

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Poetry is a form of literary work that contains high aesthetic value and conveys messages implicitly through the use of dense and symbolic language. In conveying meaning, poetry relies heavily on figurative language or figurative language such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, and irony. This figurative language not only enhances the diction but also deepens the meaning and emotions in poetry. However, this aspect often poses a significant challenge for students, particularly those learning English as a foreign language (EFL).¹ Therefore, it is important for educators to develop effective teaching methods so that students can better understand and appreciate the beauty and complexity of poetry.

In poetry learning activities in secondary schools, many students experience confusion when asked to understand the content of poems, especially due to the dominance of figurative language. A study conducted by the University of Padang Two Thousand twenty two revealed that 85% of students faced difficulties in understanding metaphors, 65% with idioms, 55% with personification, and 50% with hyperbole. Meanwhile, similes were still considered easier but remained confusing for around 30% of students. These findings indicate that figurative language is the primary obstacle for students in

¹ Boutheina Boughnim Laarif, "Poetry: The Experience of Listening," *Janus Head* 18, no. 1 (2020): 30–41.

interpreting poetic meaning.² A similar study by Serambi Mekkah University reinforces this phenomenon, with research results showing that most students have difficulty interpreting poetry because they do not understand the figurative elements in it. Even when students can read the text of a poem well technically, their understanding remains superficial and literal. This shows a gap between reading ability and the skill of interpreting the deeper meaning in poetry that is rich in symbolism and connotations.³

In classrooms, teachers often find that students can name the definition of a metaphor or simile, but are unable to recognize its contextual use in poetry. For example, when reading a line like “time is a sword,” students are unable to interpret that the phrase contains an implicit meaning about the importance of time management. As a result, the moral and aesthetic message of the poem is lost, leaving only an incomplete literal understanding.⁴ When poetry learning is done traditionally—that is, with lecture, memorization, and literal translation methods—students do not get the space to explore symbolic meanings in depth. In preliminary interviews conducted in one public high school, some students mentioned that they felt “scared” of poetry because it was considered too abstract and irrelevant to their daily lives.⁵ This has a direct impact on the low interest in literature and causes students to be

² Mastura, “English Language Study and Teaching Journal Elaste An Analysis of the Students’ Difficulties in Understanding Poetry” (2022): 9–18.

³ Haifa Almufayrij, “Saudi Students’ Perceptions of Schemata and Poetry Comprehension,” *Arab World English Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 446–463.

⁴ Amina Bouali, “Resurrecting ‘Metaphor’ inside the EFL Poetry Classroom: A Nudge towards an Integrated-Model,” *Arab World English Journal For Translation and Literary Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 187–220.

⁵ Chelya Ilham Ramdani Putra, Encil Puspitoningrum, and Sujarwoko Sujarwoko, “Simbolisme Tradisi Nyadran Desa Sonoageng Sebagai Media Pengayaan Materi Pembelajaran Sastra Siswa SMA Di Kabupaten Nganjuk” (n.d.).

less motivated to read or create poetry. Therefore, it is important to implement more interactive and creative teaching methods in the learning of literature.

Vocabulary limitations and cultural background become a big barrier for students in understanding figurative meanings. For many students, phrases or idioms containing foreign cultural elements often fail to translate meaningfully. For example, metaphors relating to Western mythology or a particular culture will be difficult to understand in the absence of contextual experience or sufficient background knowledge.⁶ ESL (English as a Second Language) students have high difficulty in understanding metaphors due to language limitations and limitations in imagining something abstract. In the Indonesian context, the existing curriculum still gives a large portion to the learning of informative and procedural texts, while literary texts, especially poetry, are often not the main focus. Students are guided to achieve academic goals such as national exams, which rarely test the ability to interpret poetry. As a result, teachers are less encouraged to develop innovative and deep understanding-oriented literature learning strategies.

