

UNDERSTANDING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN A LITERARY WORK THROUGH LITERATURE CIRCLE

Oka Rodi Putra

Universitas Baturaja

okarorody@gmail.com

Puspita Devi

Universitas Baturaja

Puspita_devi87@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article is launched based on the highly seriously significant problems that are faced by the students in literature class. They are dealing with students' interest and motivation in learning literature. Most of students are uninterested in and unmotivated to learn about literature since they find difficulties in understanding figurative language. In fact, students do not get the point on how the figurative language is used to illustrate the implied meaning of the passage. Understanding figurative language can be perfectly retrieved through a cooperative learning, that is, literature circles. Literature circles is a temporary discussion groups between students who have chosen to read the same book in which each of the students has their own roles that differ from one another. When students are given a voice in what they read, they are more likely to learn and enjoy the experience. Additionally, their learning deepens their knowledge and becomes more meaningful to them.

Keywords: *figurative language, literature circles, student's interest*

INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to provide a crucial overview of the students' uninteresting toward reading a literature, beyond just reading a common passage. It is greatly intriguing to do something significant by seeing the crucial low percentage of reading interest in South East Asian, especially Indonesia which its results indicate that there is a serious problem in the quality of Indonesian reading. Therefore, it is a need to uncover the weaknesses of students' learning and performance in Indonesia on the basis of the PISA results (PISA, 2012). In Indonesia itself, books, however, have less priority and tend to be left behind. Hence, it results the lack of owning a reading habit, not only a common passage but a literary work too. This also falls onto education field, specifically in English education study program of Baturaja University where the students have difficulties in understanding the language that is used in a literary work in as much as it causes a lack of interest in learning such courses dealing with literature. According to Ogunsiji (2000), language in a literary work may be said to work in two board dimensions namely literal and figurative dimensions. Figuration, therefore, implies extended or associative meanings, i.e., the use of language in an imaginative manner to elaborate a proposition and/or to appeal the emotions of the reader or listener. Ogbulogo (2005) explains that literature as an aspect of communication expresses meaning incidentally in which the language is coded in a creative way, using figure of speech.

The role played by figurative language in encoding the meaning of a literary text cannot be overemphasized. Specifically, it serves both functional and artistic purposes.

Figurative and extended uses of language essentially depend on the perception and processing of more concrete core concepts and phenomena, the commonly observed failure in a typical population to understand figurative language remains a puzzle. Various accounts have been offered to explain this issue, ranging from linking potential failure directly to overall structural language competence (Norbury, 2005; Brock, Norbury, Einav, & Nation K., 2008) to right-hemispheric involvement (Gold and Faust, 2010). Figurative language is a cover term for linguistic expressions whose interpretation is non-literal, where the meaning of the expression as a whole cannot be computed directly from the meaning of its constituents. Figurative language can vary in types, degrees of extension from the literal and degrees of transparency, and structure. Moreover, figurative expressions can fluctuate from a single word to a long sentence. Here belong a range of phenomena, such as metaphors, idioms, proverbs, humours and jokes, hyperbole, indirect requests, and clichés (Gibbs, 1999).

It has been claimed that it is exactly the need to go beyond the literal interpretation and grasp the intended meaning that makes figurative language special and more demanding for processing (Levorato and Cacciari, 2002). Unlike literal language, such expressions depend more heavily on both linguistic and visual context, and are often—in fact, impossible—to understand in the absence of such context. Still, in everyday communication much of the meaning is implied, and can be understood following linguistic and contextual cues (Coulson, 2005).

Yet, research in developmental disorders documents subtle dissociations between the ability to understand literal expressions and the comprehension of non-literal (figurative) language. For instance, high-functioning individuals with autism with intact structural language skills often fail to understand the meaning of jokes, irony, and idiomatic language (Gold and Faust, 2010; Vulchanova, Talcott, Vulchanov, Stankova, & Eshuis, 2012a.b). Thus, they present a case against a simple continuum view of figurative language.

