

CULTURE-BOUND TROPES IN SOMALI POETRY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Somali poets use a variety of tropes and they share most of them with their confrères of many, if not all, other nations. They frequently use metaphor, simile and metonymy, which are probably universal in all poetry throughout the world. There are, however some tropes which are specific to the Somali poetic code and which are bound inseparably and uniquely to Somali culture.

The expression "culture -bound" in the title of this paper indicates that such tropes are all correlated with other cultural phenomena which function in Somali society. The research which I have so far undertaken reveals the existence of seven culture-bound tropes, and I have given them names and provided them with letter codes for future reference. They are:

Onomastic synecdoche	OS
Onomastic transfer	OT
Onomastic replacement	OR
Pseudo-vocative	PV
Rhetorical numeration	RN
Initial targeting	IT
Inter-poem alliteration	IA

In the examples of these tropes, when two translations given, the first is preceded by an asterisk (*) which indicates an ordinary non-tropal rendering and in the second the plus sign (=) indicates a tropal one.

2. CULTURE-BOUND TROPES

Onomastic synecdoche (OS)

Of all Somali culture-bound tropes onomastic synecdoche is by far the most common. It consists of the use of proper names, in most cases those of female camels, in a tropal sense. The semantic changes involved are triggered off by the context and can be summarized as follows:

(a) The proper name becomes deonomatized i.e. it acquires the meaning of a common noun and no longer denotes a particular animal bearing that name.

(b) The number reference changes. Instead of a proper name in the singular denoting one single individual, now it denotes either a group or an unspecified number of individuals.

(c) Sex is not strictly differentiated. While in ordinary usage proper names indicate the sex of the animal, in this trope the distinction is not strict and female names may refer to both sexes.

Examples:

(1) *Wax dawanani dariiqiyo halkay Debec ku fooftaaye*

* Roads and the places to which Debec goes out to graze are entered in records.

= Roads and the places to which camels go out to graze are entered in records.

(Xaaji Aadan Afqalloo in Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, p.93.)

Debec is the name of a she-camel but it is clear from the context that the poet has in mind herds of camels, both female and male. He refers here to a geographical survey, undertaken by the government of the British Somaliland Protectorate, which included the mapping of roads and of grazing areas.

(2) *Gara naf laga waa
Hadduu seben gadiidsado
Giirna miis ma leh*

* No sustenance can be got from Garo
When times become hard,
And there is no profit then in Giir either.

= No sustenance can be got from goats
When times become hard,
And there is no profit then in cattle either.

(Maxamed Cabdille Xasan in Axmed

Cali Abokor 1986, p.24.)

Gara is a junction form of Garo, which is a proper name of a goat, while Giir is that of a cow. The poem from which these lines are taken discusses the relative values of domestic animals at a time of drought. Goats and cattle have to be watered frequently and are thus of no help to their owners. In contrast, camels because of their resistance to thirst can be depended upon in the struggle for survival. It is clear from this context that the names Garo and Giir represent goats and cattle in general and do not denote some particular animals bearing those names. This interpretation is corroborated by the translation given by Axmed Cartan Xaange in Axmed Cali Abokor 1987, p.25 where Garo and Giir are rendered as "goats" and "cattle".

(3) *Sayidkeenu tii uu na yiri torog ku heensaynay*

* We reined and saddled Torog, as our Master told us.

= We reined and saddled the horses, as our Master told us.

(Ismaaciil Mire in Said S.Samatar 1980, p.462.)

Torog is a name of a horse as is stated in the glosses on this line in Axmed Cali Faarax "Idaajaa" 1974, p.36 and in *Suugaan* 1, 1976, p.36. The poem describes a battle in which a large unit of Dervish cavalry was engaged and it is obvious from this context that Torog denotes a large number of horses and not a particular one. This is corroborated by Said S.Samatar's translation in which Torog is rendered by the word "them" referring to "horses" in the preceding line. The deonomatization of the name is also reflected in the use of the initial lower case letter in the Somali text here and in other editions of this poem in Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1974 and *Suugaan* 1. Further information on this trope can be found in Andrzejewski 1989.

Onomastic transference (OT)

This trope is rarely used. Like onomastic synecdoche, it involves deonomatization: a proper name becomes a common noun denoting a member of the category to which the bearer of the name belongs. There is no change, however, either in number or in sex reference, which remain the same as in the proper name itself.

