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The Yorùbá Animal Metaphors: Analysis and Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

The paper undertakes a study of animal metaphors in the Yorùbá language with a view to highlighting the stylistic and communicative potentials of these metaphors.

To achieve the set objective, the animals – domestic and wild – involved in metaphors and their individual distinctive characteristic features that motivate their metaphorical interpretations are highlighted. The paper also discusses the sources of animal metaphors, which are said to be located in three areas, namely: the Yorùbá naming culture, animal characteristic habits and behaviour, and the Yorùbá poetry.

In discussing the metaphorical processes involved in the interpretation of animal-related metaphors, a two-dimensional approach is adopted: stylistic and cultural. In the first, the semantic features of animals involved in metaphors are decomposed into semantic markers that are of two types. The first is the High Priority Semantic Markers (HPSM), which determine the cognitive/conceptual meaning of the metaphors, and the second is the Low Priority Semantic Markers (LPSM), which determine the secondary metaphorical interpretation. Animal metaphors involve transference of meanings, and whatever meanings or interpretations are assigned to a particular animal metaphor, are culture and context dependent.

The paper concludes with stylistic and communicative functions of animal metaphors, with the submission that stylistically animal metaphors contribute to aesthetics and poetic elegance of literary texts through their lexical tones, which can be stylistically manipulated. They are also being used as a new or additional mode of expression in both literary and routine communication.

Key Words: animal, domestic, wildlife, metaphor, and culture

1. INTRODUCTION

The Yorùbá of the South West Nigeria are a buoyant and resilient people with a vibrant language. The word 'Yorùbá' refers to the people as well as their language. What appears to be the philosophic disposition of the Yorùbá to life, generally, is captured by Babalọlá (1966) who describes the Yorùbá as people with:

> …a zest for enjoying life while at the same time attaching great importance to hardwork as the only guarantee of economic well-being.

About the Yorùbá language, he has this to say:

> …Their tonal and metaphor-saturated language in its ordinary prose form is never far from music in the aural impression it gives and which has

> produced an extensive variety of spoken art characteristic of the people (Babalọlá 1966).

Two points relevant to this study that can be deduced from Babalọlá's description of the Yorùbá people are their "zest for enjoying life and hardwork" and their "tonal and metaphor-saturated language". For a proper understanding of the subject – matter of this paper therefore – it is appropriate to make reference to the above Yorùbá philosophy-zest for enjoyment/entertainment and hardwork for economic goals.

In the Yorùbá pre-literate period, farming and hunting were the primary occupation and, even now, a greater percentage of the people are farmers and hunters. This is so because of their location that stretches between the rain and the Savannah forests. While the rich soil of the forests are suitable for the practice of agriculture, they are equally a good habitation for varieties of animals; small and big. It is, therefore, customary that in their daily activities as farmers/hunters, they come in contact with animals whose behaviour or characteristic traits they study and get acquainted with. These animals, some of which are killed either with gun or snares (traps) serve as sources of good tasty meat as well as a source of earning money. It is also a common practice that some of the animals are caught alive, tamed and domesticated. The animals in this category include the goat, sheep, cat, pig, dog, tortoise, monkey, horse and a host of others. The wild ones found undomesticable are shot dead instantly and consumed as food or sold to make money. This class includes: the lion, leopard, snake, elephant, etc. As far as the Yorùbá are concerned, like other African people, the value of animals transcends food and economic gains. Some of the animals, especially the domesticated and even the wild ones as well are veritable sources of joy, entertainment and relaxation. For example, the Yorùbá's observation in the forest of the agility of 'Ọbọ' (the colobus monkey) on the treetop; the aw-inspiring stature, tardiness and heavy treading walk of 'erin' (the elephant[1]); and the earth-digging prowess of 'Túùkú' (the river hog) provide great amusement. The domesticated animals, which are of service or source of interest and fun for the Yorùbá, are the cat as pet, dog as pet for hunting and security, the horse as mark of royalty, stamina and entertainment, and the baboon/monkey also belongs to the category of animals that entertain[2].

