

# LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITY IN YORÙBÁ POETIC DISCOURSE

By

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## CERTIFICATION

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty. To him all glory and honour is due for seeing me through this program. I also dedicate it to my loving husband, Mr. Falade Justus, his love, support and understanding was a cushion against which I leaned throughout the program and which I am still leaning on. I love you beyond words. I also dedicate it to my promising children – Justina, Faith, Ayo and Blessing. Finally, to my parents, the Late Mr. Akinyemi Ọ́sányínbí and Mrs. Olúrẹ̀mí Ọ́sányínbí, I appreciate and hold you all dearest.

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*Fáládé, M.R*  
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## ABSTRACT

Ambiguity, the occurrence of double or multiple meanings, is a natural language universal. Existing studies in the application of linguistics to Yorùbá literary discourse have focused on Yorùbá proverbs, incantations, figurative and idiomatic expressions with little attention paid to linguistic ambiguity. This study was, therefore, designed to investigate linguistic ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse, with a view to describing the types and sources of ambiguity, their communicative potential and stylistic relevance.

Noam Chomsky's Government and Binding Theory complemented with Louis Hjelmslev's Componential Analysis was adopted as framework. Interpretive design was used. Sixteen texts from the works of eleven poets were purposively sampled based on sufficiency of ambiguity: Olátúnde Olátúnjí's *Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí apá kìní àti kejì*; Afolábí Olábímtán's *Aádóta Àròfò, Àkójopò Ewì àbáláyé àti Ewì Apilèkò, Ewì Oríşiríşì*; Àtári Àjànàkú's *Orin Ewúro*; Akinwùmí Işòlá's *Àfàimò àti àwọn àròfò míràn*; DébòAwẹ's *Èkún Elédùmarè*; Olátúbòsún Oládàpò's *Àròyé Akéwì Apá kìní àti kejì, Èmí Ìn Mi Èmí Rẹ*; Olúránkínşé Olánipèkun's *Ijì Ayé*; Dénrelé Obasá's *Àwọn Akéwì Apá kejì*; Şayò Àlàgbé's *Ijálá Oğúndàre Fóyánmu*, Sulaiman Ráji's *Igi N' Dá* and Wándé Abimbólá's *Ijìnlẹ Ohùn Ènu Ifá Apá kìní àti kejì*. Data were subjected to syntactic and content analyses.

Six types of ambiguity were identified in the texts: lexical, structural, morpho-phonological, pragmatic, pun and scope. Lexical ambiguity is the most prevalent in Yorùbá poetry: *olùyà, a photographer/an artist or a worthless person*. In structural ambiguity, the complement/adjunct relation in phrase structure shows the distinction between the shades of meaning portrayed in the utterance: *ẹ lọ yà wón*; may mean *separate them* or *overtake their photograph*. Morpho-phonological ambiguity is often mapped to multiple distinct set of sounds that can be interpreted in more than one way: *dawo* can be interpreted as *betrayed the initiate* or *become an initiate*. Pragmatic ambiguity is associated with two different speech acts performed by a linguistic expression: *Kòfẹsò* could mean a *professor* or *sit-tight ruler*. The play on words with close phonological relationship leads to pun ambiguity; the play on the noun phrases *şewà* (*beans*) and *ewà* (*beauty*) in *Eléwà* (*beautiful one/beans seller*), results in pun ambiguity. Scope ambiguity involves operators and quantifiers: *omọ ọdọ àgbà*, could mean *the child who lives with the elderly man, the older house help, or a wise/clever or mature child*. Sources of ambiguity are homonym, idiomatization, irony, metaphor, polysemy and a range of a word's meaning. The stylistic relevance of the various types of ambiguity include comic effect, humour, mockery and entertainment. For instance, *kí ọkọ pa wá pọ* (*may we board the same vehicle/we die together*). It demonstrates creativity and originality on the part of the poet, as few words are used in communicating many ideas and information.

Linguistic ambiguity, derived largely from homonyms is deployed for comic, mockery, criticism and communicative effects in Yorùbá poetic discourse.

**Keywords:** Ambiguity in Poetry, Yorùbá poetic discourse, Yorùbá syntax and stylistics

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title page	i
Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Abstract	viii
Table of Contents	ix

## **CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

1.0	Background to the study	1
1.1	Statement of the problem	4
1.2	Research questions	5
1.3	Aim and objectives	5
1.4	Scope of the study	6
1.5	Significance of the study	6
1.6	Ambiguity: a conceptual framework	7
1.7	Literature and ambiguity	11
1.8	Summary	12
	Notes to chapter one	13

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

2.0	LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1	Introduction	13
2.2	Linguistics, Literature and Stylistics	13
2.2.1	Linguistics	14
2.2.2	Literature	16
2.2.2.1	Literature as a Discourse	17
2.2.2.2	Poetic discourse or poetry	18
2.2.3	Stylistics	20
2.3	Relationship between linguistics, stylistics and literature	21
2.4	Role of linguistics in literary analysis	
2.4.5	Standard language versus literary / poetic Language	
		26

2.6.0	Theoretical Framework	28
2.6.1	Transformational Generative Grammar	29
2.6.2	Concepts of TGG relevant to this study	30
2.6.2.1	Linguistic competence	30
2.6.2.2	Sentence generation	31
2.6.2.3	Grammaticalness	32
2.6.2.4	Paraphrase relations	33
2.6.3	Linguistic performance	34
2.7	Componential analysis	40
2.8	Why TGG?	41
2.9	Summary	41
	Notes to chapter two	43

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

3.0	Introduction	44
3.1	Research design	44
3.2	Data source	44
3.3	Sample and Sampling procedure	45
3.4	Method of data collection	46
3.5	Method of data analysis	46
3.6	Summary of chapter	46

### **CHAPTER FOUR: TYPES AND SOURCES OF AMBIGUITY**

4.0	Introduction	47
4.1	Lexical ambiguity	48
4.2	Structural ambiguity	56
4.3	Scope ambiguity	69
4.4	Morpho-phonological ambiguity	74
4.5	Pragmatic Ambiguity	79
4.6	Pun as a form of ambiguity	81
4.7	Sources of ambiguity	86
4.7.1	Idiomatization	87
4.7.2	Metaphor	89
4.7.3	Homonym	91

4.7.4	Polysemy	94
4.7.5	Range of word's meaning	96
4.7.6	Punctuation	98
4.7.7	Irony	99
4.8	Summary	103
	Notes to chapter four	104

## **CHAPTER FIVE: AMBIGUITY IN ROUTINE AND LITERARY COMMUNICATION**

5.0	Introduction	105
5.1	Ambiguity in routine communication	105
5.2	Ambiguity as foregrounding device	113
5.3	Ambiguity as a stylistic device	113
5.3.1	Metaphor	118
5.3.2	Irony	122
5.3.3	Euphemism	124
5.3.4	Personification	127
5.3.5	Hyperbole	129
5.5	Summary	131
	Notes to chapter five	132

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.0	Introduction	133
6.1	Summary	133
6.2	Findings	134
6.3	Conclusion	135
6.4	Contributions to knowledge	136
6.5	Suggestion for Further Studies	137

	<b>REFERENCES</b>	138
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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background to the study

Language is an essential communication tool and ambiguity is an essential part of language, cutting across all languages of the world. Ambiguity is often referred to as double or multiple meanings. Ambiguity as a literary/stylistic feature appears to be more pronounced in poetry than in any other literary genre. This is because ambiguity is dependent upon linguistic meaning rather than the speaker's or writer's intentions. It is the operative factor that makes the language of poetry beautiful. According to Gurrey (1968), the implied meanings of words in poetry are important because those meanings and associations portray the correctness of common concepts coupled with the ambiguity in human thinking or judgment.

Ambiguity may be due to the poet or artist's intention to achieve a particular style of writing; as they frequently use paradoxical terms to display their creativity or prowess with the use of words when communicating their beliefs or opinions. Ambiguity as described by Empson (1930)<sup>1</sup> is being indecisive about the meaning of a concept or word. It may also be an intention to associate several meanings to a general idea or word. The meaning(s) attributed to a concept or word may be linked to a context, certain motives or the variation in the expression or spoken speech. As poetry is structurally a linguistic expression, the poet has the power to use words in such a way that when he expresses his/her own experiences, he will equally work on a responsive reader's mind, thus enabling him/her to have a similar experience.

In other literary texts, prose narratives especially, ambiguity may be considered to be a form of defect but certainly not in poetry because it negates the effective communication enshrined in the principle of standard. For in poetry, it actually provides poets with certain meanings and effects that cannot be made by any other means, Korg argues that:

In poetry, as in every art, the limitations of the medium provide the artist with his most exciting opportunities. Just as a sculptor may shape hard stone into soft looking curves of a body, or a painter may produce the effect of depth on a flat canvas, so a poet works with language to overcome its natural deficiencies by taking advantage of the resources it offers. He does this, not by using a special vocabulary of unusually high-powered words, but by using more or less ordinary words in special ways<sup>2</sup>.

Korg's argument enumerated above tallies with the opinion of Gurrey (1968) that the kind of linguistic awareness created by the use of ambiguity as a literary device is an essential tool or equipment in literary appreciation, poetry especially. Strictly speaking, ambiguity is not a feature of poetry alone as it also occurs in our everyday language use. Sometimes, people are unconsciously ambiguous in the way they use language in their daily discourse. An hypothetical example below is from the *Oríkì* of Ìbàdàn (Ìbàdàn praise poetry):

1. Ìbàdàn ò gbonilè bí àjòjì  
*Ìbàdàn does not favour the indigene like it does strangers*

This expression is often used jokingly by non-ìbàdàn indigenes to taunt or mock Ìbàdàn indigenes. The ambiguous phrase in the above expression is gbonilè (underlined) with the following readings:

1(a) gbe + onílè > gbonilè

1(b) gba + onílè > gbonilè

1(c) gbo + onílè > gbonilè

The ambiguity extract arises from the deletion of vowels **e** in 1(a), **a** in 1(b) and **o** in 1(c), leading to a contraction in the verb-nominal combinations that resulted in ambiguity 'gbonilè'. Gbonilè, in the entire extract could therefore be given the following possible interpretations:

- i. Ìbàdàn kò gbe onílè bí ó ti gbe àjòjì

*Ìbàdàn does not accommodate the indigene like it does strangers*

- ii. Ìbàdàn ko gba ọmọ bíbí Ìbàdàn fún ẹbọ rírú bí ó ẹ n gba àjòjì.

*Ìbàdàn does not accept the indigene for sacrifice as it accept strangers*

- iii. Ìbàdàn kò gbo onílè bí àjòjì

*Ìbàdàn does not inconvenience the indigene as it does the strangers*

Oftentimes, people, especially non-indigenes use the excerpt in (i) as the correct interpretation of (1) to make a cynical comment on an Ìbàdàn person for comical effects.

Here is another common example found among people, especially between two friends during conversation; a friend asking his other friend thus:

- 2 (a) **Şé o ti şetán ká jọ máa lọ, kí ọkọ ó pa wá pọ**  
(Have you finished so tha we can go together and board the same vehicle).  
(b) Èèwò! Ọkọ kò lè pa wá pọ

The other friend responded to 2(a) above with 2(b) thus: **èèwò, ọkọ ò lè pa wá pọ** (abomination, the car won't kill us together).

The ambiguous verb phrase **pa wá pọ** underlined in the expression could be interpreted as:

- (i) Kill us both or together that is; if it is metaphrase translation  
(ii) Board the same vehicle together.

Another ambiguous expression in 3 below is an expression of prayer;

- 3.( a) Kí Ọlórún pà̀nọ̀mọ̀.  
(b) Tí Ọlórún bá pà̀nọ̀mọ̀, kí ni àwọn ará Ọ̀fà fẹ́ máa jẹ  
(May God preserve/destroy **à̀nọ̀mọ̀**. If God destroys **à̀nọ̀mọ̀**; what will the Ọ̀fà people eat?). the verb phrase **pà̀nọ̀mọ̀** which is a prayer (grant a safe journey) is ambiguous. The ambiguity arises due to the deletion of **ọ̀** in **ọ̀nà** and contraction that follows; pa+ọ̀nà+mọ̀. This ambiguity is what elicited the response in 3(b) which makes the ambiguity clearer by offering the second interpretation that “If God kills **à̀nọ̀mọ̀** (sweet potato) what would the Ọ̀fà people eat or have as food.

In actual fact, what the first friend meant in example 2a above was for the two of them to go home in the same car; whereas his other friend has given the utterance a different interpretation of *to kill l the together!*(**pa**) this is caused by many interpretations **pa** has (kill, intoxicate or join). (**Pà̀nọ̀mọ̀**) in 3, which means to preserve the road from accident, but it has been interpreted as to destroy sweet potatoes (**à̀nọ̀mọ̀**), a notable food among the Ọ̀fà people. When people misconstrue an utterance, there is possibility for ambiguity as in the cases of (1-3) above. These ambiguities elicit comic effects.

Ambiguity has attracted scholarly attention not only in literature but also in other fields such as Engineering, Philosophy, Mathematics, Law, Medicine and many others. In Literature, for instance, ambiguity is a predominant feature of poetry, where use of ambiguous words, phrases and sentences give rise to different interpretations. It lends a deeper meaning to literary works as the poet may use a single or few words to express multiple ideas. In Philosophy however, ambiguity is important because

philosophers often make spurious claims with the use of ambiguity. Ambiguity helps in the identification and resolution of philosophical problems as philosophical distinctions can become obscured by unnoticed ambiguities. In Law, the existence of ambiguity creates the need for interpretation. For example, law courts often treat ambiguity as a kind of gateway consideration when they interpret a statute. If the statute is ambiguous, the judge might become interested in sourcing for guidance through such means as legislative history that would not otherwise be considered. Ambiguity can, therefore, cause a judge to defer to an agency's view of the statute. At the same time however, ambiguity serves as an occasion for judges to establish their own views of policy, openly, quietly or unconsciously. Ambiguity is favoured in engineering, as it is believed that it could foster healthy long-term group interactions over a strategic clarity which engineers tend to employ only when they expect resistance to their ideas. In mathematics and Logic, ambiguity could be an example of the logical concept of indetermination.

The need for the study of ambiguity is backed by Scheffler (1979), who argues that ambiguity, vagueness, and metaphor are pervasive features of language, deserving of analytic study. Ambiguity became established as a widely used critical term after Empson (1930) devised a credible theory of literary criticism by developing an autonomous model of ambiguity<sup>3</sup>. He invested ambiguity with prestige and offered to elucidate the impact that poetry has on the reader because of its ambiguity. Before Empson, an ambiguous text was viewed as a faulty text or one that failed to produce a precise reference to a desired meaning.

