



A Study of Figurative Language in Academy Award Acceptance Speeches

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to analyze the figurative language in the Academy Award acceptance speeches. According to the principles of qualitative investigation, this study applied a descriptive and interpretative method of content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In the study, the source of data comes from the Academy Award acceptance speeches. Thirty-one speeches from 2004 to 2013 have been chosen for the analysis using seven types of figurative language: climax, hyperbole, hypophora, irony, metaphor, oxymoron, and simile. The theoretical concepts that guided the framework of investigation in this study are related to figurative language. The frequencies of the types of figure of speech were then examined and presented in percentage form. The connotations that were interpreted from the figures of speech were derived into common themes. The results revealed that hyperbole is the most found type of figurative language, using 18 times in 16 speeches. Metaphor holds the second spot for using 16 times in 14 speeches while simile is undiscovered. Following the metaphor is irony with 14 times of usage in nine speeches. Moreover, climax, hypophora, and oxymoron are also found in the study.

Keywords: *Figurative language, Speech*

1. Introduction

English is considered the most important language because it is one of the world's top languages used by people across the globe. Also, as we know, English is selected to be either a second language or foreign language in a number of countries. We can communicate with people from all over the world if we know English. Moreover, we can share our ideas with others because of English.

In the academic setting, an oral presentation course is proved to be a success and popularity. The heart of successful presentation is to produce the affective and memorable speeches for inducing audiences. Public speakers are trained to become one. It is expected that public speakers usually practice their communication skills to craft their artistry. Verderber, Sellnow and Verderber (2011) state,

“Public speaking, a sustained formal presentation by a speaker to an audience, is simply one form of human communication. So learning to be an effective public speaker will help you to be more effective in other communication settings as well.”

According to Raja (2017), it is believed that a change in their confidence, speaking style, intonation pattern and the rest can contribute to a positive change in their professionalism and personality. Tacheva (2013) states,

“The verbal register, intonation, articulation, pronunciation, tone, rhythm, dialect define the character of the communicative impact as positive or negative depending on whether they facilitate or hinder the achievement of communicative purposes.”

According to Wise (2013), the quote lines which people remember are mostly used figurative language to create tone to them by taking the words and applying them to other objects or concepts. It does not only make the material more pleased to receive, but also help the argument more convincing.

Figurative language can be seen by the English major students in the courses like Creative Writing and Contemporary Literature, but for those who are not, it will be heavily included in the media as motion pictures, song lyrics, newspapers, and books for them to absorb. People who work in the publishing industry will know very well about how figurative language affects their works.



O'Connell states in the interview with Sterne (2015) that it is easier to explain to people in more figurative language than it is to say it in general because when the words are made more artistic and abstract, people will do everything to understand it.

Owen et al. (2015) state that there are various techniques to understand figurative language like considering connotations of words, examine figurative language, note imagery and repetition, and pay attention to tone and mood.

Therefore, this research aims to study and analyze each type of figurative language that is used in the speeches for creating aesthetic sending and receiving between senders and receivers.

2. Objectives

The study aims to explore the use of figurative language that is used in the Academy Award Acceptance Speeches.

3. Materials and methods

This research study is regarded quantitative with the major method of content analysis. The research procedures are as follows: First of all, the researcher collected the figurative language found in the Academy Award Acceptance Speeches. The main reasons why these speeches were purposively selected are because of their level of success and popularity; the study focused on the acceptance speeches of the Academy Award winners for Best Director, Best Actor in a leading role, Best Actress in a leading Role, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, and Best Actress in a supporting from 2004 to 2013.

Then, the researcher studied the related theories based on figurative language. The framework for the analysis was synthesized from various sources. Lastly, those speeches were analyzed based on each type of figurative language. Seven types are as follows: Climax (a figure of speech in which the ideas are arranged in the order of increasing important), Metaphor (a type of figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from or a thing considered as representative of some other (usually abstract) thing), Hyperbole (intentional exaggeration that is associated with formal and persuasive speech), Oxymoron (a figure of speech by means of which two ideas of opposite meaning are combined, so as to form an expressive adjective or phrase), Hypophora (when the speakers answers his or her own question. It shows contempt for the person being addressed that is, an impatience toward, a lack of interest in, whatever response might be forthcoming), Simile (a type of figure of speech in which two entities are compared. The comparison is normally created morphologically, namely, by an indicator of resemblance, such as the word "like" or "as"), and Irony (a type of figure of speech that consists in saying the opposite of what is meant, though the words are not to be taken literally).

In the analysis procedures, to identify the figures of speech and the connotations, the researcher applied the method of labeling and coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strass and Corbin, 1998). From Miles and Huberman (1994), 30 percent of the analysis was submitted to validators to ensure at least 80 percent agreement with the researcher's interpretation before further analysis was undertaken in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis in this study. The frequencies of the types of figure of speech were then examined and presented in percentage form. The connotations that were interpreted from the figures of speech were derived into common themes.

