

## AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN THE POEM OF MARGARET ATWOOD “ A SAD CHILD”

<sup>1</sup>M. Asrul Hasby

<sup>1</sup>English Lecturer, FBMB, Mandalika University of Education, Indonesia

Corresponding Author Email: [muhammadasrulhasby@undikma.ac.id](mailto:muhammadasrulhasby@undikma.ac.id)

ABSTRACTS	ARTICLE INFO
<p>This study aimed to identify the figurative language used in the poem A Sad Child by Margaret Atwood. The study employed a qualitative method with a focus on analyzing the types of figurative language based on Perrine's theory. The primary data for this research was derived from the poem itself, complemented by secondary data from literary sources. The findings revealed that the poem utilized various types of figurative language, including metaphor, personification, symbolism, irony, imagery, and allegory. These elements collectively conveyed themes of sadness, loss of self-confidence, and the complexities of childhood emotions. This research highlighted how figurative language enhanced the emotional depth and empathetic impact of the poem. It provided valuable insights for readers in understanding the nuances of figurative language and its role in poetry.</p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025</i> <i>Revised: 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2025</i> <i>Published: December 2025</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Figurative Language,</i> <i>Poem Analysis.</i></p>

### INTRODUCTION

Literature, as described by Thomas R.A. Greg (2010), is an artistic creation that uses language as its medium of presentation, distinct from everyday language in its processing and expression by individual authors. Literature can be categorized into two groups: one that primarily conveys information and another that serves to entertain. It stems from the innate human love for storytelling and expressing experiences through words.

Literary works include drama, novels, short stories, and poems, all of which rely on imagination and creative invention. Poetry, in particular, is a form of writing where words are chosen for their sound and imagery rather than just their direct meanings. It often follows a rhythmic structure and may include rhyme. For some, poetry appears complex and is only fully understood by its writer.

Literary analysis encompasses various aspects, including figurative language, which enhances imagery and emotional connection but cannot be interpreted literally. If translated word-for-word, figurative expressions may lose their intended meaning, making it a challenge for translators to convey the correct interpretation. Figurative language includes metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, allegory, and others. This study focuses on analyzing figurative language in the poem *A Sad Child* by Margaret Atwood, aiming to identify the figurative elements used and their contextual meanings.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative method to describe and interpret the poem *A Sad Child* by Margaret Atwood. Qualitative research was chosen because it captures complex human experiences and relies on in-depth textual analysis. The researcher followed an interpretive approach, analyzing figurative language in the poem to uncover its deeper meanings. Various experts, including Merriam (1998), Creswell (1994), and Sukmadinata (2010), emphasize that qualitative research is suitable for exploring subjective realities, natural phenomena, and social interactions. The method used in this study was content analysis, which involved reading, interpreting, and categorizing elements of figurative language. This study applied qualitative methods, focusing on figurative language analysis and poem analysis to interpret the meanings conveyed in *A Sad Child*. The content analysis technique was used to systematically identify and categorize figurative elements within the poem. According to Neuendorf (2002) and Ekomadyo (2006), content analysis involves examining words, images, symbols, themes, and messages within a text.

Following Neumann's (2000) framework, the analysis involved four steps:

1. Reading the Poem – Repeated readings to understand the poem's context.
2. Underlining – Identifying figurative language such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, litotes, and personification.
3. Writing – Documenting the figurative elements found in the poem.
4. Coding Data – Organizing and categorizing the data based on figurative language types, with assigned page and line numbers for reference. Additionally, coding was used to assign initials for the page and line numbers.
  - a. Figurative Language

**Table 1 Figurative Language**

1) Allegory	: AL
2) Hyperbole	: HB
3) Irony	: IR
4) Metaphor	: MP
5) Metonymy	: MT
6) Paradox	: PD
7) Personification	: PF
8) Symbol	: SY
9) Similie	: SM

- b. Number

**Table 1 Number**

<b>P</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>Line</b>

## RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the research findings, this section begins by describing the poetry selected for research. From the poetry presented, the findings from each research question are then explained.

### Poetry “A Sad Child”

*by Margaret Atwood.*

You're sad because you're sad.  
It's psychic. It's the age.  
It's chemical.  
Go see a shrink or take a pill,  
or hug your sadness like an eyeless doll  
you need to sleep.  
    Well, all children are sad  
    but some get over it.  
    Count your blessings.  
    Better than that,  
    buy a hat. Buy a coat or pet.  
    Take up dancing to forget.  
Forget what?  
Your sadness, your shadow,  
whatever it was that was done to you  
the day of the lawn party  
when you came inside  
flushed with the sun,  
your mouth sulky,  
your palms sticky with cake,  
and said to yourself in the bathroom,  
I am not the favorite child.