As a result of their close contact and keen observation, the Yorùbá have a sound knowledge of these animals – the habits, shape, food, etc. and these are well acknowledged and appreciated in their music and poetry. It is no surprise,

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[1] That wild animals like the lion, leopard and elephant are tamed and kept in zoological gardens in the modern day society is a great surprise to the Yorùbá who express the belief that such animals are beyond tame. One of such proverbs in which the belief is expressed is: 'Ọba tó má a Mérin so kò tí jẹ' which literary means 'The king that will tame and domesticate the lion is yet to reign'.

[2] These days, one finds in some Yorùbá major towns like Ibadan, a monkey or baboon being piloted from one place to another and made to dance and perform acrobatic display for money.

therefore, that information about the nature and characteristic traits and behaviour of animals form an essential part of some of the Yorùbá oral poetic genres, such as oríkì, the Yorùbá praise poetry, Ìjálá, the Yorùbá hunters' poetry, and Ẹsẹ-ifá, the Yorùbá ifá divination poetry.

The focus of this paper, therefore, is a stylistic study of the animal-related metaphors in Yorùbá from a literary perspective. The scope of the study will cover only some of those animals within the Yorùbá climatic region and cultural milieu, which are found to have aroused great interest in them. The objective is to highlight the Yorùbá animal metaphors and the underlying philosophical disposition of such metaphors. The approach is two-dimensional-stylistic and cultural (philosophic)[3]. Since metaphor is about language, a stylistic approach will be used to explain the language elements of metaphor in order to bring out the meaning and aesthetic effects of the metaphors. To unravel the underlying philosophical disposition of the metaphors, the Yorùbá cultural attitude and psychology will be relied upon.

2. Sources of Animal Metaphors

Ọlátúnjí (1984: 51) defines metaphor as a linguistic situation in which "an object, action or situation is described in a terminology proper to another". However, a proper understanding of animal metaphors in Yorùbá goes beyond a mere definition. The contextual situation or condition under which animal metaphors are used is of paramount importance. From a psychological point of view, the usage and understanding of an animal metaphor involves some perception of attitudes, experiences or dispositions of both the speaker and the addressee. Unlike ordinary metaphors which people find relatively easier to understand, sometimes intuitively, as a result of regular usage, animal metaphors appear to be more difficult as most people, especially children under twenty years of age are confined only to the grasp of the literal meaning of the animal being metaphorically used as against their metaphorical interpretations. This obviously, is due to their limited knowledge of the habits, physical characteristics and traits of each animal from which metaphors may be drawn. For example, when a child is called or referred to as 'ẹranko' (animal) the meaning that is immediately available to him is [- human], only to discover later when being told or prompted that other meanings are possible, e.g. [stubborn; deserving beating with stick].

However, for an easy in-road to understanding animal metaphor in Yorùbá, knowledge of the factors – cultural and psychological – which form the sources of animal metaphor, must be taken into account. Such factors include the Yorùbá

[3] The word 'philosophy' as used in this paper entails the Yorùbá general ways of life – their religion, names, food, music, poetry, social and religious ceremonies, thought processes, etc. as enshrined in their culture. In other words, the Yorùbá philosophy of life is embedded in their culture.

naming culture, animal behaviour and physical attributes, and the Yorùbá Oríkì (praise poetry).

a. The Yorùbá Naming Culture

Among the Yorùbá, the names that a child is given are carefully considered as it is believed that the name that a person bears dictates his fortunes. Not only that, a child's name is meant to reflect his family history, their fortunes and misfortunes, hopes and fears as well as the circumstances of conception and birth of the child. For example, the Yorùbá name 'Adéyẹmî', 'Crown befits me', presupposes that the bearer (the child) comes from a royal family and would one day ascend the throne of his fathers.

In the Yorùbá culture, human beings are not the only creatures that bear names. Names are also given to non-human creatures, such as domestic animals like dog, cat, goat, etc. which are kept as pets. Such names, as is usual with human names, also reflect the wishes, aspirations and reservations of the pet-owner. So, it is common to find a goat with such names as 'kánîsùúrù' (we-should-have patience). Such a goat may for short be called 'Sùurù' (patience), a name which is expressive of the philosophy of the owner that patience has great value or reward. Similarly, a dog may be given the name 'Adú', 'that-which-is-black/black coloured', a name which is descriptive of the colour of the dog, or 'Ta-ń-t'Ọ́lọ́run', 'who-is-like-unto-God', a name that describes the Yorùbá philosophy of the incomparability of God. Other names that pets also bear include 'Ìwà-lẹ̀sìn' (religion is conduct), 'Kálẹ́yẹmí' (let-the-evening-be-prosperous-for me), etc.

