

An In-depth Analysis of the Manifestation of Emotions and Ideas through Similes in Short Stories by Somerset Maugham

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Abstract

Language is not always explicit, direct, and literal. Different modes of discourse and different genres entail entirely different style, structures, and lexicons. Literary genre is filled with different figures of speech including symbol, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, allusion, eponyms, and most predominantly metaphors and similes. The various kinds of literary devices are inextricably tied up with several kinds of meaning such as denotative vs. connotative, literal vs. figurative, core vs. non-core, conceptual vs. idiomatic, etc. Similes have diverse linguistic discursal and pragmatic functions such as simplification, changing abstract concepts into concrete ones, presenting new perspective on the familiar objects, and comparing and likening two completely disparate and distinct objects or phenomena. This may create feeling of surprise, amazement, revelation, and other psychological states in the readers. Metaphors are intimately related to the semantic and pragmatic meanings of utterances. They are very effective devices at the hands of the writers to create a whole range of denotative and connotative meanings. It can have a negative and positive emotional impact on the readers. Still another function of similes is the effect made on the audience and the psychological emotional effect it might exercise on the readers. In this study, an in-depth analysis of the similes employed by Somerset Maugham in his short stories is carried out to see the objects and phenomena he has employed to create the similes and exercise the desired emotional feeling, cognitive orientation, and interpretation on the side of the readers.

Keywords: figurative language, figures of speech, simile, metaphor, meaning

1. Introduction

According to Mona Baker (1992), every word or utterance has something that makes it different from any other word – lexical meaning. According to Cruse (1986), we can distinguish four main types of meaning in words: propositional meaning, expressive meaning, presupposed meaning, and evoked meaning. The propositional meaning of a word or an utterance is its literary meaning registered by a dictionary. Expressive meaning refers to the speaker's feelings or attitude. Presupposed meaning is related to restrictions on what other words or expressions are expected to be used with a certain word. Evoked meaning is connected with dialect and register variation. A dialect is a variety of language existing in a specific community or group of speakers. As to register variation, one of its expressions is the difference between formal and informal styles. Leech (1974) presents a different categorization and terminology. According to him, a lexical unit has 7 types of meaning: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. Denotative or conceptual meaning is also called logical or cognitive meaning. It is the basic propositional meaning which corresponds to the primary dictionary definition. Connotative meaning is the communicative value of an expression over and above its purely conceptual content. It is something that goes beyond mere referent of a word and hints at its attributes in the real world. Social meaning (evoked meaning according to Cruse) is related to the social context of language use, e.g. dialectal use and also to the situation in which an utterance is used.

Affective meaning in Leech's terminology corresponds to expressive meaning in Cruse's words. Reflected meaning arises when a word has more than one conceptual meaning or multiple conceptual meaning. Leech says that in church service 'the comforter and the Holy Ghost' refer to the third in Trinity. They are religious words, but unconsciously there is a response to their non-religious meanings too. Thus the 'comforter' sounds warm and comforting while the 'Ghost' sounds 'awesome' or even 'dreadful'. Collocative meaning is no other than presupposed meaning. Thematic meaning refers to the message by the way it is organized in terms of ordering focus and emphasis. For example, the same idea may be rendered through the use of the active and passive voice. It is on the second type of meaning that we would like to dwell in detail.

Connotation arises in cases you mean something else. The connotative meaning of a word is based on implication, or emotional association with a word. Deviations from the literal meanings are called figures of

speech or figurative language. There are many different kinds of figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, understatement, etc.

As Fadaee E. (2010) points out, figurative language has some features distinguishing it from nonfigurative language. For example, metaphor and simile usually contain an element of exaggeration in their comparison:

1. FL: John is a lion (metaphor).
2. Non FL: That animal is a lion (ordinary sentence).
3. FL: The book is as heavy as an elephant (simile).
4. Non FL: The box is as heavy as my suitcase (ordinary sentence).

It can also be mentioned that lion is the symbol of courage and bravery and elephant is the symbol of heaviness and greatness in literature. Another feature of figurative language is the imagery and metaphorical concept which FL has. Compare:

1. FL: The sea froth is like a pearl on the shore's neck (simile).
2. Non FL: The sea froth comes towards the shore (ordinary sentence).
3. The pearl is the symbol of luminosity and whiteness in literature.