Examples:

(4) *Sidii jaawo dhane loo shubaan jeelka kaa bi'ine*

* I shall slake your craving for salt, as one does when one pours brine for Jaawo.

= I shall slake your craving for excellent poetry, as one slake's a she-camel's craving for salt when one pours brine for her into a trough.

(Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan in Jaamac Cumar Ciise 1974, p.59)

Jaawo is a proper name of a female camel but the context indicates that any female camel is denoted by it. This interpretation is confirmed by Maxamed Cabdi Maxamed, (1989, p.33) who translates it by the French *une chamelle* "a she-camel". Yaasiin Cismaan Keenadiid (1983, Note 7 on p.170) also identifies Jaawo as a proper name of a camel, as does Axmed Cali Abokor (1986) in Note 121 on p.83

(5) *Barbaar waxaad ahaataba mar baad Bayddan kulantane*

* When you become a young man then at some time you will meet Bayddan.

= When you become a young man then at some time you will meet a girl.

(Ismaaciil Mire in Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1974, p.108.)

In the first part of the poem from which this line is taken, Ismaaciil Mire speaks about the most cherished hope which Somali pastoralists have when they marry, namely that their wives will bear them sons who will be of help to them, and he describes the disappointment which comes when sons prove to be weak and useless. Bayddan is a woman's name but the context make it clear that any marriageable girl is referred to.

Onomastic replacement (OR)

This trope consists of substituting a proper name by which its bearer is known in the real world by another, a totally different one. The context

on which the operation of this trope depends must include the knowledge of the real name of the bearer, shared by the poet with at least some members of his audience. Without such knowledge the listeners cannot recognize this device as a trope. Onomastic replacement is rare and most of the instances of it so far found are restricted to women.

Examples:

(6) *Waris baa wuruu wad iga helay iila wacansayde*

- * Of all that death will take away from me Waris is the most precious to me.
- = Of all that death will take away from me Hodon is the most precious to me.

(Cilmi Boodhari in Rashiid Maxamed Shabeele, 1975, p.79.)

Cilmi Boodhari (or Bowndheri), who is said to have died of love for a woman called Hodon. The poem was composed when he was already very ill and distressed by her having been given in marriage to another man. Anyone acquainted with the story would immediately recognize that the name Waris refers to Hodon and not to any other woman.

(7) *Daaroole weeyaan halkaan daawi ku ogaaye.*

- * Daaroole is the place where I knew that Daawi lived.
- = Daaroole is the place where I knew that Hodon lived.

(Cilmi Boodhari in Maxamed Rashiid Shabeele 1975, p.72.)

Daawi is a woman's name, now obsolescent, which is etymologically connected either with the word daawo "remedy", "medicine" or with daawo "mutual help", "cooperation". As in Example (6) it is clear that the poet refers to no other woman than Hodon. In this poem he sends her a message of love and asks the wind to carry it to her. Daaroole is a quarter of Berbera. Note that the editor uses an initial lower case letter for the name Daawi, and this may be due to the fact that he has interpreted it as one of the common nouns with which the name is connected.

Pseudo-vocative (PV)

The trope which I propose to call the "pseudo-vocative" consists of the use of a vocative form of a noun but without its normal semantic function of direct address. The syntactic positions it occupies are the same as those of a noun in any of the cases other than the vocative. The vocative forms used in this trope have suffixes which are as follows: -ow, -eey, -aay and -ooy and their optional variants -aw, -oow, -ey, -ay, and -oy. A detailed account of their distribution is provided in Saeed 1987.

Examples:

(8) *Dhoor wiilaw, goortuu ratigu dheexo dhabar joogo*

* When Dhoorwiil mounts on the back of Dheexo

= When a stud-camel mounts on the back of a she-camel

(Cumar Maxamed "Ostreeliye" in *Suugaan 2*, p.14.)

Dhoorwiile or Dhoorwiil is a proper name of a male camel and is used here with the vocative suffix -aw, though it is clear from the syntactic context that it is not the target of direct address but the subject of the dependent verb *dabar joogo* "is mounted on the back of".

In the Somali original text there is a space between *Dhoor* and *wiilaw*, but this seems to be an obvious printing error since in the commentary which accompanies the poem this name is written *Dhoorwiile*, followed by the gloss *baarqabka* "a stud camel".

It should be noted that the proper names of the camels used here can be interpreted also as instances of onomastic transfer. The line is taken from a poem in praise of camels and it refers to their mating habits in general.

