

HYPERBOLIC EXPRESSIONS IN JENNY HAN'S THE SUMMER I TURNED PRETTY: A SEMANTIC STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze hyperbolic expressions found in Jenny Han's novel *The Summer I Turned Pretty* and to explain their contextual meanings through a semantic approach. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected using the documentation technique. The data were taken from dialogues and narratives in the novel that contain hyperbolic expressions. Each expression was identified based on Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) typology of figurative language and further examined using McCarthy & Carter's (2004) criteria. The contextual meanings were analyzed using Lyons's (1977) theory, emphasizing how meaning is shaped by situational and emotional context. Results show that the novel contains 19 hyperbolic expressions reflecting adolescent emotional intensity, particularly exaggerations related to temporal distortion, spatial amplification, and metaphorical destruction. These hyperboles dramatize teenage experiences and mirror psychological states, functioning as linguistic markers of emotional development in coming-of-age narratives.

Keywords: *hyperbole, contextual meaning, semantic approach, young adult literature*

Sari

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis ungkapan hiperbola yang terdapat dalam novel *The Summer I Turned Pretty* karya Jenny Han serta menjelaskan makna kontekstualnya melalui pendekatan semantik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, dengan teknik dokumentasi sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Data diambil dari dialog dan narasi dalam novel yang mengandung

ungkapan hiperbola. Setiap ungkapan diidentifikasi berdasarkan tipologi bahasa kiasan menurut Knickerbocker dan Reninger (1974) dan dianalisis lebih lanjut menggunakan kriteria dari McCarthy & Carter (2004). Makna kontekstual dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori Lyons (1977), yang menekankan bagaimana makna dibentuk oleh konteks situasional dan emosional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel ini mengandung 19 ungkapan hiperbola yang mencerminkan intensitas emosi remaja, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan distorsi waktu, amplifikasi ruang, dan kehancuran metaforis. Ungkapan-ungkapan hiperbola tersebut mendramatisasi pengalaman masa remaja dan mencerminkan kondisi psikologis tokoh, berfungsi sebagai penanda linguistik dari perkembangan emosi dalam narasi *coming-of-age*.

kata kunci: *hiperbola, makna kontekstual, pendekatan semantik, sastra remaja*

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Introduction

Language is not only used to communicate information but also to express feelings, experiences, and ideas. One of the most powerful features in literary language is figurative language. Figurative language allows writers to say something in a more imaginative or indirect way. As Perrine (1982) states, figurative language is language that cannot be taken literally and is used for the sake of freshness and strength. Similarly, Abrams and Harpham (2009) explain that figurative language is a deviation from the ordinary use of words in order to achieve a special meaning or effect.

In literary texts, figurative language plays an important role in presenting emotions, creating atmosphere, and conveying complex meanings. According to Leech (2013), figurative language can be seen as a type of deviation that enhances the expressiveness of language. This kind of language is especially important in literature because it gives depth to the way characters and situations are described. Understanding figurative language is essential for interpreting the nuances and deeper meanings within a narrative, making it a vital aspect of literary analysis (Richards, 1965). A novel, as a type of literary text, can also use figurative language to make the story more interesting. A novel is a lengthy narrative fiction written in prose that presents human experiences through connected events and character development. Wellek and Warren (1956) describe the novel as a fictional narrative in prose, generally longer than a short story,

that attempts to represent life with more complexity and realism. In other words, the novel serves as an imitation of real life, portraying emotions, relationships, and social situations in a way that resonates with the reader's experiences. Figurative language in novels supports this by enriching the narrative with emotional depth and psychological nuance. Through devices such as hyperbole, authors are able to communicate inner conflicts and cultural values that literal language may fail to express. In this research, the researcher chose the novel by Jenny Han: *The Summer I Turned Pretty*.

This research focuses on figurative language in Jenny Han's novel *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. *The Summer I Turned Pretty* (henceforth referred to as TSITP) is a popular work of contemporary young adult fiction that contains many expressions of figurative language with engaging storytelling and relatable characters that make it an interesting research object for literary analysis. The novel captures the emotional and transformative journey of its protagonist, Isabel Conklin (Belly), a teenage girl who spends her summers at Cousins Beach with her family and childhood friends. The story is told mainly from Belly's point of view, which makes her the main character. However, other teenage characters, such as Steven, also play important roles and contribute to the emotional dynamics of the story. Their interactions reflect common teenage experiences such as love, jealousy, confusion, and emotional growth.

