

## THE PERSONIFICATION LANGUAGE FOUND IN POEM “LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN” BY LANGSTON HUGHES

**Dwi Purwandhi, Hendar**

*English Department, Widyatama Universit , Bandung, Indonesia*

---

### Related Information

Received : 16 July 2024

Accepted : 15 August 2024

Published : 18 October 2024

### Keywords

Personification

Figurative Language

Literal Meaning

### Corresponding author

purwandhi.dwi@widyatama.ac.id

### APA Citation

Purwandhi, Dwi. (2024). The Personification Language Found in Poem “Let America Be America Again” By Langston Hughes. *Biantara: Journal of Language and Culture*, 1(1), 21-27

**Abstract:** This paper provides the data, definition, and information about the figurative language in a poem called ‘Let America be America Again’ by Langston Huges. This paper will show how the figurative languages are used and what they mean in literal meaning. This paper will also provide the steps about methods used in making this paper. The data used is the descriptive analysis and using the qualitative method. This paper will discuss about the figurative language by comparing it with the literal meaning and figurative meaning so the reader will understand the differences between them. The result shown is that nearly all of the content of the poem used figurative language where the author Langston Hughes expresses his point of view that he wanted to make America as a country which stand alone and make it a place where everybody wanted to be and make it a place the Americans used to know all this time. This also explains that he thought and felt that America has changed a lot over the years. And the figurative language used in the poem is the personification because he always compares the behavior of things with human’s nature.

---

## INTRODUCTION

First of all, the readers need to know the function of the language itself. The most basic function is that of the expressive function, a trial to express a sudden change of feeling, fear, delight, pain, anger, confusion, or disgust. Whatever it is, such an expression is not a deliberate, conscious expression, but a spontaneous, immediate response not directed towards any other object. In daily life, there are 3 types of languages, formal, informal, and figurative. Formal and informal language serves different purposes. The tone, the choice of words and the way the words are put together vary between the two styles. Formal language is less personal than informal language. It is used when writing for professional or academic purposes like university assignments. Formal language does not use colloquialisms, contractions or first person pronouns such as ‘I’ or ‘We’

Informal language is more casual and spontaneous. It is used when communicating with friends or family either in writing or in conversation. It is used when writing personal emails, text messages and in some business correspondence. The tone of informal language is more personal than formal language. And sometimes, people use the 3<sup>rd</sup> type figurative language, which means phrasing that goes beyond the literal meaning of words to get a message or point across someone is using figurative language when the writing or the utterance goes beyond the actual meanings of words so that the reader or listener gains new insights into the objects or subjects in the work.

In making a scientific work or any other paper for any purpose, we must watch for

the diction and words we use. There are words that have literal meaning, which means those words can be defined using straight understanding, but some other words don't, which means we have to understand the context or expression that is being used. The writer might use metaphor words to imply the idea. If people select the correct words, then their scientific work will be easily understandable to the readers or listeners, as expected by the writer or speaker.

The discussion in this paper is related to poems, especially the ones made by Langston Hughes. Poetry is a type of artwork which is written by someone. And in poems there are many metaphor or figurative language, in order to make the poetry more alive and expressive, or also to make the reader and listener can feel the poetry itself. The figurative language or we can also call as metaphor can show up and we can find in many types of writing and speech, such as various of speech, songs, or poems. The writer or speaker usually uses the figurative language to express or deliver message indirectly so that the listener or reader can understand it in a different way. The figurative languages that are found in this poem is dominated with personification, it is most likely because the writer wanted to give a clear imagination about the situation that the writer wanted to tell and the image that feels more concrete.

Here is the sample of the figurative language found in this poem,

o.	Figurative Language	Type of Figurative Language	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning
.	Let it be dream it used to be <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 2</i>	personification	The dream that once happened	Make it a place it used to be known
.	Let it be pioneer on the plain <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 3</i>	personification	The forerunner of a smooth ground	Make America the no. 1 place in the world
.	Seeking home where he himself is free <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 4</i>	personification	Someone who is getting lost somewhere	Make America a home for everyone searching for

According to the explanations above, the writer is trying to inform the readers about the intention of this research is to show the personification languages found in the poem called "LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN" by Langston Huges, so that the readers will be able to understand what kind of personification used in the poem and its meanings. The following is providing some other questions :

1. What are Personification Languages found in "Let America be America Again" by Langston Hughes?
2. What are the meanings of that Personification Language?

Concurring to Kennedy (1979), metaphorical dialect can be partitioned into comparative, contradictory, and correlative. Comparative metaphorical dialect incorporates embodiment, allegory, and likeness, whereas contradictory metaphorical dialect incorporates overstatement, litotes, conundrum, and incongruity. Correlative

metaphorical dialect incorporates metonymy, synecdoche, image, inference, and ellipsis. "Exemplification may be a figure of discourse in which an protest, an creature, or an theoretical express (truth, nature) is turned human," composes Kennedy. Metaphor (VPoppel, 2021) is an analogy compare two things clearly but in a concise sequence. This means that the subject and object share The characteristics are similar and the writer uses them for comparison. According to Kennedy (1979), a simile compares two objects, usually expressed by a linking word, such as like, then or like. Hyperbole, according to Kennedy, is the use of exaggeration to emphasize a point. Litote (CNY,2017), is a statement about what it means to express something as opposed to someone's point of view and it is used to make someone's comments more emphasized. A statement that At first it seems contradictory, but upon further reflection, it makes sense paradox (Pfeiffer & Perrine, 1978). Synecdoche is the use of a part of something to represent the whole or vice versa, a symbol is an object or the act of representing something other than its literal nature. According to Potter, the allusion is Metaphorical language conveys indirectly to one person or even to another.

