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The Analysis of Figurative Language in the Dark Knight Movie (2018)

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Abstract – This study analyzes the use of figurative language in the movie The Dark Knight, focusing on identifying its types and interpreting its contextual meaning. Using descriptive qualitative and content analysis methods, this study categorizes figurative language into six types: metaphor, irony, simile, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism. Data were taken from the official script and transcriptions of key scenes. The results show that metaphor is the most frequently occurring, which is around 33.3%, irony 20%, then simile, hyperbole, and personification each 13.3%, and finally symbolism 6.7%. These expressions contribute to character development and narrative depth, especially in depicting the moral and psychological complexities of characters such as the Joker, Batman, and Harvey Dent. Figurative language is used not only for artistic expression but also to explore themes of justice, chaos, duality, and sacrifice. The research concludes that figurative language significantly enhances cinematic storytelling by enriching character portrayals and reinforcing key themes. The research offers insights into how language in film can serve as a powerful medium for critical reflection and emotional engagement.

Keywords – movie analysis, figurative language, The Dark Knight

abstrak – Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan bahasa kiasan dalam film The Dark Knight, dengan fokus pada identifikasi jenis-jenisnya dan menginterpretasikan makna kontekstualnya. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan analisis konten, penelitian ini mengkategorikan bahasa kiasan ke dalam enam jenis: metafora, ironi, simile, hiperbola, personifikasi, dan simbolisme. Data diambil dari naskah resmi dan transkripsi adegan-adegan penting. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metafora adalah yang paling sering muncul, yaitu sekitar (33,3%), ironi (20%), kemudian simile, hiperbola, dan personifikasi masing-masing 13,3%, dan terakhir simbolisme 6,7%. Ungkapan-ungkapan ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan karakter dan kedalaman narasi, terutama dalam menggambarkan kompleksitas moral dan psikologis karakter seperti Joker, Batman, dan Harvey Dent. Bahasa kiasan digunakan tidak hanya untuk ekspresi artistik tetapi juga untuk mengeksplorasi tema keadilan, kekacauan, dualitas, dan pengorbanan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahasa kiasan secara signifikan meningkatkan penceritaan sinematik dengan memperkaya penggambaran karakter dan memperkuat tema-tema utama. Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan tentang bagaimana bahasa dalam film dapat berfungsi sebagai media yang kuat untuk refleksi kritis dan keterlibatan emosional.

Kata kunci – analisis film, bahasa kiasan, The Dark Knight

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental communication tool used by humans in everyday life. Language allows a person to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others, both orally and in writing (Sevian et al., 2023). Language also plays a central role in expressing human identity and experience. As explained by Sinha et al. (2024) language serves as a medium through which individuals articulate who they are and how they relate to the world around them. These communicative and expressive functions make language a key element in the personal and social dimensions of life. Through language, humans share their realities, values and beliefs, thus strengthening its position as a pillar of human interaction and culture.

Beyond literal meaning, language also has artistic and rhetorical dimensions, especially when used figuratively. Figurative language includes expressions such as metaphor, simile, irony, personification, and symbolism, which convey meanings that go beyond the surface level. According to Aulia et al. (2023), artists' use of figurative language increases expressive depth and helps guide the audience to interpret the intended message. The ability to enrich meaning and emotional resonance makes figurative language a valuable component in literature and cinema.

Figurative language is a prominent feature commonly used in literary works to convey deeper meaning and add aesthetic appeal. Nurhakim et al. (2023) state that figurative language allows writers to communicate abstract or complex ideas in an imaginative and impactful way. This rhetorical device engages the reader's or viewer's emotions and provokes thought, thus making the message conveyed more memorable and meaningful.

Importantly, the use of figurative language in movies is not limited to artistic effects. According to Drobac, (2024), figurative expressions in cinematic works also function as tools of social criticism. Through metaphors, symbols, and carefully crafted ironic statements, filmmakers can highlight social issues, criticize power structures, and reflect on ideological tensions. This is particularly relevant in films that explore themes such as justice, chaos, morality, and identity-areas that often require nuanced representations beyond literal language.

