

## figure, n.

**Pronunciation:** /'fɪgə(r)/ /-jʊə(r)/

**Forms:** ME **vig(o)ur**, (ME **wyгур**), ME **fig(o)ur**, (ME **feigure**), ME–15 **fygure**, ME– **figure**.

**Etymology:** < French *figure* (= Provençal, Spanish, Italian *figura* ), < Latin *figūra* , < \**fig-* short stem of *figĕre* : see [feign v.](#)

The Latin word was the ordinary rendering of Greek *σχῆμα* (see [scheme n.](#)<sup>1</sup>) in its many technical uses; several of the senses below are traceable, wholly or in part, to Greek philosophy.

**(Note: additional meanings of “figure” from OED are omitted here)**

### V. In various uses, representing the technical applications of Greek *σχῆμα*.

( *σχῆμα*. = “*schema*” – *Ed.*)

21. *Rhetoric.*

- a. Any of the various ‘forms’ of expression, deviating from the normal arrangement or use of words, which are adopted in order to give beauty, variety, or force to a composition; e.g. Aposiopesis, Hyperbole, Metaphor, etc. Also, figure of speech.

c1386 Chaucer [Clerk's Prol.](#) 16 Your termes, your coloures, and your figures, Kepe hem in store, til [etc.].

1589 G. Puttenham *Arte Eng. Poesie* iii. vii. 128 Figures be the instruments of ornament in euery language.

1596 J. Harington *New Disc. Aiax* Prol. sig. B4, And minding to speake it shorter, by the figure of abbreviation.

1610 *Bible (Douay)* II. Psalms cxiii. Comm., By the figure Apostrophe he speaketh to the sea, river, and hilles.

c1633 T. Hobbes *Art of Rhetoric* (1840) 519 A figure is garnishing of speech in words, or in a sentence.

1665 R. Boyle *Occas. Refl.* Introd. Pref. sig. a5<sup>v</sup>, That noble Figure of Rhetoriok [*sic*] call'd Hyperbole.

1766 Ld. Chesterfield *Let.* 14 Jan. (1932) (modernized text) VI. 2705 The *egotism* is the usual and favourite figure of most people's rhetoric.

1795 L. Murray *Eng. Gram.* App. 210 Figures of Speech imply some departure from simplicity of expression.

1878 R. B. Smith *Carthage* 161 The proverb 'as many slaves, so many enemies' was, in their case, no figure of rhetoric but the stern and simple truth.

**b. In a more restricted sense (with mixture of senses [9](#), [12](#)): A metaphor or metaphorical mode of expression; an image, similitude.**

►1435 R. Misyn tr. R. Rolle *Fire of Love* 3 De flaume, whilk vndyr fygure I cald fyer.

1526 W. Bonde *Pylgrimage of Perfection* Pref. sig. Ai, Declared it by the similitude and figure of the passage of the children of Israel from Egipt.

1611 *Bible (King James)* 1 Cor. iv. 6 These things..I haue in a figure transferred to my selfe.

1727 Pope et al. *Peri Bathous* 17 in Swift et al. *Misc.: Last Vol.* That..Destroyer of fine Figures, which is known by the Name of Common Sense.

1782 J. Priestley *Hist. Corruptions Christianity* I. ii. 156 [These] expressions have much the air of figure and allusion.

1855 G. Brimley *Ess.* (1858) i. 44 Simile and figure may be regarded as a natural short-hand.

1871 B. Jowett in tr. Plato *Dialogues* II. 86 The old Pythagorean ethical symbols still exist as figures of speech among ourselves.

22.

**a. Grammar.** Any of the permitted deviations from the normal forms of words (e.g. Aphæresis, Syncope, Elision), or from the ordinary rules of construction (e.g. Ellipsis). †Formerly also *figure of speech*.

1669 Milton [Accedence](#) 40 Words are somtimes encreast or diminisht by a Letter or Syllable..which are call'd Figures of Speech.

1724 N. Bailey [Universal Etymol. Eng. Dict.](#) (ed. 2)