The evocative function of proper names in Somali poetic tropes

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1. Introduction

Somali poetic art has received a great deal of attention in the last two decades, especially in the study of the methods of its composition, memorization and dissemination, the formal constraints of alliteration and the quantitative system of scansion. Information about the publications concerned with these advances of knowledge can be found in Andrzejewski 1988, DeLancey et al. 1988 and Lamberti 1986. One aspect of Somali poetic art, however, has not been sufficiently explored, namely the evocative function of proper names when they are used in poetic tropes.

2. Onomastic tropes

Among the tropes found in Somali poetry there are three which make a special use of proper names. The first and the most common is ONOMASTIC SYNECDOCHE which uses proper names in the singular in the manner of common nouns, at the same time changing their number to the plural. The proper names involved are mainly those of domestic animals, especially of female camels.

The second is ONOMASTIC TRANSFER which makes the same use of proper names as the onomastic synecdoche, but does not involve a change in number. In addition to the proper names of domestic animals it also uses those of women, especially if they contain some element of praise.

The third, which is very rare, is ONOMASTIC REPLACEMENT. It consists of replacing the normal proper name by a fictitious one.

Normally it is possible for a Somali when he hears a proper name to recognize the species and sex of its bearer. He can do this because in the Somali naming system there are separate onomasticons, i.e. repertoires of proper names, for humans and for the different species of domestic animals, each onomasticon being sub-

divided according to sex. Although occasionally these onomasticons overlap, each has a well–established main core. The knowledge of these separate onomasticons forms part of the general fund of shared knowledge, side by side with the memorized lexical resources.

It seems highly probable that the motivation for the use of these tropes is the need to cope with the formidable constraints of 'allthrough', i.e. sustained, alliteration and quantitative scansion imposed on the poets by the conventions of Somali poetic art. Details concerning these two constraints are found in Andrzejewski 1982 and 1988, Antinucci & Axmed 1986, Axmed 1990, Banti 1987, Johnson 1979 and 1988 and Maxamed 1989. The three onomastic tropes are discussed at length in Andrzejewski 1989 and 1990.

3. Evocative function of proper names

The main function of proper names is unique reference, since they serve as identifying labels for people, domestic animals, objects and places. In addition, they may also have an EVOCATIVE FUNCTION, i.e. capability of evoking mental and emotional associations in the listener or the reader as a result of being linked through synchronic etymology with a common noun, a verb or a hybrid verb (i.e. an adjective as defined in Saeed 1987). Thus for example Geri, a proper name of a she–camel, apart from identifying an individual animal so named, is etymologically linked with the common noun geri 'a giraffe', while Baxsan, a woman's name, is linked with the verb baxso 'to escape, to be beyond' and the hybrid verb baxsan 'to be beyond, to be out–standing'.

Such associations have two characteristics: vagueness and variable intensity. They cannot be clearly defined and they differ in each person's mind, depending on his memory and emotional state at a particular time. Thus a woman's name like Magool which shares its root with the common noun magool 'a flower in bloom' may evoke the memory of various kinds of flowers together with any other memories which the listener or the reader might have. Similarly, a she–camel's name like Xula which is etymologically linked with the verb xul 'to select, to choose (the best animal for a particular purpose)' will vary in its associations, since the concrete selection is recalled from the memory of what might have occurred when the

person was choosing camels for very different purposes, e.g. the payment of bridewealth, compensation for death or injury paid or received, obligatory Islamic alms or a gift to a beloved kinsman.

The intensity of such associations varies considerably depending on the context of situation. When a proper name is used in ordinary, practical communication the associations may hardly be present. In those contexts, however, where the proper name is given special attention its evocative function come to the fore. In poetry, when the mind of the listener ist finely attuned to the slightest nuances in the text, the evocative function of proper names enriches the poem by bringing in positive images.

Evocative function is difficult to describe in precise terms and perhaps the best way to elucidate its operation is to give examples with annotations.

4. Exemplification

In the examples two translations are provided. The first, marked with an asterix, is near–literal, while the second takes into account the meanings which result from the operation of the particular onomastic trope and from the evocative function of a proper name. This translation is preceded by the letters OS, OT and OR which stand for onomastic synodoche, onomastic transfer and onomastic replacement respectively. In the examples taken from texts published before 1972 the transcription is adjusted to the requirements of the official orthography introduced in that year. The part of the translation which conveys the evocative function of a name is placed between braces, { }. Proper names in the translations and notes are written with initial capitals, but it should be noted that in Somali texts editors sometimes use an initial lower case letter instead of a capital and this reflects their perception of the tropal meaning of the name.

1. Maantii isaayuhu ka dhaco Idil dagaalkeeda
*On the day when revenge takes place because of fighting about Idil.
OS. On the day when revenge takes place because of fighting about camels {of perfect quality}. (Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan in Jaamac 1974.11.)

Idil is a name of a she-camel and here through the operation of onomastic synecdoche means a group of camels. It is etymologically linked with the hybrid verb idil 'to be complete, to be all'. In the Somali text, isaayuhu represents an emendation of isaayhu, an obvious typographic error.

2. Bilaash iyo ciyaar loo ma helo Bogiyo Heemaale
*One does not acquire Boga and Heemaal just for nothing, nor by playing games or dancing.
OS. One does not acquire camels {which bring satisfaction and are beautiful} just for nothing, nor by playing games or dancing. (Cabdi Galayax in Axmed 1986.65.)

