



Paper Type: Original Article

Figurative Language in Damilare Kuku's the Anointed Wife

Bukunmi Adetunji* 

Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; bukunnmiadetunji5@gmail.com.

Citation:

Received: 03 February 2025

Revised: 16 April 2025

Accepted: 10 July 2025

Adetunji, B. (2025). Figurative language in damilare kuku's the anointed wife. *Optimality*, 2(3), 219-232.

Abstract


Literary texts are major instruments for the analysis of styles evident in the use of language. The majority of previous studies on literary texts that have explored figurative language focus on poetic forms of literature with little attention to the prosaic form. Thus, this study investigated the deployment of figurative language in Damilare Kuku's *The Anointed Wife*, one of the short stories in the author's collection titled *Nearly all Men in Lagos are Mad*. This analysis was based on the theoretical framework of linguistic pragmatics that affords the ability to uncover linguistic depths via consideration of contexts. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to identify the various instances of figurative speeches which were important to the construction of meaning in the selected extracts and employed a descriptive-analytical method. The study revealed how society places certain expectations on people who are separated as religious icons and how these people strive to live up to the expectations of society. It demonstrated the holy family's deceitful attempts to hide their transgressions to maintain their social standing. The linguistic pragmatic approach proved apt in unveiling the linguistic pattern of figurative expressions used to portray the church family, the society and the scandal. More studies could be done using another linguistic technique to analyse the same story or examine figurative expressions in any other story in Kuku's collection.


keywords: Figurative language, Nearly all men in Lagos are mad, The anointed wife, Damilare kuku, Literary text, Short story.

1 | Introduction

1.1 | Background to the Study

Figurative language is a type of language that deviates from the literal meaning of words and phrases. Also called "ornaments of language," it requires the reader to use their imagination to understand the author's intended meaning. This type of language is similar to plain language in that it carries underlying meaning. Figurative language employs figures of speech or devices that enable words to convey meanings beyond their

 Corresponding Author: bukunnmiadetunji5@gmail.com

 <https://doi.org/10.22105/opt.v2i3.89>



Licensee System Analytics. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>).

literal or conventional sense, thereby adding beauty and emotional depth to the text. These devices are frequently used in poetry to convey the author's impressions or thoughts by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning the reader is familiar with. Figurative language is situational and context-bound and is used to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas implicitly [1]. Figures of speech can take several forms, such as personifications, paradoxes, similes, synecdoche, antitheses, hyperboles, metonymies, allegories, and idioms [2].

Figurative language has both practical and artistic uses, and it is essential to understanding the meaning of literary texts. It adds to the form's aesthetic appeal and serves as a semantic signifier. Figurative language is essential to achieving the decorative quality of literary language because it gives authors the freedom to use language in a variety of ways to accomplish particular stylistic effects. Riemer [3] claims that figurative language belongs to the category of "picture language." This implies that figures of speech have many purposes in texts. They not only adorn writings and increase their aesthetic worth, but they also convey connotative meanings and have particular effects that enhance the texts and make their meanings more concrete and accurate.

Figurative language is essential for communicating abstract ideas that may be challenging to visualise, generating emotions, and making language expressive [4], [5]. While figures of speech are frequently employed in various types of communication, literal language is the focus of most Natural Language Processing (NLP) research. The implicit nature of figurative language makes it more complex, and it is often considered a significant obstacle to automatic text comprehension [6].

According to Yule [7], understanding language involves more than just comprehending the literal meaning of words. Words that may have a specific meaning in a dictionary can change when they are used in social interactions. This quality of language provides a multitude of research possibilities and allows for words to be loaded with meaning in different ways. Scholars have analysed language to describe how speakers and writers use it to convey meaning appropriately. Words have the power to create sentences, and every act of communication involves choices made by the interlocutors [8].

Individuals may choose to use language on a literal or figurative level, depending on their intentions and desired outcomes in communication. Writers may employ figurative language to engage readers and encourage them to explore deeper meanings beyond the literal words [9]. It is common for people to switch between literal and figurative language in communication, and the structure of language reflects the functions it has evolved to serve in society [10]. Language is not neutral, but rather influenced by various factors; the meaning of words can vary depending on the context in which they are used [11]. When examining the use of figurative language in literature, context is crucial since it guides the meaning-construction process. When producing a fictional work, the author creates a context composed of personal experiences and sociocultural factors that shape the communicative process [12]. Figurative language aims to exceed the boundaries of usual meaning set by the writer or speaker, and for the recipient to decode and understand the new meaning effectively.

A literary work's use of language is crucial because it allows the author to convey their thoughts, feelings, and ideologies. A literary work cannot be realised without the use of language; consequently, authors must consider the role that language plays in the production of a literary work. Literary works are the outcome of the author's meditation on numerous occurrences of people's lives; thus, they are not only viewed as the author's made-up stories but also as the embodiment of the author's creative exploration of his or her ideas [13]. Literature is created in the midst of society as a result of the author's creativity and contemplation of the social phenomena that surround it [14]. Furthermore, human thought is intertwined with language and culture. The cultural expression of a speaking community is language. The language of a given language community will reflect or manifest the views and culture of that community. Additionally, Yunhadi [15] asserts that a society's culture can be seen in its language. As a result, the language that is used in a given society reveals a lot about that society's culture. When writing his works of literature, the author employs a variety of strategies, one of which is the use of figurative language to entice readers. A language that presents meanings

or concepts figuratively or symbolically is known as figurative language. Figurative language has aesthetic values that make a pleasant impression on the reader and can liven up the atmosphere [16].

