

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE MEANING IN THE FILM SCRIPT OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND (2010)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates figurative meaning in the film script of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), written by Linda Woolverton. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research identifies and analyzes eight categories of figurative language metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, irony and sarcasm, symbolism, idiom and allusion, and euphemism and understatement drawn from 51 data points extracted from the shooting script. The theoretical framework integrates Geoffrey Leech's seven types of meaning (1974), Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), and I.A. Richards' tenor-vehicle-ground model (1936) for the analysis of comparative tropes. Findings reveal that metaphor is the most dominant figurative device (19.6%), functioning as the primary semantic mechanism through which themes of identity, agency, and political power are constructed. Simile, personification, and symbolism each account for 13.7%, while idiom and allusion demonstrate significant intertextual complexity rooted in Lewis Carroll's source texts. The analysis demonstrates that figurative language in this script operates simultaneously at the level of character psychology, political allegory, and thematic world-building, making it a particularly rich corpus for semantic study.

Keywords: *figurative language, semantic analysis, conceptual metaphor, Alice in Wonderland, Leech's meaning types, film script linguistics*

INTRODUCTION

Figurative language constitutes one of the most semantically complex dimensions of human communication. Unlike literal language, which maps words directly onto referents in the world, figurative language generates meaning through indirect, associative, and connotative pathways that require both linguistic competence and cultural knowledge to decode. In cinematic and dramatic texts, figurative language serves a particularly layered function: it simultaneously constructs character voice, advances plot, establishes thematic architecture, and encodes ideological positions within dialogue that must remain accessible to a broad popular audience.

Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), scripted by Linda Woolverton, offers an exceptionally productive corpus for the study of figurative meaning. Derived from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), the film script both inherits Carroll's tradition of linguistically subversive nonsense a tradition in which figurative language is itself the subject of playful and philosophical interrogation and reframes it within a new generic context of heroic fantasy and feminist bildungsroman. The result is a text in which figurative expressions carry not only their immediate communicative functions but also intertextual resonances, character-specific semantic systems, and overarching allegorical significance.

Despite the film's commercial prominence and its position within a canonical literary tradition, systematic semantic analysis of its script remains relatively underrepresented in the scholarly literature. Studies of figurative language in film scripts have examined texts from action, drama, and fantasy genres (Komalasari, Wihadi, & Suryana, 2025; Wiguna & Suastini, 2024), but *Alice in Wonderland* occupies a unique generic space in which the very instability of meaning, the linguistic chaos of Wonderland/Underland is itself a thematic concern. Analysis of Carroll's original text has established frameworks for approaching its figurative language (Kapičková, n.d.; Sunthareson & Sani, n.d.), and one previous study has examined idiomatic expressions in the *Alice* script (Prastiti, n.d.), but a comprehensive semantic analysis of the 2010 film script using multiple figurative categories and integrated theoretical frameworks has not been conducted.

This study addresses that gap. It employs Geoffrey Leech's (1974) taxonomy of seven types of meaning as its primary analytical framework, supplemented by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory for the analysis of metaphorical expressions and I.A. Richards' (1936) tenor-vehicle-ground model for simile analysis. The research questions guiding the study are:

- What types of figurative language appear in the film script of *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)?
- What semantic meanings including connotative, affective, social, and thematic meanings do these figurative expressions convey?
- Which type of figurative language is most dominant and what does this dominance reveal about the script's semantic architecture?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Semantics and the Study of Meaning

Semantics, broadly defined as the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning, encompasses a wide range of phenomena including word meaning, sentence meaning, speaker meaning, and the multiple layers of meaning that any given utterance may simultaneously carry. Leech (1974) identifies seven distinct types of meaning that coexist within linguistic expressions: (1) conceptual meaning, the logical, cognitive content of an expression; (2) connotative meaning, the associations and attributes an expression accrues beyond its core definition; (3) social meaning, the aspects of meaning that encode social relationships and contexts of use; (4) affective meaning, the expression of emotional states and attitudes; (5) reflected meaning, the semantic effect of one sense of a word on another when multiple senses coexist; (6) collocative meaning, meaning that accrues from a word's habitual co-occurrence with other words; and (7) thematic meaning, the communicative significance of how a message is organized. Figurative language, by definition, operates primarily in the dimensions of connotative, affective, social, and thematic meaning it systematically diverges from conceptual (literal) meaning to generate richer and more complex communicative effects.

2.2 Figurative Language: Definitions and Categories

Figurative language encompasses any use of language in which the literal semantic content of words is deliberately exceeded, displaced, or transformed to produce meaning through

association, analogy, contrast, or exaggeration. The major categories of figurative language examined in this study are defined as follows.