The word 'camels' in the translation corresponds to Boga and Heemaal in the original which are both names of she-camels and this meaning is conveyed through the operation of onomastic synecdoche. Bogiyo represents an elision of Boga and iyo 'and' and the -e in Heemaale is an expletive conjunction used in poetry. The name Boga is etymologically linked with the phrasal verb u bog 'to be pleased with something, to welcome an event' and the name Heemaal with the common noun heemaal 'beauty'.

3. Xuurar-cayno addunka, ninka rooxo wanaagsan
Reerkiisa Alla geeyey, weligeedna rillaysa
*The man into whose family homestead God has brought a houri of this world, a good Rooxo who always makes him contented.
OT. The man into whose family homestead God has brought a houri of this world, a good wife {who brings him rest and solace} and who always makes him contented. (Faarax Shuuriye in Shire 1965.42.)

Rooxo is an archaic proper name of a woman, but through onomastic transfer refers to any woman. It is etymologically linked with the common noun rooxo, a variant form of raaxo which means "rest, solace" or "enjoyment".

4. Dahabooyinkoodaa adeeg dooni baallaha dheh
*Say: Their Dahabos will go about their homely tasks.
OT. Say: Their wives, {who are as precious as gold}, will go about their homely tasks. (Muuse Haaji Ismaaʻiil Galaal in Muuse 1956.60.)

Dahabooyinkoodaa is a plural form of a woman's name Dahabo (Dahabooyin) combined with koodaa which is itself a combination of the pronoun kooda "their" and the focus particle -baa. The evocative function results here from the etymological link between Dahabo and the common noun dahab 'gold'.

5. Xubbigayga kuma hayn inaan xiisow bixiyaaye
*It was not my wish to give away Xiise.
OR. It was not my wish to give away Xiin Finiin {a wonderful horse}. (Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan in Jaamac 1974.72.)

The poem from which this line is taken was composed in praise of the poet's favourite horse Xiin Finiin 'The Sound of Flying Gravel'. Here it is replaced by Xiisow, clearly in order to meet the demands of scansion, an interpretation which is confirmed by the translation given in Maxamed 1989.45: "Jamais mon coeur n'aurait accepté de se séparer de Xiin Finiin". Xiisow is a combination of the name Xiise with the vocative suffix -ow, which is sometimes used in poetry as a metre filler. The name Xiise is etymologically linked with the common noun xiise 'interest, value', 'fascination with something new'.

6. Anna laabta ka ma goynin caashaqii ladan e
*And I also have not cut off the love of Ladan.
OR. And I also have not cut off the love of Hodan, {a wholesome and thriving woman}. (Cilmi Boodhari in Rashiid 1974.46.)

Hodan is the name of a woman who is the subject of the poem, but to fit the requirements of the alliteration in "L", it is substituted by Ladan, another name of a woman. The name Ladan is etymologically linked with the hybrid verb ladan 'to be healthy', 'to be wholesome', 'to thrive'.

5. Concluding remarks

The formulations presented here are based on inquiries made among speakers of Somali. In the final stages of my research, I was particularly helped by several connoisseurs of Somali poetry who gave me the opportunity to check my conclusions with them. They were Mr. Mohamoud Sheikh Dalmar, Dr. Mohamed Abdi Mohamed, Dr. Mohamed Said Samantar, Hajji Farah Darror, Hajji Abdillaahi Warsame 'Hinnig' and Mr. Mohamoud Jama and I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to them.

The evocative function of proper names used in onomastic tropes is an important device of Somali poetic art and as such deserves further research in depth. It must be taken into account by editors of poetic texts in their elucidations of onomastic tropes and the awareness of it is also essential for those translators of Somali poetry who aim at a high degree of precision and endeavour to convey elusive subtleties of meaning.

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Since surnames are not normally used in Somalia, names of Somali authors are given in their customary order and are not inverted when referred to in the text. For details of the Somali personal naming system see Andrzejewski 1980.

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Arabic loanwords in Hausa via Kanuri and Fulfulde

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The Arabic loanwords in West African languages have been studied by many scholars who have published some articles on this topic[2], but none has produced a systematic work on a single language[3]. The dictionaries, too, do not always mark the Arabic origin[4] and sometimes for the Hausa language, which is the best studied one in the area, they are very misleading[5].

The Arabic loanwords in Hausa arrived: 1) directly (whether from classical Arabic, i.e. the written language and the Koranic schools or from colloquial Arabic, mainly Maghrebin dialects); 2) through other African languages which were intermediaries: Berber (Tuareg), Songhay, Manding, Fulfulde, and, especially, Kanuri.

On the Arabic loanwords in Hausa through Kanuri there is Greenberg's article, which is very useful. It is complementary to the other work on the Arabic loanwords in Hausa, unfortunately the words taken into examination are few and some of them: kullum, winzaamii, kàřàatuu, bindigàa, siřdii had been examined in his previous article, in which the author was not yet aware of the importance and the role of the Kanuri language.

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[1] Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli

[2] This article is a revised English version of a paper read at the Primo Convegno Nazionale degli Arabisti Italiani held on 18th and 19th December 1985 in Rome at Istituto per l'Oriente. See Greenberg, Hiskett, Lacroix.

[3] The only tentative to examine all the Arabic loanwords in one of the West African languages is my unpublished thesis (Baldi 1982). The corpus was formed by all the words filed by the main Hausa dictionaries.

[4] It is the case of Ha doolè "compulsion": neither Bargery (1934) nor Abraham (1962) mark it as a loanword. But, more surprisingly, neither Lukas (1937.195a) nor Taylor (1932.38b) are marking the Arabic origin of this word arrived in Kanuri and Fulfulde too.

[5] Abraham gives ʔiyaalii < Ar ʔahāli instead of Ar ʿiyāl.