

The Role of Figurative Language in Lexical Anthropomorphism

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Abstract. *Lexical anthropomorphism refers to the linguistic practice of attributing human-like characteristics, behaviors, or emotions to non-human entities such as animals, objects, or natural elements. One of the primary tools for achieving lexical anthropomorphism is figurative language, which includes devices such as metaphor, personification, and simile. This paper explores the role of figurative language in the construction of anthropomorphic imagery, focusing on how it allows non-human subjects to be imbued with human qualities. Through an examination of various examples in literature, advertising, and everyday discourse, this article demonstrates how figurative language serves as a bridge between human experience and the non-human world, fostering emotional engagement and enhancing meaning.*

Key words: *figurative language, lexical anthropomorphism, personification, metaphor, simile, human qualities, non-human entities, literary analysis, advertising.*

Figurative language plays a pivotal role in constructing and expressing anthropomorphism, a cognitive and linguistic process by which human traits and qualities are attributed to non-human entities. This linguistic phenomenon occurs frequently in literature, media, and advertising, where animals, objects, and nature are depicted with human-like actions, emotions, and personalities. The use of metaphors, similes, and personification allows these non-human entities to transcend their natural, physical limitations and engage with human experiences in more relatable, emotional ways.

This article explores how figurative language, particularly personification and metaphor, enhances the process of lexical anthropomorphism by assigning human-like qualities to the non-human world. It examines the ways in which figurative language bridges the gap between human perception and the animate or inanimate, transforming objects, animals, and nature into relatable characters.

Lexical anthropomorphism refers to the use of specific linguistic choices that assign human characteristics, behaviors, or emotions to non-human entities. This may involve the application of human-like actions to animals (e.g., “The dog thought about his next move”), or imbuing inanimate objects with human traits (e.g., “The car groaned as it started”). The process of anthropomorphizing the non-human world plays a central role in many forms of communication, from storytelling to advertising, because it creates a relatable and emotional connection between the audience and the non-human entities.

Figurative language is essential to lexical anthropomorphism because it enables the humanization of non-human entities by transforming them into more relatable or emotionally accessible figures. Through the metaphoric and personified use of words, non-human subjects – be it animals, natural phenomena, or objects – are reimagined as having human qualities such as thought, emotion, and

intention. Figurative language thus serves as a tool that not only enriches the narrative but also deepens the emotional impact of these characters or elements.

Personification, a key element of figurative language, involves giving human characteristics to non-human subjects. This device allows readers and listeners to empathize with animals, objects, and natural forces in ways that would not be possible if they were described merely by their physical properties. By attributing human actions, thoughts, or emotions to non-human subjects, personification transforms them into characters with their own agency and desires.

Examples of Personification:

- **Literary Example:** In *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, animals like Mole and Rat are given full human traits, including speech, emotions, and complex relationships. For example, Mole is described as "struggling in his little way" when dealing with a new environment, humanizing him through action and emotion.
- **Advertising Example:** The famous Coca-Cola polar bear commercials use personification, giving the bears human-like qualities of friendship, curiosity, and joy. The ad's purpose is to make the audience connect with the bears on an emotional level, as though they were human companions.

Through personification, these non-human characters are not just objects or animals; they are transformed into beings with personalities and relatable experiences, which draw the audience in.

Metaphors involve describing one thing in terms of another, often assigning human qualities to non-human entities by comparing them to familiar human characteristics. This allows complex and abstract ideas to be communicated more vividly and emotionally. By comparing animals or nature to human experiences, metaphors allow the reader to engage with these entities in a more personal and reflective way.

Examples of Metaphor:

- **Literary Example:** In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses metaphors such as "the green light" to represent the unattainable American Dream, but also to imbue the light with a sense of hope and longing that parallels human emotions.
- **Nature as Human:** "The trees groaned in pain as the wind howled through their branches" is a metaphor that not only personifies trees but also highlights human-like suffering, invoking empathy from the reader or listener.

Metaphors help to humanize the non-human world by associating its features with human-like experiences, offering deeper insight into human conditions and emotional landscapes through natural imagery.

Similes, another form of figurative language, compare two different things using the words "like" or "as". While they are more direct than metaphors, similes still serve to humanize non-human elements by drawing a parallel between them and human actions, emotions, or experiences. Similes help to anchor the non-human in familiar human contexts, creating a shared emotional response.

Examples of Simile:

- **Literary Example:** In *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, the character Charlotte is described as being "as wise as a teacher", making her not only a spider but also a figure who embodies the nurturing and guiding qualities typically attributed to humans.
- **Advertising Example:** In car advertisements, a vehicle might be described as "powerful like a lion" or "smooth like velvet", humanizing the product and making it more relatable and appealing to consumers.

Similes allow the audience to instantly connect with the subject by likening it to something familiar from their own experience, thus humanizing the non-human through direct comparison.

In literature, figurative language enriches the text by transforming non-human characters into relatable, human-like figures that evoke empathy, humor, or pathos. Through personification and metaphor, authors create dynamic, multi-dimensional characters out of animals and objects, blurring the line between human and non-human and allowing readers to explore complex themes in more relatable terms.

Advertising uses figurative language, particularly anthropomorphism, to make products and services feel more relatable and emotionally compelling. By personifying products (e.g., talking cars, animated animals), advertisers transform inanimate objects into personalities, creating a connection with consumers that taps into emotional appeal. The *Coca-Cola* polar bear and the *Geico Gecko* are prime examples of how anthropomorphized characters can increase brand recognition and emotional appeal.

Media, including films and television shows, frequently employ figurative language to develop anthropomorphic characters. Movies such as *Zootopia* and *Finding Nemo* rely on personification and metaphor to give animal characters human-like emotions, goals, and relationships, making the stories engaging and accessible to both children and adults.

The role of figurative language in lexical anthropomorphism is crucial for transforming the non-human world into a realm with human-like qualities. Through the use of personification, metaphor, and simile, figurative language creates a bridge between the human and the non-human, allowing for emotional connection, deeper understanding, and enhanced meaning. Whether in literature, advertising, or media, figurative language provides a tool for humanizing animals, nature, and objects, turning them into relatable, complex characters that resonate with audiences.

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