

# Similes in literature and daily life



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

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Abstract

The assignment aims at exemplifying, analyzing and describing the character and function of the art of simile in works. It focuses on the occurrence of figurative language in standard English as well as in Vietnamese. The paper is chiefly based on Kleiser's framework. Data analysis is done qualitatively with descriptive method. An overview of the paper is to exemplify and explain models with the purpose of revealing the character and the effects of the simile on showing expressions.

## 1. Introduction

Every public speaker, writer, poet or musician knows the value of the simile to give vividness and color to his style of expressions. The simile has long been recognized as a useful element of expression. This technique is broadly used in prose, poetry, folk-song or even in report and magazine. The research takes examples from various works of famous writers as well as from peasant sayings in daily conversations. The reason for choosing these sources lies in the fact that the means of simile is efficient not only in literary works but also in daily life. In fact, if you wish to increase freshness, originality, vividness and accuracy on your written and spoken language, then you should use the art of simile.

## 2. A review of notion and classification

### 2. 1. What are similes?

*Simile* and the related word *similar* derive from the Latin *similis*, meaning "like". A simile is a figure of speech which is extensively used in verbal

language and which has long been recognized as a useful element of expression. According to Cleary (2009), a simile is " a comparison between two unlike things that use like or as". Cuddon (2013) defined simile in this way:

A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, in such a way as to clarify and enhance an image. It is an explicit comparison ( as opposed to the metaphor, q. v., where the comparison is implicit) recognizable by the use of the words " like" or " as". It is equally common in prose and verse and is a figurative device of great antiquity (Cuddon, 2013).

A simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two things by using connecting words such as like, as or than as in " He is like a lion" or in " Tiếng suá»' i trong nhÆ° tiếng hát xa/ TrÄƒng lá»" ng cá»• thá»¥ bóng lá»" ng hoa" in Vietnamese. In fact, simile is always the product either of the fancy or of the imagination.

Similes are similar to metaphors in that they are both forms of comparison, but similes compare the two ideas whilst they remain separate by using connecting words ( like, as, so, than or various verbs such as resemble), whereas a metaphor compare two things directly. Although a comparison between simile and metaphor will be made, here is just one example:

Simile: A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.

Metaphor: A book is a garden carried in the pocket.

Obviously, the presence or absence of only word separates a simile from a metaphor. The similarities and differences will be discussed later. Now we

focus on forms and kind of similes as well as the effects of simile on showing expression.

## **2. 2. Classification of similes.**

Similes have different types and classifications, too. Bredin remarked about a scale going from the most stereotyped to the most creative similes. At one extreme is situated the conventionalized and fixed similes, and at the other extreme is the creative similes. Between the two extremes, standard (ordinary) and original (fresh, but not totally unexpected) similes can be settled.

Ortony (1993) offered a semantic distinction 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 can not be dropped.

Another classification by Fromilhague has offered a distinction between objective similes, originating from concrete physical experience, and subjective similes, stemming from individual association mechanisms. He also explains explicit and implicit similes which are the basis of this article. In explicit simile, sense or point of similarity is stated directly. Most of the sentences with ‘ as...as’ structures are of this kind as in “ as light as feather” or in “ as hot as fire”. Implicit simile, however, is the one whose sense is not stated directly and leave the onus of interpretation to the reader. Most words with “ like” are of this types as in “ eat like a bird” or in “ live like a pig”.

These types of simile can also be adapted, extended or cut. Often a writer will slide the usual expressions into “ hot like an oven” or “ oven-hot” or “

with the heat of an oven” or some other phrases. To avoid cliché and extend the image – though this has to be done with caution – a writer might take a simile like “ she looked like an angel” and change it to “ she looked like an angel, full of its sadness for humankind” – the idea being to give the object of reference more detail in order to make the image more complex.

### **2. 3. Functions of simile.**

A simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison, showing similarities between two different things. We can find simile examples in our daily speech. We often hear comments like “ John is as slow as a snail”. Snails are notorious for their slow pace and here the slowness of John is compared to that of a snail. The use of “ as” in the example helps to draw the resemblance.

Simile inputs vividness into what we say. Authors and poets utilize comparisons to convey their sentiments and thoughts through vivid word pictures like a simile. Some examples are given below:

” I would have given anything for the power to soothe her frail soul, tormenting itself in its invincible ignorance like a small bird beating about the cruel wires of a cage”. The lines have been taken from *Lord Jim* written by Joseph Conrad. The helplessness of the soul is being compared with a bird in a cage beating itself against the merciless wires of the cage, to be free.

In *To the Lighthouse* , Virginia Woolf compares the velocity of her thoughts about the two men with that of spoken words ” ... impressions poured in upon her of those two men, and to follow her thought was like following a

voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil...". She says both are difficult to follow and cannot be copied in words by a pencil.

The first verse in *A red, red rose* by Robert Burns is a well-known simile:

O my Luve's like a red, red rose

That's newly sprung in June;

O my Luve's like the melodies

That's sweetly play'd in tune.

Robert Burns uses a simile to describe the beauty of his beloved. He says that his love is a fresh red rose that blossoms in the spring.