According to Sari [17], when a writer immerses his narrative in metaphorical language that has artistic value, human problems in literary works take on a distinctive quality. The more aesthetic components a literary work has, the more valued and attractive it is regarded as. Figurative language, or the ornamental quality of literary language, is the cornerstone of literariness [18] since it allows authors to take advantage of and utilise language's latent potential in a number of ways to impact specific styles. As a result, a fascinating literary work uses beautiful language to convey information. The study of stylistics emphasises the use of linguistic style and the artistic creation of literary works. In their work, the author's style or language style is very important. The author's unique way of expressing his or her thoughts is the author's style of language, which reveals the author's soul and personality.

Therefore, this study is an analysis of figurative language in Damilare Kuku's *The Anointed Wife*. The short story is the third in her collection titled *Nearly All the Men in Lagos Are Mad*. As a creative artist, Damilare Kuku has experience as a director, producer, writer, and radio host. She has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in arts. At the moment, her most well-known roles as an actor are in the following genres: Television (Season 1 of *Ebony Life's Castle and Castle* and *Africa Magic's Unbroken*); theatre (*Kakadu the Musical* and *Ewa*); and cinema (*The Set Up* and *ChiefDaddy*). She was enthralled with writing as a child because she saw writers as spellcasters and was pulled to the timeless magic of literature.

In *The Anointed Wife*, Tade is portrayed as a self-righteous pastor who, despite his adulterous behaviour, justifies his actions as "celebrating the Lord." His hypocrisy is made even more evident through his wife, who is fully compliant with his infidelity and holds misguided views on marriage, which are common among many African women. As a result, when news of her husband's infidelity threatens to ruin her perfect family, she takes it upon herself to keep the situation under control. She fears that the public would learn about and examine the details of her dishonest existence.

1.2 | Statement of the Research Problem

There have been many scholarly engagements of literary texts with concerns ranging from stylistics, pragmatics, and lexico-semantics, to sociolinguistic perspectives and based on varying theoretical frameworks. However, few of the studies that have investigated figurative language in literary texts have largely focused on the poetic genre of literature [13], [18–22]. Even though figurative expressions are more predominant in poetry forms of literature than any other type of text, they are still found to be stylistically imperative in other texts, including prosaic texts. Given the figurative captivation of the title of Damilare's short story *The Anointed Wife*, it becomes notable to investigate the figurative constructions in the piece of work.

Thus, this study intends to fill this gap in scholarship by analysing the figurative use of language in the book. This will enable us to understand the craftiness of language and the richness that figurative expressions afford in communicating intentions beyond the surface. It will equally appreciate the authorial ingenuity of Damilare Kuku, who is a famous Nollywood artist in Nigeria.

1.2.1 | Aim and objectives

This study aims to examine the use of figurative language in Damilare Kuku's *The Anointed Wife* and its contribution to the aesthetic value, character and plot development, and overall interpretation of the text. The specific objectives are:

- I. To identify the different types of figurative language employed in *The Anointed Wife*.
- II. To analyse the effects of figurative language on character and plot development in the text.
- III. To examine the contribution of figurative language to the aesthetic value of the work.
- IV. To investigate the role of figurative language in the interpretation of *The Anointed Wife*.

2 | Literature Review

André [23] employs a pragmatic approach to analyse the figurative language employed by Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta in her 1983 novel *The Rape of Shavi*. In order to offer context, the study incorporates references and presuppositions about Emecheta's sociocultural and educational background in addition to analysing the underlying meaning that the novel's allusions, metaphors, similes, and symbols convey. The analysis reveals that the novel's metaphorical language conveys more than what is expressly said, necessitating readers to look past the surface structure to get the intended meaning. The study concludes that the novel is a complicated work that requires the reader and author to have common knowledge for interpretation to be effective.

Yeibo [18] focuses on the stylistic value of figurative language in poetry as semantic signifiers or reinforcers. Specifically, the analysis is conducted using M.A.K. Halliday's three metafunctions of language, which are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The study examines how figurative devices, including imagery, metaphors, rhetorical operations, humour, and figures of sound, are used to emphasise certain aspects of meaning in the texts concerning the context of situation and textual function. The study asserts that any serious exploration of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry or poetry, in general, must give attention to the role of figurative language in conveying textual messages and producing aesthetic effects.

Sharndama and Suleiman [19] examine the use of figurative language in two funeral songs of the Kilba people of Adamawa State in Nigeria. In performing arts, figurative language is a means of conveying ideas, sentiments, and implicit concepts. Descriptive and discursive methods were both used in the examination of the two texts. The results show that the Kilba people's performers use a variety of rhetorical strategies to make their songs' messages clear. Among other figurative language devices, these include similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, imagery, symbolism, and repetition. These metaphorical expressions are meant to arouse grief while also aiding in the audience's memory of the good traits and accomplishments of the departed.

Hidayati [24] identifies the types and functions of figurative language commonly used by the Kakong Community. The data was collected through observation, note-taking, and interviews, and then analysed using an interactive model. The findings revealed that the Kakong Community frequently uses similes, metaphors, and idioms and that these figurative language types serve several functions, including maintaining social relations, criticising, insulting, and commenting on various issues. The study also suggested that the Kakong Community prefers using figurative language, and recommended that they should take responsibility for preserving their language, including the figurative language. Furthermore, the study suggested that preserving the figurative language as part of their cultural heritage should be a consideration for further research. Finally, the study emphasised that the Kakong people should take pride in their figurative language and continue to use it, as the hidden values in figurative language are essential to developing better relationships in social life.

Olusola [21] examines how cultural elements are utilised in expressing Femi Osofisan's feminist beliefs in his drama texts, thus reinforcing the idea that all forms of language have the potential to convey ideological implications. Norman Fairclough's sociocultural model of CDA, which incorporates Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), is employed as the theoretical framework. The study focuses on three of Osofisan's drama texts, namely *Morountodun*, *YungbaYungba* and *the Dance Contest*, and *Tegonni: An African Antigone*, which mostly express his feminist tendencies. Descriptive linguistic analysis is used to analyse proverbs and figurative expressions to explain women's expressive skills. Osofisan emphasises how women can convey power through proverbs and figures of speech, and the texts' overall feminist worldview presents women as expressive and energetic.

