

## การศึกษาโวหารภาพพจน์ในบทประพันธ์เรื่อง “โอลด์ พอสซัมส์ บุค ออฟ แพรคติกอล แคท”

### A Study of Figurative Languages in the Book “Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats”

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คณะศิลปศาสตร์ สาขาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวิชาชีพ มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต

#### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อค้นหาโวหารภาพพจน์ที่ใช้ในบทเพลงและเพื่อวิเคราะห์ความหมายของโวหารแต่ละประเภท โดยนำบทกลอนจำนวน 14 บทในหนังสือบทกลอนสำหรับเด็กชื่อ *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* ประพันธ์โดย T.S. Eliot ซึ่งถูกดัดแปลงเพื่อใช้เป็นเพลงหลักในละครเพลงเรื่อง *Cats* มาเป็นข้อมูลในการศึกษา ผู้วิจัยใช้หลักการของโวหารภาพพจน์ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลพบว่ามีการใช้โวหารภาพพจน์ 12 ประเภทในเพลงที่นำมาศึกษา และได้วิเคราะห์ความหมายในประโยคที่ใช้โวหารแต่ละประเภท โดยโวหารภาพพจน์ที่ผู้วิจัยพบ ได้แก่ การใช้สร้อยคำ การกล่าวซ้ำ การอ้างถึง อุปมาโวหาร อุปลักษณ์ ภาวะแย้ง การเน้นซ้ำคำ โวหารซ้อนคำ สัทพจน์ คำถามเชิงสำนวนโวหาร ปฏิพจน์ และสัมพจน์ ตามลำดับ

**คำสำคัญ:** ที เอส อีเลียต “โอลด์ พอสซัมส์ บุค ออฟ แพรคติกอล แคท” โวหารภาพพจน์

#### Abstract

The aims of the study were to examine the song lyrics in light of the figures of speeches used, and to interpret the meaning represented by each type of the figures of speech. The data of the study were the original poems adopted from *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* written by T.S. Eliot, of which 14 fundamental songs of *Cats* the musical were based upon. The researcher used figures of speech to analyze the data. The findings showed that 12 figures of speeches were found and when the implicit meaning of each figuration was analyzed, it was found that the poems contained refrains, repetitions, allusions, similes, metaphors, antithesises, anaphoras, chiasmuses, onomatopoeias, rhetorical questions, oxymoron, and synecdoche, respectively.

**Keywords:** T.S. Eliot, “Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats,” figure of speech

## 1. Introduction

Songs and poems are valuable resources of language. Both are entertaining and also contain numerous figures of speech which express a lot of sense and imagination. Musical is another source of songs as well, especially *Cats* which is based on *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. Due to the fact that the songs in *Cats* are based on the poems, perhaps it is not easy to understand the meaning of the figures of speech for some learners. Thus the study is conducted to examine the linguistic features in the songs, however, it can be simplified to get the picture of the implicit meaning of the figures of speech.

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is a collection of whimsical poems by T. S. Eliot (2009) about feline psychology and sociology. It is the basis for the record-setting musical *Cats* of Andrew Lloyd Webber which was first premiered in London's West End in 1981; it has been performed around the world many times and has been translated into more than 20 languages. The poems were written in 1930s. Eliot, used his assumed name "Old Possum," in letters to his godchildren particularly Tom Faber and Alison Tandy. Thus, the syntax of the poem is simple: a succession of declarative, repetitive statements in parallel. Eliot was always inventing suitable cat names, as he was often asked for them by friends and strangers such as The Rum Tum Tugger, Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer.

Figurative language seems to be prevalent in songs and poems. Bernstein (1992) noted that

figurative language is expressed in "language that conveys beyond the literal, or ordinary, meaning of words" in many ways, including metaphor, simile, repetition, etc. Figurative language, as defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), is the "expressive, non-literal use of language for special effects, usually through images." Navigating one's way through figurative language requires a deeper level of text comprehension, an understanding beyond the literal level using analytical and inferential skills. For either native or nonnative English speakers, figurative language often seems complex and challenging. In her study of figurative language Allie (2003) found that students could interpret and portray the drawing as literal or figurative. Reading each poem is comparable to visiting or revisiting a new place. Some argue that teachers should not enforce scrutiny of poetry on their students, but rather, allow the students to enjoy it as a form of creative expression. Certainly, poetry should not be stripped of its beauty and entertainment value. Song lyrics often work this way because students will pick up the chorus much sooner than the verse of a song. There are many linguistic features, both syntactic and semantic, in an English song which cannot be easily understood by non-native speakers like Thai people, such as the use of idioms, metaphors, similes, and so on. Parpalea (2001) focused on neglect in the teaching of vocabulary and found that alerting the student to the figurative meaning implicit in the song is a helpful way of making songs more meaningful and

more memorable of words and vocabulary. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argued that our ordinary conceptual system is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature,” and that this is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions and vocabulary.

