

Exploring narrative device in American pop culture: A case study of Ex Machina (2014)

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Abstract

Language is a crucial aspect of life for communicating, expressing feelings, and building relationships with others. In literature, language and context are interconnected; pragmatics helps reveal the hidden meaning behind the text. In the context of pragmatic, films not only show futuristic narratives, but it also shows how dialogue and interaction between characters are used to convey deeper meaning. The language that is often used in a literary work is usually a style of figurative language. This research refers to Laurence Perrine's theory on identifying and analyzing the types of figurative language and exploring their functions in supporting narrative meaning and characterization in the film Ex Machina. This research uses descriptive qualitative method. The primary data used in this study is the film Ex Machina and secondary data were obtained from articles, journals, and previous study. Data collection technique is carried out by watching the movie, reading movie script and then, analyzed to find types and function of each figurative language used. From the research that has been done it can be concluded that the types of figurative language found in the Ex Machina film are Allegory, Hyperbole, Irony, Metaphor, Metonymy, Paradox, Personification, Simile, Symbol, and Synecdoche which are more dominantly appearing are metaphor and hyperbole. Meanwhile, the functions found in figurative language in the Ex Machina film not only function as aesthetic decoration, but also to provide imaginative pleasure, add emotional intensity, create meaning in a short compass, and to provide additional meaning related to philosophical issues such as artificial consciousness and human identity. The Ex Machina film raises the theme of artificial intelligence, consciousness, and ethics in creating technology.

Keywords: Ex machina movie; figurative language; pragmatic

INTRODUCTION

Language is a central element of human communication, enabling individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and intentions. As social beings, humans rely on language not only in direct interpersonal interaction but also through various media, including literature, music, and film. According to Ahmad (2015), language and communication are inseparable, as language serves as the primary medium through which people exchange ideas, emotions, and values. Among the many forms of media, film stands out as a rich platform for linguistic and cultural exploration due to its multimodal nature—combining visual, auditory, and textual elements to convey layered meaning.

The Oxford Dictionary defines film as “a series of moving images recorded with sound that tells a story or conveys a message.” Beyond its entertainment value, film serves as a mirror of society, a medium of education, and a form of artistic expression. Film scripts play a crucial role in shaping meaning and communicating the vision of the filmmaker. Research published by *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* (1) highlights how film is intricately connected to human psychology—both in terms of the emotions it evokes in the audience and the creative decisions made by its creators. Dialogues in film are carefully crafted to build mood, develop characters, and articulate themes. Within these dialogues, the use of figurative language becomes a significant stylistic and functional tool.

Figurative language, as noted by M. Atar Semi (in Sardani,, 1993), involves the use of expressions that go beyond the literal meaning of words, often through comparisons, associations,

or symbolic language. It adds depth, emotion, and aesthetic richness to communication. Figurative language has its own unique characteristics because it deviates from common communication rules. Figures of speech creates expressions that differ from what is spoken. When using figurative language, language takes on a more imaginative or indirect meaning (Sa'idah & Permatasari, 2024). In film, figurative language helps establish atmosphere, convey abstract ideas, and elicit emotional responses from the audience. Its presence in scripts is not merely ornamental but often essential in shaping a film's identity and narrative depth. A compelling case for the study of figurative language can be found in *Ex Machina* (2014), a science fiction psychological thriller directed by Alex Garland. The film follows the story of Caleb, a young programmer invited to the secluded residence of his company's CEO, Nathan, to participate in a Turing Test involving Ava, an artificial intelligence in the form of a humanoid robot. Over time, Caleb becomes increasingly entangled in the ethical, emotional, and philosophical complexities of the experiment. What makes *Ex Machina* particularly interesting from a linguistic perspective is the film's dialogue, which is laden with philosophical subtext, psychological manipulation, and abstract discussions about consciousness, freedom, and what it means to be human.

In this film, language is not used merely to drive the plot forward but to create psychological tension and convey profound existential themes. Characters such as Ava and Nathan use language strategically—sometimes metaphorically—to influence Caleb and challenge his assumptions. This intricate use of language makes *Ex Machina* an ideal subject for figurative language analysis. Unlike animated or romantic films, whose emotional tone often leads to overt use of figurative speech (e.g., hyperbole and similes), *Ex Machina* employs figurative language in a more philosophical and subdued manner, thereby demanding a different analytical approach.