This research presents evidence from studies of figurative language processing in the fifth semester students of English education study program arguing that this evidence calls for a revision of a simple continuum view. The author first reviewed issues of relevance to the main topic, such as how to best approach and understand the similarities and differences in the processing of literal and figurative language. For this purpose the author started by interviewing and discussing evidence from basically simple scope of brainstorming question indicating their points of view toward learning literature, to then move on to comment and feedback on the data that can be found in looking at an instrument of special interest to figurative language. The author concludes by suggesting possible ways in which these data can be interpreted in the light of current cognitive accounts of broader approaches to figurative language comprehension, that is, through literature circle.

According to Burns (1998) literature circles incorporate several features that enhance students' reading experience and encourage growth in reading. Student choice, groups of mixed ability, and student-directed interactions are among them. It is powerful when students are given the responsibility to control their own learning. Indeed, Burns (1998) also shares the idea that the study of literature through literature circles takes an individual act and turns it into a social one where students create meaning with other students. Students are not left to

guess or figure things out on their own; rather, they are supported by their lecturer and peers to do well.

An extremely attentively brilliant quote is pretty sure convenient in reflecting the goal of literature circle in basic terms as in “The primary goal of literature circles is to help kids fall in love with books” (Kasten, 1995, p. 7). Literature circles targets many learning styles and allows all students to be successful. Students learn cooperatively with one another in a safe and protective environment where they can share their experiences and grow as a learner. Long and Gove (2003) discuss the idea that reading literary works should be purposeful and reflective. In addition, learning literature is pretty sure effective to enrich the students’ knowledge (Mila Arizah, personal communication, September 2015).

Literature circles are a pedagogically sound alternative to teacher-centered discourse. They can be used at all grade and ability levels, and are often credited with instilling a love of reading and discussion in students. Furthermore, current research indicates that peer collaboration has a positive effect on student learning and performance in Language Arts (Fall, Webb, & Chudowsky, 2000), increases student learning, and also improves reading comprehension and content-knowledge (Klinger, Vaughn and Schumm, 1998, cited in Daniels, 2002). Nevertheless, the broad main of this earlier issue is drawn up clearly through literature circle, especially is caused by the stage holder in this literature circles, that is, literary luminary. This role includes identification of various types of figurative language, including but not limited to simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and idiom. This may lead to discussion about the author’s craft - why the author chose to use those particular words or phrases, and whether or not they were effective. This in-context identification can be more relevant and memorable than isolated instruction by the teacher of these types of tools. By doing such so, the main aim of this issue in which the students can have huge amount of interest in literature courses is exactly reached.

Referring to the explanation above, the writer conducted a research to see the effectiveness of using Literature Circle strategies in order to broadly understand the language used in common literary work, that is to say, figurative language as the staffing stone to own interesting in learning literature.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher applied a literature circle method where the participants of this research were 21 students in the third semester from English education study program at Baturaja University. In most of their courses, English is used as the medium of instruction. They have just had such a course dealing with English literature in this third semester. In the guidance of their lecturer, Mrs.Mila Arizah, M.Pd, they are provided the brief origins and histories of English literature in the form of authenticity of English used in the covering of Introduction to Literature course.

Purposive sampling technique used by the researcher in assigning the sample of the research. First, the researcher relied on his own judgement when choosing members of population to participate in the study. The researcher used this technique to truly maintain the curiosity toward the main goal of the research itself, i.e., to know whether the students know the figurative language or not. It also involves the destination of elements regarding the

population of interest in learning literature, which forms the criteria for selection. There were of total 21 students who participated in this research. Finally, researcher allowed the total students to be the sample of the research.

Prior to collecting data, the author conducted informal observations of the classroom climate unconditionally before the due time. Upon observing the diverse population of the class, the author realized a need to incorporate authentic text in the form of short story written by Sherwood Anderson entitled "The Dumb Man". Lastly, the author then considered the awkward classroom schedule and gathered baseline data about the students' attitudes toward comprehending figurative language in another field of literary work, i.e. song. At that time, the author used to provide a hit from New Zealand's singer, Lorde, which is highly amazingly full of figure of speech, beyond just irony.

This research analyzed the effects of literature circle in understanding figurative language in order to reach the goal, that is, to have interests in learning literature course. The researcher used multiple different quantitative research techniques to establish data for the study. At the beginning of the study, the author gathered data about the students' interest and motivation towards learning literature using the mini-survey. The author then charted that data to further analyze how the students felt about literary works for academic and recreational purposes. Throughout the study the author observed all students as they worked in their peer led groups. The author observed discussion techniques, interaction, and engagement. He recorded this to track the students' responses, reactions, and comprehensions. By analyzing this data, the author was able to determine the students' level of comprehension of figurative language.