Metaphor, in the classical rhetorical tradition, is the application of a word or phrase belonging to one conceptual domain to a referent in another domain, creating an implicit comparison without a comparative marker. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) extend this definition considerably: in their Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor is not primarily a feature of language but of thought the cognitive mapping of source domain structure onto target domain structure. They identify three primary subtypes: structural metaphors (one concept structured in terms of another), orientational metaphors (concepts organized through spatial relations), and ontological metaphors (abstract entities given the properties of physical objects or substances). This framework is essential for analyzing metaphors in the Alice script, where abstract qualities identity, courage, political authority are routinely conceptualized as physical, spatial, or containable entities.

Simile is an explicit comparison between two entities or domains using comparative markers such as 'like' or 'as.' Richards (1936) provides the most analytically precise framework for simile analysis through his tenor-vehicle-ground model: the tenor is the subject being described; the vehicle is the image or domain to which it is compared; the ground is the shared property or quality that makes the comparison semantically coherent. As Ramadian and Hasan (2022) demonstrate in their analysis of metaphors in *Bridgerton*, the identification of the vehicle is crucial because it determines the connotative register and affective weight of the comparison.

Personification attributes human qualities emotions, intentions, physical characteristics, or cognitive capacities to non-human entities. In texts where non-human characters are already present (as in *Alice*), personification operates at multiple levels simultaneously: literal (the White Rabbit is a character) and figurative (Time is given the human capacity for offense and grudge-bearing).

Hyperbole involves deliberate exaggeration beyond what is literally possible or plausible, typically for purposes of emphasis, humor, or rhetorical intensification. Understatement, its

inverse, expresses something in considerably weaker terms than the reality warrants, often generating irony.

Irony encompasses multiple related phenomena: verbal irony (meaning the opposite of what is literally said), dramatic irony (audience knowledge exceeding character knowledge), and situational irony (incongruity between expected and actual outcomes). Sarcasm is a sharper, often hostile form of verbal irony.

Idiom refers to a conventionalized multi-word expression whose meaning cannot be derived compositionally from its constituent parts. Literary allusion is the implicit or explicit reference to another text, person, event, or cultural phenomenon, relying on the audience's knowledge of the referent to complete the meaning.

Symbolism involves a concrete entity or image systematically associated with abstract meaning through cultural convention, narrative context, or authorial design. Euphemism is the substitution of an indirect, mild, or vague expression for one that might be considered harsh, blunt, or taboo.

2.3 Figurative Language in Film Scripts

Film scripts, as a genre, occupy an intermediate position between literary text and performance text. As Wiguna and Suastini (2024) demonstrate in their analysis of figurative language in *Free Guy*, film scripts exhibit a high density of figurative expressions precisely because dialogue must simultaneously characterize speakers, advance narrative, and engage audiences economically within the constraints of screen time. Komalasari, Wihadi, and Suryana (2025) compare figurative language across two divergent film genres and find that genre significantly shapes the type and function of figurative devices employed: action films favor hyperbole and simile, while character-driven dramas employ metaphor and irony more extensively. The *Alice* script, combining fantasy adventure, political allegory, and coming-of-age narrative, would be expected to exhibit figurative complexity across multiple categories.

2.4 Previous Studies on Alice in Wonderland

Scholarly work on figurative language in Carroll's Alice texts has established several important precedents for the present study. Kapičková (n.d.) analyzes figurative language in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and its Czech translations, finding that Carroll's text deploys figurative language not merely for ornamental effect but as a structural mechanism the instability of figurative meaning mirrors and produces the narrative instability of Wonderland. Sunthareson and Sani (n.d.) demonstrate that Carroll's novel employs figurative language to negotiate the boundary between the children's literature genre and adult philosophical discourse. Prastiti (n.d.) focuses specifically on idiomatic expressions in the Alice script, identifying thirteen instances of conventional English idioms adapted or redeployed for Wonderland's semantic environment. The present study builds on these precedents while extending the analytical scope to a comprehensive cross-categorical semantic analysis and integrating the Conceptual Metaphor framework.

Sujatna et al. (n.d.) provide a useful methodological model in their semantic analysis of onomatopoeia in the Joker movie script, demonstrating the value of close, script-focused semantic analysis for revealing how film language constructs psychological and thematic content. This approach treating the shooting script as a primary literary text informs the methodology of the present study.

