



## HYPERBOLIC EXPRESSION IN LANGSTON HUGHES' SELECTED POEMS

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**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bentuk-bentuk hiperbola berdasarkan teori Claridge, makna denotatif dan konotatif, dan fungsi hiperbola yang ditemukan dalam puisi-puisi pilihan karya Langston Hughes. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data diambil dari kata-kata, frasa, kalimat pada baris-baris puisi. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari empat puisi ditemukan 17 ekspresi hiperbola dalam teks puisi Langston Hughes. Ekspresi hiperbola tersebut dikelompokkan ke dalam beberapa bentuk. Terdapat 2 *hiperbola kata tunggal*, 6 *hiperbola frasa*, 2 *hiperbola klausa*, 2 *hiperbola numerik*, dan 5 *hiperbola perbandingan*. Penelitian ini juga menganalisis tentang makna denotatif dan konotatif serta fungsi dari ekspresi hiperbola yaitu *penekanan*, *evaluasi*, *penyederhanaan*, *intensifikasi minat*, *kontras perbedaan*, dan *klarifikasi*.

**Kata kunci:** *Puisi, Gaya Bahasa, Hiperbola*

**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed to determine the forms of hyperbole based on Claridge theory, denotative and connotative meaning, and function of hyperbole found in Langston Hughes's poem. This study used the descriptive qualitative method. The data was taken from a collection of poetry by Langston Hughes, in the form of lines, words, phrases, sentences, and stanzas. The result of the research shows that from four poems, it is found 17 hyperbolic expressions in Langston Hughes's poems texts. These hyperbolic expressions are grouped into five forms. They are 2 *single-word hyperbole*, 6 *phrasal hyperbole*, 2 *clausal hyperbole*, 2 *numerical hyperbole*, and 5 *comparison hyperbole*. This study also analyzes the meaning of denotative and connotative and the function of hyperbolic expressions which are *emphasize*, *evaluation*, *simplification*, *interest intensification*, *contrast of differences*, and *clarification*.

**Key words:** *Poetry, Figurative Language, Hyperbole*

### INTRODUCTION

Hyperbole is an expression to state something by using an exaggerated style of language. The word "hyperbole" comes from the ancient Greek word meaning "excessive". Hyperbolic expression is one kind of figurative language that exaggerates something with overstatement. According to (Claridge, 2011), hyperbole is an expression that exceeds the literal expression and contains the more semantic attribute of expression something. It means this expression causes something to seem excessive than it does. Hyperbole is among the most unique and intriguing because the language used is excessive, dramatic, and the style of language has an influence on the listener or reader giving a certain effect. In daily words, hyperbole



very often happens in someone's expression when they falling in love. For example, *I will bring you a moon tonight*. It exaggerates the sentence since it is impossible for a person to take or to bring the moon, the moon is an outer space thing that cannot be reached. We often find hyperbole in everyday life, there are in conversation, advertisement, song lyric, speech, but in literary work such as poetry use hyperbole language very poetic and different from other literary works or in everyday language. One of the poets whose use of hyperbole is very prominent is Langston Hughes. When reads Langston Hughes's poetry repeatedly, the writer finds a lot of hyperbole language and looks humorous which attracts people's attention to read poetry.

According to Claridge (2011:49-66), there are seven forms of hyperbole, namely single word hyperbole, phrasal hyperbole, causal hyperbole, numerical hyperbole, the role of superlative, comparison, and repetition. *The first* of hyperbolic expression is single word, This is called single-word hyperbole because it only occurs when there is a single overstatement word in the utterance or sentence. It means that when the exaggerated word is leaving out, then the hyperbolic meaning in the sentence or utterance will disappear. *The second* is phrasal hyperbole, if single word hyperbole only contains one single word, in phrasal hyperbole it contains more than one word, it is a combination of words and senses that create hyperbolic meaning. among the other forms, this form occurs frequently. *The third* is clausal hyperbole, the other form is called clausal hyperbole. It is a form of hyperbole that contains two or more clausal constituents. This form hardly occurs compared to the others. *The fourth* is numerical hyperbole, in this form, the speaker or writer use number as one way to create hyperbolic meaning. *The fifth* is the role of Superlative, if there is superlative, there must be comparison and superlative form can indicate hyperbole. Superlative makes something sound so excessive and extreme, therefore it leads to overstatement. *The sixth* is comparison, there is something that is being compared, and it potentially contains hyperbole. However, not all comparative phrases make sense to reach the goal. *The seventh* is repetition, this form of hyperbole is usually used in spoken language. Sometimes people tend to repeat their utterances a couple of times to emphasize something.