Pervasive as it, much attention has not been given to this concept, in Yorùbá studies. This study is therefore motivated by the need to investigate ambiguity, the definition, its types and exploitation in Yorùbá poetic discourse along with its stylistic and communicative potentials. This was to capture how ambiguity contributes to the overall meaning of poetry.

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

In Yorùbá literary studies, application of linguistics to literary analysis is becoming fashionable. This is evident in the works of Bámgbóṣé (1968), Owólabí (1992), Olatéjù (1998, 2006), Òjò (2013), Àjàyí (2014), Fákéyè (2014) and Àkànmú (2014). However, as universal and as vital ambiguity is as a stylistic device in Yorùbá literary/poetic discourse, it has not attracted much scholarly attention in Yorùbá studies.

This study was therefore, motivated by the encouragement given by the above-mentioned scholars in their recognition of the fact that linguistics can indeed make some contributions to literary analysis. The work then examined ambiguity as a stylistic device in Yorùbá poetic discourse within the theoretical lens of Government and Binding, an aspect of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG). The focus is designed to investigate linguistic ambiguity as a stylistic device in Yorùbá poetic discourse with a view to establishing their stylistic and communicative potentials.

## **1.2 Research questions**

This study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. What types of ambiguity exist in Yorùbá poetic discourse?
- ii. How has the Yorùbá poet explored and exploited ambiguity in their works and for what effects?
- iii. How can TGG help in disambiguating ambiguous expressions and what are the sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry?
- iv. How does context help in resolving ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry?
- v. What are the stylistic and semantic communicative effects of ambiguity as a stylistic device in Yorùbá poetic discourse?

## **1.3 Aim and objectives**

Over the years, the relationship between the study of literature and the study of language has been one of bitter rivalry over the role of linguistics in literary studies. Literary critics often claim that linguistic analysis of literature can offer no important insight into the analysis of literature (McIntyre, 2012, Tarrayo, 2014). This is disturbing since scholars in both disciplines (language and literature) have much to learn from one another, (Olatéjú, 1998). To this end, the primary aim of this study is to contribute to the ongoing debate on the significance of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation. It is hoped that this study would create more awareness on the benefits inherent in the application of linguistics to literary studies since linguistics and literary studies are two sides of the same coin, even though linguistics has its limitations, that is linguistics can be useful in the analysis of grammar but when it comes to interpreting an idiomatic, metaphorical expressions there is need to deep into historical or cultural

background for such analysis. Consequently, the primary objectives of this study were to:

- i. to show the types of ambiguities in Yorùbá poetic discourse
- ii. to show the extent to which Yorùbá poets explored and exploited ambiguity in their works
- iii. to reveal how TGG can help in disambiguating ambiguous expression and identify the sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry
- iv. to show how context can help in resolving ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry
- v. to reveal the stylistic and communicative effects of ambiguity as a stylistic device in Yorùbá poetic discourse.

#### **1.4 Scope of the study**

Poets generally use ambiguous terms or concepts to attain a style of writing and communication goals that may not be possible or achieved through any other means. Therefore, this study examines linguistic ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse. It also considers types of ambiguity found in the selected texts which may be akin to the types identified by William Empson 1930 in the English poetry. The study though is focused on poetry but is not limited to the written poetry in its scope. Where necessary, it examines oral poetry including songs, since songs are poetry rendered in music form.

#### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The application of Government and Binding model of TGG in the analysis of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse will assist in tracing various ambiguous expressions to their root forms (in this case, Deep structure) before transformational rules were applied to generate the ambiguous surface structure. Hence, this validates the fact that there exists the interdependency and interrelationship between linguistics and literary studies. Through the TGG, it will be established that the linguistic competence of the poet enhances his performance in producing words, phrases and sentences with ambiguous tendencies. The study corroborates the relationship between linguistics and literature by applying a linguistic model for the analysis of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry. Therefore, it is expected that this study will create more awareness on the benefits inherent in the application of linguistics to literary discourse analysis.

#### **1.6 Ambiguity: A Conceptual Framework**

The English word ‘ambiguous’(Hoffman,1989:205) derives from the French word ‘*ambiguité*’, which comes from the Latin word ‘*ambiguus*’. Different scholars, such as Katz, Hartman and Stock, Traugott and Pratt, Peck and Coyle and Owólabí have defined ambiguity. For Katz (1972), ambiguity occurs where there is a problem telling one thing from another. A linguistic unit is said to be ambiguous when it is associated with more than one meaning. This term is normally reserved for cases where the same linguistic form has clearly different meanings that can be associated with distinct linguistic representations. Another definition of ambiguity is presented by Hartman and Stock (1976:11), who state that a construction is ambiguous when more than one interpretation can be assigned to it; for example the statement, ‘patent medicine are sold by frightening people’. The ambiguous statement does not really tell whether the sense intended is patent medicines are sold by putting fear into people or patent medicines are sold by people who are frightening.

Ambiguity in language results from the fact that there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between expressions and meaning. As Traugott and Pratt (1984:9) argue for instance, the single sound sequence **pale** is a sign for a colour quality, a kind of stick and (with the same sound, though different spelling, **pail**) a bucket. Sentences too can be ambiguous, like, **I speak to you as a mother**, to mean I speak to you because I am a mother, I speak to you as your biological mother or I speak to you like you are also a mother. In defining ambiguity, Peck and Coyle (1984) note that it refers to the fact that words often have several meanings, thus making uncertain what is meant.

To Crystal (1988), ambiguity is the reference to a word or sentence which expresses more than one meaning and this reference has to do with linguistics. According to Empson (1930), ambiguity includes any verbal nuance however slight, which gives room to alternative reactions to the same piece of language. Empson (1930) ‘considers ambiguity as a literary device and points out that different views can often be taken of what the words mean in a line of poetry’.

Owólabí et al (2005:105) defines ambiguity (Pón-na) (1) *‘pón-na ni kí ọ̀rọ̀, àpólà tàbí gbólòhùn kan ní ju ìtumò kan lọ’* (2) *pón-na yàtò sí ọ̀rọ̀, àpólà tàbí gbólòhùn tí kò ní ìtumò kan pátó’*. ((1) Ambiguity is the state of a word, phrase or sentence having more than one possible meaning. (2) Ambiguity is different from a word, phrase or sentence without any specific meaning). Many words, phrases and sentences may be ambiguous in isolation but clear in context or amenable to logical analysis within a

particular context. For instance, in Yorùbá, the lexeme **je** can be ambiguous in isolation but clear in context. Below are different interpretations **je** an action verb can have in a sentence:

- Je - je oyè, je iyán, je tètè, je tètè.  
eat chieftancy (a literal translation) that is, to be conferred with a chieftancy title/ eat pounded yam/ eat tètè (vegetable)/ win a jackpot

These interpretations are in the sentences below:

- 4a. Mo fèran je iyán tí tí mo fì yó.  
*I ate pounded yam with meat till I was satisfied*
- b. Yésúfù ti jeoyè Başòrun ilú wòn.  
*Yésúfù has been crowned the Başòrun of his town*
- c. Mo je tètè pèlú àmàlà.  
*I ate àmàlà with vegetable*
- d. Mo je tètè níbi ìdíje àná.  
*I won a jackpot at yesterday's game*

In each of the above expressions, the ambiguous verb is underlined.

'**Dá**' can also be ambiguous in isolation but clear in context owing to the different interpretations it has. They are:

- Dá - şèdá (create)  
gé sí méjì (cut/break into two)  
yònda (release)  
Pín (divide)

These interpretations are in the sentences below :

- 5a. Olórùn ló dá wa  
*God created us*
- b. Ó dá igi nàà sí méjì  
*He broke the stick into two*
- c. Ìgè dá wòn sílè  
*Ìgè released them*
- d. Ó dá ilé àti ònà rẹ sí méjì  
*He divided his property into two*

In these examples, the lexical item underlined can mean different things in different contexts. As seen from the above, **dá** can mean:

- i. to create

- ii. to break into two or more places
- iii. to be left alone
- iv. to divide into two or more parts/portions

In other words, ambiguity is polysemic (that is, relates to polysemy) at the word level as in sentence situations (Ogbulogo, 2002:69). Similarly, Barret (1992:274) defines ambiguity as ‘multiplicity of meaning, often deliberate, that leaves the reader uncertain about the intended significance’. The key word in the above definition is ‘uncertainty’. That is, one is uncertain of which meaning is intended. To Allen (1995), ambiguity is distinguished from general indeterminacy or lack of specificity. What appears to be common to all these definitions is the simultaneous presentation of two or more meanings. Therefore, one can say that ambiguity is a form of polysemy or multiple meanings.

Gray’s (1992:18) definition of ambiguity is a summary of all the above definitions: The capacity of words and sentences to have double, multiple or uncertain meanings. This definition does not refer to only words as that which could bring about ambiguity, but also sentences. This definition is adopted in this study. As reiterated earlier on, although ambiguity occurs in our daily language usage, its occurrence is highest in literature, poetry especially. The example below illustrates this:

6.     ...  
           A díá fún Olábànlẹ̀  
           Omọ ará òde Ègbá nílẹ̀ Aké  
           Nwón ní ó kàaki mólẹ̀,  
           Ó jàre,  
           Èbọ ni ó se.  
           Ó gbọ rírú ebọ,  
           Ó rú,  
           Ó gbọ èrù àtùkèsù,  
           Ó tù,  
           Ó gbọ ìkarara ebọ ha fún un   (Abímbólá, 1968:25)

...  
*Ifá divination was performed for Olábànlẹ̀*  
*Offspring of òde Ègbá in Aké*  
*He was asked to hurry to seek refuge with the divinities*  
*He should please*  
*It is sacrifice that he should offer*  
*He heard that he should offer sacrifice,*  
*He offered it,*  
*He heard that he should make sacrifice to Èsù,*  
*He gave it,*

*He carried out the sacrifice and was immediately accepted*

The deletion of the obligatory noun objects 'ebo' in 'ru ebo' and 'atukesu' in 'tutu atukesu' is responsible for the ambiguity. Hence, **ru** and **tutu** are ambiguous. This confers on the remaining verbal elements **ru** and **tutu** the status of homonym with the following readings:

**Ru** –

- i. to perform sacrifice
- ii. to grow/develop/flourish
- iii. get mixed up (confusion)

**Tutu** has the following meanings,

**Tutu** –

- i. offer sacrifice
- ii. be calm/peaceful (*tuba*)

The ambiguity in **ru** would have been avoided if the nominal object 'ebo' had not been deleted. The deletion of the obligatory noun phrase object ebo could have given it the interpretation 'rubo' (offer sacrifice) and 'tuba' (peace) in **tutu** would have been *tuba* (peaceful).

**7 Mo ri alata ladiugbo wa**

*I saw alata in our street*

The ambiguity in the sentence above arises due to the lexeme **alata**, which could mean:

- (a) Someone who sells pepper (seller of pepper)
- (b) Someone who owns a pepper farm (owner of pepper farm)

Also in:

**8 Ode ni baba Adèle**

- (a) *Adèle's father is a hunter*
- (b) *Adèle's father is a security guard*

The underlined word **Ode** can either mean a hunter or a night watchman (security guard).

These definitions of ambiguity point to the fact of words, phrases and sentences having more than one meaning. In addition, ambiguity can arise in the figurative use of language as with idiomatic expressions, where there could be connotative and denotative meanings of words. From the definitions above, it is clear that ambiguity is a fact of linguistic life.

### 1.7 Literature and ambiguity

Literature is a fundamental aspect of language study. In its entirety, it is language in beautiful and creative use. On the other hand, ambiguity in its most technical sense, the term ambiguity is used to describe only those situations in which a surface linguistic form corresponds to more than one linguistic representation. Although ambiguity is treated as a hurdle in communication somehow, it is also referred to as beauty in expression, especially in literature. Sometimes, people are said to be either intentionally or unintentionally ambiguous in how they use language. Even in everyday discourse use of language could lead to ambiguity. When people use ambiguous language, in most cases, its ambiguity is not intended. In literature however, ambiguity may be deliberate. This is why ambiguity could be a stylistic device in literature. Ambiguity is so ubiquitous that speakers rarely notice that their utterances are ambiguous and cannot recognise the ambiguity even when it is pointed out (Thomas, 1995).

When a man offers an assistance to a lady, for instance, the lady will want to utter a word of appreciation to the man and say: 'È sè gan an, sà', (*Do it well sir; a literal translation*) or (*Thank you sir*). The man may answer jokingly that 'mi ò tí ì sè o' (*I've not done it yet*). Although the speaker is not aware of the ambiguity, the hearer does. Most words can have denotations (apparent meaning) and connotations (implied or hidden meanings). Oftentimes, we use words figuratively, even though such is more common in poetry and fiction. According to Hong-Juan (2010), in many language situations, ambiguity is intentionally employed to achieve certain specific pragmatic purposes besides its rhetorical functions. It is for this reason therefore, that some instances of ambiguity are treated as ornamental use of language especially in literature. Consequently, with that at the back of our mind, one of the objectives of this study is to treat ambiguity as a stylistic device aimed at achieving ornamentation and a purposeful communication.

## **1.8Summary**

In this chapter, we introduced the study and provided a general background that is aimed at providing a better understanding of the study. The chapter presented the objectives and scope of the study. It also looked at different scholarly perspectives on ambiguity. Ambiguity and its relationship with literature were equally discussed.

### Notes to Chapter One

1. Cited in *Ambiguity in Poetry*, a Journal of the Department of English, College of Education, University of Baghdad
2. Jakob Korg(1965)
3. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a work of literary criticism by William Empson, which was first published in 1930. The book is organized around seven types of ambiguity that Empson 1930 finds in the poetry he criticizes.
4. Cited from Sekgaila, J.C, (2000)
5. Quoted from Hong. J.F (2015), Verb Sense Discovery in Mandarin Chinese – A corpus based knowledge-intensive approach.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

##### 2.1 Introduction

Literature is the mirror of society. It exploits language resources to create, through imagination, literary works that depict events and project life. Adébáyò (2009) asserts that literature yields insight into the social and cultural lives of a society at the given period portrayed in the work. This chapter discusses linguistics, literature and stylistics and their relationship. It also presents the role of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation by looking at the contributions of some renowned scholars who engaged in the study of language and literature. Standard language (hence SL) and poetic or Literary language (hence PL/LL) are also reviewed and the theoretical framework

##### 2.2 Linguistics, literature and stylistics

Language is the raw material for literature. Stylistics which studies the style of a texts mainly literature, intersperses the discipline or field of linguistics and literature by making their relationship explicit. Therefore, this section discusses linguistics, literature and stylistics one after the other.