This paper will facilitate the people who are eager to study English and to challenge themselves by learning English through songs and poems. After understanding the deep sense of an implying meaning in figure of speech the readers will get in the emotion of the song without losing the main point and find it more beautiful in melodies, yet improve their listening skill, and gain a lot of vocabulary. Furthermore, this study can support the knowledge of linguistics especially in the field of cognitive linguistics.

## 2. Objectives

Music is another language as well as English whether with or without the lyrics. The study was undertaken to achieve the following aims:

- 1 To examine the lyrics in light of figures of speech, and
- 2 To interpret the meaning of words in the poem with figures of speech

## 3. Method

The researcher conducted this study in light of some figures of speech from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which contains 14 fundamental songs

of *Cats* the musical, and categorized them into four groups: Comparison (metaphors, similes, and synecdoches;) Reference (allusions;) Repetitions (anaphoras, refrains, and repetitions;) and Rhetoric (antithesis, chiasmus, onomatopoeia, oxymorons, and rhetorical questions.) The procedures of the study are shown below:

- 3.1 The researcher collected the poems from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, written by T.S. Eliot.
- 3.2 The researcher studied the principles of figures of speech to understand any figuration better before using it as the framework of the study.
- 3.3 After reading the principles and the poems thoroughly, the researcher selected related figures of speech.
- 3.4 The chosen figures of speech were used to establish the scope for the study.
- 3.5 The researcher used the figures of speech to analyze the content of the poems.

## 4. Results

Regarding the total number of which figure of speech is used the most and which song used the figures of speech the most, “Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer” seems to contain the greatest number of figures of speech. The figures of speech which are used the most and the least are refrain and repetition respectively. The figures of speech ranked from the most used to the least are as follows:

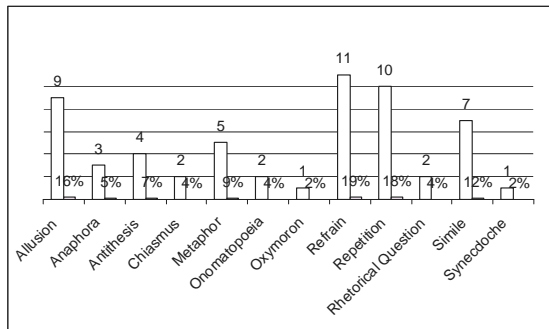


Figure1 Frequency of the use of figures of speech

Figure1 indicates that refrain was used the most among all of the figures of speech. It was used 11 times or 19%. The second was refrain was repetition which was used 10 times or 18%. The next was allusion. Similar to repetition, it was highly used as well (9 times or 16%). In mid range, there were possessed simile, metaphor, and antithesis respectively. Simile was used 7 times or 12%. Metaphor was used 5 times or 9% and the last of this level is antithesis which was used 4 times or 7%. The rest figures of speech which were not frequently used that much were: anaphora (3 times or 5%) followed by chiasmus, onomatopoeia, and rhetorical question (2 times or 4%) and the least used of the figures of speech were oxymoron and synecdoche (once used each or 2%)

