



WWJMRD 2022; 8(05): 63-67

www.wwjmr.com

International Journal

Peer Reviewed Journal

Refereed Journal

Indexed Journal

Impact Factor SJIF 2017:

5.182 2018: 5.51, (ISI) 2020-

2021: 1.361

E-ISSN: 2454-6615

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## Poetic Devices – A Learning Point to Enhance English Language Skills

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### Abstract

English language is a globally appreciated language with remarkable linguistic features. There are many genres of literature such as poetry, drama, fiction and short story. Of all these genres, poetry is the most intricate and subtle version of language. The literary devices which are embedded in poetry include simile, metaphor, epigram, rhyme, allegory, irony, hyperbole, oxymoron and many more. As a matter of fact, poems are often referred as the language of God. It is because of the implicit and soothing expressions framed in verses with brevity. Almost all poems have a beautiful rhyming and rhythm manifested in a crisp manner. This paper presents selected literary devices in a given set of poems with an analysis. It enlivens the beauty of English language and makes a point that poems are excellent genre to enhance language skills of writing, reading and speaking.

**Keywords:** Poetic devices, figurative language, English language skills, teaching English and genre.

### 1. Introduction

*'It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge'*

-Albert Einstein

Literature is a vast source of knowledge with abundant literary devices. It's mirror of human conflict presented by various authors across the globe. Each writer presented the themes with versatility using different techniques for the effectiveness. Though there is a notion to avoid metaphors, similes or any other literary devices, yet these devices play a vital role to provide accurate or effective experience to the audiences. To justify this, the current paper discusses the various poetic devices and their usage. Teaching English language is not just providing grammar principles but to make the learner involved in the language and use it effectively. Irina Chireev, (2015) points out that teaching English is not mere transfer of knowledge to students but increasing language skills in real life situations. It has been a challenge for ages to teachers of English to develop speaking skills in the multi lingual student community. Teaching English to the second language learners is always a challenging aspect. The teacher has to resort to various approaches to teach language effectively. Teaching communication skills would be stale, if literary examples are not considered. Poetry can be the works of great beauty due to its meter and rhyme scheme like the ebb and flow of an ocean. Reading and understanding poems really help the student to show more involvement towards language. Moreover, the students are exposed to new vocabulary, techniques of language from the lines of the poems. Through different terms of poetry used in the classroom, the students get more benefits of knowing new terms and words. (M. Ilankumaran, P. Deepa, 2018). Mathew Arnold defines, "Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things and hence its importance". It is the resolution of the language teacher to select appropriate poems that consist of beautiful literary devices for students to develop the language skills. According to Reena Mittal, (2014) "Poetry develops an understanding of texts and their literary beauty in the language classroom."

## 2. Research Objectives:

- To highlight poetic devices as an effective tool in ELT
- To present selected Poetic Devices with an analysis
- To make a point that by incorporating poetic devices, language can be effective.

There are great number of poetic devices used by great many authors in English literature. However, few of them have been taken for the study and analysed for the usage. The students ought to be aware of these amazing devices to implant in their usage. It's the role of the teacher to ignite the minds of the pupil to nurture the ideas of effective communication. Sachin L. Patki Adarsh (2013), argues that the students should learn how to speak the language efficiently and confidently. This comes through the practice and learning language skills.