4. Results

This section analyzes the data collected according to the method applied in the present research. The results are presented according to the actual number in percentage form.

From Table 1, it was revealed that hyperbole was used most while simile was found none. Some examples of figurative language found in the data are presented here with the borrowed words highlighted as follows:

Table 1 Results of Frequency of Usage of Figurative Language

Figurative Language	Frequency of Usage
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[1474]



1. Climax	5
2. Hyperbole	18
3. Hypophora	1
4. Irony	14
5. Metaphor	16
6. Oxymoron	1
7. Simile	0

1. Climax

1.1 On March 2, 2014 at Dolby Theatre, Jared Leto has won the 86th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film 'Dallas Buyers Club':

"In 1971, Bossier City, Louisiana, there was a teenage girl who was pregnant with her second child. She was a high school dropout and a single mom, but somehow she managed to make a better life for herself and her children. She encouraged her kids to be creative, to work hard and to do something special. That girl is my mother, and she's here tonight."

Analysis: The statement has the climatic meaning. Leto detailed his mother that since she gave birth of his in 1971, she raised him and his brother while she was a teenager and made them the sensational people and encouraged them to be creative, to work hard and to do something special from then to now. The climatic condition of this quote is the narrating of the statement from the beginning to its peak. The climax is used because Leto wants to express her feeling.

2. Hyperbole

2.1 On February 27, 2005 at Kodak Theatre, Jamie Foxx has won the 77th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Leading Role from the film 'Ray':

"And first I'm going to start it out with Taylor Hackford. Taylor, you took a chance, man. I mean that love for Ray Charles was deep down in the earth somewhere and you opened it up. And it's cracked open and it's spilling, and everybody's drowning in this love."

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Foxx honored the director, Taylor Hackford by stating Hackford as the one who brought the love of Ray Charles which was deep down in the earth like the groundwater. He also mentioned that the love flooded over the surface and got everyone drowned which means people indulged by Charles' memoir. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Foxx wants to express his feeling.

2.2 On March 7, 2010 at Kodak Theatre, Mo'Nique has won the 82th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Supporting Role from the film 'Precious':

"Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey, because you touched it the whole world saw it."

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Mo'Nique thanked Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey, two of the several members of producer teams, that because of them the world then had the opportunity to know 'Precious'. She stated that to show how powerful they were by describing that only the touch of their hands, the whole world saw it which in the reality the film cannot be seen by everyone in the globe. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Mo'Nique wants to express her feeling.



2.3 On February 22, 2009 at Kodak Theatre, Penélope Cruz has won the 81th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Supporting Role from the film ‘Vicky Cristina Barcelona’:

“And I always felt that this was, that this ceremony was a moment of unity for the world, because art, in any form, is and has been and will always be our universal language and we should do everything we can, everything we can to protect its survival.”

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Cruz said that the Academy Awards was the moment that united the world because art was the universal language and we had to do everything to protect it which means she stated that art made impossible possible because she was a Spanish actress who knew that art brought her to the Oscars stage and gave her moment. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Cruz wants to express her feeling.

2.4 On February 26, 2012 at Hollywood & Highland Center, Meryl Streep has won the 84th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Leading Role from the film ‘The Iron Lady’:

“When they called my name I had this feeling I could hear half of America going, “Oh no! Oh, c'mon why? Her? Again?” You know? But, whatever.”

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Streep said that at the moment, she could hear half of the Americans murmured about her. She described that because she is the most nominated actress at the ceremony history and she thought that people who were watching would be tired of seeing her on the stage. The phrase ‘half of America’ indicated to number of people who would react after seeing her. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Streep wants to make the stage humorous.

2.5 On March 7, 2010 at Kodak Theatre, Sandra Bullock has won the 82th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Leading Role from the film ‘The Blind Side’:

“Gabby, I love you so much. You are exquisite. You are beyond words to me.”

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Bullock said to Gabourey Sidibe that she could not describe her with any words because she was beyond words to her. Bullock implied that Sidibe was extremely excellent. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The Hyperbole is used because Bullock wants to express her feeling.

2.6 On February 27, 2011 at Kodak Theatre, Natalie Portman has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Leading Role from the film ‘Black Swan’:

“Darren Aronofsky. You are a fearless leader, a visionary.”

The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Portman admired Darren Aronofsky, the director of Black Swan, that he was a fearless leader and visionary which mean he could lead her and the crew through everything with his leadership and he had the creativity to create something fresh and new like the idea in The Black Swan. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Portman wants to express his feeling.