Previous research has examined the use of figurative language in various media. Tinambunan et al. (2024), in their study of the film *Moana*, found that metaphors were the most dominant form of figurative expression, followed by irony and hyperbole. Similarly, Sriwedani et al. (2023) identified hyperbole as the most prevalent form in *Me Before You*, reflecting the film's emotional intensity. Other studies, such as Brenda's (2024) analysis of songs in *Encanto* and Arfani & Damayanti's study of Katy Perry's lyrics, confirmed the prominence of metaphor, personification, and symbolic language in conveying cultural and emotional meaning. However, these studies predominantly focus on genres where expressive language is more naturally expected—animated films, love stories, and pop music. They often prioritize identifying the types of figurative language rather than exploring how those expressions function within the narrative structure or contribute to character development and thematic construction. In contrast, *Ex Machina* provides a more restrained and intellectual use of language, reflecting themes of artificial intelligence, human nature, and consciousness. Yet, to date, no specific study has analysed the figurative language in *Ex Machina*, particularly in relation to its function in enhancing narrative and thematic elements.

This research aims to fill that gap by analysing the types of figurative language in *Ex Machina*'s script. The film's minimalist yet intellectually dense dialogues offer rich material for exploring how language shapes audience interpretation and emotional engagement. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What types of figurative language are used in the *Ex Machina* movie script? and (2) How does figurative language function within the film's narrative and dialogue? The scope of the study is limited to the analysis of verbal expressions found in the original script of *Ex Machina* (2014), with no focus on visual or non-verbal elements. The analysis centres on how figurative language contributes to the thematic depth, character psychology, and philosophical undertones of the film. By using this approach, the study seeks to uncover how figurative language is utilized in a genre that is not typically associated with highly emotional or poetic expression. Academically, this study contributes to the field of linguistics and film studies by offering a detailed investigation of rhetorical devices in science fiction film dialogues. It enhances our understanding of how figurative language operates in complex narrative contexts and how it serves both aesthetic and functional purposes. Practically, the findings can benefit screenwriters, film analysts, and literature

scholars by offering insights into how language can subtly shape meaning and emotional response in storytelling.

In conclusion, *Ex Machina* presents a unique opportunity to examine figurative language as a tool for philosophical exploration and narrative construction. Through analysing the film's dialogue, this study aims to shed light on the interplay between language, consciousness, and identity, offering a new perspective on how stylistic language choices reflect and enhance a film's central themes.

Review of literature

Figurative language has long been an essential topic in literary and linguistic studies, evolving from its roots in classical rhetoric to its current treatment in cognitive linguistics and stylistics. It plays a central role in enhancing human communication by allowing speakers and writers to express abstract or complex ideas through more concrete and relatable imagery. Aristotle, in *Poetics* (as cited in Bialostosky), emphasized that metaphor is not simply an ornament but a cognitive and persuasive device. It helps individuals understand abstract concepts by mapping them onto more familiar ones. This view situates figurative language not just as a tool of beauty, but as a way of structuring knowledge. The theoretical development of figurative language continued with scholars like I.A. Richards, who introduced the concepts of "tenor" and "vehicle" to explain how metaphors operate. According to Richards, metaphors consist of a tenor (the subject being described) and a vehicle (the image used to describe it), creating a bridge between different conceptual domains. Max Black later expanded metaphor theory with his interaction view, which proposed that metaphorical meaning arises through a dynamic interaction between two semantic fields, not through fixed comparisons. This idea laid the groundwork for more complex interpretations of metaphor in literary and media texts. A major shift in the study of figurative language came with the cognitive approach introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. They argued that metaphor is not merely a linguistic decoration but a fundamental mechanism in human thought. Expressions such as "time is money" or "life is a journey" reflect the way people understand their experiences using conceptual metaphors. In this perspective, figurative language becomes a cognitive structure that guides how individuals interpret and interact with reality. This development shows how figurative language is deeply embedded in human cognition, shaping both language and perception.

