

INANIMATE ANIMATED: SYNECDOCHE IN YORUBA TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT: The traditional medicine Yoruba is one among the several systems of medicinal techniques used in the contemporary society Yoruba. The traditional medicine Yoruba is broad. It involves the use of words incantatory and other such material ingredients as herbs, leaves, roots, seeds, earth and other forms of ingredients that depend on the cure type that it is wanted, or, best saying, of the type of treated disease. This work reveals the philosophy Yoruba, its interaction and interrelation among the cosmoses, physical and spiritual. The work also display that the synecdoche is used as an interaction weapon among cosmos, and as a weapon of transfer of medical power.

Keywords: Yoruba; Nigeria; Traditional medicine

INTRODUCTION

Yoruba traditional medicine is one of various systems of medicinal techniques in their contemporary society. Yoruba traditional medicine is broad. It involves the use of incantatory words and other material ingredients including herbs, leaves, roots, seed, earth and other forms of ingredients depending on the type of medicine they are making.

Apart from the materials involve in the making and usage of Yoruba traditional medicine there are incantatory words such as: **Aasan, Ayajo, Ofo** and **Ogede**¹.

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(1) Ofo, ayajo, aasan and ogede are regarded as incantatory words, because it is ambiguous to interpret each of them as incantation. Opefeyitimi (1997: 47) even regard ayajo as

It has been observed that synecdoche as a trope is a strong paradigm upon which the transfer of power rests. Therefore, in the making and utility of Yoruba traditional medicine, synecdoche is very prominent.

This work reveals the Yoruba philosophy of the interaction and interrelatedness between their cosmos, physical and spiritual. Also, the work is to examine how synecdoche is employed as a weapon of interaction between cosmos, and as a weapon of transfer of medical power.

Lastly, it reveals how inanimate objects become animated in Yoruba traditional medicine. The work concludes with deductions that synecdoche is a strong trope makes use in Yoruba traditional medicine.

YORUBA TRADITIONAL HEALING PROCESS

Yoruba attach much importance to sound health, well-being and prosperity. There is no problem that looks unsurmountable to Yoruba people. And that is why they give regard to their medicine (oogun). There is a proverbial saying in Yoruba that "oogun lo lojo iponju" (trans medicine is useful on the day of adversity). This means that, Yoruba people make use of oogun to challenge various situations they find themselves.

Healing process in Yorubaland is a very complex process. The experts involved are many. Though they have distinct function but to a greater extent they are interdependent on one another. This is to show that an arm of knowledge is not adequate to solve human problems.

The experts involved in healing process in a traditional Yoruba society are: Ifa priest/priestess, Onisegun, the witches (Eleye or Aje), Adahunse, Ateegun, Psychiatrist (Awowere) and gods and goddesses².

In Yorubaland, there are three main ways in which medicine could be applied. They are oral, that is through the mouth; this is called **atenuje**; the second is through the recipient's body – **Ataragba**, and the third means is called Aransi or Asasi, the one send to somebody.

The means by which a particular medicine is applied does not show whether it is evil or good but the purpose it is used for will show whether it is evil or good.

incantation special and ofo as incantation proper. This amounts to nothing else than ambiguity. Therefore, it is better to regard these powerful words of Yoruba as incantatory word and also retain their Yoruba names. Afolabi Olabimbtan (1991: 35) call the incantatory poetry.

(2) The details of their interdependency are in AJIBADE, G. O. *Traditional Yoruba healers: Problems of Meaning and Practice*. Forthcoming.

Osanyin has been regarded as the custodian of medicine and that is why he's praised thus³:

*A bi gbogbo ara kiki oogun
Ewe kan mi mo pe
Igba ewe lo n je mi loju olo
Okunrin nla tii figbo sile foogun
Okunrin nla tii fewe sohun gbogbo.*

*(The one with his body full of medicine
I called on a single leaf
Two hundred leaves answered me on the mill stone.
The great man that spares herbs for medicine
The great man that uses herbs to do all things).*

The above descriptive poetry (Oriki) of Osanyin is establishing the fact that Osanyin is the custodian of Yoruba traditional medicine. He's the one who knows how to use herbs to make different types of medicine.

On the other hand, Orunmila is also associated with healing among the Yoruba but he is more of consultancy through various means of oracular consultation/divination.

In this article our concern is the use of synecdoche in Yoruba medicine, particularly the objects used to transfer powers to another objects, person or group of persons. Therefore, this work uses the paradigm of the third means of applying Yoruba traditional medicine – this is the one sent to meet another object or person (Aransi/Asasi). This will be examined to show interrelations between the cosmos.

SYNECDOCHE IN YORUBA MEDICAL OBJECTS

Under the subject of discussion are about six different types of medicine which are sent to people. In all cases the end results of all of them are destruction and loss.

