



Metaphors and Similes in The Book of Revelation

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Abstract

The article aimed to examine meanings of the figurative language, namely metaphors and similes in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. The figurative languages found in the Book of Revelation were used to emphasize terms, parables, or visions about what John saw. The data containing metaphors and similes were collected from the verses in the Book of Revelation. This document analysis used a qualitative method to analyze the data descriptively. The findings showed 34 figurative languages of metaphors and similes in the Revelation in 26 verses. The metaphors appeared in four verses, while the similes occurred in 30 verses. Metaphors were less frequent compared to similes because in the Book of Revelation, there were not many words of God but parables about what would happen in the future according to John's vision. The similes used animals and objects, comparing the characteristics of the human body and objects, comparing the condition or situation of humans and objects, and comparing objects, both concrete and abstract. The findings of the research would be an alternative way to learn and understand the figurative language in the Bible: Book of Revelation.

Keywords: *bible; figurative language; metaphor; revelation; simile*

Introduction

Language is a tool used by humans to communicate with each other to express thoughts, and feelings and convey information. According to Dewi et al, (2020), language is a communication tool that humans always use to be able to help, find, and share ideas and information that can be useful for people around them. Language brings peacefulness, and happiness to the world, it can convey thoughts, ideas, feelings, and emotions in life. In prehistoric times, early humans used sounds and voices produced by their mouths and bodies to communicate. However, the more modern the language, the more developed and different. Starting from the mother tongue, second language, foreign language, body language, and even slang created by very creative teenagers. Language is defined as a tool for communicating and interacting with others using signs, symbols, and codes to make it easier to understand orally and in writing (Mkandawire, 2018). Based on Yanto, et al. (2023), communication will be disrupted when the rules, patterns, sounds, word order, and sentences in the language are violated so it will cause confusion and miscommunication with other people. Therefore, in addition to spoken language, it can also be written (coded), and gestures can also be used as language cues to stay

connected and communicate with each other in social life in society.

In learning a language, one thing that must be deepened is being able to find what is implicit or explicit meaning in a language used by using semantics. Semantics function is to study the meaning of sentences; words, and phrases (Nafisa, 2021). In analyzing semantics one thing that must be understood is how to interpret the meaning of words implied in a work, utterance, or argument into a meaning that has the same meaning as what is implied by the author according to the interpretation of the reader. The knowledge of semantics is very useful for various groups in the world of education, for example for researchers or teachers, it is useful for analyzing the meaning of a word being studied. Objects that are usually used in analyzing semantics are poetry, songs, sentences in novels, and the Bible which uses figurative language.

Based on Buta, et al. (2018), figurative language is one of many forms of literature studies that we need to understand well the real meaning behind an utterance or sentence that appears or is uttered by someone. Figurative language is the language used to convey imagination and interpretation of meaning for readers (Ketaren et, al. 2021). To make the language more expressive in conveying ideas that provoke emotions, figurative language is used. (Chakrabarty, 2022). Figurative language can be categorized into 12 types, namely the simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, metonymy, symbol, irony, hyperbole, understatement, synecdoche, allegory, and paradox (Perrine, 1992). Amung (2021) states that figurative language is displayed and used in literary works like poetry, prose, rhymes, and novels, and also in the Bible aims to convey a different meaning according to the interpretation of each reader. Figurative language is also used to show the creativity of the author and to make the language of his writing more beautiful and interesting to read. The researchers focused on two figurative languages used in the Book of Revelation, namely similes and metaphors.

According to Rahmadhanti et, al (2022), a metaphor is substituting words for others with whom they share characteristics and style of meaning. A metaphor is figurative language that describes something with direct and precise comparisons based on similar or perhaps the same characteristics (Matrix Education, 2018a). It is usually called comparative figures of speech or equations. For example: "The Lord is my shepherd", "I am the bread of life", "I am the way and the truth and the light", and "You are the salt of the earth". There are some ways how to analyze the meaning of the metaphor: compare two objects (tenor and vehicles), the comparison without "like" or "as", the similarities of the objects, and how the meaning is being represented by the metaphor (Condliffe, 2017).