Rahman and Amin [13] examine the use of metaphorical language in the novels *Reisei To Jounetsu No Aida* by Ekuni Kaori and *Reisei To Jounetsu No Aida* Bluuby by Hitonari Tsuji, as a means of expressing the author's thoughts, personality, and perspectives. An author can express their views and show off their individual style by using a particular language in their writing. The study uses Michael C. Halley and Stephen Ullman's metaphorical perspective for the analysis. According to the study, a writer's linguistic style can

convey details about their cultural upbringing and the communication setting. The writers convey their emotions and ideas through metaphorical language, and readers can distinguish each writer's particular style from another.

Younas et al. [25] focus on deciphering Taufiq Rafat's poem "The Time to Love" metaphorical language to uncover its deeper implications. It attempts to answer three main study questions: figuring out what kinds of figures of speech are employed, figuring out which lexical categories are used, and comprehending the meanings that are expressed through figurative language. The study uses a multilevel method to look at lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions, as well as figures of speech like alliterations, assonances, consonances, metaphors, personifications, and symbols. The analysis concludes that figurative language is essential to understanding the poem's meaning because it links these linguistic elements to clarify themes of love, nature, and human experience.

3 | Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the study of linguistic pragmatics, which emphasises the crucial role of context in interpreting implied meanings that go beyond semantic meanings. The boundary between semantics and pragmatics is often indistinct since language is almost always used in a particular context. However, if an analysis references the speaker or user of language, it falls under the field of pragmatics [26]. This paper uses this theoretical framework to examine how Damilare Kuku uses figurative language to convey meaning distinctively in her short story.

Pragmatics examines the meaning that speakers convey beyond the words they use, as opposed to the semantic meaning encoded in language. It involves studying the relationship between language and speech functions, and the factors that influence our language choices in social interactions and their impact on others [27]. While there are variations in scholars' definitions, the concept of implied, extralinguistic, or intended meaning is universally recognised. Pragmatics involves analysing various components, including linguistic and physical context, deictic information, reference, implicature, the cooperative principle, and presuppositions, to uncover this hidden meaning.

Saeed [28] explains that the words used in the same phrase, sentence, or paragraph make up the linguistic context, often referred to as discourse context. This limits the number of viable interpretations and influences how meaning is interpreted. When referring to knowledge as context, Saeed [28] distinguishes between mutual knowledge and background information as crucial elements of the physical context. Mutual knowledge is the background knowledge that the speaker may presume the hearer possesses, whereas background knowledge is defined as common sense, encyclopaedic, sociocultural, or real-world knowledge. Deixis is the portion of language that locates what is discussed from the speaker's point of view [29]. It can involve allusions to geographic (here-there, this-that), temporal (now-then), discursive (former-latter), or social relations (I-you).

Reference comprises the subparts of inference, anaphora, and exophora. Reference is the act of using language to help a listener identify something. The act of meaning or implying one thing by stating another is known as implication. It can be traditional or unorthodox, and it can be a component of sentence meaning or reliant on the discourse context. Figures of speech are one type of implicature [29]. According to Grice, the cooperative principle is based on four maxims known as Gricean maxims: Quantity, quality, relation, and manner maxims. It acknowledges that verbal communication cooperates with shared, mutually beneficial goals [7]. An assumption a speaker makes about what the audience knows or believes to be true is known as a presupposition. When a statement is written or spoken, presumptions are assumptions that are accepted as true and do not change even in the face of disagreement [29].

4 | Methodology

The data for the study is a literary text, the short story *The Anointed Wife* by Damilare Kuku. It is one of the twelve collections of twelve short stories by the author in *Nearly all the Men in Lagos are Mad*. The story is chosen because of the socio-cultural and religious issues addressed by the piece. The story is an x-ray of the

typical deception that reigns in the marriage of most religious leaders. Its satiric tendency and portrayal of realities in marriages and homes in Lagos, the busiest city in Nigeria, make the piece worthy of attention.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique [30], [31] to identify the various instances of the use of figurative language that are instrumental to the construction of meaning in the work. Consequently, 5 extracts are drawn across the story for analysis. The book is downloaded from the publisher's website Masobe Books¹.

The extracts selected for analysis reflect the depth of conveyance of the author on the themes of the novel, which include religion, hypocrisy, patriarchy, gender roles and social expectations in marriage, particularly that of the religious leaders. The study employed a descriptive-analytical method. By this, we can attend to the linguistic items of figurative implications used by Kuku to pass her message across beyond the surface. It uncovers Kuku's skilful use of language, vivid imagery, and compelling characters and affords the chance to appreciate Kuku's unique voice and style.

5 | Results

Extract 1

Do you think it is easy to be a pastor's wife? How can you know what it means to be the partner of a man with a divine calling, made of flesh but instructed to lead with the spirit? Any ordinary wife has their work cut out for them in loving their husbands, in serving them for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, but a pastor's wife has to help her husband maintain his holy anointing, and to do so with an invisible hand (29).