There are two kinds of meaning used to analyze this poems. Denotative meaning is the literal or actual meaning of the word itself. According to Leech in Wibisono et al (2021:421) denotative meaning or conceptual meaning or cognitive meaning as widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication, where denotation is definition of word which is literal meaning of word. it means that denotation is when you look up a word in a dictionary, such as Oxford, what you get is meaning. While, in connotative meaning is an additional meaning that is far from the literal meaning. According to Leech in Wibisono et al (2021:422) states that connotative meaning is the communicative value and expression by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its conceptual meaning. From the explanation above, meaning is an opinion or expression that is produced by someone and it can be known by word. the meaning of an expression is determined by the meaning of its parts and how they are combined. By knowing the meaning, listeners or readers can understand or interpret the meaning of what the speaker says by showing how they related to the situation or context The meaning produced the interpretation about



word, phrase, or sentence according to the context using connotative and denotative meanings.

According to Mora (2006: 203-222), the function of hyperbole used to emphasis, evaluation, expression of surprise, simplification, interest intensification, contrast of differences, humour, clasification and polite de-emphasis. *The first* is emphasis, this function is the most prominent goal for overstatement label as hyperbolic function; segments that indicate emphasis through exaggeration. *The second* is evaluation, this function is two folds since one can express both positive and negative opinions emotions and attitudes. The speaker found the negative evaluation, on the other hand, is a form of subjective judgment whereby speakers attack, complain, condemn, criticize, express disapproval, antipathy, or some other negative attitude. *The third* is simplification, this function too remarks that exaggeration often makes use of round numbers to approximate quantities, as in the extract below. *The fourth* is interest intensification, in this function, the speakers try to impress their listeners and draw their attention, to make the story more engaging and entertaining or else dramatic. *The fifth* is Contrast of Differences, this function is a good means of intensifying contrasting situations. Here the hyperbole aims to extend and heighten this discrepancy to the maximum, to make the disparity even more extreme. *The sixth* is clarification, this function, overstatement is employed to reduce ambiguity, and so to increase the likelihood that the intent of the speaker's message is correctly understood. Hyperbole is often used in creative writing just to make a description more amusing or creative. Hyperbole is not a simple form of distortion because hyperbole works by being recognized as a figural exaggeration. Therefore, the researcher concludes the function of hyperbole is very important to use because it makes an impression on the reader or listener's attention.

This study talking about hyperbolic expression in Langston Hughes selected poems. Langston has his characteristics in writing his poetry. Langston was also the leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City, and a pioneer of jazz poetry who made the lives of African Americans the subject of his writings. He wanted to tell the story of his people in a way that reflected true African American culture, including their love of music and that language themselves despite their suffering. In his poetry, Langston uses the hyperbolic expression that is very prominent to describe the life of black people who are full of dreams, hopes for freedom. Some aspects make his poetry interesting to discuss. Based on the situation, this study is going to do the best effort to prove that Hughes transform's idea of African American dream is literary work. He presents pictures of African-American life in his poetry. Therefore, the study focuses on forms, meaning, and function of hyperbolic expression in Langston Hughes' selected poems. The difference between this research and the other is the research object, the theory used, and the research focus.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used the descriptive qualitative method by Creswell (2009:233) states that research design is plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. It means research design discusses the data and methods that are going to



be used in collecting and analyzing the data. The source of data in this study was Langston Hughes' selected poems. These poems are written in the Harlem Renaissance era, namely *Dreams*, *The Weary Blues*, *The Negro Mother*, and *Trumpet Player*. Data collection activity was important part of any form of research. To collect the data, the writer adopts some steps, as follows: Reading the poem, underlining, taking notes and The last, the writer attempt to describe the data based on the problems of the study. After finishing, the researcher was going to analyze the data to achieve the purpose of the study. In analyzing the data, using some steps: categorizing, identifying the forms, Searching and finding the hidden meaning and function, and drawing a conclusion based on the result of the data analysis.