Some similes are found in daily life such as "as busy as a bee" comparing someone's level of energy to a fast-flying bee or "as agile as a monkey" implying someone can move as well as a monkey.

According to Fromilhague, similes have various functions. Firstly, they serve to communicate concisely and efficiently. They are one of a set of linguistic devices which extend the linguistic resources available. Secondly, they can function as cognitive tools for thought in that they enable us to think of the world in alternative ways.

Simile can be an excellent way for an author either to make an unusual thing seem more familiar like "The planet Zenoth was as cold as ice" or a familiar thing seem more unique as in "Her smile was jagged like a broken zipper".

In this way, similes can help the reader imagine the fictive world of a piece of

literature. Good similes can also make readers think about things in a new way, and can sometimes create a lasting effect. Scottish poet Robert Burns's declaration that his "love's like a red, red rose" forever linked the concepts of love and red roses in our minds.

Simile can help to make new connections for the reader. One of literature's purposes is to help better explain the world around us, and the technique of simile is one of those ways in which we are able to see things in a new way. All types of analogies are cognitive processes of transferring meaning from one thing to another, and thus the use of simile in literature has real synaptic effects. For this reason, and for aesthetic purposes, simile has been a popular literary technique for many hundreds of years.

From the above discussion, we can infer the function of similes both in our everyday life as well as in literature. Similes can make our language more descriptive and enjoyable. Writers, poets, and songwriters make use of similes often to add depth and emphasize what they are trying to convey to the reader or listener. Similes can be funny, serious, mean, or creative. Using similes attracts the attention and appeals directly to the senses of listeners or readers encouraging their imagination to comprehend what is being communicated. In addition, it inspires life-like quality in our daily talks and in the characters of fiction or poetry. Simile allows readers to relate the feelings of a writer or a poet to their personal experiences. Therefore, the use of similes makes it easier for the readers to understand the subject matter of a literary text, which may have been otherwise too demanding to be comprehended. Like metaphors, similes also offer variety in our ways of thinking and offers new perspectives of viewing the world.

## 2. 4. Similes and metaphors.

It would be a mistake to leave the subject of simile without a word about metaphor. The word "metaphor" derives from two Greek roots: *meta*, meaning "over, beyond" and *pherein*, meaning "to carry, transfer".

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison". In literary texts, simile is used with metaphors to enhance the effect and beauty of the text. As metaphor is a covert comparison, simile is an overt one which explicitly and precisely explains the object and it is the first and simplest method for conveying the beauty of message which is used in poetry, prose and also usual conversations. Simile is much less investigated than metaphor, although it occurs as frequently in discourse. It can have an affirmative or a negative form: the affirmative form asserts likeness between the entities compared, as "the sun is like an orange" and the negative one denies likeness, as "the sun is not like an orange".

Similes share with metaphors the goal of relating one thing to another, but they do it in a slightly different way. Look at the example:

Simile: Simon is like a rocket.

Metaphor: Simon is a rocket around the circuit.

The presence or absence of only one word separates a simile from a metaphor. And because of the words *like* or *as*, it is classified as a simile. It is obvious that in a simile, there is an explicit comparison-one thing is said to



be like something else. In a metaphor, there is no comparison because the two things are treated as identical ( an implicit comparison).

In addition to *like* or *as* , several other words and expressions indicate the presence of a simile. A common one is *than* , as in " faster than a speeding bullet" or " sharper than a serpent's tooth". Here are some more expressions that signal the use of a simile:

is similar to  
may be compared to  
is akin to

is comparable to  
puts one in mind of  
is a kind of

as though  
can be likened to  
is the same as

is not unlike  
is not dissimilar to  
may be seen as

In the world of figurative language, similes have long taken a back seat to the more glamorous metaphor. Similes are similar to metaphors in that they are both forms of comparison, but similes compare the two ideas whilst they remain separate, whereas a metaphor compares two things directly.

### **3. Aims and objectives of the study**

The study aims at exemplifying and analyzing models with the purpose of revealing the character and the effects of the simile on showing expressions. Accordingly, the paper tells you how to use the simile, the form and kind to use, and when to avoid it through risk of artificiality and the danger of becoming trite and obvious.

## **4. Research methodology**

### **4. 1. Sample of the study.**

The paper takes examples from the books of many well-known writers. These examples are chosen carefully which are suitable for each aspect. The models are either sentences in stories or verses in poems, thus they are short and each does not exceed 40 words.

### **4. 2. Theoretical framework.**

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Kleiser (1925) and other authors like Grothe (2008) and Alm-Arvius (2003). However, Kleiser's framework is chiefly used.

### **4. 3. The uses of similes.**

The simile is generally regarded as a purely poetic accessory-as an artifice which, belonging to the realm of poetry, is sometimes divorced from its proper relationship and forced into the association of prose. Simile is always the product either of the fancy or of the imagination, and is therefore a poetic attribute. Still, simile is a poetic ornament mainly, and the similes that leap to one's mind when one hears the word mentioned are nearly always taken from famous poems. Simile is an imaginative, and therefore poetic, means of giving a vivid description.