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research aim is not to measure frequency as its primary objective but to interpret the semantic functions of figurative expressions within their textual and contextual environments. The descriptive dimension ensures systematic documentation of all identified figurative devices before interpretation. This design aligns with the approaches adopted by Komalasari et al. (2025), Wiguna and Suastini (2024), and Prastiti (n.d.) in their analyses of figurative language in film scripts.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data source is the White Shooting Script of *Alice in Wonderland*, written by Linda Woolverton, dated 9/9/08 with Blue Revised Pages dated 10/28/08. The script was submitted as the primary corpus for analysis. This version represents the closest available text to the final realized film and includes both dialogue and stage directions. Stage directions are included in the analysis because they contain figurative language that constructs the visual and atmospheric world of the film language that, while not spoken aloud, shapes audience comprehension of setting, character, and theme.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through a systematic close reading of the entire script. All utterances dialogue and stage direction were screened for the presence of figurative language using the eight categorical definitions established in the Literature Review. An expression was identified as figurative if it met the criterion of semantic indirection: its meaning in context diverges from its compositional literal meaning in a way that requires interpretive processing involving analogy, association, exaggeration, or inversion. Ambiguous cases were resolved by reference to context and by testing whether a literal interpretation would produce coherent meaning within the narrative. A total of 51 data items were identified and recorded.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each identified expression was classified into one of the eight figurative categories. Second, each expression was analyzed semantically using the relevant theoretical framework: Leech's (1974) meaning types for all categories; Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) metaphor subtypes for metaphorical expressions; Richards' (1936) tenor-vehicle-ground model for similes. Third, the communicative and thematic functions of each expression within its narrative context were interpreted. Frequency counts were conducted to identify dominance patterns across categories.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies 51 instances of figurative language across eight categories. The distribution and semantic functions of each category are presented and discussed below. Frequency data are summarized in Table 9.

4.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is the most dominant figurative device in the script, accounting for 10 instances (19.6%). The analysis distinguishes three subtypes following Lakoff and Johnson (1980): conceptual (structural and orientational), ontological, and container metaphors. Table 1 presents all identified metaphors.

Table 1. Metaphor in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Utterance / Data	Figurative Expression	Type / Subtype	Speaker
1	I'm falling down a dark hole, then I see strange creatures...	"dark hole" — the terrifying unknown mapped onto a physical fall; emotional descent rendered as spatial motion	Conceptual Metaphor (Orientational)	Young Alice
2	The only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it is possible.	"achieve the impossible" — impossibility treated as a conquerable spatial destination; abstract goal as physical object	Conceptual Metaphor (Structural)	Charles Kingsley
3	The entire world is falling to ruin...	"world falling to ruin" — social and political collapse mapped onto structural disintegration and gravitational descent	Conceptual Metaphor (Structural / Ontological)	Mad Hatter
4	You've lost your muchness.	"muchness" personified as a tangible object that can be lost; inner vitality and identity treated as a possessable entity	Ontological Metaphor (Entity)	Mad Hatter
5	In there. Something's missing.	Identity/courage located spatially inside the body; emotional deficiency as a physical absence inside a container	Container Metaphor	Mad Hatter
6	He had a vision that stretched half-way around the world...	"vision stretching" — intellectual foresight given physical dimension; abstract thought mapped onto spatial extension	Conceptual Metaphor (Orientational)	Alice
7	This is my dream! I'll decide how it goes from here.	"dream as possessable territory" — life path treated as a physical route over which the subject asserts ownership and direction	Conceptual Metaphor (Structural)	Alice
8	When the White Queen once again wears the crown...	"wearing a crown" as restored justice and legitimate authority; crown = abstract political order condensed into physical symbol	Ontological Metaphor (Symbol)	Mad Hatter
9	I make the path!	"life/destiny as a path constructed by personal agency" — existential autonomy mapped onto physical road-building	Conceptual Metaphor (Structural)	Alice

10	Nothing ever stopped him.	"obstacles as physical barriers" — adversity to achievement conceptualized as impediment to forward movement	Conceptual Metaphor (Structural)	Alice
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The most semantically complex and thematically central metaphor in the script is the ontological metaphor 'You've lost your muchness.' The invented noun 'muchness' absent from standard English lexicons is given ontological status as a possessable entity that can be lost. This is a pure ontological metaphor: an abstract quality (vitality, courage, authentic selfhood) is conceptualized as a concrete, bounded substance that can be held, measured, and misplaced. Leech's connotative and affective meaning dimensions are both active here: the term connotes Alice's former fearless character while the Hatter's tone carries deep affective weight, grief, disappointment, longing. The phrase becomes the thematic nucleus of the entire narrative, the diagnostic statement against which Alice's journey of recovery must be measured.

The conceptual metaphors of 'I make the path' and 'achieving the impossible' both instantiate the cross-domain mapping LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 44). Goals are destinations; obstacles are barriers; agency is direction-setting. This mapping is so pervasive in the script that it structures the entire narrative arc: Alice's refusal to follow the prescribed path (the Oraculum's prediction) and her insistence on making her own path constitutes the central dramatic tension. The metaphor is not decorative but architecturally constitutive of the plot.