##### 2.2.1 Linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of the structure and evolution of human language and it is applicable to every aspect of human endeavor. Linguistics, according to Abrams (1981:94) is:

a systematic study of the elements (of language) and the principles of their combination and organization in language.

Omamor (2003) in her own view describes linguistics as:

... how languages work, the differences that exist between language, what exactly language does in society, the how of this, how to go about analyzing any language, what concepts, such as 'part of speech', tense and aspect, number, gender, mood and the like mean and how they manifest or get grammaticalised in different languages (p.8)

Abrahams and Omamor's views are not radically different from those of Fowler (1996) and Webb and Kembo Sure (2008) who claim that linguistics is a scientific study of language. Language remains the formidable tool that writers use for literary creativity.

Therefore, without language, there is no linguistics, language being a critical key that unlocks any literary text. Linguistics allows us to understand commonalities and their origins as well as determine structural differences and their limits. Olatéjú (1998; 2004), while emphasising the role of linguistics in literary studies, asserts that knowledge of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation is very relevant since literature uses language. Language is the raw material of literature, while linguistics is a scientific study of language. This makes linguistics crucial for literary analysis and interpretation, as it provides a framework within which to describe and explain the function and construction of context (form). Therefore, it automatically implies that linguistics is germane to this study. Olatéjú (1998) buttress the role of linguistics in literary analysis, says that linguistics has provided some systematic procedures, models and terminologies that can be employed in analysing literary works.

Linguistics is very broad, with many fields, some of which include: phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and lately, pragmatics. Graphology and lexicography are also parts of linguistics. Phonetics is the study of language at the level of sound; that is, how sounds are articulated by the human speech mechanism and received by the auditory mechanism, Phonology studies combination of sounds into organised units of speech as well as the formation of syllable and larger units. Morphology studies the patterns of formation of words by the combination of sounds into minimal distinctive units of meaning. Syntax is the level that concerns how words combine to form phrases, phrases combine to form clauses and clauses join to make sentences. Semantics deals with the study of meaning in language. Pragmatics has to do with contextual aspects of meaning in particular situations. Graphology is the study of the writing system of a language and the conventions used in representing speech writing, for example formation of letters. Lexicology studies the manner in which lexical items are grouped together, as in the compilation of dictionaries.

Linguistics has grown to form many branches. A few examples include psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, neurolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, philosophical linguistics, educational linguistics and so on.

Linguistics can add a profound and fresh experience to one's appreciation of literary analysis. Stylistics draws on a wide array of theories and methods from linguistics. Hence, linguistics is relevant to the present study, as it provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry. Linguistic structures, such as sentences and words, proffer access to the understanding of a literary text. In other

words, language and literature forge a partnership. A good knowledge of linguistics is vital for a deeper understanding of the structure and effects of literary works. Consequently, we can conveniently learn and study language and its proper use through the study of linguistics.

### **2.2.2 Literature**

Literature is a work of art that uses language. Collins Online Dictionary defines literature as written materials, such as poetry, novel, and essays; especially works of imagination characterised by excellence and by themes of general or enduring interest. In the word of Hartmann and Stock (1973) literature denotes those writings which are considered worth preserving and subjected to aesthetic evaluation. In other words, literature is a discourse (literary discourse) like other discourses such as: historical discourse, legal discourse, journalistic discourse, poetic discourse etc. Furthermore, Babalola (1967:7) defines literature (lírírésò) in Yorùbá language as: ‘àkójopò ìjìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ ní èdè kan tàbí òmíràn, ìjìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ t’ó jásí ewì, àròfò, ìtàn, àlò, iyànjú, ìròhìn, tàbí eré onítàn, eré akònilògbòn lóri ìtágé’. *the totality of wise words in one language or the other, wise words which can be poetry, myth, folktales, folklore, admonition, news, or drama, play.* Welleck and Warren (1949) say literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, which is a social creation. It is a fundamental aspect of language study.

Adébáyò (2010) posits that literature refers to imaginative works dealing with human and other beings, in which language is used in a special way and that the aesthetic function predominates. What is being referred to as the creative use of language. It is writing considered to be an art form, or any single writing deemed to have artistic or intellectual value, often due to deploying language in ways that differ from ordinary language. The true end of literature is to delight, instruct, satirise and perform didactic functions. Literature enables us to grow both emotionally and intellectually. Thus, it trains us in exercising our emotions in a wholesome manner (Okon, 2008). As we identify with various ambiguities created by the poet, for example, we not only learn to admire positive values, but also instinctively reject others which are not so noble or honourable.

#### **2.2.2.1 Literature as a Discourse**

Discourse is one of the prominent variables in this work therefore, It is imperative to understand the concept of ‘discourse’ at this point.

### **What is discourse?**

Discourse is a unit of language longer than a single sentence. Hence, Grawitz, (1990) equates the structure of a text to a discourse. According to Collins online Dictionary, discourse is spoken or written communication between people, especially serious discussion of a particular subject such as, Law, History, Philosophy, Literature and any other subject for that matter. Hence, we have Legal discourse, Historical discourse, Philosophical discourse, Literary discourse and other types of discourses. Modern linguistics proposes a broader definition of discourse, saying it is a discrete and unique enunciative process, where the speaker or author makes language concrete in speech. However, from the earlier submissions of Grawitz and Collins and by implication, discourse as used in this study is synonymous with **text** and can be spoken (oral) or written.

Literature or literary discourse from the foregoing therefore apparently integrate the analysis of non- literary genres and literature. As earlier mentioned, discourse as used in this study is therefore related to units of language longer than a single sentence. Poetry as a discourse is a way or method of expressing thought and ideas. The Yorùbá poets whose work constitute the data for this study notably exploits language as a means of communicating or passing a message. For instance, Olátúbòsún’s message in the poem below goes beyond food consumption. The intuitive knowledge of the poet in Yorùbá language and culture enables him to know that they do not say all they intend to say, sometimes, they choose the variant of the word they want to say. In the poem, the poet expresses his worries and repercussions of unplanned sexual relationship between two immature boy and girl.

(1) Àjàdí mi Gòkèèèè  
Ominú ló nkọ mí lóunje ò yá bù je  
Èrù ló mbà mí ni ò jẹ nfẹ bù ‘kèlè  
Ominú tó wá nkọ mí, kò jọ tàìle ara  
Èrùtó mbà mí, kò sì jọ tàìsàn  
Ominú òpò èyàn,  
Tó tí jẹrù è láí tójó  
Wọn sáré mumi tán  
Omi sáré pá wọn lóri ni  
Wọn jègèdè àìpòn yó

Ódí wón nílè ìgbònsẹ̀  
 Ọ̀pò èyàn ló ti jẹ́rú è tó dákòtì  
 Ọ̀pò èyàn ló ti jẹ́rú è tó bà láyé jẹ́  
 Ọ̀pò tó kánjú jẹ́rú è  
 Ló fà ya lára bí aṣo  
 Èyàn méjì ló jàmàlà ifẹ́ yó tán  
 Eyo gágá leni tó ndá yà ìgbé-òrìn (Ọlátúbòsún, 1975:54)

*My worries has nothing to do with body weakness  
 My fear has nothing to do with sickness  
 It's the fear of many people  
 That have eaten such prematurely  
 They rushed to drink water  
 The water gushed into their head  
 They ate unripe plantain  
 It blocked their anus  
 Many have eaten such and were abandoned  
 Many ate such and it destroyed their lives  
 Many that hastily ate such  
 Were torn apart like cloth  
 Two persons ate amala/made love to satisfaction  
 Only one person suffered diarrhea*

The poet metaphorically refers to unplanned sexual relationship which resulted in unwanted pregnancy as eating unripe plantain in a haste and resulted in constipation and indigestion. He goes further to compare the satisfaction two people derived when they ate amala and only one person suffers diarrhea to unplanned sex enjoyed by two people that resulted in unwanted pregnancy, which only one person; the girl bears the burden, shame and rejection.

As in other parts of the world, literature in Yorùbá studies is divided into three genres, namely: prose narratives, drama and poetry. Therefore, poetry, the focus of this study, as far as ambiguity is concerned would be discussed below.

#### **2.2.2.2 Poetic Discourse or Poetry**

Poetry otherwise described as poetic discourse in the study is one of the genres of Yorùbá literature. According to Korg (1960:2) poetry works at the limits of knowledge, seeking to express the inexpressible. The Yorùbá poet exploits language resources to create, through imagination, ambiguous words, phrases and sentences (ambiguity) as part of their stylistic and communication strategies to communicate their opinions and ideas to their listeners/audiences. The Yorùbá poet employs ambiguity for aesthetic pleasure and also for impacting knowledge, inculcating values, or heightening

our awareness of the world around us. One of the distinguishing characteristics of poetry/poetic discourse from other genres of literature is its use of a different kind of language known as literary/poetic language (LL/PL). In poetry, aesthetic effect is achieved through the poet's language manipulation, while in prose; aesthetic effect is derived from the writer's manner of discourse presentation, character portrayal and development (Oniemayin, 2004).

According to Olatéjú (1998:136) poetic language is non-casual, examined and critical. Which means the literary/poetic language relies on linguistic devices ( such as foregrounding) to make the expression or poetry stands out. In other words, the systemic violations of the norms of standard language is what makes poetic/literary language stands out. This is unlike the kind of language used in other genres of literature like prose narrative and drama in which the standard language (SL) is used. For SL, the use of language is casual, unexamined and uncritical. In essence, in standard language, the use of linguistic devices are for communicative and informative purposes without attempt of attracting any attention. Another distinguishing aspect of poetry, according to the Formalists is the difficult nature of poetry, especially its language. One of the difficult aspects of the language of poetry /poetic discourse includes the use of linguistic devices such as deviation, foregrounding and ambiguity the focus of our study. Poetry as one of the genres of literature has been classified into two main parts namely; Oral and written poetry.

**Oral poetry:** oral poetry is composed and rendered verbally before an audience without writing. In oral poetry, sound and its use is prominent, since it is a face to face performance, the poet must be bold, abreast with the sociocultural norms, creative and imaginative to get the attention of the audience. Audience plays a tremendous role in oral poetry.

**Written poetry:** This is the type of poetry written, printed, published online. There is specific author who is credited with the poem; there is no audience participation in written poetry. The only way audience can participate is through criticism which sometimes may not be effective. Both oral and written poetry have one thing in common, that is, to teach, educate and entertain.

### 2.2.3 Stylistics

Stylistics is the study of language in literature. According to Ọlátẹ́jú (1998), stylistics is a relatively new discipline. It may have been coined from a partial combination of the English words ‘style’ and ‘linguistics’, that is;

$$\textit{Style} + \textit{Linguistics} = \textit{Stylistics}$$

According to Bally (1990), stylistics is everything emotional and expressive in language and in speech. It selectively adopts and appropriates a range of concepts and models to investigate the interpretative impact of various linguistic features employed in literature. Hartmann and Stock (1973:223) defined stylistics as the application of linguistic knowledge to the study of style. It is an area of mediation between language and literature. Short (1996) says ‘stylistics can sometimes look like either linguistics or literary criticism, depending upon where you are standing when you are looking at it’. Stylistics is a technique of explication which enables us to define objectively what an author or poet has done in his use of language. It investigates all aspects of grammar and meaning, especially in formal contexts, and it is as much a linguistic analysis of literary texts as it is a literary evaluation of language.

Widdowson (1975:3) observes that the value of stylistic analysis is that it can ‘provide the means whereby the learner can relate a piece of literary writing with his own experience of language and so extend that experience’. As linguistics studies language scientifically, as well as style in impersonal and objective manner, stylistics studies and analyses style objectively and technically through the application of linguistics methodology. Leech (1969) defines stylistics as simply the study of literary style or to make matters even explicit, the study of the use of language. In literature, the linguistic analysis of literary language is known as stylistics. Lyons (1997:22) defines stylistics ‘as the study of stylistic variation in language and of the way in which this is exploited by language users. It is a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism, between language and literature.

Stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of usage patterns of language in speech and writing. It is the study of style used in literary language and the effect writer or poet wishes to communicate to the reader, Crystal (1970). It attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language, such as socialisation, the production and reception of meaning, literary criticism and critical discourse analysis. Finch (2000)

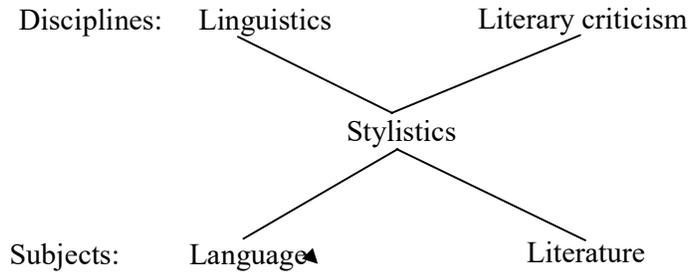
defines stylistics as the branch of linguistics that applies the methodologies of linguistics to analyse the concept of style in language. Branches of stylistics are: Applied stylistics, Computational stylistics, Forensic stylistics, Functional stylistics, Linguistic stylistics, Literary stylistics, Mathematics/Statistical stylistics, Mentalists or Generative stylistics, Pragmatic stylistics, Sociolinguistic stylistics and so on.

### **2.3 Relationship between linguistics, stylistics and literature**

Language is the most formidable tool used for literary creativity. It also serves as an avenue through which literature delights and instructs. Linguistics, which is the scientific study of language and language use, functions as a way to unlock any literary text. Stylistics, the branch of linguistics which studies the style of a text, intersperses the discipline of linguistics and literature and serves as a crucial link between the two complementary disciplines. Jakobson (1960:337) underscores the relationship between linguistics and literary studies, stating that:

If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists have been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistics science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realize that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms.

Here, Jakobson is talking about the interface of the two disciplines: linguistics and literature. He means that a literary critic untrained in linguistics and a linguist with no knowledge of the literary function of language, cannot offer a meaningful interpretation of a literary text. In the same vein, Widdowson (1975) speaks of the relationship between the two disciplines of linguistics and literature, claiming that stylistics is an area of mediation between two subjects. He makes it an all inclusive study of linguistics, literary criticism, language and literature. The diagram below illustrates this concept:



As evident in the diagram, stylistics is a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism, between language and literature. Widdowson (1975) observes that the value of stylistic analysis is that it can provide the means whereby the learner can relate a piece of literary writing with his own experience of language and so extend that experience.