(9) *Masaw sabbahay iyo intaan Magan ka soo gaadhay*

* What I acquired from my father, O serpent, and Magan

= The principle which I acquired from my father, who was as cunning and wise as serpent, and from Magan

(Saahid Qamaan in *Suugaan* 3, p.29)

The poet speaks here about the principle of equality in the traditional Somali pastoral democracy. The serpent is regarded as a symbol of cunning and wisdom and the poet uses it as a metaphor of praise for his father. Magan is probably a mistake for Madar and refers to the poet's great-grandfather. The context clearly indicates that *masaw* is not a form of direct address.

(10) *Tiicay wadaageed haddii rsg isku tuurtuuro*

* When men throw themselves upon the dividing of O Tiica!

= When men rush to divide the camels among themselves

(Aadan-Gurey Maxamed Cabdille in *Suugaan* 2, p.7.)

Tiica is the name of a she-camel which in this context is equivalent to the grammatical case used when a noun is "annexed" by a possessive pronoun, but here it has the vocative suffix -aay. The literal translation which would reflect this function would be "O Tiica, her dividing".

The meaning of Tiica is transformed here into that of "a group of camels" through the operation of onomastic synecdoche. The line is taken from a passage in the poem in which a camel-rustling raid is described and the context makes it very clear that poet does not use *Tiicay* a form of direct address.

Rhetorical numeration (RN)

This trope consists of the use of a cardinal numeral combined with a demonstrative, without explicitly specifying the nature of the units represented by the numeral. It is used by poets when they boast about the excellence of the logic and the aesthetic standard of what they have said in the immediately preceding lines. The contexts in which the rhetorical numeral occurs indicate that what is referred to is either the relevant lines of the poem or the points of the argument presented in them. At the same time it is clear that the numeral must not be taken literally.

Examination of instances of this trope reveals that the number of the lines which precede the numeral is usually much greater than is indicated and that distinct points of argument are not readily reducible to that

number. In view of this we must conclude that this trope simply conveys the meaning "what I have just recited in the preceding lines".

In all the instances of this trope which I have examined the numeral is afar "four". I have heard of some poems where other numerals were used but have not been able to find the requisite texts.

Examples:

(11) *Afartaa madkeeyaye sidii macallin maw sheegay?*

* I have drawn fire from those four, as one does by twirling the fire-making stick on its base. Have I not stated them like a teacher?

= I have drawn fire from what I have just said, as one does by twirling the fire-making stick on its base. Have I not stated it as clearly as a teacher does?

(Saahid Qamaan in *Sugaan* 3, p.28.)

This line is preceded by nine, and not four, lines of the poem and the points of argument which they contain do not lend themselves to division into four units.

(12) *Afartaa ha'da intaan ka deyyey. hilin ma qaadsiyey?*

* Have I not put these four on the road, as I have taken care to use in them the alliteration in the H sound?

= Have I not presented these lines in a clear and convincing manner, as I have taken care to use in them the alliteration in the H sound?

(Salaan Carrabey in Andrzejewski and Musa
H.I.Galaal 1963, p.195.)

This example is preceded by eighteen lines in the poem and as for the number of points of argument, there is the same difficulty in quantifying them as in Example 11.

(13) *Afartaa sidii Deleb la riday. maysu daba joojay?*

- * Have not I put these four in a row one after the other, like the sticks thrown in the Deleb game?
- = Have I not presented these points of my argument as successfully as when one throws the highest scoring set of dicing sticks in the Deleb game?

(Cali Dhuux in Andrzejewski and
Musa H.I.Galaal 1963, p.24.)

There are thirty-four lines preceding this statement and it would be difficult to group the points of the argument sustained in them into four units or groups. The poet uses the imagery taken from the Deleb game which is explained in Section 3.

Initial targeting (IT)

It frequently happens that in the first line of a Somali poem a particular person is addressed by name. This at first gives the impression that the whole poem is intended as a personal communication. Usually, however, that impression is not sustained and it becomes clear that the target of the poem is a wider audience or some other person altogether.

Such initial targeting is called in Somali *halqabsi*, a noun related to the phrasal verb *ku halqabso* "to link the subject matter with [someone]".

Sometimes the person named in this trope is known to all the members of the audience, but in many poems his identity may be entirely lost in the oral transmission and this reflects the relative unimportance of identifying him. It is the context which will decide whether the whole poem is addressed to the person named or not.

Numerous instances of initial targeting can be found in the published collections of Somali poetry. Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan, for example, often addresses members of his entourage in the opening lines of his poems but it is clear from what follows that what he says is intended for a wide audience.

