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## The Use of Personification and Apostrophe as Facilitators in Teaching Poetry

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### Abstract

In this paper, the author presents a rationale and offers suggestions for why personification and apostrophe, as main figures of speech, could be used in the EFL classroom as well as how teachers and/or teachers in training might use them to enhance understanding and appreciating English poetry, in other words, to facilitate learning. First the researcher defines the two figures, giving examples, and then the function of both figures would be stated. The author makes a survey of the methods of teaching personification and apostrophe in English poetry. A list of accessible personification and apostrophe resources is shared at the end.

استخدام التجويد والفاصلة العليا كميّسين في تدريس الشعر

الخلاصة: في هذه الورقة ، يقدم المؤلف الأساس المنطقي ويقدم اقتراحات لماذا يمكن استخدام التجسيد والفاصلة العليا ، كشخصيات رئيسية في الكلام ، في الفصل الدراسي في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وكذلك كيف يمكن للمعلمين و / أو المعلمين في التدريب استخدامها لتعزيز التفاهم وتقدير الشعر الإنجليزي ، بمعنى آخر ، لتسهيل التعلم. أولاً ، يحدد الباحث الرقمين ، ويعطي أمثلة ، ومن ثم سيتم توضيح وظيفة كلا الشكلين. يقوم

المؤلف بإجراء دراسة استقصائية لأساليب تدريس التجسيد والفاصلة العليا في الشعر الإنجليزي. تتم مشاركة قائمة بالتجسيد وموارد الفاصلة العليا في النهاية.

## Introduction

Poetry, of all the other genres of literature is the oldest and the most critical genre. To make it more exciting,

a teacher of literature in general and poetry in particular might depend on teaching the poetic texts that have personification and apostrophe as the most prominent figures of speech to create an optimal learning circumstance and to facilitate learning on behalf of the students and teaching on behalf of the teachers.

Poetry is characterized by many characteristics, but the most significant is its language which is artificial and essentially different from the common everyday language that people speak. Although this may be true of some poetry, one can easily find numerous examples that demonstrate poetic diction of an entirely different sort. The poet is permitted with a special kind of liberty in using the language to convey his message; this liberty is called poetic license. This does not mean that there is a special vocabulary peculiar to poetry. The poet may go beyond the limits of the language by using this license to communicate new areas of experience. It gives the poet the chance to “twist or wrest the language according to his needs in the use of figurative speech, archaism, rhyme, strange syntax, etc. . .” (Sayakhan: 51).

Literary personification has long been taken for granted as the master trope of poetic language. It works as a complex artistic tool for revealing and pinpointing the problems and limits inherent in narration in particular and poetic texts or verbal creation in general (Paxson: i).

A figure of speech, in poetry, “is not a mere decorative device, a pretty or fancy way of saying something which might be better said literally” (Deedari and Mansouri: 12). A literal statement might not be formative enough to convey the poet's meaning. Using such language, the poet intends to enrich his means of communication.

## Personification

Personification means using comparative similes and metaphors to give living qualities to non-living objects or ideas. It is a part of figurative language. In his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Cuddon states that this figure is “inherent in many languages through the use of gender” (661). A writer can either say something literally, or figuratively. If it's literal, then the words mean exactly what they mean. But the meaning of words said figuratively is hidden behind description. When a writer uses figurative language, the description brings a deeper meaning and understanding to the

words. An example of personification extends throughout this whole short poem "Two Sunflowers Move in a Yellow Room" by William Blake who personifies Sunflowers in his poem:

*Two Sunflowers*  
*Move in the Yellow Room.*  
*'Ah, William, we're weary of weather',*  
*said the sunflowers, shining with dew.*  
*'Our traveling habits have tired us.*  
*Can you give us a room with a view?'* (mercury.educ)

The flowers are depicted with a human characteristic of weariness and motion caused by the weather. In a human way, they converse with the poet and make a request to put them in a room with a window with plenty of sunshine and a nice view.

And in Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not Stop for Death", death is treated like a person, taking on the characteristics of a carriage driver. The first stanza reads:

*'Because I could not stop for Death,*  
*He kindly stopped for me;*  
*The carriage held but just ourselves*  
*And Immortality.'* (Kennedy and Gioia: 367)

In this poem, Death *kindly* stops the carriage, drives slowly, passes a school, and pauses. These are the human actions, but in this poem Death has taken on these characteristics. Personification is not supposed to be realistic or believable. It is not literal. A poet, or any writer for that matter, can use personification in order to convey an idea, entertain a listener or reader, make a point, and (or) create a tone. For instance, Emily Dickinson personifies death as a kind gentleman who stops for the speaker to take her to her final residence or resting place. Here Death drives a carriage, politely gives the speaker a ride, and points the horses' heads to the direction of eternity. Dickinson is not trying to make this portrayal of death realistic. Instead, she is trying to convey the idea that death is a natural phenomenon and it should not to be looked at as a fearful matter, that there is an afterlife, and that the grave is man's next home (enotes).