One interesting aspect of the Yorùbá naming culture as regards pets or domestic animals is the use of such names as instrument of attrition employed by rival co-wives in a polygamous setting. A good illustrative example of this kind of scenario is found in a serial-play relayed on the Broadcasting corporation of Ọyọ state (BCOS) Television with the title 'Bàtà Wàhálà' (shoe-of-trouble) meaning 'a legacy of trouble'. The Television play highlights the bitter rivalry that always characterizes a polygamous home. In the play, a man follows the foolish steps of his polygamous father by marrying as many wives like his father. Then, trouble begins as the wives are locked in bitter rivalry and vicious attack on one another. Each of the rival co-wives, and even the husband, has a pet dog, goat or cat to which is given a name that is expressive of the animosity and ill-will that one co-wife nurses against the other. For example, one of them names her dog 'Ĺílọ-ńí-ó-lọ̀' (go-she-must), another one names her cat 'Ẹ̀wà-ń-bí-wọn-ńínú' (beauty-nauseates-them) and another names her goat 'Jẹ́-n-ŕílé-gbé' (leave-me-and let-me remain), while the eldest wife names her dog 'Sùúrù-lérè' (patience is rewarding). Their husband also has a goat he names 'Mẹ́ẹ́ - lỌlọ́run-wí' (God-approves-of marrying-many-wives). So, whenever any of the co-wives comes into the sitting room with her pet and the pet is called, or addressed by the name given to it, the

co-rival being referred to knows that the pet name is an indirect reference to her and she responds appropriately by bringing her own pet and doing the same thing. Through the pets' names, the rival wives pass uncomplimentary remarks to insult the sensibility of one another as the names have metaphorical insinuations. For example, 'Líl̩ọ́-ni-ẹ́-l̩ọ' (Go, you-must) is expressing the fact that other co-wives must go; 'Ẹ̀wá-ń-bíwọn-nínú' (beauty-nauseates-them) is expressing the point that her beauty angers other wives, making them jealous; 'Jẹ́-ń-rile-gbé' (allow-me-to-remain-in-the-house) is pleading with the name that they should leave her to enjoy her matrimonial home. Their husband with his own pet's name 'mẹ́ẹ́-l'Ọl̩ọrun-wí' (God-approves-of-many-wives), advocates that he has not committed any untowards acts by having many wives as God approves of polygamy. It is therefore, clear that in all the above cases, the names of the pets/domestic animals are not just names but metaphors meant to abuse, harass and insult the sensibilities of a rival co-wife.

b. Physical Attributes and Characteristic Traits of Animals

The Yorùbá in their traditional occupation as farmers and hunters have contact with animals, whether as domestic animals or wildlife in the forest. The behavioural characteristics of the animals are well known and from them metaphors are formed when man/human beings are predicated of the actions and habits of the animals. For example, the cat 'ológbò' is well known and loved for its friendly mien and curiosity; the sheep 'agùtàn' is known for its gentility or at times, its sheer stupidity; the goat 'ewurẹ́' for stubbornness; the horse 'ẹ̀sin' for stamina; the dog 'aja' for being an uncritical follower; while the pig 'ẹlẹ́dẹ̀' is hated for its dirtiness but loved for its high fertility. The monkey 'ọbọ̀' is loved for its agility but hated for its destructive and silly tendencies. For the wild animals in the forest, hunters come home from their hunting expeditions (games) to narrate their observation and experiences about the wild animals. Sometimes, they are fascinated by the physical appearance, beauty or gait of a particular animal. For instance, the lion 'kìnnìhún' is admired and considered the king of the animals because of its glossy skin and the bushy crown like ring of hair around its neck; the deer 'egbin' for its beauty; the leopard 'ẹkùn' with its beautiful spotted skin; the duiker 'ẹtu' for its extremely broom-like thin legs and fantastic speed; the elephant 'erin' for its aw-inspiring-gait; and the love of the colobus monkey for trees of great height. The physical attributes and characteristic cry, gait and habits of these animals, as observed by hunters and farmers form the bases of the metaphorical allusions made to a particular animal, e.g.