To collect the data, a questionnaire was administered to all students before (pre-test) and after (post-test) intervention. The students were asked to fill in the data preceded onto the questionnaire. The questions related both to their self-esteem, anxiety, and attitude toward learning literature, and analyzing figurative languages themselves. It spent about 60 minutes. The scoring system used by the researcher to measure this questionnaire was conducted by using the formula of $N = \frac{\text{True Items} \times 100}{\text{Total Items}}$. All the data obtained data were converted into percentages ranging from 1-100. The achievement of the students was categorized as follows: Excellent (80-100), good (70-79), average (56-69), poor (40-55), very poor (<40). (Buku Pedoman FKIP UNBARA, 2014, p. 12).

In this research, the data were analyzed by using t-test. Paired sample t-test was applied to see whether or not there was a significant difference on student' understanding of figurative language between before and after intervention. Meanwhile a Stepwise regression analysis was used to see the contribution of each aspect of figurative language understanding. The analyses of data were conducted by using SPSS 16.0.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using literature circles as an intervention to improve students' motivation and interests to enjoyably learn literature. In order to assess motivation the students completed surveys before and after the study began. Table 1 shows the result of the survey. Each option the students chose from the survey was worth a certain amount of "points". Students could earn a maximum of 100 points in all. A

higher score meant the student had more positive feelings toward understanding the language in a literary work, that is to say, figurative language, vice versa.

Based on the data analysis of the students' understanding of figurative language before the intervention was done, the students' mean score was 67.53 or was in average level of achievement. There were only 4 students in excellent level of achievement, 1 student was in good level of achievement, 8 students were in average level of achievement, and only 2 students were in poor level of achievement.

Table 1
Mean Score of Students' Understanding of Figurative Language

Level of Achievement	Pre Test	
	Mean	Frequency
Excellent (80 – 100)	85.25	4
Good (70 – 79)	70.00	1
Average (56 – 69)	61.37	8
Poor (40 – 55)	53.50	2
Very poor (< 40)	-	-
Total	67.53	15

In the second meeting, the participants in which have been randomly divided by the researcher to three groups where each groups consists of 5 students of the total population were decreased into 15 students because the others 6 students were absent, were introduced the term literature circles to be applied in literature class, this was predominantly attracted to one of the significant roles in the literature circles, that is, literary luminary role. In order to assess their comprehension students were given questions to answer upon the completion of the literature circle itself. The comprehension check was then graded and assigned a percentage score.

The participants, indeed, were given their own roles in the literature circle discussion. They worked on the debut single from New Zealand singer, Lorde, entitled Royals. This song was chosen by seeing the content of the songs that contains dynamic lyrics overwhelming by figures of speech. Each group had only 6 roles, that are to say, travel tracer, summarizer, connector, literary luminary, and vocabulary enricher that mixed up with discussion director. There was one student who concerned on two roles, i.e., discussion director and vocabulary enricher. They gave good contribution and participated actively and creatively to work the puzzle undone relating to the literary work they focused on. Furthermore, the one who had literary luminary, in which became the key of the successfullness of the group, found the difficulties in understanding some terms in lyrics, but the other who had another roles tried to help his/her friend. Not only that, the discussion conducted by each group spent smoothly and creatively where all of the roles were held in a convenient portion.

Relating to the understanding of figurative language, the researcher then found the significant improvement by seeing the student's cooperative contributions in expressing their effort to seek the meaning of particular figure of speech used in the passage given through the literature circles. The students' mean score was 76.92 or was in good level of achievement.

There were increasingly significant improvements of composition in which placed 8 students in excellent level of achievement, 5 students in good level of achievement, and only 2 students in average level of achievement.

