

KIRARI (EPITHET) AS A PASSING DEVICE IN MODERN HAUSA PROSE FROM NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The prose (novel) is one of the traditional genres of not only Hausa literature but literature in general. In this discourse, the novel is used as a source material for use of kirari (epithet) as a passing device. The Hausa novel categories are explored, Kirari defined time for its composition and recitation explained and its use as a passing device in the prose examined. The discourse concludes that kirari, as a literary genre, is commonly used as a passing device in the novels studied.*

Introduction

Praise-epithet is not a genre used at any time. There are occasions that bring about its composition or recitation or both. In Hausa society, the professional praise epithet composers (Yan-ma'abba) are mostly the people best known for using the genre for different purposes. The occasions that usually bring about the use of Kirari include wedding ceremony, feast, installation of new chief etc. Hence there is the occasion that inspires the composition of any given epithet.

Thus, drawing upon the use of praise epithet as a passing device in some selected Hausa prose, the paper explores the authors' use of Kirari in the selected texts. More especially the paper examines the device (figure of speech) as it is used in the novels.

Additionally, the stylistic devices used in the epithet, where necessary, are explained. This explains the figurative value of the epithets traced therein.

Hausa literature

The first literary work in prose using Boko script was believed to be **J. F Schon's Magana Hausa (Yahaya, 1988:14)**. Other Western Hausaists that followed after him include **C. H** and **J. A Robinson** and **Dr. Baike**. In fact, many Hausas works derived their sources from Hausa folklore. Examples include Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's **Shehu Umar (1968)**, Bello Kangara's **Gandoki (1934)** and Muhammad Gwarzo's **Idon Matambayi (1934)**.

Categories of Hausa Literature:

The most notable amongst the list of Hausa literature include the following:

1. Fiction (Littafan hira)
2. Play(s) (wasa, Pl. Wasanni)
3. Poetry (Waka, Pl Wakoki)
4. Epithets (Kirari)
5. proverbs (Karin Magana).

(Skinner, 1980:1-6)

The Hausa Novel (Prose):

Early Stage:

The 1993 creative writing competition organized by Rupert East, brought about the emergence of the first pieces of creative prose writing in Roman-Script Hausa. These were **Ruwan Bagaja** by Abubakar Imam, **Gandoki** by Bello Kagara (Imam's elder brother), **Shehu Umar** by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, **Idon Matambayi** 'The Eye of the Enquirer' by Muhammad Gwarzo and **Jiki Magavi** co-written by East and John Tafida.

Middle Stage:

New crop of Novellas were published by the Gaskiya Corporation and the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company (NNPC) during the 1960s and early 1970s. The first published one was Sa'idu Ahmad's – '**Tauraruwar Hamada**' The Sahara Star' in 1965. this was followed by **Nagari Na Kowa** 'Good to Everyone' by Umar Dembo which was published in 1969, and **Dare Daya** 'One Night' in 1973. (Furniss 1995). The Novellas published during this period are very much similar to the ones written from the 1930s. they showed many features common with their forerunners. Furniss explains that, "As in the earlier period, where one book

presented the exploits of a cheating, reprehensible counter hero, a 'trickster, another presented the ideal of the moral man. These two dimensions of representation, the 'praiseworthy,' and the potentially 'reprehensible', are recurrent aspects of much of Hausa Literature (Furniss, 1995:38).

Present Stage:

Circ 1980: Two years earlier, the NNPC had published a novel called **Kitsen Rogo** 'Illusion' by AbdulKadir Danganbo which, unlike the novels before, has little mixture of fantasy and reality. It has also taken present day social and political issues as its main themes. The novels published in this period are different in various ways from those which had gone before; as a result of two further competitions. There was NNPC competition in 1979 for which they had Twenty-two (22) entries. The overall winner was Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina's **Mallakin Zuciyata** 'power over my Heat'. This was followed by two others which were **So aljannar Duniya** 'Love is Heaven on Earth' by woman writer, Hafsatu AbdulWahid and **Amadi Na Malam Amah** 'Malam Amah's by Magaji Danbatta. All the three appeared together in 1980. There was also the creative writing competition in Nigerian Languages organized by Federal Department of Culture in 1980. A number of Hausa Language works were published through Nigeria Magazine. A part from play and a collection of Love poetry, four novels were published. Again, Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina emerged winner with his **Turmin Danya** 'The Strong Man.' The others include **Tsumangiyar Kan Hanva** 'The Driving Whip' by Musa Muhammad Bello. **Karshen Alewa Kasa** 'The Discarded left over' by Bature Gagare and **Zabi Naka** 'choose yours' by Munir Muhammad Katsina. All the novels were published in 1982.

