

## Diction in Emily Dickinson's Poems

Yosi M. Passandaran  
Indraprasta PGRI University  
[yosimpass@gmail.com](mailto:yosimpass@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Diction is word choice. In poetry, the diction is commonly used by the poet. This research aims to find a description of the characteristics and uses of diction in poetry-poem by Emily Dickinson. From this description, it will be seen how Emily Dickinson in choosing words to pour her imagination into a poem. Using qualitative methods and librarian technique, the data will be analysed by describing the words included in diction that is based on: (1) the connotation and denotation meaning, (2) the general and specific meaning, (3) the use of words from other languages, and (4) the style of language. As the sample data, use four poems by Emily Dickinson, namely: "A Bird Came Down", "Faith", "Hope Is The Hope Is Thing With Feathers" and "I'm Nobody! Who Are You ". The fourth of these poems will be analyzed based on the four types of diction. From the results of the study found three types of use of diction, i.e. connotation—denotation meaning, specific—general meaning, and the use of the style language. A third using of diction is most widely found in the poem entitled "I'm Nobody! Who Are You? ".

Keywords: poetry, diction, and diction characteristics

### A. Introduction

Language is a tool to communicate and express the human mind to others. By language, a human can express the mind, idea, and everything we think about in literary works. So, language is so wide tool to a human in communication with each others. One of communication tool is expressing in literary works.

A literary work can express all about human problems, humanity, and life. We can draw the suffering, the struggle, love, faith, and hate in it. By literature, a writer expresses them in valued ways into drama, prose, or poem. They are the form of literary work that is used by the writer as an author.

In literature, there are two elements that build literary works: intrinsic and extrinsic. One element is related to others. The intrinsic element function builds a literature work from inside. The power of the literary work can be measured from the theme, setting, characters, and plot. While the extrinsic element function builds a literary work from the outside of 'environment'. The outside can be said as an external environment such as social, culture, religion, and language.

Two important things in literature, i.e. imaginary experience and power are the power of the writer's thinking in the developing world of fiction. Of course, the writer's thinking is strongly influenced by the writer's experience. Through the language of literature is concerned, because of the rhythmic use of diction and the meaning of figurative language, a writer expresses in terms of life as well as real-world environment or the fact the most interesting social attention. With a more sensitive response of the power and soul more clearly. A writer reveals the various events and moments that have caught into literary works.

Poetry is one of literary works form. A poem is a piece of writing that usually has figurative language and that is written in a separate line that often have a repeated rhythm and sometimes rhyme ([www.merriam.webster.com/dictionary](http://www.merriam.webster.com/dictionary)). So, the meaning of the poem itself is generally described as a form of writing using language that is beautiful. This beautiful language may be figurative language.

A poet is careless of putting words in his poems, but are formulated in such a way. So, the ideas presented, and the poetic aspect of poetry still awake. It is called diction. Diction as one element of the poem. It has meaning as word choice made by the poet to describe or reflect his fluctuation feelings. In addition, with the use of proper diction will be able to reflect the space, time, philosophy, message, effects, and tone of a poem. Thus, the role of diction in a poem is very meaningful. It is caused by the words are not merely as a tool that connects or relates the readers with the poet's intuition.

A poem has its own character from one to another. This characteristic can be seen from the word choice or diction. In other words, from the diction used by poets,

poetry into having a characteristic can be distinguished from other poems, both with a poem written by the poet itself as well as other poems. One of the American poets was Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). Emily Dickinson was also one of the female poets whose works ought to be taken into account at that time. The theme of the poem by Emily Dickinson started from a simple theme like nature around, sentimentalism personal, spiritual, until death. With these diverse themes, the poems of Emily Dickinson have power on the use of the words chosen. The power of Emily Dickinson as a female poet outside of suspected persons due to personality, Emily Dickinson was a conservative figure. Therefore, the expression of her mind, feeling, and opinion were described by certain words. The right choice of words collaborate the beautiful words and meanings into certain words.