This research deliberately focuses only on hyperbole. This selection is not based on mere frequency, but on its complementary thematic and functional roles within the narrative of a coming-of-age novel. Hyperbole serves as a linguistic reflection of the heightened emotional landscape of adolescence, capturing the characters' tendency to experience feelings of joy, boredom, and love with dramatic intensity. It is the language of subjective, natural emotion. This device maps the protagonist's psychological journey from idealistic emotional expression to a more complex and nuanced understanding of her world. Therefore, this study will focus on the analysis of hyperbolic expressions in the novel TSITP to identify and analyze their occurrence, as well as interpret the contextual meaning of these expressions as part of the characters' emotional and psychological expressions.

Methods

In this research, the method used is a descriptive qualitative method in order to analyze the data supplied. Qualitative research is a study that focuses on the materials, situations, activities, or relationship qualities that have a holistic description emphasis and are mostly delivered in detail (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012). Moreover, the descriptive approach contains descriptions in detail (Creswell, 2009).

The data of this research are expressions of hyperbole found in Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty* (second edition, Simon & Schuster, 2022), which consists of 46 chapters and 276 pages. The data were collected using a documentation technique, by reading the novel thoroughly, doing initial scanning for hyperbolic expressions according to Knickerbocker and Reninger's (1974) theory, documenting the potential data, and doing preliminary screening. The analysis process was conducted through several steps: (1) definitional test based on McCarthy and Carter's (2004) theory, (2) Contextual confirmation, (3) Exclusion of ambiguous data, and (4) Analyzing contextual meanings using Lyons's (1977) theory.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses three representative hyperbolic expressions identified in Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. Out of nineteen total findings, these examples were selected for their thematic diversity and emotional depth, illustrating temporal distortion, spatial amplification, and metaphorical destruction. Each example is analyzed through three stages: identification and classification using McCarthy and Carter's (2004) criteria, function in context within the narrative, and semantic interpretation following Lyons's (1977) theory of contextual meaning.

Example 1:

"We'd been driving for about seven thousand years." (Belly, p. 1, l. 1)

This expression clearly represents hyperbole through counterfactuality and intensification. The time span of "seven thousand years" is physically impossible, signaling an intentional exaggeration. According to McCarthy and Carter's (2004) criteria, this statement constructs an "impossible world" where the literal interpretation cannot be true. The exaggeration also fulfills the intensification criterion, extending an ordinary experience into an emotionally charged one. Belly's addition, "or at least that's

how it felt” marks her awareness that this is an expressive overstatement, not a factual claim.

Within the story, this hyperbole communicates Belly’s boredom and impatience during a long car ride. The exaggerated time span dramatizes the emotional distortion of duration typical of adolescent experience, where anticipation or discomfort can make time feel endlessly stretched. This expression simultaneously characterizes Belly’s narrative voice as dramatic, expressive, and emotionally transparent. The humor and exaggeration establish an intimate tone between narrator and reader, allowing the audience to feel her restlessness rather than simply observe it. From a semantic perspective, the phrase derives its meaning entirely from the situational and emotional context. Lyons (1977) emphasizes that contextual meaning emerges from how linguistic forms interact with circumstance. In this case, the phrase “seven thousand years” does not denote literal time but the subjective experience of waiting. Through hyperbole, Jenny Han transforms a mundane event into an emotional statement of impatience. The meaning lies not in duration but in affect.

Example 2:

“I think maybe all of Cousins Beach heard us laughing.” (Belly, p. 18, l. 3)

This statement demonstrates hyperbole through counterfactuality and disjunction of context. Literally, it is impossible for an entire seaside town to hear two people laughing. The use of the modal phrase “I think maybe” softens the claim while signaling self-awareness of its exaggeration. The expression also exhibits what Pomerantz (1986) calls “extreme case formulation,” maximizing intensity by universalizing the experience through the word “all.” The exaggeration elevates a moment of shared laughter to an event of symbolic magnitude.

In the narrative, this hyperbole arises after a joyful, nostalgic moment among Belly, Conrad, Steven, and Jeremiah. The laughter signifies connection, belonging, and emotional release. For Belly, the moment feels so joyful that she imagines it echoing across the entire beach. This expression embodies adolescent joy that feels infinite and all-consuming. The phrase “all of Cousins Beach” also symbolizes Belly’s emotional world, representing not just a geographical space but the totality of her memories and identity formed during her summers there. Through exaggeration, Jenny Han captures the warmth, intimacy, and boundless energy of youth.