4.2 Simile

Seven similes were identified (13.7%), ranging from comic social comparisons to psychologically charged visual descriptions. Table 2 presents the analysis using Richards' (1936) tenor-vehicle-ground model.

Table 2. Simile in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Utterance / Data	Figurative Expression	Comparative Structure	Speaker
1	To me a corset is like a codfish.	Corset compared to a codfish — both are absurd impositions on the body; compares a social norm to a physical absurdity	Tenor: corset / Vehicle: codfish / Ground: ridiculous imposition	Alice

2	It's a formal execution. I want to look my best.	Implied comparison: execution = formal social occasion; Hatter treats beheading with the same composure as a social event	Tenor: execution / Vehicle: formal occasion / Ground: decorum	Mad Hatter
3	She can make anyone fall in love with her: men, women, even the furniture.	White Queen's charm compared to universal gravitational force; hyperbolic simile extending the tenor beyond rational limits	Tenor: charm / Vehicle: gravity / Ground: universal effect	Red Queen
4	He used to do the best Futterwacken in all of Witzend.	Comparative praise: Hatter's past joy implicitly contrasted with current madness; before/after temporal simile of self	Tenor: past Hatter / Vehicle: present Hatter / Ground: lost joy	Cheshire Cat
5	Her head is so small — a pimple of a head.	White Queen's head compared to a pimple — trivially small, inconsequential; physical comparison to humiliate a rival	Tenor: White Queen's head / Vehicle: pimple / Ground: smallness	Mad Hatter (quoting Red Queen)
6	The shadows of the pillars fall on her like prison bars.	Pillars' shadows explicitly compared to prison bars using 'like'; Alice's entrapment by social expectation rendered visually	Tenor: shadows / Vehicle: prison bars / Ground: confinement	Stage direction (narrator)
7	Bulbous, bloated, like a blimp.	Red Queen's head directly compared to a blimp using 'like'; physical grotesquerie as political satire	Tenor: Red Queen's head / Vehicle: blimp / Ground: inflated size	Alice

The most semantically rich simile in the script is Alice's comparison of a corset to a codfish: 'To me a corset is like a codfish.' The ground of this comparison the shared quality is the absurd physical imposition on the body. The vehicle (codfish) is chosen not for any aesthetic or material resemblance but for its social absurdity: no rational person would wear a codfish, yet society demands the corset with equivalent irrationality. This simile functions as a compressed feminist argument: by making the ground of comparison explicit (both are ridiculous impositions), Alice denaturalizes the corset's social normalcy. Leech's social meaning dimension is strongly activated the simile is a challenge to a specific social register and its authority to define 'proper' dress.

The stage direction simile 'The shadows of the pillars fall on her like prison bars' is notable for its visual precision and its thematic density. The tenor (shadows) is an unstable, ephemeral phenomenon; the vehicle (prison bars) is one of the most culturally loaded symbols of confinement. The ground is visual form (parallel lines of shadow/bars) but the affective

meaning extends far beyond form: Alice is already imprisoned by social expectation before she has spoken a word. The simile activates Leech's affective and connotative meaning dimensions simultaneously.

4.3 Personification

Seven instances of personification were identified (13.7%). The script's pervasive personification of abstract entities reflects its heritage in Carroll's philosophical nonsense tradition, where the boundaries between the human and the non-human are systematically unstable. Table 3 presents the analysis.

Table 3. Personification in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Utterance / Data	Analysis	Human Quality Attributed	Speaker
1	Time became quite offended and stopped altogether.	Time is attributed the human emotional quality of being offended; its cessation is caused by an emotional reaction, not mechanics	Emotional sensitivity, wounded pride	Mad Hatter
2	The Vorpal Sword knows what it wants.	A weapon is ascribed desire and autonomous will; the sword acts as an agent pursuing its own purpose beyond Alice's control	Volition, desire, intentionality	Absolem
3	His clothes even perk up.	Hatter's clothing responds to his emotional state; garments are personified as emotional barometers that react to human mood	Emotional responsiveness, mood	Stage direction
4	The Hat sails over the treetops.	A hat is given autonomous flight without mechanical propulsion; its movement implies purposeful self-direction	Autonomous movement, agency	Stage direction
5	The Tall Flowers have gaunt, haunted human faces.	Flowers are given human physiognomy and psychological states (haunted); nature is infused with human suffering	Human faces, psychological trauma	Stage direction
6	Underland is bizarre, illogical, often dangerous, absurd, and strangely beautiful.	The land itself is described with human psychological qualities — bizarre, illogical, absurd — as if it reasons and chooses its own character	Rationality, irrationality, aesthetic sensibility	Stage direction
7	The Oracle tells of each and every day.	A calendar document is personified as a narrator with the human capacity to tell and communicate stories over time	Speech, narration, memory	White Rabbit

