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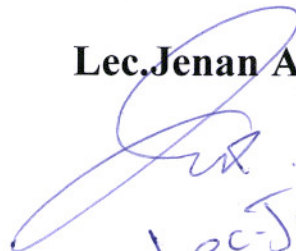
## **A Linguistic Analysis of Hyperbole**

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15.4.2018

**2018**

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

“ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ  
إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ”

صدق الله العلي العظيم

( 9 - الزمر )

**To**

**Our parents ... with love**

## Acknowledgements

We thank God for his help. As we show our gratitude to our supervisor **Lec.Jenan A. Muftin** for her advices and support.

Also we thank our friends for their encouragement.

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## *Abstract*

Hyperbole is an ever -present figure of speech in daily communication.. It over exaggerates the speaker's meaning through his / her intense feelings and sincere attitude towards the listener, and hence, it reflects the speaker's real intention. Simply speaking, hyperbole regards as a figure of speech . It means over exaggerated something by using words which makes those who listen or read hyperbolic - speech feeling astonished since it's being hard to be believed. It's used mostly in daily conversations and in poetic texts. Hyperbolic expressions have been discussed in informal everyday conversation and academic, writing.

The present paper consists of two chapters ; chapter one deals with some introductory remarks concerning this linguistic phenomenon like its definitions , feature and so forth . Chapter two sheds light on the most common realizations of hyperbole giving illustrative examples as possible .

The conclusions are summed up at the end of the paper .

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **" Literature Review "**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In the last two decades or so, that is from the 1980s and onwards, both linguistic semantics and other, related disciplines that deal with meaning and thinking have seen a steadily increasing interest in figurative language. More specifically, this interest has centered on the occurrence of words and formulations that have some kind of extended or transferred meaning (Alm-Arvius,2003:10).

Figurative language uses words deviating from their proper definitions in order to achieve a more complicated understanding or heightened effect. Figurative language is often achieved by presenting words in order for them to be equated, compared, or associated with other normally unrelated words or meanings. Literal usage confers meaning to words, in the sense of the meaning they have by themselves, outside any figure of speech. It maintains a consistent meaning regardless of the context, with the intended meaning corresponding exactly to the meaning of the individual words. Figurative use of language is the use of words or phrases that implies a non-literal meaning which does make sense or that could also be true (Ibid.).

A figure of speech expresses an idea, thought, or image with words which carry meanings beyond their literal ones. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by stimulating the imagination and evoking visual, sensual imagery; such language paints a mental picture in words (Coomaraswamy ,2007:1).

A Figure of Speech is where a word or words are used to create an effect, often where they do not have their original or literal meaning .If someone says that

they are 'starving', they do not mean that they are in fact dying of hunger, but that they are very hungry. This is a simple example of a figure of speech, where the word is used to heighten or increase the state that they are describing (Ibid.).

Figurative language can take multiple forms, such as simile or metaphor. Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia Of Literature says that figurative language can be classified in five categories: resemblance or relationship, emphasis or understatement, figures of sound, verbal games, and errors (Montgomery,2007:117).

Figurative language is language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation. When a writer uses literal language, he or she is simply stating the facts as they are. Figurative language, in comparison, uses exaggerations or alterations to make a particular linguistic point (Hardcastle and Beck,2005:8).

Figurative language is very common in poetry, but is also used in prose and nonfiction writing as well. There are many different types of figurative language. For example, it often includes the use of a specific type of word or word meaning:

Metaphor: A metaphor is a comparison made between things which are essentially not alike. One example of a metaphor would be to say

**1. Nobody invites Edward to parties because he is a wet blanket.**

Simile: A simile is like a metaphor and often uses the words like or as. One example of a simile would be to say,

**2- Jamie runs as fast as the wind.**



Personification: When something that is not human is given human-like qualities, this is known as personification (Ibid.).

An example of personification would be to say:

**3. The leaves danced in the wind on the cold October afternoon.**

Hyperbole: Exaggerating, often in a humorous way, to make a particular point is known as hyperbole. (Ibid.).

