



THE PERCEPTION OF HYPERBOLE IN YORÙBÁ ORAL LITERATURE: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: *Hyperbole is a figurative language and literary technique in which a speaker or an author uses exaggeration or emphasizes an idea to create strong emotional impressions in Yorùbá oral literature. Hyperbole is a language that consists of linguistic resources employed by literary artists and one of the most important stylistic features often employed by the Yorùbá oral poets, during performance. The Yorùbá poets most of the time take into consideration, the Yorùbá grammatical rules governing the speech, nouns and usage among the Yorùbá people. The main focus of this paper is to analyse hyperbole on how the Yorùbá poets unfold their emotions about the happenings or events in the society in such a way that they will arouse and sustain the interest of the audience. The paper also discusses how conversations and hyperbolic utterances convey messages to the audience with a view to having the easiest understanding of the communication motives. The paper shows that social-cultural relationship between the poet and the audience renders the hyperbolic utterances meaningful and it also contributes to knowledge about the effective use of hyperbole in the Yorùbá society.*



INTRODUCTION

Hyperbole is one of the literary devices and effective ways to get points across to the people by using unrealistic exaggerations in all kinds of Yorùbá literature either oral or written to illustrate vividly on how the language will be a continuous literary effect.

The poets put into consideration the type of audience to which their poetry is directed and this determines their choice of language. It is observed that the effect the Yorùbá genre has on the audience is not achieved just by simple language through which the message is delivered. For instance, a poem can deal with any subject imaginable to attract the interest of the audience. It must have literary qualities mostly recognized in the language of the poet. The language of Yorùbá poem demonstrates an interesting combination of Yorùbá literary usage.

According to Reaske (1966:34), hyperbole is a figure of speech which employs exaggeration. Leech (1983) sees hyperbole as a feature of everyday conversations that people use to exaggerate and evaluate. Gibbs (2000:12) states that hyperbole is an understatement, and jocularity and rhetorical questions as forms of verbal irony. Francis (1992):244) states that figurative languages express ideas, opinions, or the author's thinking which consists of syntax, words and clauses to pass certain conditions and situations. Abrams (1971) defines figurative language as a standard significance or sequence of words in order to achieve special meaning. Olatunji (1984:55) states that hyperbole is an exaggerated description, the attribution, to people or things of values or qualities far beyond the state of things

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HYPERBOLE IN YORÙBÁ ORAL LITERATURE

Example 1:

Kò sí ọmọge bíi ìbíyẹ

Hàdógún ni mo sínà sínú irunmọre

Ẹbọ àti ẹrù ni wọn se kí ń tólè jáde

(There is no beautiful lady like ìbíyẹ

I miss road in her pubic hair for 17 days

Ritual and sacrifice were offered before I could come out)

The foregoing hyperbolic language is used to describe a beautiful lady in an exaggerated way to convince the people in the community that the beauty of the lady is no equal. For example, it is not possible for a human to miss a road for 17 days in the pubic hair of a female. One will be surprised that the pubic hair of a lady human being can be so wide that a co-human being can hide there or stay there for days. In essence, it is common in Yorùbá oral poetry to describe an attribute of a beautiful girl in an exaggerated way so that any man who wishes to approach her as a future partner will think twice before doing so. That is, the chanter wants the public to believe that the high quality of the girl is of no equal.



EXAMPLE 2:

Obìnrin kùrùbútú wú ọkọ rẹ lẹgàn

Ó tẹrí bẹtẹ gbegbá ịsu.

(A short woman attracts her husband in the farm

She bends her head to carry two hundred yams).

The above excerpt describes and exaggerates a short woman who is a powerful carrier of load to the admiration of her husband in the farm. It is doubtful that a woman can carry two hundred tubers of yam without any sign of hardship. All that they chanted is that they want the society to believe is that a short human being could be useful for farm works. Also, he is indirectly advising any good farmer to marry such a woman to boost his farm work. In essence, a short woman is usually a good farm worker.

EXAMPLE 3:

Èmi ò léyín lẹnu,

Şeni mo n mí ọgòrò síkùn,

Şeni mo tiraka tíí kí n tó lè mi garawa

(I have no teeth in my mouth,

I tried to drink palm wine,

I tried hard before I could drink a gallon (litters) of palm wine)

In the above excerpt, the chanter uses hyperbolic language to impress to his audience that he is a good palm wine drinker. The chanter wants his audience to believe that he could have drunk more palm wine if he had teeth. Does chanter need the teeth to drink palm wine? The chanter wants to prove to his audience that he has the ability to drink palm wine to any level. In essence, the chanter's humour is to impress to his audience that he is a good entertainer.

