

# An Analysis of Figurative Language in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*

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## Abstract

This study examines the use of figurative language in Laurie Halse Anderson's 2009 novel *Wintergirls*, focusing on both its stylistic variety and semantic function. Specifically, the study (1) identifies and classifies types of figurative language employed, and (2) analyzes the meanings conveyed using Leeche's (1981) seven types of meaning. The systematic random sampling method involved the selection of 13 chapters from which 224 excerpts were extracted for analysis. Coding guidelines, tables, and excerpts comprise the research instruments. Each form of figurative language and type of meaning was categorized to determine their frequencies and then presented as percentages. The study adopted the validation methodology of Miles and Huberman (1994) to ensure reliability. Findings reveal that metaphor is the most frequently used figurative device ( $f = 89$ , 39.73%), while connotative meaning emerges as the most dominant semantic category ( $f = 51$ , 22.77%). The results suggest that figurative language in *Wintergirls* not only enhances aesthetic quality but also serves as a vehicle for expressing emotional trauma, identity struggle, and psychological complexity. These insights contribute to literary stylistics and offer pedagogical value for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

**Keywords:** figurative language, Laurie Halse Anderson, *Wintergirls*, literary analysis, Leeche's seven types of meaning

## 1. Introduction

Language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium to engage readers in deeper interpretation and shared understanding, specifically in literature. The figurative language and literal language are distinct forms of communication that serve different purposes. Each of these exerts various effects on readers and listeners. Figurative language amplifies the depth of textual meaning, adding nuance to storytelling (Rosa & Eschholz, 2015). Moreover, figurative expressions that can create connections between authors and readers, drawing upon shared experiences and emotions (Marius, 1999). Additionally, figurative language enriches literature by allowing authors to express ideas beyond literal meanings, fostering emotional engagement and aesthetic appreciation (Abrams, 1999).

Figurative language is described as the use of language in a creative rather than literal sense. It is often linked with poetry, yet it can also be found in ordinary writing and speech. Thus, figurative language allows the authors to grab their readers' attention. In addition, figurative language allows readers to further interpret the text and understand more than what is presented at the surface level. In sum, different kinds of figurative language are employed in this novel so that the author can express different ideas more creatively, develop a deeper sense of each scene, and involve readers more artistically.

The study of figurative language in a literary work is not only about the surface structures of the work but also the meaning behind it. Many scholars acknowledge the critical role of figurative language in literature, as it enhances the vividness and engagement of the work, effectively conveying events, emotions, and other elements of the story. Thus, figurative language enhances communication by imbuing it with depth and complexity, enabling us to comprehend abstract ideas in concrete terms. It can take various forms, such as metaphors, similes, hyperboles, personifications, and idioms. On the other hand, literal language expresses direction and primarily conveys information without metaphorical or non-literal expressions, providing an unambiguous meaning. As a result, to fully understand English literature, students and teachers should explore works that address similar struggles or conflicts to establish a connection with the narratives. Contemporary realistic works of fiction are suitable for students, as they portray real-life situations more vividly than other genres. Moreover, figurative language plays a key role in literary texts, adding depth beyond literal meanings, especially when readers grasp figurative language to understand English literature's themes and messages. Past research has looked at various forms of figurative language in literature, showing how they make texts richer and more engaging. Yet not much work has focused on the range of figurative language in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Wintergirls*, and what these forms mean.

Despite the insightful classifications provided by Leeche's (1981) semantic categories, existing studies have not sufficiently addressed the deeper conceptual or cognitive significance of figurative language in *Wintergirls*, particularly concerning its portrayal of mental illness and trauma. Prior research tends to focus on identifying and categorizing figurative expressions by type and frequency (e.g., Wijayanti, 2017), yet lacks an in-depth analysis of how these figures function within the emotional and psychological landscape of the narrative (Tiarawati & Ningsih, 2019). Thus, there remains a need to bridge the quantitative identification of figurative language with a qualitative or cognitive interpretation that can account for the symbolic embodiment of internal struggles, especially in emotionally intense,

contemporary fiction like *Wintergirls* (Richmond, 2018). This study aims to bridge this gap by closely examining figurative language in *Wintergirls*, thereby contributing to our understanding of literary devices in modern novels. This research investigates and categorizes the various forms of figurative language in *Wintergirls*, pinpointing the meanings they convey using Leech's seven types of meaning. This study predicts that metaphors will be the most common form of figurative language in *Wintergirls*, and connotative meaning will be the most often expressed type of meaning.