While many of these theories have been applied to literary texts, their relevance extends to other forms of narrative, including film. In this study, the theory of figurative language proposed by Laurence Perrine (2016) is used as the main analytical framework, particularly due to its applicability to fictional and dramatic works such as *Ex Machina* (2014). Perrine (2016) defines figurative language as expression that deviates from literal meaning to convey something deeper, richer, and more emotionally resonant. His framework is well-suited to analysing film texts, as it includes both the classification of figurative devices. Perrine (2016) categorizes figurative language into several key types, including simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. Similes explicitly compare two unlike things using connectors such as "like" or "as," while metaphors make implicit comparisons without such words. Personification involves giving human qualities to non-human entities, often to create emotional resonance. Apostrophe addresses abstract concepts or absent figures as if they were present and responsive. Synecdoche uses a part to represent the whole, and metonymy substitutes something closely related for the thing actually meant. Further, Perrine (2016) explains that symbols and allegories are forms that carry both literal and figurative meaning. Symbols often convey layered interpretations, while allegory tends to establish a one-to-one correspondence between surface elements and deeper meanings. Paradoxes, meanwhile, contain apparent contradictions that reveal deeper truths. Hyperbole and understatement adjust intensity—either by exaggerating or downplaying—to serve rhetorical effects. Irony, another key figure, involves saying one thing while meaning the opposite, often to convey satire or criticism. These varied forms work together to enrich textual meaning, making figurative language a powerful expressive tool in films.

These theoretical concepts are especially valuable when applied to *Ex Machina*, a 2014 science fiction film directed by Alex Garland. The film tells the story of Caleb, a programmer chosen to test the artificial intelligence of a robot named Ava, created by the reclusive tech CEO Nathan. As Caleb interacts with Ava, he becomes entangled in moral and emotional dilemmas that blur the boundaries between human and machine. Throughout the film, figurative language is used both visually and verbally to convey deeper meanings. For instance, Ava's name may allude to "Eve," invoking biblical associations with creation, innocence, and the fall from grace. This symbolic naming supports the film's exploration of ethics, identity, and technological power. The film's dialogue also employs metaphor and irony to communicate psychological and philosophical ideas. Ava's confinement in a glass room, for example, becomes a metaphor for both the fragility and transparency of artificial consciousness. Nathan's godlike role as creator introduces allegorical elements, suggesting parallels with mythological and religious narratives about creation and rebellion. In these ways, figurative language enriches the film's themes, intensifies its emotional undertones, and challenges the audience to reflect on the nature of consciousness, control, and freedom.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyse the use of figurative language in the film *Ex Machina* (2014). The qualitative approach is chosen to allow in-depth exploration of language phenomena within the film's narrative, particularly how meaning and style are constructed through figurative expressions. As noted by Bogdan and Biklen, qualitative research generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken language and observed behaviour, enabling researchers to grasp complex social and cultural phenomena. Creswell further asserts that qualitative research aims to understand the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue, while Denzin and Lincoln emphasize the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry within a natural setting.

To conduct this research, a content analysis method is used to examine the figurative language found in the film's original English-language script. The focus lies in identifying the types of figurative language as proposed by Perrine (2016), and in understanding how these expressions contribute to the overall narrative, character development, and thematic construction of the film. The analytical process is guided by the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the researcher reduces data by selecting and categorizing instances of figurative language from the film script. Then, data are presented in tabular form to facilitate pattern recognition. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on linguistic features, contextual interpretation, and dominant stylistic patterns observed.

The primary data of this study consist of selected dialogues from *Ex Machina*, chosen for their relevance to the research objectives, particularly in illustrating figurative language. These are supported by secondary data drawn from theoretical literature, such as scholarly books and journal articles on stylistics, figurative language, and translation studies. Perrine (2016)'s typology of figurative language—encompassing simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, irony, symbol, and others—serves as the main analytical framework for identifying and interpreting the data. The process of data collection follows several systematic steps. First, the film is watched closely to understand the narrative context and character dynamics in which figurative expressions occur. Second, the original script of the film is examined and read to locate and extract relevant linguistic data. Third, individual lines or utterances containing figurative language are identified and documented. Finally, these expressions are interpreted through close reading, paying attention to their meaning, function, and stylistic impact in the context of the film. The interpretation process is supported by contextual analysis and guided by the theoretical lens of figurative language as outlined by Perrine (2016).