EXAMPLE 4:

Ó pé tí mo ti jéyàn mọ,

Èmi kò mọ òkèlè bíbù,

Şe ni òkèlè mi dà ròdò bí ẹsọ àgbọn.

(I have not eaten pounded yam for a long time,

I don't know how to make sizeable mole,

This makes the size of my mole to be like coconut-fruit).

In the foregoing example, the chanter exaggerates his love for pounded yam. That is, the chanter wants his audience to see him as a good eater of pounded yam. Also in a humorous



way, the chanter describes the size of mole of pounded yam as small as coconut fruit. One could ask the question concerning how it could be possible for the chanter to swallow the coconut-fruit size of pounded yam? Besides, he wants the audience to believe that his size of mole of pounded yam could have been bigger than that of coconut fruit if he had been eating pounded yam frequently. In essence, this chanter's impression of his love for pounded yam is highly exaggerated.

EXAMPLE 5:

Ègún gún mi lésè,

Ó ti àtàrí mi jade,

Ọpélopé ara tí mo yá.

(A nail pinches me in the bare foot,

And gets out on my head,

It is because I reacted in a haste).

The above example shows that the chanter wants to entice his audience that he has a good control of language use. The chanter describes his problem in an exaggerated way, so that his audience cannot only sympathize but also see him as a clever man naturally. It is not possible for a nail like object to pinch one in the leg and come out on the head without doing any harm to the body concern. In essence, the chanter wants his audience to see him as a clever and perfect man with the way he attends to sudden and dangerous matters.

EXAMPLE 6:

Ayé gbó, ọrun mò,

Lójó tí bàbá mi ẹ iwúyè

(The world hears, the heaven knows,

On the day of my father's installation ceremony).

In the foregoing example, the chanter exaggerated his father's installation ceremony by saying, the whole world was aware and the heaven was informed. It is highly impossible for anybody to organize such a huge ceremony. All that the chanter wishes to tell his audience is that his father's ceremony was very elaborate. In essence, the chanter wishes to tell his audience that his father's ceremony was lavishly celebrated in such a way that so many people were in attendance.

EXAMPLE 7:

Ó file ọ̀n ọ̀tí,

Ó fò̀nà rokà,

Ó fi gbogbo agbada dínran.



(He filled the whole house with drinks,

He filled his passage with food,

He used all cooking pots to fry meat).

In the above foregoing, the chanter exaggerated the preparation for certain ceremony. All that the chanter wants to tell his audience is that preparedness for such ceremony was great. This is because it is doubtful if one fills a whole house with drinks, fills the whole passage with food and use all cooking pots in the house to fry meat. In essence the chanter wants to impress his audience that the man's wealth fills his household and spent a lot of money for the ceremony.

EXAMPLE 8:

Àì dǎmí lóbinrin dùnmí púpò,

ᚼe nì n̄ bá síjú olórò sókè

Tí n̄ bá sọ pé kí ọ̀dọ̀kùnrin ma da n̄nkan sí

Látàáró kùtù tí wọn bá n̄ bá mí sùn

N kò ní mira

(It pains me that I am not a lady,

I would have open my virginal,

And inform young boys to pour in their sperm,

As they are engaging in sexual act with me from the morning

I would not feel like doing anything).

In the above example, the chanter wishes himself to be born as a lady so that he could have been so sexually generous that every young man will be forced to engage her in sexual act without any hinderance. One could see that there is a serious exaggeration in what the chanter wants to insert into the mind of his audience. This is because one cannot believe that a lady can be so sexually powerful to withstand a sexual rigour for a full day without any adverse effect on the person concerned. In essence, the chanter wishes to impress to his audience that he would have been a sex-machine if he had been a lady.

EXAMPLE 9

Ọmọ asíyín ẹnu kí ẹgbèrún ènìyàn rína,

Ọmọ asíyín kí ilé mọ roboto

(The offspring of he who opens his teeth for thousands of people to see

The offspring of he who opens his teeth to provide bright light)



In the above excerpt, the chanter exaggerated the whitish colour of his teeth to his large audience. The distribution of such teeth is not only exaggerated but alarming. This is because it is difficult to find a person who can open his teeth for thousands of people to see and at the same time using the same whitish teeth to provide very bright light all over the places. In essence the impression that the chanter wants to create before his audience is that, God give him a stainless white set of teeth. Also the chanter wants to create an impression before his audience that he has a good control of Yorùbá language like other poets in the society.