One of example of hyperbole would be to say:

**4. My eyes widened at the sight of the mile-high ice cream cones we were having for dessert.**

Symbolism: Symbolism occurs when a noun which has meaning in itself is used to represent something entirely different. One example of symbolism would be to use an image of the American flag to represent patriotism and a love for one's country.

Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. In rhetoric, it is also sometimes known as auxesis (lit. "growth"). In poetry and oratory, it emphasizes, evokes strong feelings, and creates strong impressions. As a figure of speech, it is usually not meant to be taken literally (McCarthy and Carter 2004: 152).

Hyperbole may also be used for instances of such exaggerations for emphasis or effect. Hyperboles are often used in casual speech as intensifiers, such as saying :

## **5. The bag weighed a ton.**

Hyperbole makes the point that the speaker found the bag to be extremely heavy, although it was nothing like a literal ton. Understanding hyperboles and their use in context can further one's ability to understand the messages being sent from the speaker. The use of hyperboles generally relays feelings or emotions from the speaker, or from those who the speaker may talk about. Hyperbole can be used in a form of humour, excitement, distress, and many other emotions, all depending on the context in which the speaker uses it (Ibid.).

Hyperbole is a figure of speech of bold exaggeration. It has a long history of study as a rhetorical figure of speech in written texts, and has been, since the time of ancient Greeks, one of many figures of speech discussed within the general framework of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in the ancient world, was associated with persuasive speech and the exercise of power, and centuries of treatises on eloquence and techniques of expression testify to this. Only relatively recently have pioneers such shifted the study of figurative rhetoric into the domain of common language. However, not a great amount of research exists into everyday spoken hyperbole, and much of the literature on hyperbole in spoken language is subsumed within studies of verbal irony and humour (Preminger, 1974: 359).

### **1.2 Hyperbole: Definition**

Hyperbole is a kind of 'structuring' of reality where there are competing realities; it can enable sharp focus on one account of reality and downplay rival account, and it brings the listeners into the perspective of the speaker in a powerful way. Although it may be heard as a counter to other claims to describe reality, or as

describing impossibilities, hyperbole is not heard as an act of lying. (McCarthy and Carter ,2004: 152)

Hyperbole is according to classical rhetoric, “a figure of speech of bold exaggeration”. It has a long history of study as a rhetorical figure of speech in written texts, and has been, since the time of ancient Greeks, one of many figures of speech discussed within the general framework of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in the ancient world, was associated with persuasive speech and the exercise of power, and centuries of treatises on eloquence and techniques of expression testify to this. (Preminger ,1974: 359).

Only relatively recently have pioneers such as Fontanier (1968:78) shifted the study of figurative rhetoric into the domain of common language. However, not a great amount of research exists into everyday spoken hyperbole (, and much of the literature on hyperbole in spoken language is subsumed within studies of verbal irony and humour. Hyperboles can be found in literature and oral communication. They would not be used in nonfiction works, like medical journals or research papers; but, they are perfect for fictional works, especially to add color to a character or humor to the story. Hyperboles are comparisons, like similes and metaphors, but are extravagant and even ridiculous. They are not meant to be taken literally.

Hyperbole is the use of obvious and deliberate exaggeration. Hyperbolic statements are often extravagant and not meant to be taken literally. These statements are used to create a strong impression and add emphasis. We use hyperbole frequently in everyday language, saying things like:

**6. I'm so hungry I could eat a cow, or**

**7. We had to wait forever for the bus.**

Hyperbole sometimes makes use simile or metaphor to create the effect of exaggeration, such as :

**8. He's as strong as an ox.** (Gibbs, 2000:321)

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**9. The bag weighed a ton.**

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Sacks et al. (1974: 702)say that hyperbole is a figurative language technique where exaggeration is used to create a strong effect. With hyperbole, the notion of the speaker is greatly exaggerated to emphasize the point. The word "hyperbole" is actually composed of two root words: "hyper" which means "over," and "bole" which means "to throw." So, etymologically, "hyperbole" translates roughly to "over throw" or "to throw over." True to its origins, hyperbole or language that is hyperbolic overstates a point or goes a bit too far. Here are examples of hyperbole:

**10 .That woman has no self-control.**

**11 .That was the easiest question in the world.**

**12. Nothing can bother him.**

**13 .I can smell pizza from a mile away.**

**14. I went home and made the biggest sandwich of all time.**

### **1.3 Features of Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is often used in day-to-day speech. For example, upon seeing your friend after a long absence, you may say, "I haven't seen you in a million years!" You and your friend both know that this is not literally the case. Here, hyperbole is used to emphasize how long it feels since you last saw your friend. It uses exaggeration to emphasize a certain characteristic of something, and especially how it feels. Hyperbole can be used to communicate all kinds of feelings and amuse or surprise people with the creativity of a description (Grice 1978: 125).