Metaphor

Metaphors are used to make comparisons between two things that are not literally the same, including creating vivid and imaginative images in the reader's mind. The phrase "a man with a divine calling, made of flesh but instructed to lead with the spirit" uses metaphor to create a vivid image of the pastor's role. The metaphorical language emphasises the duality of the pastor's nature- both human and divine. The phrase "made of flesh" emphasises the human side of the pastor, while the phrase "instructed to lead with the spirit" refers to the pastor's religious calling. This metaphorical description helps to communicate the complex expectations placed on pastors and their families.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole exaggerates something to create a vivid and dramatic effect. The clause "Any ordinary wife has their work cut out for them" uses hyperbole to exaggerate the difficulties of being a wife. By using this figure of speech, the author emphasises the increased difficulty of being a pastor's wife. The hyperbole is also used to create a sense of tension, as the phrase highlights the immense pressure placed on the wife to fulfil her duties. This exaggerated description helps the reader to understand the unique challenges of being a pastor's wife.

Allusion

Allusion is a figure of speech that refers to a well-known person, place, event, or literary work to create a comparison or add depth to a message. The phrase "for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health" is an allusion to traditional wedding vows. The allusion serves to create a point of comparison for the reader, making it easier to understand the unique responsibilities of being a pastor's wife. By using this well-known phrase, the author also emphasises the seriousness of the commitment that the pastor's wife has made to her husband and her church.

Metonymy

¹ www.masobebooks.com

Metonymy is a figure of speech that refers to something by using a term that is closely associated with it, but not necessarily a part of it. The phrase "holy anointing" uses metonymy to represent the pastor's spiritual authority. The anointing is a symbol of divine empowerment, and by helping her husband maintain it, the wife is seen as supporting his spiritual leadership. The use of metonymy in this phrase highlights the importance of the pastor's role and the responsibility of the wife to support it. By using this figure of speech, the author also emphasises the spiritual nature of the pastor's work.

Personification

Personification is when human characteristics, qualities, or actions are attributed to non-human entities such as animals, inanimate objects, or natural phenomena. The clause "to do so with an invisible hand" personifies the role of the pastor's wife. The use of personification gives agency to the wife's actions as if her actions have a life of their own. By personifying the role of the pastor's wife, the author highlights the importance of her work and her ability to help her husband fulfil his calling. The phrase also creates a sense of mystery, as the "invisible hand" suggests a hidden, mysterious force at work.

Overall, the figurative language in this extract emphasises the challenges and responsibilities of being a pastor's wife. By using metaphor, hyperbole, allusion, metonymy, and personification, the author creates a vivid and memorable description of the pastor's wife's role or more appropriately, the societal construction of the roles expected to be assumed as the wife of a pastor.

Extract 2

How long has it been since I became the mummy of our organisation, the mother in our marriage? I can't remember. It feels like forever since I had the pleasure, the intimacy of hearing my own name fall from my husband's lips, my real name, not Mummy, sometimes followed by one of the children's names. I look at him now. His pleading eyes and downturned mouth. His hair is impeccably groomed, his salt and pepper beard neatly trimmed. We have been married for over twenty years. Our love has gone beyond compassion, beyond butterflies in the stomach and settled into a form of kinship. Tade and I are members of an elite, exclusive club, we couldn't be closer if we had shared some kind of blood covenant (29).

- I. Metaphor: The phrase "the mummy of our organisation" uses a metaphor to create a vivid image of the wife's role in the church. The metaphorical language suggests that the wife is the nurturing force that keeps the organisation alive, much like a mother figure. This metaphorical description helps to communicate the importance of the wife's role in the church. The noun "organisation" also gives an impression of the church as a coordinated place having a designed system and regulated patterns of operations.
- II. Anaphora: Anaphora involves the repetition of a word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences or phrases. The repetition of "my own name" emphasises the wife's desire to be recognised as an individual, and not just as a mother figure. By repeating the phrase, the author emphasises the wife's longing for intimacy and connection with her husband. The anaphora also creates a sense of rhythm in the writing, drawing the reader's attention to the wife's emotional state.
- III. Imagery: Imagery is a language used to create sensory experiences, usually through descriptions of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. The phrase "beyond butterflies in the stomach" uses imagery to describe the depth of the couple's relationship. The imagery of butterflies in the stomach is a common metaphor for the feeling of falling in love. By saying that their love has gone "beyond" this feeling, the author suggests that their love ought to have deepened and matured over time.
- IV. Simile: Simile directly compares two things. Similes are often used to create vivid and imaginative images in the reader's mind. The phrase "we couldn't be closer if we had shared some kind of blood covenant" uses a simile to compare the couple's relationship to a blood covenant. The comparison creates a sense of intimacy and exclusivity, emphasising the bond between the couple. By using this figure of speech, the author also suggests that the couple's relationship is sacred and binding.
- V. Personification: The phrase "His pleading eyes and downturned mouth" personifies the husband's facial expressions. The use of personification gives life to the husband's emotions, making them seem more real.

and immediate. This technique helps the reader to understand the husband's feelings and creates a sense of empathy for both characters.

- VI. The extract shows a complex and nuanced relationship between the narrator, who is the wife of Tade, the pastor, and her husband. The figurative language used in the extract, such as the metaphor of the wife as the "mummy of our organisation" and the simile of the couple's relationship as a "blood covenant," emphasises the depth and importance of the couple's bond. At the same time, the use of anaphora, imagery, and personification highlights the wife's sense of longing for intimacy and recognition from her husband. The extract conveys a sense of complexity and tension in the relationship between the couple, as the wife struggles to balance her own desires and needs with her role as the wife of a pastor. The use of figurative language adds depth and nuance to the portrayal of the characters and their relationship, making the extract both engaging and thought-provoking.

Extract 3

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you. As you go about your daily activities, please do not let the devil take hold of your mind with fake news. Two weeks ago, an article was released accusing pastor of sleeping with a young lady on the 19th of June 2020. The young lady claims that my husband, our daddy in the Lord, picked her up from Festac, took her to a hotel close by to have inappropriate relations with her. She says she is coming forward because she saw Daddy on television preaching and she didn't think that it was right for an adulterer to be the one to guide people on their spiritual journeys (30).