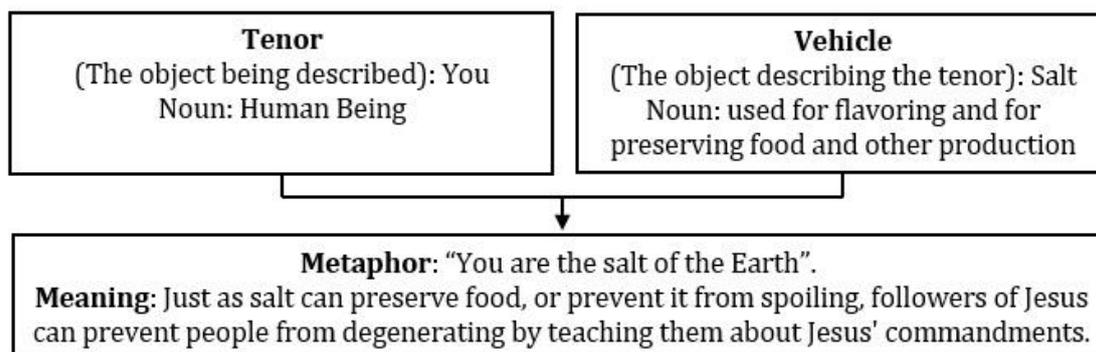


Figure 1. How a Metaphor Works – A Flow Chart

A simile is a figurative language used to compare two things that logically have different forms but is considered to have almost the same meaning focusing on their characters; it is stated explicitly with words “like” and “as” (Matrix Education, 2018b). A simile is used to describe the nature or character of a thing by comparing. According to Resi, et, al. (2021), the simile is divided into two; explicit and implicit. Explicitly compares two objects openly, while implicitly comparing objects hidden then the reader must be able to infer the meaning of the comparison. For example: “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”, and “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.” Samadova, (2022) argues that in its use, simile has a function as an efficient way of communicating to use language in alternative ways.

The Bible is not a work of art like novels, poetry, or songs that use figurative language to beautify writing, but the Bible is God's utterances which are recorded in a Book containing various kinds of commands, prohibitions, and also suggestions that humans must understand and follow. Even though the Bible is not a work of human literary art, figurative language is also used for emphasis and makes the Gods' words strong and can be delivered and translated according to the perspective of each human well. The Bible is divided into two, namely the old testament and the new testament. In the old testament, there are stories of prophets from the prophet Adam to the prophet before Jesus was born, while the new testament contains history before Jesus was born until His ascension which consists of four different Books and letters from His followers. The Book of Revelation is the last chapter of the new testament in the bible. Revelation contains several things that were conveyed by John about his visions in life after Jesus left. Unlike previous books and letters which have words that are rather easy to understand and adapt. Even in Revelations, there are also figurative words used to describe something that happened in John's vision, but its disclosure requires a detailed understanding. But compared to the New Testament, the Old Testament has many examples of metaphors and similes in a simpler sense (Seely, 2017).

Several studies have studied this topic, Toar, et al. (2023) researched the types of figurative language; metaphors used in the Song of Songs. Meanwhile, Amung (2021) examines the figurative language used in the Bible: New Testament, so seven figurative languages and two meanings are found, namely conceptual meaning and connotative meaning. Resi, et al (2021) examined the figurative language used in the Psalms and the results found several figurative languages in the Psalms, namely metaphor, simile, paradox, and hyperbole. Based on the background above, the

following research question was formulated: What are the meanings of metaphors and similes used in the Book of Revelation?