My darling, when it comes  
right down to it  
and the light fails and the fog rolls in,  
and you're trapped in your overturned body  
under a blanket or burning car,  
and the red flame is seeping out of you  
and igniting the tarmac beside your head,  
or else the floor, or else the pillow,  
none of us is;  
or else we all are.

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Based on the poem above, the researcher found the types of figurative language used in the poem according to Perrin's theory (1969), among which were:

### 1. Metaphor

The writer found two metaphor figures of speech.

- a. "You're sad because you're sad. It's psychic. It's the age. It's chemical." (Stanza 1, Lines 1-3)

Reason: This metaphor compared sadness to a medical condition (psychic, age, chemical), presenting sadness as an uncontrollable condition with complex causes.

- b. "Your sadness, your shadow" (Stanza 4, Line 14)

Reason: This metaphor compared sadness to a shadow, showing sadness as something that always accompanies, is inseparable, and has a profound impact. Therefore, the writer concluded it was classified as a metaphor.

### 2. Personification

The writer found one personification figure of speech.

- a. "Hug your sadness like an eyeless doll" (Stanza 2, Lines 5-6)

Reason: This personification gave human qualities to sadness, such as needing a hug and attention, presenting sadness as a living entity that requires care. Therefore, the writer concluded it was classified as personification.

### 3. Symbol

The writer found three symbolism figures of speech.

- a. "Eyeless doll" (Stanza 2, Line 6)

Reason: This symbolism represented the loss of direction and self-confidence, as well as the inability to see into the future.

- b. "Fog rolls in" (Stanza 5, Line 20)

Reason: This symbolism represented uncertainty, confusion, and the loss of direction.

- c. "Lawn party" and "cake" (Stanza 3, Lines 9-10)

Reason: This symbolism represented happiness that was unbalanced with sadness, showing the contrast between expectation and reality.

### 4. Irony

The writer found two irony figures of speech.

- a. "Count your blessings. Better than that, buy a hat. Buy a coat or pet." (Stanza 2, Lines 7-8)

Reason: This irony showed the discrepancy between the advice given and the problem faced, highlighting the insensitivity to sadness.

- b. "None of us is; or else we all are" (Stanza 5, Line 22)

Reason: This irony showed the contradiction between the uncertain statement and the awareness of universal sadness..

### 5. Imagery

The writer found three imagery figures of speech.

- a. "Flushed with the sun" (Stanza 3, Line 9)

Reason: This imagery described a bright physical condition, but contrasted with sadness.

- b. "Mouth sulky" (Stanza 3, Line 10)

Reason: This imagery depicted emotions of sadness and disappointment.

- c. "Palms sticky with cake" (Stanza 3, Line 10)

Reason: This imagery described an uncomfortable physical condition, contrasting with pleasure.

## 6. Allegory

The writer found one allegory figure of speech.

- a. "Lawn party" (Stanza 3, Line 9)

Reason: This allegory represented happiness that was unbalanced with sadness, showing the contrast between expectation and reality.

A study of the poem "A Sad Child" by Margaret Atwood shows the use of various figures of speech, such as metaphor, personification, symbolism, irony, imagery, and allegory, to depict sadness and loss of confidence in childhood. Based on Perrine's (1969) theory, the structure of the poem is complex with deep meanings that evoke empathy for the child's grief. Metaphors and symbolism show grief as a profound condition, such as the comparison of grief to a medical condition and the "eyeless doll" symbol that reflects loss of direction. Personification and imagery reinforce the impression of empathy, while irony and allegory highlight insensitivity to grief. Overall, this study confirms the importance of the use of figures of speech in building understanding and empathy for children's grief.

## CONCLUSIONS

A study of the poem "A Sad Child" by Margaret Atwood shows that the use of various figures of speech, such as metaphor, personification, symbolism, irony, imagery, and allegory, effectively builds empathy and understanding for the sadness and loss of confidence in childhood. Each element serves to illustrate the complexity of a child's emotions when facing major challenges, such as uncertainty, anxiety, and identity confusion. The rich structure of the poem and the use of various figures of speech work together to create deep meaning and a strong emotional impact on the reader. The poetic imagery allows the reader to feel and understand a child's struggle in the face of grief and loss of confidence. Thus, the poem not only conveys a story of loss and emotional distress, but also invites the reader to feel the depth of emotions that are often hidden behind the innocence and helplessness of childhood.

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