



An Analysis of Figurative Language in *A Dog's Way Home* Movie

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the types of figurative language found in the movie *A Dog's Way Home*. Figurative language plays a crucial role in enhancing emotional depth and narrative expression in films, yet academic research focusing specifically on its types in cinematic texts remains limited. The objective of this research is to identify, categorize, and describe the kinds of figurative language used throughout the film using M.H. Abrams's classification. By doing so, the study aims to raise awareness of how non-literal expressions function as stylistic devices that enrich storytelling in visual media. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyze selected dialogues and scenes containing figurative expressions. The findings reveal a total of 64 figurative expressions. Among them, personification (21.9%) and irony (20.3%) were the most dominant, followed by simile, metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, paradox, and synecdoche. The frequent presence of these expressions contributes to the film's narrative tone and supports its central themes. This study provides insight into the use of figurative language in popular films and serves as a useful reference for students and educators in literature, film studies, and English language learning contexts.

Keywords: figurative language, movie, *A Dog's Way Home*

Introduction

Figurative language is a powerful narrative tool that enables authors and filmmakers to evoke emotion, create vivid imagery, and enhance storytelling beyond literal meaning. In cinematic works like the 2019 film *A Dog's Way Home*, figurative

expressions add depth to the narrative, especially in portraying values such as loyalty, resilience, and the human-animal bond.

Figurative language is more than decorative it strengthens the connection between the text and the audience. Khadifa et al. (2022) categorize it into figures of thought and rhetorical figures, both of which shape layered meanings. Fardeni & Maulina (2025) view figurative language as a bridge that conveys abstract emotions and universal truths. Similarly, Ayu & Simanjuntak (2025) emphasize that devices like metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole enhance not just aesthetics but also moral and emotional messaging. This is evident in *A Dog's Way Home*, where such expressions evoke empathy and emotional engagement with the protagonist's journey.

Abrams & Harpham (2009) argue that figurative language invites deeper cognitive and emotional involvement by moving beyond the literal. Rofiq & Khasanah (2022) stress the role of metaphor and personification in emotional resonance, while Sejati & Wijaya (2024) highlight how figurative expressions help reveal broader themes and implicit messages.

Although previous studies have explored figurative language in films like *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *Moana*, limited research addresses its role in *A Dog's Way Home*, particularly in illustrating the emotional and symbolic dimensions of the human-animal relationship. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying and classifying the types of figurative language used in the film based on M.H. Abrams's framework, and to highlight its function as a narrative and stylistic element in cinema.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to explore the kinds of figurative language used in the 2019 film *A Dog's Way Home*. The research process includes data collection, classification, and interpretation. The primary data source is the official movie script, which contains dialogue and narrative expressions with potential figurative language. To support the analysis, the film itself serves as a secondary source, allowing observation of how the expressions are delivered visually and aurally through tone, gesture, and setting.

Data were collected through documentation and observation. The script was closely read to identify stylistic elements, while the film was observed to understand their presentation in context. Identified expressions were classified based on Abrams & Harpham's (2009) framework, which includes simile, metaphor, personification, and other figures of speech. This method offers insight into how figurative language functions as both a literary and cinematic device, contributing to the emotional and thematic depth of the film.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This study explores eight types of figurative language: personification, simile, metaphor, irony, metonymy, paradox, hyperbole, and synecdoche, based on the classification proposed by Abrams & Harpham, (2009). It achieves two main results: identifying the types of figurative language used in the movie *A Dog's Way Home* and

interpreting their meanings. The data from the movie script was analyzed using this framework. Table 1 presents the classification and amount of each type found in the film, highlighting their characteristics and narrative functions.

Table 1. Figurative language in A Dog's Way Home movie

No	Type of Figurative Language	Amount	Percentage
1	Hyperbole	6	9.4%
2	Irony	12	20.3%
3	Metaphor	9	14.1%
4	Metonymy	6	9.4%
5	Paradox	2	3.1%
6	Personification	14	21.9%
7	Simile	12	18.8%
8	Synecdoche	2	3.1%
	Total	64	100%

Discussion

1. Hyperbole

In *A Dog's Way Home*, the line *"I was hungrier than I'd ever been"* is a clear example of hyperbole. At first glance, it may appear as a simple exaggeration of physical hunger. However, within the context of Bella's long and arduous journey, this expression conveys something much deeper: her emotional suffering, extreme vulnerability, and longing for connection and safety. The phrase does not merely emphasize bodily need it symbolizes the emotional emptiness Bella feels during her separation from home and loved ones.

According to Abrams (1999), hyperbole as a figure of thought functions to express heightened emotional states, often magnifying internal turmoil. In this case, the exaggeration reflects not only the character's physical condition but also the intensity of her emotional distress. This supports the expressive theory of literature, where language mirrors inner experiences. The hyperbolic expression connects Bella's subjective pain to the audience's understanding, deepening emotional resonance and inviting empathy. Therefore, hyperbole in this film is not ornamental; it enriches the narrative's emotional texture and illustrates how language can intensify and externalize complex emotional realities.

2. Irony

The dialogue *"My first home was full of cats. And I'm a dog."* serves as a prime example of irony. This contrast between expectation and reality conveys more than just an amusing situation it embodies a profound commentary on belonging, identity, and acceptance. In typical contexts, dogs and cats are portrayed as natural adversaries. Yet Bella, a dog, finds her earliest sense of home in the company of cats.