Content analysis is employed not only to identify the surface structure of figurative expressions but also to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in dialogue and character interaction. This approach allows the researcher to explore how figurative language shapes the film's philosophical

themes, particularly those related to consciousness, identity, and artificial intelligence. All findings are presented in the next chapter, along with discussion and interpretation. The complete list of data is included in the appendix for transparency and reference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Types of Figurative Language in *Ex Machina* Movie

To find out the types of figurative language used in the film *Ex Machina*, the researcher identified and classified the data based on the types of figurative language explained by Perrine (2016). The following table presents the distribution of each type of figurative language found in the data, complete with the frequency of occurrence and percentage of the total data.

Table 1 Types Figurative Language in *Ex-Machina* movie

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Frequency
1	Allegory	1
2	Hyperbole	10
3	Irony	2
4	Metaphor	20
5	Metonymy	1
6	Paradox	1
7	Personification	1
8	Simile	3
9	Symbol	3
10	Synecdoche	1
Total		43

Based on Table 1 above, it can be seen that metaphor is the most dominant type of figurative language used in the film *Ex Machina*, with a frequency of 20 times of the total data. This shows that this film relies heavily on metaphors to convey deeper meanings, especially in describing the complexity of the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence. In second place is hyperbole with 10 occurrences, which shows a tendency to use excessive expressions to strengthen emotions or dramatize certain situations. Meanwhile, other types of figures of speech such as irony, simile, and symbol also appear but in more limited numbers. Some figures of speech such as allegory, metonymy, paradox, personification, and synecdoche are only found once but remain significant in enriching the layers of meaning in the film's narrative. The diversity of the use of this style of language reflects a complex artistic approach in conveying messages in the film *Ex Machina*.

Types of Figurative Language in *Ex Machina* Movie

After identifying the types of figurative language in the film *Ex Machina*, it was found that this film utilizes various styles of language to strengthen the delivery of meaning and build the atmosphere of the story. This sub-chapter discusses these types in more detail based on the frequency of their appearance.

Allegory

In the entire dialogue of the film *Ex Machina*, the use of allegory language style is only found once, namely in the conversation between Caleb and Nathan towards the end of the film. The quote appears in the context of a discussion about power, creation, and the ethical impact of technology, especially artificial intelligence created by Nathan.

CALEB: **"I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."**

NATHAN: "There you go again. Mister quotable."

CALEB: "No. There you go again. It's not my quote. It's what Oppenheimer said when he made the atomic bomb."

(Garland, 2014, p. 88)

Caleb's statement quoting the famous line from J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist behind the atomic bomb, is not only a historical reference, but also functions as an allegory that represents an abstract meaning in the context of the story. According to Johnson and Arp (801), an allegory is often an extended metaphor or a collection of related symbols and serves to convey a big idea or abstract concept indirectly. In this quote, the phrase "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds" is not literal. Caleb does not actually become death or the destroyer of worlds physically. However, the statement allegorically reflects the moral and power position he has or realizes he is in relation to the project of creating an artificial being (Ava). Like Oppenheimer who describes his awareness of the great consequences of his creation, Caleb is also in an ethical dilemma between creation and destruction.

Symbolically, this quote implies the destructive power in the hands of humans, especially when faced with technology that rivals or surpasses humanity itself. Allegory emerges here because this single, meaningful phrase represents complex ideas about the responsibility of the creator, the moral limits of science, and existential consequences. In this way, Caleb is not simply quoting Oppenheimer; he is allegorizing himself as a figure aware of the destructive potential of 'creation' in the context of humans and artificial intelligence.

Hyperbole

In the film *Ex Machina*, hyperbole is one of the most frequently found types of figurative language, with a total of 10 occurrences. Different from other forms of figurative language that are more subtle or symbolic, hyperbole in this film tends to appear in the form of dramatic and rhetorical expressions, especially in the dialogue between the main characters. Here are two examples of quotes that show the use of hyperbole, complete with the context of the conversation and the reasons for the categorization of the figurative language.

The first example is a line uttered by Nathan when he first introduces the secret experiment to Caleb. Nathan offers Caleb the opportunity to see and test his extraordinary creation, Ava, an artificial intelligence with a human-like body and behaviour. Before revealing the details of the experiment, Nathan asks Caleb to sign a non-disclosure agreement. To convince Caleb, Nathan not only conveys the information logically, but also uses emotional pressure. He frames the choice as a turning point in Caleb's life, whether he will witness the wonder of technology, or choose not to participate and 'regret it for the rest of his life.'