From the explanation above, the writer focuses on the analysis of diction using in Emily Dickinson's poems by Emily. The word choice or any dominant diction used and an overview of diction in Emily Dickinson's poems. Thus, the characteristics of the poems by Emily Dickinson can be found.

## **B. Literature Review**

As one of literary work, a poem can be the most popular in literature. So many poets become famous because of their works in the poem. According to Waluyo (in Siswanto, 2008:108), *puisi adalah bentuk karya sastra yang mengungkapkan pikiran dan perasaan penyair secara imajinatif dan disusun dengan mengkonsentrasikan struktur fisik dan struktur batinnya*. It means a poem able to be a place for the poets to express their mind and feeling imaginative. They write in source and deep structure, word by word become a beautiful form and meaning, and using figurative language.

Poetry can be known by the specific form. They have a unique form based on the writer or poet write to express their mind and feeling. In poetry, we find the word and meaning can be interpreted as syntactically and semantically. Based on this statement, Anindita (2017:40) said that "Poetry itself is actually derived from *poiesis*

(creating), consisting of two things, namely the body and the spirit. The body in poetry can be interpreted syntactically, while the spirit in poetry can be interpreted semantically.

In literature, especially in poetry, the sense is implied in a word that contains the meaning of each word, in this case, reveal an idea. In other words, the words are a tool to be delivered to notions of others. The word choice or diction are required to convey our purpose rightly because by having knowledge about word choice. Then, it can help a person to disclose exactly what it conveys, either oral or in writing.

Diction is concerned with how to choose words that are suitable to be used to convey an idea and how to form the right words, grouping using exact phrases. Diction is the use of the word in the poem. In the diction of poetry, we will be faced with the word choice in the poem. A poet should be able to choose the right words to convey the intent or meaning of the poem, as revealed by Sayuti (2010:143) that the diction as one element which builds the existence of poetry. It means the selection of words took place by the poet to express ideas and feelings that churned and track on themselves.

Another statement comes from Keraf (2007:24) that he has three definitions of diction. One of the definition: the word choice or diction is the ability to distinguish shades of meaning precisely from the idea of wanting to be conveyed and the ability to find the form that is appropriate to the situation and the value of a sense of belonging to community groups of listeners. The statements mean that diction is an ability. The poets should have this ability to express their words in their poem. The poem is a tool to send a message from the writer (poets). The reader can know not only the message but also feel what the poet send their poem.

The appropriateness of the choice of words recalled a word to engender the right ideas on the imagination of the reader or listener, so the question of the appropriateness of the word will be also problems concerning the meaning of someone's words and vocabulary. The writer is able to rich

vocabularies and free to choose a word that is considered the most appropriate representative of his mind. The precision of the meaning of the word also questions like where the relationship between the form of words in the reference.

Tillotson (2014:47) has a term related to diction, poetic diction. The term means: (1) the sum of words used in poetry, (2) the sum of words used by any single poet, and (3) the sum of favorite words used by a single poet. Hence, the term indicates the specific characteristics of the poets to choose certain word into their poem.

The word choice in poetry relates to meaning, sound harmony, and word sequence. Meaning relates to the word meaning itself. Sound harmony relates to the pattern of rhyme in poetry. Then, word sequence relates to the poet background. The more extensive of the poet's insight or knowledge, it used more words quality in their poem.

Generally, the using of diction can be classified into four parts, they are:

(1) Connotation and denotation meaning,

The connotation meaning here is not the actual meaning. This is the meaning of a negative meaning. While the actual meaning is denotative. A word has a meaning which can be seen the references in the dictionary. For example, the word 'eat' in the sentence "I eat rice", by the word 'eat' in denotative has true meaning, namely to place the food into the mouth. Whereas the word 'eat' in the phrase 'fence eating crop', in the connotation meaning as a parable to the people who tackle their own friend or family. Another example is '*greasy*' is a completely innocent word: *Some things, like car engines, need to be greasy. But greasy contains negative associations for most people, whether they are talking about food or about people.*

(2) General and specific meaning words

General word has a general meaning and specific has individual meaning. General meaning refers to the wide meaning of the word, i.e. 'vehicle'. The word 'vehicle' can be more specific as 'car', 'bus', etc.