Definitions of epithet:

There are as many definitions of different aspects of oral literature as there are researchers themselves. The researcher here is concerned with kirari (epithet) alone. We shall look at various definitions so as to arrive at working definition for the purpose of our paper here.

For its confusing nature, *Kirari* (epithet) has attracted several definitions in various ways by different scholars. This confusing nature of the epithet results from the fact that its features and characteristics are also present in some other related terms such as 'taakee' (drummed equivalent of verbal epithet) and 'waa□ aa' (song). These features that are found in '*Kirari*' which are at the same time available in 'taakee' and waa□ aa' include praising, flattery, inciting, encouraging. This is why the terms are sometimes mixed up and seen as one (Kafin Hausa 1997:99) (CSNL Vol. XVIII). Thus, it may be said that there are as many definitions of *Kirari* as there are writers on *Kirari* and its related fields. For instance, Alhassan and Zarruk (1976) believe that *Kirari* and 'taakee' are so related and alike that when one goes deep into them, one would see the two as same since both are literary terms that are used to praise, flatter and incite. They further explain that, without doubt, there are differences between the two terms.

However, researchers who fail to go deep into the meaning of *Kirari* may end up not defining it well. Thus this might lead to no definition at all. Yet difference writers have defined *Kirari* from their own points of view since no single definition satisfies everyone. G. P Bargery (1925) gives his own definition of *kirari* thus:

Epithets applied to, or set cries and expressions lauding and flattering, important cities or chiefs. Flattering expressions used by a professional beggar regarding the person or the relatives of the person from whom he hopes to receive some largesse; lauding and flattering himself by a contestant in any games e.g. gwadabe, abin biya, epithet applied to a Waziri (Bargery, 1925:608).

In examining the above definition one would agree with Mahmud (1972:2) that: Bargery's definition of *Kirari* is in actuality of a limited nature. *Kirari* in fact, encompasses much wider sphere than Bargery has expected.

This is because the definition is too specific in excluding other aspects that need to be included. In fact, '*Kirari*' may be applied to everything whether living or dead, whether concrete or abstract. May be this is what necessitates some other scholars to put forward their working definitions. According to Mahmud (1972:2):

Kirari is a kind of metaphorical description or flattering expressions accorded to somebody in order to extol his virtues or something to portray its beauty, goodness, effect and the like.

In his complementary definition, Yakubu (1972:1) states that:

Kirari is in general a sort of praise, a rhythmic prose. Whenever it is recited by the 'yan ma'abbas (professional *Kirari* composers and reciters), or a sort of

boastful metrical narration when recited by the public entertainers such as the hunters, the boxers and the wrestlers. It is normally narrated in high-pitch adulatory style, enumerating in hyperbolic apostrophe, the qualities of the subject to which it is directed.

The above definitions are related in that both explain *Kirari* as a tool that can be used in praising and or flattering a person/thing. In their definition, Alhassan and Zarruk (1976:2) are of the view that:

Kirari is an aspect (in Hausa oral literature) that gives a brief description of things which includes explanation of things, behaviours or abstract things. *Kirari* is among the aspects of the Hausa sayings that are full of wisdom and deep meaning for example proverbs, 'taake' and 'zambo'.

In conclusion they believe that, *Kirari* can be understood better if taken separately from the other genres to see where they look alike and where they differ.

However, Umar (1980) goes further to give his own definition of the concept. He states that:

Kirari is a planned utterance that has wisdom and contains description and illustrations which is applied especially for the purpose of flattering one or something. (Umar 1987:24).

He further adds that:

Kirari is a planned statement which is a bit long and wisdomatic that is applied especially for the purpose of flattering one or something. (Umar, 1987:24).

From the foregoing we can see that *Kirari* can be of brief description as Alhassan and Zarruk (1976) explain and it can also be of lengthy forms as Umar (1987) explains.

Therefore, it all depends on the person or the thing the *Kirari* is aimed at.

Occasions/time for Epithet

Epithet (*Kirari*) is not a genre that is heard that at any time. There are certain occasions that bring about its composition or recitation or both. The 'Yan ma'abba (professional 'Kirari' composers and reciters) are mostly the people that recite it at different occasions. The occasions that brought about 'Kirari' Hausa society include: wedding ceremony, naming ceremony, *sallah* feasts, installation of a new chief, community works, sport activities (such as wrestling, boxing), other professional activities (like smithing, weaving, dyeing, and other articles for selling). Therefore, it is the occasion that inspires the composition of any given *Kirari*.