EXAMPLE 10:

Ọkùnrin Àkùré ń toko bò,

Ó fi agada perin,

Obìnrin Àkùré ń toko bò,

Ó fi osimo pa èkùn.

(An Akure men is coming from the farm,

He used cutlass to kill elephant,

An Akure woman is coming from the farm,

She used knife to kill buffalo.

It is clearly shown in the above excerpt that the poet/chanter exaggerates the natural power and boldness given to the people of Akure by almighty God. In Yorùbá society, people know that elephant and buffalo are wide animals. Therefore, people do not usually come in contact with any of them. It is unbelievable that a man or a woman can be so bold to kill an elephant or buffalo with either a cutlass or a knife respectively. Naturally the information about the appearance of either of the above wide animals is capable to cause, not only confusion but an embarrassment to a village or a town. But here the poet/chanter tells his audience that the people of Akure i.e. man or woman can be bold, powerful and courageous to face and kill elephant or buffalo at will. In essence, the chanter wants to impress his audience that both man and woman of Akure are warriors and powerful people.

EXAMPLE 11:

Òjọ déyìn kùlé àná rẹ̀,

O fi okó la òná pàrà méjì,

O ní bí ò bá ayá,

Yòò bá àna òun níbi góngó imú.

(Ojọ arrives at the backyard of his in-law's house,

He uses his penis to pierce the way into two,

He says that if he misses his wife at target,



He will not fail his mother-in-law at its tail neck of his nose)

The poet/chanter exaggerates the sexual behaviour of Òjó and his unbelievable manner in the above example. Also, the poet informs his audience that Òjó uses his penis like iron rod to pierce a concrete way in order to have fun with either his wife or his mother-in-law. As a human being, one will find it difficult that Òjó as a person can behave irrationally because of an ordinary sexual urge. In essence, the poet wants to impress his audience that Òjó can be irrational to seduce anybody at any point in time, if it becomes sexual matter. In other words, the poet wants his audience to label Òjó as a social adulterer in the society.

EXAMPLE 12:

Ọmọ ìkòyí ẹ̀sọ

Ọmọ wa dómi nílẹ̀, mi ò wá ẹní

Ohun mo wáwá jorí ẹní lọ

Ọmọ a dọkọ lójú àgbàrá

Kí ìyanrìn má dà sí

(The offspring of Ìkòyí

The offspring of sexual act without mat

What I want goes beyond the mat

The offspring, he who engages in sexual intercourse in emission passage

That the sand will not obstruct it).

In the foregoing exalt, the chanter exaggerated the Ìkòyí woman as an uncontrollable irrational lover of sexual affairs. Also the poet wants his audience to believe that Ìkòyí women are not decent when it comes to love making because they can engage in sexual act anywhere, anyhow at any point in time. In essence, the poet says that, the Ìkòyí women are also irrational sexual equal in the society. It is doubtful if one can say of any woman of this animalistic sexual behavior in the society. Therefore, the poet wants to impress his audience that Ìkòyí women are naturally adulterous.

EXAMPLE 13:

Ìkòyí ẹ̀sọ, ọmọ èrù ọ̀fà,

Ọmọ Ogun nílẹ̀ ogun lóko,

Ọmọ sọfun yòyò pọ igba ọ̀fà sílẹ̀.

(The offspring of Ìkòyí ẹ̀sọ,

the offspring of every word of arrow,

The offspring of war at home, war in the farm,



The offspring of he who vomits 200 arrows).

In the above exalt, the chanter portrays the offspring of Ìkòyí, as war-like people in an exaggerated way so that people can believe that the Ìkòyís have no other work or business than to wage war always and anywhere. It is not easy to believe that some people can always engage themselves in war all the time without giving peace a chance to rein. Even, the poet portrays the Ikoyis as being so powerful that they are capable of vomiting 200 arrows at will. Also, one could be surprised about how someone could stomach 200 arrows. In essence, the poet wants to impress his audience that the he has the control of language use. He also exaggerated that the Ìkòyí people, have no equal in the society.

EXAMPLE 14:

Mo lè şeré kádún

Mo lè gbàlámù kósù,

Mo le fapá olósè sebè,

Kò kádún ní kòkò mi

(I can play music for a year

I can chant Alámò for a month

I can use the hand of olósè rad to prepare soup

And preserve for a year in my cooking pot)

The foregoing poet exaggerated, his ability to excel in doing certain things better than others in the society. For example, one will find it difficult to believe that a poet can engage himself in musical display for a whole year and also chant Alámò for a whole year. Besides, the poet tells his audience that he is capable of preparing soup, with the hand of a small rat (*olósè*), and preserve it for a whole year. This could also be doubtful, the poet wants to impress his audience, not only is he a tireless artist but he is a good economic man.