(3) The use of other languages

Another language here is the language different from the first language's poet. Here, the poet used the words from another language. The poet is able to explore their imagination to choose certain words to express their feeling, mind, or opinion in a different language. The other language can be a foreign language or local language. The using of another language here, it is a symbolization of the poet identity.

(4) Figurative language.

Figurative language, generally used in a poem or literary works. The purpose of figure language in literary works makes the meaning of the words become smooth and beautiful. The certain words are represented by symbols, i.e. in the sentence: "*his life was an oak tree that had just lost its leaves*", the symbol here is the 'oak'. The 'oak' tree means the circle of life between death and birth. We can see from its leaves. They grow and the fall to the earth. So, we can see this figurative is a metaphor.

From the explanation above, it can be summarized that the diction is about the right words choice in the poem and words style choice from the writer/poet. It can be a difference between a writer/poet to each others. They have their own creativity and style to make their poem difference.

### C. Research Methodology

The research used a qualitative method approach. According to Miles and Huberman, (1985:91), *qualitative research is usually focused on words and actions of people that occur in a specific context*. The data were analyzed by describing the characteristics of the objects of the data. in addition, the researcher used the library

method to explore library sources in physical and online, such as books, journal, and others.

The source data were four poems by Emily Dickinson. They were “*A Bird Came Down The Walk*” (nature), “*Faith Is A Fine Invention*” (spiritual ), “*Hope Is the Thing With Feathers*”, and “*I’m Nobody! Who are You*” (life)? They were chosen based on several criterias and themes, such as nature, life, and spiritual (religion). The poems were taken from “*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R.W. Franklin (1999).

The data covered words, phrase, or sentence from the fourth of Emiliy Dickinson's poem. They were selected by the criteria from theoretical review about diction. The diction based on four classifications: (1) denotation and connotation meaning, (2) general and spesific meaning, (3) the use of other languages, and (4) figurative language.

#### D. Findings

There were kinds of diction used by the poet Emily Dickinson). And the data were found from the forth of poems could be shown:

1. The poem “*I’m Nobody! Who Are You?*”

Table 1  
Connotation and Denotation Meaning

No.	Type	word/phrase/sentence	line
1	Connotation	<i>Advertise</i>	1;4

From the table above, there was found one type of connotation meaning. The word ‘advertise’ meant ‘telling by shouting’. The real meaning or literal meaning of the word was ‘to spread’ (news) or ‘to inform’.

Table 2  
Specific and General Meaning

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	line
1	Specific	<i>Lifelong June</i>	1;5

From the table above, there was one type of specific meaning. The phrase 'lifelong June' meant 'along time in June'. It could be defined from the word 'lifelong'.

Table 3  
Figurative Language

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	line
1	Personification	<i>An admiring Bog</i>	1;6

From the table above, there was one type of figurative language in this poem. It was personification. It was found in the phrase 'an admiring Bog'.

2. A poem "The Hope is Thing With Feathers"

Table  
Figurative Language

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	line
1	Personification	<i>Chillest land</i>	1;6
2	Personification	<i>Strangest sea</i>	3;2
3	Metaphor	<i>Feathers</i>	1;1
4	Metaphor	<i>A crumb</i>	3;4

From the table above, there was found a figurative language. The poem had two phrases and two words. The type of figurative was personification and metaphor.

3. Poem "Faith"

Table 1  
Connotation and Denotation Meaning



No.	Type	Word/phrase/word	Line
1	connotation	<i>See</i>	1;2

From the table above, there was one type of connotation and denotation meaning. The word of this type was “see” and it is connotation type.

Table 2  
Figurative Language

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	line
1	Metaphor	<i>Microscope</i>	

From the table above, there was one type of figurative language. The word of this type was “microscope”.

4. A poem “*A Bird Came Down the Walk*”

Table 1  
Connotation and Denotation Meaning

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	Line
1	Connotation	<i>Rapid eyes</i>	3;1
2	Connotation	<i>Velvet head</i>	3;4

From the table above, there was one type of connotation and denotation meaning. The phrase of this type was ‘rapid eyes’ and ‘velvet head’. The both of phrase were connotation type.