Epithet as a passing device in Hausa prose:

Epithet as earlier defined by many scholars, has also been described by Chambers 21st Century Dictionary as 'an adjective or short description phrase which captures the particular quality of the person or thing in it describes'.

Indeed, many attempts have been made to work on epithet whether as a main topic or merely as a passing device. For instance Alhassan and Zarruk wrote their book *Kirarin Duniya* in 1976 where they wrote one hundred and sixty (10) epithets on the world, under different topics.

Umar (1980) made an attempt to treat epithet (*Kirari*) under a wider chapter on short-form verbal art in his book, *Adabin Baka*.

Bunza (1987) in his paper, 'Nason *Kirari* cikin Rubutattun Wakokin Hausa' shows how *Kirari* features in some Hausa oral songs.

In his Ph.D. Thesis, Mukhtar (1990) has made a stock taking of Suleiman Ibrahim Katsina's use of *Kirari* in his two novels. *Mallakin Zuciya* and *Turmin Danya*.

Epithet is a figure of speech that features in most Hausa novels. Hardly does a Hausa novel go without at least an epithet featuring in it.

Graham Furniss believes that:

Epithets may be strictly specific to the self – praise performances of wrestlers in one context, and be merely a passing device in a novel where a character nods in the direction of that 'other' language code external to the narrative (Furniss, 1996:16).

Here are some working examples:

- (1) John Tafida Wusasa (1976) *Jiki Magayi*: The novel is on a failed love relationship and the tragic end of the main hero, Abubakar.

- (i) Kowa ya ja da ni ya fadi (p. 6)

Meaning:

Whoever challenges me will certainly lose.

- (ii) (*Zakari*) *Tausayinka – da sauki* (p. 12)

Meaning:

(Zakari) the sorrow in your heart is little

- (iii) *Mugunta ita ce hali na, wanda kuma ya yi nufin yin ta shi ne aboki na*

Meaning:

Wickedness is my hobby, whoever intends doing it is my friend

The numbers two and three epithets above refer to Zakari. The first addressed to him while the second by himself and for himself.

- (2) Alhaji Abubakar Imam (1978) *Ruwan Bagaja* The novel is on the adventure, in search of the water of cure.

- ii. *Koje Sarkin labari* (p. 1)

Meaning:

Koje the king of tales

- ii. *Ni ne Sarkin labari* (p. 1)

Meaning:

I am the king of tales

The epithets are on Koje, a famous story teller in in the novel. The first by others whereas the second by himself.

- iii. *Malam Alhaji Imam, malami uban malamai!* (p. 8)

Meaning:

Malam Alhaji Imam, the leader of all scholars.

- iv. *Rika mini nan, malami uban malamai* (p. 9)

Meaning:

Hold on! Teacher of all scholars

- v. *Hakanan ne, Malam! Hakanan ne malamin malamai* (p.9)

Meaning:

That is it! That is it leader of all scholars

All the epithets above are used to address the same person, Malam Alhaji Imam.

- vi. *Zurke dan Muhamman!* (p. 13) x 5

Meaning:

Zurke son of Mamman!

The epithet is usual address by Shehu on Zurke just as the letter addresses the former below:

- vii. *Himma dai dan Shehu!* (p.5)

Meaning:

Go on son of Shehu

- viii. *Zandaro dan Zotori* (p. 16)

Meaning:

Zandoro (onomatopoeic name for his height '70 feet') son of Zotoro

- ix. *Zandoro dan zotori, Sarkin tsawon 'yan Adam* (p. 17)

Meaning:

Zandaro, son of Zotori, the king of the tall ones

- x. *(Daula) Na Malam Iro masu kwana salla!* (P. 28)

Meaning:

(Daula) of Mister Iro, one that prays all night long.

- (3) Malam Tanko Zango (1978) *Da'u fataken Dare*

It is important to note that even the title of the novel is an epithet. It means: Da'u, the night merchant. It deals with the activities of the 'Night Merchants'.

- i. *Ni ne Bakin Duhu daidai yaro cimakar ka kulki ko gora* (p. 7).

Meaning:

I am the black darkness fit for everyone, I do with both smaller and bigger sticks

- ii. *Ai ni ne Sambo Bakin Duhu* (p. 7)

Meaning:

I am Sambo, black darkness

- iii. *Ni ne Da'u fataken Dare, da rana ni ke barci. Mai nema na a daji, cikin dakinsa ina kwana. Mai sona gabasa, ya same ni a yamma Na zo na yi abin da na yi zan tafi* (p. 12).

Meaning:

I am Da'u the night merchant; I sleep only in the day time. Whoever looks for me in the forest (can) find me sleeping in his room. He, who wants to find me in the East, will only find me in the West. I came and did what I would and left.