Method

Research Design

The method used in this study was descriptive qualitative. Padilah (2017) argues that qualitative research methods aim to collect, analyze, interpret data, and draw conclusions from the research. Descriptive methods in the research were carried out by revealing and showing the facts that appeared during the research (data from the object), it appeared from something that would be observed and then continued by analysis and reasons. This research was designed to identify, and analyze the figurative language (Metaphor and Simile) used in the Bible: Book of Revelation.

Data Collection

To collect the data needed in this study used document analysis of the research subject. Morgan (2022) states that document analysis is a research method for analyzing written documents such as books, newspapers, journals, and visual documents such as photos, videos, and films. In this study, the researchers used steps to collect the data:

1. use the Bible: The Book of Revelation
2. found and selected the figurative language → Metaphor and Simile used in the Book of Revelation
3. write down the data found, and,
4. arranged the data into the classification.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data found in this study, the researchers used several steps:

1. Identified the subject found: After the data collection process is complete, then identified the data found based on the kinds of figurative language (Metaphor and Simile) that appear in the research.
2. Classified: Classified figurative language (Metaphor and Simile) that has been found in tables.
3. Data analysis of findings: Analyzed, interpreted, and reported the data findings into a qualitative research result.

Results

The findings from this research will be explained in detail in this chapter. After processing and analyzing the document of the Bible: the Book of Revelation, it found several verses used figurative language metaphor, and simile.

Table 1. Simile and Metaphor on the Book of Revelation

No	Statement of The Revelation	Figurative Language
1	"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending (1:8)	Metaphor
2	"A great voice, as of a trumpet" (1:10)	Simile
3	"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow" (1:14)	Simile

4	"and his eyes were as a flame of fire" (1:14)	Simile
5	"and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" (1:15)	Simile
6	"and his voice as the sound of many waters" (1:15)	Simile
7	"and his countenance was as the sun shined in his strength" (1:16)	Simile
8	"I am the first and the last" (1:17)	Metaphor
9	"The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" (1:20)	Metaphor
10	"and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (1:20)	Metaphor
11	"his eyes like unto a flame of fire" (2:18)	Simile
12	"and his feet are like fine brass" (2:18)	Simile
13	and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers (2:27)"	Simile
14	"I will come on thee as a thief (3:3)	Simile
15	"So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot" (3:16)	Metaphor
16	"and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me" (4:1)	Simile
17	"And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone"(4:3)	Simile
18	"and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (4:3)	Simile
19	"and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain" (5:6)	Simile
20	"and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see" (6:1)	Simile
21	"and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair" (6:12)	Simile
22	"and the moon became as blood" (6:12)	Simile
23	"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together" (6:14)	Simile
24	"and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace" (9:2)	Simile
25	"And they had hair as the hair of women" (9:8)	Simile
26	"and their teeth were as the teeth of lions" (9:8)	Simile
27	"and his face was as it were the sun" (10:1)	Simile
28	"and his feet as pillars of fire" (10:1)	Simile
29	"and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roared" (10:3)	Simile
30	"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters" (14:2)	Simile
31	"and as the voice of a great thunder" (14:2)	Simile
32	"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire" (15:2)	Simile
33	"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2)	Simile
34	"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1)"	Simile

The results of the observation and analysis found 34 figurative languages; metaphors, and similes used in the Book of Revelation which consists of 26 verses. To make it clearer and easier, the researchers displayed them in Table 2.

Table 2. Quantity of Metaphors and Similes in Revelation

Figurative Language	Quantity	Verses
Metaphor	4	1:8, 1:17, 1:20, 1:20, 3:16
Simile	30	1:10, 1:14, 1:14, 1:15, 1:15, 1:16, 2:18, 2:18, 2:27, 3:3, 4:1, 4:3, 4:3, 5:6, 6:1, 6:12, 6:12, 6:14, 9:2, 9:8, 9:8, 10:1, 10:1, 10:3, 14:2, 14:2, 15:2, 21:2, 22:1

Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss the analysis of the meaning of data used in figurative language that has been found in the Book of Revelation. consists of metaphors and similes.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a figurative use of language in which a new meaning is evoked by a word or phrase by shifting from its own literal meaning (Rafat, 2022). A metaphor is a figure of speech that is used to express something imaginatively to compare two things directly. To understand the meaning of a metaphor, the reader needs to recognize the following three things: the topic being discussed (noun 1), its image/description (noun 2), and the similarities between the two things before interpreting it.

