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Types of Figurative Language Used in *Knives Out* Movie

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the types of figurative language used in the film *Knives Out* and described the meanings of the utterances. The research focused on classifying the figurative language produced by the characters and explaining how each expression contributed to the message of the dialogue and the overall story. The data were taken from the film script and were analyzed using Perrine and Arp's theory of figurative language. This research applied a qualitative method, in which all utterances that contained figurative language were collected and categorized based on their types. The analysis showed that various types of figurative language were found in the film, including simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, paradox, and irony. The findings indicated that figurative language in *Knives Out* was not only decorative, but also helped shape the storyline, deepen the characterization, and convey moral reflection. Figurative language functions as a key linguistic and thematic element that builds both the narrative and the moral dimension of the film.
Keywords: *figurative language, Knives Out, movie analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential medium through which individuals communicate ideas, intentions, and emotions (Agustina & Hendar, 2022). In literary and cinematic works, language often goes beyond literal expression and incorporates figurative forms to enrich meaning, emphasize impressions, and create aesthetic effects (Habiburrhaman et al., 2024). One of the media where figurative language frequently appears is film dialogue, as characters often speak in expressive, symbolic, or exaggerated ways to convey tension, humor, conflict, and characterization (Wiguna & Suastini, 2024).

Figurative language is a crucial element in narratives because it enhances expressiveness and contributes to the stylistic identity of the work (Grensideng & Agung, 2023). Understanding figurative language is therefore important not only for appreciating stylistic choices but also for recognizing how writers and scriptwriters construct layered expressions and implied meanings (Sukarini, 2022). Many previous studies have examined figurative language in novels, poems, or songs, while film dialogue has also become a growing area of inquiry because it combines written script with oral performance (Melly & Hilman, 2022; Mulyati, 2019; Ramadhan, 2022; Tiarawati & Ningsih, 2019; Yusnitasari et al., 2022).

However, studies on figurative language in films often tend to focus only on identifying the types without giving enough attention to how these expressions function in building the narrative and the characters.

The mystery film Knives Out (2019), written and directed by Rian Johnson, presents a rich and varied use of figurative language. The narrative, which centers on solving the mysterious death of a wealthy novelist, involves dynamic interactions between detectives, family members, and household staff. The characters' speech includes numerous figurative expressions that strengthen characterization, create tension and humour, and support the overall dramatic tone. In this film, figurative language does not only decorate the dialogue, but also helps shape the storyline and convey moral reflections related to truth, greed, and responsibility.

This study aimed at identifying the types of figurative language used in Knives Out (2019) and describing their meanings based on the context of the dialogue. The analysis was carried out using Perrine and Arp's theory of figurative language by focusing on figurative expressions in a popular mystery film, this research provided a clearer picture of how language choices in film dialogue can build narrative meaning and moral messages. The findings are expected to give academic contribution to the study of figurative language in audiovisual media. Moreover, this study may also serve as a reference for students and researchers who are interested in analyzing figurative language in film.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined figurative language in different types of texts. Bora and Agung (2023) analysed figurative language in Ed Sheeran's song Give Me Love and found seven types of figurative expressions, including simile, personification, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, synecdoche, and metonymy. Their study shows that figurative language helps express deeper emotional meaning and creates a stronger aesthetic effect in song lyrics. Another study by Ulfa et al. (2022) investigated figurative language in The Jakarta Post headlines. They found that metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche, personification, simile, and eponym were commonly used to attract readers' attention and to summarize complex events in short but meaningful expressions.

Atallah and Wibowo (2025) focused on metaphors in several songs by Harris J and showed that metaphor is used to communicate spiritual themes, emotional experiences, and personal reflection. Their findings suggest that metaphors help create symbolic meanings that listeners can relate to. In another study, Swarniti (2022) analysed figurative language in Adele's song Easy on Me and identified personification, hyperbole, litotes, paradox, allusion, and symbol. The study concludes that figurative language is used to express emotional struggles and strengthen the message of the song. Research on figurative language in Disney movie songs by Hariyani et al. (2024) also shows that figurative expressions support storytelling and convey moral values. It was found that figurative language creates imagery and emotional effects that match the themes of the films and make the songs more meaningful for audiences, especially children.

Taken together, the previous studies show that figurative language plays an important role in many different genres and media. Figurative expressions help express emotions, clarify

ideas, support moral messages, and create aesthetic quality in various texts. However, most of these studies focus on song lyrics or news media. Research that examines figurative language in film dialogue, especially in detective or mystery films, is still limited. There is also little discussion on how figurative expressions help build mystery, shape characterization, and support thematic messages in modern detective cinema. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by analysing the types of figurative language used in Knives Out and explaining how these expressions contribute to the narrative and thematic elements of the film.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research focuses on describing and interpreting human expressions in their natural context. In this study, the descriptive qualitative method allowed the researcher to present figurative expressions in their original form and categorize them based on established theoretical criteria.