Kleiser (1925) claimed that there are four main uses of simile, including pure description, association, ornamentation and the effect of proverbial wisdom. We will take these uses in order.

#### 4. 3. 1. Purely descriptive.

The use for description is the chief use of simile. Generally speaking, descriptive passages are of three kinds-of persons, of interiors, and of natural scenery. Simile is the most effective in natural scenery. Conrad is a master in using similes in his works. His similes are extremely good. They are easily understood even by those who have never seen the sights he is describing and they are extraordinarily beautiful giving you the picture he is attempting to convey far more truly and far more vividly than any number of pure descriptions could do. Take an example from " Lord Jim":

The young moon, recurved and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of glass, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon (Conrad, 2005).

He made a comparison between " the young moon" and " a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold". By using the mean of simile, the author painted a perfect picture about the beauty of the moon. Similarly, that " the Arabian Sea" is compared with " a sheet of glass" shows an extremely smooth and lissom stream. The excellent simile draws a natural picture vividly and perfectly.

Descriptions of people are often given both very vividly and very briefly by using the technique of simile. Take this from " The gift of the Magi" of O. Henry- an American writer of short stories " Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters". The comparison

between " Della's beautiful hair" with " a cascade of brown waters" describes very long, very soft and smooth hair.

Each of these passages conveys a description by means of a simile which could not possibly be as effectively made in any other way. The technique of simile allows readers to make his own picture, and so conveys to him his own individual interpretation of the scene you are trying to present.

#### **4. 3. 2. Associative.**

The second use of simile is nearly as important as that of pure direct description. Kleiser (1925) claimed that " it is this, to suggest by means of the simile employed the hidden character of the thing you are describing". Thus O. Henry, in " The gift of the Magi", describing Jim's surprise when seeing Della's hair, says " Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail" (Henry, 1906). Della-Jim's wife-has a very long and smooth hair. However, she sold her beautiful hair to buy a gift for Jim on Christmas-" a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design". Absurdly, Jim sold his gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's to buy a present for his wife-the set of combs. Jim's attitude shows a sacrifice and true love to his wife.

#### **4. 3. 3. Ornament.**

According to Kleiser, ornament simile is a quite legitimate but " sometimes a simile put in merely to improve the rhythm of a sentence, or to enhance the effect of a description already given, is justified by its result; but the dangers are obvious". The ornament use of simile is particularly effective in a story written in a rather bare, straightforward style; the sudden introduction of a

particularly apt simile arrests the attention, and forces the reader to take particular note of the passage in which it occurs. Similarly, it is very effective to recur to a simile already made in order to recall the circumstances under which it was first made. For instance, in "Lord Jim", when the author wishes to remind the reader of the state of mind of his hero on an earlier occasion without putting it in so many words, he again refers to the "thin gold shaving" of the moon and the sea "like a sheet of ice".

#### **4. 3. 4. Proverbial.**

Simile is used very largely by country folk and peasants of all lands, but their similes are of a very particular kind, and to get your effect you must know exactly the kind of thing that peasants say. "As slow as turtle", for instance, is a peasant saying in thousands of the century, and it has the true elemental ring; it might be found in fairy tales. The simile is a good way of achieving your effect if you are speaking of peasant life, for it is one of the poetic beauties of genuine peasant speech; but it must be such similes as would naturally occur to a cowherd or a fisherman or a washerwoman.

Simile is an important technique in most works; therefore, to make a good use of simile, you should watch the similes that occur to you instinctively, try to compare the people and things you see every day to something that will at once give a good idea of the real object and at the same time be original; for you must at all costs avoid the obvious simile, which is mere waste of time. Moreover, when you have both sifted your "inspired" similes and carefully created them out of your fancy and your observation, you should read those authors who are especially successful in the art of simile, noticing how they obtain their effects.

## **5. Results and discussion**

From the above analyses, we can see that almost writers and poets utilize the means of simile in their works. In addition, every one also uses similes in daily conversations and even many similes last in thousands of century and become typical similes in life as "as nimble as a rabbit" or "as busy as a bee". It is indisputable that similes play an important role in enhancing the effects of expressions. They can make our language more descriptive and enjoyable. Besides, they can add depth and emphasize what the authors are trying to convey to the readers or the listeners. However, the uses of similes can be confusing to people who are not fluent in a given language because they will interpret the words literally. Also, similes can change from region to region, and even among groups of people.

## **6. Summary**

This study on similes and their use has exemplified and analyzed proses and verses as well as peasant sayings to discover four uses of similes. Pure description, association, arnamentation, and proverb are main uses of similes in which the first is the most important. So, too, the study suggest the ways to make a good simile and avoid bad similes. Types of simile are also showed and especially, metaphors are mentioned in order that people are not confused among the two notions. All types of analogies are cognitive processes of transferring meaning from one thing to another, and thus the use of simile in literature has real synaptic effects. For this reason, and for aesthetic purposes, simile has been a popular literary technique for many hundreds of years.

## 7. Implication

Simile can be an excellent way for an author either to make an unusual thing seem more familiar or a familiar thing seem more unique. In this way, similes can help the reader imagine the fictive world of a piece of literature. Good similes should be therefore made to make readers think about things in a new way.

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