Table 2

Mean Score of Students' Understanding of Figurative Language through LC

Level of Achievement	Post Test	
	Mean	Frequency
Excellent (80 – 100)	85,75	8
Good (70 – 79)	76,50	5
Average (56 – 69)	68,50	2
Poor (40 – 55)	-	-
Very poor (< 40)	-	-
Total	76,92	15

The result of t test paired showed that t value was -4.781 with Sig. 0.000. From the result, it can be concluded that there was a significant understanding of figurative language through literature circle method. To be clear see table 3

Table 3. The result of t test paired sample

Source	Average Score		Df	Mean Square	t	Sig
	Pre test	Post test				
LC	67,53	76,92	15	1.31000E1	-4.781	0.000

DISCUSSIONS

The data analysis of the student's understanding of figurative language preceded in a literary work after the invention showed that the student as a whole find a light on understanding those kinds of rhetorical and artistic language, i.e., figurative language, by using the literature circles method. Although the researcher only gave an extremely little number of stimuli, that is, only one literary work, but the tricky way the researcher used to choose the song enlisted lot of figure of speech in its lyrics, seems pretty much successful to make the one in a million ways. In other words, the "Royal" song is convenient enough to be applied as an instrument.

Moreover, the result of the implementation of literature circle indicated that the students felt enjoyable in working on each of their own roles. It was proved by the significance progress that the students have after the intervention. The mean of the students' score in understanding figurative language by using LC, indeed, was higher than the first one when they did it in the first survey where LC was not used. These findings were similar to Farinacci (1998) who was found that LC can improve the students' understanding toward figurative language through literature circle.

Furthermore, the findings above were also supported by Long and Gove (2003) which stated that the students felt enjoy and satisfy with their own works because they are more

likely to engage in purposeful and reflective discussions with literature circles because they are interpreting the text from more than one perspective or point of view.

Ferguson and Kern (2012) discussed roles in literature circle that assigned to students based on comprehension strategies: sensory image-maker, inference maker, questioner, connector, and synthesizer. In each role, the researchers provided guidelines and example questions for students to respond to. As a result, the students will contribute actively and understand what they focus on. In another study, the researcher Lin (2004) identified key roles such as the questioner, illustrator, passage master, and connector. Students were given a role sheet and expected to complete their own assignment sheet each time their group met. Although student roles and strategies may differ, research supports shaping literature circles to meet the needs of the students.

Literature circles are one important tool to motivate students. When students are given a voice in what they read they are more likely to learn and enjoy the experience. Additionally when they are afforded the opportunity to discuss what they are reading with others, who are also reading the same text, their understanding deepens and becomes more meaningful.

Literature circles provide for great opportunities to discuss books and get students wanting to read, beyond just a common passage. Long and Gove (2003) argue that in literature circles students question one another, change their point of view and push each other to delve deeper into the text.

Again, Long and Gove (2003) found that students who participated in literature circles became more curious about what they were reading as well as more involved and absorbed in the texts. Lehman and Sharer (1996) argue that when teachers create an environment, such as a literature circle, they are promoting curiosity and inquiry amongst their students. Teachers who use literature circles push their students understanding beyond the obvious by having them discuss with one another their viewpoints and questions. Literature circles give them the opportunity to read what they want to read and that choice can be powerful.

CONCLUSION

The research on student motivation and learning clearly shows how important it is for students to be motivated in order to learn. This information has important implications for educators. Given that many researchers find a link between student motivations and learning it is critical for educators to continue presenting interesting and intrinsically motivating materials to their students. Literature circles are just one way to motivate students to learn a literature course. They are a valuable tool to get students interested in learning different and, at times, more challenging literary works consisting of figurative languages. When students have the opportunity to discuss with others without judgment or fear of being incorrect they are more likely to take risks and make gains in their comprehension. Remembering that literature circles are student-centred it is critical for teachers to be there to support their students along the way. Only when that occurs will learning be maximized.