- I. Metaphor: This portion highlights the use of the metaphor "devil" to describe the potential influence of fake news. This metaphor is powerful and emotionally charged, as it taps into common cultural and religious beliefs about the forces of evil. By invoking this metaphor, she conveys a sense of urgency and concern about the potential impact of what she assumes to be a piece of false information about her husband. The use of the phrase "fake news" is also notable. It connotes a judgment of the released article as a form of falsehood and propaganda, and its use in this context suggests that the accusations against the pastor are not only false but also intentionally malicious.
- II. Repetition: With repetition, a word, phrase, line, or stanza is repeated for emphasis or effect. The repetition of the term "young lady" and the use of the phrase "our daddy in the Lord" have stylistic implications. The repetition of the term "young lady" serves to emphasise the youth and vulnerability of the accuser, as well as to draw attention to the power dynamic at play in the situation. The use of the phrase "our daddy in the Lord" thus puts the previous expression in perspective, as it underscores the position of authority that the pastor holds within his community against an ordinary woman in society. These devices create a sense of tension and unease, as the reader is forced to confront the potential abuse of power by someone who is supposed to be a spiritual leader.
- III. Euphemism: Euphemism uses a mild or indirect word or expression to refer to something unpleasant, embarrassing, or taboo. This involves the use of the phrase "inappropriate relations" to describe the alleged actions of the pastor. This euphemism is significant, as it allows the author to convey the gravity of the situation without being overly explicit. The use of a euphemism is also notable because it highlights the taboo nature of the accusations against the pastor. By not explicitly stating what the pastor is alleged to have done, the author creates a sense of suspense and tension, as the reader is left to imagine the worst. This use of understatement serves to emphasise the seriousness of the accusations and underscores the potential consequences for pastor Tade and his community.
- IV. Irony: Irony is a figurative device in which the intended meaning of a word or expression is different from, or even opposite to, its literal or usual meaning. The ironic expression is deployed to underscore the hypocrisy perceived to be at play in the situation. The use of irony is powerful because it draws attention to the contrast between the pastor's alleged behaviour and his role as a spiritual leader. By suggesting that an adulterer should not guide people on their spiritual journeys, the accuser is implicitly criticising the pastor's character and calling into question his fitness for his role. This use of irony creates a sense of tension and conflict, as the reader is forced to consider the moral and ethical implications of the accusations against the pastor.

The devices used in this extract help to create a sense of drama and tension. The figurative language used in the extract serves to create a sense of urgency, concern, and gravity, highlighting the emotional weight of the situation. The use of metaphor, repetition, euphemism, and irony all contribute to the overall effect, creating a complex and nuanced portrayal of the accusations against the pastor. Through the use of these linguistic devices, the author is able to convey a sense of moral and ethical complexity, as well as the potential consequences of the allegations for the pastor and his community.

Extract 4

After that, we kissed every time we were alone. Falling against each other with fevered passion. My rubbing against his groin became more practiced, and I was rewarded with a bulge that grew with each caress. One day, I couldn't take it anymore so I hiked up my skirt and got on top of him. I found the sweet spot between our bodies and I rocked my hips back and forth, the thin material of my underwear and the cotton of his trousers moistening. He moaned hotly against my neck, his hands fondling my breasts as he whispered my name over and over. Evelyn. Evelyn. Those moments felt like liquid ecstasy. But he never allowed us to go beyond that until we were married three years later. So, you see? That prostitute is lying and she will soon be cast back into the pit of hell where she crawled out from (33).

- I. Metaphor: The first paragraph uses figurative language to convey a sense of intense physical passion between the narrator and her lover. The phrase "sweet spot" is a metaphor for the point of maximum pleasure, and the use of the word "moistening" creates a sense of physical wetness and arousal. The phrase "pit of hell" is a metaphor for a place of evil, emphasising the narrator's contempt for the accuser. The language is confrontational and aggressive, with the use of the word "lying" suggesting that the narrator believes the accusation is completely false.
- II. Imagery: The language is erotic, with phrases such as "fevered passion" and "rubbing against his groin," creating an image of desire and lust. The language is also sensory, with descriptions of touch, sound, and movement, adding to the intensity of the scene.
- III. Repetition: The repetition of the narrator's name, "Evelyn," adds to the sense of intimacy and personal connection between the two lovers. Moreover, the repetition of the phrase "cast back" adds to the sense of finality and dismissal, as if the accusation has already been dealt with and dismissed.
- IV. The language in the extract is emotive and sensual, with the use of figurative language creating a strong sense of physical passion and desire. In the overall sense, this piece is an ironical delivery. In a bid to justify her husband against accusations of sexual infidelity, the pastor's wife is flashing back to the display of sexual indiscipline exhibited between herself and pastor prior to their marriage.

Extract 5

I should not have been surprised. Gossip these days is a hot commodity, a quick path to wealth on the internet highway. In the old days, rumours would circulate among friends and family in your area, in the worst-case scenario, it might reach another local government area or state. These days, bad news travels at the speed of light, leaping from one blog post in Lagos to London within seconds. Several blogs reposted the original article and within a week, the girl whose name I have refused to learn or remember had sat down with journalists detailing her alleged one-night encounter with my husband. I compared the metrics of my Facebook post and retweets of the church's official response to the bloggers and saw that we were losing. Badly. What? Are you surprised that I'm talking about losing? Do you think this is an ethical or moral war that this girl is waging against my husband? Of course not. This thing is all about PR. Even though she is a liar and a prostitute, the truth is, in this social media era we are in, the only thing that matters is who people believe, who they sympathise with. And right now, I am losing, but I won't be for long (33-34).

