
UNIT 22 FIGURES OF SPEECH-I

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22.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss some major figures of speech that characterise literary texts. Common, everyday language also presents instances of the use of these figures of speech, but literature (being a creative manipulation of language) is marked by such uses for producing greater effect and providing aesthetic pleasure. Some of these figures of speech that are used as literary devices are:

- simile,
- metaphor,
- synecdoche,
- metonymy, and
- personification.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

A figure of speech is an expression that is generally not a part of common, ordinary language, but a marked feature of literary pieces. Figures of speech represent the use of words in ways different from their ordinary, literal use, and are employed by creative writers to produce figurative meaning, thus lending verve, vivacity and force to their writings. In this unit we shall discuss some of the more frequently used figures of speech.

22.2 SIMILE

A simile is an expression in which we make a comparison between two things to present an effective word-picture, and use such words as *like* and *as*.

Example

When the white feet of the baby beat across the grass,
The little white feet nod like white flowers in a wind,

They poise and run like puffs of wind that pass
 Over water where the weeds are thinned.
 (From D.H. Lawrence: 'Baby Running Barefoot')

Glossary

beat (verb): hit (the grass)

nod: bend forward and down

poise: keep steady

puff: a short quick movement of air

weeds: wild plants growing where they are not wanted

In the above example the baby's feet are compared to flowers bending forward and to puffs of wind blowing over water .

Check Your Progress 1

Read the whole of the poem 'Baby Running Barefoot' by D.H. Lawrence given below and try to answer the questions given at the end.

When the white feet of the baby beat across the grass
 The little white feet nod like white flowers in a wind,
 They poise and run like puffs of wind that pass
 Over water where the weeds are thinned.

And the sight of their white playing in the grass
 Is winsome as a robin's song, so fluttering;
 Or like two butterflies that settle on a glass
 Cup for a moment, soft little wing-beats uttering.

And I wish that the baby would tack across here to me
 Like a wind-shadow running on a pond, so she could stand
 With two little bare white feet upon my knee
 And I could feel her feet in either hand.

Cool as syringa buds in morning hours,
 Or firm and silken as young peony flowers.

Glossary

'winsome': attractive in appearance

'fluttering': moving in a quick, irregular way

tack: change its course

syringa: lilac, a shrub with fragrant pale pinkish-violet, or white flowers

'peony': a plant with red, pink or white flowers

1 What is the picture that comes to your mind when you read the poem?

22.3 METAPHOR

We have already discussed metaphor in Block 1, Units 1-2. It is a figure of speech in which we use a name or a descriptive term or phrase for an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Whereas in a simile there is a direct comparison, a metaphor suggests a comparison between two things not usually thought of as similar. We can say about a person that her absence was like a long winter. This would be a simile, but if we say that his greeting was 'lacking in warmth', or that 'it was a wintry greeting' this would be a metaphor.

Other examples of metaphor:

- i) The river snakes its way through the mountains.
- ii) The ripe pumpkins were golden idols among the corn stalks.
- iii) On their shining tracks the waiting diesel engines purred softly.

In the above examples, one thing is described as if it were something else. The river winds through the mountains as if it were a snake, the pumpkins were golden idols, and the diesel engines purred as if they were kittens.

22.3.1 Extended Metaphor

Once you can recognise metaphors, you will be able to appreciate their effectiveness in language. Sometimes a writer continues a metaphor over an entire poem or any other piece of writing. This is called an extended metaphor. Extended metaphors are often easier to recognise because they continue over a longer stretch of writing.

Example

I remember once, as a kid, lying on my back watching clouds. Row upon row of factory-perfect models drifted along the assembly line. There went a schooner, flag flying –, and look, a snapping toy poodle with the most absurd cut! Next came chilly Greenland, with Labrador much too close for comfort. But the banana split was the best one of all.

(Reprinted from *The Language Arts Handbook*, Alberta Correspondence School.)

Glossary

'schooner: a fast sailing ship with at least two masts

'poodle: a kind of pet dog, with thick curly hair which is often clipped into a pattern

'labrador: a dog with a broad head and chest

ba'nana 'split: a sweet dish of split banana, ice cream, etc.