Hough (1969)<sup>2</sup> explains that a stylistic analysis of a literary work rests upon the dictum that the text is an organic unity in which matter and manner as well as thought and expression are indissolubly one. Stylistics seeks to bridge the gap between linguistic studies and the literary approach to criticism. It investigates all aspects of grammar and meaning in formal contexts, and it is as much a linguistic analysis of text as it is a literary evaluation of language. It seeks to account for the interpretative effects of a text through close study of its linguistic detail, such as syntactic structuring, semantic deviation, deixis and modality.

Stylistics provides avenues for the systematic teaching of literature and language. Linguistics offers the analyst a more systematic or methodical way of proving his intuition as he arrives at the meaning of any literary text. Linguistic structures proffer access to the understanding of a literary text; that is, language and literature forge their partnership. In other words, linguistics, on the one hand focuses on the language of the text, noting carefully how it ‘behaves’ and ‘misbehaves’; while literature, on the other hand, lays its eyes on the artful devices, which imply its ‘flux’, ‘flow’ and ‘fluidity’ (Widdowson, 1975:82).

As a linguistic approach to literature, stylistics focuses on forms and patterns that constitute linguistic features, which, in turn, serve to ground a literary interpretation and ‘helps to explain why, for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible’ (Lintao, 2013:36). Thus, stylistics occupies the middle ground between the two disciplines and connects them together, for its primary concern is with language as a means of literary expression. Although stylistics is part of linguistics, ‘stylistic analysis

shades imperceptibly into literary appreciation' (Widdowson, 1975:11). Stylistics draws on a wide array of theories and methods from linguistics. A good knowledge of linguistics is vital for a deeper understanding of the structure and effect of literary work. From the discussion above, it is obvious that the three disciplines, linguistics, stylistics and literature interact so closely that their relationship is mutual.

#### **2.4 Role of linguistics in literary analysis**

The interplay or interface between linguistics and literature, which has raised various issues in literary studies and linguistics, is the focus of this sub-section. There appears to be a fruitful working relationship between them, that is, through language, the relationship between linguistics and literature can be reinforced. This study is not interested in the seeming academic battle that has been raging between the exponents of the two disciplines, which have caused a delay in the discovery of the areas of mutual interest and understanding between the two disciplines.

However, the gulf is becoming a thing of the past, as it has become evident that linguistics has something to contribute to literary study just as a linguist working on literature have something to benefit from literary studies.(Ọlátéjú,1998:23), while emphasizing the role of linguistics in literary studies, claims that:"knowledge of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation is very relevant since literature uses language". Spitzer (1982)<sup>3</sup> explains the symbiotic relationship between the literary critics' concern for art appreciation and the linguists' concern for linguistic description. To him, a cycle exists in which linguistic observation stimulates or modifies literary insight, while literary insight incites further linguistic observation. Linguistics is a powerful tool for literary interpretation, for it provides a framework within which to describe and explain the function and construction of context. The adoption of linguistic models in Yorùbá studies is on the increase.

A considerable number of Yorùbá scholars have made one linguistic model or the other the basis of their research. Among them is Bámgbóṣé (1968), who presents an explicit analysis of selected Yorùbá proverbs. He relates the syntactic structures of the proverbs to their meanings. He classifies the form of Yorùbá proverbs into three: grammatical, lexical and dialectal. Even though the work discusses the syntactic structures of proverbs in relation to the meanings which the proverbs have, it neglects the semantic aspects, which is given attention in this study.

Ọlábódé (1981), employs the componential analytical model of TG in his analysis of metaphor and allied tropes in Yorùbá. Owólabí (1992) applies the Transformational Generative Grammar to the analysis of selected Yorùbá poems. He identifies the syntactic structures of some Yorùbá poetic texts, and explains the transformational rules that produced them, relating how the syntactic structures contribute to the semantic interpretation of the text. Owólabí's work does not discuss ambiguity specifically, but the work cannot be totally dismissed, as it serves as a springboard to this work, especially with regard to the role of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation.

Ọlátéjú (1998) applies the Transformational Generative Grammar to analyse Yorùbá literary discourse. He asserts that the transformations that produce the literary language are passive, permutation, substitution, deletion and insertion. Ọlátéjú's work is very instructive, in that it makes it clear that the transformations which produce the standard language are obligatory but those that produce the literary language are optional. He elaborates further that the knowledge of linguistics enables the literary critic/ stylistician to see how the language elements at the various levels combine and interact to form a network of patterns in literary works. The work further shows that the competence of the creative artist does not rely only on his ability to produce the norms of the standard language but also helps him to employ foregrounding devices in his work. Ọlátéjú's work is an eye-opener in the application of linguistic model to the analysis of Yorùbá literature. However, it does not discuss how the linguistic competence of the poet helps to produce in poetic discourse ambiguity, which is a vital stylistic or literary device in literary discourse.

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is adopted by Òjó (2013) to analyse Yorùbá proverbs in selected literary works. She points out that SFG emphasises the sociological aspects of language description and regards language as a social behaviour. It is functional and semantic rather than formal in orientation. It sees language as a behaviour having a relationship with society. Although the work is a model of performance and also contextually descriptive, it fails to account for the competence of a native speaker of a language to produce an infinite number of sentences from a finite set. This study fills these gaps by looking at how Yorùbá literary artist's linguistic competence helps to use ambiguous expressions in communicating the ideas and opinions found in their works.

Àjàyí (2014) presents an in-depth analysis of the distinctive features and value of the *Ọfọ* genre, the Yorùbá incantatory poetry, using the intergrated theory of text linguistics (ITTL). The principle of grouping, prominence and cohesion are used in the analysis. He notes that the principle of grouping enables the writer to assign appropriate roles to participants, which may be human, animal or inanimate objects, to bring about certain events. Grouping may be chronological or sequential. In prominence, the participants cannot be of equal importance and status. At least one participant or event must be prominent. The main function of prominence is to show that a participant or an event is of more importance than others in the same context. Also the participants and events are the major tools which a writer employs to create his art. The principle of cohesion concerns the way in which the component of surface text are mutually connected within a sequence. Hence, the principle of cohesion is used to judge the result of the interrelation of the principles of grouping and prominence. Àjàyí's work serves as a springboard to this work, in that it examines the structure, communicative functions and semiotics of *ọfọ*. It however does not consider the relation between form and meaning as crucial in the generation of sentences that are both grammatical and meaningful. This work fills this vacuum.

Àkànmú (2014), in the analysis of new idioms and idiomatic expressions in Yorùbá literary and routine communication, employed the theory of standard language complemented by the componential analysis model. He notes that the componential analysis makes it possible to describe meaning relationships and grammatical behaviour of word classes. When words belong to the same semantic field in componential analysis, it allows them to be broken down into minimal distinctive features or components for correct analysis and interpretation.

Another Yorùbá scholar who employs a linguistic model to the analysis of literature is Fákéyẹ (2013), in her analysis of irony and the ironic in Yorùbá tragic plays. She adopts Roland Bathes' theory of semiology. She concludes that the theory, being an interpretive model embraces the contexts and different types of irony and the ironic elements in the form of situations and actions in the process of interpretation. The theory according to her, accounts for the various possibilities of interpretation of irony and the ironic through the elements of semiology in the form of signifier, signified, denotation and connotation, for a wider scope in the meaning making-process. The work dwells on the communicative and stylistic functions of irony and the ironic. She, however, makes no reference to the fact that the creation and use of

ambiguity in literary discourse have to do, in some way with the linguistic competence and linguistic performance of Yorùbá writers and that irony and the ironic may have some connotative traits of ambiguity.

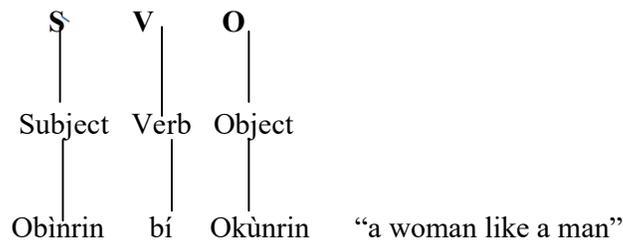
As revealed from the works of the above-mentioned scholars, linguistics provides the literary critic a more systemic or methodical way of proving his intuition as he arrives at the meaning of any literary text. Thus linguistic knowledge helps in solving the problem of ambiguity in any literary work.

## **2.5 Standard Language (SL) versus Literary / Poetic language (LL/PL)**

Ordinarily, ambiguity is not a feature of everyday discourse but of literary or poetic discourses. However, ambiguity finds its way into everyday conversation, knowingly or unknowingly though, it is within the range of poetic or literary language. This being the case, it is imperative to discuss the relationship between standard language (SL) and poetic/literary language (PL/LL)

The theory of standard language was formulated by Jan Mukarovsky (Mukarovsky, 1970), a linguist and a critic who was prominent in the 1930's. Mukarovsky was interested in identifying the formal and functional distinctions between literary and non-literary writings, noting that literary text deviates from what he termed standard language. The consequence of such deviation is the creation of a defamiliarising effect for the readers, which is a hallmark of literature. In other words, the theory is about the norms and violation of norms. He wanted to know if the poet is bound by the norm of the standard language and how the norm asserts itself in poetry.

He sought to know the extent to which a work of art can be used as data for ascertaining the norm of the standard. To Mukarovsky, standard language is the language of day-to-day discourse and its essence is effective communication or mutual understanding between encoder (speaker) and the decoder (hearer). The language of everyday discourse is casual, devoid of ornamentation, unexamined and uncritical and neither does it draw unnecessary attention to itself nor open up provocative questions about the nature of its coding<sup>4</sup>. It is the kind of language used in school, in church, on radio, in marketplaces and any formal setting, such as government business. The standard language must conform to certain linguistic norms. For example, the Yorùbá language, like most languages of the world, has the structural pattern of:



Effective communication is the hallmark of SL, which calls for employment of words and phrases that can be fully comprehended. The literary language, unlike the standard language, is non-casual, examined and critical, drawing attention to itself and opening up provocative questions about the nature of its coding. The SL conforms with the entire linguistic norm. Conversely, in literary language, the linguistic norms of the standard language are freely broken under the aegis of poetic licence. Furthermore, expressions which are considered to be ungrammatical, unacceptable and meaningless in SL might be acceptable and meaningful in LL. As noted by Olatéjú (1998), literary language (LL) is the stylistic variant of standard language (SL). That is, the literary language deviates from the norms of the standard language.

In the words of Welleck and Warren (1973), literary /poetic language organises and tightens the resources of everyday language, and sometimes does violence to them in an effort to force us into awareness and attention. Mukarovsky (1970) identifies poetic/ language as an entity separate and distinct from the standard language. In his view, the standard provides the background against which various distortions are produced with the aim of creating aesthetic effects. For poetic or literary language, the standard language is the background against which is reflected the aesthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components of the work. The notions of automatism and foregrounding are important in this regard.

Automatism refers to production of an utterance in an automatic manner, while foregrounding is associated with a more conscious execution of the utterance that arises when the appropriate norms are violated. In other words, automatism is synonymous with standard language (SL), while foregrounding or de-automatism is synonymous with poetic/literary language. By implication, it becomes impracticable to have an absolute distinction between literary language and standard language.

Standard language automatizes or conventionalises in a way that the communicative values of the language are enhanced. Hence, it must be in conformity

with the entire linguistic norms. In standard language, foregrounding is logically prohibited, while, in literary language, foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background. The function of LL consists in maximally foregrounding the utterance. However, foregrounding finds its way to SL, as Mukarovsky indicates its possibility in journalistic language, where it can be used as subordinate to communication in order to draw readers' attention more closely to the information articulated. In other words, the literary language is viewed as the aesthetic employment for the transmission of thought.

Mukarovsky (1964) asserts that poetic/literary language, unlike standard language, manifested by the foregrounding devices, has to de-automatise perception in order to achieve surprise. For the purpose of this study, ambiguity is categorised as a poetic/literary language because of its nature and function in literary and non-literary communication. The goal of literary language is aesthetic. It is for this reason that ambiguity and other forms of deviation which are peculiar to LL are reduced to the barest minimal in SL.

### **2.6.0 Theoretical framework**

Language is unique, in that it is not only the medium for describing everything else in the universe, but also for describing itself (Trangott and Pratt, 1984). For this reason, it is imperative that every description of language should be grounded in a theory. Therefore, this section discusses the Government and Binding theory of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), the theoretical approach adopted for this study and other concepts of TGG crucial to the study. Componential Analysis will be discussed.

First, TGG considers the relation between form and meaning as crucial in the generation of sentences that are both grammatical and meaningful. Second, the theory accounts for ability of individual native speaker or hearer to produce and understand intelligible utterances in his/her language. A predominant feature of the use of language in poetry is the use of many words, strings of words and sentences that are ambiguous. Hence, TGG appears to be best suited for the analysis of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse.

### 2.6.1 Transformational Generative Grammar

Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is a theory of generative syntax which addresses the problem of what language is and what makes language a specifically human phenomenon. It explains how the competence of a native speaker of a language enables such a speaker to produce an infinite number of sentences from a finiteset of rules, such that sentences generated are not only grammatical but also meaningful. The grammar is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogenous community, who knows his/her language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatical irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and errors in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (P.3)<sup>5</sup>. In other words, TGG is all about what a native speaker of a language knows about his/her language. As an illustration, a Yorùbá speaker on reading or hearing the utterance below:

- 2(a) Etí kanṣoṣo kò yẹrí (Ọlátúbòsún, 2002:7)  
*One ear does not befit the head*
- (b) \*Kò yẹrí kanṣoṣo etí  
*\*Not befits one ear*

recognizes 2(a) to be a grammatically correct and well-formed Yorùbá utterance and 2(b) to be well-formed but semantically anomalous. Similarly, he recognizes the ambiguity in the following utterance:

- (3)
- Ọjọ Adárúdurùdu dé 'lẹ̀ yí  
Mo m'ohun t'ó kókó ẹ  
Adárúdurùdu sọ wá d'ìgbàgbó  
Ó ní k'á k'áṣà wa jù sínú igbó  
Ó sọ wá dẹrú tán  
Ó ní ká máa bé́rí f'óba (Ọlábímtán , 1969:7)
- On the day Adárúdurùdu arrived this land  
I knew what he first did  
Adárúdurùdu converted us to Christianity  
He asked us to do away with our culture  
He made us slaves  
He asked us to behead for the king/salute the king*

The undelined phrase above, *bé́rí f'óba*, can be given the interpretations of:

- (a). To behead someone for the king  
(b). To salute or reverence the king

The knowledge that enables a native speaker to understand and know this is said to be innate or intuitive. That is, the native speaker's knowledge of his language is

natural, untaught and specie-specific (Yusuf, 1997:2)<sup>6</sup>. In other words, no one goes to school to learn how to speak his language. The native speaker-hearer's knowledge is referred to in transformational term as 'linguistic competence' (LC). Another concept that is crucial to the transformationalist is 'linguistic performance' (LP) which Chomsky (1965:4) defines as the direct use of language in concrete situations.

