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ONOMASTIC SYNECDOCHE: THE USE OF PROPER NAMES
OF CAMELS IN SOMALI POETRY

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INTRODUCTION

In the large repertoire of stylistic devices employed by Somali poets there are tropes which are closely bound up with the pastoralist way of life and the love of alliteration which pervades Somali culture, as has been demonstrated in Andrzejewski 1993.

Among such tropes we find onomastic synecdoche in which the literal sense base consists of proper names given by Somali herders to individual domestic animals. In the choice of proper names for tropal use there is marked preference for those of camels.

In this article an account is given of the operation and functions of the onomastic synecdoche of this type. It represents a slightly modified and updated version of an unpublished conference paper (Andrzejewski 1989b).

ONOMASTIC PRACTICES OF SOMALI PASTORALISTS

In describing this trope it is essential to take note of the fact that Somali pastoralists give separate proper names to every female and to some male ones in their herds. If the size of the herd is large it is divided into smaller groups, each under the care of different herders who are thus able to memorize all their individual names. Other domestic animals are also given proper names, though the practice is less methodical when applied to sheep and goats.

The identification of animals by name is important when referring to them and calling them at such tasks as milking, the daily checks to find that all of them have come back from the pastures or the routine removal of parasitic insects. It provides an element of order and accountability and eases the burden of work for the people who look after them.

Each species of domestic animals has its own onomasticon i.e. a

repertoire of customary names, within which different forms are used for males and females. Although some overlapping and innovation occur within the separate onomasticons each has a core of characteristic names, and when a Somali brought up in the pastoralist environment hears them he can usually recognize from the name the species and the sex of the animal concerned. Ambiguity, if it arises, is in most cases resolved by the context in which the name occurs.

These onomastic practices go beyond the practical needs of everyday life. The poets who belong to the pastoralist environment often use proper names of domestic animals in apostrophizing them or speaking about them. They also apply such proper names to constructing the trope which is referred to here as onomastic synecdoche.

SEMANTIC CHANGES INVOLVED IN ONOMASTIC SYNECDOCHE

In its ordinary usage a proper name in the singular denotes one particular individual. In an onomastic synecdoche, however, three semantic changes occur:

- (a) De-onomatization takes place. The proper name acquires the meaning of a common noun and no longer denotes a particular individual which bears that name.
- (b) There is a change in the categorization of the number. While a proper name in the singular denotes one single individual, within this trope it denotes either a group or an unspecified number of animals.
- (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.

PREFERENCE FOR CAMEL NAMES

In the vast majority of cases animal names which occur in onomastic synecdoche are those of camels, especially the female ones. Such preference over other animals is due to the dominant role which camels play

in the life of Somali pastoralists in arid areas. Not only can they live long periods without water and thrive on meagre and forbidding vegetation, but they are capable of sustaining long marches to distant pastures and wells, a quality which is essential for nomadic pastoralism in Somalia.

Apart from their practical value as powerful allies of man in the struggle for survival and well-being in a harsh environment, camels are traditionally used in various social transactions. They are given as bridewealth to the family of a girl at marriage, as compensation for injury or insult and as payments in the settlement of blood feuds. Camel herding is regarded as a noble occupation and gifts of camels are highly prized and are used in strengthening bonds of friendship and clan alliances.

In traditional warfare the looting of camels was often the principal motive in launching raids and success in these was frequently the theme of triumphant boasts of poets of the victorious clan.

It is not necessary to expatiate here on the role of camels in Somali society since ample accounts have been given by various scholars: Anders Hjort af Ornäs (1988 and 1993), Axmed Cali Abokor (1986 and 1987), Enrico Cerulli (1959), David D.Laitin and Said S.Samatar (1987), I.M.Lewis (1961), Mohamed Abdillahi Rirash (1988), Said Sh.Samatar (1982), Yaasiin Cismaan Keenadiid (1984) and the various contributors to the serial *Camel Forum*.

Among domestic animals only horses equal camels in prestige. Nevertheless their names are very seldom used in onomastic synecdoche because, perhaps, they are viewed much more as individuals than representatives of a group or of the species. This is clear from an account given by Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" (1977) and from poems in praise of individual horses in which they are treated as if they had almost human attributes and in some cases even supernatural powers.

ACTIVATION OF THE SEMANTIC CHANGES

Onomastic synecdoche has no special morphological or syntactic exponents but it has what may be described as a prosodic marker. This consists of the fact that the proper name involved in the trope is a bearer of the dominant alliterative sound of the poem. In the numerous instances

of onomastic synecdoche which I have examined I have found only one exception: non-alliterative proper names occur only if there is already another alliterative proper name in the line denoting an animal of the same species.