2.7 On February 26, 2012 at Hollywood & Highland Center, Christopher Plummer has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film ‘Beginners’:



“I have a confession to make. When I first emerged from my mother's womb, I was already rehearsing my Academy thank you speech.”

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Plummer said that he prepared his Oscars acceptance speech since the day he was born, but it was completely not possible because there is no one knew the words since the first day of life. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Plummer wants to make the stage humorous.

“And lastly, my long-suffering wife, Elaine, who deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for coming to my rescue every day of my life.”

Analysis: The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. Plummer said that his wife should win the Nobel Peace Prize, the award honoring people whose virtue are accepted in general, for coming to his rescue every day of his life which means he could not be himself today without the help of his wife, then he would honored her the invaluable award like the Nobel Prize. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Plummer wants to make the stage humorous.

2.8 On February 27, 2011 at Kodak Theatre, Christian Bale has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film ‘The Fighter’:

“And our little girl who's taught me so much more than I'll ever be able to teach her. The statement has the hyperbolic meaning. He thanked his daughter, who taught him more than he taught her.”

Analysis: The statement was expressed by his love in his daughter, but it could not be real that Bale’s daughter would teach him more than Bale himself. The hyperbolic condition of this quote is the exaggeration of the statement. The hyperbole is used because Bale wants to express his feeling.

3. Hypophora

3.1 On February 22, 2009 at Kodak Theatre, Penélope Cruz has won the 81th Academy Awards for Best Actress in a Supporting Role from the film ‘Vicky Cristina Barcelona’:

“Has anybody ever fainted here? Because I might be the first one.”

Analysis: The statement has the hypophoric meaning. Cruz asked that has anybody ever fainted at the acceptance moment because she might be the first one who did it. The hypophoric condition of this quote is the question that is suddenly answered by the one who asks. The hypophora is used because Cruz wants to make the stage humorous.

4. Irony

4.1 On February 25, 2007 at Kodak theatre, Martin Scorsese has won the 79th Academy Awards for Best Directing from the film ‘The Departed’:

“Could you double-check the envelope?”

Analysis: Scorsese said to the presenters for making sure about his name in the envelope by double-checking it again. The statement has the ironic meaning because everyone knew that the name could not be anybody else but Scorsese himself. The ironic condition of this quote is the intended meaning of the question is different from the true meaning of the form. The irony is used because Scorsese wants to make the stage humorous.



4.2 On March 2, 2014 at Dolby Theatre, Cate Blanchett has won the 86th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Leading Role from the film 'Blue Jasmine':

"Sit down; you're too old to be standing. Blanchett talked to the audience, who were standing for her, to sit down."

Analysis: The statement has the ironic meaning because she stated that people who applauded for her were too old to stand for a long time which she means that they did not need to do this. The ironic condition of this quote is the intended meaning of the statement is different from the true meaning of the form. The irony is used because Blanchett wants to make the stage humorous. And perhaps those of us in the industry who are still foolishly clinging to the idea that female films with women at the center are niche experiences. They are not. Audiences want to see them and, in fact, they earn money.

"So... The world is round, people! Blanchett said that the idea of the female led film could not make money was arrogant and old-fashioned."

Analysis: The statement has the ironic meaning because the reality showed up that Blue Jasmine made money and received the highest honor in film, the Oscars. She also sarcastically mentioned that "the world is round" which means 'your heart should be opened'. The ironic condition of this quote is the intended meaning of the statement is different from the true meaning of the form. The irony is used because Blanchett wants to express her feeling.

4.3 On February 26, 2012 at Hollywood & Highland Center, Christopher Plummer has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film 'Beginners':

"You're only two years older than me, darling. Where have you been all my life? Plummer talked to his Oscars that where it had been throughout his life."

Analysis: The statement has the ironic meaning because he said that the Oscars was two years older than him, but why it took him so long to have the award in his hand. The ironic condition of this quote is the intended meaning of the statement is different from the true meaning of the form. The irony is used because Plummer wants to make the stage humorous.

4.4 On February 27, 2011 at Kodak Theatre, Christian Bale has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film 'The Fighter':

"What a roomful of talented and inspirational people and what the hell am I doing here in the midst of you? It's such an honor. Bales asked himself that why he was in the roomful of talented and inspirational people."

Analysis: The statement has the ironic meaning because even though he was the winner of the night, he felt that there were so many people who were bigger more talented than him. It was surreal for him to believe that he was in the midst of them. The ironic condition of this quote is the intended meaning of the question is different from the true meaning of the form. The irony is used because Bales wants to express his feeling.

5. Metaphor

5.1 On February 27, 2005 at Kodak theatre, Clint Eastwood has won the 77th Academy Awards for Best Directing from the film 'Million Dollar Baby':



“To make a picture in thirty-seven days it takes a well-oiled machine. And that well-oiled machine is a crew--the cast.”