Studies at NTU Singapore reveal that many students experience barriers in understanding the aesthetic beauty of poetry due to a lack of explicit training in stylistic devices such as metaphor and simile. Zheng emphasized the importance of a structural introduction to figurative language in enhancing students' appreciation of the deep meaning and

⁶ Lorena Robo, "Discrepancies of Figurative Language Use Reflected Through Cross-Linguistic and Intercultural Differences in English and Albanian Language," *European Journal of Language and Literature* 6, no. 1 (2020): 22.

emotional value in poetry.⁷ Li's study confirms that vocabulary limitations and cultural gaps are significant barriers for learners in understanding figurative meanings. Foreign culture-based phrases and idioms often fail to be understood contextually, especially for readers with no experience of that culture.⁸ Research by Moea shows that ESL students have significant difficulties in understanding metaphors due to language limitations and barriers to abstract thinking.⁹ Poetry, which demands time, reflection and contemplation, is considered irrelevant to the instantaneous digital world. This exacerbates the situation, as students are further removed from authentic and immersive literary experiences.¹⁰ The discrepancy between teachers' teaching approaches and students' learning styles further complicates the issue. Teachers tend to use one-way explanatory methods that are normative and formal, while students need a participatory and dialogical approach.

Figurative language is not just a literary ornament, it is at the heart of poetry itself. Metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole are expressive means that allow poets to convey emotions, thoughts, and messages in depth. Without the ability to understand figurative language, students cannot capture the essence of poetry, but only read it

⁷ Michelle Zheng, "Make Space for Beauty : A Contemporary Vision Make Space For Beauty :"(2024).

⁸ Mingyu Li, "Non-Native English-Speaking (NNES) Students' English Academic Writing Experiences in Higher Education: A Meta-Ethnographic Qualitative Synthesis," *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 71 (2024): 101430.

⁹ By Moea Kananelo Sylvester, "Challenges and Opportunities/Propositions in Poetry Teaching and Learning in Literature in English At Two Leribe Schools" (2008).

¹⁰ Amy Winograd, "Loose-Lipped Large Language Models Spill Your Secrets: The Privacy Implications of Large Language Models.," *Harvard Journal of Law & Technology* 36, no. 2 (2023): 615–656, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=171868631&site=ehost-live>.

as a series of beautiful but empty words. Research by Gibbs states that understanding figurative language is positively correlated with critical thinking skills and crosscutting interpretation skills.¹¹ Students who are used to interpreting metaphors and symbols in poetry show more reflective and analytical thinking, both in literature and subjects such as history, philosophy, and even science.

The most previous studies have taken a quantitative approach, highlighting only the frequency of errors or students' comprehension scores, not their subjective experiences.¹² This leaves a gap in the literature to delve deeply into how students experience and overcome difficulties when dealing with figurative language in poetry. Existing research also tends to take place in urban schools with sufficient resources, while local contexts such as suburban schools or areas with distinctive cultural settings are rarely highlighted. In fact, cultural background greatly influences the way students interpret symbols and figurative language in poetry. Therefore, a qualitative study is needed that can capture students' authentic experiences in understanding poetry. With a phenomenological approach, researchers can understand from the inside how students process, respond to, and interpret figurative language in the context of their real and complex classrooms.

This kind of study also has great potential to help teachers evaluate and redesign their learning strategies. By knowing what really confuses students, teachers can be more responsive and contextualized

¹¹ Raymond W Gibbs Jr, "Pragmatic Complexity in Metaphor Interpretation," *Cognition* 237 (2023): 105455.

¹² M A Legarde, "Students' Common Errors in Solving Routine & Non-Routine Problems: A Mixed Method Analysis," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis* 5, no. 05 (2022).

in choosing methods, materials, and approaches to teaching poetry. In addition to its practical contribution, this study is also important for enriching the academic discourse on literary pedagogy. By presenting qualitative data from students' and teachers' experiences, this research can be a relevant new reference to be developed in curriculum, teacher training, or education policy in the field of English literature. This research is also relevant to national education policy, especially the Pancasila Student Profile which emphasizes the importance of critical literacy, art appreciation, and reflective ability. By strengthening students' ability to read poetry figuratively, this research is in line with the spirit of humanist and transformative education.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to comprehensively explore students' experiences in understanding figurative language in poetry texts, including its various forms such as metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole. The research will not only explore the types of difficulties students face, but will also examine how their linguistic, cultural and cognitive backgrounds influence their interpretation of the implied poetic meaning. In addition, this study aims to critically evaluate the various learning strategies used by teachers in assisting students when learning to teach material about poetry, including the pedagogical approaches used, the learning media applied, and the extent to which these strategies are able to facilitate in-depth understanding of figurative meaning.

