

EXPLORING THE USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL “5 CENTIMETERS PER SECOND” WRITTEN BY MAKOTO SHINKAI

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language is a crucial element of literary expression, enriching narratives by conveying complex emotions and imagery beyond literal meaning, thereby deepening reader engagement and thematic resonance. Despite extensive research on figurative language in literature, specific analyses focusing on its distribution and function within contemporary translated Japanese novels particularly the melancholic and poetic works of Makoto Shinkai, such as *5 Centimeters Per Second* remain underexplored. This study aims to identify and analyze the types, frequency, and functions of figurative language specifically simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and verbal irony in the English translation of Shinkai's novel, in order to understand its contribution to the narrative's emotional and thematic impact. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with purposive sampling, the researcher systematically identified and interpreted figurative expressions within the text. Key findings reveal that metaphor (42,2%) and simile (37,1%) dominate the figurative landscape, collectively constituting 79,3% of instances. These are used extensively to evoke vivid imagery and profound emotional depth (e.g., “Akari's presence had been my only lifeline”). Hyperbole appears less frequently (20,3%), intensifying moments of emotional extremity, while verbal irony is entirely absent (0%), aligning with the novel's earnest, introspective tone. The study concludes that Shinkai strategically prioritizes metaphor and simile to explore themes of distance, longing, and transience, utilizes hyperbole for dramatic emphasis, and eschews irony to maintain emotional sincerity. This pattern underscores how figurative language functions as a primary vehicle for the novel's poignant storytelling.

Keywords: *Figurative Language, 5 centimeters Per Second, Makoto Shinkai, Metaphor, Simile, Literary Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Indeed even though many use English as a tool to communicate, it is important to respect other languages. Why? Because language is not just human's

tool to communicate with each other but it is also one of the very special parts of culture for human beings, just as costume, building, and art that reflect historical values of different communities. Adger (2019: 11) expresses, "Language, from this perspective, is like many other aspects of human culture." Therefore, as human beings, we have to keep it and develop it, ensuring our traditions are kept alive for future generations.

Certainly, many people love English. Consequently, people read themes and language versions in English, Japanese, Indonesian, or even other languages. However, many people read in English because many people learn English. English has become a widely used language. According to Winaldo and Oktaviani (2022: 21), "English is the universal language of communication." This statement demonstrates the fundamental role of English both nationally and globally. Although English is an international language, each country has its own characteristics. English is not only used in Britain but also in other countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, and so on, and each region has its own uniqueness (Aqil, 2020: 01).

"Merriam Webster illustrates literature as writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest" (Maharsi, 2012: 33). This means that literature includes works that are written beautifully and express important ideas that remain relevant over time and can be appreciated by people from different cultures. Literature itself comes in various forms, ranging from poetry and prose to drama. As noted by Cansrini and Herman (2022: 61), "literary works come in various forms, ranging from poetry and prose to drama. One type of literary work in prose form is the novel." This highlights the diversity within literature, where the novel stands out as a significant branch of prose. Novels are distinct for their narrative structure, often combining imaginative storytelling with a deep exploration of themes, characters, and settings, allowing readers to engage meaningfully with the text.

According to Webster in Swarniti (2022: 02), figurative language is a way of expressing an idea with full imagination. Figurative language is indeed one of the ways humans express their feelings artfully. It allows humans to use their

creativity and vivid imagery in communication to convey their emotions using beautiful and unique words. Furthermore, Colston (2015: 02) stated that there are ten types of figurative language. These include simile, rhetorical question, mixed figures, verbal irony, metaphor, colloquial tautology, idiom, metonymy, understatement, and hyperbole.

In the discussion of novels, it is evident that they represent a form of literary art that frequently incorporates slang terms and various types of figurative language. A novel is a storybook that features a plot, characters, abundant vocabulary, and diverse cultural and social backgrounds. According to Palupi et al. (2021: 36), "A novel is a book that has a plot, cultural background, social background, character, and has a lot of vocabulary." A novel is a genre of literary work that evolves with the times.

It was found that *5 Centimeters per Second* contains many melancholic and poetic sentences, which offer significant potential for identifying various forms of figurative language, such as metaphors, personifications, and hyperboles. This issue serves as the foundation for this thesis, as figurative language is often used to convey deeper meanings compared to literal language. In other words, the meaning of figurative language is frequently implicit and requires a strong contextual understanding.