Although many researchers have explored figurative language in literary texts, there is still a research gap in examining how figurative language operates in cinematic dialog, especially in complex and philosophically rich films such as *The Dark Knight*. Previous studies have often focused on identifying types of figurative language without delving deeply into its contextual meaning or its narrative and ideological functions in the film. In addition, research linking linguistic analysis with moral and philosophical themes in movies is also relatively limited.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the types and contextual meanings of figurative language used in specific dialogues in *The Dark Knight*. As such, this study aims to uncover how figurative language contributes not only to character development and thematic depth, but also to the movie's broader commentary on justice, chaos, and human nature. By examining these figurative expressions in their narrative and ideological contexts, this study intends to show how language in film operates as a powerful means of expressing philosophical dilemmas, reflecting social tensions, and shaping the moral perceptions of the audience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research approach to analyze the use of figurative language in *The Dark Knight* movie. Qualitative research particularly focuses on the interpretation of data through descriptive presentations (Yusuf et al., 2020). According to Qurrotul (2017), qualitative research is descriptive and usually uses an inductive analysis approach, emphasizing the process and meaning from the subject's point of view. This approach allows researchers to explore language in depth—not only identifying figurative forms, but also understanding their contextual meaning in cinematic narratives.

The descriptive qualitative design is suitable for this study because it emphasizes naturalistic inquiry, where data are interpreted within their real-world context. Rather than quantifying the presence of figurative language, this study aims to describe its types and explore how those linguistic expressions support character development, highlight moral dilemmas, and deepen thematic elements in the film. The research process followed a systematic and reflective procedure adapted from a qualitative content analysis framework, which is commonly applied in discourse and language studies to examine meaning and function in a text.

Data collection involved several steps, starting with the identification of relevant dialogues containing figurative language such as metaphor, simile, personification, irony, hyperbole, and symbolism. The dialogues were extracted from the official movie script and transcribed directly from selected scenes. The selected data were then categorized based on the type of figurative language they represent, using linguistic theories as a basis. After categorization, each expression is interpreted contextually, taking into account the narrative situation, the speaker's intent, and thematic relevance in the film.

In addition to primary data from the movie, this study also uses secondary data, which includes scholarly articles, books, and previous research related to figurative language and movie analysis. These sources provide a theoretical framework and support the interpretation of the findings.

The methodological approach in this research is inductive and interpretive, which allows for a deeper understanding of how figurative language enhances character development, supports philosophical themes, and engages the audience through multi-layered meanings. This design is appropriate to this study's focus on language as a narrative and ideological tool in cinematic discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings and interpretation based on the two research objectives: (1) to identify the types of figurative language used in *The Dark Knight*, and (2) to analyze the contextual meanings of each figurative expression found in the selected dialogues.

1. Types of Figurative Language Found

The analysis of selected dialogues in *The Dark Knight* identified six main types of figurative language: metaphor, irony, simile, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism. These expressions were strategically used by key characters—primarily the Joker, Batman, Harvey Dent, and Commissioner Gordon—to convey moral dilemmas, philosophical reflections, and psychological complexity. Based on the qualitative analysis of the film's

dialogues, various instances of figurative language were identified and categorized. The table below summarizes the findings, presenting the types of figurative language, their frequency of occurrence, and their relative proportion in the data.

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Figurative Language Found in *The Dark Knight*

No.	Types of figurative language	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Metaphor	7	33.3%
2.	Irony	6	28.6%
3.	Symbolism	4	19%
4.	Simile	2	9.5%
5.	Personification	1	4.8%
6.	Hyperbole	1	4.8%

Based on the table above showed that, metaphor appeared as the most dominant type, used to express abstract themes such as chaos, morality, justice, and identity. Irony followed closely, often employed to foreshadow character transformation or reveal hidden intentions. Symbolism played a key narrative role, for instance, through Batman's bat symbol or Joker's act of burning money – both rich in ideological implications.

2. Contextual Meanings and Functions

Each figurative expression carried meaning beyond its literal form, shaped by the narrative context and the speaker's perspective. The contextual analysis reveals three main functions of figurative language in the film:

a. To portray character psychology:

Joker's metaphors like "I'm an agent of chaos" and "Madness is like gravity" reflect his belief in disorder as a natural state. Harvey Dent's irony – "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain" – reveals his inner moral decay. Batman's metaphoric presence as "the hero Gotham deserves" shows his internal conflict and sacrifice.

b. To deepen the thematic structure:

Figurative language is central to expressing the film's core philosophical tensions between chaos and order, idealism and realism, or justice and vengeance. For example, personification in "The city just showed you..." frames Gotham as a moral mirror for its people.

c. To influence audience interpretation:

These figurative expressions not only serve narrative purposes but also encourage the audience to reflect on broader moral and societal issues. Through irony and symbolism, the film provokes critical thought about power, corruption, fear, and human duality.