NATHAN: (CONT'D) What can I tell you? You don't have to sign. We could spend the next seven days shooting pool and getting drunk together. Bonding. And when you discover what you missed out on, in a year or so's time, **you'll spend the rest of your life regretting it.**
(Garland, 2014, p.17)

The phrase "you'll spend the rest of your life regretting it" is a form of hyperbole because it states that Caleb will regret his whole life if he does not participate in the experiment. This is an exaggerated claim and impossible to rationally ascertain. Lifelong regret is an extreme assumption that cannot be measured, especially in the context of a choice that does not necessarily have that big an impact. This figure of speech is not meant to be read literally, but as a way to create emotional pressure and strengthen the appeal of what Nathan will offer. This is in accordance with McArthur's definition (491), that hyperbole is a statement that is 'usually deliberate and not meant to be taken literally.' Thus, hyperbole is used here as a rhetorical strategy to influence the decisions of other characters, as well as to give dramatic weight to the moment of narrative transition.

Irony

In the film *Ex Machina*, irony appears as one of the less frequent types of figurative language, with only one clear example found in the analyzed data. Irony is a way of speaking where someone says the opposite of what they really mean, usually for humorous or sarcastic effect. In this film, the example of irony is seen during a conversation between Nathan and Caleb when they talk about Caleb's type of woman. Nathan suddenly gives an unexpected and humorous response that clearly shows irony.

NATHAN: What's your type, Caleb?

CALEB: Of **girl**?

NATHAN: No, of **salad dressing**. Yes, of girl. In fact, don't even answer. Let's say it's black chicks.

(Garland, 2014, p.60)

In this scene, Nathan asks Caleb about his preference in women. When Caleb confirms that he's asking "of girl," Nathan replies, "No, of salad dressing," which is clearly an ironic statement. Nathan doesn't really want to know about salad dressing; he is being sarcastic and mocking Caleb for being too literal or awkward. According to Johnson and Arp (817), verbal irony happens when a speaker says the opposite of what they mean, often mixed with sarcasm. In this case, the mention of salad dressing works as irony because it's absurd in the context and meant to highlight how obvious the question was. This moment shows how irony is used to create humour and express character personality, especially Nathan's sharp and unpredictable style of speaking.

Metaphor

In the film *Ex Machina*, metaphor stands out as a dominant form of figurative language, appearing 20 times out of a total of 43 figurative expressions. Metaphors in this film are not merely decorative; they function as tools for expressing psychological depth, power dynamics, and the philosophical weight of the narrative. Rather than directly stating how the characters feel or think, the film allows them to articulate complex internal experiences through metaphorical language that captures what is otherwise difficult to convey literally. This is in line with McArthur's (653) view that metaphor operates by linking the literal to the abstract in order to enrich meaning.

The first example appears when Nathan reflects on his physical and mental state after a night of drinking. He says that if he has "a heavy night," he tries to compensate the next morning with exercise, juice, and antioxidants.

NATHAN: Like you wouldn't believe. And if I have **a heavy night**, I always try to compensate the next morning. Exercise. Juice. Anti-oxidants. You know?

(Garland, 2014, p.12)

The phrase "a heavy night" is metaphorical because it does not refer to literal weight. Instead, it conceptualizes time and experience as a burden or pressure that leaves a residue the following day. In doing so, it suggests that the consequences of indulgence are not only physical but also psychological. This metaphor offers insight into Nathan's complex self-perception. On the surface, he presents himself as someone in control capable of offsetting excess with self-discipline. Yet the very need for compensation suggests guilt, instability, or perhaps an inner conflict between indulgence and control. It mirrors the broader tension in the film between rationality and instinct, between the programmed and the unpredictable. Metaphorically referring to a night as 'heavy' also positions experience as something that weighs on the self, much like the ethical and emotional burden of creating artificial intelligence.

