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Module: English Language

Lecture: Figures of Speech

Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a word or phrase that possesses a separate meaning from its literal definition or meaning. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by simulating the imagination and evoking visual; such language paints a mental picture in words. Some types of figurative language are the following:

Simile: is a comparison between two ideas or concepts using words “like” or “as”.

For instance: “He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.” (Tennyson)

“My heart is like an apple tree whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit.” (Christina Rosseti)

Metaphor: (direct comparison) is like simile but without using words “like” or “as”. This implies that concepts share some quality or trait.

For instance: We received a tidal wave of complaints. = which means we have received so many complaints.

- She is a jewel.
- He is a couch potato. = not very active, or lazy.

Hyperbole: the use of exaggeration or over statement to make a point. It may be used for emphasis, for humor, or for poetic intensity.

For instance: You usually read something and you have to interpret it all the time!

- I died laughing.
- To be starved to death.

Euphemism: is usually used to soften the language especially the vulgar one.

For example: John passed away. = He died.

- Go around the bend. = Crazy.
- Split. = The divorce.

Personification: giving an inanimate object or an animal a quality or trait that persons have.

For example: The trees were dancing in the breeze. = Trees cannot dance only people can do this.

- The angry waves crashed against the rocks. = People get angry not waves.

Alliteration: the repetition of an initial consonant sound in the same expression.

For example: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” (Henry David Thoreau, Walden.)

Synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole.

For instance: Many hands make light work. = Here hands are used to refer to people.

- She bought new wheels. = here wheels are used to refer to the car that she bought.

Onomatopoeia: the formation of words according to the sounds made like: bang, splash, cuckoo.

Oxymoron: a figure of speech that has two contradictory words appearing side by side.

For instance: Alone together.

- Sharp dull.
- Freezer burn.

Apostrophe: to personify abstract ideas or concepts or inanimate objects or to bring them to life (bring to life dead people) through talking to them.

For instance: “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. (Jane Taylor)

- O holy night! (Adolph Adam)
- “Then come, sweet death, and rid me of this grief. (Queen Isabel in Edward 2).

Idioms: are expressions that mean something different than the words in the phrase might indicate.

For instance: He has got cold feet. = He is nervous.

- I am on the top of the world. = I am very happy, jubilant.
 - It is a piece of cake. = It's easy.
 - It is raining cats and dogs. = It's raining hard.
- Kill two birds with one stone. = Get two things done with a single action.

Proverbs: a proverb is a short wise saying that offers advice or wisdom about how to make choices or live your life.

For example: Absence makes the heart grow fonder. = Being away from someone or something for a period of time makes you appreciate that person or thing more when you see them or it again.

- All good things must come to an end. = Everything ends; good times don't last forever.
- Don't judge a book by its cover. = Don't judge someone or something by its appearance.
- Easy come, easy go. = When you make money quickly, it's very easy to lose it quickly as well.

Activity 01:

Identify the figure of speech used in the following sentences.

1. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! (Luke 13:34)
2. Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll! (the Ocean by Lord Byron)
3. Barack Obama made a fiery speech.
4. At last, they agreed to disagree.
5. I haven't seen you for ages.
6. Words are easy like the wind.
7. Infancy is the beginning of life as dawn is the beginning of the day.
8. Our echoes roll from soul to soul.
9. The wind lies in the arms of the dawn.
10. Hope is the poor man's bread.
11. She worked two jobs because she had six hungry mouths to feed.
12. Go and gather the green leaves on the grass.
13. The camel is the ship of the desert.
14. Variety is the spice of life.

Activity 02:

Indicate the meaning of the following proverbs:

1. A bad workman always blames his tools.
2. Actions speak louder than words.
3. A leopard can't/ doesn't change its spots.
4. All that glitters is not gold.
5. An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
6. An empty vessel makes much noise.
7. As you sow, so you shall reap.

Activity03:

Indicate the meaning of the following idioms:

1. Costs an arm and a leg.
2. Once in a blue moon
3. Under the weather.
4. Spill the beans.
5. Break a leg.
6. The ball is in your court.
7. As right as rain.