In summary, the figurative language found in *The Dark Knight* plays a vital role in constructing character identity, advancing philosophical themes, and engaging viewers in critical reflection. These expressions are deeply embedded within the film's narrative structure and are essential in conveying the moral complexities, psychological depth, and ideological tensions that define the story and its characters.

DISCUSSION

The figurative expressions found in *The Dark Knight* are not merely stylistic ornaments; rather, they serve important narrative and ideological purposes that align with existing theories on figurative language. According to Aulia et al. (2023), figurative language deepens expressive meaning and invites audiences to interpret messages beyond literal terms. This is evident in how *The Dark Knight* uses metaphors, irony, and symbolism to construct its thematic core. For instance, Joker's metaphorical declaration, "I'm an agent of chaos," embodies his rejection of societal order, while Harvey Dent's ironic line, "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain," reveals the tragic trajectory of his character arc. These expressions reflect the psychological states of the characters and contribute to the portrayal of moral ambiguity, as discussed by Nurhakim et al. (2023), who emphasized the emotional and reflective dimensions of figurative language.

Furthermore, the use of figurative language in this film reinforces the film's exploration of complex philosophical ideas, such as justice, chaos, duality, and sacrifice. These themes are not only articulated through dialogue but also symbolically represented in visual motifs—such as the bat symbol or the Joker's act of burning money—which align with Drobac's (2024) assertion that figurative language in cinema can serve as a tool for ideological critique. The interplay between language and symbol allows *The Dark Knight* to raise questions about the nature of heroism and the cost of moral compromise, thus encouraging audiences to engage in deeper reflection.

This finding also supports Yusuf et al.'s (2020) view that language in narrative media, including movies, is shaped by context and serves to express identity. Each character in *The Dark Knight* exhibits a unique language pattern associated with their worldview and psychological state. Batman's metaphor as "a hero worthy of Gotham" encapsulates his own burden of justice and moral responsibility, while Joker's chaotic rhetoric systematically challenges institutional power and exposes the hypocrisy embedded within social structures. In this case, figurative language becomes a mirror of identity construction and a means to express internal conflict, positioning language as a major force in shaping the moral stance and ideology of the film.

While previous research has focused on literary texts—such as Winata (2023) and Ayu & Simanjuntak (2025)—this study extends the scope of allusion analysis to cinematic discourse, showing that film dialogue can have figurative and symbolic depth with equal, or even greater, narrative and emotional impact. The integration of language with audiovisual elements such as visuals, sound design, and cinematography creates a multidimensional storytelling platform, where meaning is constructed not only through dialog, but also through imagery, tone, and character dynamics. As such, this analysis confirms that figurative language in *The Dark Knight* functions as a powerful narrative and ideological device, capable of shaping character identity, reinforcing thematic messages, and provoking critical reflection on broader social and philosophical issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion conducted in this study, it can be concluded that the research has successfully addressed the formulated problems

regarding the types and contextual meanings of figurative language found in *The Dark Knight*. The conclusions of this study are as follows:

- 1) The types of figurative language identified in *The Dark Knight* include six main categories: metaphor, irony, symbolism, simile, personification, and hyperbole. Among these, metaphor appeared most frequently, indicating its central role in expressing abstract concepts and thematic messages. Irony also featured prominently, often used to reveal character transformation and highlight narrative tension.
- 2) The contextual meanings of figurative language reflect the psychological and ideological dimensions of the characters, particularly in portraying moral struggles, internal conflict, and the tension between justice and chaos. The figurative expressions are closely tied to the film's storyline and contribute significantly to the depth of character development, especially for Batman, Joker, and Harvey Dent.
- 3) Figurative language in the film plays a strategic role in shaping the narrative, reinforcing philosophical themes, and guiding audience interpretation of the story's moral implications. It functions not only as an aesthetic device but also as a narrative tool that adds depth, symbolism, and reflective value to the cinematic experience.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of figurative language as a powerful cinematic device that goes beyond artistic expression to convey complex ideas, character psychology, and philosophical tensions. By revealing how language operates within a film's narrative framework, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between linguistics and visual storytelling. It is hoped that future research will continue to explore the role of figurative language in other film genres, offering greater insight into its narrative and ideological functions across a range of cinematic contexts.

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