## 3. Poetic Devices

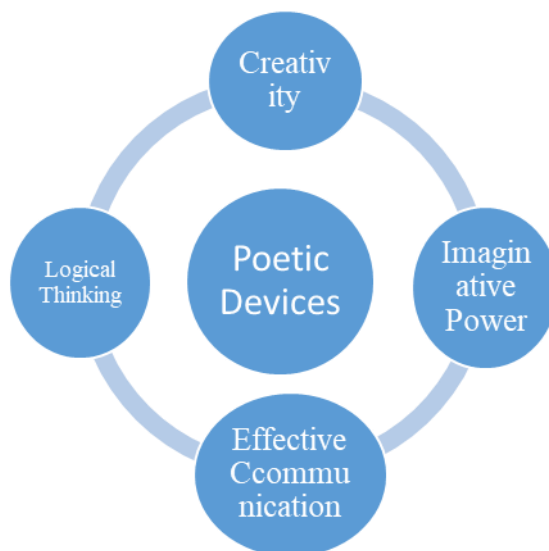
Figurative language is common in poetry and the examples can be traced from the real life. Some of the poetic devices are often used in poetry. They are: Allegory, Metaphor, Simile, Hyperbole, Alliteration, Irony, Oxymoron, and Epigram etc. These add beauty to the poetic language and such terms are found rarely in other genres like prose, drama or novel. By learning these devices, students will improve creativity, imaginative power, logical thinking, critical thinking skills apart from language skills like vocabulary and syntax. In addition, the poetry induces and promotes special qualities of life.

**Table 1:** Poetic Devices.

| S.No. | Name of the Poetic device | Meaning  | Example   |
|-------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1.    | Allusion                  | An indirect expression designed to refer a person, place, thing, or event    | We've got an Einstein over here.                    |
| 2.    | Alliteration              | A series of words begin with the same consonant sound to emphasize something | Neeraj's nephew needed some new notebook            |
| 3.    | Epigram                   | It is a concise, clever, and paradoxical statement                           | If we do not end war, war will end us.              |
| 4.    | Hyperbole                 | It uses extreme exaggeration to make emphasis                                | My mother has million things to do today.           |
| 5.    | Irony                     | Using words so the intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning.  | Our English teacher has poor grammar                |
| 6.    | Metaphor                  | containing an implied comparison   | Our boss is a tiger                                 |
| 7.    | Oxymoron                  | Saying two contradictory terms for special effect                            | Sad fun, dull light                                 |
| 8.    | Paradox                   | juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, reveals a deeper truth                   | This is beginning of the end                        |
| 9.    | Symbolism                 | a symbol is used to represent a concept                                      | The Prime Minister made the dove flew to mark peace |
| 10.   | Simile                    | Making indirect comparison using 'like'                                      | The tree is like a goddess of forest                |

Rich language resources available in the English Language and reading, interpreting and performing poetry should be a central pedagogical feature of the English teaching programme. Poetry enables the exploration of sound, image and word association while extending the semantic

resources available to students. (Stephen Elting and Arthur Firkins, 2006). As poetry is embedded with literary terms, literary forms, it makes students to show more interest towards poetry. This approach of poetic devices will certainly enrich language skills among students.



**Fig. 1.**

### Interrelated Skills of Poetic Devices

By understanding poetic devices, many subskills will be learned. Students can improve creativity, imaginative power, logical thinking, critical thinking skills and

effectiveness in communication. The way describing and interpreting something will be drastically enhanced by the application of poetic devices. The following discussion elaborates selected poetic devices with an analysis.

### 3.1 Poetic Devices - # 1. Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a literary device used in literary works or spoken expressions to attract the audience. It is a figure of speech that adds depth of meaning to the language. The word "oxymoron" is derived from Greek, referring to a combination of oxy- meaning sharp and -mōrōs meaning dull. Oxymoron is about saying two contradictory terms which are used together for special effect. Poets have been using oxymoron as a literary device for ages to stimulate humour, range of emotion and philosophical thought. If these oxymorons are applied in daily conversations, learners' language becomes very effective providing intellectual touch. Some of the examples of Oxymorons used by renowned poets are absent presence (Sidney 1591), beggarly riches (Donne 1624), darkness visible (Milton 1667), falsely true (Tennyson 1862), melancholy merriment (Byron 1819). Oxymorons for day-to-day usage for effect are deceptively honest, definite maybe, dull roar, eloquent silence, freezer burn, friendly takeover, genuine imitation, good grief, growing smaller, guest host and historical present are some to mention.

Oxymoron is used by great poets for better expression and effect. For instance, in William Wordsworth's poem the world is too much with us, he uses the contradictory words sordid boon to express his dismay in the fact that "we have given our hearts away" by placing great emphasis on material wealth and have neglected the Mother Nature which is the only remedy to make us better people. Similarly, John Milton in his poem Paradise Lost describes hell as darkness visible. By this oxymoron, the writer cautions people that darkness is not a physical phenomenon but it relates to inner senses. This device is applied to invoke humour also. In the poem by Brian Cleary, oxymoron oval square is used in a silly tale.