Metaphor 1 : **"I am Alpha and Omega**, the beginning and the ending (1:8)"

Based on the phrase from this verse, the topic is I (God/Jesus), and the image is Alpha and Omega. This phrase means that God is eternal, existing from the beginning of the world to the end of the world. God is also always there everywhere in every life in this world.

Metaphor 2 : **"I am the first and the last** (1:17)"

Similar to the previous verse, the topic of this verse is me (God/Jesus), and the image is the first and the last. This verse means that God is the only being/thing that existed for the first time long before the existence of this world, and He will also exist at the end of this life because He is eternal.

Metaphor 3 : **"The seven stars are the angels** of the seven churches (1:20)"

The topic of this verse is seven stars, and the image is the angels of the seven churches. This verse means that the seven stars of the angels are followers who are placed in seven sections to be able to spread happiness to all people in the world.

Metaphor 4 : and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest **are the seven churches** (1:20)"

The topic of this verse is seven candlesticks, and the image is the angels of the seven churches. This verse means that God's followers who are placed in various parts of the world are like a candle flame that always illuminates the earth and humans so that they can live a good life according to God's commands.

Metaphor 5 : "So then because **you are lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot (3:16)"

The topic of this verse is you (human) and the image is lukewarm. This verse means people that be depicted as lukewarm are the people who are neutral and they didn't choose anything in their life so they didn't fully trust everything that they saw and heard.

Simile

Similes and metaphors are figurative languages that have almost the same meaning, which is used to compare two things and then convey ideas and meaning directly. A simile is a direct comparison that states that two or more objects have something in common by using "as" or "like" (Tampubolon, 2017). To understand the meaning of a Simile, readers must take the following steps to get the true meaning of a phrase; the phrase must use "as" or "like", the comparands are related to each other, the themes of the simile are related, and the last is interpret it. According to Lestari et al. (2022), the analysis of simile is divided into four: (a) comparing animals and objects, (b) comparing the characteristics of the human body and objects, and (c) comparing the condition or situation of humans and objects, (4) comparing objects, both concrete and abstract.

a. Comparing animals and object

1. "and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb **as it had been slain** (5:6)"

This verse compares two things about "lamb" and "it had been slain". The similarities between these two are the characteristic of the lamb that had been slain is poor and weak.

b. Comparing characteristics of the human body and object

1. "His head and his hairs were white like wool, **as white as snow**" (1:14)

This verse compares several things, "white head and hair", "wool", and "snow". The theme of this verse is the color and texture of hair, wool, and snow. This verse is also a simile because it compares related things to one another. This verse means that John saw God in the form of a human with a head and hair that was soft, and pure white so that those who saw it would be dazzled by His charm.

2. "and his eyes were **as a flame of fire**" (1:14)

This verse compares two things between "his eyes" and "flame of fire", the theme of this verse is the characteristics of eyes and flame of fire, the similarity between these two is sharp and fiery. The phrase means that the God seen by John has sharp, red, and angry eyes towards mankind who are still doing injustice and evil on earth after God left.

3. "and his voice **as the sound of many waters**" (1:15)

This comparison is about the "voice" and "sound of many waters". The theme of the verse is about the characteristics of voice and the sound of water which means that the voice makes the listener feels so comfortable and makes calm because of the good rhyme.

4. "his eyes **like unto a flame of fire**" (2:18)

This verse compares two things about "eyes" and "flame of fire", the theme of this comparison is characteristics. This verse means that the eyes look so shaped and feel scary to other people.