### **Types of Figurative Language**

#### **1. Personification**

According to Abrams (1999 :99) "personification, in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings."

#### **2. Simile**

Stated by Abrams (1999:97), "in a simile, a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word "like" or "as". The word metaphor comes from Greek; it means to carry over. In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison (Abrams, 1999:97)

#### **3. Hyperbole**

According to Abrams (1999:120) "Hyperbole is bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility.

#### **4. Irony**

According to Abrams (1999:135), In most of the modern critical uses of the term 'irony' there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects. Irony is a way of speaking or writing by saying something while the meaning is another. It refers to a situation in which reality differs from appearance. It occurs in sentence or words when they imply contrast or opposite meaning.

#### **5. Paradox**

A paradox is often used to make a reader think over an idea in innovative way. As stated by Abrams (1999:201), a paradox is a statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes good sense.

#### **6. Metonymy**

Metonymy is a change of name, the use of the one word for another, the use of an idea by means of terms involving association. As stated by Abrams (1999: 98), "metonymy (Greek for "a change of name") is the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relationship in common experience.

#### **7. Symbolism**

Symbolism is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself (Abrams,

1999:311). From theories above, it means figurative language has 8 types such as personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, paradox, metonymy, and symbolism.

### Meaning of Personification

1. Concurring to Tairako (2018) and Ko (2018), exemplification is an attribution of human characteristics and/or feelings to non-humans, lifeless objects, or theoretical thoughts.
2. According to Abrams (1999:99) "Personification, in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings".

### Types of Meaning

According to Geoffrey Leech (1981, 9), there are 7 types of meaning:

#### 1. Conceptual meaning

As Leech underlines in "Semantics. The Study of Meaning", the emphasis in this classification should be put on the logical or conceptual meaning (also called "denotative" or "cognitive") (1981, 9). The reason for this is his statement that conceptual meaning "is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication". (Leech 1981, 9)

#### 2. Connotative Meaning

For the sake of precisely defining this type of meaning, Leech's book on semantics needs to be consulted once again: "Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content." (Leech 1981, 12)

#### 3. Social Meaning

Leech stresses that the social type of meaning includes all the social circumstances regarding the use of a piece of language. (1981, 14) since these are closely related to various social groups who are parts of these circumstances, David Crystal and Derek Davy established a classification of socio-stylistic variations which vary according to (1969, 66):

- 1) Dialect (The language of geographical region or social class)
- 2) Time (e.g. The language of the 18<sup>th</sup> century)
- 3) Province (Language of law, science, advertising, etc.)
- 4) Status (polite, colloquial, slang, etc.)
- 5) Modality (Language of memoranda, lectures, jokes, etc.)

#### 4. Affective Meaning

Another type of meaning which is closely related to the social meaning is the one which, according to Leech, deals with the way a language can reflect personal feelings of the speaker that may include attitude to a listener or something he is talking about, (1981, 15). Furthermore, affective meaning can be expressed directly and indirectly, once again depending on the context. 1) You are a horrible person and I hate you. (Direct message) 2) Boyfriend: "What's wrong?" Girlfriend (in a clearly nervous tone): "Nothing." As it can be seen from the examples mentioned above, the factors such as tone of voice, mimic and gestures can be significant when "decoding" the message of an utterance (Leech 1981, 16).

#### 5. Reflected Meaning

In a case of reflected meaning, it can be explained as the one appearing in situations of multiple conceptual meanings, when one sense of a word influences our response to another sense, as stated by Leech. (1981, 16) Furthermore, he exemplifies the statement

above in the cases of The Comforter and The Holy Ghost where, although both terms refer to the third element in the Holy Trinity, there are certain semantic differences between those two expressions. Thereby is The Comforter described by Leech as something “warm and comforting” while The Holy Ghost he perceives as “awesome”. (1981, 16) Lastly, he points out that in similar cases words can also impose the suggestive power with a little help of the power of associations. (1981, 16)

#### 6. Collocative Meaning

To clearly define what constitutes the collocative type of meaning a quotation from Leech needs to be mentioned: “Collocative meaning consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur in its environment.” (Leech 1981, 17) To clarify his definition, he used the examples of the adjectives “pretty” and “handsome” and the words which usually find themselves in their vicinity.