Through a qualitative approach that focuses on students' subjective experiences and classroom teaching practices, it is hoped that the results of this study can make a significant contribution to the development of a more effective, contextual, and down-to-earth poetry

learning model. The approach in question not only considers the linguistic structure of the poem itself, but also includes affective and social aspects that influence how students interact with the text. In other words, this research seeks to offer more humanistic and responsive pedagogical solutions to students' real needs, bridging the gap between the poetry taught in schools and meaningful literacy experiences for students in the contemporary era. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference for teachers, curriculum designers, and language education practitioners in designing literary learning that is not only informative but also transformative.

B. Identification of Problem

Based on the explanation of the background of the study above, the problems identified in this research are as follows:

1. Junior high school students experience difficulties in understanding figurative language contained in English poetry texts.
2. Students have limited vocabulary mastery, which affects their ability to interpret figurative expressions in poetry.

C. Scope and Limitation of Research

This research is a qualitative descriptive study that focuses on exploring the difficulties experienced by students in understanding figurative language in English poetry texts. The study also examines how teachers' learning strategies support or hinder students' comprehension. The scope and limitations of this research are as follows:

Research topics

This study focuses specifically on students' difficulties in understanding figurative language in poetry, including metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, and idioms. The discussion is limited to linguistic, cognitive, and contextual aspects of figurative meaning, and does not address all types of difficulties related to poetry reading.

Research Population and Subjects

The subjects of this research are eighth-grade students at MTS Al-Ma'arif in Serang Regency who have received English poetry lessons. Participants were selected purposively based on their observable difficulties in understanding figurative language.

Problem Limitations

This research does not analyze poetry writing skills, grammatical competence, or general vocabulary mastery. It focuses solely on students' ability to interpret figurative meanings within poetry texts. The study also does not evaluate the entire English curriculum, but only the teaching approaches related to figurative language.

Research Context and Location

The research was conducted in an English classroom setting at one MTS in Serang Regency. The findings reflect the local educational context and are not intended to be generalized to all schools. Instead, they provide an in-depth understanding of students' experiences within the specific learning environment.

D. Research Question

1. How is the level of students' ability to understand and identify types of figurative expressions in poetry?
2. What factors make it difficult for students to determine figurative expressions in English poetry texts?

E. The Objective of Study

1. To describe students' ability to understand figurative expressions in poetry.
2. To analyze the factors causing students' difficulties, including linguistic, cognitive, and affective/psychological aspects.

F. Significances of Study

With this research, the researchers hope to contribute to students' and teachers at MTS AL-MA'ARIF. Proper research will produce accurate, detailed, and reliable information that can greatly benefit the researchers themselves and others, especially students'. It is hoped that this research will provide the following benefits:

For teachers, it is hoped that the results of this research will provide insight into the factors that influence difficulties in understanding figurative language in English Poetry text and provide solutions to overcome them. This will help teachers create more effective learning strategies and strengthen students' understanding of figurative language and poetry reading skills, so that students' can easily understand and read English Poetry text.

For students', it is hoped that the results of this study can help students' understand the factors that influence difficulties in reading and understanding English poetry text and provide solutions to

overcome them. This is also expected to help improve English poetry reading skills and strengthen English vocabulary comprehension.

For further research, it is hoped that the results of this study can strengthen understanding of the difficulties in figurative language in English poetry text for junior high school students'. In addition, this study can serve as a reference and theoretical basis for future researchers and be further developed if there are aspects not covered in this study.