The development of "An Analysis of Figurative Language in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*" includes a brief overview of the theory applied, the approach taken, and the necessity of its application in this research. To examine this phenomenon, this research aims to apply Leech's (1981) framework for categorizing meaning in figurative language, analyzing its presence in *Wintergirls*. Prior research has demonstrated the impact of figurative language on reader engagement, but few studies have specifically investigated Anderson's novel. By identifying the forms of figurative language used and their corresponding meanings, this research contributes to literary and linguistic analysis (Leech, 1981).

### 1.1 Background of Study

Understanding figurative language in literary work is increasingly important, considering that writing fiction is rapidly growing, and sometimes it is beyond imagination. Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* is a book whose sophisticated use of figurative language invites study or examination. The novel is full of similes, metaphors, and other literary devices used to deepen the emotional resonance of the narrative and enable readers to relate to the challenges encountered by the protagonist. For Lia's experience with anorexia, Anderson, for instance, employs vivid and expressive analogies. In one scene, Lia says her body is "a stack of bones in a skin sack." This metaphor captures the sense of emptiness accompanying anorexia and the disconnection from her body.

*Wintergirls* is a 2009 novel by Laurie Halse Anderson that follows the psychological difficulties of Lia, an 18-year-old struggling with anorexia and self-injury. Lia and her best friend, Cassie, battle eating disorders and have a dangerous competition to achieve the lowest body weight. Lia's anorexia worsens due to the competition, and she hides her weight by paying bribes and concealing food. Cassie, consumed by her eating disorder, was found in a motel room. This causes Lia to experience hallucinations and visions of her deceased friend. The book uses Cassie's ghostly appearances to represent Lia's guilt and inner conflict. Lia receives short-term psychiatric treatment but cannot afford to return to a specialized facility. Lia decides to run away with Elijah, the boy who found Cassie's body in the motel room. Lia first encountered him when she requested to see the room where Cassie was found. Later, they agree to go on a trip together before a snowstorm hits. Elijah doubts her recovery and leaves her behind. Eventually, Lia seeks help from her mother, leading to her hospitalization. The novel highlights recovery challenges, the need for professional intervention, and the risks of ignoring mental health problems (Anderson, 2009).

Lastly, this novel will be analyzed based on the types of figurative language used in the narrative text and the types of meanings that can be drawn from the use of figurative language itself using Leech's approach. This study will focus on seven types of figurative language concerning the meaning found in *Wintergirls*.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

*Wintergirls* is analyzed in this paper to identify the types of figurative language used in this text and explain its contribution to creating the overall meaning of the text. Then, the framework is used to identify different types of meanings. After finding the types of figurative language and types of meaning, figurative language is categorized into these different meaning types. It is hoped that by combining the analysis of the types of figurative language and the types of meaning of the figurative language, the analysis will provide a better and deeper understanding of the text, and, otherwise, is also expected to be a good contribution to literary analysis.

In addition to achieving the research aims mentioned earlier, some definitions or categories of the terms are provided. The first objective seeks to identify the types of figurative language used in *Wintergirls*, while the second explores the kind of meanings conveyed through figurative language based on Leech's (1981) framework. This study aims to explore the use of figurative language in *Wintergirls* through two primary objectives:

1. To identify and classify the types of figurative language present in the novel.
2. To analyze the meanings conveyed by these figurative expressions, based on Leech's (1981) seven types of meaning.

By aligning figurative forms with their semantic functions, the study provides a deeper understanding of how Anderson's language constructs emotional and psychological depth. The findings are intended to contribute to both literary scholarship and language pedagogy, particularly within EFL contexts.