In the example quoted above the writer uses a series of metaphors to form word pictures of various shapes of clouds floating overhead. The words may differ in range and meaning, but they all describe clouds. We find that with the help of word pictures the writer makes the scene vivid for us.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 List the objects with which the clouds are compared in the passage given above.

- 2 i) Read the following sentence and say whether it is an example of extended metaphor.

"His face was webbed: in fact, the wrinkles were so dense that it seemed all expression was caught in a net."

(from Sharon R. Curtin: *The Oxford Guide to Writing: A Rhetoric Handbook for College-Students*)

- ii) 'Webbed' here is used in the sense of being like a spider's web of woven threads and not in the sense of the webbed feet of a duck. What does 'webbed face' mean?

22.3.2 Mixed Metaphor

Occasionally a writer combines two metaphors which do not normally go together. This is called a mixed metaphor.

Example

Most of those at the gathering were friends and co-workers who had toiled in the constituency vineyards trying to harvest votes in campaigns of yesteryears. To them, Dalton Camp was a comrade in the trenches, sharing in victory, commiserating in defeat, and ready when called on.

Glossary

con'stituency: a town or area which elects someone to represent it in parliament

trenches: long narrow channels dug in the ground for defensive purposes

In the example quoted above the political friends trying to gather votes are first described as harvesters collecting grapes and then as soldiers fighting in the trenches, though harvesters and soldiers have nothing in common. Compare this example with the one under 'extended metaphor' in Exercise 2(1) under Check Your Progress 3, where an old man's face was described as a spider's web, and wrinkles as part of that net. There the words *web* and *net* had related meanings.

You can find another example of mixed metaphor in the following:

When I graduate, I hope to become a well-oiled cog in the beehive of industry.

Here a 'well-oiled cog', which is associated with machinery, does not go with 'beehive'.

A very good example of mixed metaphor is to be found in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' where the hero wonders:

"To be, or, not to be – that is the question;
whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and allows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them”

Here the speaker begins by referring to the 'slings and arrows' of fortune (using the metaphor of bows and arrows) and ends by talking of a "a sea of troubles" (the metaphor of waves of the sea) – both within the same interrogative sentence, signifying his dilemma.

Check Your Progress 4

Point out the similes and metaphors in the following passages:

- i) Never seek to tell thy love
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind does move silently, invisibly,

(Blake: '*Never Seek to Tell Thy Love*')

- ii) As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself;

(W. Wordsworth: '*Resolution and Independence*')

Glossary

couched: reclining as if on a couch (used only in literary writing)

e'spy: happen to see,

'thither: to that place (old use)

en'dued: provided (with)

re'poses: rests (used in formal writing)

- iii) The peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the name of God a hundred times.

(Nissim Ezekiel: '*Night of the Scorpion*')

- iv) The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him.
(Stephen Crane: *The Red Badge of Courage*)

- v) He feels a "pestered animal", a well-meaning cow worried by dogs.
(Stephen Crane: *The Red Badge of Courage*)

22.4 SYNECDOCHE

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part of an object refers to the whole, or the whole to a part.

Examples

Has Mike got wheels? (meaning a car, a motorcycle or a bicycle)

Look at that skirt! (meaning a woman)

Can you spare your wallet? (meaning some money from your wallet)

He is skilled at twisting another person's arm. (coercing him by moral pressure)

Check Your Progress 5

1. Read the following poem and answer the questions given below:

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? 4

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire? 8

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? And what dread feet? 12

What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp? 16

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee? 20

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
(William Blake: 'Tiger') 24

- i) What does the phrase 'immortal hand or eye' refer to?

- ii) In what lines is God shown as almost wrestling with the Tiger while shaping it?

- 2 Read the following passage and answer the question given below:

Oh, when this my dust surrenders
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again,
May these loved and loving faces
Please other men!

(de la Mare: 'Farewell')

What do 'hand', 'foot' and 'lip' stand for?

22.5 METONYMY

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of an attribute or adjunct is substituted for that of the thing meant.