Examples

(14) *Dawruhu. Colaadow. adduun wa'a daruur sabane*

O Colaad, the vicissitudes of the world are like seasonal clouds.

(Gabay Shinni in Shire Jaamac Axmed 1965.
p.19)

This line is addressed to a man called Colaad, but the poem was composed in order to reprove another man, namely a chieftain who had transgressed the limits of the power granted to him by his people under the covenants of customary law and had assumed dictatorial powers.

(15) *War Suudow sedkaa wa jannee samac hadalkayga*

O Suudi, Paradise is to be your portion, listen to my words.

(Maxamed Cabdille Xasan in Jaamac Cumar Ciise
1974, p.142.)

Ostensibly this poem was addressed to Xaaji Suudi Shabeele, one of the members of the Dervish Supreme Council. It is clear from the context of the poem and the circumstances of its composition that it was a manifesto addressed to the Somali public at large in which Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan condemned the treachery of some previously trusted members of his entourage.

(16) *Tixda gabay beryaa Maxamadow, waanigaan tirine*

For some time, O Maxamed I have not recited any lines of poetry

(Maxamed Kaahin Feedhoole in *Suugaan* 2, p.9.)

This line is addressed to a man called Maxamed, but its intention was to warn young Somalis against the lure of going to Aden in search of work and financial betterment, in view of the poet's unpleasant experiences there.

Initial targeting is by no means an archaic trope and has been used in recent years in polemical poems. We find an example of this in Said S.Samatar 1989, p.38, where a poem by Khaliif Sheekh Maxamuuud is targeted to a man called Abshir. The editorial note on p.51 reveals some uncertainty as to his identity and this confirms the view that initial targeting is a form of ornamentation and does not play an important role in the structure of the poem.

Inter-poem alliteration (IA)

It is a custom among the poets, which goes back as far as Somali oral history can reach, to engage in debates, discussions and disputes in verse. In their exchanges the poets comment on current events, express their views and often engage in aggressive polemics. In the past such exchanges used to take place at clan or inter-clan assemblies but the words of the poets spread all over the country, since they were memorized by poetry reciters who reproduced them verbatim, as accurately as their powers of memory allowed, at other assemblies. For this reason it was possible for poets to communicate across long distances. This custom still continues, though the reciters are now often replaced by cassettes.

According to the unwritten code of Somali poetics it is a sign of artistic refinement if the poetic dialogue is continued in the same alliteration. This binding of different poems by the same alliterative sound I propose to call inter-poem alliteration. This practice is quite common but here I shall limit myself to two illustrations.

After the battle of Jidbaale, where the Dervish forces suffered heavy losses, Kaarshe Saliq, a poet who sided with those Somalis who fought against Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan, composed a poem which expressed his great joy over the event. The poem alliterates in the consonant q.

(17) *Darsawiishta qooqani markay. nagu qaamaamaysey*

When the frenzied Dervishes rushed upon us

(Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan in Jaamac Cumar
Ciise 1974, p.249.)

When the poem reached Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan, via neutral territory, he replied in a poem using the same alliterative sound. It opens with the following line:

(18) *Nimanyohow qaamaadas i diley. qaduro waa ysabe.*

O men, it was a freak of chance that struck me - amazing are the
vicissitudes of life.

(Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan in
Jaamac Cumar Ciise 1974, p.249.)

A similar case of reciprocal alliteration is found in an exchange between Nuur Cali Qonof and Cali Dhuux. In the first poem Nuur complained

about the ingratitude of the people on whom he had bestowed favours and gifts in the past and who now, when he he was in need because of a severe drought, did nothing to help him. In the opening line he describes the drought which is so severe that she-camels refuse to suckle their young. The alliterative sound in this poem consists of vowels, which in the Somali system of alliteration are all regarded as the same sound irrespective of their quality.

(19) *Abyanow. abaarahakan dhacay geel ilmihi xoorye.*

O Abyan, in these times of drought that have come, she-camels reject their offspring.

(Nuur Cali Qonof in Shire Jaamac Axmed 1965, pp.54-55.)

Cali Dhuux feared that Nuur bore a grudge against him. His apprehension was substantiated when Nuur, though invited, did not come to the assembly at which Cali Dhuux was to recite his poems. Cali Dhuux then composed a rejoinder in which he put the blame on other people for Nuur's plight and explained that he himself was impoverished by the ravages of the Dervish war. The poem has the same alliterative sound and begins with the following line:

(20) *Nuur Cali! Irdhahay tuseen noogu iman waayey*

O Nuur Cali! He failed to come to us because of the rebuffs they gave him.