The central idea of TGG triggers off the form and content conflict, which postulates that alternative syntactic structures can express the same meaning. The transformationalists believe that form and content are distinct and that the surface structure is determined by repeated application of certain formal operations called 'grammatical transformations'. Several transformational tools are obligatory in the sense that they apply to the deep structure of a kernel string, like declarative, interrogative or imperative; whereas other tools are optional, like passive or negative constructions. Other distinctions are made between sentences in terms of grammaticalness and acceptability.

While grammaticalness is taken as a stylistic criterion which detects whether a sentence is well formed or deviant, grammaticality is a feature of competence and acceptability is of performance (Chomsky, 1965:1). In TGG, the sentence is considered the basic unit of syntactic analysis. However, the transformationalists contend that directions for generating structural descriptions of the sentence are usually set down in phrase structure rules.

## **2.6.2 Concepts of TGG relevant to this study**

This section focuses on the concepts of TGG which form the fulcrum around which the study revolves. These concepts are linguistic competence and linguistic performance.

### **2.6.2.1 Linguistic competence**

Chomsky (1965) makes a fundamental distinction between the twin concepts of *competence* and *performance* which form part of the basis of the TGG. For him, competence is concerned with grammaticality of language and acceptability is the sole concern of performance. Competence, according to Chomsky is the native speaker's knowledge of his language, the mastery of the system of rules, while 'performance' is the production of actual sentences in use in real-life situations.

A person's linguistic competence (LC) is his knowledge of the structure or grammatical norms or rules of the language. We attribute knowledge of a language to a person and this accounts for his ability to use the language to produce and understand utterances in it. The ability to use the language does not require any conscious knowledge. One needs no formal instruction to learn his language. In other words, a person's ability to use his language involves being able to produce and understand an infinite number of potential utterances including the ones he has never spoken or heard before.

As part of competence model, idealized native speakers of a language has underlying competence in his/her generation and comprehension of sentences. Competence can manifest in various ways. They include (a) sentence generation (b) grammaticalness (c) paraphrase relations.

#### 2.6.2.2 Sentence generation

Linguistic competence encompasses the ability of a native speaker to produce and understand sentences of their language either in or out of context and to distinguish those that conform to the code of the language from those that do not. For example, what we utter daily is assumed not to have been memorized. That is, the native speaker can use language to accomplish communicative goals that appropriately capture the situation. Thus, a native speaker can request, pray, curse, preach, plead or perform any verbal act as the situation demands. An example is given below:

4.     Ìfẹ̀ dùn pọ̀  
           Níbi ẹ̀ni méjì bá gbé wèrè pọ̀ (Ọlátúbòsún 1975:54)  
           *Love is sweet (pleasurable)*  
           *Where two people are mad ly in love*

The competence of a Yorùbá native speaker enables him/her to detect that the word *wèrè* (a mad person) belongs to the nominal group, whereas it is used as verb here. Again he/she is able to detect the ambiguities that arise in the adverb *pọ̀* (together) in the phrase *dùn pọ̀* (sweet together) and *wèrè pọ̀* (mad together). The ambiguity arise in *dùn pọ̀* due to the following readings it has:

- 4.(a) (i) *dùn papọ̀* – to be sweet together  
        (ii) *dùn púpọ̀* – to be very pleasurable

Also, *wèrè pọ̀* could have these readings:

- 4.(b) (i) wèrè papò – be mad together  
(ii) wèrè púpò – extremely mad

The competence of the native speaker makes him/her know that the second reading of 4(b); *wèrè púpò* may not be acceptable in daily communication but may be acceptable in poetry. Therefore, even when words, phrases or sentences are ambiguous, he/she is able to distinguish which of the readings is intended in a particular situation. The intended reading in the excerpt above would then be 4(b) and 4(a), hence , the translation below:

Love is pleasurable

Where two people are madly in love.

### 2.6.2.3 Grammaticalness

The native speaker of a language is considered to have perfect knowledge of the rules of his/her language. He/she should be able to recognise grammatical sentences, that is, sentences that are in accord with the system, internalized by the language user and sentences that are not in accord with the system which are referred to as ungrammatical or deviant sentences in transformational terms. The examples below illustrate this:

- 5 Bóyè bá fẹ́ tarúgbó dé  
Gbogbo arúgbó ilé ní í kó lọ  
Bó bá fẹ́ toní yèèpè dé  
A la gbogbo sèsé dànù  
Oyè àlògbó ló fẹ́ tikẹ̀hìn dé  
Tó wá dami sẹ̀ní  
Kálárúgbó ó parúgbó `ẹ̀ mó  
Oyè baba àgbà mbò

#### Omo iyá àgbà

Tí 'ò bá ẹ̀tán màlùù òkú

(Ọlátúbòsún 1975, p101)

*If harmattan is tensed*

*It affects the elderly ones*

*If it blew sand*

*It leaves marks on the leg*

*The coming harmattan may be severe*

*That looks like dropping water*

*Everyone should take care of their elders*

*Severe harmattan is on the way*

*The older mother's child*

*Who is not prepared for burial cow*

- (a) Ọmọ iyá àgbà
- (b) \*Ìyá àgbà ọmọ  
\*Mother older child

The native speaker of Yorùbá recognises sentence 5(a) as meaningful because it conforms to the syntactic structure of the Yorùbá language, and similarly recognises (b) as ungrammatical as it deviates from the syntactic norm of the language. The ambiguous words, phrases or sentences conform to the grammatical rules and norms of the Yorùbá language as can be seen in the example above. The many interpretations the word possess do not mean they deviate from the grammar of the language. These are:

- (i) The child of the older woman
- (ii) The eldest of the woman's children

However, example 5 (b) as deviant and unacceptable as it is in everyday conversation, it may occur and make sense in poetry.

#### 2.6.2.4 Paraphrase relations

The linguistic competence of a native speaker enables him/her to detect sentences that have same denotative meaning and the ones that could be excluded from the same meaning. For example, when confronted with a sentence like the one underline below:

6. Mo tún gbórin dé –lárògún òwe  
Mo gbórin dé-mo fẹ forin ké sároko  
Mo fẹ kéwì sòrò sójú ibi ọ̀rò ọ̀ wà  
Aroko làgbà l'Ọlófin tẹ̀lẹ̀tẹ̀lẹ̀ tẹ̀lẹ̀rì  
Níjọ aláyé ti dáyé aroko ló jọba  
Àgbè loba  
Àgbè ló n' ọ̀raa rẹ̀ bẹ̀ (Fálétí, 1982:45)

*I brought music full of proverb*  
*I brought music to draw the villagers*  
*I want to render poetry on matter arising*  
*He that farms is the leader at*  
*Ọlófin in the time past*  
*Since the inception of the world farmer has been king*  
*Farmers are kings*

*It is the farmer that caused it*

- (a) Àgbè loba (*Farmers are king*)
- (b) Ọba ni àgbè (*King is a farmer*)

A Yorubá native speaker recognises (b) as passive paraphrase of (a), which is its active version, even with the presence of ‘ni’ in (b), which is not present in (a). However, he/she knows that (a) and (b) express the same meaning in view of the similarity in their information content. It is observable that paraphrasing leads to ambiguity. As expressed in the phrase above with the following interpretations of ‘*Àgbè loba*’:

- (i) Àgbè jé ọba nítorí pe ó ní ounjẹ ní yanturu.
  - (ii) Iṣẹ àgbè ni iṣẹ tí Ọba yàn láàyò.
  - (iii) Àgbè ni ọba torí kò lajú.
- (i) *Farmers are kings because they have food in excess.*
  - (ii) *Farming is the king’s profession/hobby.*
  - (iii) *The king is a farmer because he’s not civilised.*

The interpretation in (i), could be a way of eulogizing the farmer who has in his possession almost everything he needs to feed his family. Hence, he is referred to as king who has dominion over his subjects. In (ii), it could be a way of saying the king is a farmer by profession or farming is his hobby. The interpretation in (iii) could be a derogatory expression for an uncivilised king; hence, he is referred to as farmer. The ambiguous phrase enables the poet to express unlimited experiences or ideas.

### 2.6.2 Linguistic performance

Linguistic performance (LP) or simply performance is the production of actual sentences as used in real life situations. In other words, while competence is a speaker’s knowledge of the structure or grammar of the language, performance is the way in which he/she uses it. That is, the speaker’s ability to generate a limitless number of utterances or expressions in his/her language with a few words.

In natural speech situations, a native speaker is often constrained by extra-linguistic factors like false starts, stage fright, word searching phenomenon, memory failure. All these mingle with the native speaker’s underlying competence such that his/her performance in production manifests a wide range of distortion. This means that, even though the mature speaker exhibits an inbuilt language acquisition which enables him/her to internalize the system of the rules of the language to generate an infinite number of sentences, he/she does not exhibit such mastery in his/her performance. Therefore, performance is always lower than competence. Performance takes competence into account as the two concepts are of great

significance to both the linguist and the stylistician. While the linguist takes interest in the speaker's competences, the stylistician is more interested in the speaker's performance.

The transformationalist sees creativity in the use of language as an aspect of linguistic performance. Linguistic creativity brings out such poetic effects like ambiguity in poetry, as can be seen in the poetic lines below:

7. Àṣàdànù lomodé ṣàkúta òde baálè  
 Adíá fáyé  
 Níjò tí òun ìsekúṣe jò nṣòtá  
 Nwón ní káyé rú  
 ...  
 Ayé kò kò **rú**  
 Èṣù ní ta ni kò rú?  
 Ta ló rú?  
 Nwón ní Ayé ni ò rú  
 Ni Èṣù ní kí àwọn méjèjèì ó fowọ sí ijà  
 Gbígbe tí Ìsekúṣe gbé Ayé  
 Ló bá dá ayé mólè  
 Gbogbo ayé ní  
 Ìsekúṣe **dáyé** Abimbólá (1968:63)

*Ifá divination was performed for Ayé  
 On the day he makes enemy with Ìsekúṣe  
 Ayé was asked to perform sacrifice  
 ...  
 Ayé refused and did not perform it  
 Èṣù asked who did  
 And who did not  
 They replied Ayé did not  
 Èṣù threw the two of them to a fight  
 As ìsekúṣe lifted aye up  
 It knocked ayé down  
 Everyone says Ìsekúṣe entered/threw ayé*

The deletion of the obligatory noun phrase object in **rú** confers on it the status of a homonym, therefore, it becomes ambiguous with the three readings below; or it could be a transitive verb, in which case, it must take an obligatory noun phrase object

- rú efin (brings out flame/smoke)
- rú òfin (to transgress a law)
- rú ewé (shed leaves)

It could be an intransitive verb where it does not take direct noun phrase object in a sentence like:

omi náà rú (to stir)

**Rú** in this sense is no longer interpreted as sacrifice nor violation of the law, but means to stir. Some of the objects of the transitive verb **rú** could give other plausible meanings like **rú jáde** (spring up). It could also take other modifying verbs like **dà+rú = dàrú** (Np)(uproar/mixed up). A sentence like: **Nwón ní káyé rú**, makes one to assume that the poetic licence of the poet gives room for him to let the listener from the context of the genre assume that **rú** in the poem has an obligatory object which is **ẹbọ** but the omission of **ẹbọ** gives room for other interpretations like:

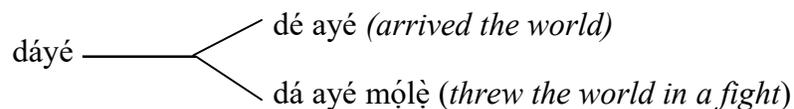
Nwón ni káyé dàrú  
 Ayé kò kò dàrú  
 Èsù ní ta ló rú?  
 Ta ni kò rú?  
 Nwón ní ayé ni kò rú

*They said Ayé should be unsettled  
 Ayé refused to be unsettled  
 Èsù asked who did  
 Who did not  
 They said it is Ayé*

This may not necessarily be the intention of the poet but it is a plausible interpretation inferred from the poetic licence.

- rú** - To perform sacrifice  
 - Growth or development  
 - Mix up or disorderliness

The context shows that **rú** (sacrifice) is the right interpretation but other interpretations are possible as well especially when the overall interpretation of the entire poem is considered. For example, the lack of orderliness in the world, or arrival of bad deeds in the world makes the other interpretations of **dáyé** plausible. **Dáyé** here means:



**Dáyé** becomes ambiguous due to the elision of the vowel ‘e’ or vowel ‘a’ in **dé** + **ayé** or **dá** + **ayé**, which gives the two plausible interpretations above. The Ifá poet is able to exploit the creative property of the Yorùbá culture of comparison by the knowledge he has in the Yorùbá language to produce these ambiguous expressions.

This poem can be regarded as a sample of linguistic performance and a clear manifestation of his linguistic competence in Yorùbá. In essence, performance takes competence into account, as the two concepts are of great significance to both the linguist and the stylistician. Linguistic competence plays a considerable role in making a distinction between any two or more sentences that may be ambiguous.

### **The Government and Binding model of TGG**

The model of TGG applied for analysis in this study is “Principles and Parameters”, also known as Government and Binding Theory ( henceforth, GB).

The theory is considered appropriate for the following reasons:

First, in GB, the model of grammar is reduced to four (4) levels of representations namely:

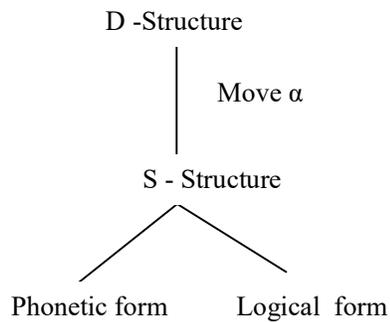
D- Structure

S- Structure

Phonetic Form and

The Logical Form, as illustrated below:

8.