### 1.3 Significance of Study

The significance of analyzing figurative language and its meaning in *Wintergirls* lies in its ability to present emotional and aesthetic value to the reader. Figurative language can evoke distinctive memories, cultural associations, and psychological depth. In literary works, authors often combine literal and implied meanings, requiring deeper analysis to uncover nuanced interpretations. Language and meaning are inherently intertwined—language constructs meaning, and meaning shapes language. The application of figurative language serves not only as a stylistic device but also as a means of constructing emotional and symbolic resonance within the narrative.

In *Wintergirls*, Anderson employs metaphor, simile, and other devices to communicate the protagonist's internal experiences with

anorexia, guilt, and psychological turmoil. According to Leech (1981), such figurative expressions frequently produce connotative, affective, and associative meanings that deepen the emotional and symbolic layers of the text. Figurative language enhances atmosphere, evokes sensory perception, and immerses the reader in the character's inner world. This enables a more profound connection between the reader and text, promoting empathy and reflective engagement with issues like mental health, identity, and emotional recovery.

Investigating the use of figurative language in this context is especially relevant in modern literary works, where psychological complexity and symbolic expression are often foregrounded. In such narratives, figurative language functions not only decoratively but also thematically and cognitively. This emphasizes the need for an analytical framework that is both structurally comprehensive and interpretively sensitive.

While numerous studies have explored figurative language in literary texts by quantifying types such as metaphors, similes, and personifications (e.g., Wijayanti, 2017; Tiarawati & Ningsih, 2019), most of these investigations focus primarily on frequency and surface-level categorization. In the context of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*, which deals explicitly with themes of anorexia, trauma, and psychological fragmentation, such quantitative approaches may fall short of capturing the deeper cognitive and emotional dimensions conveyed through figurative expressions. Although Leech's (1981) seven types of meaning provide a valuable framework for semantic classification, there remains a notable gap in examining how figurative language in the novel functions as a vehicle for expressing internal psychological states, particularly from the perspective of conceptual or cognitive metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). This gap suggests the need for studies that not only quantify figurative language but also interpret its narrative and symbolic significance, especially in literature centered on mental health. Therefore, this study contributes to filling that gap by analyzing *Wintergirls* through Leech's model while acknowledging the potential for complementary theoretical frameworks to enrich the interpretation of metaphorical language in emotionally charged contemporary fiction.

Finally, this research has both practical and theoretical implications. In EFL contexts, understanding figurative language enhances students' cultural literacy and interpretive skills. Additionally, literary analysis of mental health-themed fiction such as *Wintergirls* encourages empathy and emotional awareness. By focusing on the types and meanings of figurative language using Leech's semantic framework, this study contributes to both literary scholarship and applied linguistics, while laying the groundwork for future interdisciplinary explorations in cognitive poetics or metaphor theory.

## 2. Literature Review

Figurative language, as defined by Abrams (1999), includes metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, irony, and litotes. These devices enable authors to evoke vivid imagery and deeper emotional resonance. Leech's (1981) framework of meaning provides an analytical lens to categorize language into conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings.

Several studies have explored figurative language in literary texts. Wijayanti (2017) analyzed Paulo Coelho's *Adultery*, identifying a predominance of comparative figures of speech. Tiarawati and Ningsih (2019) examined *Ugly Love* by Colleen Hoover, noting a dominance of personification. Simile was the most common device found in Coelho's *The Alchemist* (Harya, 2017). Whereas in *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman, a prevalence of similes was reported (Sriwulandari et al., 2022).

In sum, these studies highlight the varied applications of figurative language in literature, reinforcing the necessity of further analysis in contemporary fiction.