This research observed on May 27, 2024 there are Ten types of Figurative Language such as simile, rhetorical question, mixed figures, verbal irony, metaphor, colloquial tautology, idiom, metonymy, understatement, and hyperbole. Therefore, the researcher interested in conducting the thesis titled "Exploring the Use of Figurative Language: An Analysis of the Novel *"5 Centimeters Per Second"*". The novel *"5 Centimeters Per Second"* is an original work by Makoto Shinkai, written in Japanese. However, in this research, the researcher utilizes the version translated into English by Kristi Fernandez for analysis. In this study researcher uses only several types of Figurative Language, including: simile, verbal irony, hyperbole, and metaphor.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Figurative Language

Figurative language plays a significant role in communication as it allows individuals to convey complex emotions, thoughts, and ideas creatively. By using metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and other figures of speech, speakers can add depth and richness to their expressions. Saputri and Setyaningsih (2014: 5) state, "Figurative language is language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation." This flexibility enables people to explore abstract concepts and subjective experiences, but it can also pose challenges in interpretation, particularly when the listener or reader is unfamiliar with the cultural or contextual nuances behind the expressions. Therefore, understanding figurative language often requires a combination of linguistic knowledge, cultural insight, and the ability to infer meaning based on context.

Kinds of Figurative Language

In the view of Keraf in Hutaruk (2017: 42), Figurative Language is classified into 14 types: Metonymy, Hyperbole, Paronomasia, Allusion, Allegory, Epithet, Synecdoche, Eponym, Irony, Antonomasia, Satire, Simile, Antiphrasis, Personification, Innuendo, and Metaphor. However, in this study, the researcher focuses only on four types: metaphor, simile, verbal irony, and hyperbole.

The rationale behind this selection is to ensure a more in-depth analysis of the chosen figurative language types. Future research could explore the remaining types to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the novel's stylistic elements.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is when we say something whose meaning is outside the sentence. Referring to Stern in Aljadaan (2018: 2) states "Hyperbole is a kind of figurative language where the speaker says something while meaning another thing." This means that hyperbole is a type of figurative language in which a person expresses something in an exaggerated way while intending a different meaning. Even though the words may sound extreme, they should not be taken literally.

"Hyperbole is kind of figurative language that is used to make the object become bigger than real object so it will give special effect and make the reader

more imagine to understand the actual meaning from the sentences” (Padillah et al 2019: 71) This statement explains that hyperbole is used to exaggerate an object beyond its real state. The purpose is to create a dramatic or emotional effect, helping the reader to visualize and better understand the actual meaning of the sentence.

Zainuddin (2017: 16) states that hyperbole is a form of expression, whether spoken or written, that exaggerates something or someone to appear greater, better, or more significant than reality. This means that hyperbole is intentionally used to amplify a statement beyond its actual truth for dramatic effect. It is often employed in literature, speeches, and everyday conversations to create emphasis, evoke strong emotions, or add humor. However, the exaggeration is not meant to be taken literally but rather to enhance the impact of the message being conveyed.

The conclusion is that a hyperbole is a sentence that is spoken which has a different meaning and has the aim of making the reader better understand the true meaning of the sentence. Here are examples of hyperbole:

- 1) After a century, i'm finally met a boyfriend.
- 2) I waited in line for ages.
- 3) I have a million things to do

Verbal Irony

“Verbal irony was a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed ... Verbal irony could be found in utterance with the intention of saying or expressing a hidden or guarded version of what was meant” (Harahap & Zainuddin, 2022: 74). Irony contains a contrast between what is said and what should be intended, simply it is used to sarcasm.

Bryant and Tree (2002: 100) describe verbal irony as a form of expression in which words are used to communicate a meaning that differs from, and often directly contrasts with, their literal interpretation. This means that verbal irony relies on context and tone to convey an implied meaning, often used for humor, sarcasm, or emphasis. The true intent behind the statement is usually understood through the speaker's tone of voice, facial expressions, or the situation in which the words are spoken. Consider the following verbal irony:

- 1) Telling a quiet group, "Don't speak all at once."
- 2) When someone is late, "You're right on time, as usual."
- 3) When someone drops something, "Nice catch!"

Function of Figurative Language

According to Hutauruk (2017: 40) "the function of figurative language as a kind of language departs from the language employed in literal ways of describing person or object in order to make imaginative description in a fresh way," meaning that it is another way of describing an object or a person using non-literal meanings in order to create a more imaginative description.

"The function of figurative language is to stimulate a certain image. It affects the beauty of the language in both oral and written communication. On the other side, it is also related to the understanding of the message conveyed" (Hutauruk, 2019: 130) it means there are at least two functions of figurative language: to enhance the aesthetic quality of both oral and written language, and to make communication easier to understand.