the lion 'kìnnìhún' – for royalty and beauty because of its glossy skin
big rat 'òkété'[4] – for treachery
civet cat 'ẹtà' – for sleepiness
dog 'ajá' – for sexual incontinence/promiscuity

c. Poetry

Poetry is another good source of Yorùbá animal metaphor. Whatever observation and/or experiences hunters have about animals in the forest are usually composed into poems of great aesthetic and rhythmic value; and are sung about. It is therefore customary to find in Yorùbá oral poetic genres of different kinds, such as Ìjálá (the Yorùbá hunters' poem), oríkì (the Yorùbá praise poetry) and ẹsẹ-ifá (the Yorùbá ifá divination poetry), verbal salute to animals. In such poetic compositions, their admiration and love for the animals are expressed, while information is also given about the peculiar characteristic traits of each of the animals they have observed. For example, in the excerpt below from Ìjálá chant, the elephant (erin) is being praised for its might, aw-inspiring gait and the high value of its tusks, skin and meat. The praise goes thus:

> Erin lábá-owó, erin abìkúnlẹ̀ pelemọmọ (Babalọlá 1966: 93, line 1) O' elephant. Possessor of a savings-basket full of money, O' elephant, huge as a hill, even in a crouching position.

Also in the excerpt below from Ìjálá chant, the duiker (ẹtu), a highly prized animal among hunters is being praised thus:

> Ẹtu òtòǹpòrò lẹ́gàn (line 6)
> Lájḭ́nbú aláyà gbẹ̀du (23)
> Àkọ́bḭ́ baálẹ̀ ògbómọ̀ṣọ́[5] (25)
>
> (Babalọlá 1966)

> O duiker, the most highly prized in the forest
> Lájḭ́nbú whose chest skin makes a good royal (gbẹ̀du) drum
> The first-born of the baálẹ̀ (compound head) of Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́.

Here, the animal, duiker is being praised or hailed for its fleet of foot, its chest skin which is good for making gbẹ̀du drum, a type of royal drum meant for kings alone, and for the natural linear mark on its face similar to the traditional royal

[4] Some of the animals, e.g. the 'rodent' (òkété) and 'ẹdun' (colobus monkey) are claimed to have derived some of their characteristic attributes from the Yorùbá myths. See Abìmbọ́la (1976: 180).

[5] Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́ is a Yorùbá town whose natives are well-known for their traditional facial marks, especially the vertical one-stroke mark across the nose ridge. The town is about 80 kilometres North of Ibadan, the Ọyọ State capital, Nigeria.

facial mark found on the faces of the Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́ people, especially their king. All this points to the high prestige which the animal (duiker) enjoys among the hunters in general and whose flesh is being hailed as being very tasty for human food and is highly appreciated as a gift especially among relatives-in-law.

Apart from Ìjálá, the Yorùbá hunters poem, which has the largest concentration of verbal salute to animals, oríkì, which according to Ọlátúnjí (1984: 67), is the most popular Yorùbá oral poetic genres is also a very rich source of animal metaphors. In Oríkì, which is a collection of descriptive phrases and sentences, animal metaphors feature prominently. For example, characteristic traits of animals, such as their manner of living, manner of eating, sleeping, walking, running or appearance of animals, which arouse their interest, are predicated of human beings as in the oriki of the Arẹ̀sà lineage given below:

Ọ̀kẹ́rẹ́ ni mí
Mo lè fọpo, ládágún mọdẹ
Ọ̀fọ̀fọ̀,
Mo le fọyìn l'Adẹ

(Babalọlá 1966: 141)

I am a squirrel
I can prepare palm oil from palm-nuts on the forest of the Mọdẹ lineage
I am skilled at washing
I can produce palm oil by washing palm-nuts in Adẹ palm forests.

Here, the poet predicates himself as ọ̀kẹ́rẹ́ (the squirrel), an animal that is noted for its undying love for the palm-fruits. The squirrel's manner of scraping the palm-oil (juice) from palm-nuts on palm-trees with dexterity is now being used metaphorically to describe the skilful manner in which the poet can extract or produce palm oil from palm-fruits. The poet is from the lineage whose profession is making palm oil.