Hyperbole is used to communicate, images, emotions, and ideas in a more effective, way than through plain language. For example, an author might want to say that Mary lives in a large house. The reader knows that Mary lives in a big house, but that is all. No other context is given to explain how big the house is. Characteristics like size are often relative to the experiences of the reader and may not carefully portray what the author means (Winner 1988: vi).

Hyperbole is perhaps one of the most widely recognized forms of figurative language and one that permeates everyday life through the advertising and entertainment industries. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration for extra effect. The

author can use hyperbole to add extra drama or comedy to a situation or even for the purpose of propaganda (Langdon et al. 2002:23).

Hyperboles can joint easily with metaphors and similes to increase their effectiveness, although an author must be careful not to use common phrases at the risk of being cliché. Also, exaggerations are only effective if the extent of it is outlandishly wild, otherwise, there would be no hyperbole. Like all figures of speech, when used correctly and in the proper context, hyperboles can be used to better express an writer's intentions and meaning. (Recchia et al. ,2010: 255).

## CHAPTER TWO

### " Realizations of Hyperbole "

#### 2.1. Basic and Composite Hyperbole

Hyperbolic use of language is very frequent but has rarely been thought worthy of serious analytical attention. Hyperbole is usually treated as a minor trope which belongs with one or the other of the two dominant figurative uses of language, metaphor and irony. In this paper, we examine the range of ways in which hyperbole is manifested, in both its 'pure' uses and its prevalent co-occurrences with other tropes. (Cano,2009:25).

##### 2.1.1. Numerical Hyperbole

In this category one deals with expressions such as *millions, hundreds or thousands*, and their reciprocal singular forms, which contribute in a large degree to the creation of hyperbolic meaning. Expressions such as:

#### 15. I told you a million times.

Are good examples of the types of numerical expressions used in hyperboles, mainly dealing with expressions of time, amount, or quantity (Gibbs and O'Brien,1990:35).

A Famous example can be seen in the poem " Still Falls the rain "

#### 16. " Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails upon the cross"

These numbers do not refer to the nails which are instilled in the flesh of Jesus Christ , rather it refers to the beginning of the second world War. However, this

does not mean that it's not a symbolic number. It has a very deep and powerful meaning. As if the poet wants to say with every dead person , the nails increase in the flesh of the Redeemer (pbuh) . With every dead flower , the nails increase, with every drop of child tears , the nails increase.

It is doubtless that high and rounded-up numbers (e.g. *10000*) as well as smaller and more precise ones (e.g. *six*) are certainly found in hyperbole. However, the most striking and compelling numerals in the creation of exaggeration are the higher and rounder ones, especially multiples of hundreds, thousands, etc. which are simple to be recognized . Rounded-up figures are easier to process than specific figures, so that, they are more active in terms of their intended hyperbolic meaning (Ibid.).

That is, taking into account Sperber and Wilson's (1995:53) notes on relevance criteria, depended on the balance between processing effort and meaning effect, one can state that rounded-up figures are optimally relevant within the context of the creation of hyperbolic meaning effects. Whereas high numbers are frequently present in exaggerated expressions, hyperboles based on precise and low numbers are, contrastingly, less predictable than the formers. The example *I told you a million times* uses a high and round figure, *million*, which largely contributes to conveying speaker's annoyance.

McCarthy and Carter's study (2004: 179) reveals a list with the most common cases seen as hyperbole proneness: *dozens, zillions, millions, hundreds, thousands*, and *billions of*, and *a dozen, a million, a hundred, a thousand*. By and large, all these numeral expressions and expressions of quantity seem to produce very rich hyperboles.