The primary data source was the film Knives Out (2019), written and directed by Rian Johnson. The data consisted of dialogues spoken by the characters that contained figurative language. To obtain the data, several steps were conducted. First, the film was watched repeatedly to understand the storyline and identify scenes containing figurative expressions. Second, the dialogues were transcribed into written form to make the analysis process more systematic. Third, all utterances that showed figurative expressions were highlighted and collected as preliminary data.

After the data were collected, the researcher conducted a qualitative content analysis. In this study, the analysis began with identifying each figurative expression within the transcribed dialogues. The selected data were then classified into nine types of figurative language based on Perrine and Arp's (1992) categorization: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, paradox, and irony. This classification process was carried out by comparing each expression with the definition and characteristics of the figurative language categories stated in the theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part of the study presents the results and discussion of the analysis of figurative language used in the film Knives Out (2019). The analysis aims to identify the types of figurative language found in the movie grounded in the theoretical frameworks proposed by Perrine and Arp's classification of figurative language consisting of simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, paradox, and irony. The data analyzed in this chapter were taken from the film Knives Out (2019), focusing primarily on the dialogues spoken by the main character, Detective Benoit Blanc, to other supporting characters such as Marta Cabrera, Ransom Drysdale, and Linda Drysdale. For each type of figurative language found, the data are presented in the form of selected dialogues.

a. Simile

Simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two dissimilar things, usually signaled by the words like, as, than, similar to, or resembles (Perrine & Arp, 1992). Its primary function is to clarify meaning, enhance imagery, or emphasize emotion through comparison. In Knives

Out (2019), Benoit Blanc frequently employs similes when addressing the Thrombey family. His figurative comparisons serve not only as analytical tools but also as reflections of his intelligence, irony, and moral perspective.

1. Family Interview in the Living Room
   Blanc: "*The truth is like a fog, you think you can see through it, but you're lost the moment you stop moving.*"(Johnson, 2019, 00:42:10)

The simile is like a fog compares the concept of truth to fog. Denotatively, fog is a thick mist that obscures vision. Blanc implies that truth, like fog, is difficult to perceive and requires continuous effort to uncover. The fog represents the uncertainty of the family's statements and the deceptive atmosphere of the case.

2. Confrontation After Will Reading
   Blanc: "*You're circling this inheritance like a pack of vultures at a feast*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:50:10)

The simile like a pack of vultures at a feast draws a vivid comparison between the Thrombey family's greed and the behavior of scavengers feeding on a carcass, equates the family's reaction to Harlan's death with that of predators exploiting decay, revealing their willingness to benefit from loss and tragedy for their own advantage.

3. Blanc Explaining the Mystery's Structure
   Blanc: "*This case is like a doughnut with a hole inside of a hole*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:45:30)

The simile like a doughnut with a hole inside of a hole uses absurd imagery to describe the complexity of the investigation. Blanc suggests that the case has layers, where each answer reveals another missing part. This comparison highlights that the mystery is not straightforward and still contains deeper unanswered questions.

b. Metaphor

Metaphor is an implied comparison between two different things without using comparative words such as like or as. Instead, it asserts that one thing is another, transferring qualities from one domain to another (Perrine & Arp, 1992). In Knives Out (2019), Benoit Blanc frequently uses metaphors when analyzing the Thrombey family and their motives. His metaphoric expressions transform logical observation into vivid imagery, revealing his intellectual depth and moral insight.

1. Blanc Describing the Investigation's Beginning
   Blanc: "*This house is a loaded gun*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:43:30)

The metaphor This house is a loaded gun compares the Thrombey mansion to a weapon that is ready to go off at any moment. It suggests that the house is full of tension, secrets, and potential danger. Blanc implies that any small action could trigger a major revelation, showing that the investigation is unstable and could change direction quickly.

2. Blanc Explaining Family Greed
   Blanc: "*This family is a nest of snakes, coiled and ready to strike*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:02:40)

The metaphor a nest of snakes vividly depicts the Thrombey family as a group of venomous creatures coiled and ready to strike. Blanc's comparison suggests that beneath the family's polite appearance lies hostility, selfishness, and treachery.