It is also common to find in oríkì, metaphorical expressions in which a person is being predicated of prestigious animals such as the elephant 'erin', horse 'ẹṣin' and the tiger 'ẹkún' as in:

Ọmọ Adégorìitẹ̀, ọmọ̀ Èjìgbàrà Ìlẹ̀kẹ̀
Ọmọ ọ̀gán-àn , **<u>omọ ehín erin</u>** (Babalọlá 1966: 147, lines 70–71)
Offspring of Adegorìié, offspring of those who used to wear double strings of beads
Offspring of Ọ̀gán-àn, <u>offspring of Elephants' Tusks</u>

The animal metaphor here is the elephant's body-part, the tusk 'ehín erin' (underlined). Elephant tusk is noted for its high economic value. That the poet predicates the person being praised in the excerpt of the elephants' tusk is to express, metaphorically, the point that he is a 'prosperous person', a person of high substance or high social standing in the society. Also, in:

Ọlọ́ṣǔnde ń bẹ ńlé, àb'ó ròde? (line 3)
…ọmọ ẹwà tì̀ẹ̀mì̀ bí̀ Ì̀rù ẹṣin (10)

(Babalọlá 1966: 177)

Is she, Ọlọṣunde at home, or has she gone a-visiting
…the hair, endowed with beauty plentiful as hair on a horse's tail.

The subject of the oríkì, Ọlọṣunde, a female, is being predicated of the horse's tail 'Ì̀rù ẹṣin' which is usually very hairy for her exceeding beauty. The motivation for this interpretation is the comparison of the degree of the subject beauty with the bushy hair on the horses tail. In the cognomen of the late king of Ẹdẹ, Ọba Adétóyèṣe Laoye, the poet predicates him of an elephant thus:

Àkànjí̀ Erin (Odùbíàn 1964: 16)
Àkànjí̀, the elephant

This is a metaphorical expression, which alludes to the giant social and traditional status of the man as a king with his royalty and powers. Similarly, in the example below, 'ọ̀bọ̀' (the monkey) is being used as metaphor:

Oní̀lù tí̀ ń lùlù àmọ̀réwọ́
Ẹn tó máa joye <u>kì̀ í̀ se ọ̀bọ̀</u>
(Babalọlá 1966: 301, lines 15–16)

A drummer drumming trickishly, to catch out his dancer,
the prospective chief who has to dance to the drumming is not a fool.

In the Yorùbá culture, the drummer and the dancer are sometimes locked in a competition of supremacy on the dancing floor. In that circumstance, the drummer tries to outmatch the dancer by introducing intricacies into his drumming style, however the dancer too who also wants to outmatch the drummer is not a novice to such intricacies. That is what actually happens in the text, where the dancer (the prospective chief) is said not to be a monkey 'ọ̀bọ̀'. The metaphorical expression here 'kìí ṣe ọ̀bọ̀' (he is not a monkey) has the interpretation that the dancer is 'not a fool'. 'Ọ̀bọ̀' (monkey) has the metaphorical meaning of 'foolishness' or 'stupidity'.

One of the most striking aspects of animal metaphors in the Yorùbá poetic genres-oríkì̀, Ì̀jálá and ẹsẹ-ifá is the anthropomorphism of animals. Through anthropomorphism, metaphors are created by ascribing such human characteristics as thoughts, emotions and feelings to animals. The essence of this, ostensibly, is to create a parallel between animals and humans, a condition considered necessary for a proper understanding of the nature and emotions of humans through animals. This particular practice Abímbọ́lá (1976: 195) contends is common to Negro African people. For example, a man may be predicated of the leopard in oríkì as 'ọmọ ẹkùn', i.e. offspring of the tiger. In this case, the person

being predicated has the semantic feature of [+ human] and is said to have been begat by 'ẹkùn' which has the semantic features $\begin{pmatrix} + \text{animal} \\ - \text{human} \end{pmatrix}$ which is an anomaly. However, the predication of the man as tiger lies in the comparison of the attributes of the tiger [+ bold/courage] with those of the subject.