G. The Previous Study

1. An Analysis of Figurative Language in Poetry by Maya Angelou

The research gap identified in the study is that while previous studies have analyzed poetry and song lyrics, they focused on different writers or themes, such as Kelly Darrow's poetry or song lyrics, and did not specifically concentrate on Maya Angelou's poetry and her distinctive use of figurative language. Moreover, the existing studies have not comprehensively examined the diversity and characteristics of figurative language in Angelou's poems, nor have they highlighted how these devices contribute to the deeper meaning and aesthetic qualities of her poetic works. The current research fills this gap by providing a focused, detailed analysis of the types and frequency of figurative language in selected poems by Maya Angelou, thus contributing to a richer understanding of her poetic style and the function of figurative expressions in her work.

2. An Analysis of Figurative Language in Poems by Laksmi Pamuntjak

This journal analyzes the use of various types of figurative language in the poems of Laksmi Pamuntjak. The research is qualitative in nature with a content analysis approach, which categorizes figurative language based on its type, such as metaphor, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, and others. From the three poems analyzed, it was found that the use of figurative language varies greatly and does not always appear in every poem. This study aims to show how figurative language enriches the meaning and aesthetics of poetry, as well as helping readers understand the hidden meanings in these literary works.

Gaps Found

Existing studies on figurative expressions tend to focus on song lyrics or works by other authors with different thematic orientations. Research specifically examining figurative expressions in Laksmi Pamuntjak's poetry is still limited. Very few studies analyze multiple types of figurative expressions at once or relate their use to thematic elements such as love, struggle, or hope in Pamuntjak's poems.

Novelty

This research specifically focuses on Laksmi Pamuntjak's poems and systematically identifies various types of figurative expressions used in her works. It highlights the diversity and irregular distribution of figurative expressions across different poems and connects their use to central themes such as love and struggle. It offers new insights into Pamuntjak's stylistic

strategies in creating meaning and aesthetic value through figurative expressions.

3. Figurative Language and messages in Poems about COVID 19.

This study aims to identify the types of figurative language used in poems about COVID-19 and explain the messages conveyed through these poems. Data were obtained from five poems accessed via the internet, then analyzed using Leech's (1969) theory for categorizing figurative language and Nurgiyantoro's (1995) theory for understanding the meaning of figurative language. The results of the study show that there are eight types of figurative language, namely metaphor, personification, simile, hyperbole, irony, litotes, metonymy, and oxymoron, with metonymy being the most dominant (28.9%). In addition, the messages that emerge from the poems are divided into two, namely social messages and moral messages, which are related to experiences and attitudes towards the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Gap: Generally, previous studies have focused more on analyzing the literal meaning and linguistic aspects of poems or other texts related to COVID-19, but few have specifically examined the use of figurative language in literary works such as poetry in the context of the pandemic. Additionally, many studies have emphasized the analysis of the general content of the message without delving into the figurative aspects that support the aesthetic and emotional delivery of the message.

Research Novelty: This study offers a new contribution by highlighting the use of figurative language in poetry about COVID-19, particularly from the perspective of Leech's theory of figurative

language and Nurgiyantoro's analysis of message meaning. This provides deep insights into how poets use figurative language to reinforce social and moral messages during the pandemic, an aspect that has previously received little attention in the literature on poetry and the pandemic specifically.

H. The Organization of Writing

This paper has been divided into five chapters, which have contained several points that have described the chapter.

Chapter I is Introduction. This chapter has consisted of the background of the study, identification of problem, limitations of the study, research question, objective of the study, significances of study, previous of study, and organization of writing.

Chapter II Theoretical Framework. This chapter has consisted of theories from some experts with whom we have conducted the research from this research.

Chapter III is Research Methodology. This chapter has consisted of the methodology of the research, which has included the research method, instrument, technique of data collection, and technique of data analysis.

Chapter IV is Research findings and Discussion. This chapter has consisted of a description of the data and a discussion of findings.

Chapter V is Conclusion and Suggestion. This chapter has presented the conclusion of the overall content of the research and suggestion given by the researcher to the readers.