3. Blanc Commenting on Deception
   Blanc: "*The truth is a tapestry woven from lies and threads of honesty*."(Johnson, 2019, 01:10:00)

The metaphor truth is a tapestry presents the idea of truth as something carefully woven together from many different threads. Blanc uses this image to suggest that truth in the Thrombey case is not a single, straightforward fact but a complex composition of honesty, lies, and partial truths.

c. Personification

Personification attributes human qualities to inanimate objects, abstract ideas, or non-human entities (Perrine & Arp, 1992). In Knives Out, Blanc personifies truth, deceit, and justice to dramatize his reasoning and moral stance.

1. Blanc Reflecting on the Case
   Blanc: "*The truth has a funny way of coming out, no matter how deep you bury it*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:45:15)

The personification has a funny way of coming out gives human qualities to the idea of truth. Blanc means that truth acts like a living being it can reveal itself no matter how much people try to hide it.

2. Blanc Discussing Lies
   Blanc: "*Lies don't just sit there they grow, they fester*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:47:10)

The personification Lies... grow, they fester presents falsehoods as living organisms. Blanc suggests that deceit does not remain harmless but expands, spreads, and creates further problems. This highlights how one lie can lead to more lies and cause increasing damage in the investigation.

3. Blanc's Reflection on Justice
   Blanc: "*Justice may be slow, but she never loses her way*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:20:00)

The personification Justice may be slow, but she never loses her way portrays justice as if it were a woman who moves steadily but always finds her destination. Blanc suggests that although justice might take time to arrive, it is constant and reliable, never straying from its rightful path.

d. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration used for emphasis or emotional impact (Perrine & Arp, 1992). Blanc often uses it to express astonishment, irony, or humor when confronting the Thrombey family.

1. Blanc's First Interview
   Blanc: "*This case has more twists than a barrel of snakes*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:37:30)

The hyperbole more twists than a barrel of snakes exaggerates how complicated the case has become. Blanc means that every clue he uncovers only leads to more confusion and unexpected turns.

2. Blanc Addressing the Family's Reactions
   Blanc: "*I've never seen a family implode this fast in my entire career*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:55:50)

The hyperbole implode this fast in my entire career exaggerates how suddenly the Thrombey family collapses after the reading of the will. Blanc uses it to describe how the family's relationships, morals, and composure fall apart almost instantly once their financial expectations are threatened.

3. Blanc Describing the Evidence
   Blanc: "*There's enough deception here to fill an encyclopedia*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:04:00)

The hyperbole enough deception to fill an encyclopedia exaggerates how many lies the Thrombey family has told. Blanc means that the family's dishonesty is so great and detailed that it could fill an entire set of books.

e. Apostrophe

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses someone absent, dead, or an abstract concept as if it could respond (Perrine & Arp, 1992). In Knives Out, Blanc occasionally personifies and addresses abstract notions such as truth, fate, or conscience as if they were living entities.

1. Blanc Reflecting Alone in the Study
   Blanc: "*Oh, truth, you slippery serpent show me your face!*" (Johnson, 2019, 00:46:20)

The apostrophe Oh, truth, you slippery serpent shows Blanc speaking directly to the idea of truth as if it were a living being capable of hiding or escaping. Blanc uses this expression to voice his frustration with how difficult it is to uncover the real facts hidden among so many lies and manipulations.

2. Blanc After Questioning the Family
   Blanc: "*Oh, conscience, do your duty before it's too late*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:50:15)

The apostrophe Oh, conscience, do your duty shows Blanc speaking to the idea of conscience as if it were a living force capable of taking action. Blanc is appealing to morality itself, as though calling upon the inner sense of right and wrong to reveal the truth and guide everyone toward honesty.

3. Blanc Examining Harlan's Portrait
   Blanc: "*Old man, if your spirit's still in this room, guide me to your truth*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:02:00)

The apostrophe Old man, if your spirit's still in this room shows Blanc speaking to Harlan Thrombey's spirit as if the late author were still present and able to hear him. Blanc's words suggest a symbolic conversation with Harlan's lingering wisdom and moral presence, as though Blanc is seeking silent guidance or approval from the man whose death he is investigating.

f. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole, or the whole represents a part (Perrine & Arp, 1992). It functions to condense complex ideas into symbolic references.

1. Blanc Addressing the Family's Greed
   Blanc: "*All I see are hands reaching for a will, not hearts mourning a man*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:54:20)

The phrase hands reaching for a will uses hands to represent the entire people acting greedily. Blanc suggests that the family's entire being is consumed by greed.

2. Blanc Discussing Hypocrisy
   Blanc: "*There are too many mouths talking and not enough ears listening*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:01:15)

The phrase hands reaching for a will uses hands to stand for the entire group of people acting out of greed. Blanc implies that the Thrombey family's whole selves not just their hands are driven by selfish desire, completely consumed by their hunger for inheritance and wealth.