Researchers have clearly shown how much literature helps improve linguistic and cultural competencies. Examining how literature influences Thai undergraduate students who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Isariyawat, Yenphech, and Intanoo (2020) found that reading literary works develops language competency and cultural awareness. Using a mixed-method approach, including qualitative and quantitative data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, their study included one hundred English majors from Buriram Rajabhat University. Results showed that students in EFL had a positive attitude toward literature, appreciating its advantages in enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking ability. Furthermore, the findings also improve students' appreciation and understanding of other cultures' literature, supporting tolerance and perspective about the world (Isariyawat et al., 2020).

Recent studies have examined the impact of multimedia on EFL education and discovered that using short videos markedly improves Saudi EFL learners' receptive understanding of idioms compared to conventional text-based approaches. Their research underscores enhanced performance, heightened engagement, and favorable attitudes toward learning, accentuating the significance of contextual and visual learning in idiom acquisition. Participants in the short films group surpassed those in the blogger group regarding post-test results, demonstrating superior idiom comprehension and retention. Furthermore, students perceived short videos as more engaging, inspiring, and efficacious for comprehending idioms than conventional approaches. The research indicates that integrating short films into EFL instruction can enhance the efficacy and enjoyment of idiom acquisition (Aljebreen & Alzamil, 2022). Furthermore, studies have explored the pedagogical value of figurative language in literature courses, emphasizing its importance in fostering critical thinking and interpretative skills (Gibbs, 2023). Yimwilai's 2015 study found that an integrated approach in English-as-a-Foreign-Language classrooms significantly improved students' achievement, critical-thinking skills, and attitudes towards literary reading, suggesting it enhances academic outcomes and literature disposition. Richmond (2018) stated that figurative language in *Wintergirls* is used extensively to convey the protagonist Lia Overbrook's struggles with anorexia nervosa and her mental state. In applying Leech's framework, this study bridges linguistic analysis with literary interpretation, providing a structured methodology for understanding *Wintergirls* beyond its narrative surface.

This is consistent with earlier studies on figurative language in literature, which emphasizes its part in enhancing textual involvement and interpretative skills (Gibbs, 2023). Using figurative language—such as personifications, similes, and metaphors—not only improves textual meaning but also promotes emotional and aesthetic appreciation (Abrams, 1999). Including literary works in EFL courses helps students acquire analytical abilities that support their general level of language competency.

### 2.1 Figurative Language in Literature

Leech's Framework of figurative language (1981) categorizes figurative language into seven types: simile, metaphor, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, litotes, and irony. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two objects or concepts using "like" or "as". The metaphor describes an object or action in terms of another, using "like" or "as" to emphasize the resemblance between the two. Metonymy represents another closely related word or concept, using associations and contextual connections to convey the intended meaning. Personification attributes human qualities to non-human entities or abstract qualities. A hyperbole is an exaggerated statement, litotes negates its opposite, and irony is a statement with different intended meanings. Leech's framework has been influential in understanding and analyzing figurative language.

1. Metaphor compares two things without using "like" or "as." It is an implied comparison between two things that are not alike but share some similar qualities. For instance, "my walls go up and my doors lock," and "paper girl."
2. Personification gives non-human traits or qualities and helps readers connect with the ideas and feel emotions more strongly.
3. Simile is a figure of speech that compares two things using "like" or "as." It is a direct comparison between two things that are not alike but share some similar qualities. As can be seen from the following examples, "like a ghost" or "like a shadow."
4. Metonymy is a figure of speech that replaces the name of something with a word or phrase closely associated with it.
5. Irony is a figure of speech where the intended meaning is opposite to the literal sense, often used to create humor or emphasize a point.
6. Hyperbole involves making exaggerated statements to emphasize a point or create a strong impact and is a powerful tool for writers. It can help express strong feelings or leave a lasting impression on readers. For instance, "yellow bubbles of fat under my skin."
7. Litotes refers to a figure of speech that uses a double negative or negative expression to express a positive idea. For instance, "I'm almost ready."

### 2.2 Leech's Approach to Types of Meaning

Meaning plays an important role in understanding what is communicated. Leech's approach is one of the first attempts to analyze how meaning is defined and perceived through the content of semantics or lexical meaning, including figurative language. Figurative language, such as metaphor, may provide a new perspective to investigate how meaning is structured in the language.