## ANALYSIS

The result of the research shows that from four poems, the writer found 17 hyperbolic expressions in Langston Hughes' poems. The writer found five forms of hyperbolic expression there are *Single-word hyperbole*, *Phrasal hyperbole*, *Clausal hyperbole*, *Numerical hyperbole*, and *Comparison* based on Claridge (2011:49-66). The analysis of meaning in these four poems is seen from both sides, namely *denotative meaning* and *connotative meaning* (Leech in Wibisono, 2021:421). The last, the writer found six functions of hyperbolic expression, there are *emphasize*, *evaluation*, *simplification*, *interest intensification*, *contrast of differences*, and *clarification* based on Mora (2006:203-222). The function of hyperbole is very important to use because it makes an impression on the reader and listener's attention.

### Forms and meaning of Hyperbolic Expression Found in Langston Hughes' Selected Poems.

#### *Single Word Hyperbole*

This is called single-word hyperbole because it only occurs when there is a single overstatement word in the line or sentence. It means that when the exaggerated word is left, then the hyperbolic meaning in the line or sentence will disappear.

*I heard a Negro play  
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
He did a lazy sway  
He did a lazy sway  
To the tune o'those Weary Blues.  
With his **ebony** hands on each ivony key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.*

From line seven in the first stanza of *The Weary Blues* poem, the bold word of **ebony** in *with his ebony hands on each ivony key* line is included in the single-word form. In this case, the hyperbolic expression of this word is used to describe the physical appearance of the man's hands. The man in this poem is a negro man that works as a musician. He is a pianist. The speaker would like to tell the reader that the black skin of the Negro is not a black color as the ebony wood. The *ebony* is signed to the pianist's hands. Therefore the speaker uses the word *ebony* to describe the color of a Negro's skin as if like ebony. In denotative meaning, the bold word of **ebony** is an adjective that is suitable used to describe black charcoal wood. While in



connotative meaning the word **ebony** is used to describe the physical appearance of the man's hands. The speaker would like to tell the reader about his experience at the night when heard the blues music tune and the song sang.

#### *Phrasal Hyperbole*

In phrasal hyperbole it contains more than one word, it is a combination of words and senses that create hyperbolic meaning.

*Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
**Frozen with snow***

From line four of the second stanza in the *Dreams* poem, it found the hyperbolic expression of **frozen with snow** as phrasal form. In this case, the speaker of the poem would like to give an extra meaning in advance line *life is a barren field*. In this poem, the speaker wants to tell the reader about how someone should hold the dream faster for if not, that dreams will lose. The use of that phrase is to make an exaggerating meaning that the dying dream like the frozen of ice added with snow, where there are no sunshine to break it down. It means that this phrase is added to strengthen the hyperbolic meaning in this stanza that snow makes it could not move from a place or being rigid and it just like a dream if we don't make it come true soon. In denotative meaning, the words **frozen with snow** are used to describe white water vapor droplets that are solid and hard. While in connotative meaning to describe someone's life if the dreams die. In this poem, the speaker wants to tell the reader how someone must be achieved those dreams quickly.

#### *Clausal Hyperbole*

It is a form of hyperbole that contains two or more clausal constituents. This form hardly occurs compared to the other.

*The negro  
With the trumpet at his lips  
Has a head of vibrant hair  
Tamed down,  
**Patent-leathered now  
Until it gleams  
Like jet-  
Were jet a crown***

In the case above the bold marker, words are included in clausal hyperbole expression form. The speaker still described the physical appearance of the negro man as the subject of the *trumpet player* poem. The four last lines have shown the part of clauses in the second stanza, where the speaker wants to explain the hair looking of the negro man at the time. The hyperbole expression is shown in that clauses relation. It emphasizes the negro man's black hair glowing and looking so blacky and shiny by using the word **jet** to mark the hyperbole expression of the stanza and by defining jet as *a crown* to mark that the black hair is as the man's magnificence. In denotative, clause describes the black skin color of the trumpet player's like the color of crown very shiny black. The **crown** is a beautiful headdress, so here the author compares black on the skin with a black jet on the hair. While connotatively the author of the poem wants to tell the reader how the physical appearance of the skin color of the trumpet player who has a very black skin tone. He



describes how the negro physically looks, where the black skin is the hallmark of the negro.