Table 2  
Figurative Language

No.	Type	Word/phrase/sentence	Line
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1	Personification	<i>Frightened beads</i>	2;2
2	Personification	Convenient grass	4;2

From the table above, there was one type of figurative language. The phrase of this type was ‘frightened beads’ and ‘convenient grass’. Both of the phrase were personification.

### E. Discussion

Based on the finding from the data, we found the descriptions and the characteristics of diction in the poem "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" and "The Hope is Thing With Feathers".

#### 1. The poem *"I'm Nobody! Who Are You?"*

The theme of this poem is about the personalities of someone. The ‘someone’ here was the writer/poet herself, Emily Dickinson. The writer felt that she was just an ordinary person. It meant, she was not from high social level. This poem contained strong satire.

The using of diction based on the data could be shown as:

##### a. Connotation and denotation Meaning

The word ‘advertise’ meant ‘telling by shouting’. The real meaning or literal meaning of the word was ‘to spread’ (news) or ‘to inform’. Emily chosen the word ‘advertise’ as negative or satire. She wanted to inform the reader about what did she know.

##### b. General and Specific Meaning

The phrase ‘lifelong June’ meant ‘along time in June’. It could be defined from the word ‘lifelong’. It came from the word ‘long’. The using of this word gave the deepest meaning to the word ‘long’. Emily used the word because she

wanted to give a strong expression about 'time'. We can think about how long we spend time in our life. So, it meant spending a long time in June.

c. Using other languages

This poem was in English. Emily used English in her poem. She didn't borrow the words from other languages, only English.

d. Figurative Language

The literal meaning of the phrase 'an admiring bog' was a wonderful swamp. Emily used the phrase as the admire expression of someone. It was like the mud in the swamp, thick mud.

From the analysis of the poem "*I'm Nobody! Who Are You?*" It could be concluded that the poem has satire. The diction by Emily Dickinson was used to light or to smooth the meaning. In this poem, she wanted to make the reader understand her. She was nobody. She was not a famous or important person. On the other hand, she was a strong woman.

2. A poem "*The Hope is Thing With Feathers*"

The poem told about hope. Emily expressed about a hope that it was not only can be had by everyone but also herself.

a. Connotation and denotation meaning

No data found in this poem.

b. General and Specific meaning

No data found in this poem.

c. Using other languages

No data found in this poem.

d. Figurative language

There were two types of figurative language in this poem. There were personification and metaphor.

1) Personification

The phrase “*chilliest land*” meant ‘a frozen land’ as if the land could be frozen. The idiom of ‘the something that can be frozen’ meant the land as ice desert. It was a place where it covered by ice. The other phrase was ‘strangest sea’. It had a meaning as nobody knew about the sea, what kind of the sea and where was the sea. The other meaning, strangest sea was the stranger place.

## 2) Metaphor

The word “*feather*” in the sentence “*hope is the thing with a feather*” has a meaning which was associated with ‘a hope’ like light things. The ‘light things here was like a ‘feather’. Emily used the idiom of the word ‘feather’ to associate that hope is a common thing. Everybody has a hope. While the other phrase ‘a crumb’ has meaning as ‘a things waste’ or ‘useless things’. The phrase was in the last line. Its purpose was showing the word ‘extremity’ clearly in the previous line. It was an idiom about ‘useless things.

From the explanation above, we concluded that the poem “Hope is The Thing With Feathers” had only one diction. It was a figurative language. Emily wrote the most figurative language in her poem.

## 3. Poem “Faith”

The poem told about a ‘trust’. Emily expressed her opinion about ‘her faith’ in this poem. The dictions in this poem were:

### a. Connotation and denotation meaning

There was only one kind of meaning. It was connotation meaning from the word ‘see’. The word ‘see’ meant more than ‘to see’ (by eye). The word ‘see’ here was ‘to understand’. Referred to the previous word, ‘Gentlemen’, the word ‘see’ was aimed at the person who understands about ‘faith’. Specifically, the similar ‘believe’ with Emily.