In all the epithets above as they are used in the novel, are ones used by the people for themselves (Self Kirari).

- iv. *Ya'u Jirgin sama* (p. 13)

Meaning:

Ya'u the aeroplane (for his speed)

Ya'u, a character in the novel, is epithetically addressed as the aeroplane.

- v. *"Ni ne Musa yaron Da'u
"Abokin Ya'u Yaron Da'u
Mai so ya bi shararra
"Sai ya zo da kudi hannu
"Sule biyu na Da'u
"Sule Sule na yaran Da'u
"In babu kudi, kyauro kwanta a kwarin baya.*

Meaning:

I am Musa Da'u's boy

Ya'u's friend, Da'u's boy

Whoever wants to travel by road safely

Should come with money at hand

Two shillings for Da'u

One shilling each for Da'u's boys

If you have no money then take another road (for your safety)

The above is also an application of self Kirari by the main character, Da'u.

- (4) Ahmadu Ingawa (1981) *Iliya Dan Mai Karfi*: The novel is on the adventure of Iliya Dan Mai Karfi. The title of the novel is also epithetic just like the one above.

- i. *Iliya dan mai karfi* (p. 19) x 2

Meaning:

Iliya, son of the strong one.

- ii. *Kwalele dokin Iliya, Kwalele dokin Yaki,*

Ba ni saishе ka, ba ni kuwa bada aron ka. X 2

Meaning:

Kwalele Iliya's horse, Kwalele, the Battle horse

I will neither sell you, nor will I lend you out.

The epithet above is for Iliya's horse. It is the usual epithet he applies to it whenever he rides it.

- iii. *(Iliya) Tsoho mai daka wa yaro kashi* (p. 29)

Meaning:

(Iliya) the old one that beats up a young man

- iv. *Bugu mai kashe kura! Baban Falalu sai dubu ta taru* (p. 30)

Meaning:

Extreme beating is what kills a hyena! Father of Falalu only many can challenge you

- v. *Manya maganin karakar kasa!* (p. 31)

Meaning:

Elders, the cure to the earth resistance

- vi. *Mutum daya tamkar dubu*

Meaning:

One man who is equal to a thousand men!

All the epithets above are used to address Iliya, the main character of the novel.

- (5) Musa Muhammad Bello (1982): *Tsumagiya Kan Hanya*

- i. *Na Ladi baban mota*

Kasasn mota

Mota ta sanku (p. 3)

Meaning:

One betrothed to Ladi, father of the motor

You know the motor

The motor knows you

The epithet is for a famous driver (in the novel), Sani.

ii. (Sambo) *Zakara mai neman suna bada kwaya ka ci tsakuwa* (p. 12)

Meaning:

(Sambo) The Cock, one after popularity, gives grains and takes stones.

iii. *Munka'ila mushen gizaka ka mutu kana bai wa yara tsoro* (p. 32)

Meaning:

Munka'ila, the dead caterpillar that frightens the children

iv. *Uwargida sarautar mata* (p. 34)

Meaning:

First wife's position is (like) chieftaincy title to women

The epithets are addressed to Munka'ila and Hafsi respectively.

v. *Tangaran 'sayen mai kasada* (p. 36)

Meaning:

Crockery business is risk taking

vi. *'Harsashi' maganin mai kwanto* (p. 44)

Meaning:

Bullet is the remedy for those that lie down (when it is shot)

There is the use of metaphor in the two epithets above.

(6) AbdulKadir Dangambo (1984) *Kitsen Rogo*: The novel is on the illusion of the city. It is proverbial as well as epithetical.

i. *Kitsen Rogo marmari daga nesa* (p. vii)

Meaning:

Cassava fat, longing from the far

ii. *Tauren kiyashi dauki abin day a fi ka* (p. 2)

Meaning:

The matured ant, take what is heavier than you

(7) Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina (1986) *Mallakin Zuciyata*: It is a novel with love relationship as its subject matter. It contains only two epithets which are:

i. *Sangwamin tama Usman* (p. 48)

Meaning:

Usman, the iron – ore staff

ii. *Garanhotsami mugun babba, ana rabo yana cin gaya* (p. 131).

Meaning:

Garanhotsami the wicked one; while food is being served he eats without stew.

There is metaphorical address in the two epithets. In each case, the figurative device is used.

Conclusion:

We have successfully presented and defined the terms literature and epithet and also explored the genre – epithet as a passing device in modern Hausa Prose. Similarly, the use of the concept, the situation of its use and users have been examined. It is also the conclusion of this paper that epithets feature in almost every Hausa novel.

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