In his work Fadaee (2010) mentions that Western Rhetoricians present two categories of figures of speech; one is scheme, 'meaning form', which changes the ordinary pattern of words, like hyperbole, apostrophe, ellipsis, and antithesis. The phrase 'John, my best friend' is a scheme using 'apposition'. The other is trope, literally meaning 'to turn', that changes the general meaning of words, like simile, metaphor, irony, allegory, satire, symbol, paradox. The trope 'she is as beautiful as rose' is an instance of simile. There are numerous classifications of figures of speech, as some rhetoricians have classified them into as many as 250 separate figures. Symbol, metaphor and simile are the most important figures of speech in almost all languages.

As we said, simile is one of the most important figures of speech. According to Shamisa (1983), simile is the claim of likeness of two things in one or two attributes. "Simile is fundamentally a figure of speech requiring overt reference to source and target entities, and an explicit construction connecting them" (Gibbs, 1994:40). Unlike metaphors, similes make use of some similarity markers such as "like," "as" , e.g. he eats like a hoarse. Galperin (1977) also defines simile as an overt and metaphor as a covert comparison. Compare:

-The ship ploughs the waves (metaphor)

-The ship goes through the waves like a plough ploughing the land (simile).

Fadaee emphasizes that simile is much less investigated than metaphor, although it occurs as frequently in discourse. According to Fromilhague (1995), similes serve to communicate concisely and efficiently and function as cognitive tools for thought in that they enable us to think of the world in novel, alternative ways. Still another function of similes is the effect made on the audience and the psychological emotional effect it might exercise on the readers. In discourse, they can also fulfil more specific functions depending on the textual genre in which they occur. In scientific texts, comparison and analogical reasoning play an important role.

Similes have different types and classifications, too. Bredin (1998) classifies smiles within a range from the most stereotyped to the most creative similes. Between these two extremes, he places standard (ordinary) and original (fresh, but not totally unexpected). Ortony (1993) distinguishes between literal and non-literal similes. In non-literal similes, topic and vehicle are not symmetrical and the similarity markers can be dropped, but in literal similes, the terms can be reversed and the similarity markers cannot be dropped.

Fromilhague (1995) categorizes similes into objective similes, originating from concrete physical experience, and subjective similes, stemming from individual association mechanisms. He also mentions explicit and implicit similes. In explicit simile, sense or point of similarity is stated directly. Most of the sentences with 'as...as' structures are of this kind: 'as light as feather', 'as hot as fire'. Implicit simile is the one whose sense is not stated directly. Most words with 'like' are of this types: 'eat like a bird: eat very little', 'live like a pig: live very untidily', 'swim like a fish: swim very well'.

2. To come up with the analysis of similes, the following questions were made:

1. What kinds of similes are employed by Somerset Maugham?
2. What kinds of meanings did he create through the use of those similes?
3. What were the intended effects of those similes on the readers?

4. How were those similes categorized and to what effect?

3. Materials and instrument.

The materials selected for this study have been the short stories by Somerset Maugham. Altogether, 35 episodes with similes have been extracted from the following works:

1. Rain
2. The fall of Edward Barnard
3. The Pool
4. Mackintosh
5. The Three Fat Women of Antibes
6. The Facts of Life

The idea to carry out this research was prompted by S. Maugham's lively and vivid manner of narration, his rich use of idiomatic and figurative language, similes and metaphors in particular. The reason why we opted for the metaphoric analysis of his works has been the fact that his language is inundated with a rich source of different meanings such as denotative, connotative, organizational, conceptual and idiomatic discourse. His language encompasses the whole gamut of a diverse genre, register, and style elucidating different aspects of life through immaculate characterization and description.

4. Data analysis

Born in Paris, of Irish ancestry, Somerset Maugham was to lead a fascinating life and would become famous for his mastery of short evocative stories that were often set in the more obscure and remote areas of the British Empire. Suffering from a bad stammer, he received a classic public school education at King's school in Canterbury, Kent. Rather more unconventionally, he studied at Heidelberg University, where he read philosophy and literature. He then studied in London, eventually qualifying as a surgeon at St Thomas' hospital. He conducted his year's medical practice in the slums of the East End. It was here that he found material for his first, rather lurid, novel *Liza of Lambeth* in 1897 and much of the material for his critically acclaimed autobiographical novel *Of Human Bondage* although this wasn't to be published until 1915.

He moved to Paris where he would strike up a successful working relationship with Laurence Housman and write a number of plays that would be run in London from 1908. At the outbreak of The Great War he first served with a Red Cross unit in France before taking up a far more interesting assignment as secret agent in Geneva and then Petrograd. In Russia, he was given the rather mammoth job of attempting to prevent the Russian Revolution from starting. His novel *Ashenden*, published in 1928, would draw on these eclectic experiences. Continuing with more peacable travels, Maugham took to the South Seas, where he visited the island of Tahiti and on which he based his novel *The Moon and Sixpence*. Sickness would then force Maugham to return home and remain in a Scottish tuberculosis sanatorium.