Metonymy

Metonymy appears once in the film *Ex Machina*, but even with its limited frequency, it contributes significantly to the tone of human-machine interaction. According to Johnson and Arp (779), metonymy is 'the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant.' This device appears

in the early stages of Caleb's first conversation with Ava. In this moment, Ava prompts Caleb to ask her a question, initiating their first dialogue exchange. Caleb responds:

CALEB: Whatever **comes into your head**.
(Garland, 2014, p.23)

The phrase “comes into your head” is a clear instance of metonymy, where the term ‘head’ is used to refer to ‘thoughts’ or ‘mind.’ While this expression is common in informal English, its significance here lies in the artificial intelligence context. Ava, as a humanoid robot, possesses a synthetic brain, yet Caleb uses human-centered language that assumes natural thought processes. Through this metonymic substitution, the script subtly affirms Ava’s apparent sentience, framing her as a being capable of thought rather than as a mere machine following prewritten algorithms.

Paradox

Paradox is another figurative device that appears only once but carries strong philosophical weight. Johnson and Arp (814) define a paradox as ‘an apparent contradiction that is nevertheless somehow true.’ This figure is employed by Nathan, the film’s creator figure, during a moment of self-reflection about the limits of control and wealth. In this data, Nathan attempts to articulate a universal truth, but subverts a traditional idiom in the process:

NATHAN: It’s funny. It doesn’t matter how rich you are: shit goes wrong. You can’t insulate yourself from it. It’s supposed to be **death and taxes** you can’t avoid. But actually, it’s **death and shit**.
(Garland, 2014, p.45)

In this line, Nathan plays with the familiar adage ‘nothing is certain except death and taxes,’ replacing the bureaucratic concept of ‘taxes’ with the profane but emotionally charged ‘shit.’ The paradox emerges in this unexpected substitution: while taxes are institutionally unavoidable, Nathan suggests that misfortune ‘shit’ is even more inevitable. This contradiction is ironic yet sincere. As a wealthy man likely capable of tax avoidance, Nathan’s real problems stem not from institutional constraints but from personal chaos, ethical decay, hubris, and emotional detachment. By substituting ‘taxes’ with ‘shit,’ the paradox reveals a deeper truth about the human condition, such as external structures may be manipulated, but internal disorder remains inescapable. This usage encapsulates the film’s broader commentary on the illusion of control and the inherent messiness of life, even for those at the top of the technological hierarchy.

Personification

Personification is found once in the script, delivering emotional undertones to a seemingly mundane moment. As defined by Johnson and Arp (776), personification attributes ‘the attributes of a human being to an animal, an object, or a concept.’ This technique subtly animates the abstract concept of time in a conversation between Nathan and Caleb. In the context of the data, Nathan casually greets Caleb and explains why he had Kyoko wake him:

NATHAN: Hey. Sorry to send Kyoko to wake you, man. I just didn’t want too much of **the day to slip by**.
(Garland, 2014, p.34)

The phrase “the day to slip by” anthropomorphizes time by implying it has the ability to move away, much like a person evading attention. ‘Slip by’ suggests intentional motion, as if the day is an active agent that can escape unnoticed. This personification infuses the moment with subtle urgency. Beneath the casual tone, Nathan’s words convey an implicit pressure to move forward with his undisclosed plans, reinforcing the film’s atmosphere of concealed intentions. Additionally, this use of personification aligns with the film’s motif of temporal manipulation. Time appears natural, yet is managed by external forces. It just as Caleb believes he is participating in open dialogue, while in reality, everything is controlled by Nathan.

Simile

A simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two things with a conjunction such as 'like' or 'as if'. In the movie *Ex Machina*, similes appear twice and are used to show something that is difficult to explain directly. Similes help characters describe something more clearly through comparison. The first example occurs when Caleb is discussing Ava with Nathan. They talk about how Ava makes jokes, which Caleb believes is a sign of high artificial intelligence.

CALEB: It got me thinking. In a way, the joke is the best indication of AI I've seen in her. It's discretely complicated. **Kind of non-autistic.**
(Garland, 2014, p. 46)

The sentence "kind of non-autistic" is a form of simile that compares the way Ava thinks to humans who are not on the autism spectrum. Caleb uses this comparison to explain that Ava can understand complex social things, such as jokes. Although the word 'kind of' sounds vague, it makes it clear that according to Caleb, Ava's ability to joke is a sign that she can actually think like a human.

Symbol

Symbols are figures of speech that take something literally, but also carry a deeper, additional meaning. In *Ex Machina*, symbols help the audience understand how the characters make sense of unusual situations, especially when they are dealing with highly advanced technology. These symbols show feelings of awe, confusion, and even fear about the boundaries between humans and machines. The first example occurs in a conversation between Caleb and Nathan when they talk about the possibility of creating conscious machines.