Novel 5 Centimeters Per Second

5 Centimeters Per Second, an anime which has been made by Makoto Shinkai in 2007. One of the greatest anime that ever made. Nirwana and Gultom (2018: 91) conclude that the novel "5 Centimeters Per Second" begins with the encounter of Takaki Toono (Takaki) and Akari Shinohara (Akari) in Tokyo during their elementary school days. Takaki is from Nagano and Akari is from Shizuoka. They become close friends, but eventually have to part ways when Akari's father is transferred to Iwafune, Tochigi. This separation deeply affects them as they had promised to attend the same junior high school, Nishi Junior High. Their last meeting during their elementary school farewell becomes a poignant memory. Despite being apart, they continue to exchange letters, with Akari's letters finding their way to Takaki's locker. They promise to meet on March 4th. After school, Takaki sets off on a long journey to Iwafune. Despite his late arrival, Akari waits for him, and they finally reunite, expressing their long-held feelings before parting ways. This becomes their last meeting until they become adults and enter the workforce.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher uses descriptive as the research design and qualitative as the approach. As stated by Fiantika et al (2022: 03-04), qualitative research is a type of research that does not use statistics in its findings and emphasizes how researchers understand and then interpret events, interactions, and behaviors of subjects in specific situations according to the researchers' perspective. Therefore, the researcher believes that the descriptive qualitative method is suitable. This is because, in this study, the researcher will identify phrases or clauses of figurative language and then interpret them.

In this study, researcher employed purposive sampling as the methodology for selecting data sources. Fauzy (2019: 125) in his book entitled "*Metode Sampling*" states "Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a sampling technique based on the researcher's judgment of who meets the criteria to be included in the sample." This is because the researcher himself has conducted a review of 5 Centimeters Per Second even though it is in anime form, and from this review the researcher realized that there are many poetic words. Although researchers have not carried out reading activities on the novel 5 centimeters per second There are, often many similarities between the novel and its adaptation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section aims to present all analytical findings in an objective, structured, and accessible format prior to further interpretation. Researchers typically employ various visual tools such as tables, charts, diagrams, or direct quotations to present data comprehensively.

Simile

Table 1. Sentences That Contain Figurative Language of the Simile Type

No	Textual Data (Quote), Page, and Line	Figurative Language Type	Interpretation
1	"Look, it's almost like snow"(Page 1, Line 1)	Simile	The phrase "Looks, it's almost like snow" contains a simile, which is a figure of

No	Textual Data (Quote), Page, and Line	Figurative Language Type	Interpretation
			speech that compares two different things using "like" or "as." In this case, "almost like snow" is comparing whatever is being referred to with snow, suggesting a similarity in appearance or quality.
2	“The sky was a clear pale blue, as if someone had dissolved blue paint in plenty of water”(Page 1, Line 7)	Simile	The text contains figurative language, specifically a simile. The phrase "as if someone had dissolved blue paint in plenty of water" compares the clear pale blue sky to the result of diluting blue paint, creating a vivid image of the sky's color. This comparison helps to convey the clarity and softness of the sky's hue.

Similes are a powerful stylistic device that enrich literary texts by drawing vivid comparisons using "like" or "as." In the dataset of 93 similes analyzed from the novel called 5 Centimetres Per Second, these comparisons play a central role in creating imagery, evoking emotion, and enhancing the reader's sensory experience. For instance, the simile “the sky was a clear pale blue, as if someone had dissolved blue paint in plenty of water” transforms a simple description of the sky into an artistic image, allowing readers to visualize a delicate hue with more precision. Similarly, “the dense lights of the streets twinkled like stars” uses a natural phenomenon to describe the cityscape, bridging the mundane with the majestic.

*Metaphor***Table 2. Sentences That Contain Figurative Language of the Metaphor Type**

No	Textual Data (Quote), Page, and Line	Figurative Language Type	Interpretation
1	"A boy who just turned eleven, and a girl the same age who's just about his height. in a world filled with light." (Page 1, Line 14)	Metaphor	While not a direct metaphor, describing the world as "filled with light" can imply that the world is good or joyful, suggesting a deeper meaning beyond the literal description.
2	"Their petals drifted down silently, carpeting the asphalt under our feet and turning it pure white" (Page 1, Line 5)	Metaphor	The metaphor of "carpeting the asphalt" implies that the petals cover the ground like a soft rug, which contrasts with the hard surface of the asphalt, adding depth to imagery. Lastly, describing the asphalt as "turning it pure white" invokes the powerful transformation of the environment, highlighting the beauty of nature.