However, on recovery, he returned to the Far East and collected imperial information and experiences that would form the basis of many short stories, plays and novels: *East of Suez* in 1922, *Our Betters* in 1923 and *The Letter* in 1927, are amongst the better known of these.

Returning to settle in France in 1928, he wrote what many regard as his satirical masterpiece *Cakes and Ale*. A literary biography within a novel that examined the private sin that accompanies public success. The winds of war would not allow Maugham to remain in France indefinitely. A British agent once more, he was forced to flee from France with a single suitcase one night in 1940. He settled in the United States for the duration of the war, writing the semi-mystical *The Razor's Edge* there in 1945.

Somerset Maugham was the master of the short, concise novel and he could convey relationships, greed and ambition with a startling reality. The remote locations of the quietly magnificent yet decaying British Empire offered him beautiful canvasses on which to write his stories and plays. The real-life inhabitants of these locations were frankly shocked at being portrayed as so trivial, parochial and vacuous creatures. Maugham would enjoy the undying hatred of many a South-East Asian planter and his wife for the rest of his life. Yet, for the rest of us, his realistic depictions of the boredom and drudgery of plantation life, and the desire and trappings of what they would regard as civilisation, can re-evolve what were perhaps the more genuine feelings felt by many of the planters and civil servants in the further flung reaches of the Empire. His English is clear and lucid and this makes his books easy to come to terms with. His works are often full of the basest, and yet more interesting, of the human vices but can still evoke the day to day feelings and emotions that allow us to

understand and identify with his characters. A complex and interesting character, Somerset Maugham managed to catch much of the darker essence of Empire.

We categorized the similes based upon the objects or phenomena used for comparison by the author to create similes. For instance, there have been comparisons with animals, natural phenomena, objects, physiological processes, parts of the body, etc. The episodes with similes were extracted from the six stories mentioned above, the meanings created were analyzed and categorized and are shown in the table 1.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we made an endeavor to analyze the similes employed by Somerset Maugham in his short stories and to manifest their presumed effect produced on the audience. The language utilized by Maugham is richly figurative and among the figures of speech he resorts to similes and metaphors stand out. Nature imagery, animal imagery, physiological imagery, psychological imagery, etc are some of the categories presented in this study. The writer's purpose in application of figurative language has been to effectively transmit connotative, implicit secondary meaning and interpretation of discourse. The diversity and dynamicity of the similes may have more persuasive influence on the readers. Moreover, the sociocultural issues could be elucidated more dramatically and clearly through the similes which have been intertwined with the building blocks of culture in its different manifestations. His use of similes can also be an indication of his effort to make intangible abstract and impalpable ideas more concrete and understandable. He has taken daily familiar experiences, events and objects to change the unknown and enigmatic to known and familiar. Furthermore, an access to the psychological state of the characters is made possible through the similes. The frequency of his animal imageries and the ones taken from natural phenomena can illustrate his concern and interest in nature.

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Table 1. Datasheet of Mock-up Test

Utterance/phrase	The category or the nature of simile	Kind of meaning	Produced effect on the audience
1. Her face was long, like a sheep`s , but she gave no impression of foolishness, rather of extreme alertness; she had the quick movements of a bird.	animal imagery	connotation	foolishness
2. The most remarkable thing about her was her voice,	object imagery	connotation	irritation