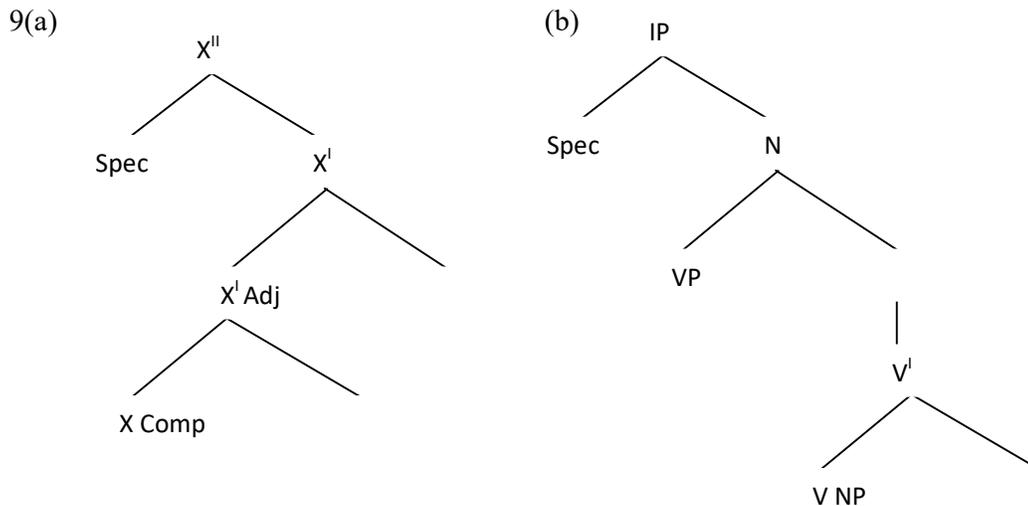


This is done according to a set of principles that regulate different levels and relations between them which contribute in a bit to the total account of a sentence.

Second, in GB, the D-structure and S-structure are related to one another by a transformational rule known as move – @ (move alpha). All the transformational rules in the previous theories were subsumed or collapsed into a single rule called **move alpha**. It means move anything anyhow and anywhere, leaving the relics of the movement at the extraction site. Movement must be in agreement with the rule of the grammar of such language. In essence, GB accounts for all the rules that involve permutation through a uniform transformational rule known as move -@.

Finally, the theory accommodates all languages by simply applying the move alpha principles to the structure of the language. Also, its sub theoretical principles make it possible to account for the syntactic analysis of variation in the structure of other languages.

Constructions can also be analysed using the tree representation in which phrase structure rules are illustrated and represented in what is known as a **tree diagram**. A schema for structural representation in GB is illustrated below for both phrasal and sentential structures.

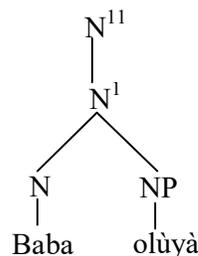


The structures in (9a) above are language-specific. These accurately fit in for head-last languages, such as English. But in Yoruba, the head comes first, which determines the position of the items represented.

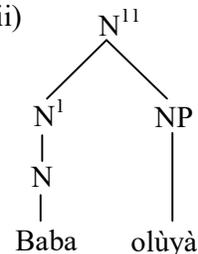
So a simple ambiguous phrase or proposition can be structurally represented in a tree diagram to show its syntactic features and functions as follows:

Baba olùyà

(10ai.)

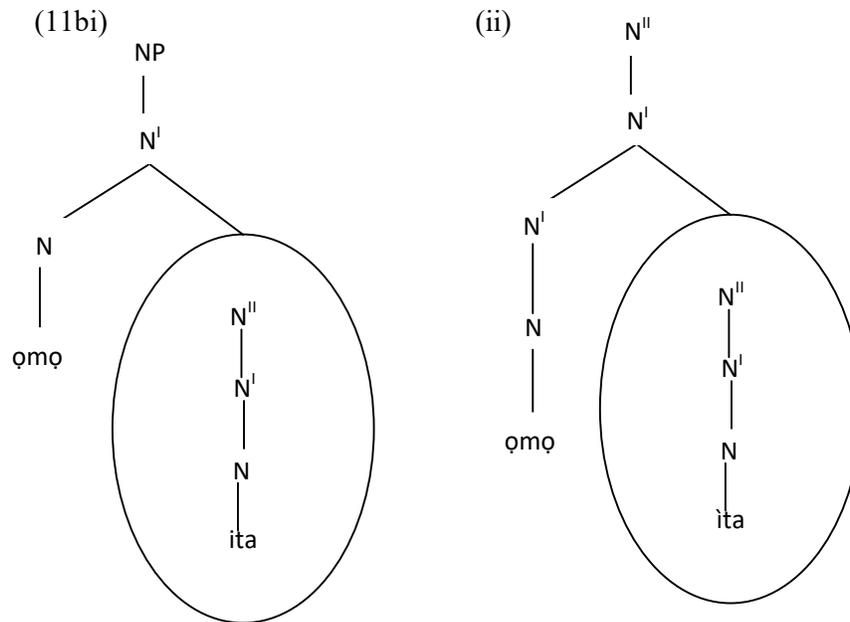


(10aii.)



In the example above, the NP *olùyà* functions as the complement of the head *baba*, which expands the N *baba* to N<sup>1</sup>. This means the father of a person that is an artist or a father who himself is an artist. Conversely, in (ii) the NP *olùyà* functions as the adjunct,

that is giving an additional information to the head *baba*. It means one who fathers a worthless child or who himself is a worthless father.



The NP *ita* in (11bi) functions as the Noun of *qmq* the NP head which is interpreted as the complement, the representation above, shows the different possibilities of *qmq*(child) available. Literarily, it means somebody who sleeps outside. The NP *ita* “outside” in (bii) is a Noun that modifies a HN (head noun). Functionally, it is an adjunct that gives additional information to the head of the phrase). It means that *qmq*(child) is not only sleeping outside but also a child that is wayward. A complement is a sister node to  $N^0$  (that is,  $x^0$  is a variable representing head of any phrase) contrastively, an adjunct is a sister node to  $N^1/x^1$  ( that is, it is adjoined to the bar level or intermediate projection higher than  $N^0$  or  $x^0$ ). The theory internal way of capturing the difference between the complement and adjunct within the purview of GB is that the complement is adjoined to  $x^0$  that is the head of the phrase while an adjunct is adjoined to the intermediate projection. Moreover, there can only be one complement but many adjunct.

## 2.7 Componential Analysis (CA)

The theory is based on the approach that the meaning of a word is composed of semantic components. Atchison (2003)<sup>7</sup> opines, that by componential analysis, it is possible to state the smallest indivisible units of lexis or minimal components. The total meaning of a word is broken up into its basic distinct components. Táíwò (2016)<sup>8</sup> says, in CA, the meaning of a word is seen in terms of a number of components of meaning (semantic components). By this approach, a lexical word can be broken down into its ‘ultimate contrastive elements so that the lexical item in question can be distinguished from other lexical items in the same language’. (Atchison, 2003)

Each component of meaning is expressed by a feature symbol of + or - mark. The plus (+) indicates the presence of a feature, while minus (-) indicates the absence of a certain feature. CA helps us understand meaning relations, such as synonymy and antonymy. Two componential meanings are exclusive if one contains at least one feature contrasting with one feature of the other. Thus, the meaning of ‘woman’ is opposite or contrasted to that of ‘child’ due to the contrast between the features + ADULT and -ADULT, as shown below;

Woman = + HUMAN  
          + ADULT  
          - MALE

Child = + HUMAN  
          -ADULT  
          + MALE or - MALE

While many meanings can be understood in terms of binary contrast, there are some oppositions that involve more than two terms. CA also helps in making conceptual distinctions and contrast for the understanding of the meaning. For example, the ambiguous word ‘rú’ (growth/sacrifice) in page 9 has the semantic features of

12. RÚ – + ŞÈTÙTÙ (APPEASE)  
          - GBÈRÚ (GROWTH)  
          + RÚBỌ (SACRIFICE)

Also, **bẹ́rín** in page 28 has the semantic features of

(13). Bẹ́rín – + Ìkíní (SALUTE)  
          – Orí bíbẹ́ (BEHEAD)  
          + Bọ̀wọ̀ fún (PAY HOMAGE)  
          + Salute – Behead + Pay homage

## 2.8 Why TGG?

Transformational Generative Grammar was considered to be most appropriate for this study because it solves some questions that structuralism has left unanswered. For instance, structuralism neglects the competence of a native speaker of a language to produce infinite number of sentences. Furthermore TGG employs the deductive method in building a theoretical account of grammar which helps the native speaker to generate not only sentences that conform to the rules of the language but also sentences that do not.

Oham (1964), in his defence of the powerfulness of the model, states that TGG is a useful tool in describing texts. He states further that:

A generative grammar with a transformational component provides apparatus for breaking down a sentence in a stretch of discourse into underlying kernel sentences (or strings, strictly speaking) and for specifying the grammatical operations that have been performed upon them. It also permits the analyst to construct, from the same set of kernel sentences. These may reasonably be thought of as alternatives to the original sentence, in that they are simply different constructs out of the identical elementary grammatical units. Thus the idea of alternative phrasings, which is crucial to the notion of style, has a clear analogue within the framework of a transformational grammar.

TGG not only shows the inter-relatedness between sentences but also explains and solves ambiguities in sentences that appear identical but are transforms from different structures.

## 2.9 Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the role of linguistics in literary study; we reviewed the works of scholars who have employed linguistic models in their Yorùbá studies. We also looked at the relationship between linguistics, stylistics and literature. The discussion also covered standard language versus poetic language.

We have discussed the theoretical approach adopted for the study, the TGG. This theory was employed for this study because it explains the ambiguities in words or sentences that appear identical. It is a grammar that utilises finite rules to generate infinite number of sentences.

Transformationalists consider the relation between form and meaning as crucial in the generation of sentences that are both grammatical and meaningful. TGG explains how complex sentences are generated and how they are related to simple sentences.

The chapter stressed that the derived structures of a sentence, that is, the surface structure is transformed according to transformational rules, from the underlying structure, that is, the deep structure. The linguistic competence, which is what we know about language and linguistic performance which is what we do when we speak or listen, were also considered. We also discussed Componential Analysis, which is useful in making conceptual distinctions and contrasts for the understanding of meaning. The next chapter discusses the methodology adopted for the study.

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. For details on brief history on linguistics, see Abraham (1981),Robins (1988).  
Ọlátẹ́jú (1998) and Oha (1994) for brief history on stylistics as an academic discipline Ọlátẹ́jú (1998) and Adébáyò (2009) for discussion on literature
2. Cited in Seldan (1988:200); he discusses the mutual relationship that exists between language and literature
3. As cited in Canaras (2002)
4. Ọlátẹ́jú (1998:136) ‘A Syntactic Approach to Literary Discourse Analysis: The Yorùbá Example’
5. See Ọlátẹ́jú, A (1998:36-37) “A Syntactic Approach to Literary Discourse Analysis: The Yorùbá Example”
6. Cited in Ọlátẹ́jú, A (1998:36-37) “A Syntactic Approach to Literary Discourse Analysis: The Yorùbá Example”
7. Quoted from Sekgaila, J. C. (2000) “Linguistic Ambiguity in Northern Sotho: Saying the Unmeant”
8. Cited in Taiwo, O. (2016) Transformational Grammar 11

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides details on research design, data sources, methods, sample and sampling procedures, data collection and analysis. Section 3.1 discusses the research design adopted for this study, while Section 3.2 describes the data sources. The samples and sampling procedures are examined in section 3.3 and section 3.4 explains the method of data collection and method of data analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Explaining research designs, Bamgboye and Okoruwa (2009) explained that it shows how the research questions will be connected to the data and what tools and procedures will be used in answering the research questions. Consequently, this study adopts the interpretive design. The adoption of this design was premised on the fact that it is most suitable when intended meaning is underlying or not overtly stated. The primary objective of this study was to examine linguistic ambiguity as a literary device in Yorùbá poetic discourse. This was with a view to establishing their stylistic and communicative implications. The study relied on qualitative data to explore the ambiguities inherent in the selected poetic texts. In other words, data was narrowed to only the poetic texts which explored and exploited ambiguity as a discourse strategy.

#### **3.2 Data source**

In order to answer our leading research questions on identifying the types of ambiguity found in Yorùbá poetic discourse as well as explore and explain ambiguity in such works, the research was purposive in its selection of data sources. For the study therefore, data were obtained from the works of eleven Yorùbá poets with sufficient occurrence of ambiguity. Data were subjected to syntactic and content analyses. For an easy view of the poets and their works, a tabular format was adopted for the presentation of data as shown below:

**Table 1: The list of selected poetic texts and poets**

S/N	Poet's name	Works
1.	Adébáyò Fálétí collected by Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí	Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí apá kíní Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí apa keji
2.	Afọlábí Ọlábímtán	Àádóta Àròfò Àkójopò Ewì Àbáláyéàti Ewì Apilẹ̀ko Ewì oríşiríşì
3.	Àtàrí Àjànàkú	Orin Ewúro
4.	Akinwùmí Işọlá	Àfàimò àti àwọn Àròfò míràn
5.	Débò Awé	Èkún Elédùmarè
6.	Ọlátúbòsún Ọládàpò	Àròyé Akéwì apá kíní àti keji, Èmí Ìn Mi Èmí
7.	Olúránkinşé Ọlánípẹ̀kun	Ìjì Ayé
8.	Dénrelé Ọbasá	Àwọn Akéwì apá keji
9.	Şayò Àlàgbé	Ìjálá Ọ̀gúndáre Fóyánmu
10.	Sulaiman Rájí	Igi Ní Dá
11.	Wándé Abímbólá	Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Enu Ifá apá Kíní àti keji

### 3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a representative of a data too large to be managed within a limited time; such a sample must therefore have the characteristics of the larger data. Due to the fact that the interest of this research lied in poems which involve language use without a one-to-one correspondence between intended meaning and expressions, the study reviewed over 40 Yoruba poetic texts. Thereafter, sixteen of the texts were purposively selected based on their sufficiency in ambiguity. This serves as primary data for the analysis. In addition, several published Yoruba and non-Yoruba journals, conference and seminar papers relevant to this study were consulted in other to connect the research with current interpretation and analysis of linguistic ambiguity in discourse generally and later, in poetry specifically. All data from these three categories or sources however constituted secondary data. Finally, data also included oral poetry, especially poems rendered as songs since it is a known fact that some poems down the century have been rendered in music form. These were also treated as secondary source of data.

### **3.4 Method of data collection**

Due to the primary aim of this study, stated earlier as a contribution to ongoing debate on the significance of linguistics in literary analysis and interpretation, the researcher goes about collecting poems written by Yoruba poets of different pedigrees. Several visits were made to the library and poems were sought online widely. Poets known to researcher were approached for helpful suggestions on Yoruba poetic texts with any form of ambiguity. These were the different means that cumulatively aided data collection.

### **3.5 Method of data analysis**

This research critically studied the final selection of sixteen poetic texts and identified all instances of ambiguity in the works of the eleven poets and extracted them. Study then proceeded to break them into types of ambiguity based on how the poets explored and exploited ambiguity in their works. The extracted portions were further subjected to ambiguity content re-evaluation in order to identify recurring themes relevant to analysis. Six types of ambiguity were identified: lexical, structural, morpho-phonological, pragmatic, pun and scope.