In the case of collocative meaning, the quasi-synonyms need to be mentioned, such as “to wander” and “to stroll”, whereby Leech explains that “cows may wander, but may not stroll”. (1981, 17) Besides that, a person can only “tremble” with fear and, on the other hand, only “quiver” with excitement. (1981, 17)

#### 7. Thematic Meaning

The thematic type of meaning provides an answer to the question: “What is communicated by the way the author formed and organized the message?”, i.e. can be considered as a part of sentence semantics. (Leech 1981, 19) There are multiple examples of these occurrences, such as the ones where the active and passive sentence constructions are confronted, e.g. Mr. X donated the first prize. (Active) vs. The first prize was donated by Mr. X. (Passive) (Leech 1981, 19).

In its core, however, Leech states that thematic meaning is “matter of choice between alternative grammatical construction”, for instance in sentences “A man is here to see you.” and “There is a man here to see you”. (1981, 19) Moreover, emphasis by substituting one element with another or stress and intonation can also be of great importance when dealing with this type of meaning. (1981, 19-20)

The Data of The “Let America Be America Again” By Langston Hughes

o.	Figurative Language	Type of Figurative Language	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning
.	Let it be dream it used to be <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 2</i>	personification	The dream that once happened	Make it a place it used to be known
.	Let it be pioneer on the plain <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 3</i>	personification	The forerunner of a smooth ground	Make America the no. 1 place in the world
.	Seeking home where he himself is free <i>Paragraph 1</i> <i>Line 4</i>	personification	Someone who is getting lost somewhere	Make America a home for everyone searching for
.	Let America be the dream the dreamers	personification	America is a dream that	Make it a place that

	dreamed <i>Paragraph 2</i> <i>Line 1</i>		people have when sleeping	people wanted
.	Let it be that great strong land of love <i>Paragraph 2</i> <i>Line 2</i>	personification	America has a strong land because of love	America is a place that's filled with love from people in it
.	Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme <i>Paragraph 2</i> <i>Line 3</i>	Personification	A place where kings can't cooperate and the tyrants can't make a scheme	Don't make America as a kingdom country and make it a republic country instead

## METHOD

This paper aims to analyze and find out what are the figurative language used in a poem by Langston Hughes called "Let America be America Again". The research methods used is a scientific method for achieving data This The research technique could be a logical strategy for procuring information for a certain objective, Non-participant perception is the strategy utilized, in which the analyst does not effectively participate within the perception. This will explain how rich the vocabulary used in this poem

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the table above, we can make a discussion:

1. From the sentence : "let it be dream it used to be" from paragraph 1 Line 2, it has several meanings with literal meaning "the dream that once happened" which means that America is a just a "dream" that happened before, but in the figurative meaning, the author wants America to be the place that Americans used to know.
2. In "let it be pioneer on the plain" from paragraph 1 Line 3 , in literal meaning it means that America is the forerunner of a smooth ground, nevertheless in the figurative language it means that the author wants America to be the best place in the world.
3. Next, in "seeking home where he himself is free" from paragraph 1 line 4, in literal meaning it means someone who is getting lost somewhere, but in figurative language it means make America a home for everyone searching for.
4. "let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed" from paragraph 2 line 1, in literal meaning means America is a dream that people have when sleeping. But in figurative language means make it a place that people wanted.
5. "let it be that great strong land of love" from paragraph 2 line 2, in literal meaning means America has a strong land because of love and in figurative language means America is a place that is filled with love from people in it.

6. Last one in “where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme” from paragraph 2 line 3, in literal meaning means a place where king cannot cooperate and the tyrants cannot make a scheme and in figurative language means do not make America as a kingdom country and make it a republic country instead.

Looking at the discussion above we can make a conclusion that in poem, there are many figurative languages used in poem including in ‘Let America be America Again’ by Langston Hughes. It indicates that figurative language is very useful to make a poem to be more interesting to the readers.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of personification in Langston Hughes’ *“Let America Be America Again”* reveals how the poet employs this literary device to deepen the emotional and ideological impact of his work. Through personification, Hughes vividly brings to life abstract concepts such as freedom, America, and equality, transforming them into active agents within the poem. This technique allows Hughes to portray America not merely as a geographic or political entity but as a dynamic, evolving idea—one that is both idealized and critiqued. By giving voice and human characteristics to concepts like liberty and opportunity, Hughes underscores the dissonance between America’s founding promises and the reality experienced by marginalized groups. Personification thus becomes a powerful tool in conveying the frustrations and hopes of those who have been denied the “American dream.” The poem’s use of this figurative language enhances its emotional resonance, inviting readers to reflect on the nation’s identity and its failure to fulfill its democratic ideals for all citizens.

The research has shown that personification, as used in this poem, serves not only a stylistic function but also a political one, emphasizing the struggle for equality and justice. This analysis of Hughes’ use of personification helps to illuminate the broader themes of the poem, reaffirming its relevance in discussions of American identity and social justice. Through this technique, Hughes transforms the poem into both a lament for unfulfilled promises and a call to action for the reclamation of America’s original ideals.

## REFERENCES

- Lyons S. Kelly , (2019) *Going Down Home with Daddy*. Florida, USA  
Nyong’o L, (2019) *Sulwe*, Hawaii, USA  
Maillard N. Kevin (2019) *Fry Bread : A Native American Family Story*. New York City, USA.  
Doyon C. Samara (2020) *Magnificent Homespun Brown : A Celebration*. Wabanaki, state of Maine.