This ironic twist aligns with Abrams & Harpham's (2015, pp. 186–190) view of irony as an expressive literary tool. Bella's tone is not sarcastic; rather, it reflects a sincere

▪ awareness of the unexpected ways in which love and home can manifest. Irony here becomes a device for exploring broader social and emotional truths. Bella's realization challenges normative boundaries—suggesting that kinship is not always defined by similarity. The irony also humanizes Bella's journey, reinforcing the notion that emotional bonds can transcend natural instincts and species divisions. This supports the film's overarching themes of inclusion and the search for familial connection.

3. Metaphor

The statement "*Home is the only place you know*" encapsulates metaphorical meaning that extends beyond the idea of a literal house. For Bella, "home" is not merely a physical structure it represents safety, love, familiarity, and emotional identity. It is the only environment where she feels seen, protected, and connected.

Abrams (1999) highlights metaphor as a vehicle for expressing emotional truth through imaginative comparison. In this case, the metaphor of "home" encapsulates Bella's psychological landscape. The phrase suggests that her world is emotionally defined by the memories and bonds attached to that place. Rather than being just a destination, home becomes a symbol of emotional belonging and a container of her identity. This metaphor enhances the film's exploration of the human-animal bond by portraying animals as beings capable of forming meaningful, memory-bound attachments. As a result, the audience is encouraged to empathize with Bella's internal motivation, viewing her journey not as instinctive survival, but as a deeply personal quest.

4. Metonymy

Bella's statement "*The White House has nothing on this!*" represents metonymy, where "The White House" symbolizes political power and elite status. In contrast, Bella uses it to highlight a moment of personal joy, suggesting that the emotional significance of her experience outweighs even the grandest human symbols.

Abrams (1999) notes that metonymy allows a part or symbol to stand in for a broader idea. Here, Bella reinterprets a culturally loaded symbol to elevate the emotional value of her current environment likely one filled with warmth, familiarity, or emotional fulfillment. This linguistic choice reflects her worldview, in which emotional authenticity surpasses social markers of prestige. The metonymy does not merely offer a witty comparison; it reframes value systems, prioritizing felt experience over social status. For the audience, this figurative expression reveals how characters measure worth through love and connection, not material symbolism. In educational contexts, this also invites analysis of how characters use cultural references to express inner realities.

5. Paradox

The dialogue "*Being a good dog didn't work*" expresses a striking paradox. It undermines the expectation that obedience and goodness will always lead to reward or safety. Bella's disappointment reflects a conflict between moral behavior and the harsh realities she faces despite doing everything "right," she experiences separation, fear, and suffering.

Abrams (1999) identifies paradox as a powerful means of conveying internal contradiction and moral complexity. Bella's statement illustrates the psychological

▪tension between idealism and experience. It challenges the conventional narrative that virtue is always rewarded. This paradox not only adds depth to Bella's character development, but it also presents a critique of real-life injustices. For viewers, it evokes empathy and moral reflection prompting them to consider how society, like the film, sometimes fails to honor goodness. Through this paradox, the film offers an emotionally grounded insight into resilience, survival, and the complexity of living by one's values in a world that often disregards them.

6. Personification

In the dialogue "*Dutch wanted me to stay*," the character Bella attributes human desire to Dutch, a fellow animal. Although animals do not express intentions through language, Bella interprets Dutch's behavior emotionally. This is a classic use of personification, where non-human entities are given human traits to emphasize emotional depth.

According to Abrams (1999), personification intensifies narrative connection by projecting internal emotion onto external entities. Here, Dutch's supposed "wish" becomes a way for Bella and the audience to read emotional significance into a silent relationship. The narrative suggests that animals possess emotional awareness, just as humans do. This aligns with the film's recurring theme: the equivalency of emotional capacity between humans and animals. Personification therefore enriches the portrayal of interspecies relationships, allowing audiences to feel the sincerity and complexity of these bonds.

7. Simile

"*His sadness was like a heavy rain*" is a simile that connects internal emotion to a natural phenomenon. The comparison between sadness and heavy rain enhances the audience's understanding by translating emotional experience into a shared, sensory image. Rain, often symbolic of melancholy or grief, captures the intensity and weight of the character's sorrow.

Similes, as described by Abrams (1999), function by illuminating abstract emotions through tangible comparisons. This simile enables viewers to visualize and feel the burden of sadness that permeates the scene. It also reflects the narrative's broader strategy of using natural elements to depict emotional states. By invoking rain, the film creates a mood of sorrow that is relatable and universally understood. This form of figurative language is particularly useful in visual storytelling, where emotions must be conveyed with brevity and impact.

8. Synecdoche

The phrase "*The claws were everywhere*" uses a part "claws" to represent a larger threat or creature. Instead of naming the predator, Bella fixates on its most dangerous part. This use of synecdoche magnifies fear and suspense, emphasizing what feels most immediate and threatening in the character's perception.

Abrams (1999) explains synecdoche as a device that highlights part-for-whole relationships. Bella's reference to "claws" reflects her emotional state, focusing the audience's attention on the sensation of danger rather than the objective source of it. This

- figurative expression allows the viewer to inhabit Bella's psychological experience her sense of being overwhelmed, surrounded, and physically vulnerable. Synecdoche here intensifies the narrative by transforming simple detail into a symbol of larger conflict. It also encourages viewers and students alike to consider how language shapes emotional perspective in storytelling.

Conclusion

Examining the figurative language in *A Dog's Way Home* shows how devices like personification, simile, paradox, metaphor, and others enrich character development, emotional depth, and thematic resonance. These expressions reflect Bella's inner journey and convey values such as loyalty, resilience, and empathy. Figurative language in film enhances audience connection and deepens interpretation beyond the literal.

Future studies may explore how different audiences perceive figurative expressions in film. Educators are also encouraged to use film-based analysis to strengthen students' critical and emotional understanding of language.

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