### **3.6 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter laid out the research design, sample procedure and method of data collection and analysis. It also linked the research question and objectives with research design. The next chapters are preoccupied with data presentation, analysis and discussions on result of findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TYPES AND SOURCES OF AMBIGUITY

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, data analysis and interpretation is discussed in three parts. They are Empson's classification of ambiguity, second; types of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry and third sources of ambiguity. Ambiguity in linguistics became widely accepted after Empson's (1930) publication of seven types of ambiguities. Before then, ambiguity was seen as a faulty sentence or one that failed to produce a precise meaning since it involves different meanings. Empson invested ambiguity with prestige and offered to elucidate the impact poetry has on the reader because of ambiguity. For his purpose of literary criticism, he found that ambiguities could be classified into seven, based on their appearance or nature. They include:

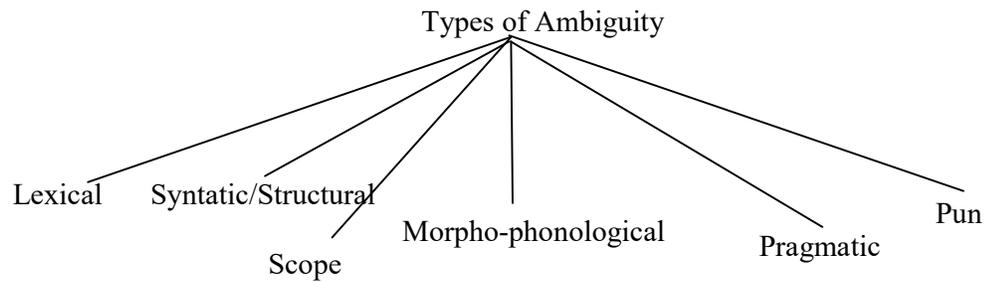
1. The first type is the metaphor, that is, when two things are said to be alike which have different properties. This concept is similar to metaphysical concept.
2. Two or more meanings are resolved into one. Empson 1930 characterises this as using two different metaphors as one.
3. Two ideas that are connected through context can be given in one word simultaneously.
4. Two or more meanings that do not agree but combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author.
5. When the author discovers his idea in the act of writing. Empson 1930 describes a simile that lies half way between two statements made by the author.
6. When a statement says nothing and the readers are forced to invest a statement of their own, most likely in conflict with that of the author.
7. Two words that within a context are opposites that expose a fundamental division in the author's mind.

In the classification of ambiguity, some scholars see vagueness as a type of ambiguity, whereas there is distinction between ambiguity and vagueness. Ambiguity is associated with more than one distinct meaning, vagueness has to do with lack of specificity, for instance:

Mo lè kàwé

*I can re-ad*

the sentence is vague as it does not specify the type of book I can read. It is therefore not ambiguous as it does not have more than one distinct meaning. Though Empson's seven types of ambiguities were based on his analysis of English poetry, our discussion of types of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry is being motivated by Empson's study. In this work, therefore, we have discovered these six types of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry as well. They are Lexical ambiguity, Syntactic/Structural ambiguity, Scope ambiguity, Morpho-phonological ambiguity, Pragmatic ambiguity and Pun ambiguity. They are illustrated in the diagram below:



#### 4.1 Lexical ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity is a linguistic term for a word's capacity to carry two or more obviously different meanings. In most cases, the intended meaning is made clear by the context. Mackay and Bever (1967:193) contend that a sentence is lexically ambiguous if a word has two distinct meanings and no differences at the other grammatical levels. It arises when a word has more than one generally accepted meaning. Examples are given below:

- 1.(a) Ènikan n bẹ láyé ijelòò  
 Tí orúkọ rẹ n jẹ Agbódórogun.  
 Kò sógun tí yóò jà tí kii sẹ  
 Ó jẹ jagunjagun tí gbogbo ayé n gbórúko  
 Bí yóò jagun kii mú àpò  
 Bí yóò jagun kii mú ọfà  
 Odó kan n bẹ lówó rẹ,  
 Tó jégbòogi,  
 Èyí ni ó n gbé lọ sójú ogun.  
 Bí ó bá gbé odó ọhún dé ààrín ogun  
 À tú iṣu sí i nínú lati fi gúnván  
 Bí ó bá fi lè gúnván tán  
 Dandan ni kii ó sẹgun  
 Ó wá di ọjọ kan tí ogun wólú  
 Wón ránsé sí Agbódórogun.  
 Ọun náà kò **b'Èsù** Ọdàrà, ó gbéra,  
 Ó n lọ pa itú bí í ti í sẹ rí gbogbo (Fálétí, 1982:16)



E rò óore ooo  
 E rò óoree,  
 Kó má e dí kókó  
 Bí ò tí ì hó oo  
 E má mà foógùn si  
 Kó má tiiri (Fálétí, 1982:13)

*Should the military quit governance and we return to democracy,  
 Can we stop oppressing one another?  
 Can we rule without oppression?  
 That we will not make the children of the poor suffer?  
 Can we allow free and fair election?  
 Can we govern rightly?  
 Can we stop cheating one another?  
 Carefully think about it  
 Patiently ponder on it  
 Don't allow it to develop cold feet  
 If the time is not ripe  
 Don't plunge into it  
 For it not to fail*

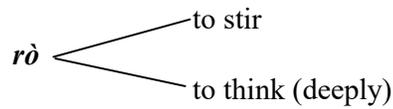
Fálétí's concern in the political poem titled 'Bíri layé n yí', is the transition of power from military rule to a democratically elected government. Should the military eventually quit governance, will the politicians live a reformed life and avoid the mistakes that brought in the military in the first instance?. The expression *Rò óore* in the above poem is ambiguous, as it accomodates more than one meaning:

- (i) kí wón ro nńkan papò (bi àmàlà,tàbí èkọ)(*stir something*)
- (ii)wón ro ọrò ní àròjinlè, (kó le gún) (*to think deeply*)

The overall intention of the poet is to warn the aspiring politicians and the military to be cautious of their actions, so that the chaos that led to the military rule will not repeat itself again. The second possible interpretation which is figuratively metaphoricalis, to stir it very well:

E rò óoree  
 Kó má e dí kókó  
 Bí ò tí ì hó oo  
 E má mà forógùn si  
 Kó má tiri  
 Kó má e dí kókó (Fálétí, 1982:13)

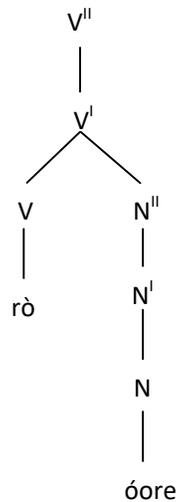
*Stir it well  
 So that it will not get lump  
 If it has not boiled  
 Do not put the turning stick  
 So that the water will not become lukewarm  
 So that it will not get lump*



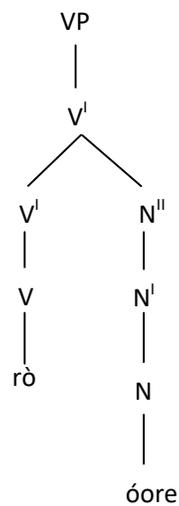
The fact that when one needs to prepare amala (**ro àmàlà**) the water has to boil before adding the àmàlà powder (**èlùbó**) and *stir it* well (**rò óore**) corroborates the second interpretation above. The functions of the ambiguity in the poem is political communication directed to the aspiring politicians to expect the fury and chaos should they repeat the same mistakes (corruption, maladministration, etc) they made during the previous political dispensation. The play on the verb '**rò**' (stir/think) contributes to the stylistic effect of the ambiguity.

This can be structurally interpreted thus:

1c(i)



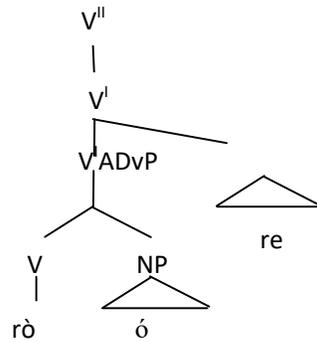
(ii)



When the verb **rò** also translates to *stir* as in (1c)i) **rò** a transitive verb requires a complement or receives an action being expressed by verb.

Rò óre

Think Np well



ó is a complement of rò, the verb. Theoretically, ó object Np of rò functions as the complement

But when *rò* is interpreted to be ‘to think’, as in (1cii), the verb takes ó as an adjunct because the interpretation of the phrase is figurative. Hence, it is an additional information, theoretically, GB captures adjunct as a sister node of  $x^1$  (in this context,  $x^1$  is represented as  $v^1$ ). Hence, the ambiguity in the structure. Although the word is spelt and pronounced the same, they stand for different ideas.

Also in the poem cited below, titled ‘Kábiyèsí Oyèkàn Keji’, Òlábímtán appraises the patience and perseverance of Òba Oyèkàn before he was installed as the king which earned him a prestigious and reputable position among his chiefs and subjects.

- (d) Kábiyèsí Adéyínká àgbà oyè  
 Kábiyèsí Oyèkàn Keji, òba wa  
 Òba Atérígbeji  
 Ajóríki bíi baba mi  
 Adé á pé lóri, iré yí o ká  
 Bàtà a pé lèsè rẹ àgbà oyè  
 Atérígbadé, Òba tó ju Òba lọ  
 Àgbà oyè t’ó f’ àgbà méréndínlógún dúró  
 T’ó f’òrúnmilà ẹ itèsè oyè (Òlábímtán, 1969:12)

*His Royal Highness Adéyínkà  
 Oyèkàn the second, our king  
 King Atérígbeji  
 Who shares praise poetry with my father  
 May you live long our King, you are surrounded with wealth  
 May the shoe last longer on your feet  
 His Royal Highness  
 Atérígbadé, a king who is superior to other kings  
 His Royal Highness that makes sixteen chiefs standing/surety  
 That makes Òrúnmilà the supporting chief*

The verb ‘**dúró**’ in the excerpt could be interpreted as:

- (i) In a standing position
- (ii) Used as surety

The word ‘**dúró**’ makes the poem ambiguous as we are not sure if it means using sixteen chiefs as surety, or used as an idiom to mean that he installed other sixteen (16) chiefs/kings, to enhance an appellation as a king that installs other kings (**Ọba tí ń fi ọba jẹ**). The verb ‘**dúró**’ is a form of lexical ambiguity which expresses divergent ideas in the context of usage. Apart from the interpretations above, by **Àgbà oyè t’ó f’àgbà m̀erindínlógún dúró**; the poet may also mean using the sixteen principal Odù as back up. Apart from the stylistic elegance induced by the two –syllable verb, the ambiguity is used to effectively communicate the impression of the king (Ọba) as truly an imperial majesty- a king that installs other kings or king of kings. The stylistic import of the ambiguity creates a sense of humour and makes a cynical comic of the king’s power.

- (e). In the poem ‘Èèwò Oriṣà’ cited below, the poet, Ọlátúbòsún admonishes the people to be mindful of any position they find themselves in life so that unexpected evils will not befall them.

Àwọ̀n àgbà tí wọ̀n kilò  
Pédà ’ò le è pàkò mì  
Nwọ̀n tún s̀èkilò ikilò  
Pé kákò ó má fojú dadà  
Aláyé tó lájá ò gbọ̀dò **polówó**  
Aláyé tó lájá ò gbọ̀dò **polówó**  
**Olówó** fowó síbi tówó gbé  
Látijó aláyé ti dáyé ni (Ọlátúbòsún, 1973:28)

*The elders that warned  
That the sword cannot kill the sheat  
They also gave warnings  
That the sheat should not underestimate the sword  
People that say dog should not kill its owner  
People that say dog should not kill its owner  
It is possible only if the owner respects himself  
That has been the adage since the beginning of time.*

The ambiguity in **polówó** and **olówó** arise from the uncertainty of the intended meaning. These are

- (i) Olówó ajá/ẹni tí ó ni ajá – The dog’s owner
- (ii) Olówó kan – A rich personality

In the poem, what the poet intends to say is that whatever the position someone attains in life, there should be moderation and carefulness. But he has unconsciously given

another meaning. With this, we can say the poet is creative, by using one word to give different meanings.

In the poem below, ‘Òtẹ̀-ò-lówò’, Olábímtán talks about giving honour to whom honour is due, rather than creating unnecessary enmity that we should embrace the spirit of togetherness.

- (f) Ìlárí lètẹ̀ kò lówò  
 Ohun a fòtẹ̀ mú ní òdètẹ̀  
 Ohun a finúkan mú ní dára  
 Ìṣòkan dára ó juDàda lọ (Olábímtán, 1975:26)

*Enmity has no value  
 Anything that is handle with hostility is not good  
 Anything that is handle diligently is always good  
 Ìṣòkan is far better than Dàda*

The ambiguity in the underlined word above (f) is due to its double interpretation. Which are:

- (i) ju – better ( which has to do with quality) while the second interpretation is;  
 (ii) ju – Older ( this has to do with age)

The uncertainty of which meaning is intended out of the two caused the ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is the property of being ambiguous; that is a word, term, notation, sign, symbol or any other form used for communication is called ambiguous if it can be interpreted in more than one way. Bever and Rosenbaum (1966) share the same view:

It is intuitively clear that lexical ambiguities can be divided into two types based on the nature of the relation between the two meanings of the ambiguous lexical items... Some lexical ambiguities have two meanings which seem to bear no relation to each other... For other lexical ambiguities, the two meanings appear to be related.

An instance of this is seen in (g) below:

- (g) Òjò ifẹ̀ pa mí lóde  
 N ò délé wí:  
 Iná ifẹ̀ jó mi lóde,  
 N ò dọ̀dọ̀dẹ̀ sọ,  
 Mo torí oge:  
 Mo dijàkùmò  
 Ìfẹ̀ ló n pa mí bí ọtí (Olátúbòsún, 2002:15)



*Rain of love titilated me in an outing  
 I couldn't mention it at home  
 Fire of love inflamed me in an outing,  
 I couldn't mention it at home  
 Because of a damsel  
 I became a marauder  
 Love intoxicates me like wine*

The verb 'pa' is lexically ambiguous, as it accomodates two interpretations:

- (i) pa – to kill
- (ii) pa – intoxicate

Although the word is spelt and pronounced the same way, it stands for different ideas. Mackay and Bever (1967:93) note that a word is lexically ambiguous if it has two distinct meanings and no differences at the other grammatical levels. An instance of this is seen in 'Bíri Layé N Yí', in the poem, Fálétí talks about transition from military rule to democracy and the atrocities of the politician in rigging election. example below:

- (h) Bí'rí layé n yí íí  
 Bírí layé n yí oo  
 Ayé ò ɕe tɛnikan  
 Layé n yí í  
 Ìbò jɛ tán búrùjì ò jɛ(Fálétí, 1982:9)

*The world is moving round  
 The world is moving round  
 The world belongs to noone  
 Its moving round  
 Vote counts but rigging doesn't*

- (i) jɛ - won
- (ii) jɛ - eat

The two underlined **jɛ** as used in the poem can be interpreted as won or eat. The uncertainty in which of the **jɛ**, above caused the ambiguity whether it means won or eat.