The personification of Time 'Time became quite offended and stopped altogether' is the most philosophically complex instance. Time is attributed the distinctively human capacity for emotional injury and the power to act punitively in response to that injury. This personification serves multiple semantic functions simultaneously. At the literal level, it explains the permanent tea party (time frozen by the Hatter's insult). At the thematic level, it suggests that all systems temporal, political, social are ultimately responsive to human relationship and emotion. Leech's thematic meaning dimension is central here: the organization of this information (Time as the aggrieved party, the Hatter as the offender) structures a moral framework in which neglect and betrayal have cosmological consequences.

The personification of the Vorpal Sword 'the Sword knows what it wants' is equally significant. It transforms a weapon into an agent with autonomous desire, displacing responsibility from Alice (who fears killing) onto the sword itself. This serves a narrative function (relieving Alice's moral anxiety about slaying) but also carries deep connotative meaning: the sword's 'knowledge' implies that some acts of violence are encoded in the order of things, predestined and legitimate rather than chosen. As Sunthareson and Sani (n.d.) observe in their analysis of Carroll's novel, the boundary between tool and agent in the Alice universe is consistently blurred, destabilizing conventional assumptions about human moral agency.

4.4 Hyperbole

Six instances of hyperbole were identified (11.8%). Hyperbole in the script consistently serves dual functions: comic exaggeration and serious thematic statement. Table 4 presents the analysis.

Table 4. Hyperbole in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Utterance / Data	Hyperbolic Analysis	Rhetorical Function	Speaker
1	She can make anyone fall in love with her: men, women, even the furniture.	Extension beyond the human — furniture as love object — renders the exaggeration absurd and comic; signals extreme charm through impossible reach	Comic exaggeration of charm; political satire	Red Queen
2	I've been shrunk, stretched, scratched and stuffed into a teapot.	Accumulation of physical indignities catalogued in rapid sequence; hyperbolic listing	Emotional venting; existential assertion	Alice

		conveys existential complaint and loss of agency		
3	I've been up there for weeks trailing one Alice after the next!	Duration and repetition exaggerated for comic effect; conveys obsessive, prolonged effort with absurd comic exhaustion	Comic complaint; characterization	White Rabbit
4	He had a vision that stretched half-way around the world.	Intellectual scope measured in geographic distance — the globe itself becomes insufficient to contain the vision's reach	Eulogy; elevation of character	Alice
5	I sometimes believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast.	The precise number 'six' before the mundane marker 'breakfast' heightens the absurdity; quantifying the impossible for comic and thematic effect	Characterization; thematic statement on imagination	Charles Kingsley / Alice
6	My, what a regrettably large head you have. I should very much like to hat it.	The Red Queen's abnormal head is addressed as an extraordinary creative challenge; exaggeration turns physical deformity into satirical flattery	Flattery as manipulation; satirical characterization	Mad Hatter

Charles Kingsley's statement 'I sometimes believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast' is the script's most philosophically loaded hyperbole. Its precision (six, not 'many') gives it an air of methodological rigor that renders the impossibility more rather than less credible. The mundane temporal marker 'before breakfast' creates a comic contrast between the extraordinary cognitive act and the ordinariness of the daily routine. Leech's affective meaning is central: the statement conveys Kingsley's character, his joyful, deliberate embrace of impossibility in a single utterance. Its thematic significance extends throughout the film: Alice invokes this exact formulation at the moment of maximum terror (facing the Jabberwocky), transforming inherited hyperbole into personal courage. As Ramadian and Hasan (2022) note regarding hyperbolic metaphors, the transgression of logical limits marks ideologically significant speech acts.

4.5 Irony and Sarcasm

Six instances of irony and sarcasm were identified (11.8%). The script deploys all three major subtypes: verbal irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony. Table 5 presents the analysis.