In *Wintergirls*, Anderson explores the intensity of loss and recovery through words and an indirect writing style, so this will allow readers to understand in detail the complexity of the narrative. Leech (1981) categorized types of meaning into seven kinds.

1. Conceptual meaning refers to words or sentences based on the structure and form of the word, which have a clear and logical definition.
2. Connotative meaning is words or sentences with implied or explicit meaning.
3. Affective meaning specifies meaning that expresses the personal feelings or attitudes of the speakers.
4. Collocative meaning is the connection a word makes with the meanings of other words that are often used around it.
5. Associative meaning refers to the connections or associations that a word or phrase evokes in the mind of the reader or listener.
6. Social meaning refers to the words or expressions' social and contextual implications, influenced by age, gender, social status, and cultural background.
7. Thematic meaning is how the information in a discourse is organized and sequenced. It helps with the structure and coherence of writing or conversation.

Leech's seven types of meaning framework offers a comprehensive understanding of language's multifaceted nature, encompassing conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meanings.

### 2.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory: A Comparative Perspective

While Leech's (1981) semantic-pragmatic framework forms the analytical core of this study, it is also valuable to consider alternative theories of figurative language, particularly those rooted in cognitive linguistics. One of the most influential perspectives is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*. This theory posits that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical or poetic device, but rather a fundamental mechanism of human thought and understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), figurative expressions reflect the conceptual structures through which individuals comprehend abstract experiences by mapping them onto more concrete domains. These recurring patterns of thought, termed conceptual metaphors, underpin much of everyday language and are central to how people make sense of complex phenomena.

In Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009), the protagonist frequently employs metaphors such as "empty," "frozen," and "ghost" to

describe her physical and psychological states. These metaphors exemplify conceptual mappings like “the body is the container” or “emotional numbness is cold,” both of which illustrate how metaphor helps frame psychological distress in terms of physical or spatial experience (Coulson & Van Petten, 2002). Such metaphors are not ornamental; rather, they serve as cognitive tools that structure Lia’s perception of herself and the world.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously assert, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”

While Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is powerful in uncovering the cognitive architecture behind figurative language, its focus tends to be more theoretical and universal, often abstracting away from specific textual or stylistic nuances. In contrast, Leech’s (1981) framework offers a more linguistically detailed and functionally specific model, categorizing metaphors, irony, metonymy, and other figures based on their communicative functions, including connotative, affective, and social meanings.

Given the emotionally complex and stylistically rich nature of *Wintergirls*, Leech’s theory provides a more practical means for close literary analysis. As a result, it helps dissect how particular expressions convey layered emotional states, reflect character psychology, and shape narrative tone. As such, while CMT offers essential theoretical insight, Leech’s model is better suited to the objectives of this study, which aims to classify types of figurative language and analyze the range of meanings they convey within the text.

### 3. Method

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to examine figurative language in *Wintergirls*. The primary data source consists of 224 excerpts systematically sampled from 13 chapters. Data collection involved close textual reading and categorization based on Leech’s (1981) framework. Coding and frequency distribution analyses were conducted to determine the prevalence of figurative devices and meaning types.

Additionally, thematic analysis explored recurring motifs and their semantic implications. The study adheres to qualitative research validity measures, including triangulation and peer review, to ensure the reliability of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### 3.1 Research Data

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative interpretation. A random sampling method was employed to select 13 chapters from *Wintergirls* (chapters 5–65, in five-chapter intervals), chosen for their representation of key emotional and narrative developments. From these chapters, 224 excerpts containing figurative language were extracted.

The classification of figurative language followed Leech’s (1981) typology, encompassing metaphor, simile, hyperbole, irony, personification, metonymy, and litotes. Each excerpt was also analyzed according to Leech’s seven types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, affective, social, thematic, collocative, and associative.