According to Lyons (1977), contextual meaning depends on the interplay between linguistic expression and its situational context. Here, “all of Cousins Beach heard us” should not be understood literally but as a representation of emotional magnitude. The hyperbole transforms sound into a metaphor for feeling where joy resonates through every part of Belly’s world. The noun phrase “Cousins Beach” functions metonymically to represent her emotional universe. Thus, this hyperbole conveys a sense of expansive happiness, illustrating how emotional experiences shape meaning beyond literal interpretation.

Example 3:

“His eyes looked so hopeful, it killed me, killed me to not answer him the way he wanted me to.” (Belly, p. 237, l. 24)

This expression represents a strong example of metaphorical hyperbole. The phrase “it killed me” constructs an impossible world, fulfilling the counterfactuality criterion. The repetition “killed me, killed me” intensifies the emotional charge, amplifying the feeling of guilt. As Norrick (2004) notes, repetition in hyperbolic statements heightens expressive force, reflecting the speaker’s psychological turmoil. Here, Belly’s repetition dramatizes the emotional impact of disappointing Jeremiah.

This moment occurs at a turning point in the narrative when Belly cannot respond to Jeremiah’s affection. The hyperbole conveys the internal conflict between empathy and helplessness. The phrase “it killed me” symbolizes the emotional finality of the situation. She realizes that some outcomes cause inevitable pain. By invoking the language of death, Belly expresses emotional suffering so strong it feels physically destructive. This aligns with Kövecses’s (2000) observation that emotional pain is often conceptualized through metaphors of bodily harm or death.

In contextual semantic terms, the verb “killed” has shifted from its literal meaning to express psychological pain. Lyons (1977) emphasizes that meaning depends on intersubjective understanding; the phrase is comprehensible because readers recognize “death” as a universal metaphor for extreme emotion. The repetition mirrors the cyclical nature of guilt, and its rhythm evokes the breathlessness of grief. Through exaggeration, Belly translates inexpressible emotion into shared meaning. The hyperbole thus functions

as both self-expression and emotional regulation, enabling her to articulate and manage her inner conflict.

Discussion

Across these examples, hyperbole emerges as a dominant linguistic strategy in Jenny Han's narrative. Temporal distortion ("seven thousand years"), spatial amplification ("all of Cousins Beach"), and metaphorical destruction ("it killed me") represent different ways exaggeration conveys teenage emotional reality. Collectively, these forms illustrate how hyperbole transforms literal events into emotionally heightened experiences, bridging the gap between external action and internal feeling.

The prevalence of hyperbole (nineteen instances throughout the novel) underscores its narrative significance. It reflects the protagonist's heightened emotional perception and aligns with the coming-of-age theme where feelings are intense, immediate, and unfiltered. Through the semantic and contextual functions of exaggeration, Han successfully captures adolescence as a period of emotional maximalism. Hyperbole becomes not just a stylistic choice but a psychological marker of youth, turning ordinary experiences into vivid representations of the inner world.

Conclusion & recommendation

Based on the analysis and findings, nineteen hyperbolic expressions were identified in Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. These expressions are predominantly used by the teenage protagonist, Belly, to express intensified emotions such as impatience, joy, nostalgia, frustration, and guilt. Through various forms of exaggeration, namely temporal ("seven thousand years"), spatial ("all of Cousins Beach"), and metaphorical ("killed me, killed me"), Belly's emotions are dramatized, illustrating the heightened sensitivity typical of adolescence. Hyperbole becomes a key stylistic and psychological tool that conveys the protagonist's emotional perception of the world, transforming ordinary experiences into deeply affective moments.

Analyzed using Lyons's (1977) contextual semantics and McCarthy and Carter's (2004) criteria, these expressions construct meaning through situational, social, and psychological context, transforming literal impossibilities into emotional authenticity. Hyperbole serves as the novel's primary device for dramatizing adolescent subjective

experience, reflecting the teenage tendency toward emotional extremity. Future research might compare hyperbolic patterns across young adult authors or examine developmental trajectories of figurative language within series narratives.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was reported.

About author

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