Another instance of anthropomorphism is a physical description in oríkì of the baboon (ìnàkí) as 'olójú-arédè' (i.e. possessor-of-eyes-shy-like-a-bride's). The anthropomorphism in the expression lies in the comparison of the baboon's face with the shy-looks of a new bride. When therefore, the baboon is metaphorically described as 'olójú-arédè', the attributes of a new bride which are 'human' and 'shy' are being ascribed to a creature that is 'non-human'.

From the foregoing, it is clear that animal metaphor in Yorùbá are shrouded in anthropomorphism by ascribing to them actions, behaviour, and attributes such as naming which are proper only for human beings. It may, therefore be right to say that the Yorùbá animal metaphors are rooted in the Yorùbá culture and tradition. Having traced the sources or origin of animal metaphors thus far, it is therefore relevant to discuss the Yorùbá animal metaphors within their socio-linguistic contextual situation of usage for a good understanding of their stylistic and semantic interpretations as well as the philosophic disposition underlying their usage.

3. Animal Metaphor Analysis and Interpretation

It is necessary to point out that certain conditions/factors are necessary before any utterance can be regarded as animal metaphor. The first is that both the speaker and hearer must have some shared assumptions. The speaker believes and knows that the utterance he makes is metaphor and the hearer also believes no less. It must be added also that the shared assumptions of both the speaker and hearer include their knowledge of animal characteristic traits and behaviour which serves as the basis on which metaphor is drawn. For instance, for a person to be described as '*ẹdun'* (colobus monkey) both the speaker and hearer know the facts, i.e. the characteristics of the animal 'ẹdun' (white-thighed colobus monkey) as being associated in the Yorùbá culture with 'twin children'. It is also associated with negative reversal of fortune. On the basis of this assumption therefore, the expression can be interpreted to mean: 'the man is a 'twin-child'' or 'the man's fortune has suffered a setback' (financially poor). Without such shared assumptions, it would be difficult to give value to animal metaphors in Yorùbá. Another factor is that animal metaphors involve meaning transfer. In meaning transfer, the attributes and actions associated with an animal are transferred to the person being predicated of an animal. The third factor is motivation and this is culture dependent. For instance, whatever attributes an animal is claimed to have

depend largely on the Yorùbá culture and philosophy of life. The cultural phenomenon explains why an animal like the tortoise (ìjàpá) will have different attributes in different cultures, e.g.

Tortoise: i. Slow (English culture)
ii. cunning (Yorùbá culture)

The point being made is that in the use and understanding of animal metaphor in Yorùbá, motivation is essential, and that it is both context and culture dependent.

For an easy understanding of the Yorùbá animal metaphors, there is need to decompose the characteristic features of the animals involved in metaphors to their semantic markers. Semantic markers, like Ọlábọ̀dé (1981: 102) observed are of two types – the High Priority Semantic Markers (HPSM) and the Low Priority Semantic Markers (LPSM). The HPSM, as far as animal metaphor is concerned, point to the areas of general similarity of the animal features; and are significant in determining the cognitive or conceptual meaning of the animal metaphor. In other words, they contribute maximally to the meaning of a word, and because of this, they are said to be high on the scale of priority. In this regard, all animas have, basically, the Semantic Markers of $\begin{pmatrix} + \text{animate} \\ + \text{animal} \end{pmatrix}$.

As for the LPSM, they contribute minimally to the cognitive or conceptual meaning of an animal metaphor, but significantly to its secondary or metaphorical meaning. The addition or subtraction of the LPSM does not affect the cognitive or conceptual meaning of an animal, hence, they are regarded as low on the priority scale of the semantic markers. When, therefore, reference is made to the LPSM, there is a shift from the linguistic knowledge to the extra-linguistic one. In other words, the LPSM determine the metaphorical or connotative interpretation of an animal metaphor. It is important to note that an animal metaphor can have more than one LPSM. For instance, after giving the HPSM of the animal 'ẹkun' (tiger) as $\begin{pmatrix} + \text{animate} \\ + \text{animal} \end{pmatrix}$, it can also be given some other LSPM as in the oríkì below:

