frequent figurative language found in that song, followed by simile, hyperbole, and repetition [9]. Wijayana in his study which specified to one of the figurative language, hyperbole, investigated construction types and categories of hyperbolic expressions found in various Indonesian song lyrics, comprising the genres of “kroncong,” “dangdut,” and other popular songs. The findings revealed that hyperbole was constructed in either positive or negative sentences, metaphors, superlative, and serial adjectival constructions [10].

Saidah in her study analyzed the types and the functions of figurative language in the Four (Deluxe) album using theory of Johnson and Arp. The findings concluded that types of figurative language found in the album were hyperbole, simile, symbolic, personification, and allegory. Hyperbole was the most dominant one. The functions of figurative language found in the album were to provide imaginative pleasure, to talk a lot in a short compass, and to add emotional intensity [11]. Alfaruq in his study analyzed the figurative language in the the Prestige movie. The findings showed that there were seven categories of figurative language identified by the study's findings. Seven kinds of figurative languages were found, they were personification, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, and paradox. Hyperbole was the most frequent figurative language found in the study. The function of figurative language here was to deepen character development, reveal inner emotions, and enhance thematic expressions [12].

Beside in the literary works, the figurative language was also analyzed in political discourse. Rohaniyah analyzed certain figurative language, hyperbole and synecdoche, in Jokowi's political speeches in 2014 and 2015 live on Metro TV. She found 18 expressions in the two of Jokowi's speeches (APEC CEO SUMMIT 2014 and Asian-African Conference Commemoration 2015). In 2014 Jokowi used 11 figurative expressions from 5 expression in hyperbole and 6 expressions in synecdoche. In 2015, Jokowi less used figurative expression. The language that he used was mostly natural language. The figurative language he used in his political speech in 2015 only found 7 expressions; 3 expression of hyperbole and 4 expressions of synecdoche. The function of figurative language in her study was to exaggerate certain points or claims to emphasize political agendas, strengthen persuasive impact, and capture audience attention [13].

N.K Dewi et al analyzed the figurative language in Joe Biden's Inaugural Speech. The study found that there were 13 figurative languages used by Joe Biden. There were 6 types figurative language found in the speech consists of six metonym, one synecdoche, two simile, one epithet, two metaphor and one allusion. There were 26 meanings of the data consists of 13 contextual meanings of the data which the meanings based from the context where the language is used. And 13 lexical meanings of the data were the meanings found in online dictionary. The theory used in the study was Keraf's theory. The function of figurative language in their study was to inspire hope, unity, and resilience, which are key themes in Biden's message to the nation.

Juanda analyzed figurative language in Kamala Harris's victory as vice president election speech on BBC news. The figurative language found in the study was hyperbole, simile, personification and paradox. Hyperbole was the most frequent type of figurative language found in Kamala Harris's speech. The theory that he used in the study was Perrine theory. The function of the figurative language in his study was create emotional connections with the audience, fostering feelings of pride, motivation, and unity. Nainggolan et al investigated the figurative language in Joe Biden's victory speech. The study found the total 86 sentences that contain examples of figurative language on Joe Biden's victory speech. There are 5 types of figurative language used on Joe Biden's victory speech from 7 types of figurative language proposed by Leech. The [five](#) types of figurative languages used on Joe Biden's victory speech are metaphor, personification, hyperbole, simile, and litotes. Metaphor was the most frequent figurative language found in the study.

Figurative language in political discourse is less commonly analyzed than in the literary work. Considering the fact, that's why this study was conducted. This study analyzed the figurative language in Donald Trump's inaugural speech. As we know, Donald Trump has been inaugurated as the president of The USA for the second time on January 20th, 2025. Although the previous studies also analyzed the figurative language in the inaugural speech of a certain president or vice president of the USA, this study was different from the previous ones in case of the theory. The previous studies used Leech, Perrine and Keraf's theory while this study used M.H Abrams theory. M.H. Abrams is well known for categorizing literary theory into four main approaches in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953). They are Mimetic theory which focuses on the world/reality, Pragmatic theory which focuses on the effect on the audience, Expressive theory which focuses on the author/speaker, and Objective theory which focuses on the text itself. Although Abram's theory is typically used in literature, two of his four approaches, pragmatic and expressive, are strongly related to describe the function and meaning of figurative language in political speech. This point which makes this study different from the previous ones. So, the research questions of this study were what types of figurative

languages found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech as the 47th president of the USA on January 20th, 2025 and how are the function and meaning of figurative languages realized in the speech.

II. Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem [14]. While Bogdan and Biklen said that qualitative research is a research pictures rather than number. In other words, instead of measuring data with statistics, qualitative research presents data in the form of words, observations, field notes, interviews, or visual materials [15]. Descriptive research describes the object of research by making a description of a number of variables studied systematically. So, qualitative descriptive research is a research method that utilizes qualitative data and described descriptively. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research aimed to explore, understand, and interpreted people's experiences, behaviors, motivations, or social contexts in depth.

The source of data of this study was Donald Trump's inaugural speech as the 47th president of the USA on January 20th, 2025. The 2025 speech was chosen here because the speech addressed new issues or challenges that were not present in earlier speeches, such as economy, politic, foreign affairs and national security. The data of this study were words, phrases, clauses and sentences expressing figurative language uttered by Donald Trump in the inauguration ceremony. The main instrument in this study was the researcher himself since the researcher who conducted whole process of this study. To ensure the validity and realibility of this research, source triangulation was used. It involved different sources of information such as scripts, journal and video. The data were collected from Donald Trump's Inaugural Ceremony on Youtube [16]. The data collection was conducted in three steps. The first step was browsing Donald Trump's Inaugural Ceremony on Youtube. The second step was downloading the video. The last step was transcribing the video into written text.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used the data analysis model initiated by Miles and Huberman which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing [17]. The first step was data reduction. Data reduction means process of simplifying large and complex data so that later it is easy to understand and process. The second step was data presentation. It refers to compiling and displaying the data that has been reduced in a clear and structured form. The data presentation in this study was in form of table. The last step was conclusion drawing. After conducting the two previous steps, the conclusion of the analysis was drawn.

III. Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data, it was found that there were 23 figurative languages found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech. They were personification, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, simile and symbolism. The finding can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Figurative Language found in Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech

Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage
Personification	9	39,1
Hyperbole	5	21,8
Metaphor	4	17,3
Metonymy	2	8,7
Simile	2	8,7
Symbolism	1	4,4
Total	23	100

• Personification

Personification describes a thing that non-human is doing something that humanlike. The following is personification found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech

1. *A tide of change is sweeping the country,*
2. *Sunlight is pouring over the entire world,*
3. *America has the chance to seize this opportunity like never before.*
4. *The world is now witnessing in the United States of America.*
5. *Our country can no longer deliver basic services in times of emergency*
6. *We have a public health system that does not deliver in times of disaster*

7. *And we have **an education system** that **teaches** our children to be ashamed of themselves*
8. ***National unity** is now **returning** to America*
9. ***Our power** will **stop** all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent, and totally unpredictable.*

Data 1:

*“A **tide of change** is **sweeping** the country,”*

The clause above means that enormous change has hit throughout the country of the USA. The clause above is personification because the word **a tide of change** is a non-human object which is given human property **sweeping**. From the clause above, we can see that *a tide of change* does an activity (*sweeping*) as if it were human. From the pragmatic approach, the phrase “tide of change” triggers imagination and emotion, building optimism and engagement. It Aims to invite the audience to support or participate in the ongoing change. From the expressive approach, this clause conveys the spirit of a major ongoing change, depicting an atmosphere of enthusiasm and optimism.