Examples

I enjoy reading *Shakespeare*. (his plays)

A minister of the *Crown*. (the king)

Please clean the *brass*. (things made of brass)

My friend plays *Beethoven* beautifully. (his music)

The *Oval Room* was the source of the Watergate. (Office of the President of U.S.A., which is oval in shape).

Check Your Progress 6

- 1 Read the following passage and answer the question given below:

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.
(Tennyson: '*Crossing the Bar*')

What does 'My Pilot' refer to?

- 2 Read the following lines from Robert Graves' poem 'The Naked And the Nude' and identify metonymy.

Lovers without reproach will gaze on bodies naked and ablaze;
The Hippocratic eye will see nakedness, anatomy;.....

Glossary

'hippo'cratic 'eye: the eye of a doctor

a'natomy: the structure of animal and human bodies.

Personification is the giving of human characteristics, powers or feelings to inanimate (non-living) objects or abstract qualities. In personification, as in metaphor, a comparison is implied. The purpose of personification, like that of metaphor, is to make the description vivid.

Example

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motion lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late schoolboys and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

(John Donne: 'The Sun Rising')

Glossary

motion: movement

saucy: rude, disrespectful

pe'dantic: showing too much insistence on formal rules

wretch: a rogue (in playful expressions)

chide: scold

'prentices: apprentices, persons under an agreement to serve somebody for low wages in order to learn that person's skill.

In 'The Sun Rising', the sun is talked of as an old fool who gets up early to sneak through windows to wake up lovers, who obviously do not like to be disturbed. He is asked to chide other people like the schoolboys who will get late for school. The picture we get is that of an elderly person in the family asking everybody to rush to work. The sun might as well wake up the ants (here means peasants) in the fields so that they may resume their work of gathering harvest, and the huntsmen to get ready to go for a hunt with the king. The poet says that love, which is constant, is not affected by change of season or climate, or by months, days or hours, which are merely small bits of time.

Check Your Progress 7

What expressions does the poet use to rebuke the sun?

22.7 PASSAGE FOR STUDY

Read this passage from the story 'The Lost Child' by Mulk Raj Anand and answer the questions given at the end.

The Lost Child

It was the festival of Spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily clad humanity, thick as a crowd of bright-coloured rabbits issuing from a warren, and entering the flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine outside the city gates, sped towards the fair. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock-carts. One little boy ran between his parent's legs, brimming over with life and laughter, as the joyous, smiling morning, with its open greetings and unashamed invitations to come away into the fields, full of flowers and songs.

"Come, child, come," called his parents, as he lagged behind, arrested by the toys in the shops that lined the way.

He hurried towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call, his eyes still lingering on the receding toys. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit of the day, was tender, and giving him her finger to catch, said;

"Look, child, what is before you."

The faint disgust of the child's unfulfilled desire had hardly been quelled in the heavy, pouting sob of a breath, "M-o-th-e-r", when the pleasure of what was before him filled him eager eyes. They had left the dusty road on which they had walked so far to wend its weary way circuitously to the north, and had entered a footpath in a field.

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale, pale, like melting gold, as it swept across miles and miles of even land, a river of yellow light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying at places into broad, rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver light. Where it ended, on a side stood a dense group of low, mudwalled houses put into relief both by the lower forms of a denser crowd of yellow-robed men and women and by high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises that rose from it, across the groves, to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Siva's mad laughter.

Check Your Progress 8

1. What words and phrases in the opening paragraph suggest the festive mood of the crowd?

- 6 What literary device has the writer adopted in the use of words such as 'whistling', 'creaking', 'squeaking', 'roaring' and 'humming'?
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22.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed how figures of speech help to make one's writing more effective than literal or direct statements. They can add colour to language and make it more vivid. We have seen how comparisons embodied in similes, metaphors or personifications provide us with images or word pictures that help us to understand the meaning better.

22.9 KEY WORDS

'figure of 'speech: an expression, e.g., a simile or metaphor, that gives variety or force, that uses words differently from the way they are used literally.