EXAMPLE 15:

Ọmọ arúbọ rúbọ

Kí èyè rẹ kanifin àná

Arúfin ẹbọ agbe

Ùre a dé ọdọ òrìşà

(The offspring of he who uses child for sacrifice

His mother comes to say the sacrifice will be acceptable

The prayer will reach the dignity)



In Yorùbá society, the poet uses the above oríkì (praise poetry) to show the powerful and unchallengeable attribute of the Yorùbá kings. The poet exaggerates the unequal powers of Yorùbá kings which nobody cannot query. For instance, one may find it difficult to believe that a king can freely offer a human child for sacrifice and the woman will come the following day to say thanks to the king and also praying that the sacrifice will be acceptable to the divinities. In essence the poet wants to tell the audience that the king can do anything good or bad in the society without any challenge from anybody i.e. culturally any Yorùbá king in those days is capable of behaving anyhow, anytime without fear from anybody.

EXAMPLE 16:

Ọmọ akó iṣu sun síná

Kí èrù ba ebi

(The offspring of he who roasts many yams in fire

To create fear for hunger)

The above exalt signifies that the poet wishes to exaggerate the generosity of a good farmer with large farm, who always prepares food to feed many people i.e. the farmer is portrayed as he who has a lot of yam to feed as many people as possible. Also, the poet portrays the farmer as so generous; whoever comes across him his sure of sufficient food.

EXAMPLE 17:

Ọmọ orílẹ̀ tí àkóbì ogún ebè,

Tí a wa igba iṣu

(The offspring of he who cultivates 20 hips

Then harvests 200 tubers of yams)

In the above exalt, the vicinity of land owns by certain family is exaggerated. One will wonder how a family can cultivate just 20 heaps and plant 20 yam-sets and record a heavy harvest such as 200 tubers of yam from the small person. In essence, the poet wants to impress the audience that the family concerned are not only that hard-working farmers but are also blessed with vital lands for the profession.

EXAMPLE 18:

Tí mo bá rí ẹ̀ lẹ̀yìn

Mo le gba eégún lójú

Tí mo bá rí ẹ̀ lẹ̀yìn

Mo le ta òrìṣà òkè láyà

(If you give me your support



I can disgrace masquerade

If you support me

I can mess up the divinity)

In the foregoing exalt, the poet assures his audience that if he is sure of their seek-able support he can go at length; he can hide to disgrace anybody in the society. Here, the power of the audience is highly exaggerated. This is because it is a taboo in Yorùbá society for anybody not only to mess up any masquerade but for one to go to the extent of engaging the divinities, the un-seen spirit, in physical combat. In essence, the poet wants to impress his audience that, he can engage in any business without fear since their support is certain.

EXAMPLE 19:

Ọmọ a fabéré gún yàn

Kí ìdógbèrège maa mọ

(The offspring, he who pounds pounded yam with needle

So that the neighbours may not know)

The unbelievable attitude of a miser is highly exaggerated in the above exalt by the poet i.e. the poet wants to tell his audience that a miser can be so terrible the way he prepares his food in his home secretly so that the close neighbors may not come and share out of his prepared food. It is doubtful if one can find such a person pounding yam with a needle in the society. All that the poet wants to tell his audience is that there are some people in the society who are so stingy that they are not willing to share part to their belongings with anyone, even their closest relations.

EXAMPLE 20:

Àsajé ilé ìlórò

Ó fi igbá oní bọ̀nifọ̀n

(Asaje of ìlórò community

She offered two hundred human beings for sacrifice to Obalufon dieties)

In the foregoing example, the poet exaggerated the power and the long life of a wonderful woman in ìlórò community in the way that one can be doubtful of the extent of such a great and fearful woman. Usually, In Yorùbá society no human is allowed to be the chief priest of a fearful divinity; not even to talk of allowing such a wicked woman to offer as many human beings for sacrifice without being challenged by any authority i.e. to say, Àsájé of ìlórò community was an un-challengeable character in her community. Also the research reviews that the annual celebration of Obalàfọ̀n divinity comes up once in a year and the only sacrificial material was a human being. The poet wants to create the impression before his audience that the human being lived in the community for about 300 hundred years. The research also confirmed that offering of human being as sacrifice stopped by the foreign missionaries many



years ago. That is to say, one can doubt the terrible story attributed to such a wicked woman. In essence, the poet wants to establish that it is possible to find such a woman who was as brave, wicked and powerful to raise to such a high traditional position in the society.