- I. Simile: The extract employs direct comparison to relate gossip to a "hot commodity." This suggests that gossip is in high demand and is seen as valuable in today's society. The use of the word "commodity" also implies that gossip can be bought and sold, which highlights the commercial aspect of social media. The simile includes the description of social media as an "internet highway", which suggests that social media is

a fast and efficient means of communication, much like a highway. This emphasises the speed at which information travels on social media and highlights the potential reach of any given message.

- II. **Metaphor:** This text employs metaphor to describe the spread of rumours in the past. Rumours are described as "circulating," which suggests that they are like a fluid moving through a network of people. This metaphor emphasises the localised nature of rumours in the past, as they were typically limited to a small group of individuals. The verb "losing" is a metaphor which describes the position of the religious family in the conflict with society. They suggest that they are currently "losing" the battle, but they will not be for long. This metaphor implies that the conflict is like a contest, in which victory or defeat is determined by public opinion. The use of the word "long" suggests that the conflict is temporary and that the author is confident in their ability to turn the situation around.
- III. **Hyperbole:** Hyperbole is used in the text to describe the impact of social media on the spread of gossip. They describe how several blogs reposted the original article within a week, which suggests that the information has spread rapidly and widely. The use of the adverb "badly" to describe how the church's response is faring in comparison to the bloggers' employs hyperbole, emphasising the perceived severity of the situation.
- IV. **Rhetorical questions:** A rhetorical question is a figure of speech that is posed as a question but is not meant to be answered directly. Rhetorical questions are used in this instance to challenge the reader's assumptions about the nature of the conflict. They ask if the reader is surprised that they are "losing" and if they think the conflict is an "ethical or moral war." This strategy allows the author to reframe the conflict as a purely strategic one, in which the goal is to win over public opinion rather than to uphold moral values.

The impression of this extract is that it describes the wife's experience of dealing with the spread of gossip and rumours on social media. She is concerned with the potential impact of this gossip on their "holy" reputation and public opinion, and views the situation as a strategic battle for public support. The use of figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, is prominent throughout the extract and helps to emphasise the speed and scale of communication on social media. The wife's tone is defensive and somewhat combative as they attempt to protect their reputation and defend her husband against the allegations. This highlights the power of social media to spread information quickly and the challenges that individuals and organisations face in managing their public image in this environment.

Extract 6

As the weeks went by the scandal grew wings and added jetpack fuel. I had to sit through interviews she gave to all and sundry, watch her lower her overfilled eyelashes in false modesty, her overflowing cleavage clearly showing who she really is, an opportunist and a gold digger. I watched and read every single thing this girl said because knowing your enemy is the first step to destroying them (38).

- I. **Metaphor:** In the passage, the metaphor "the scandal grew wings and added jetpack fuel" suggests that the scandal was becoming increasingly powerful and unstoppable, like a fast-flying jet with powerful propulsion. This metaphor helps to convey the sense that the sexual scandal of pastor Tade was growing quickly and taking on a life of its own, which is an important aspect of the writer's narrative.
- II. **Hyperbole:** In the passage, the writer uses hyperbole to describe the woman at the centre of the scandal, saying that her "overfilled eyelashes" and "overflowing cleavage" are on full display. These descriptions are exaggerated to the point of absurdity, but they help to convey the writer's disdain for the woman and to paint her as someone desperate for attention and willing to do whatever it takes to get it.
- III. **Oxymoron:** "False modesty" is an example of an oxymoron, which is a figure of speech that combines two contradictory terms to create a new meaning. In this case, "false" and "modesty" are opposite ideas, as true modesty is characterised by a lack of pretence or vanity, while falsehood implies the opposite. By combining these two terms, the writer creates a sense of contradiction or tension that emphasises the woman's insincerity and manipulative behaviour. This oxymoron is used to convey a sense of the woman's hypocrisy and to paint her as someone who is not what she appears to be.

The scandal is described with vivid and sometimes exaggerated language to describe the scandal as it unfolds, using metaphors, hyperbole, irony, and allusion to create a sense of drama and urgency. The language used suggests that the writer has a strong negative opinion of the woman at the centre of the scandal, and the use of figurative language helps to reinforce this negative impression. The extract creates a vivid and dramatic picture of a scandal and the writer's negative opinion of the woman involved in it.

6 | Discussion

The use of figures of speech in *The Anointed Wife* uncovers the underlying moral inconsistencies and satirical disposition of the author. Kuku's employment of metaphors in portraying Pastor Tade is a stylistic choice which illustrates the societal duality imposed on religious leaders. However, the metaphor risks oversimplifying the complexities of religious leadership, despite effectively illustrating the tension between humanity and divinity. The metaphoric presentations illustrate the pastor's role as inherently paradoxical human flaws that must be harmonised with spiritual integrity. On the other hand, as well, Kuku's metaphorical approach, while vivid, may inadvertently neglect the systemic issues of religious leadership, as it prioritises individual duality over the broader, institutionally entrenched power dynamics. This limitation embodies André's [23] assertion that metaphors occasionally necessitate readers to transcend superficial readings. The reader may develop an oversimplified view of the pastor's moral dilemmas without a critique of the religious context in which these conflicts arise.

Kuku employed hyperbole to depict the burden of responsibilities of the Pastor's wife. Kuku emphasises her challenges and the idealised martyrdom of the pastor's wife. This embellishment may be critiqued for romanticising her suffering instead of confronting the genuine emotional and psychological burden imposed by such societal expectations. Yeibo [18] argues that hyperbole in literary works frequently facilitates particular interpretations. In Kuku's oeuvre, this may be perceived as an undue elevation of the wife's status to an almost saintly figure, thereby undermining a critical examination of the gendered expectations placed upon her. Despite its dramatic nature, the symbolic commemoration of her sacrifices may inadequately address the fundamental gender disparities that subordinate her to her husband's spiritual authority.