(Cali Dhuux in Shire Jaamac Axmed 1965, p.55.)

When several poets take part in a series of exchanges on a common theme, their poems make up a series which in Somali is called silsilad "a chain". A part of such a chain in which Cali Dhuux, Qamaan Bulxan and Salaan Carrabey took part is documented in Andrzejewski and Musa H.I. Galaal 1963, but several other chains are still remembered.

In past times a whole chain was seldom linked all through by inter-poem alliteration, but in the last two decades two long chains of modern political poems were composed which are so linked, and this has given rise to their names: Siinley "The chain alliterating in S" and Daalley "The chain alliterating in D".

3. CULTURAL PHENOMENA

The cultural phenomena with which the tropes under discussion can be assumed to be correlated are listed below and provided with letter codes.

Sustained alliteration	(SA)
Quantitative scansion	(QS)
Transmission of messages	(TM)
Naming system	(NS)
The Deleb game	(DG)
Cult of alliteration	(CA)

A brief description of these phenomena is given here before it is demonstrated in Section 4 how they are correlated with the tropes under discussion.

Sustained alliteration (SA)

In Somali poetry the same alliteration is carried in each line of the whole poem. Thus a long-line poem of say 100 lines must contain 200 words beginning with the same consonant or with a vowel (of any quality).

Further information about this system can be found in Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, in Andrzejewski 1982, Banti 1987, Said S.Samatar 1982 and Yaasiin Cismaan Keenadiid 1984.

Quantitative scansion (QS)

Somali poetry has a complex system of quantitative scansion, in which the metric measure is a mora (a unit of time). A short syllable counts as one mora and a long one as two morae, and the length of a syllable is determined by the length of its vowel or diphthong. Consonants or their position in relation to vowels or diphthongs are not relevant in this system.

Morae are arranged into feet and these in turn are arranged into metric lines. Poetic genres have their own specific metres. In addition to the rules concerning the number of morae there are rules which govern the occurrence of short and long syllables in certain slots within the metre of the line.

Detailed information about this system is provided in Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, in Banti's introduction to Xuseen Sheekh

Axmed "Kadarre" 1990, in Johnson 1979 and 1988, and Maxamed Cabdi Maxamed 1989.

Transmission of messages (TM)

In pre-colonial times the inhabitants of the pastoralist interior normally conducted their communications across distances by means of oral messages which were carried by travellers or, in exceptional circumstances, by special messengers.

It was a part of the traditional moral code that travellers should accept the task of carrying memorised messages and should deliver them as accurately as possible. In important matters messages were sometimes put in verse form, as an aid to memorization.

In addition to the person-to-person messages, most poets even when they addressed their words to the public at large, expected that their poems would be carried across distances by men who would memorize them and that others would memorize them again from them. It was in fact a form of "oral publishing" and the unwritten copyright law made it obligatory that the poet's name should be given at each recital of his poems, even after his death.

Accounts of the Somali methods of oral communication and memorization are provided in Andrzejewski 1981, Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964 and Said S.Samatar 1982.

The naming system (NS)

The Somali naming system makes a clear distinction between the names given to men and to women so that the sex of a person is immediately recognized from the name. Domestic animals are also given proper names and although some innovation takes place, each species has its own traditional onomasticon i.e. a repertoire of names which are considered appropriate for its members. These onomasticons are further subdivided according to sex.

The name-giving system applied to domestic animals makes it possible for pastoralists, who are all acquainted with these onomasticons, to recognize from the proper name the species and the sex of the animal referred to.

Annotations identifying proper names of domestic animals in poetic texts are found in Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1974 and 1977, Axmed Cali Abokor 1986 and 1990, *Suugaan* 1 and 2, and Yaasiin Cismaan Keenadiid 1984. The annotations in Axmed Cali Abokor 1986 are so numerous that they cover a large part of the onomasticon of camel names.

The Deleb game (DG)

There is a traditional Somali game which used to be played by boys in the nomadic interior, called Deleb. A board was drawn on sand and pebbles were used as pawns. Their movement and the capabilities of taking the opponents' pawns were determined by throwing four small sticks in the manner of dice. Each stick, cut vertically, had a dark side which was covered by bark and a light one which was clean of it. The scoring depended on the configuration of the dark and the light sides of the four sticks as they lay on the ground after the throw. Detailed rules of this game can be found in Morin 1931.