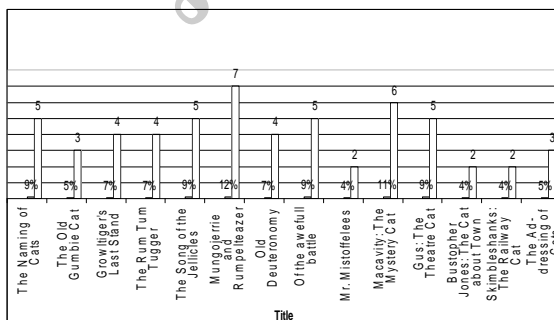


Figure2 Frequency of figures of speech used in the songs

Figure2 shows that “Mungojerrie and Rumpelzeazer” contains seven figures of speech or 12%. This appeared to be the greatest number. “Macavity: The Mystery Cat” was not far from the first as it includes six figures of speech or 11% and so was placed in the second. There were a few songs which contained 5 figures of speech or 9%, that is “The Naming of Cats,” “The Song of the Jellicles,” “Of the Awefull Battle,” and “Gus: The Theater Cat.” “Growliger’s Last Stand,” “The Rum Tum Tugger,” “Old Deuteronomy” also shared the same number of figures of speech used for 4 times or 7%. Next in rank of figures of speech used for 3 times or 5% were two songs: “The Old Gumbie Cat,” and “The Ad-dressing of Cats.” And the least were three songs which appeared 2 times or 4% which were “Mr. Mistofelees,” “Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town,” and “Skimbershanks: The Railway Cat.”

According to all accounts, both figures desperately demonstrate the results in number which contains the use of figures of speech in songs. The song which used figures of speech the most could be assumed that it also used the most used figures of speech. On the other hand, not seem the same as the song which contains figures of speech in the smallest number, it could not be assured that the least used of the figures of speech would be found.

## 5. Discussion

Eliot has noticeably used refrains in almost every poem in *Old Possum's Book*, as it is particularly associated with the structure of almost every song or poem. In addition, the poems were written to Eliot's godchildren, according to Lake (2003), his study found that children will pick up the chorus much sooner than the verses of a song because it is easy for the children to remember. Therefore some figures of speech have been used to attract children. Similarly onomatopoeia are used too because it commonly occurs in animal noises, remarkable in "Of the Awefull Battle." Repetition and anaphora are also used to emphasize the actions and to make the circumstances in which the poems to be more exciting as in "The Old Gumbie Cat," and "The Rum Tum Tugger." Antithesis, chiasmus, rhetorical question, oxymoron, and synecdoche are used to restate what is going on through the poems, and to delineate the characters, such as in "Mr. Mistoffelees," "Old Deuteronomy," and "The Addressing of Cats." He draws attention to the similarities between feline and human personality traits by using allusion, such as in "Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town" alludes to Beau Bummel, and "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" alludes to Professor Moriarty. Allusion is also made to Kipling's poem "l'Envoi" in "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat" and to many locations especially in "Growtiger's Last Stand," which describes several places along the Thames. This may relate to the previous study of Allie (2003), where

"reading each poem is comparable to visiting or revisiting a new place. The poems can be interpreted as literal or figurative." That is for the readers to imagine the picture of the places right in their mind and clearer understand the situation in the scene. Other comparisons like simile and metaphor are also used to make the audience understand of the characters and their actions as in "Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer," "Gus: The Theatre Cat," "Macavity: The Mystery Cat," and "Of the Awefull Battle."

In addition, figurative language is useful for students to learn the English language. Here, the teacher of English can apply the study for facilitating their students. A song is an interesting choice of teaching tools to motivate the students, as Dunaway (2010) stated that "while students will say 'I can't read poetry' or 'poetry doesn't make sense,' they never say they can't figure out a song, nevertheless, its original is close to poetry."

## 6. Conclusion

Song is another useful tool to learn the language, since "Language and music are closely tied together in brain processing by pitch, rhythm, and syntactical phrasing" (Lake, 2003). The present study focuses on analyzing linguistics features in the songs of Webber's musical *Cats* which the 14 songs are based on Eliot's poems in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. There are differences between poems and songs,

but it becomes less meaningful where verse is set to music.

In terms of figurative language, refrains, repetitions, allusions, similes, metaphors, antitheses, anaphoras, chiasmuses, onomatopoeias, rhetorical questions, oxymoron, and synecdoche, are respectively related in the study. To analyze poems and songs requires one to think deeply. Moreover, figures of speech seem to be an interesting point for anyone who is interested to learn a foreign language. Songs and poems remain a source linguistic study. Researchers who want to do further studies can use the results of the present study as the springboard for their research for instance, they can study other figures of speech, syntactic features of songs, advertisements, and movie scripts.

### 7. Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank all the teachers for giving knowledge; her special thanks are extended to Dr. Nakonthep Tipayasuparat, the adviser of the study, for his invaluable guidance.

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