Data 2:

*“**The world** is now **witnessing** in the United States of America.”*

The sentence above means that all the people around the world is paying much attention to the USA now because of the result of the presidential election. The word **the world** is an inanimate object that is given human property **witnessing**. From the sentence above, we can see that *witnessing* is human property because it uses the human perception, that is human eye, to conduct the activity. So, the sentence above belongs to the personification. From the pragmatic approach, this sentence functions to focus the audience and give the impression that what is happening is very significant. It also Implies that the actions or changes in the US are important not only domestically but also internationally. From the expressive approach, this sentence reflects the speaker’s feeling that something big and significant is happening in the United States. It also indicates that the event, Donald Trump’s inauguration, has global impact and attracts the world’s attention.

Data 3:

*“And we have **an education system** that **teaches** our children to be ashamed of themselves”*

The clause above means that the education system in the USA has not fulfill the academic expectation of its system. We can see from the clause above that is personification. The abstract noun **education system** is given the human property, **teaches**, which is strongly associated to a teacher (human). Although **education system** represents the teacher as the doer of the education system itself, it is still regarded as non-human object. From the pragmatic approach, this clause functions as a critique intended to mobilize the audience to pay attention to and possibly reject the current education system. The clause evokes emotional reactions, encouraging listeners to feel concerned and possibly support education reform. From the expressive approach, this clause conveys the speaker’s negative emotions toward a problematic education system. This clause also shows the speaker’s attitude of wanting to reveal what they perceive as the truth.

- **Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility. The following below is the hyperbole found in Donald Trump’s inaugural speech.

1. *I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our **250-year history**,*
2. *I was saved by God to **make America great again**.*
3. *we have something that no other manufacturing nation will ever have — **the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on earth** — and we are going to use it.*
4. *Americans pushed **thousands of miles** through a rugged land of untamed wilderness.*
5. *Rescued **millions from tyranny**, lifted **billions from poverty**, harnessed electricity, split the atom, launched mankind into the heavens,*

Data 4:

“I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our 250-year history,”

The clause above is hyperbole. From the clause, it can be seen that the utterance uttered by president Trump shows an exaggerated expression. From the utterance, president Trump feels as if he were the only president in **250-year history** who tested and challenged than any other presidents in the USA history. From the pragmatic approach, this clause is meant to evoke empathy from the public by showing that the speaker has faced extraordinary difficulties. It aims to influence public opinion, creates sympathy, justification, and a strong leadership image. From the expressive approach, this clause contains a very strong personal claim (“more than any president”). The speaker portrays themselves as a tough figure who has gone through many trials. This may reflect pride and self-defence.

Data 5:

*“Rescued **millions from tyranny**, lifted **billions from poverty**, harnessed electricity, split the atom, launched mankind into the heavens,”*

The clause above shows the exaggerated expression uttered by president Trump. The word **millions** and **billions** show the exaggerated expression. He uses this excessive expression to convince the Americans that he can make the America great again. Although the fact might have been proven in the history of the USA. From the pragmatic approach, it aims to reinforce public confidence, showing that we have succeeded in the past, so we can again in the future. The list of achievements is arranged to arouse feelings of pride in the audience. From the expressive approach, the clause reflects an optimistic view of history and human achievement. Donald Trump likely expresses the identity of their nation, as saviour of the world and pioneer of technology.

- **Metaphor**

Metaphor is an implied comparison between two things. The following below is the metaphor found in Donald Trump’s inaugural speech.

1. *For American citizens, **January 20th, 2025**, is **Liberation Day***
2. ***Today is Martin Luther King Day.***
3. ***Ambition is the lifeblood** of a great nation*
4. ***Americans are explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and pioneers.***

Data 6:

*“For American citizens, **January 20th, 2025**, is **Liberation Day**”*

The sentence above is metaphor. Two things which are compared are **January 20th, 2025** and **Liberation Day**. President Trump in his utterance tried to convince the American that by his re-election inaugurated on **January 20th, 2025**, it will bring the liberty for the USA. From the pragmatic approach, this sentence aims to influence public opinion, position a political event as a victory or liberation. By naming a date “Liberation Day,” the speaker creates an alternative historical narrative where a power change (Re-election of Donald Trump) is seen as a revolutionary moment. From the expressive approach, this phrase “Liberation Day” carries strong emotional charge, as if the speaker feels that the date marks the end of a dark period. This statement reflects the speaker’s subjective political belief that the regime or condition before that date was a form of dark period.