high, metallic, and without inflection; it fell on the ear with a hard monotony, irritating to the nerves like the pitiless clamour of the pneumatic drill.			
3 .As he walked past them backwards and forwards for the sake of exercise, he had heard Mrs. Davidson`s agitated whisper, like the distant flow of a mountain torrent , and he saw by his wife`s open mouth and pale face that she was enjoying an alarming experience.	nature imagery	connotation	agitation
4. But Mrs. Davidson had given two or three of her birdlike glances at heavy grey clouds that came floating over the mouth of the harbour.	animal imagery	connotation	quickness
5. She looked from Macphail to his wife, standing helplessly in different parts of the room, like lost souls , and she pursed her lips.	religious imagery	connotation	religious imagery
6. When I was broken and weary she would put her work aside and take the Bible and read to me till peace came and settled upon me like sleep upon the eyelids of a child , and when at last she closed the book she`d say: `We`ll save them in spite of themselves.`	physiological imagery	connotation	peacefulness
7. It (the rain) was like a deluge from heaven , and it rattled on the roof of corrugated iron with a steady persistence that was maddening. It seemed to have a fury of its own . And sometimes you felt that you must scream if it did not stop, and then suddenly you felt powerless, as though your bones had suddenly become soft ; and you were miserable and hopeless.	nature, psychological and physiological imagery	connotation	fierceness and helplessness
8. When the rain stopped and the sun shone, it was like a hothouse, seething, humid, sultry, breathless , and you had a strange feeling that everything was growing with a savage violence.	nature imagery	connotation	sense of growth
9. They (the mountains of Nebraska) were like huge mole-hills, rounded and smooth, and they rose from the plain abruptly. Dr. Macphail remembered how it struck him that they were like a woman`s breasts .	physiological imagery	connotation	roundness
10. Her soul, which was black as night , is now pure and white like the new-fallen snow .	nature imagery	connotation	vivid contrast
11. The fat man`s eyes contracted till they seemed like pin - points , and their scrutiny made Bateman so uncomfortable that he felt himself blushing.	object imagery	connotation	mistrust
12. Then, beyond, you saw the vast calmness of the Pacific and twenty miles away, airy and unsubstantial like the fabric of a poet`s fancy , the unimaginable beauty of the island which is called Murea.	poetic imagery	connotation	airiness
13. She`s like a beautiful exotic flower that must be sheltered from bitter winds.	nature	connotation	need of protection
14. You had expected something wholly beautiful and you get an impression which is infinitely more complicated than any that beauty can give you. It is like the weakness in the character of a great man which may make him less admirable but certainly makes him more interesting .	psychological imagery	connotation	complicatedness
15. He was a little man, without angles, plump, with a round face like the full moon and a little fat round nose.	nature imagery	connotation	roundness
16. He was bowed and gnarled like an old tree .	nature imagery	connotation	wryness
17. He looked hardly human, but his eyes were very	supernatural	connotation	brightness

bright, and in the half-darkness they seemed to glow with a reddish light.	forces		
18. Their life was patriarchal. It had a completeness that gave it a beauty as definite as that of a symphony by Beethoven or a picture by Titian.	art imagery	connotation	beauty and harmony
19. He was very thin and his skin hung on his bones like an old suit too large for him.	object imagery	connotation	looseness
20. She vanished like a naiad started by the approach of a mortal.	supernatural forces imagery	connotation	nimbleness
21. She wrung out her hair, and as she stood there, unconcerned, she looked more than ever like a wild creature of the water or the woods.	animal imagery	connotation	wildness and self-absorption
22. He loved Ethel as a poet might love the moon.	poetic imagery	connotation	pure love
23. Ethel was lovely as she went about the little house, lithe and graceful like some young animal of the woods, and she was gay.	animal imagery	connotation	gracefulness
24. He knew that when a white man marries a native or a half-caste, he must expect her relations to look upon him as a gold mine.	object imagery	connotation	richness
25. All his plans for the future were like a house of cards and he scattered them with angry impatience.	object imagery	connotation	uncertainty, instability
26. He groveled at her feet like a cur.	animal imagery	connotation	humiliation
27. She reminded one of the red hibiscus, the common flower of the hedgerow in Samoa, with its grace and its languor and its passion.	nature imagery	connotation	graceful and passionate beauty
28. It suggested itself to me that in her elusiveness, like a thought that presents itself to consciousness and vanishes before it can be captured by words, lay her peculiar charm.	psychological imagery	connotation	elusiveness
29. And now, looking out of the window at the lagoon and the strip of foam which marked the reef, he shuddered with hatred of the brilliant scene. The cloudless sky was like an inverted bowl that hemmed it in.	object imagery	connotation	roundness
30. He loved them (the natives) because they were in his power, as a selfish man loves his dog.	animal imagery	connotation	selfish love
31. His head ached horribly. It felt as though all sorts of little savage things were beating inside it, trying to get out.	object imagery	connotation	acute pain
32. His eyes were closed and the words he said were like a wind singing through the fronds of the coconut trees.	nature imagery	connotation	softness
33. In her black bathing-dress Frank looked like the huge cetacean which the Japanese catch in the Torres straits and which the vulgar call a sea-cow.	animal imagery	connotation	hugeness
34. 'Beatrice, what are doing?' she cried in her deep voice. It was like the roll of thunder in the distant mountains.	nature imagery	connotation	loudness
35. The little white ball whizzed about like a small demon of mischief.	supernatural forces imagery	connotation	wickedness or roguery

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