### 2.1.2. Words of Hyperbolic Nature

Claridge (2011:66) explores words with hyperbolic nature. In the example

#### 17. She is allergic to everything.

The exaggerated content is found only in one word: *everything*, thus resulting in an example of extreme case formulation.

#### 18 . The mind of man is capable of anything. (p.5)

This is a quote taken from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It's said so because he means since the past and the present is found in the mind of man , so he's capable of doing anything , and that in fact has some sort of exaggeration which is our concern in this simple project

Regarding the hyperbolic nature of words, one can say that all lexical word categories are described as "hyperbole-prone", although the most commonly used ones are adjectives and nouns. In the case of nouns ,the use of words such as *loads* or *ages* is very significant. Their hyperbolic meaning requires whole sentences :

#### 19 .I ate loads of chocolate.

But the hyperbole is inherent only in the world itself.

As an alternative description of these words, one can take into account Claridge's (2011) classification of what she calls *universal quantifiers*, in which she includes quantifiers (e.g. *all*, *every*), pronouns (e.g. *everything*, *nothing*, *nobody*), and adverbs (e.g. *always*, *never*, *ever*). These categories work as hyperbole-prone, giving as a result in most cases extreme cases formulations ,e.g.

#### 20. She knows everything.

In the case of adjectives, examples such as *incredible* which expresses the idea that something is harder than usual to believe, or *endless*, used in cases of strengthening cases, contribute to the creation of hyperboles (Peter,2012:23).

An obvious example is found in the following ayah :

والشعراء يتبعهم الغاؤون \* الم تر انهم في كل واد يهيمون \* (الشعراء - 21-224-225)

In this example , the word (( يهيمون )) carries a meaning of hyperbole in its nature in which Allah describes the poets that they go deep without thinking .

Another example is taken from the poem "A Red, Red Rose" (By Robert Burns):

22- "As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in love am I;  
And I will love thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.  
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:  
O I will love thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run."

The poet Robert Burns gives many examples of hyperbole in this piece. The poet says that he would love his beloved until the seas are dried up, and the rocks are melted.

### 2.1.3. Comparison

Another common way of producing hyperbole is by means of comparison which can create very forceful exaggerations. It is necessary to note that there are

different ways of expressing comparison. One way to do this is through resembling metaphors, which exploit similarities between concepts ,e.g.

### 23. Her teeth are pearls.

Meaning that her teeth are white and bright like pearls). Regarding hyperbole, similarity can underlie exaggeration as in the case of *His nose is an elephant's trunk*, in which the size and shape of a person's nose is compared to an elephant's trunk which expresses exaggerated connotations (Grady, 1999:153).

Another method to construct hyperbolic comparisons is through the use of similes which in this case are considered grammatical structures marked *by* as or *like*, and in which we map only the similarities of two different concepts; as in the following verse in Quadama Poem :

وأقبح من قرد وابخل بالقرى      من الكلب وهو غرثان اعجف-24

Here , the poet made a sort of comparison between who is being dispraised and the a monkey in his ugliness; and between the dog in his non-generosity describing him ( غرثان اعجف ) which means ( the very slim and hungry )

Within this category, as commented before, a wide range of idiomatic similes are found, due to some similes containing a hyperbolic ingredient is found, such as *as strong as an ox*, *as crazy as a goat*, or *as easy as ABC* (Veale, 2012:41).

An example taken from Shakespeare's " Macbeth " Act II, Scene II:

### 25- "Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red."

Macbeth, the tragic hero, feels the unbearable prick of his conscience after killing the king. He regrets his sin, and believes that even the oceans of the greatest magnitude cannot wash the blood of the king off his hands. We can see the effective use of hyperboles in the given lines.

## 2.2.Hyperboles in Conversations

In order to enhance reliability, the criterion for labeling hyperbole was also adopted from McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study. Hyperboles in the conversations, therefore, must display at least three of the following characteristics (pp.162-163)

**1- Disjunction with context:**the speaker's utterance seems at odds with the general context.

**24-She is going to die of embarrassment**

Actually this does not mean that her heart will stop because of that situation . However , using hyperbole here is to focus how embarrassed she feels .