"One tall midget reached up high, touched the ground above the sky, tied his loafers, licked his tongue, and talked about the bee he stung. He painted, then, an **oval square** the colour of the bald man's hair, and in the painting, you could hear what's undetected by the ear." (McCarson, Debbie)

Oxymorons provide the striking language effect elevating humour. They can be witty phrases thus can become memorable ones. One of Shakespeare's best-known plays, Romeo and Juliet tells the story of two "star crossed lovers" who come from duelling families. An example of using Oxymoron is in Act I Scene I, which reveals the contradictory ideas of love and hate together.

Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all. Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.

Why then, O brawling love, **O loving hate**...

In Act II Scene II, Juliet is saying goodbye to Romeo during the famous balcony scene. She says mentioning sad parting as a sweet affair. Good night, good night. Parting is such **sweet sorrow!**

In Dylan Thomas' poem - Do not go gentle into that good night, he uses the oxymoron – blinding sight to invoke the fury.

Grave men, near death, who see with **blinding sight**

Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Thus, oxymorons leave a strong impact on the audiences. This poetic device is apt to use in a situation of contrasting ideas and it gives effect when word choice is made appropriately to provide suitable meaning.

### 3.2. Poetic Devices - # 2. Irony

Poetry offers deep interpretations with less obvious meanings implicitly presented in the work. Irony is an enchanting device used by poets to present the themes in an indirect manner. According to Ilankumaran, (2015) "Creative thoughts can lead to learning languages effectively. Thoughts make a mind registered with images which are known as ideas". When a poem contains irony, there is a clear discrepancy between appearances and reality. It is catchy for students as the effect is often humorous. A few examples from famous poets will illustrate how irony is used.

Emily Dickinson's poetry is enjoyable by her short and easy to read poems. She uses irony in many of her poems to enliven the contradictions prevail in the human life. Fame is a bee. It has a song -- It has a sting -- Ah, too, it has a wing. The irony is that bees are frightening and dangerous as fame which is enticing as well as troublesome. The final line speaks of how fleeting fame is once it has been achieved. By examining the irony in this poem, students will be able to understand the negative consequences of fame. Similarly, Edgar Allan Poe often struggles with the inevitability of death in his poems, and he often uses irony to contrast life and death. The opening stanza of "For Annie" uses irony to challenge the reader's assumptions:

Thank heaven! The crisis, the danger is past, And the lingering illness Is over at last, And the fever called "living" Is over at last.

The ending lines of the stanza, which suggest that death brings a welcome end to the "fever" of living. It shows how life's struggles might be compared to an "illness" full of danger and crisis. Another piece of example comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Water, water everywhere, and all the boards did shrink; Water, water everywhere, And not a drop to drink.

The mariner is dying of thirst while surrounded by water that he cannot drink. This shows a contradictory situation and discrepancy between appearances and reality. The mariner was surrounded by water and still thirsty, many people are surrounded by crowds but ultimately lonely. There is huge wealth in this world, yet poor are starving. This irony brings out various life situations which are contradictory.

### 3.3. Poetic Devices - # 3 Metaphor

A metaphor is considered a literary device which is a technique convention or structure that is used in literature and creative writing. A metaphor is an implied comparison between two unrelated things, people, objects, animals etc. Metaphors do not use the words "like" or "as" when make a comparison.

Eg. He is a walking encyclopaedia. It means he is full of knowledge.