Data 7:

*“**Today is Martin Luther King Day.**”*

This sentence above is metaphor because it compares two things. They are **Today** and **Martin Luther King Day**. From this utterance, President Trump would like to convince that *today*, his inauguration day, is same to *Marthin Luther King Day* which brought the equality for black people in the USA. From the pragmatic approach, this sentence aims to inform and simultaneously remind the audience of the significance of the day. It also informs, reminds, and invites the audience to commemorate and honor this important day. From the expressive approach, it reflects the speaker’s awareness of the day’s importance as a moment of reflection, inspiration, and recognition of the history of struggle.

- **Metonymy**

Metonymy is the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experiences. The following below is the metonymy found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech.

1. *And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant **the Stars and Stripes** on the planet Mars.*
2. *They crossed deserts, scaled mountains, braved untold dangers, won the **Wild West***

Data 8:

*"And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant **the Stars and Stripes** on the planet Mars."*

This sentence above is metonymy. The phrase **the Stars and Stripes** is a thing that is associated to the national flag of the USA. **The Stars and Stripes** illustrates the flag of the US which consists of stars and red-white stripes. From the pragmatic approach, this sentence aims to stir nationalism and gain support for space programs or national policies. It also aims to motivate, evoke nationalism, and rally support for the country's major projects. From the expressive approach, this sentence radiates optimism and great ambition from the speaker, who wants to realize the nation's grand dreams and goals. The emphasis on the "Stars and Stripes" (the US flag) reinforces the speaker's national identity and pride.

- **Simile**

Simile is a comparison between two distinctly different thing is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or "as". The following below is the simile found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech.

1. ***Like in 2017**, we will again build the strongest military the world has ever seen.*
2. *Confidence and pride is soaring **like never before***

Data 9:

*"**Like in 2017**, we will again build the strongest military the world has ever seen."*

The sentence above shows the simile because it compares two things by using "like" or "as". In the utterance of president Trump above, he would like to compare the situation in 2017 with the situation where he is going to be the new president of the USA. He would like to express that in the coming year, the military force of the USA will be as strong as the military force in 2017. From the pragmatic approach, this sentence can be used as a strategy to gain political support, especially from groups prioritizing national security. It is also used to evoke confidence in the audience that the country will remain militarily strong. From the expressive approach, the reference to 2017 indicates pride in previous achievements. In this sentence, Donald Trump expresses ambition, pride in past military achievements, and determination to maintain strength.

- **Symbolism**

Symbolism is only applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something or has a range of reference, beyond itself. The following below is the analysis symbolism found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech.

Data 10:

*We will be a rich nation again and it is that **liquid gold** under our feet that will help to do it.*

The utterance above shows symbolism because the phrase **liquid gold** represents the natural resource, oil and gas, in the USA. As we know that gold is in solid form rather than liquid form. So, the **liquid gold** symbolizes crude oil which can bring prosperity to the USA. From the pragmatic approach, the phrase aims to convince the audience that prosperity will return, focusing on natural resources as the key factor. From the expressive approach, this sentence reflects the speaker's strong belief in the country's economic revival. It also shows the speaker's confident and ambitious attitude toward a better future.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that this study was similar to the previous studies in case of finding the types of figurative language. What makes this study different from the previous ones was to describe deeper meaning of the figurative languages by using pragmatic and expressive approach. The use of figurative language used in the political speech is strongly associated to convince people, shape public opinion, mobilize support, and influence policy outcomes.

IV. Conclusion

After conducting the whole process of analyzing data, it can be concluded that the figurative languages found in Donald Trump's inaugural speech were personification, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, simile and symbolism. The most frequent figurative language found in the speech was personification. From this study, it can be seen that the figurative language can also be found in the political speech although it is not as common as in the literary work. This study will possibly help to enrich learning and understanding of figurative language meaning especially in political discourse. This study can recommend the next researcher to conduct the study of figurative language in other forms of political discourse, such as political campaign and political debate.

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