EXAMPLE 21:

Èmi lomo a gbó sésé wolé Ifá

Omọ atèkùnlé mọ iye odù tó hù

Omọ a dá'fá béni wejù

(Am the offspring of he who hears sound and enters into a house

The offspring of he who knows what Ifá says from backyard

The offspring of old, he who divines Ifá, like using magic)

The foregoing exalt, depict the person who is very fast in Ifá divinity system. The divinal describes himself as if he can predict what the Ifá says without being there. It can be seen from the above that the diviner exaggerated his knowledge about Ifá divinatory system. It is doubtful if a diviner is capable of foretelling what Ifá says without being in attendance. All that the diviner want to tell his audience is that he excels in anything pertaining to Ifá divinity system.

EXMPLE 22: Omọ síjú eran, fi agbọn adiyẹ toṛẹ

(The offspring, who he is so generous that give out a whole fowl)

The behavior of the person concern in the above example as a great miser is highly exaggerated. It is not possible for a person to call himself a generous person, when he can only give out the lower jar of a fowl. In essence any miser should be able to give out more than that. Also any miser of this categories can hardly be found in Yorùbá society. This can only be seen as in representation of any good character in any community.

EXAMPLE 23:

O ṣeni to mọ òpè dídá

Bí aláwoko ọ̀nà ilawè

O gboso síle o rí ìhòhò dape

Torí kí ìdòtín ma aba gbọn si

(There is no palm wine tapper like

Alawoko ọ̀lawe

Who removes his dresses and taps wine nakedly

Because he wants his wine to be clean).



It is established in the above example that alawoko of Ìlawe was a great palm-wine taper of no equal in the community. The man's system of palm-wine taping was exaggerated to the extent that he often removes all his dresses because of sanitation. Hardly can such a palm wine tapper can be found in the society. The chanter or the poet wants to tell his audience that alawoko is an excellent and hardworking palm-wine tapper who has decency to his system.

EXAMPLE 24:

Ibi tó bá wù mí ma gbé ohùn mi gbà

Mo le ké bí égún

Mo lè fohùn bí èniyàn

Mo le dún bí òrò

Mo de ki eyẹ kẹyẹ ma ké mó

Eyẹ ayé fé gbòde

Loni ẹ ó ri mi wò bí iran

(I can tune my voice partner, the way I like

I can shout like masquerade

I can speak like human being

I can murmur like òrò spirit

Am around no bird should make any sound

The witches bird can perform

Today you will see my wonderful performance)

In the above exalt the poet or chanter describes himself as a supernatural performer in the society. The poet exaggerated his performance technique so as to impress his audience that nothing can come across his way during performance. Also, he compared himself to witches by saying that nobody should make any sound while he his performing. It is doubtful if one can see a poet of these high qualities or attributes in Yorùbá society. Besides, the poet impressed his audience that he can manipulate the use of Yorùbá language during performance.

EXAMPLE 25:

Tẹgbón tàbúrò jàjò kú torí àgbondò olose

Èran kí la rí jẹ agbondo eku wẹrẹ?

(Two brothers fight to death because of the lower jar of olose rat

Which quantity-type of meat do they get from the lower jar of olose rat?)



In the foregoing exalt, it is clearly shown that one should not fight over unnecessary matter. The poet wants to tell his audience that two close brothers engage themselves in an unnecessary query which is capable of causing them their life. The poet exaggerated the kind of antagonism between two close brothers to the extent that they want to kill themselves over a minute issue. One can be surprised whether it is possible for two close brothers to attempt to kill themselves because of ordinary lower jar of small rat. In essence, the poet wants to impress his audience that he has the control of Yorùbá language by using hyperbole during performance. Besides the poet want to tell his audience that they should deviate from any unreasonable and party issue that can take their life.

CONCLUSION

It is established in the work that both literal and figurative languages are adopted in varying degrees in the Yorùbá oral genre. The effect of the Yorùbá genres on the audience is accomplished by relatively straightforward and beautiful language through which the message is delivered. The social-cultural relationship between the poet and the audience rendered the hyperbolic utterances meaningful in society. Finally, this study contributes to knowledge about the effective use of hyperbole in the Yorùbá society.

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