The cult of alliteration (CA)

The mode of communication and the verbal art of the Somali people is characterized by what could be described as the cult of alliteration. This method of bonding and of acoustic ornamentation is extremely popular and is used not only in poetry but also in proverbs, in public oratory and even in the ordinary language of everyday life. Words which are either complementary or contrastive in their meanings are often linked by alliteration e.g. bashbash iyo barwaaqo "contentment and prosperity", bad iyo berri "sea and land", miyi iyo magaalo "town and country", shaahid iyo sheeko "eye witness and report" or wadaad iyo waranle "cleric and spear-bearer".

Playwrights often join their interacting characters by alliteration, e.g. Shabeel and Shallaayo or Diiddan and Diiddane. Some go even so far as to give alliterative names to all their characters in a play and a good example of it is the highly popular *Wedhaf iyo shimbiro war isu ma hayaan* where the dramatis personae are: Muxibbo, Mawliid, Mustafa, Aw Marqaan, Muumina, Muruq, Maryan, Margrate, Madar, Mukhtaar, Muuq-dheer, Mahad, Maxamuud and Mooge.

Some writers of modern fiction also cannot resist the lure of alliteration and choose such titles for their works as *Caashaq iyo curaaf*, *Dhibbanaha aan dhalan* or *Masugto meher ma leh*.

4. CORRELATIONS

The correlations between the tropes under discussion and the cultural phenomena described in the two preceding sections are stated here by juxtaposing their letter codes and placing between them the plus sign (+). In this notation, for example, IA + CA should be read as "the trope IA is assumed to be correlated with the cultural phenomenon CA". In each case the grounds are given for the assumption made.

OS, OT and OR + SA, QS and NS

The use of proper names in the three onomastic tropes, OS, OT and OR enlarges the number of words at the poet's disposal very substantially and makes it easier for him to overcome the formidable combined constraints of SA and QS. The operation of onomastic tropes would hardly be feasible without the type of naming system (NS) which exists among Somali pastoralists.

PV + QS

The constraint imposed by QS often makes it very difficult to fit the appropriate words into the pattern of scansion used in the poem. The use of PV offers the poet the possibility of increasing the moric length of the word by adding to it a vocative suffix, a practice which is not allowed in comparable sentences in prose.

RN + DG

The assumption of this correlation is very tentative but provides a plausible explanation of the frequent use of RN by Somali poets, especially those with a pastoralist background. The Deleb game used to be very popular among youths and seems likely that the poets in their adulthood would have vivid memories of playing it. The sense of triumph in getting a maximum score in one's throw of the sticks could easily be transferred to any other form of success, an assumption corroborated by Example (13).

IT + TM

Before the advent of cassette recorders, poets depended on memorizers for conveying and disseminating their oral texts. Good memorizers, who were obviously men of exceptional gifts, were greatly valued, even though they served anonymously as channels of communication. They were often minor poets themselves, keen on some form of recognition, which they received by being mentioned in the first line of a poem.

The IT trope, in my view, was a form of honouring and rewarding memorizers of poems or poetic messages and the practice was then enshrined in the Somali poetic code. It still persists even now, when the role of memorizers has been replaced, to a very large extent, by modern technology.

IA + CA

Somali people derive great pleasure from listening to alliterative poetry and this statement is based on both observation and direct inquiries which I have made. Such pleasure is enhanced when poems concerned with the same themes are also linked by the same alliteration, thus merging their acoustic and semantic aspects.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The culture-bound tropes described here form a significant part of the unwritten code of Somali poetics and it is essential to take them into account in any description of Somali literary culture. They are also of interest to anyone concerned with literary theory in general since they exemplify the interdependence between formal characteristics of poetry and other features of the culture in which they function.

An awareness of the nature of these tropes is essential for editors and translators of Somali poetry, since they have to use methods of elucidation and translation appropriate to the type of readers they have in mind. In monolingual works the editors have to assess the degree of familiarity with the poetic code on the part of their readers and to decide what annotations are necessary. Translators also have to make decisions as to how to deal with the culture-bound tropes. For the general public it may be enough to convey their meanings without revealing the underlying structures, but for readers who wish to gain deep insights into Somali culture some form of annotation is highly desirable.

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Since surnames are not normally used in Somalia i names of Somali authors lare given in the order customary in Somalia and are not inverted. For further details see Andrzejewski 1980.

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