3. Blanc Observing the Family's Argument
   Blanc: "*Too many voices in this room and not a single mind among them*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:03:45)

The phrase voices and mind stand for people and the way they think and speak. Blanc uses this phrase to describe the family's constant talking without any real sense or purpose.

g. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with another closely associated with it (Perrine & Arp, 1992). It emphasizes relationships and symbolic substitutions such as referring to power as the crown or authority as the law. In Knives Out (2019), Blanc frequently employs metonymy to allude to the Thrombey family's wealth, status, and moral corruption through associated objects or institutions rather than direct accusation.

1. Blanc Observing the Mansion
   Blanc: "*This house speaks volumes about the hands that built it*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:40:10)

The phrase this house acts as a metonymy representing the Thrombey family's legacy and fortune. Blanc uses it to symbolize the pride, power, and entitlement that have come to define the Thrombey name.

2. Blanc Discussing Influence
   Blanc: "*Money has a way of pulling strings even from the grave*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:52:20)

In this context, money functions as a metonymy for power and manipulation, representing the force that drives the Thrombey family's behavior. Blanc uses it to symbolize the control and influence that persist even after Harlan's death.

3. Blanc Confronting Ransom
   Blanc: "*The pen signed your guilt long before your hand did*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:40:10)

The phrase the pen functions as a metonymy for Ransom's deceitful actions and forged writings, substituting the object for the criminal acts it enabled. Blanc uses it to represent the false documents and forged letters that expose Ransom's guilt.

h. Paradox

Paradox is a statement that seems self-contradictory but reveals deeper truth upon reflection (Perrine & Arp, 1992). In Knives Out, Blanc frequently uses paradox to describe the contradictions within the family and the moral complexity of truth.

1. Blanc's Reflection During Investigation
   Blanc: "*The closer I get to the truth, the less I understand it*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:48:10)

The paradox the closer I get to the truth, the less I understand it contrasts the ideas of discovery and confusion.Blanc means that as he uncovers more facts, the mystery only grows deeper, revealing that truth is not simple but layered and complex.

2. Blanc Addressing Linda
   Blanc: "*Your honesty hides more secrets than your lies ever did*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:56:30)

This paradox highlights the tension between honesty and secrecy, exposing the irony within selective truth. Blanc suggests that the honesty being shown is incomplete used to hide personal motives and shape perception rather than to reveal the full truth.

3. Blanc Analyzing the Family's Unity
   Blanc: "*This family is bound together by hatred stronger than love*." (Johnson, 2019, 01:01:50)

The paradox bound together by hatred stronger than love contrasts feelings of affection and hostility. Blanc suggests that the family's unity is not based on genuine care, but on shared resentment and selfish interests. This expression highlights the dysfunctional nature of the Thrombey family and reveals that their connection is driven more by conflict than by love.

i. Irony

Irony is a figure of speech in which the intended meaning contrasts sharply with the literal one (Perrine & Arp, 1992). It often exposes contradiction, hypocrisy, or self-deception. In Knives Out, Blanc employs irony to mock the Thrombey family's pretensions and reveal hidden truths beneath their civility.

1. Blanc's Initial Observation
   Blanc: "*You all seem like such a happy family*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:42:00)

The ironic statement You all seem like such a happy family is spoken with clear sarcasm by Blanc. Blanc uses it to ridicule the Thrombey family's constant arguing and false civility.

2. Blanc Interviewing Walt
   Blanc: "*Mr. Thrombey, your loyalty to your father is truly inspiring*." (Johnson, 2019, 00:47:00)

The line Your loyalty is truly inspiring serves as a clear example of verbal irony in Blanc's dialogue. Blanc uses it to condemn Walt's opportunism and false devotion to Harlan's memory.

3. Blanc Responding to Linda's Defense
   Blanc: "*And your father's publishing company must've been a fine charity, then*."(Johnson, 2019, 00:59:00)

The irony in Blanc's remark comes from his sarcastic reversal, where he refers to the company as a charity. Blanc uses it to mock Linda's false belief in her own hard work and independence, revealing that her success actually stems from inherited wealth and privilege.

CONCLUSION

Figurative language used in *Knives Out* plays an important role in supporting the film's themes and messages. From the data analysed, the figurative expressions are shown to be more than decorative because they help shape the storyline, strengthen character portrayal, and highlight the film's moral ideas. The analysis also shows that these expressions help build the film's mood and reveal the relationships and tensions between the characters. Therefore, this study concludes that figurative language in *Knives Out* functions as a key linguistic and thematic element that supports both the narrative development and the moral dimension of the film.

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