**2- .Shifts in footing:** there is evidence (e.g. discourse marking) that a shift in footing is occurring to a conversational frame where impossible worlds or plainly counterfactual claims may appropriately occur.

**3- Counter factuality not perceived as a lie:**the listener accepts without challenge a statement which is obviously counterfactual.

**4- Impossible worlds:** speaker and listener between them engage in the construction of fictitious worlds where impossible, exaggerated events take place. For example :

**25- Spring break will never come**

Here , it feels as if time has slowed down and vacation will never come . We know this is not true but we use hyperbole to contact how things feel to us.

**5- Listener take-up:** the listener reacts with supportive behavior such as laughter or assenting back-channel markers and/or contributes further to the counter factuality, impossibility, contextual disjunction, etc.

**6- Extreme case formulations and intensification:** the assertion is expressed in the most extreme way (e.g. adjectives such as endless, massive) and/or extreme intensifiers such as nearly, totally are used. These are not necessarily counterfactuals or absurd worlds, as many may be heard as (semi-) conventional metaphor as in the following extract from Dicken's *Hard Times*

**" You have been so careful of me that I never had a child's heart.**

**You have trained me so well that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, Father ,from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear .Mr. Gradgrind was quite moved by his success, and by this testimony to it. " My dear Louisa," said he, you abundantly repay my care. Kiss me, my dear girl." (p.134)**

Here ,Mr. Gradgrind prevented his children from being a real normal children by following up a restricted educational system with them . He thought that he's in the safe and natural path of growing children up but it seems that he's literally broken them down. The exaggeration is found in the harsh way of education. Taking care of children does not mean prevent them from life or prevent them from making mistakes

**7- Relevant interpretability:**the trope is interpretable as relevant to the speech act being performed, and is interpreted as figurative within its context,

though there may also be evidence of literal interpretations being exploited for interactive/affective purposes.

### **2.3. Functions of Hyperboles**

As our concern , the present paper deals the application and the significance of hyperboles in literature . It is used to evoke strong feelings or emphasize a point . It can be used to exaggerate any situation or emotion humorously and even seriously. Hyperbole is commonly used in poetry to make comparisons and describe things in more embellished terms ; as well it can be used in plays and prose for the same rhetorical purposes. It is said that hyperbole has very serious implications in literature in which the writer or the poet makes common human feelings remarkable and intense to such an extent that they do not remain ordinary (Veale, 2012:66).

Using hyperboles in literature develops contrasts , when one thing is described with an overstatement and the other thing presented seriously , a strong contrast will be noted ; this is used to attract the reader's attention .

By the same token , hyperboles can be used in conversations to create an amusing effect , or to emphasize the meaning required. ( Ibid.)

Hyperbole adds excitement and fun where a boring story can come to life or become comical with the use of hyperboles . It can create some sort of entertainment and fun . Hyperboles are ridiculous and are not meant to be taken literary.

## CONCLUSIONS

Hyperbole is a term in rhetoric for exaggeration or overstatement, usually deliberate and not meant to be taken (too) literally. Everyday idioms are often hyperbolic: *a flood of tears, loads of room, tons of money, waiting for ages, as old as the hills, having the time of one's life*. Their purpose is effect and emphasis, but frequency of use diminishes their impact.. Language is used as a medium of persuasion and progression on one hand, and a medium of uproar, anarchy and retrogression on another hand. Figures of speech are combinations of words whose meaning cannot be determined by examination of the meanings of the words that make it up.

This paper focuses on hyperbole, a long neglected form of non-literal language despite its pervasiveness in everyday speech. It addresses the production process of exaggeration, since a crucial limitation in figurative language theories is the production and usage of figures of speech, probably due to the intensive research effort on their comprehension. In our daily conversation, we use hyperbole to create an amusing effect, or to emphasize our meaning. However, in literature it has very serious implications. By using hyperbole, a writer or a poet makes common human feelings remarkable and intense to such an extent that they do not remain ordinary. In literature, usage of hyperbole develops contrasts. When one thing is described with an over-statement, and the other thing is presented normally, a striking contrast is developed. This technique is employed to catch the reader's attention.

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