In the novel *5 Centimeters Per Second*, metaphors are used extensively to express deep emotional states and complex human experiences. Across 106 examples, metaphors serve as a lens through which the characters' inner thoughts and relationships are revealed. For instance, the metaphor "Akari's presence had been my only lifeline" shows how essential she was to the narrator's emotional survival, equating her presence to a rescue line in a desperate situation. Similarly, metaphors like "we created our own little world" suggest isolation and intimacy between characters, framing their bond as a space removed from reality. These metaphorical phrases do more than describe—they immerse the reader in the character's psyche.

*Hyperbole***Table 3. Sentences that Contain Figurative Language of the Hyperbole Type**

No	Textual Data (Quote), Page, and Line	Figurative Language Type	Interpretation
1	"every single barb hurt me deeply" (Page 4, Line 12)	Hyperbole	The text employs figurative language to convey emotional pain through the metaphor of "barbs." The use of the word "barb" suggests sharpness and aggression, implying that the hurtful words or actions of others cause deep emotional wounds. The phrase "hurt me deeply" reinforces the intensity of this pain. While the language is straightforward, the metaphorical aspect lends a more profound emotional context to the experience being described, making it more figurative than literal.
2	"We hadn't been all that far apart." (Page 9, Line 14)	Hyperbole	The text "We hadn't been all that far apart" contains a figurative expression. The phrase "all that far apart" is an example of hyperbole, as it suggests a greater distance than may actually be the case. It implies emotional or relational closeness rather than a literal measurement of distance.

In 5 Centimeters Per Second, a total of 51 hyperbolic expressions were identified, each serving to amplify the emotional tone and intensity of the story.

Hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, is used by the author to dramatize the characters' feelings and perceptions. For example, the line "I read through it again, for the zillionth time" is not a literal claim, but an emotional emphasis on obsession and longing. Similarly, "I was seriously starving!" exaggerates physical hunger to reflect the character's emotional or situational distress. These overstatements are not meant to deceive, but to express how overwhelming simple moments can feel for the characters.

Verbal Irony

In Notably, the text does not employ verbal irony, a device where words convey a meaning opposite to their literal interpretation. This absence aligns with the story's earnest and introspective tone, which favors direct emotional expression over sarcasm or contradiction. By avoiding irony, the narrative maintains its sincerity and emotional vulnerability, ensuring that metaphors, similes, and hyperboles remain the primary tools for conveying the characters' feelings.

Discussion

This quantitative analysis of Makoto Shinkai's novel *5 Centimeters Per Second* reveals that the text primarily employs metaphor (42.2%) and simile (37.1%) as its dominant figurative devices, combining for 79.3% of all instances. Metaphors, such as "Akari's presence had been my only lifeline," deepen emotional and thematic resonance by directly equating abstract feelings with tangible imagery. Similes, like "Look, it's almost like snow," enhance relatability and vividness through explicit comparisons. Together, these devices suggest the narrative prioritizes introspective, evocative language to convey emotions and relationships.

Hyperbole appears less frequently (20.3%) but serves to intensify key moments, as seen in "I read through it again, for the zillionth time," amplifying emotions like frustration or obsession. In contrast, verbal irony is absent (0%). This absence of verbal irony indicates the text favors earnest expression over humor or cynicism.

Overall, the distribution underscores the text's reliance on comparative and exaggerated language for emotional and thematic impact. Metaphors and similes

establish depth and imagery, while hyperboles punctuate dramatic moments. The scarcity of irony further reinforces the narrative's introspective and direct tone, aligning with its focus on emotional authenticity rather than rhetorical contradiction.

CONCLUSION

From the conducted research, it can be concluded that Makoto Shinkai's novel *5 Centimeters Per Second* demonstrates a distinctive pattern in its use of figurative language, with metaphors (42.2%) and similes (37.1%) constituting the majority (79.3%) of figurative expressions, highlighting the author's preference for comparative language to create emotional depth and vivid imagery. Hyperboles appear with moderate frequency (20.3%), serving to intensify dramatic moments, while verbal irony is entirely absent (0%), reflecting the novel's predominantly sincere and introspective tone. These findings collectively illustrate how Shinkai effectively employs figurative language to enhance the narrative's exploration of themes like distance, longing, and emotional journeys, while also providing a framework for analyzing similar literary works that emphasize emotional storytelling through figurative devices.

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