To ensure inter-rater reliability, 30% of the excerpts ( $n = 67$ ) were reviewed by external evaluators with expertise in literary and linguistic analysis. Coding discrepancies were resolved through consensus, resulting in an inter-coder agreement of 89.55%.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The study involved a thorough reading of *Wintergirls*, focusing on relevant excerpts for figurative language investigation. The selected excerpts were typed and printed, and the close reading method was used to identify their figurative language representation. 224 excerpts were selected as research samples.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis includes four stages. First, research on relevant themes and aspects of the extracts is conducted to link examples and findings back to broader discussions relating to the text. After that, the figurative language is categorized through close textual reading, focusing on examples of metaphors, similes, and other key aspects of figurative language. The findings are presented by categories to systematize the functions and objectives of the identified figurative expressions. Finally, the expressions are accompanied by discussions of layers of meanings according to Leech’s framework.

Therefore, this comprehensive analysis helped uncover the nuances and messages conveyed through Anderson’s words, allowing for a deeper understanding of the text. This researcher used categorization and coding procedures to arrange and structure data for data analysis, assuring comprehension and interpretation by other experts.

### 4. Results

The following section presents the analysis and findings regarding figurative language in *Wintergirls*. The central aspect of the narrative represents the loss and recovery of one character’s identity. It is argued that these representations are enabled and augmented using figurative language. The analysis was conducted to address two research questions: the first one concerns which types of figurative language are used, and the second one discusses the kinds of meanings conveyed using figurative language based on Leech (1981). These seven types will be elaborated on in the following sections, focusing on the relevant types of figurative language identified in the study. Figure 1 presents the first research question on the type of figurative language employed in Anderson’s novel *Wintergirls*.

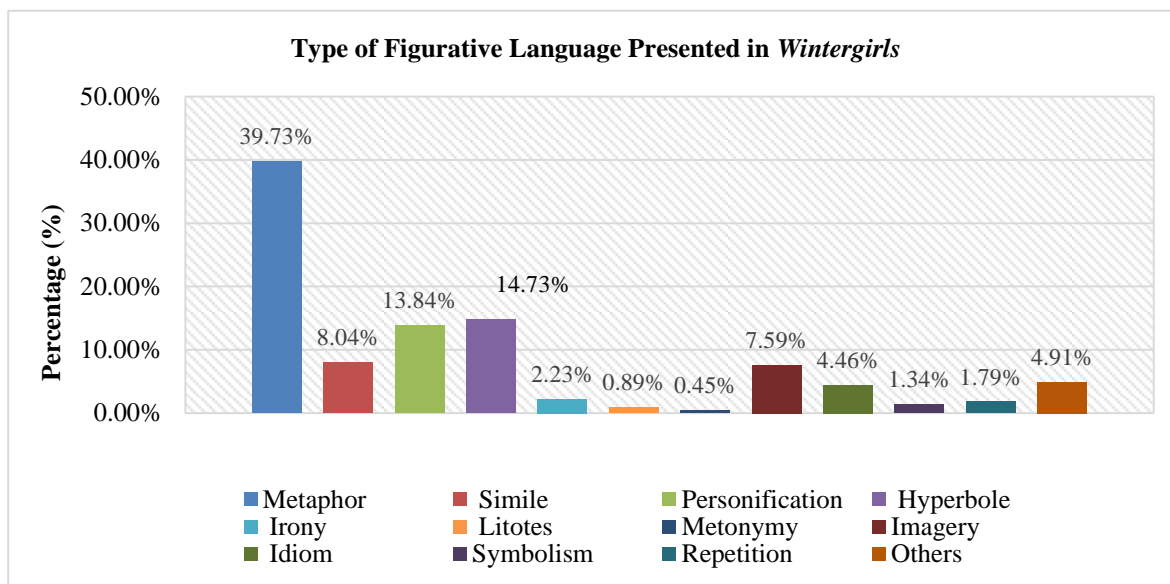


Figure 1. Types of Figurative Language Presented in *Wintergirls*

Figure 1 illustrates that metaphor was the most prevalent ( $f = 89$ , 39.73%), followed by hyperbole ( $f = 33$ , 14.73%) and personification ( $f = 31$ , 13.84%). Less frequent were simile (8.04%) and idioms (4.46%), while litotes (0.89%) and metonymy (0.45%) were rare.