It must be noted here that in Somali poetry an alliterative word normally signals to the reader that he may have to interpret it outside its ordinary range of meanings. In the case of onomastic synecdoche the activation of the semantic changes involved is ultimately triggered off by the context in which the proper name occurs. I use the term "context" in its widest sense, to comprise the verbal environment within the poem and the background knowledge shared by the poet and his audience at the time of the original first performance of it. This includes the familiarity with the onomasticon appropriate to the species of the animal concerned.

How such activation is effected will be seen from the two examples given below. In them two translations are given: the first conveys the meaning which the expression would have if it were not a trope and were used in the ordinary language while the second, written in italics, represents the meaning after the semantic changes involved in onomastic synecdoche have taken place.

(1) **Jiilaalku reera uu dhibay, bay dhool ku hoyataaye**

Dhool comes home for the night to the family settlements upon which the jiilaal season has brought hardship.

Camels come home for the night to the family settlements upon which the jiilaal season has brought hardship.

(From a poem by Cumar Maxamed "Ostreeliya" in *Suugaan* 1977, p.13.)

During the "jiilaal", the main dry season, most of the camels are driven to distant pastures by young herders while family settlements usually stay behind and depend on a few milk camels which are left with them. When the rains come and grass is plentiful the herds return and there is plenty of milk for everyone. It is clear from the context of the poem that here a whole herd is referred to and not a single individual camel. One camel

could not return to several settlements at the same time and a herd coming home would normally be composed of both female and male camels. "Dhool" is a name of a female camel and it is interesting to note that, while normally in Somali orthography all proper names are capitalized, the transcriber of this poem uses an initial lower case letter for it, thus treating it even graphically as a common noun. He follows this treatment of proper names of camels, used synecdochically, throughout the whole poem.

(2) Hirrigtey garbaha kaga dhufteen hadaw ka buubaashay

Hadaw stampeded, running away from the sticks with which they struck her on the shoulders.

Camels stampeded, running away from the sticks with which they struck them on the shoulders.

(From a poem by Qowdhan Ducaale in *Suugaan* 1976, p.46.)

This line is taken from a poetical boast about a successful camel rustling raid. It describes a scene in which the victors are driving away the looted camels. It is clear from the context that a whole herd was involved, most likely composed of both female and male camels. No one would consider it worth describing in a poem, which is composed in a heroic mood, if only one camel was captured. The synecdochic use of the name "Hadaw" would also be obvious to a Somali listener since the attackers would not be likely to know the names which the owners had given to their camels. As in Example (1) "Hadaw" which is a proper name of a she-camel is written with an initial lower case letter.

CHALLENGE TO EDITORS AND TRANSLATORS

It is clear from the examples given above that a literal translation would be incomprehensible to the foreign reader. It would be so even for a Somali reader brought up in an urban environment and cut off from contacts with the pastoralist way of life. For this reason editors of texts published entirely in Somali often provide notes identifying the proper names as those of animals of a particular species and sex. Such annotations can be found in the works of Axmed Cali Abokor (1986), Axmed

Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" (1974 and 1977) and in various poems edited in the textbooks of Somali literature listed by Andrzejewski (1988b). Axmed Cali Abokor's work has so many annotations of this kind that it could provide a basis for future compilation of an onomasticon of camel names.

Translators have two options open to them. Firstly they can augment the translation by adding the requisite information in annotations or by inserts within the text. Secondly they can simply translate the ultimate meaning which arises from the context of an onomastic synecdoche, and thus totally mask its formal characteristics as a trope.

AUGMENTED TRANSLATION

In most cases translators of Somali poetry use this type of translation. Its advantages are that it reflects more faithfully the pastoralist way of life and brings an element of defamiliarization which some readers may find attractive. Annotations, however, can deter some people who read poetry merely for pleasure and are not interested in its ethnographic background.

The examples below illustrate how augmented translation is used.

(3) **Abaar kama tallaabsado ninkaan Toga xeraynayne**

Solo quelli che tengono Toga possono sopravvivere alle carestie
[The man who does not keep Toga in his enclosure does not survive a drought.]

(From a poem by Faarax Sooyaan in Yaasiin
Cismaan Keenadiid 1984, p.92.)

The translator provides a footnote on "Toga" which says "Nome di cammella [Name of a female camel]." He assumes that the reader will infer from the context that the meaning of the line is *The man who does not keep camels in his enclosure does not survive a drought.* It is clear from the context that more than one camel is referred to since one camel would not be enough to sustain a man and his family.

**(4) Suub ninkii dhaqay,
Seexan waayoo...**

He who Suub the camel owns
sleeps not tranquil...

(From the poetic text of a camel watering song
in Axmed Cali Abokor 1986, p.60, translated in
Axmed Cali Abokor 1987 p.63.)