REFERENCES

- Brock J., Norbury C., Einav S., Nation K. (2008). Do individuals with autism process words in context? Evidence from language-mediated eye-movements. *Cognition* 108, 896–904. 10.1016/j.cognition.2008.06.007 [PubMed] [Cross Ref]
- Burns, B. (1998). Changing the classroom climate with literature circles. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 42(2), 124-130. Retrieved June 8, 2008 from EBSCO Host database.
- Carrison, C., Ernst-Slavit, G., Spiesman-Laughlin, J. (2009). Creating opportunities for “grand conversations” among ELLs with literature circles. In J. Coppola & E. Primas (Eds.), *One classroom, many learners: best literacy practices for today’s multilingual classrooms*. (pp.91-117). International Reading Association.
- Coulson S. (2005). “The Literal/Nonliteral distinction,” in *The Literal and the Nonliteral in Language and Thought*, eds Coulson S., Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk B., editors. (Berlin: Peter Lang), 9–22.
- DaLie, S. O. (2001). Students becoming real readers: Literature circles in high school English classes, in Ericson, B.O. (Ed.), *Teaching Reading in High School English Classes*. Urbana: NCTE, 84-100.
- Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Daniels, H. (2006). What's the next big thing with literature circles? *Voices from the Middle*, 13(4), 10.
- Fall, R.; Webb, N.; Chudowsky, N. (2000). "Group discussion and large-scale language arts assessment: Effects on students' comprehension". *American Educational Research Journal*. 37(4): 911–942. doi:10.3102/00028312037004911.
- Ferguson, L., & Kern, D. (2012). Re-visioning literature circles: Incorporating comprehension strategy instruction in student-led discussions. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 47(2), 23.
- FKIP UNBARA. (2014). *Buku pedoman fakultas keguruan dan ilmu pendidikan universitas baturaja*. Baturaja: FKIP UNBARA
- Gibbs, R. W. (1999). “Figurative language,” in *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Science*, eds Wilson R., Keil F., editors. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press;), 314–315.
- Gold R., Faust M., Goldstein A. (2010). Semantic integration during metaphor comprehension in Asperger syndrome. *Brain Lang.* 113, 124–134. 10.1016/j.bandl.2010.03.002 [PubMed] [Cross Ref]
- Heydon, R. (2003). Literature circles as a differentiated instructional strategy for including ESL students in mainstream classrooms. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59, 463-475.
- Kasten, Wendy. (1995). Literature Circles for the teaching of literature-based reading. In M. Radencich & L. mCkAY (Eds.). *Flexible Grouping for Literacy in the Elementary Grades*. 66-80. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Kennedy, XJ. (1983). *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Lehman, B.A., & Scharer, P.L. (1996). Reading alone, talking together: The role of discussion in developing literary awareness. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(1), 26-35. Retrieved June 8, 2008 from EBSCO Host database.

- Levorato M.C., Cacciari C. (2002). The creation of new figurative expressions: psycholinguistic evidence in Italian children, adolescents and adults. *J. Child Lang.* 29, 127–150. 10.1017/s0305000901004950 [PubMed] [Cross Ref]
- Lin, C. (2004). Literature circles. *Teacher Librarian*, 31(3), 23.
- Long, T.W., & Gove, M.K. (2003). How engagement strategies and literature circles promote critical response in a fourth-grade urban classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(4), 350-360. Retrieved June 8, 2008 from EBSCO Host database.
- Norbury, C. F. (2005). The relationship between theory of mind and metaphor: evidence from children with language impairment and autistic spectrum disorders. *Br. J. Dev. Psychol.* 23, 383–399 10.1348/026151005x26732 [Cross Ref]
- Ogbulogo, C. (2005). Concepts on Semantics. Lagos Sam Publication.
- Ogunsiji, A. (2000). “Introductory Semantics” In Babajide, A.O. (ed) *Studies in English Language*. Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers.
- PISA (2012). *What students know and can do: student performance in mathematic, reading and science*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA-2012-results-snapshot-Volume-I/ENG/pdf>
- Vulchanova M., Talcott J., Vulchanov V., Stankova M. (2012a). Language against the odds, or rather not: the weak central coherence hypothesis and language. *J. Neurolinguistics* 25, 13–30 10.1016/j.jneuroling.2011.07.004 [Cross Ref]
- Vulchanova M., Talcott J., Vulchanov V., Stankova M., Eshuis H. (2012b). Morphology in autism spectrum disorders: local processing bias and language. *Cogn. Neuropsychol.* 29, 584–600. 10.1080/02643294.2012.762350 [PubMed] [Cross Ref]
- Wilfong, L. G. (2009). Textmasters: Bringing literature circles to textbook reading across the curriculum: This strategy enables teachers to use literature circles with not just content area trade books but textbooks too. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 164.