- b. General and specific meaning

No data found in this poem.

- c. Using other languages

No data found in this poem.

- d. Figurative language

There was only one kind of figurative language, metaphor. It was in the word '*Microscope*'. The word meant a specific tool and it was only used to the specific needs. The word 'microscope' as an idiom had meaning as something could be important if we need it. It related to the previous word 'faith'. So, the meaning that a belief was the right of everyone. They thought it as an important or unimportant thing.

From the explanation above, the conclusion was Emily used two kinds of diction in this poem. They were connotation meaning and metaphor.

#### 4. A poem "*A Bird Came Down the Walk*".

The poem told about nature. Emily Dickinson expressed her awe to nature in the earth. She used animals object as 'the character' in her poem,

- a. Connotation and denotation meaning

The phrase 'rapid eye' had a literal meaning as 'sharp eye'. While the phrase 'velvet head' had a literal meaning as 'soft head'. As connotation meaning, the phrase 'rapid eye' could be defined as 'spy'. And, the phrase 'velvet head' could be defined as 'straight mind'.

- b. General and specific meaning

No data found in this poem.

- c. Using other languages

No data found in this poem.

- d. Figurative language

There was only one kind of figurative language in this poem. It was personification. The figurative language was found in the phrase '*frightened*'

*beads*' and '*convenient grass*'. The phrase '*frightened beads*' meant that the beads looked frightened. The beads here were birds. The birds looked frightened because they were in a large amount. While the phrase '*convenient grass*' meant the kindness grass. Kindness here was so many grasses grew in the wide land.

From the explanation above, we conclude that Emily Dickinson used connotation meaning and figurative language in her poem. The figurative was used as the description of the animal's activities. The animals were the main characters in the poem. Moreover, the animal activities became Emily's impression and fascination about nature for her inspiration in the poem "*A Bird came Down the Walk*".

From all Emily Dickinson's poems, they contained three kinds of diction. They are connotation and denotation meaning, figurative language, and specific and general meaning. They are two kinds of figure language: personification (5 data) and metaphor (4 data). The using of general and specific meaning (1 data), and connotation and denotation (3 data). the using of other language didn't find in all poems.

From the explanation above, it could be described as:

1. Connotation and denotation meaning

Three of the Emily's poems had this kind of diction. They were found in the word and phrase from the poem "*I'm Nobody! Who Are You?*", "*Faith*", and "*A Bird Came Down the Walk*". The diction was aimed to hide the literal meaning, such as in the word '*advertise*' in the poem "*I'm Nobody! Who Are You?*" The word meant negative connotation. So, the readers didn't think they found negative word showed in Emily's poem.

2. General and specific meaning

It was only one poem that had this kind of diction, "*I'm Nobody! Who Are You?*". The diction was in the word '*lifelong*'. The word was used to make the meaning strong about the range of the time would be longer than usual. The length of time here emphasized the time Emily spent.

3. The use of other languages

All the Emily Dickinson's poems wrote in English. No other language words were used in the fourth of her poems here.

4. Figurative language

All the fourth of Emily's poems used figurative language. It was used to hide the real meaning or the purpose of the writer. The figure language could be praise or allusion to the events or people around the poet/writer. The writers didn't write in real meaning to show their feeling. So did Emily, she didn't express her mind, opinion, and feeling directly. Emily wrote her poem not only to express everything about her but also to develop her poem into a beautiful literature work.

## **F. Conclusion**

From the findings and explanations above, a fourth of the poem by Emily Dickinson can be concluded as:

1. There were three kinds of diction in Emily Dickinson's poems. They were the using of connotation and denotation meaning, general and specific meaning, and figurative language.
2. From all of Emily Dickinson's poems, the using of diction mostly was found in the poem "I'm Nobody! Who Are You? And then it was figurative language. The fewest diction was general and specific meaning.
3. The characteristics of Emily Dickinson's poems were in connotation and figurative language. It meant Emily Dickinson has bright of thinking. She could choose the right and beautiful words to express her mind and feeling in her poems. Like most poets, Emily always uses figurative language in the poems.

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