'metaphor: the use of words to indicate something different from the literal meaning, as in 'I'll make him *eat* his words.'

me'tonymy: the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant. (e.g. *crown* for *king*)

per,sonifi'cation: representing something as a person

'simile: comparison of one thing to another e.g. 'He is as brave as a lion'.

sy'nechdoche: a figure of speech in which part is named, but the whole is understood, (e.g., *200 extra hands* for *200 extra workmen*), or the whole is named but a part is understood (e.g. *India beat England at cricket.*)

ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 A baby running on the grass and the movements of its feet.
- 2
 - i) 'The little white feet nod like white flowers in a wind.'
 - ii) 'They poise and run like puffs of wind that pass over water where the weeds are thinned.'
 - iii) 'The sight of their white playing in the grass is winsome as a robin's song, so fluttering.'
 - iv) '.... like two butterflies that settle on a glass cup for a moment, soft little wing-beats uttering.'
 - v) 'I wish that the baby would tack across here to me like a wind-shadow running on a pond.'

vi) '.... her feet..... cool as syringa buds in morning hours.'

vii) '..... firm and silken as young peony flowers.'

- 3 a) The movements of the baby's feet are like
 i) flowers waving in the wind, and
 ii) puffs of wind passing over water .
 We can almost see the movement of flowers and the waves on the surface of water.
- b) They are attractive like
 i) the fluttering of a singing robin, and
 ii) the beating of the butterflies' soft little wings.
 We can almost hear the sounds made by the robin and the butterflies.
- c) The touch of the baby's feet on the poet's hands is
 i) cool like syringa flowers in the morning, and
 ii) firm and soft like young peony flowers.
 We can almost feel the touch of flowers.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 murmur: a soft low sound, continuous and indistinct
 flow: the rise of the tide
 stirring: movement
 streaks: thin lines
 crevices: narrow openings or cracks in rocks, etc.
 rugged: rough
- 2 It is a vast cave. When the water rises, it fills the cave and makes a soft low sound as it comes in. It appears as if the mighty forces of nature were moving in the dark cave to bring about a change. At some places bright sunlight enters the cave through the narrow openings in its sides.
- 3 The cave is filled with the sound of water coming in and the forces of nature appear to be working in it. At places, sunlight enters the cave through the crevices. In the same way, 'his mind' was full of ideas and appeared to be working on them. Sometimes he was able to see the light in the midst of the prevailing confusion.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 A schooner, a toy poodle, Greenland, a Labrador, and a banana split.
- 2 i) Yes
 ii) The wrinkled face of an old man.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) metaphor; love is described as a gentle wind.
 ii) simile; the huge rock is compared to a sea-beast.
 iii) simile; the peasants repeating the name of God are compared to swarms of flies.
 iv) simile; the fighting in the battle is compared to the grinding done by an 'immense' machine.
 v) metaphor; the man is described as a 'pestered animal.'

Check Your Progress 5

- 1 i) God, who designed the tiger's body.
 ii) In lines 15 and 16 .

What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
God is shown as a blacksmith using his tools – the hammer and the anvil, and shaping the tiger's brain.

2 The body.

Check Your Progress 6

- 1 God
- 2 'the Hippocratic eye', referring to the medical people.

Check Your Progress 7

Old fool, unruly, saucy, pedantic wretch.

Check Your Progress 8

- 1 festival of Spring; a gaily clad humanity; bright-coloured rabbits; flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine; brimming over with life and laughter; joyous, smiling; flowers and songs.
- 2 The crowd of 'gaily-clad' people coming out of 'narrow lanes and alleys' is compared to 'bright-coloured rabbits' coming out of a warren. A simile.
- 3
 - i) people wearing bright-coloured clothes
 - ii) fell behind
 - iii) the toys left behind and getting farther off
 - iv) in anger
 - v) going round
 - vi) made vivid by their distinct outline in the background and the contrast with the crowd of people.
- 4 The mustard field of yellow flowers is like a shining yellow river. The movement of the plants is like the rise and fall of water under the influence of a strong wind. At places the plants have formed separate clusters as if the river had turned into side streams. The long stretch of continuous plants gives the impression of a river flowing into a distant sea of silver light, which is in fact an illusion.
- 5 People talking and shouting merrily in an unrestrained, almost wild, manner.
- 6 Onomatopoeia.