#### *Numerical Hyperbole*

From the poem explanation above, in this form, the speaker or writer uses numbers as one way to create hyperbolic meaning.

*Three hundred years in the deepest South.  
But god put a song and prayer in my mouth.  
God put a dream like steel in my soul.  
Now, through my children, I am reaching the goal.*

From line one in the second stanza of *The Negro Mother* poem above, the speaker would say “**Three hundred years**”. In this case, the year entered by is a numerical form, where *three hundred years* is a marker of the time the negro mother lived in slavery. But logically in the twentieth century, no human being can live for 300 years. However, the number of years that the writer of this poem puts gives the reader doubts so that it is considered excessive. In denotative meaning describes the time we can't pass, because logically in the twentieth century no human being can live for 300 years. While in connotative **three hundred years** is a marker of the time the negro mother lived in slavery. In the second stanza from line above, use numbers to explain about a long time ago in the deepest South of America the negro mother escapes herself from the plantation and hides to tries find freedom. In this case, The use of the year in the line of poetry above is only as a time marker which is added excessively so that it creates meaning and impression that is very excessive or unreasonable. The speaker in this poem is telling the story of her life as a woman who managed to get through difficult times.

#### *Comparison Hyperbole*

In comparison, there is something that is being compared, and it potentially contains hyperbole.

*From the trumpet at his lips  
Is honey  
Mixed with liquid fire  
**The rhythm**  
From the trumpet at his lips  
Is ecstasy  
Distilled from old desire*

From lines, five-seven in the third stanza above it can be seen that the lyrics of **the rhythm from the trumpet at his lips is ecstasy** included in comparison form. In this case, the speaker compares the rhythm of the trumpet music played by the man with an ecstasy. As we know that the rhythm is a sound in a voice or music that is repeated so that the listener can be anesthetized and enjoy listening to the music that is sung. In this case, compare this rhythm like ecstasy where ecstasy itself is a symbol of addiction for its users where when we use ecstasy repeatedly it will make us addicted and happy but as if exaggerating the meaning of the sound of the musical rhythm produced by the trumpet by ecstasy. In denotative explanation, the sound of the trumpet being blown by the player is like ecstasy. **Ecstasy** is a type of illegal drug whose effects can be immediately felt is a change in mood to be very



happy and energetic. That is why this drug is so easy to become addicted to. While connotatively the author wants to describe the Claus lyrics in the trumpet player piece of poetry to explain that the music produced by the trumpet player can make people who hear it feel happy and still want to hear the sound of music from blowing the trumpet. In this case, the poet compares the sound of trumpets with ecstasy which both have the aim of attracting the listener's attention.

## Functions of Hyperbole in Langston Hughes' Selected Poems

### *Emphasize*

Emphasize is the most prominent goal for overstatement label as hyperbolic function; segments that indicate emphasis through exaggeration.

*Three hundred years in the deepest South.  
But god put a song and a prayer in my mouth.  
**God put a dream like steel in my soul.**  
Now, through my children, I am reaching the goal.*

From line three in the second stanza of *The Negro Mother* poem, the speaker would say "**God put a dream like steel in my soul.**" This line of poetry performs the function of emphasis where in this poem the author wants to tell how the speaker in the poem likes strong dreams from god to steel inside. Dreams that strengthen in suffering and weakness. This shows the suppression of the passion that grows from a woman who goes through a variety of bad experiences.

### *Evaluation*

This function is two folds since one can express both positive and negative opinions emotions and attitudes. The speaker found the negative evaluation, on the other hand, is a form of subjective judgment whereby speakers attack, complain, condemn, criticize, express disapproval, antipathy, or some other negative attitude.