Personification is similar to metaphor, in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, death, nature, treason, frustration, ecstasy, hunger, or fate) is made human in such a way as to render a normally disembodied idea or aspect dramatically effective.

## Function of Personification

Poets do not use Personification as merely a decorative device but to serve the purpose of giving deeper meanings to literary texts. It adds life and vividness to expressions or concepts as we always look at the world from the perspective of a human being. Writers and poets rely on this device to bring inanimate things and abstraction to life, so that their nature and actions are better understood because it is easier to relate to something that is human or that possesses human qualities. The use of such devices encourages poets to develop a perspective that is new as well as creative. It's often used in poetry to enhance the meaning and beauty of poems.

## Apostrophe

Apostrophe (Greek *apostrophé*, "turning away"; the final *e* being sounded) is an exclamatory figure of speech. It occurs when a speaker breaks off from addressing the reader or the audience (e.g. in a play) and directs his/her speech to a third party such as an opposing party or some other individual, sometimes absent from the scene. Often the addressee is a personified abstract quality or an inanimate object or a dead person. In dramatic works and poetry, such a figure of speech is often introduced by the vocative exclamation "O". Poets may apostrophize a beloved, the Muse, God, love, time, or any other entity that cannot respond in reality.

An apostrophe can include personification, if the object is treated as if it were human. For instance, Donne's sonnet "Death Be Not Proud" is an apostrophe where the speaker addresses death as someone who is vain, boastful and conceited. Death lives in the worst places on earth and with the most disgusting phenomena such as sickness, war, deceit, and hunger. It thinks it has the upper hand over men, and can dominate their lives, actions and destiny, but actually, it does not. It thinks it can kill, but it cannot. But, the poet is not trying to be realistic here; he fears death to the furthest extent, but, by using certain figures of speech, like personification and apostrophe, he is depicting death as nothing to fear; death can be transcended in the afterlife.

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, apostrophe is a rhetorical device in which the speaker speaks to a dead or absent person, or an abstraction or an inanimate object. It involves *speaking* to something or someone dead or absent, while personification involves only *giving* human qualities to those mentioned above. Apostrophes are found throughout poetry, but they are less common since the early twentieth century (*grammarist.com*). Poets may apostrophize anything; a beloved (dead or alive), the Muse, God, love, or time. A writer or a speaker, using an apostrophe, detaches himself from the reality and addresses an imaginary character or a non-

existent person in his speech as if it were capable of understanding human feelings. The word *Q* is often used to signal such an invocation. English literature is rich with examples of apostrophe; let us examine Shakespeare's use of this device in his play *Macbeth*:

*“Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand?  
Come let me clutch thee!  
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.” (act ii, scene 1)*

In his mental conflict before murdering King Duncan, Macbeth has a weird vision of a dagger and he addresses it as if it were really present before him.

Sir Philip Sidney, in his sonnet series *Astrophil and Stella*, apostrophizes sleep:

*Come Sleep! O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,  
The bating place of wit, the balm of woe,  
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,  
The indifferent judge between the high and low;  
With shield of proof, shield me from out the prease  
Of those fierce darts Despair at me doth throw;  
O make in me those civil wars to cease;  
I will good tribute pay, if thou do so. (Abbot et. al: 159)*

The speaker asks sleep to come to him, and describes it as if it were a fair judge, a protector, a peace maker who deserves tribute.

### **Function of Apostrophe:**

The effect of an apostrophe in poetry is to personify or bring to life something not living, so the poet is able to address it directly. By employing this figure of speech in their literary works, poets try to bring to life abstract ideas, inanimate objects, or non-existent persons so that “the nature of emotions they want to communicate gets across in a better way” because the readers are more convenient when they relate themselves to the abstract emotions when they signify them in their natural surroundings; moreover, using apostrophe motivates the reader to develop a point of view that is creative, fresh, as well as vivid (literary devices.net). Using the apostrophe in poetry helps to emphasize what the poet is saying and gives his words greater power. In his poem "Death Be Not Proud," John Donne uses apostrophe to personify and address death and, in so doing, he takes away some of its mystery and awe. When he confronts death as if it were a person, he wields more power over it and is able to tell death "nor yet canst thou kill me".

## **Methods of Teaching Personification and Apostrophe**

Since figures of speech cannot be translated literally, they are difficult for English language learners to understand. The interpretation of these figures is based on students' description of the image; therefore, direct instruction is often needed to provide the knowledge required to understand expressions of the figurative language as well as the surrounding context. Experiencing the language used by poets provides the students with a rich learning context; it gives them the access to how words can be put together in a unique way. By studying the works of great poets across cultures and histories, students extract knowledge about figurative language and poetic devices from them. Students learn about personification and apostrophe by reading and discussing poems that feature these figurative devices. They can use the poems as a guide to brainstorm lists of nouns and verbs that they arrange randomly to create apostrophes and personifications in poems they write on their own.