Ẹkùn ọkọ Ṣíjúwọlá
Tiger, husband of Ṣíjúwọlá

In the example, a man, Ṣíjúwọlá is predicated of 'ẹkùn' (the tiger). Considering the LPSM of 'ẹkùn' as $\begin{pmatrix} + \text{pugnacious} \\ + \text{fierce/strong} \\ + \text{daring} \end{pmatrix}$ the metaphor 'ẹkùn' can then be interpreted based on the Low Priority Semantic Markers as: a fighter, a fierce or strong man or a daring person depending on the socio-linguistic context of usage. It is also important to note that in decoding an animal metaphor, the LPSM of the metaphor has to be ordered according to their importance. In other words, in any

animal metaphorical analysis and interpretation (process) the most functional among the low priority semantic marker is highlighted. Using the above example as an illustration, the semantic features of 'ẹkùn' have been ordered according to their importance with 'pugnacious' being the foremost attribute of 'ẹkùn', followed by 'fierceness/strength' and daring respectively. However, considering the context in which the metaphor is used, the best candidate among the LPSM is [+fierce/strong]. The candidacy is based on the fact of the context that the man Síjúwọlá is not fighting in any contest of battle, but that he is being eulogized for this strength of character. Similarly, when a person is predicated of a wolf 'ìkookò', apart from the HPSM of

(+ animate
+ animal)

which make the animal 'ìkookò' to be interpreted as an animal, the LPSM which are:

(+ carnivore
+ blood thirsty
+ wild
+ voracious)

are used in determining its secondary or metaphorical interpretation. Considering the social context of usage therefore, any other semantic markers can be highlighted. Thus, the man can be interpreted to be a 'man-eater', a bloodthirsty person, a wild person or a voracious person.

Having discussed the metaphoric processes involved in Yorùbá animal metaphors, the distinctive characteristic features constituting the low priority semantic markers of some of the animals involved in metaphors are given below, each semantic feature with a corresponding semantic marker:

Dog 'ajá' (+ promiscuity
+ uncritical follower
– table manner)

Pig 'ẹlẹ́dẹ̀' (+ dirty
+ irrational anger
+ high fertility)

snake 'ejò' (+ poison
+ treachery
+ cruel)

Big rat/rodent 'òkété' (+ treachery
+ night crawler)

Elephant ‘erin’	+ royal/honour + might/strong + clumsy
White colobus monkey ‘ẹdun’	+ twin – born + bad fortune
Red colobus monkey ‘àáyá’	+ fast speed + playful
Fox ‘kọ̀lọ̀kọ̀lọ̀’	+ meat–glutton + hen–eater
Bull ‘àgbò’	+ pugnacious
Tortoise ‘ìjàpá’	+ cunning + clever
Snail ‘ìgbín’	+ slow movement + calm + inertia/lazy
Hare ‘ehoro’	+ running/speed
Horse ‘ẹsin’	+ stamina/strong + royal – personal hygiene
Squirrel ‘ọ̀kẹ́rẹ́’	+ talkative + palm-fruit eater
Goat ‘ewúrẹ́/ẹran’	+ stubborn

He–Goat ‘òbúkọ’’	+ sexually licentious + smell
Sheep ‘àgùtàn’	+ gentle + sluggish + low intellect
Deer ‘egbin’	+ beauty
Monkey ‘ọ̀bọ’ (general)	+ agility + playfulness + stupidity/foolishness

Before we conclude this paper, it is necessary to highlight the stylistic and semantic significance of animal metaphors in the Yorùbá language. Though the incidence of animal metaphors is highest in poetry, it is not restricted to it as it is also commonly used in everyday language usage situations. And wherever they are used, they are consciously contrived to achieve both stylistic and communicative goals. Stylistically, animal metaphors perform aesthetic functions. The lexical tones of the expression constituting animal metaphor contribute to the tempo and rhythm of poetry. Some of the animals involved in metaphors sometimes have more than one attributive name which can be used in poetic compositions. The names can be used stylistically to produce an aesthetic effect as in the excerpt:

Kòtò tí a gbẹ́ sílẹ̀ fájànàkú
Erin mojú erin ò bá ibẹ̀ lọ

The grave dug and covered in disguise for the elephant
The elephant got suspicious, the elephant took another way as trap.