The word 'metaphor' combines the Greek words 'meta' (between) and 'phero' (to carry). This literary device strengthens writing by showing comparison and also helps make our writing more interesting to read. Metaphors are used widely across the world to make their speech elegantly. For example, 'Life is a pizza'. Life is compared to Pizza by Richard Templar in his Rules of life. He says pizza contains different ingredients and similarly life is also a mixture of happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, love and many other emotions. He argues that we eat pizza by

removing the unpalatable ingredients or swallow them. And in the same manner, we must move ahead in life accepting the bitter realities. (Templar R, 2018) By using this metaphor, the author successfully transferred his ideology of life. At the same time, Carl Sandburg uses Metaphor in his poem 'Fog':

"The fog comes  
On little cat feet  
It sits looking  
Over harbor and city  
On silent haunches  
And then moves on"

In this short poem Carl Sandburg uses metaphors to speak 'the fog'. He compares the fog with the cat because the cat also comes with soft paws and without giving any sign of arrival. The same is the case with fog, as it approaches exactly in a similar way. Then the poet says the thick cloud of the fog covers the entire city in a similar way as the cat sits silently by folding its legs and looking around. The fog engulfs the harbour and the whole city silently and looks around the places, the way a cat does. It disappears after sometime, just like a cat without being noticed by anyone. By using the metaphor, the poet made an effective expression of fog.

### 3.4. Poetic Device # 4 Epigram

An Epigram expresses authenticable ideas for exciting surprise and holding ones' attention. It is a concise, clever, and sometimes paradoxical statement or line of verse. Irish poet Jane Wilde (who wrote under the pen name "Speranza") observed that "epigram is always better than an argument in conversation." (Richard. N, 2018). Interestingly, when asked for his favourite epigram, Karl Marx responded, 'de omnibus disputandum,' i.e., 'doubt everything.' (Dan Subotnik, Toxic Diversity. NYU Press, 2005).

Some of the Epigrams used by famous poets are:

- ✓ "The more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws." (Tacitus)
- ✓ "There are no gains without pains." (Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth")
- ✓ "If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth the writing." (Benjamin Franklin)

In 'Auguries of Innocence' by William Blake, the poet praises God as the light, God appears and God is light; to those poor souls who dwell in night, But does a human form display; to those who dwell in realms of day. (Lines 129 – 132). Here the poet points out the humanity of people. God is the light of humanity. Only the Almighty can save humanity in this world. He may live in people's souls who can show great humanity on creatures. Similarly, the poet Henry Wadsworth Long Fellow also said philosophically in the poem 'The Builders' that the Almighty resides in people's heart who follow the core-values such as hard work, respect, responsibility, honesty and integrity.

All are architects of Fate, Working in these walls of Time;  
some with massive deeds and great,  
Some with ornaments of rhyme. Let us do our work as well,  
both the unseen and the seen; Make the house, where Gods may dwell,  
beautiful, entire, and clean. (Baldwin, Emma)

An Epigram sometimes offer humour, attack the target subject and create lasting impression on the readers. William Words Worth uses Epigram in his poem "The Rainbow." 'The child is father of the man,' this epigram is a statement of wisdom that the qualities of little children like open mindedness, bondage, innocence can be emulated and learnt in some situations by adults. 'Failures are the pillars of success,' is another example of epigram. A shocking contradiction is made to the allocated meaning of an expression how can failures be the pillars of success. But it has underlying meaning failure can be the learning point from mistakes and to be cautious in future. Failures enhance the will power of doing the best for the next attempt. Epigrams can be used in speeches, debates and in negotiations in order to grab the attention of the audience.

### 5. Conclusion

The language ability of learners can be improved by reading literary text and applying them in their conversation. Communication skills are the most essential soft skills required at the time of job interviews. If the students are well and good in communication, they can survive anywhere sustain their jobs. The current paper focused on the need to develop communication skills of the students through teaching poetic devices. These devices make the student learn the different styles of language. By the acquisition of these devices, students know the appropriateness of the language. Incorporating literature and poetic devices in the language can make the students lively and motivating. Poetic devices are tools with which the students can achieve effectiveness in communication. They learn various devices, diction, and literary terms only by involving into that. To achieve the best outcomes, the teacher has to implement new methods and approaches to the students. Speaking practice can be given to them then and there to make them more confident. Poetic words need to be used whenever appropriate. Thus, teaching poetic devices in the classroom makes the students think innovatively and become confident speakers in the society.

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