Table 5. Irony and Sarcasm in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Utterance / Data	Ironic / Sarcastic Analysis	Intended Meaning	Speaker
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1	I couldn't be more interested, but you'll have to excuse me.	Verbal irony: the statement asserts maximum interest while the action (fleeing) contradicts it entirely; polite dismissal masked as enthusiasm	Complete disinterest; escape from social obligation	Alice
2	I doubt they'll notice if we never arrive.	Sarcasm: Alice knows the entire party was planned for her engagement; her feigned indifference mocks social pretension	I am the entire purpose of this event	Alice
3	This venture is impossible.	Dramatic irony: the audience understands Charles Kingsley's vision will succeed (it frames the whole narrative); the colleague's certainty becomes ironic	The venture will define a new trading empire	Colleague
4	You'll be my new favorite.	Dramatic irony: the Red Queen's 'favorites' exist only until they displease her; the court knows this promise is a threat	Temporary favor before inevitable punishment	Red Queen
5	I want to look my best. — It's a formal execution.	Situational irony: the Hatter applies social etiquette (formal dress) to his own beheading; life's last act treated as a social obligation	Dignified acceptance; mockery of death through social performance	Mad Hatter
6	At least we have each other. [Stayne tries to stab Iracebeth]	Situational irony: the Red Queen's statement about companionship is immediately contradicted by Stayne's attempted murder; irony at the structural level	The alliance was always false; power replaces loyalty	Red Queen / Stayne

The most structurally complex instance of irony in the script occurs at the moment of the Red Queen's banishment: 'At least we have each other' spoken by Iracebeth in apparent consolation as she is chained to Stayne is immediately followed by Stayne's attempted murder of the Queen. This is a case of situational irony operating at the level of narrative structure: the statement expresses precisely what is destroyed within seconds of its utterance. The gap between the Queen's belief in the companionship and the reality of Stayne's contempt carries Leech's affective meaning at its most concentrated the irony is devastating rather than comic.

Alice's repeated use of verbal irony and sarcasm 'I couldn't be more interested, but you'll have to excuse me'; 'I doubt they'll notice if we never arrive' establishes her as a character operating at a different semantic register from those around her. Her irony is the linguistic mark of her social nonconformity: she says one thing and means another because the social world itself requires a performance of compliance that she consistently refuses. As Komalasari et al. (2025)

observe, irony in film scripts frequently functions as a characterological signature distinguishing the protagonist from the social environment.

4.6 Symbolism

Seven symbols were identified (13.7%). Symbolism in the script operates at the intersection of Leech's connotative and thematic meaning dimensions, encoding the film's central arguments about identity, power, and transformation in concrete visual and narrative forms. Table 6 presents the analysis.

Table 6. Symbolism in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Symbol	Surface Form	Symbolic / Figurative Meaning	Leech's Meaning Type
1	The Hat	Scorched, burned top hat worn throughout the narrative	Grief, survivor guilt, and enduring identity; the Hatter refuses to discard the hat of his lost clan — it is simultaneously a memorial and a self-definition	Connotative / Affective
2	The Rabbit Hole	A literal underground passage fallen into twice	Threshold between social conformity and psychological liberation; each descent marks a transformation in Alice's identity and agency	Connotative / Thematic
3	The Vorpal Sword	A shining silver sword with runes on the blade	Legitimate authority, predestined purpose, and the weight of collective hope; its runes suggest a pre-inscribed destiny connecting past champions to Alice	Connotative / Social
4	The Crown	Physical crown moving from Red Queen's head to White Queen's	Justice, restored moral order, and the collective will of Underland; its autonomous movement — without human hands — signals that power answers to a higher principle	Connotative / Thematic
5	Red vs. White Queens	Two sisters ruling competing kingdoms	Fear vs. love as governance philosophies; tyranny vs. benevolence; the Red Queen rules by terror, the White Queen by principle — both represent potential paths for society	Connotative / Social
6	The Butterfly / Absolem	Blue caterpillar transforms into butterfly by story's end	Metamorphosis as parallel to Alice's journey of self-discovery; Absolem's transformation echoes Alice's own psychological transformation from uncertain girl to self-determining woman	Connotative / Thematic

7	Eating and Drinking Potions	'Drink Me', 'Eat Me' — substances that alter size	Power, conformity, and social adaptation; growing/shrinking reflects how social context forces individuals to change their 'size' (voice, presence, identity) to navigate power structures	Connotative / Affective
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The Hat is the script's most semantically complex symbol. Its narrative history the Hatter's original Hightopp hat discarded after the Horunvendush Day and replaced by the burned hat of his lost clan encodes grief, survivor guilt, and the construction of identity through loss. Every scene in which the hat appears or is threatened activates this semantic history. When Alice returns the Hatter's original hat to him in the Red Queen's dressing room ('You look yourself again'), the simple physical act carries the weight of all its symbolic associations: the hat is the self, the recovered hat is the recovered self. This is symbolism operating through Leech's thematic meaning, the organization and emphasis of narrative information to produce meaning beyond the literal event.

The autonomous movement of the Crown at the moment of the Red Queen's defeat floating off one head to settle on another without human hands is a particularly sophisticated use of symbolism. The crown's agency implies that political legitimacy is not a human construction but an independent principle that seeks its rightful bearer. This supports the film's ideological argument: Mirana does not seize power; power returns to her because she embodies the values that legitimate authority requires.