The above example, a Yorùbá poetic expression, the elephant (erin) is also referred to as ‘àjànàkú’. The lexical tones of ‘àjànàkú’ and ‘erin’ (repeated twice) contribute to the poetic quality (aesthetics) of the expression. Another stylistic import of animal metaphors is that they perform emotive functions. They can be used positively in paying tributes, compliments and in eulogizing an animal or human being who have aroused their interest. Similarly, they can be employed uncomplimentarily to satirize, rebuke or castigate any person whose conduct is condemnable. Some of the animal metaphors have more than two readings – complimentary and non-complimentary – and depending on the circumstance and context, an animal metaphor can be used either way. For instance, when a man is described as ‘ẹṣin’ (the horse), this can be interpreted complementarily to mean a

man with stamina for work or running, or non-complimentarily as 'an unhygienic man' as buttressed in the expression:

Ẹṣin jí ẹsin ò bójú
Ẹṣin jí ẹṣin ò wẹsẹ̀
Pẹ̀tẹ̀pẹ́tẹ̀ àtàná ń bẹ ní pátákò ẹṣin

The horse wakes up without washing his face
The horse wakes up without washing his feet
The first of the previous day still lurk in the horse's feet.

In the above Yorùbá popular expression, which expresses the Yorùbá belief about the horse's unclean habits, confirms the meaning of 'unhygienic' that is ascribed to the man. In the same way, a man can be metaphorically referred to as: 'ajá' (dog) to mean 'a faithful companion' or 'an uncritical follower', 'àgùntàn' (sheep) to mean 'gentle/meek' or 'stupid', ẹdun (colobus monkey) to mean 'a twin child' or 'a man with a mark of misfortune'[6].

As for the communicative functions of the Yorùbá animal metaphors, this consists in their uses as a new and additional mode of expression in both literary and routine communication. For example, when used in an appropriate context, animal metaphors like 'ẹlẹ́dẹ̀' (pig), 'ejò' (snake), 'ìgbín' (snail), 'ìjàpá' (tortoise), etc. express particular information about the person who is being predicated of them. In other words rather than being direct and blunt, it is an indirect way of expressing an idea in a subtle or indirect manner. When used in a complimentary manner, the characterizing role of animal-related metaphorical expressions like 'Àkànbí erin', 'Àdìgún ẹkùn', etc. perform emotive functions as the person being predicated in this manner is elated. This usage is very common in oríkì and ìjálá poetry.

4. Conclusion

The principal adjective of this work is a stylistic study of the Yorùbá animal metaphors. The paper highlights the animals – domestic and wild – involved in metaphors and their distinctive characteristic features which motivate their metaphoric interpretations.

The major sources of animal-related metaphors in Yorùbá are located in the Yorùbá naming culture, observation of animal characteristics and poetry. Animal-related metaphoric expressions are said to be involved in meaning transfer and are motivated by such factors as culture and context.

[6] The expression 'ẹdun arinlẹ̀' (the colobus monkey that tread the bare ground) is a Yorùbá expression used in describing a once prosperous person who then later suffered a reversal of fortune.

In discussing the metaphoric processes involved in the interpretation of animal metaphors, the semantic features of such animals are decomposed into semantic markers which are of two types – The High Priority Semantic Marker (HPSM) which determine the cognitive or conceptual meaning and the Low Priority Semantic Marker (LPSM) which determine the connotative or secondary (metaphorical) interpretation. In other words, a particular metaphor is prone to have two interpretations;

i. the conceptual/connotative meaning;
ii. the secondary meaning which is metaphorical.

The paper then undertakes a brief survey of some of the animal-related metaphors and the bunch of semantic markers which determine their metaphorical meaning or interpretation. The interpretation of animal metaphor is said to be culture and context bound.

In conclusion, the stylistic and semantic effects of animal metaphors are highlighted. Stylistically, animal metaphors are used, especially in poetry, in paying tributes and compliments to animals and humans as well. When human beings are predicated of an animal, they are either intentionally or consciously used in anthropomorphism to eulogise, pay compliments and tributes to human beings. When used in an uncomplimentary manner, they are usually intended to satirize, rebuke, condemn or describe negative aspects of his character. Animal metaphors are also used in achieving communicative goals as they are used as new or additional mode of expression in both literary and routine communication.

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