Analysis: The statement has the metaphoric meaning. Eastwood said that making the film had to use a well-oiled machine. He compared his team to the machine that worked hard and never failed to reach its limit. The metaphoric condition of this quote is the comparing of two unlikable things to show the characteristic of the statement. The metaphor is used because Eastwood wants to make an image to the words.

5.2 On March 2, 2014 at Dolby Theatre, Jared Leto has won the 86th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film ‘Dallas Buyers Club’:

“And to those of you out there who have ever felt injustice because of who you are or who you love, tonight I stand here in front of the world with you and for you.”

Analysis: The statement has the metaphoric meaning. Leto said to people who have ever felt injustice because of being who they are that he would stand against the world with them which means he would fight the bullies or people who have the idea that opposed with what he thought. He compared the world to people. The metaphoric condition of this quote is the comparing of two unlikable things to show the characteristic of the statement. The metaphor is used because Leto wants to express her feeling.

5.3 On February 27, 2011 at Kodak Theatre, Christian Bale has won the 83th Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role from the film ‘The Fighter’:

“My wonderful wife, who's my mast through the storms of life.”

Analysis: The statement has the metaphoric meaning. Bales compared his wife to the mast, which carried him through the storms of his life which means she was the important part of his journey of life. The metaphoric condition of this quote is the comparing of two unlikable things to show the characteristic of the statement. The metaphor is used because Bales wants to express his feeling.

5.4 On February 22, 2009 at Kodak theatre, Danny Boyle has won the 81st Academy Awards for Best Directing from the film ‘Slumdog Millionaire’:

“Just to make, my, um, Grace, Gabriel and Caitlin, my kids, and their wonderful mum Gail, thank you so much for letting me be ‘Tigger’ for so long.”

Analysis: The statement has the metaphoric meaning. Boyle thanked his wife and three kids for letting him be “Tigger” for so long. He described himself as Tigger from Winnie the Pooh, whose character is always happy and playful. The metaphoric condition of this quote is the comparing of two unlikable things to show the characteristic of the statement. The metaphor is used because Boyle wants to make an image to the words.

6. Oxymoron

6.1 On February 22, 2009 at Kodak theatre, Danny Boyle has won the 81st Academy Awards for Best Directing from the film ‘Slumdog Millionaire’:

“I don't know what it looks like on television, everybody, but in the room it's bloody wonderful, really. So, well done, everyone.”



Analysis: The statement has the oxymoronic meaning. Boyle described about the inner of auditorium which was bloody wonderful. He combined two words from different meaning to create new meaning. According to Cambridge dictionary, the word “bloody” is used to emphasize what you are saying in a rude way or it means “covered with or full of blood”, but when it is with the word “wonderful” it creates the positive meaning which means “absolute wonderful”. The oxymoronic condition of this quote is a pair of words that are combined to create an effect in the statement. The oxymoron is used because Boyle wants to make the speech interesting.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the usage of figurative language in 31 speeches from 2004 to 2013, the most found type of figure of speech is hyperbole which is used 18 times in 16 speeches. The results have demonstrated that situations causing excitement or pressure have made people doing something uncontrollable. The hyperbole is the way that words are exaggeratedly communicated, then the language which were spoken in the acceptance speeches often include hyperbole by overstating the speeches caused by enthusiasm. Afterwards, metaphor is held the second position of the most found type by being used 16 times in 14 speeches. When people want to illustrate their imagination with the words, they usually bring outer appearances of things or living things to compare with those words to make their speeches interesting and perfect for interpreting or understanding. Aside the metaphor, there is irony, the figure of speech that is used 14 times within 9 speeches. The irony is the way that the words real meaning is opposite to the words form. Sometimes people will use it for making humorous or sarcastic effects to the words. In this case, most of the irony are used for making jokes. Moreover, there are also 5 climax, hypophora, and oxymoron are used in the speeches. They are not the popular types of figure of speech. Then, it is hard to meet them being used in everyday lives.

The research outcome matches with the theory of Deignan Littlemore, and Semino (2003) who claimed that figurative language is used to express thoughts and emotions to affect the ideas and attitudes. The resultant of study coincides with the studies of Apiraktangsakul (2008) and Kraitongsook (2013) of Rangsit University, whose projects appeared that the most found type of figurative language is hyperbole.

Further research may be conducted along different lines. For instance, the sociolinguistic aspect of the use of those figurative language may be studied. This dimension will shed some light on the variation in the use of these figurative language in such parameters as age, gender, social class and educational background. The use of the figurative language in local newspapers, poetry and proverbs would be also worth investigating.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my family for the continuous support, patience, motivation, and immense knowledge.

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