4.7 Idiom and Allusion

Seven idioms and allusions were identified (13.7%). The script's allusive dimension is one of its richest, drawing on Carroll's original texts, Victorian English idioms, and world-specific neologisms that function as invented idioms within Underland's linguistic system. Table 7 presents the analysis.

Table 7. Idiom and Allusion in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Expression	Type	Semantic Analysis	Speaker
1	Off with his/her/their head!	Idiomatic allusion	Direct allusion to Carroll's original text; functions as the Red Queen's ideological signature — a reflexive idiom in which	Red Queen

			punishment is the default response to any challenge to authority	
2	Down with the Bloody Big Head (Downal wyth Bluddy Behg Hid)	Coded idiom / resistance slogan	A politically charged counter-idiom created in opposition to the Red Queen; its phonetic disguise reflects how oppressed groups encode dissent in language to survive surveillance	Resistance characters
3	You've gone round the bend.	Fixed idiom	Conventionally means 'gone mad'; here revalued positively by Charles Kingsley — madness is reframed as the condition of visionary thinkers, inverting the idiom's social stigma	Charles Kingsley
4	All the best people are bonkers.	Proverbial inversion	Inverts social norms: conventional sanity is implicitly associated with mediocrity, while madness signals distinction; the utterance creates a counter-social hierarchy	Charles Kingsley / Alice
5	'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves...	Literary allusion (Carroll's Jabberwocky poem)	Intertextual allusion to Carroll's nonsense verse; in the film, it functions as a narrative incantation — the Hatter recites the poem as if summoning a shared memory, bridging Carroll's source text and the film's world	Mad Hatter
6	Curiouser and curiouser.	Allusion / neologism (Carroll)	A direct allusion to Carroll's original; the grammatically impossible comparative intensifier ('curiouser') signals entry into a world where linguistic rules break down alongside physical ones	Alice
7	Fairfarren, Alice.	Underland idiom / farewell	A world-specific farewell whose invented etymology suggests 'fare far and well'; emotionally charged because it implies both blessing and permanent departure — heightened by the Hatter's knowledge that Alice will not remember him	Mad Hatter / Absolem

The resistance slogan 'Downal wyth Bluddy Behg Hid' (Down with the Bloody Big Head) is the script's most innovative idiomatic construction. Woolverton invents both the semantic content and the phonetically distorted orthography of an Underland resistance idiom. Its distorted spelling, mimicking a dialectal or deliberately coded pronunciation reflects the linguistic reality of political dissent: oppressed communities often encode their resistance in forms that are legible to insiders but opaque to authorities. Prastiti (n.d.) notes that idiomatic expressions in the Alice script frequently serve to demarcate social membership, and this is the

clearest instance of that function. The slogan creates and maintains the Underland Underground Resistance as a community of meaning.

The Hatter's recitation of Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' poem serves as the script's most complex allusion. Intertextually, it bridges Carroll's 1871 source text with Woolverton's 2008 script, asserting narrative continuity. Semantically, the Hatter's delivery fragmentary, incantatory, shifting mid-recitation from the poem to direct address ('It's all about you, you know') transforms literary allusion into a personal summons. The poem stops being a poem and becomes a prophecy delivered specifically to Alice. As Kapičková (n.d.) demonstrates, Carroll's nonsense verse functions in the original as a semantic experiment in sound and invented meaning; in this script, it is re-semanticized as prophetic speech.

4.8 Euphemism and Understatement

Five instances of euphemism and understatement were identified (9.8%). Though the least frequent category, these expressions carry significant semantic weight because they operate at the intersection of Leech's affective and social meaning dimensions — managing emotional and social reality through linguistic attenuation. Table 8 presents the analysis.

Table 8. Euphemism and Understatement in the Film Script of Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Expression	Type	Semantic Analysis	Speaker
1	I've come to the end of this life. / Transform.	Euphemism for death	Absolem replaces 'dying' with transformation; death is linguistically reframed as metamorphosis, shifting its connotation from loss to potential. The substitution carries Leech's affective meaning — managing the emotional weight of mortality	Absolem
2	I may have underestimated her.	Understatement	Massive failure (losing Alice, the Bandersnatch, and the Vorpal Sword simultaneously) compressed into mild self-critique; the gap between the scale of failure and the mildness of admission creates bitter irony	Knave of Hearts
3	I'm fine. Really, I'm fine.	Understatement (repeated)	The Hatter's repeated insistence on being 'fine' while clearly dissociating from trauma is a systematic understatement; its repetition	Mad Hatter

			becomes a coping mechanism, signaling the inverse of its literal meaning	
4	There's that trouble with your digestion.	Euphemism / comic deflection	Alice uses Hamish's digestive problem as a socially acceptable deflection from a deeper rejection; the real reason (incompatibility, lack of love) is displaced onto a physical ailment	Alice
5	I had to do it. He would have left me.	Euphemistic justification	The Red Queen obliquely refers to murdering the King with 'I had to do it'; the passive construction and conditional framing linguistically minimize an act of extreme violence as a relational necessity	Red Queen