Moreover, Kuku's employment of allusion, particularly to traditional marriage vows, effectively underscores the wife's commitment but risks reinforcing the archaic, patriarchal structures that delineate her identity. Readers may emotionally connect with the phrase "for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health," yet it simultaneously obscures the more troubling aspects of the relationship, particularly the ways in which the wife's autonomy is compromised in her roles as carer and spiritual support to her husband. This allusion reinforces the traditional, frequently limiting view of marriage that may obstruct a more progressive or feminist interpretation of the wife's experience. Olusola's [21] study on cultural representations of power in literature indicates that figurative language can both reinforce the status quo and illuminate ideological beliefs, thereby supporting either side of the debate. In Kuku's case, the reference can be construed as endorsing rather than challenging a framework that perpetuates disparities in women's power.

Again, Kuku's employment of euphemism and irony with the use of the phrase "inappropriate relations" conveys the gravity of the pastor's alleged conduct without overtly challenging him. Although euphemism lets one be subtle, it also downplays the gravity of the charges. This avoidance of direct confrontation can be viewed as a form of narrative evasion, allowing the book to evade the moral repercussions of the pastor's actions. The irony in the allegation of the pastor as an "adulterer" leading people spiritually only highlights the hypocrisy in the circumstances. Though it highlights the moral conflicts at hand, this irony also leaves unquestioned the more general problems of responsibility inside religious establishments. Kuku might be ignoring the systematic character of the issue by concentrating on the hypocrisy of the individual: religious leaders and establishments that support such activities. While metaphor can reveal moral conundrums, it is argued that emphasis on euphemism may weaken the moral critique since it avoids direct interaction with the weight of the pastor's activities [13].

Kuku's metaphor of gossip as a "hot commodity" and the "internet highway" accurately illustrates the rapidity and extent of rumour dissemination in the digital age. Viewing the issue solely as a strategic, public relations-driven conflict reduces the complexity of the situation by framing social media as merely a battleground for public opinion. The rhetorical enquiries in this passage, questioning whether the situation qualifies as an "ethical or moral war," shift the focus from the moral substance of the assertions to the realm of public opinion and media influence. This analysis of social media's influence is precise. However, it risks overlooking the more significant ethical issues regarding the pastor's conduct and the church's role in managing such crises. While figurative language can highlight social dynamics, according to Younas et al. [25], Kuku's focus on the public relations element may lessen a closer examination of the moral and social obligations that religious leaders and their families should uphold.

Conclusively, Kuku's metaphor of the scandal "growing wings and adding jetpack fuel" captures the growing character of the crisis, but it emphasises a narrative choice that gives dramatic imagery top priority over a critical analysis of the social systems allowing the dissemination of false information. Though vivid, this metaphor runs the danger of sensationalising the issue instead of exploring the underlying reasons for public disenchantment with religious leaders. The oxymoron of "false modesty" highlights the hypocrisy at hand, and even lessens the systems that support such hypocrisy to flourish. In this sense, Kuku's use of metaphorical language, while interesting, could be criticised for accentuating the drama of the controversy without really interacting with the more general structural problems at the core of the story.

In essence, even though the figurative language in *The Anointed Wife* surely gives the narrative more depth and richness, it also raises important issues regarding the way these tactics simultaneously highlight and hide the moral and social criticisms buried in the story. Kuku's figurative language captivates the reader and deepens the moral and ideological overtones of the short story. It consequently encourages readers to critically evaluate the consequences of these tactics in depicting the conflicts between public personas and private reality.

7 | Conclusion

This study has explored the figurative devices deployed in Damilare Kuku's language in the short story *The Anointed Wife*, showing how the protagonist of the story uses the resource of language to portray first different aspects of the scandal that stands at the centre of the plot and then also the characters representing the church and society. The study employed linguistic pragmatics as the framework to interpret the extensive use of language in the story in relation to the context of usage. This aided the understanding of the messages underlying the figurative expressions. The study reveals how figurative language in the selected extracts reflects the challenges and responsibilities associated with the role of a pastor's wife in relation to societal expectations. The language framings through figurative means also show the complexities of the relationship between pastor Tade's wife and the complainant of the scandal and underscore the hypocritical stance of the so-called religious leaders in the society. The devices employed also evoke dramatic effects in the novel. Future studies can apply another linguistic technique to the analysis of the same story or consider figurative expressions in any other story in Kuku's collection.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability

The data used and analyzed in this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Yusnitasari, V., Wangi, W., & Sugianto, Y. (2022). An analysis of figurative language on the song lyrics "You are My Sunshine" by Anne Murray. *Language and art*, 6(1), 309–322. <https://ejournal.unibabwi.ac.id/index.php/lunar/article/download/1971/1290>
- [2] Sodikova, S. (2025). The role of language identity in sociolinguistics. *International journal Multidiscipline*, 1(1), 103–105. <https://www.tlepub.org/index.php/2/article/view/73>
- [3] Riemer, N. (2010). *Introducing semantics*. Cambridge university press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=lang_en&id=tJjZ0FmNdzIC&oi=fnd&pg=PR13&dq=Introducing+semantics&ots=IZt-q-luHZ&sig=k8103JpN294y1XTPU-5PeTpMSaA
- [4] Ferguson, H. J. (2024). Commentary on the special issue: New approaches to figurative language research. *Discourse processes*, 61(1–2), 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2024.2314945>
- [5] Colston, H. L., & Gibbs, R. W. (2021). Figurative language communicates directly because it precisely demonstrates what we mean. *Canadian journal of experimental psychology/revue canadienne de psychologie expérimentale*, 75(2), 228. <https://psycnet.apa.org/buy/2021-47506-001>
- [6] Lugli, S., & Strapparava, C. (2025). Understanding is seeing: Metaphorical and visual reasoning in multimodal large language models. *Proceedings of the annual meeting of the cognitive science society* (Vol. 47, pp. 3470–3478). University of California. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1zd9598p>
- [7] Yule, G. (2012). *The study of language 4th edition*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819742>
- [8] Flusberg, S. J., Holmes, K. J., Thibodeau, P. H., Nabi, R. L., & Matlock, T. (2024). The psychology of framing: How everyday language shapes the way we think, feel, and act. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 25(3), 105–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15291006241246966>
- [9] Oko, E. C., & Mbey, E. G. (2025). The role of iconicity in language evolution and processing: Bridging embodiment and symbolic representation. *Advances in law, pedagogy, and multidisciplinary humanities*, 3(1), 296–323. <http://103.133.36.82/index.php/alpamet/article/view/920>
- [10] van Leeuwen, T. (2023). Social semiotics and multimodality. In *The routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 320–336). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003082637-28>
- [11] Forouhandeh, B., Clarke, R. J., & Reynolds, N. L. (2022). Rethinking peer-to-peer communication: how different mediums and product types influence consumers' language. *European journal of marketing*, 56(8), 2281–2308. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2020-0793>
- [12] Osuchukwu, C. N. (2022). The role of context in meaning construction beyond semantics to pragmatics. *African journal of humanities and contemporary education research*, 5(1), 157–172. <https://publications.afropolitanjournals.com/index.php/ajhcer/article/download/194/134>
- [13] Rahman, F., Amin, M. A., & others. (2022). Authors' figurative expressions from two novels: A comparative analysis between RTJNA rosso and RTJNA Blu. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 12(1), 150–157. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1201.18>
- [14] Fauziyati, K., & others. (2020). An analysis of stylistic in after dark by Haruki Murakami. *JournEEL (journal of english education and literature)*, 2(1), 47–53. <https://doi.org/10.51836/journeel.v2i1.82>
- [15] Yunhadi, W. (2016). Realitas bahasa dalam postulat sapir dan whorf. *LINGUA: Jurnal bahasa, sastra, dan pengajarannya*, 13(2), 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.30957/lingua.v13i2.227>
- [16] Bagul, A., Pratiwi, D. P. E., & Ardiantari, I. A. P. G. (2023). Discovering the meaning of figurative language in Jamie Miller's song lyrics. *Elysian journal: English literature, linguistics and translation studies*, 3(1), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.36733/elysian.v3i1.4240>
- [17] Sari, Y. M., Triani, S. N., & Yanti, L. (2023). Penggunaan eufemisme pada novel sunset bersama rosie karya tere liye. *Innovative: Journal of social science research*, 3(6), 8142–8161. <http://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative/article/view/7409%0A>
- [18] Yeibo, E. (2012). Figurative language and stylistic function in JP clark-bekederemo's poetry. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 3(1), 180–187. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.3.1.180-187>

- [19] Sharndama, E. C., & Suleiman, J. B. A. (2013). An analysis of figurative languages in two selected traditional funeral songs of the Kilba people of Adamawa State. *International journal of english and literature*, 4(4), 167–174. <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJEL>
- [20] Syahrina, A. (2019). *A stylistic study of figurative language in katy perry's song lyrics from witness album* [Thesis]. <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789/49300/1/SI19047.pdf>
- [21] Olusola, A. O. (2020). Proverbs and figurative expressions as markers of feminist ideology in selected Femi Osofisan plays. *Linguistik online*, 101(1), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.101.6679>
- [22] Jama'an, F., Firza, F., & others. (2021). Metaphor on Japanese song lyric By Miwa: a stylistic study. *Journal of cultura and lingua*, 2(1), 26–32. <https://culingua.bunghatta.ac.id/index.php/culingua/article/download/21/9>
- [23] André, D. C. (2010). A study of context and figurative language in Buchi's Emecheta's the rape of shavi: A pragmatic approach. *Communication and linguistics studies*, 3(1), 5–14. 10.11648/j.cls.20170301.12
- [24] Hidayati, N. (2017). Figurative language in Kakong community: A study in Lombok island. *Journal of english education*, 2(1), 74–82. <http://usnsj.com/index.php/JEE/article/view/2.1.74-82>
- [25] Younas, A., Shahzad, W., Naveed, A., Aziz, S., & Younas, A. (2024). An analysis of figurative language in taufiq Rafat's poem "the time to love." *Qlantic journal of social sciences and humanities*, 5(1), 399–412. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.379019364>
- [26] Awodey, S., & Frost-Arnold, G. (2024). *Studies in semantics: The collected works of Rudolf Carnap*. Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/actrade/9780192894878.book.1%0A
- [27] Birner, B. J. (2025). *Introduction to pragmatics*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://download.e-bookshelf.de/download/0000/6451/92/L-G-0000645192-0002338914.pdf>
- [28] Saeed, J. I. (2015). *Semantics*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Semantics%2C+5th+Edition-p-9781119709886>
- [29] D'Haen, T. (2021). *Linguistics and the study of literature* (Vol. 1). BRILL. <https://brill.com/display/title/28801?language=en>
- [30] Adeniran, A. O., & Tayo-Ladega, O. (2024). Critical analysis of phenomenological research design in a qualitative research method. *Management analytics and social insights*, 1(2), 186–196. <https://doi.org/10.22105/ad338t15>
- [31] Adeniran, A. O., Asifat, J. T., Familusi, O. B., & Folorunso, S. S. (2024). Critical analysis of research methods and misperceptions of statistical analysis. *International journal of innovation in management, economics and social sciences*, 4(3), 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.59615/ijimes.4.3.29>