5. "and his feet are **like fine brass**" (2:18)

This verse compares two things about “feet” and “fine brass”, still the same as the previous verse, it has a characteristic theme. It means that the feet look so strong and powerful to make everything around it can break easily.

6. “I will come on thee **as a thief**” (3:13)

This verse compares two things, "I" and "thief", this verse has the meaning that God will come to this world without signs, without prior announcement, and will come without permission so we as human beings should always be on guard and always do well then we may enter His kingdom.

7. “And he that sat was to look upon **like a jasper** and a sardine stone” (4:3)

The things that compare in this verse are about “ a man” and “a sardines stone”. The similar characteristics of these two are about someone who has a great position that is respected by everyone.

8. “and his face was **as it were the sun**” (10:1)

This verse compares two things of “his face” and “sun”, this verse means that the face is full of happiness, friendly, and warm so many people want to be the people of Him.

9. “and his feet **as pillars of fire**” (10:1)

The things that compare in this verse is “his feet” and “pillars of fire”, these verse means that God’s feet look so strong, and powerful.

c. Comparing the condition or situation of humans and objects

1. “and his feet like unto fine brass, **as if they burned in a furnace**” (1:15)

The things that compare in this verse are “his feet” and “brass burned in a furnace”. The theme of this verse is the form of feet and brass that are hard, stiff, strong, and powerful. It means that God’s feet have powerful and strong to keep humans on the earth.

2. “and his countenance was **as the sun shined in his strength**” (1:16)

This verse compares two things about “countenance” and “sun shined”, the theme of this verse is the condition of the objects. This verse means that the face or the countenance of God looks so warm and friendly.

3. “and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; **as the vessels of a potter** shall they be broken to shivers” (2:27)

This verse compares two things about “people that had been ruled” and “vessel of a potter”. The condition shown in this verse is in a state of complete disrepair. This verse means that John also saw a group of people who were burned and also crushed without any residue from his own actions in the world.

4. “and the first voice which I heard was **as it were of a trumpet talking with me**” (4:1)

This verse compares “voice” and “trumpet”. The theme of this simile is the condition when the sound is heard. John said that the voice that he heard is like the trumpet, which means that the voice is so louder and more powerful so it makes everyone who heard feel so frightened and surprised.

5. "and I heard, **as it were the noise of thunder**, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see" (6:1)
The things that compare in this verse are "the voice" and "the noise". The similarity between this verse is the sound that is produced by something in the sky. This verse means that there is a great sound, louder, and more powerful that comes to the earth and then makes everyone amazed.
 6. "And they had hair **as the hair of women**" (9:8)
This verse compares two things about "their hair" and "hair of woman". This verse talked about the condition of the people's hair, it means that the "something" that John saw in his vision of the groups of people who have long and beautiful hair as the hair of the woman.
 7. "and their teeth were **like the teeth of lions**" (9:8)
The things that compare in this verse are "their teeth" and "teeth of the lion". The similarity between these two is the condition of human teeth with animal teeth. It means that human teeth look very scary and have strong fangs that can easily tear their opponent's body apart.
 8. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband**" (21:2)
There are "new Jerusalem" and "bride", the theme of this verse is something new. This verse means that God has prepared new life, a new world for the people who believe in Him and follow everything that He orders us to do.
- d. Comparing objects, both concrete and abstract
1. "A great voice, **as of a trumpet**" (1:10)
This verse compares two things about "great voice" and "trumpet", the theme of this verse is "sound". The similarity between these two is produced big and loud sounds. This simile means that everyone will immediately hear God's voice and know where the sound is coming from. Referring to the entire verse, this phrase means that John heard God speaking to his people in a loud and clear voice so that people would understand and believe in Him.
 2. "and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight **like unto an emerald**" (4:3)
The things that compare in this verse are "rainbow" and "emerald". The similarity between these two is characteristic. The rainbow that full of beautiful colors and also the emerald that precious and wonderful. This verse means that someone who wears the crown is a very fascinating person.
 3. "and the sun became black **as sackcloth of hair**" (6:12)
Two things that are compared in this verse are "black" and "hair". The similarity of these two is a characteristic. Many people have black hair, and black seems like darkness and full of something strange. The verse means that the sun will be blocked out by the moon or the cloud then it fell like the night, full of darkness and negative energy.
 4. "and the moon became **as blood**" (6:12)
The thing that is compared in this verse is "moon" and "blood". The similarities between these two are the characteristics of them. The verse