In teaching poetry, Elaine Showalter says that the literature instructor is offered "some of the fundamental, immediate, active, even physical ways to engage students in learning" (62). In a poetry class, the teacher may ask the students to think about certain things or ideas and identify human characteristics that they may have. Then write the feelings that those characteristics might create. They can write sentences that contain personification and/or apostrophe to describe those humanized things or ideas. The teacher might challenge his/her students by telling them that they will receive one mark for listing at least three characteristics; one mark for listing at least two feelings; and three marks for the sentence(s), one for the capitalization, one for punctuation, and one for including personification and/or apostrophe. In this way, they can earn twenty marks for instance. Students will create lists to identify these two figures of speech. As the first step, the teacher reads a poem including personification and/or apostrophe as the main figures of speech to the students. Using realia, the teacher may present the concepts of these two figurative devices to the class by displaying or drawing pictures related to the subject. He/she can locate the figures of speech and ask them to identify the thing or idea, human characteristics given to the things or ideas, and the feeling(s) evoked. For Example: In Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not stop for Death", death is the idea or thing, stopping and driving are human characteristics; kind and gentle are feelings associated with human beings. The teacher may provide the students with a list of common feelings for example: happy, sad, delighted, disappointed, disgusted, alarmed, jolly, hurt, scared, bubbly, lost, mad, afraid, tickled, sorry, angry, frightened, silly, etc. Teachers or teachers in training can make the illustrations into a class book. This activity can be used with a science lesson depending on the topic being covered, for instance, 'the bubbles jumped happily out of the fish's mouth' or 'the sound waves escaped out of the speaker and found their way into my ear'. Students might be instructed to describe a natural phenomenon using personification or apostrophe such as earthquakes, thunderstorms, blizzards, twisters, sunrises, tsunamis, fog, etc.

The teacher may walk around the classroom assessing students' understanding of the subject matter. He/she can provide feedback and support for them. Students might describe similes or

metaphors rather than personification or apostrophe, so the teacher should make sure the students understand that the non-living objects need to be described as if they were living. An established guideline is included in the student directions. Students will determine the meanings of words and phrases used in personifying or apostrophizing things, ideas, or absent persons.

In their explication of the lines of the poem, teachers should try to provide examples from the lines or stanzas which are closely related to students' lives because students can capture and remember figurative language more easily in natural language settings as they relate the figurative language to their real life. Students should be familiar with grade appropriate poetry. They should be able to identify stanzas, lines, and understand that some poems contain many figures of speech. Students should be able to write sentences using conventions such as punctuation marks and capital letters where necessary.

Teaching this topic well requires going beyond memorization and identification. It requires mastery. Students should know what personification and apostrophe are within poetry. Simply knowing the definition, however, is not sufficient. They should be able to identify them in poems, if they are to understand the purpose of using such figures of speech. Students should be able to explain the purpose behind using them and recognize how they contribute to the theme of the poem. They should be able to write poems or parodies using these devices to communicate more clearly.

To help students recognize and differentiate between personification and apostrophe, the teacher can give the students examples of each of the devices during the lecture, divide the class into pairs, give each pair a number of flashcards, then have the students write out the name of the devices taught, he can ask them to search in their literature books for examples of the two devices and create two flashcards for each. Each card should have the name of the device on one side and an example from literature on the other. When the students have finished creating one for each of the two literary devices, they can have the pairs switch partners with another pair of students and practice identifying the literary device with a new set of flashcards.

## **Conclusion**

In teaching Figurative language, one should remember that the meaning of "figure" is "drawing" or "picture". Figures of speech such as personification and apostrophe create pictures in the mind of the reader or listener. These pictures help convey the message faster and more vividly than words said literally. We use figures of speech to add colour and interest, and to awaken the imagination. Figurative language is everywhere, from classical works like those of Shakespeare or the Bible, to everyday speech, pop music, television and commercial issues. It makes the reader or listener use their imagination and understand much more than the simple literal words.

Students are mostly concerned with the literal meanings and find in figurative language one of the hardest obstacles. They need to realize that the poets do not use figures of speech as pieces of ornament to decorate their poems, but rather to carry complicated human experiences and “to stand for the thing, idea, feeling, or attitude” they are trying to communicate ( Deedari and Mansouri: 12). Students need to know that people do use figures of speech in their everyday speech. These figures should not be studied in isolation, but rather in their relationship to the whole poem. To understand the function of each figure, the teacher has to give simple and concrete examples.

In teaching Poetry, the teacher of literature should keep in mind that “An analysis of these figures should be postponed until the students understand the poem itself” (Allen and Valette: 210). In teaching poetry, every teacher needs to call upon a number of techniques and methods. If teachers of poetry disagree on the methods of teaching a certain poet, they must agree on goals: To put their students in touch with the mind of that poet. No doubt, it is known for every one that “good poetry lessons occur in classrooms where young people are guided by responsive teachers who implement as well as they plan” (Brewbaker : 22).

The students should know that the difference between 'apostrophe' and 'personification' is that in an apostrophe the person referred to has to be absent, whereas in personification it is not necessarily so. Moreover, in an apostrophe persons are merely referred to, whereas in personification inanimate objects become endowed with human qualities.

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