The translator provides a note on "Suub" stating that it is a "female camel name" and he expands the text of the original by inserting the word "the camel". The near-literal translation would be "The man who rears Suub fails to sleep." The words seems most likely to have been composed by a camel herder who complains about the hardships of his life which involve constant vigilance in protecting the camels against rustlers and beasts of prey. It is obvious from the context that "Suub" does not represent one individual camel and that the synecdochic meaning is *The man who owns camels cannot sleep.*

(5) Intay Ayro kala qaadayaan aarsan mahayaane!

Finché si razzieranno Ayro l'uno con altro, non si vendicheranno!
[As long as they will loot Ayro from each other they will not avenge themselves!]

(From a poem by Cali Xuseen Xirsi in Antinucci and Axmed
Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, p.106, translated on p.107.)

The translators provide a note on Ayro as "un nome di cammella" [a name of a female camel] and leave it to the reader to infer from the context that what is meant is camels in general, of both sexes, since obviously constant raiding would not be done to capture one female camel. The poet laments here over the fact that his countrymen spend their energies on camel rustling raids instead of avenging the wrongs inflicted on them by foreign powers.

MASKED TRANSLATION

The use of masked translation of this trope, which is much less frequent, is fully justified on the ground of the analogy with idiomatic expressions. After all, no translator reveals to the reader the meanings of individual components of an idiomatic expression but provides a rendering which conveys its overall meaning in the target language. Masked translation is extensively used in Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993, a work which aims at general readership rather than at specialists in Somali studies.

In the case of onomastic synecdoche masked translation enhances the smoothness of the text but it has the disadvantage of losing the aura of authenticity created by augmented translation. Two examples of masked translation taken from works of Somali scholars are given below.

(6) Meesha iyo xeebtaan lahaa xiito ka eryoode

...j'aurais... razzié tous les chameaux qui broutent entre Xalin et la côte.
[I would have raided the camels which graze between Xalin and the coast.]

(From a poem by Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan in
Maxamed Cabdi Maxamed 1989 p.46, translated on p.47.)

The near-literal meaning of this line would be "I said [to myself] raid Xiito from [the area] between the place [here] and the coast!" Xiito is a name of a female camel but the translator treats it as a common noun meaning "camels" and this is reflected again in writing it in the transcript of the original with an initial lower case letter as in Examples 1 and 2. The place name "Xalin" does not occur in this line of the original, but it is clear from a previous line that that is where the action would take place.

(7) Sow Deero iyo Cawl dorraad adigu kama dhicin

Non hai tu razziato proprio ieri i loro cammelli?
[Did you not loot their camels just yesterday?

(From a poem by Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan in Yaasiin

Cismaan Keenaadiid 1984 p.150, translation on p.152.)

A close translation would be "Did you not loot Deero and Cawl from them the day before yesterday?" The proper names Deero and Cawl are those of female camels but the translator treats them as meaning camels of either sex and it is obvious from the context that the reference is to large numbers of camels captured from one of the clans by the colonial forces. It should be noted that Deero bears the alliteration of the poem while Cawl does not.

THE APPEAL OF ONOMASTIC SYNECDOCHE

There is no doubt that the use of onomastic synecdoche seems attractive to both Somali poets and their listeners. Although it is difficult to speak with certainty about such matters it seems reasonable to conjecture that one of the functions of this trope is to enhance the degree of stylistic concretization. Somali camel herders have a strong emotional attachment to their camels and when a camel name which belongs to the traditional onomasticon of that species is mentioned it conjures up for them many positive associations. It is also likely that it will remind them of some particular camel bearing that name which they had known. As camels are normally tended in herds, the image of the particular camels would associate itself with that of its companions.

ONOMASTIC SYNECDOCHE AND THE FORMAL CONSTRAINTS IN SOMALI POETRY

In the humane sciences, including literary studies, we can rarely establish direct causal links between cultural phenomena with complete certainty. Yet correlations can be observed which go beyond the possibility of mere coincidence. One such correlation can be posited between the use of onomastic synecdoche and the formidable formal constraints of Somali poetry, which consist of "all-through" inter-line alliteration and quantitative scansion patterns. These are described in Johnson (1979 and 1988), Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" (1986), and Banti (1987) and have been shown to be correlated with various other aspects of Somali poetic art and traditional culture in Andrzejewski (1982 and 1988a).

There can be little doubt that the use of onomastic synecdoche relieves to an appreciable extent the heavy demands which these constraints put on the lexical resources of the poet. He has to find numerous alliterative words for his poem, sometimes amounting to 300 or more, which at the same time must fit into the scansion pattern of the genre he employs. In such circumstances of pressure the rich onomasticon of camel names comes swiftly to his aid.

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