CALEB: If you've created a conscious machine, it's not the history of man. It's the **history of Gods.**
(Garland, 2014, p. 18)

This line not only explains the importance of the discovery, but also uses symbols to compare the creation of artificial intelligence to divine power. "History of Gods" is not just a dramatic statement. It is a symbol that implies that the act of creating a being that can think for itself is something beyond the capabilities of ordinary humans. Caleb is not just praising Nathan, but also indirectly conveying his concern: if humans begin to create conscious beings, then we are stepping into territory that is usually only associated with God. This symbol emphasizes the film's larger theme of human responsibility and power over its creation.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech that uses part of something to represent the whole. In the film *Ex Machina*, synecdoche appears to describe the relationship that begins to form between Caleb and Ava, especially how Ava conveys feelings or tests Caleb's reactions in a very subtle way. One example is in the following quote:

AVA: **The way your eyes fix on my eyes, and lips. The way you hold my gaze, or don't.**
AVA (CONT'D): **Have I read them incorrectly?**
AVA (CONT'D): **Do you think about me when we aren't together?**
AVA (CONT'D): **Sometimes, at night, I wonder if you're watching me on the cameras.**
(Garland, 2014, p. 57)

The sentence "The way your eyes fix on my eyes, and lips" is an example of synecdoche. Here, Ava refers to 'eyes' and 'lips' as the body parts that Caleb focuses on. However, she is not just referring to those physical features, but to the whole way Caleb notices her, responds to her, and perhaps even feels emotionally or sexually attracted to her. By referring to body parts like 'eyes' and 'lips,' Ava is representing her entire self, such as her body, her feelings, and her attractiveness.

This style also shows that Ava is aware of how Caleb sees her. She is observing how he views her as an emotionally involved human being. Synecdoche here is an important tool to show how Ava views their interaction, not just as a robot who responds logically, but as someone who can read the emotions and feelings of others. In addition, subsequent sentences such as “Do you think about me when we aren’t together?” and “I wonder if you’re watching me on the cameras” deepen the meaning of the synecdoche. Ava is not only asking if Caleb notices her body parts, but further: whether Caleb thinks about her as a whole person. This shows that Ava is aware of her image in Caleb’s eyes, and she begins to question the meaning of that attention is it just a visual attraction, or is there a deeper connection.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how figurative language is used in the film *Ex Machina*, focusing on both its types as categorized by Perrine (2016)’s theory of figurative language. Through a close analysis of selected dialogues, the research reveals that the film makes extensive and purposeful use of figurative expressions to convey its psychological and philosophical themes, enhance emotional engagement, and deepen narrative meaning. The study identified ten types of figurative language used in the film: metaphor, hyperbole, irony, simile, symbol, allegory, metonymy, paradox, personification, and synecdoche. Among these, metaphor emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 46.5% of the total data. Metaphors were especially effective in conveying abstract or complex ideas related to artificial intelligence, consciousness, identity, and the relationship between creator and creation. For example, Ava is frequently described or referred to in metaphoric terms that suggest not only her artificial nature but also her emotional or symbolic significance. Hyperbole was the second most frequently used figure of speech, comprising 23.3% of the data. It often served to emphasize strong emotional states, dramatic turns in the storyline, or the perceived magnitude of a character’s feelings or intentions. The use of hyperboles helped to add intensity to emotionally charged scenes and highlight the psychological tension between the characters, especially during confrontational or morally ambiguous moments. Other types of figurative language, while less frequent, still played a meaningful role. Irony, simile, and symbolism appeared at key moments to express hidden or layered meanings. These devices added depth to the dialogue and encouraged the audience to interpret the characters’ words and motivations from multiple perspectives. For instance, symbols were used to represent control, surveillance, and entrapment, aligning with the film’s broader themes of autonomy and manipulation.

In conclusion, the use of figurative language in *Ex Machina* is not merely decorative or stylistic—it serves essential narrative, thematic, and emotional functions. By carefully employing metaphors, hyperboles, symbols, and other figures of speech, the film communicates complex philosophical concepts in a more accessible and emotionally resonant way. It also enriches character development and intensifies the audience's engagement with the story. This study demonstrates that figurative language plays a crucial role in shaping the film’s tone, message, and viewer experience.

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