

Figures of Speech

Xiaoling Chen¹, Haochun Qi²

¹Gansu Construction Vocational Technology College, Lanzhou 730050, Gansu, China.

²General Office of the People's Government of Gansu Province, Lanzhou 730050, Gansu, China.

Abstract: Rhetoric can be seen as the art of language and life, which can help us understand more easily, exactly and effectively. Besides, it can make our expressions more clear and vivid. In this paper, I mainly introduced such figures of speech in detail as simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, antonomasia, and synaesthesia.

Keywords: Rhetoric; Figures of Speech; Simile; Metaphor; Metonymy; Synecdoche; Personification; Antonomasia; Synaesthesia

Rhetoric is originally concerned with oral discourse, regarded as the art of oratory. Then it has begun to be associated with writing when the written forms had gradually become important in our daily life. Actually rhetoric can help us understand and accept more easily, exactly and effectively, what's more, it can make our expressions more clear. In a word we can see it as the art of language. In this paper, I will mainly introduce certain figures of speech, including simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, antonomasia, and synaesthesia.

1. Figures of speech

1.1 Simile

Simile derives from the Latin word, meaning "like". It is one of the commonest figures of speech in English. "Simile: A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, in such a way as to clarity and enhancement of an image. It is an explicit comparison." (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms*)

Thus the major function of simile is to connect what we are so familiar with unfamiliar to draw a rather clear picture in the mind through the comparison. And the commonest connectives used in simile are "like" and "as (··· as)". The expression of simile is "A is like B". Although simile actually makes a comparison, it is different from ordinary, literal comparison. Comparison can be made between both two like and substantially different elements, and simile is certainly the latter. Use some examples to illustrate:(1) Tom looks like his brother.(2) Tom and his brother as like as two peas.

The first sentence is comparison, which compares two like elements, Tom and his brother, while the second is exactly simile, because two totally different elements are compared, human beings and pears. More examples of simile, my love is like a red, red rose. (Robert Burns)

1.2 Metaphor

"A figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. The basic figure in poetry. A comparison is usually implicit; whereas in simile it is explicit". (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms*)

Metaphor is a kind of implicit comparison, which is implied rather than stated; simile is made with connectives as "like", "as (··· as)", "as if" and so on, while there are no connectives in metaphor. So the expression of metaphor is "A is B".

In fact, metaphor is a more higher and powerful form than simile, for it requires great ability to find out and show the relationship, especially the hidden association between two unlike elements. Therefore metaphor is also called a condensed or implied simile. The examples about metaphor:(1) You are my sunshine.(2) Learning is climbing up a mountain.

1.3 Metonymy

About the term metonymy, *Webster's New International Dictionary* defines "A figure of speech that consists in using the name of one thing for that of something else with which it is associated." It is actually a change of name, using the substitution of one name of one thing for that of another.

In fact, the use of metonymy is very common in our daily life. For example, White House actually represents the American government, Kremlin the Russian government, crown the royalty and pen writers. It is not difficult to see metonymy can express more briefly and effectively. Give some examples: (1) He has a good ear for music. (2) Those big noses, blue eyes and yellow hair taught you English.

1.4 Synecdoche

According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, synecdoche is "a figure of speech in which a part is used for a whole, an individual for a class, a material for a thing, or the reverse of any of these." At the first sight, synecdoche is similar to metonymy, but from the definitions, it is clear that the relationships in synecdoche are superior and hyponym, whereas there are no these relationships in metonymy. See the following instances:(1) They are short of hands at the harvest time. (2) The children were frightened by the cats in the zoo.

1.5 Personification

In *Webster's New World Dictionary*, personality is defined as "a figure of speech in which a thing, quality, or idea is represented as a person", which is to attribute human characteristics to impersonal things, such as animals, inanimate objects, and abstractions.

It is known that personality is usually and frequently used in children's books, especially in cartoon stories, where all the animals can speak, even inanimate things as trains and cars, to add vividness. Let's look at some examples:(1) Night is a great mother.(2) Her words were bitterly sarcastic.

1.6 Antonomasia

It is the replacement of a proper noun by a common noun, or a common noun by a proper noun to refer to a class or type, or one proper noun by another proper noun. Here the proper nouns usually used for common nouns are listed, mainly coming from the following sources: ① From the Bible or mythology: Eden — Paradise, Solomon — A wise man. ② From history: Caesar — Great man, Napoleon — Conqueror, ③ From literature: Uncle Tom — American, Holmes — A wise detective. More examples are given:(1) He is the Napoleon of crime. (2) He is a regular Sherlock Holmes.

1.7 Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia is defined as "the mixing of sensations; the concurrent appeal to more than one sense; the response through several senses to the stimulation of one" in *A Dictionary of Literary*.

There are five sensory modalities: vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell. In synaesthesia the combination of more than one sense are used to express what the speaker and writer want to. For example, a sweet voice, heavy silence and so on. More examples:(1) Soft music like a perfume and sweet light.(2) He gave me a sour look.

2. Conclusion

The figures of speech above share some qualities, but still differ from each other. They are widely used in our daily life, seen as a part of our language and life, so it would be a mistake to look them only as decorative devices. In Aristotle's opinion, rhetoric gives charm and distinction to what we virtually express; figures of speech do balance between the obvious and obscure.

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