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ENGLISH

Figures of Speech

What are Figures of Speech?

Figures of speech are literary devices which are used to express ideas that move beyond their literal meaning.

Functions of Figures of Speech

- They impart beauty to the language by stimulating the **visual**, **aural** and **sensory** appeal of the verses.
- The reader is made to use his imagination to create rich mental pictures.
- They provide freshness of expression and clarity of meaning.
- They can be used in poetic as well as in everyday language.
- Language of speeches and debates can also be enriched with the use of figures of speech.
- In short, figures of speech make the language more colourful, descriptive and interesting.

Types of Figures of Speech

There are more than **200** types of figures of speech in English. In this chapter, we will be covering a few of them.

Simile	Metaphor	Personalisation	Synecdoche
Transferred Epithet	Metonymy	Pun	Euphemism
Tautology	Inversion	Antithesis	Irony
Oxymoron	Paradox	Repetition	Alliteration
Onomatopoeia	Apostrophe	Hyperbole	Understatement
	Climax	Anticlimax	



Simile

- **Simile** is a figure of speech which directly compares two things which may have similar qualities.
- It employs the use of words such as **'like'** or **'as'**.
 - (a) The prisoners languished **like** caged animals. (The prisoners are likened to caged animals.)
 - (b) Manish is **as** thin **as** a reed. (Manish is compared to a reed.)

Popular Examples:

—She entered with ungainly struggle **like** some huge awkward chicken, torn, squawking, out of its coop.!

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventure of the Three Gables*

—In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch **like** a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun . . .!

—Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*

—O my Luve's **like** a red, red rose

That's newly sprung in June;

O my Luve's **like** the melodie

That's sweetly played in tune.!

— Robert Burns, *Red Red Rose*

—The air smelled sharp **as** new-cut wood, slicing low and sly around the angles of buildings.!

—Joanne Harris, *Chocolat*

Metaphor

- **Metaphor** is a figure of speech which makes a direct equation between two things which share similar qualities.
- Unlike similes, metaphors do not use words such as **'as'** or **'like'**.
 - (a) **My old employer was the devil incarnate.** (The old employer is equated with the devil.)
 - (b) **The pen is the tongue of the mind.** (The pen is equated with the tongue.)

Popular Examples:

—All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players!!

— Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

—I fall upon the thorns of life.!

— P. B. Shelly, *Ode to the West Wind*

—Entangled in the cobweb of the schools.!

— William Cowper, *The Task*

We also use various metaphors in our day-to-day language.

Flogging a dead horse – It is a metaphor for a pointless argument which refuses to die.

Why does the boss have to flog the dead horse? I thought the matter is already settled.

Elephant in the room – It is a metaphor for an uncomfortable or unpleasant fact that everyone sees but no one acknowledges for the fear of causing embarrassment or awkwardness.

Mitesh's dismissal from his job is the veritable elephant in the room tonight.

A gift that keeps on giving – It is a metaphor for something will continue to be useful longer than it is intended to be.

Friendship with a good person is a gift that keeps on giving.

Music to my ears – It stands for something which brings joy to the listener.

The fact that my favourite actor has won an award is music to my ears.

Personification

- **Personification** is a figure of speech where human qualities or activities are attributed to animals, non-living things or abstract ideas.
- Through personification, writers and poets offer a fresh perspective to the reader.
- Readers relate to the inanimate as they would relate to humans.
 - (a) The skies **wept**. (The skies are given the human ability to weep.)
 - (b) Your arrogance **betrayed** you today. (Arrogance is said to have the ability to betray.)

Popular Examples:

—When well-apparelled April on the heel
Of limping winter **treads**.||

— Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

—Stormy, husky, **brawling**,
City of the big **shoulders**||

— Carl Sandberg, *Chicago*

—Ah, William, we're **weary** of weather,
said the sunflowers, shining with dew.||

—William Blake, *Two Sunflowers Move in The Yellow Room*

—O Rose thou are **sick**||

—William Blake, *The Sick Rose*



Synecdoche

- **Synecdoche** is a figure of speech where a part is used to signify the whole.
 - (a) The family has many **mouths** to feed. (The word 'mouth' represents members of the family.)
 - (b) Two **heads** are better than one. (The word 'heads' represents people.)

Popular Examples:

—Blind **mouths**! that scarce themselves know how to hold!

—John Milton, *Lycidas*

—"You run about, my little Maid,

Your **limbs** they are alive!

—William Wordsworth, *We are Seven*

—The **hand** that mocked them and the **heart** that fed.!

— P. B. Shelly, *Ozymandias*

—The western **wave** was all a-flame.!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

—I should have been a pair of ragged **claws**

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.!

—T. S. Elliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

Transferred Epithet

- **Transferred epithet** is a figure of speech where a quality of one noun is ascribed to another.
- By doing so, the adjective is transferred to a noun to which it does not belong.
 - (a) Phillip's **happy** days are here again. (Phillip is the one who is happy, but the noun 'days' is ascribed the quality of happiness.)
 - (b) Priti has committed too many **careless** mistakes. (Here, Priti is the one who is careless. But the quality is ascribed to the noun 'mistakes'.)

Popular Examples:

"The new man wrote a question at which I stared in **wide-eyed amazement**!

— Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man*

—Lord Ullin reach'd that **fatal shore**!

—Thomas Campbell, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*

— ... may be completely destroyed in that second's instant of a **careless match**,"

—William Faulkner, *Golden Land*

—...until it shines, like her own **honest forehead**, with perpetual friction."

—Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*