These results indicate that Anderson's prose relies heavily on metaphor to articulate the protagonist's psychological fragmentation and body image distortions. Hyperboles and personifications also serve to intensify emotional states, contributing to the novel's overall tone of distress.

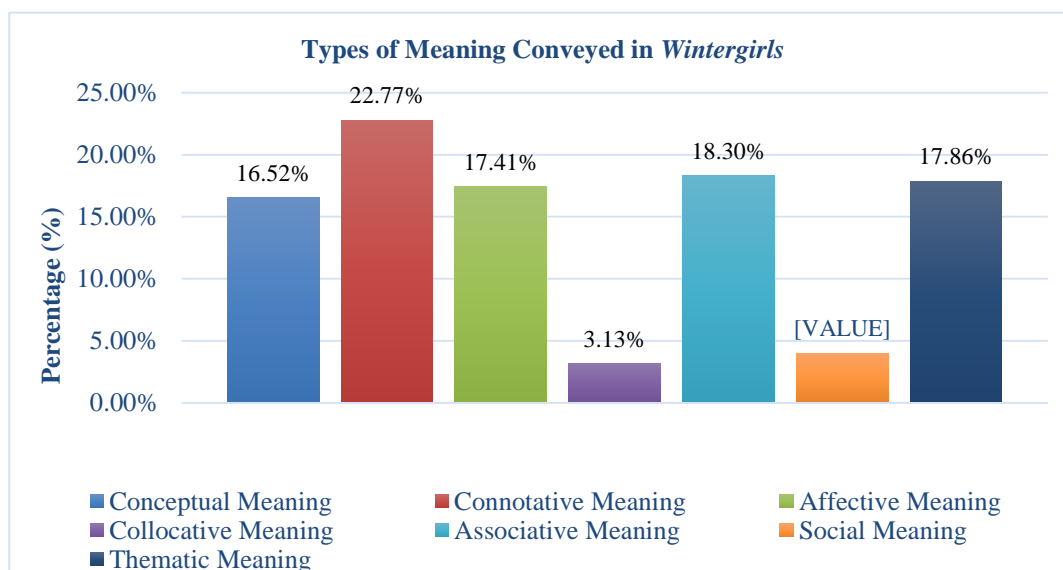


Figure 2. Types of Meaning Conveyed in *Wintergirls*

As illustrated in Figure 2, the study identifies the frequencies and percentages of each type of meaning based on Leech's framework. Among the seven categories, connotative meaning emerges as the most frequent ( $f = 51$ , 22.77%), followed by associative meaning ( $f = 41$ , 18.30%), thematic meaning ( $f = 40$ , 17.86%), affective meaning ( $f = 39$ , 17.41%), and conceptual meaning ( $f = 37$ , 16.52%). In contrast, social meaning ( $f = 9$ , 4.01%) and collocative meaning ( $f = 7$ , 3.13%) appear less frequently, representing the least utilized semantic categories in the novel.

As shown in the findings section, it can be concluded that Anderson relies heavily on connotative and associative meanings to convey the protagonist's emotional and psychological struggles.

## 5. Discussion

The predominance of metaphor and connotative meaning in *Wintergirls* underscores the novel's focus on internal experience over external action. Anderson uses metaphorical constructs to depict Lia's anorexia, not as a mere illness, but as an existential condition—often described in terms of “emptiness,” “invisibility,” and “fracture.” These metaphors function cognitively and emotionally, transforming abstract psychological states into tangible imagery. Leech's (1981) categories—particularly connotative, affective, and thematic meanings—allow us to trace how language shapes the reader's emotional engagement with the protagonist's trauma.

### 5.1 Types of Figurative Language

The findings revealed various types of figurative language in *Wintergirls*, including simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, personification, and litotes. This research discovered 1 metonymy, 2 litotes, 5 instances of irony, 18 similes, 33 hyperboles, 31 personifications, 89 metaphors, 17 imagery, 4 repetition, 10 idioms, 3 symbolism, and 11 other types of figurative language.