*Children, I come back today  
To tell you a story of the long dark way  
That I had to climb, that i had to know  
In order that the race might live and grow.  
**Look at my face-dark as the night**  
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.  
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea  
Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.*

From line five in the first stanza of *The Negro Mother* poem, the speaker would say "**Look at my face-dark as the night.**" This line of poetry performs the function of evaluative hyperbole. In this case, the evaluative function here is giving an opinion on something, the writer of the poem the negro mother in this line carries out a negative evaluative function. The speaker in this poem gives a negative self-assessment which he exaggeratedly compares his black face to the night.

### *Simplification*

This function too remarks that exaggeration often makes use of round numbers to approximate quantities, as in the extract below.

*The negro  
With the trumpet at his lips  
Has **dark moons** of weariness*



*Beneath his eyes  
Where the smoldering memory  
Of slave ships  
Blazed to the crack of whips  
About thighs*

From line three in the first stanza of the *Trumpet Player* poem, the speaker would say "**dark moons**." The hyperbole numerical phrase on dark moons in the trumpet player has dark moons of weariness poems serves as a simplification function. In this case, the writer of this poem wants to describe the situation of the trumpet player simply, but the use of dark moons is too much to explain the fact that there is only one moon but it is made as if there are two or more moons.

#### *Interest Intensification*

In this function, the speakers try to impress their listeners and draw their attention, to make the story more engaging and entertaining or else dramatic.

*The negro  
With the trumpet at his lips  
Has a head of **vibrant** hair  
Tamed down,  
Patent-leathered now  
Until it gleams  
Like jet-  
Were jet a crown*

From line three in the third stanza of the *Trumpet Player* poem above, the speaker would say "**vibrant**". Vibrant hair in the line of poetry has a had of vibrant hair that serves as an interest intensification to give additional meaning to the description of the trumpet player. In this case, this line of poetry aims to attract the interest of the reader to be anesthetized by describing the speaker in this poem, namely the trumpet player.

#### *Contrast of Differences*

This function is a good means of intensifying contrasting situations. Here the hyperbole aims to extend and heighten this discrepancy to the maximum, to make the disparity even more extreme.

***The music**  
**From the trumpet at his lips**  
**Is honey**  
Mixed with liquid fire  
The rhythm  
From the trumpet at his lips  
Is ecstasy  
Distilled from old desire*

From the datum above of the *Trumpet Player* poem, the speaker would say "**the music from the trumpet at his lips is honey**." The music from the trumpet at his lips is honey is a line of poetry that contains a hyperbole function as a contrast of differences. In this case, the poet describes the sound of trumpet music compared to sweetness. Hyperbolically these two different things are so contrasting so clearly that the hyperbole function of this part of the poem is so clearly displayed in this stanza.

#### *Clarification*



This function, overstatement is employed to reduce ambiguity, and so to increase the likelihood that the intent of the speaker's message is correctly understood.

*The negro  
With the trumpet at his lips  
Has a head of vibrant hair  
Tamed down,  
**Patent-leathered now  
Until it gleams  
Like jet-  
Were jet a crown***

In the case from lines five-eight in the second stanza of the *Trumpet Player* poem above, the speaker would say "**patent-leathered now until it gleams like jet-were jet a crown**". The lyrics of the poem patent leathered now until it gleams like jet were jet a crown in the second stanza of the trumpet player's poem performs a clarification function. In this case, the poet just wants to clarify the physical appearance of the trumpet player's hair. In this case, the poet wants to describe the hairstyle of the trumpet player, but it is made dramatically and the line of poetry above contains a hyperbole function that is excessive in describing the hair.

## CONCLUSION

This study purpose to analysis about forms, meaning, and function of hyperbolic expression. The writer hopes that this study may give a great contribution to the reader, in giving the deep knowledge and understanding about hyperbole, especially about forms of hyperbolic expression, meaning, and function of hyperbolic expression in some poems. In this analysis, the writer uses Claridge, Wibisono at al, and Cano Mora's theory that explains firstly, forms of hyperbolic expression like *single-word hyperbole*, *phrasal hyperbole*, *clausal hyperbole*, *numerical hyperbole*, and *comparison hyperbole*. Secondly, explain the meaning, and the last explain the function of hyperbolic expression. The writer concludes that the five forms of hyperbolic expression, meaning, and six functions are commonly found in the poem's of Langston Hughes's.

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