means that the moon that saw by John was colored red like blood, and in this era, people call it the blood moon or the red lunar eclipse.

5. “And the heaven departed **as a scroll** when it is rolled together” (6:14)
Two things that are compared in this verse are “heaven” and “a scroll and rolled”. The similarity of these objects is characteristic. Heaven/sky will be ravaged and divided.
6. “and there arose a smoke out of the pit, **as the smoke** of a great furnace” (9:2)
This verse compares two things “smoke out of the pit” and “smoke of a great furnace”. The similarity of these objects is the characteristics of the smoke. The verse means that the smoke that arose out of the pit was so wide and made everyone cannot breathe in.
7. “and cried with a loud voice, **as when a lion roared**” (10:3)
This verse compares two things of “loud voice” and “the lion roared”. The similarity between these two is the characteristics of the sound produced. This verse means that there will be many people who cried loudly.
8. “And I heard a voice from heaven, **as the voice of many waters**” (14:2)
The things that compare in this verse are “voice from the heaven” and “voice of many waters”. The similarity between the objects is the characteristics of the sound produced. The verse means that there will be the sound of heaven that is serene, calming, and make comfortable for the listeners.
9. “and **as the voice of a great thunder**” (14:2)
This phrase is also a kind of simile, it compares the voice produced by something. This verse is the continuation of the previous phrase, it means the voice that was heard is also very scary and makes people who hear it fearful.
10. “And I saw **as it were a sea** of glass mingled with fire” (15:2)
The verse compares two things about “something that John saw” and “sea of glass mingled with fire. The similarities of the objects are the characteristics. This verse means that something that John saw is something terrible and full of fear, all kinds of things flying around aimlessly and destroying each other.
11. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear **as crystal**, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1)
Two things that are compared in this verse are about “pure river of water of life” and “crystal”. This verse has a meaning that at the end of John’s vision, he saw the new world of His kingdom, full of everything good, love, and happiness.

This research has some similarities and differences with previous studies of Toar, et al. (2023), Amung (2021), and Resi, et al. (2021). The similarities are examining the types of figurative language in documents, two, the documents studied are the Bible, and three, the data analysis method uses descriptive qualitative analysis. Meanwhile, the difference from previous studies is that the research aims to analyze and interpret the meaning contained in the verse that used figurative language.

Conclusion

Based on data findings and discussions in this research on metaphors and similes from the Book of Revelation in the New Testament Bible, it can be concluded that 34 figurative languages were found in the 22 verses consisting of five metaphors and 29 similes. The 29 similes are divided into the things; first comparing animals and objects is 1 data; second comparing the characteristics of the human body and objects is 9 data; third comparing the condition or situation of humans and objects is 8 data; and fourth comparing objects, both concrete and abstract are 11 data.

Based on the data finding and the analysis of the document, the metaphors are less compared to similes because metaphors are a direct comparison without using "as" or "like" which are usually found in the word of God for example; "I am the light of the world". The Book of Revelation is written about John's vision of the future that will happen so there are many parables about what he saw (similes), therefore there are only five metaphors used in this book because God does not contain many words of God.

The Book of Revelation provides a lot of teachings and suggestions about what things humans should understand about what will happen in the future. In this book, people are reminded that later, at the right and proper time, God will return, without warning, without notification, and without signs so people must always be prepared, and on guard.

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