A multitude of studies have investigated the application of figurative language in modern novels. Wijayanti (2017) examined *Adultery* by Paulo Coelho and discovered four categories of figurative language, with comparison being the most predominant. Tiarawati and Ningsih (2019) examined *Ugly Love* by Colleen Hoover, identifying six categories of metaphorical language, with personification being the most prevalent. Harya (2017) examined Coelho's *The Alchemist*, identifying seventy occurrences of figurative language, with similes comprising the largest share. In a separate study, Sriwulandari et al. (2022) analyzed *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman, concentrating on four categories of figurative language, with similes being the most prevalent.

In short, all the studies used the qualitative method and different theoretical frameworks that inform the study, such as Leech's theory (Harya, 2017; Tiarawati & Ningsih, 2019). In conclusion, the research shows the importance of figurative language in literature for reader engagement and imagination (Sriwulandari et al., 2022).

### 5.2 Types of Meaning

Using Leech's (1981) seven types of meaning, the figurative language in *Wintergirls* can be categorized into five distinct dimensions: connotative, associative, thematic, and affective. Each enhances the narrative. Leech's framework of 7 types of meaning offers a thorough methodology for comprehending language semantics beyond mere dictionary definitions. Based on these research findings, there were 51 connotative meanings, the most often occurring type in the novel. Associative meaning follows, and 41 cases were detected. Thematic meaning with 40 and affective meaning with 39 were found. Similarly, there were 37 conceptual meanings. The two least commonly used categories of meaning include 9 social and 7 collocative meanings.

This paradigm has been employed in diverse linguistic contexts, including the analysis of corporate slogans—highlighting their metaphorical and semantic dimensions (Ishchuk, 2020)—and the exploration of cultural identity maintenance in poetry (Al-Malkawi & Albzour, 2022). In several studies, analysts identified all seven of Leech's semantic categories (Yunira et al., 2019), demonstrating the model's comprehensive applicability. The framework's adaptability enables a nuanced examination of meaning across various linguistic and cultural environments, underscoring its significance in understanding language's complexity (Al-Malkawi & Albzour, 2022). Moreover, this descriptive qualitative study investigates the contextual meaning of dialogue in *The Ugly Duckling*, focusing on how situational factors influence interpretation (Thao et al., 2021).

## 6. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the critical role of figurative language in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*, revealing its function as a stylistic and semantic tool for articulating psychological complexity. The analysis of 224 excerpts shows that metaphor (39.73%) is the most frequently employed device, reflecting the protagonist's emotional fragmentation and disordered perception of self. Leech's (1981) framework further reveals that connotative (22.77%) and associative meanings (18.30%) dominate the text, underscoring the novel's reliance on implicit, symbolic expression rather than direct narration.

These findings support the argument that figurative language in contemporary fiction not only enhances literary aesthetics but also conveys nuanced psychological states, particularly those related to trauma, identity, and mental health. For educators, this underscores the pedagogical value of integrating literary texts into EFL instruction to foster cultural literacy, emotional awareness, and interpretive skills.

## 7. Recommendation

Future research can build upon this study by applying Leech's model or complementary frameworks (e.g., Conceptual Metaphor Theory) to different genres, authors, or cross-cultural literary texts. A comparative study between *Wintergirls* and other narratives addressing mental illness could offer broader insights into the rhetorical and cognitive strategies employed in contemporary young adult fiction. Moreover, in pedagogical settings, integrating multimedia resources—such as short films or digital storytelling—can further support learners' understanding of abstract and figurative language. As recent research suggests, visual and contextual learning tools enhance idiomatic and metaphorical comprehension, making them valuable supplements in EFL classrooms (Aljebreen & Alzamil, 2022).

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## Authors' contributions

The author took the lead in drafting and writing the manuscript. All other authors provided critical feedback, assisted in refining the content, and contributed to the revision process. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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