Absolem's refusal to say 'I am dying' and his substitution of 'I've come to the end of this life / Transform' is the script's most semantically complex euphemism. 'Transform' is not merely a softer synonym for 'death' it reframes death within a biological and philosophical model of metamorphosis. The word choice carries the full weight of his caterpillar-to-butterfly symbolic trajectory: in choosing 'transform,' Absolem activates the symbolic meaning of his own character arc. Leech's connotative meaning dimension (transform connotes growth, potential, new form) entirely displaces the affective weight of mortality. This is euphemism functioning not to deny but to recontextualize.

The Hatter's repeated 'I'm fine. Really, I'm fine' constitutes a sustained understatement that accumulates ironic force through repetition. The phrase is semantically hollow it asserts normalcy in a character defined by trauma, dissociation, and madness. Each repetition intensifies rather than resolves the gap between statement and reality. Leech's affective meaning is inverted: the phrase's surface calm generates emotional anxiety in the reader/viewer rather than reassurance.

4.9 Frequency Summary and Dominance Analysis

Table 9 presents the frequency distribution of all eight figurative language categories identified in the script.

Table 9. Frequency Distribution of Figurative Language in Alice in Wonderland (2010)

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Dominant
1	Metaphor (Conceptual, Ontological, Container)	10	19.6%	Yes
2	Simile	7	13.7%	
3	Personification	7	13.7%	
4	Hyperbole	6	11.8%	
5	Irony and Sarcasm	6	11.8%	
6	Symbolism	7	13.7%	
7	Idiom and Allusion	7	13.7%	
8	Euphemism and Understatement	5	9.8%	
	TOTAL	51	100%	

Metaphor is the dominant figurative device (19.6%). This finding aligns with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) foundational claim that metaphor is not simply a linguistic ornament but the primary conceptual mechanism through which humans understand abstract experience. In a script fundamentally concerned with abstract themes identity, courage, political legitimacy, the nature of reality conceptual metaphor is the appropriate dominant mode. The equal distribution of simile, personification, symbolism, and idiom/allusion (each at 13.7%) reflects the script's generic complexity: a fantasy film requires visual, performative, and intertextual figurative modes in addition to the conceptual-metaphorical.

The relatively lower frequency of euphemism and understatement (9.8%) reflects the script's tonal register: while these devices are present and semantically significant, the narrative predominantly favors amplification (through hyperbole, metaphor, and symbolism) over attenuation. The exceptions Absolem's euphemism for death, the Hatter's understatement of trauma are concentrated in the script's most emotionally complex moments, suggesting that attenuation is reserved for the extremes of psychological experience.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the film script of *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) is semantically complex, deploying eight categories of figurative language across 51 identified instances to

construct character, advance narrative, encode political allegory, and build thematic architecture. Metaphor is the most dominant category (19.6%), primarily operating as conceptual metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) framework, mapping abstract qualities of identity, agency, and power onto spatial, physical, and ontological domains. Simile, personification, and symbolism each account for 13.7% of identified instances, reflecting the script's simultaneous engagement with comparative, animate, and emblematic modes of meaning-making.

The analysis reveals three overarching semantic functions served by figurative language in this script. First, figurative language constructs and communicates character interiority: the Hatter's repeated understatement ('I'm fine'), his metaphorical diagnosis of Alice's 'lost muchness,' and the personification of his clothing as an emotional barometer all externalize psychological states that cannot be represented through action alone. Second, figurative language encodes the script's political argument: the symbolism of the crown, the irony embedded in the Red Queen's management of loyalty, and the resistance slogan's coded idiom all construct a critique of tyranny through indirection rather than direct statement. Third, figurative language maintains the script's intertextual contract with Carroll's source texts: the allusive deployment of Carroll's verse, the reuse of Carroll's idioms ('Curiouser and curiouser,' 'Off with his head!'), and the philosophical reframing of Carroll's nonsense tradition all locate Woolverton's script within a specific literary history.

These findings carry implications for the teaching and study of English for Specific Purposes in literary and film contexts. The script provides a rich pedagogical resource for instruction in figurative language interpretation, intertextual reading, and the analysis of how semantic indirection serves rhetorical and ideological functions in popular media texts. Future research might extend this analysis through a comparative study of the 2010 script and Carroll's source texts, or through a reception study examining how audiences from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interpret the script's figurative meanings.

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