(3) Oriki of Osanyin is more than this but we have decided just to make use of this to suit our argument.

These are:

Abilu – Push – at – somebody

Apepa – Act of call and kill

Asapa – Act of cut and kill

Apeta – Act of call and shoot

Agunpa – Act of pierce and kill

Alupa – Act of beat and kill

Though, these medicines are not done in the same way, but they have something in common. Each of them makes use of body part of the would – be recipient before they can harm the person. They can make use of that person's urine, faeces, hair, foot print, shadow or picture.

For example, after they have prepared the medicine or charm, if **apeta** is to be used they can call on the person wherever he/she is staying. His/her shadow or picture will appear and such person's shadow or picture will be shot without that person's presence. Hence, the person will die wherever he/she is.

If it is **Asapa**, cutlass will be used instead of gun. And by the time the person's shadow or picture is cut with a charmed cutlass the action will fall on the person and he/she will die.

At times, it may be the voice of that person that is needed before he/she could be killed. In this situation, **apepa** is used. The person's name will be called and by the time he answered the caller, the person will die. And that is why the Yoruba believe that you must see the person calling you before you answer.

If it is **agunpa**, a charmed sword will be used to pierce either the faeces or urine or hair of the would be recipient. In that wise, it is believed that part of that person's body stands for the person's whole being. And the expected problem will commence on the recipient's body part where the used object is found. If faeces is used, the problem will start from the anus. If urine of that person is used, the problem will start from either the penis or vagina as the case may be.

If it is **Alupa**, cudgel is used to beat the shadow or picture of the would-be recipient. This shows that the person's shadow or picture is taken to be that person's whole being.

The idea of employing synecdoche to transfer medical power from person to person, far and near is not accidental but cultural and spiritual or metaphysical. It has its roots deepened in Yoruba world views. Ajuwon (1991) corroborates this by saying that:

To the Yoruba, there is no event on earth without a divine origin. Everything on earth, whether animate or inanimate, has a soul, and indeed a cognomen or attributive name... The god Osanyin was reputed to have possessed immense knowledge of these names and in fact, of traditional medicines which he introduced into the primordial world at the descent on earth of the 401 Yoruba divinities.

This quotation from Ajuwon is to buttress our argument on the fact that Yoruba use an object or part of human being to stand for the whole person. And this they do in order to transfer a kind of power to their target.

One will wonder why object like hair on the head is spoken to and it will receive action taken. It is a belief among the Yoruba that everything on earth, abstract or concrete has soul and name, so they can receive action. It is believed that leaves can hear and speak. That is why they take a part to represent a whole in their application of traditional medicine.

The Yoruba believe that there are spirits in the air who could be sent to certain places to deliver their messages after they have observed the necessary protocols. By the time they speak their heart desires concerning the recipient of the action to be taken, it is believed that the object they are using also has a soul and the word of their mouth (which is incantatory) has turned the object into the person, hence the spirit will act upon their requests.

This is showing the Yoruba philosophy of interaction between the cosmos. Yoruba hold that there is a strong interrelation between them and everything in their world. That is why they personify objects to symbolize something else or take part of an object to stand for the whole object.

At this juncture, one can even use Yoruba medicine to show interrelatedness of personification, symbolism and synecdoche as tropes.

The reason why synecdoche is being employed in this category of Yoruba traditional medicine is not far fetched. A Yoruba proverbial saying goes thus "O rese were oo bu soogun, Ologbon wo ni yoo gbe tire duro?" (trans: you see the leg of a mad person you don't cut it to prepare medicine, which wise person will allow you to cut his/her own).

Since, this category of medicine is used to fight one's enemy it may not be easy to get in touch with one's enemy freely without being opposed. Therefore, it is considered wise and safe to make use of metaphysical means of fighting one's enemy.

CONCLUSION

The use of synecdoche is of paramount importance to the users and makers of Yoruba traditional medicine. It is a means of transfer of power from a region to another in order to effect a desire or change. This work has also shown that all things in Yoruba world view are interrelated and inter dependent as well. This corroborates Yoruba philosophy of binary principle of complementarity.

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RESUMO: A medicina tradicional Yoruba é um entre os vários sistemas de técnicas medicinais utilizadas na sociedade contemporânea Yoruba. A medicina tradicional Yoruba é ampla. Envolve o uso de palavras encantatórias e outros ingredientes materiais tais como ervas, folhas, raízes, sementes, terra e outras formas de ingredientes que dependem do tipo de cura que se deseja, ou, melhor dizendo, do tipo de doença tratada. Este trabalho revela a filosofia Yoruba, da interação e interrelação entre o cosmos, físico e espiritual. O trabalho também mostra que a sinédoque é empregada como uma arma de interação entre cosmo, e como uma arma de transferência de poder médico.

Palavras-chave: Yoruba; Nigéria; Medicina tradicional