In the poem 'Ojò mo tẹ', Ọlábímtán talks about someone who is fond of himself and felt that he is being loved by everyone around him but was disapointed when he is insulted.

- (i) Gbogbo ayé nńí mi nńkan sáára  
 Ayé kò kúkú rínú; awọ ti bonú aṣebi  
 Gbogbo èniyàn nńí mi sí filà  
 Mo rò pé kò s'èni tó mi l'áwùjọ

Ojú mi là lóníí, mo té  
Nwòn gbé dígí sí mi níwájú  
Mo wá rí'ra mi gedegbe (Ọlábímtán, 1969:52)

*Everyone is hailing me  
They did'nt know my thought; the evil in the heart has been  
covered by flesh  
Everyone bow for me  
I thought noone matched my standard  
My eyes were opened today, I was disgraced  
They brought before mea mirror  
I saw myself clearly*

The ambiguity in the excerpt above is due to the underlined verb là, which may mean:

- (a) là -*Opened* (a literal meaning)
- (b) là – *Exposed* ( a connotative meaning)

The context in which a lexically ambiguous word is used often makes evident which of the meanings is intended. When a word or concept has an inherent meaning based on widespread of informal usage, it is called lexical ambiguity. This is often the case, for example, with idiomatic expressions, whose definitions are rarely, if ever, well-defined and are presented in the context of a larger argument that invites a conclusion. This is the case in the second interpretation of *Là* above. Lexical ambiguity is by far the more common type in Yorùbá poetry, and more often than not, lexical ambiguity exhibit idiomatic interpretation in their second meanings.

#### 4.2 Structural/Syntactic ambiguity

Structural ambiguity arises when a phrase or sentence has more than one underlying structure even though none of the constituents is ambiguous. It means that a sentence is structurally ambiguous not because it contains a single lexeme that has several distinct meanings but because the syntactic structure causes multiple interpretations. According to the transformationalists, there are two distinct deep structures, for instance in 2 below. The linguist, however attempts to find a way of explaining the facts about the speaker-hearer's linguistic capacities. In this respect Fowler (1977:3) states that the linguist has to account for the structure of English sentences (also in Yorùbá) in a way which takes cognisance of speakers' intuitions of deviance, similarity, distinctness, and ambiguity in their experience of English sentence.

In ‘Àgò O’! the opening poem of the anthology, the poet, Obasá pays homage to God and everyone that has contributed to his achievement as a successful poet and editor.

He also introduces himself to the audience or reader thus:

2. (a) Mo ní, bí ẹ̀ kò rí ni,  
 È kò mọ̀ ni?  
 Bí ẹ̀ kò m’Òsà,  
 È kò j’iyò l’óbè?  
 Ígbà t’ẹ̀ kò mọ̀ mí,  
 È kò gbóhùn mi?

Èmi l’Akéwì Akòwé

Èmi l’Akòwé Akéwì

Bí mo ti níké kíké

Bèè ni mo níko kíkò

(Obasá, 1982:2)

*I said, if you don’t see me  
 Don’t you know me  
 If you you don’t know River Òsà ,  
 Don’t you consume salt?  
 When you didn’t recognise me  
 Don’t you hear my voice  
 I am a poet secretary/writer  
 I am a secretary/writer poet  
 Much as I recite  
 I also write*

The underlined sentences above are ambiguous, and their ambiguities are due to the different structures which are permitted by the rule of syntax, rather than to any ambiguous word. (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993:77). For example in Yorùbá syntax, the structure of a noun having a qualifier, is: HN + Q.

Using this underlying syntactic framework or structure, Akéwì akòwé and Akòwé in lines 7 and 8 of (i) can be interpreted thus:

(ai) HN + Q

**Akéwì Akòwé**

- 1) A poet and also a secretary (a poet secretary)
- 2) A poet to a secretary ((secretary’s poet)
- 3) A poet who is also learned/ educated poet (a learned/educated poet)

(Afinjú Akéwì) (**idiomatic**)

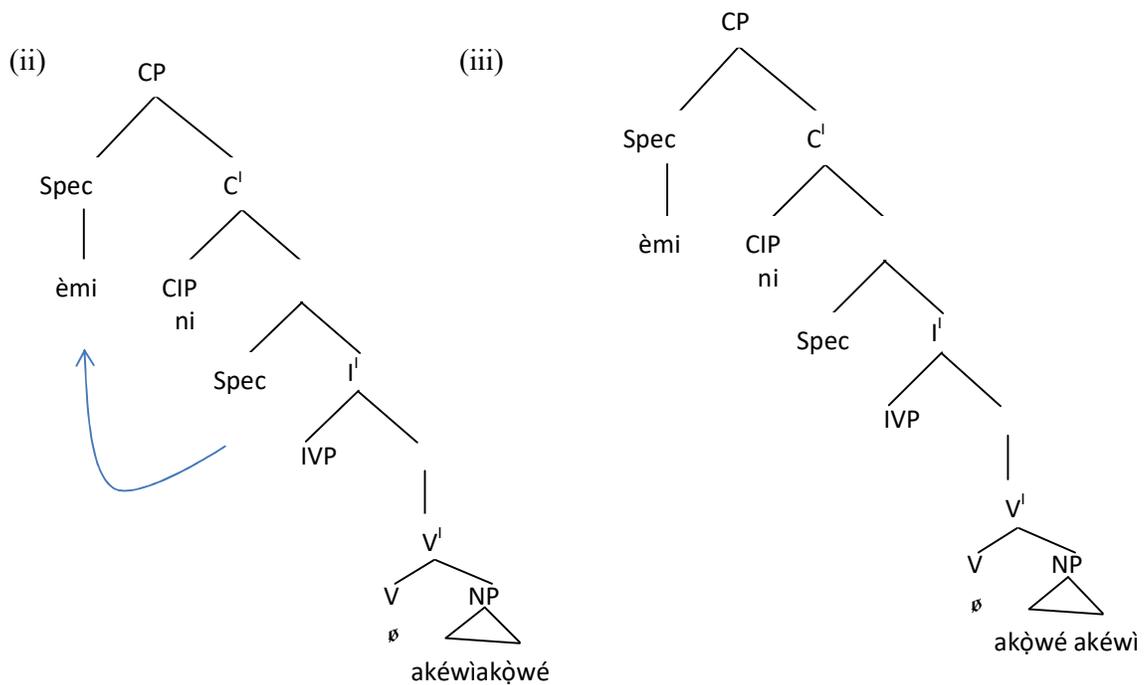
(aii) **Akòwé Akéwì**

- (1) A secretary and also a poet (a secretary poet)
- (2) A secretary to a poet (a poet’s secretary)
- (3) A secretary who is also educated/learned (an enlightened secretary)

(Afinjú akòwé) (**idiomatic**)

It is obvious in this classification that a swap in the position of the items can make the sentence ambiguous as shown in (2ai), *Akéwì (poet)* is the HN and *Akòwé (secretary)* Q is translated to be the direct complement of *Akéwì (poet)*. In (aii) *Akéwì (poet)* functions as the complement of the HN *Akòwé (secretary)*. The third interpretations of (ai & aii) are idiomatic, that is, a learned or educated poet (*afínjú akéwì*) and an enlightened secretary (*afínjú akòwé*). As part of the limitations of linguistics to literary analysis, there are certain areas which it may not be able to explain. This is the case with the third interpretations of (ai and aii) above.

The two possibilities are illustrated below:



The ambiguity in the structures above is apparently depicted due to the fact that no verb to show the state/status of *akéwì akòwé* in the clause/sentence because the sentence is a verbless sentence. *Ni* is a focus marker which shows *èmi* has been moved to leftmost position of *ni* (that is, Spec – Cp) hence, the beginning of the ambiguity. The interpretations for (ii) goes thus:

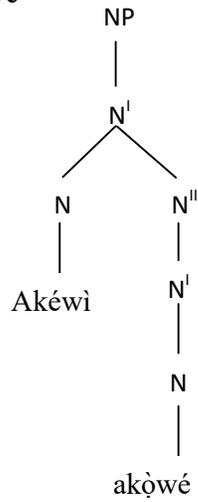
(a) The referent is a poet who is also a secretary

(b) The referent is a poet to a secretary

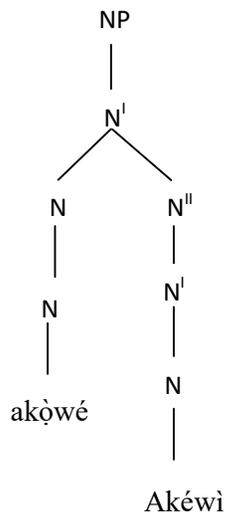
While the interpretations for (iii) is : (a) The referent is a secretary who is also a poet

(b) The referent is a secretary to a poet.

Akéwì akòwé

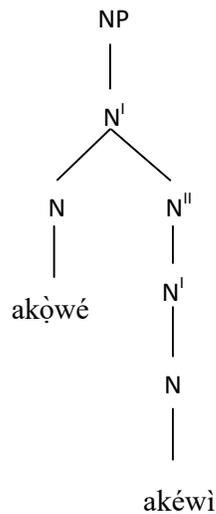


The surface interpretation where Akéwì takes akòwé as its complement.

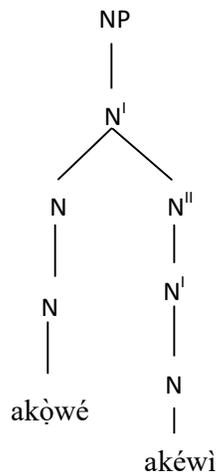


The second interpretation is that Akéwì is an adjunct of the head akòwé

Akòwéakéwì



The interpretation shows on the schematic tree diagram that akòwé is the head and has akéwì as its complement



This is the other interpretation where akéwì takes akòwé as an adjunct

Ọbasá in this poem wants to tell his audience/reader that he is an accomplished literate poet. But he has unconsciously given different interpretations which are equally meaningful and acceptable. With this, we can say the poet is creative for using few words to create many meanings. The communicative function is to explain the fact that he is an accomplished poet, writer and educated person. Therefore, there is stylistic elegance and creativity in the poem. The sentence could have a literal interpretation in one and a metaphorical meaning as indicated in (ai & aii) above.

In ‘*Yòyò Lenu Ayé*’, Olátúbòsún used the poem to express his worries on the way people react or seesituations and circumstances in life. He tries to tell his audience and readers the difficulty in trying to please everyone around whether you are rich or poor. He goes thus:

- (b). Ení bá n fójójúmó gbó’hun táyé le wí  
 Kò kúkú ní fẹmí ara rẹ lẹrí isinmi  
 Bí i kóóko tí bá m̀bẹ lójú omi  
 Èyàn tó bá nf̀p̀p̀ò ìgbà jókòó síhun èdá lèrò  
 Ìdààmú ayé ni ó pa ’lúwa rẹ sóri èrò  
 Kò síwà àtata  
 Tó le tẹ gbogbo omọ Aádámò lórùn  
Owó ló p̀p̀òjù lówó Àjàyí níjósí  
 Àjàyí oní-kànga-àjípòn (Olátúbòsún, 1989: 118)

*Whosoever listens to whatever people say daily  
 Shall not be at peace for once  
 Just like the weed growing on the water  
 Anyone who broods on human thoughts  
 It is worry that will kill such person  
 There is no good character in man  
 That can satisfy human being  
 Money was too much in Ajayi’s hand sometime  
 Ajayi the one with early pot of water*

The underlined sentence above is ambiguous, which can mean:

- (i) Owó ti p̀p̀òjù lówó Àjàyí  
*He was extremely rich/wealthy sometimes ago*
- (ii) Àjàyí fi ìgbà kan jẹ aláilówó lówó  
*Ajayi was once poor*

Considering the D-structure of the sentence, then we can resolve the ambiguity.

**D-structure:** Owó ni ó p̀p̀òjù ní owó Àjàyí  
*There was much money on Ajayi*

**S-structure:** Owó p̀p̀òjù ní owó Àjàyí  
*Ajayi had much money*

From the D-structure, rather than being blunt the poet might ironically want to say that Àjàyí was sometimes very poor. Even though the ambiguity was not intended, unconsciously has given another interpretation of Ajayi having much money sometimes ago. The stylistic effects of the ambiguity could be to mock Ajayi or the poet employs it as a sarcasm. In the poem, ‘Ìkíni’, Obasá, after paying homage to God also

appreciates his master and laments on his demise. He goes further to tell the audience/reader his personality among other poets. Thus:

(c) Ọ́gá mi d'ẹ̀rù, ọ̀ rọ̀run  
 Ọ̀run Alákeji, àrẹ̀mabò  
     Ọ̀run rere, Ọ̀run rere  
     Ọ̀run rere ni t'ónínúure  
 Ẹ̀ kòì mò mì?  
 Ojú mi jọ t'àlejò ndan?  
Eni tí kò mọ̀kun, mọ̀sà  
 K'ó bojú ọ̀run wò (Ọbasá, 1982:3)

*My boss packed load, he went to heaven  
 Heaven where noone goes and return  
 Good heaven, good heaven  
 Good heaven is for the good people  
 Haven't you known me?  
 Does my face look like that of a stranger?  
 He who neither knows the ocean/sea, nor the lagoon  
 Should look at the sky*

The ambiguity in the underlined sentence above arises from the obscure sense which leaves us wondering whether:

- (i) Ẹ̀ni tí kò mọ̀ ọ̀kun àti ọ̀sà
- (ii) Ẹ̀ni tí kò mọ̀ ọ̀kun sùgbón tí ó mọ̀ ọ̀sà  
*Someone who does not know the ocean/sea and also does not know the lagoon, or (both)*  
*That the person does not know either ocean or the lagoon*  
*(know nothing)*

In other words, we are not certain if the poet is referring to someone who knows both the ocean and the sea or only knows the ocean alone or the sea alone

What the poet communicates to his audience/reader in the underlined ambiguous expression is that he is a celebrated and renowned poet who should be known by everyone having travelled far and near. But unknowingly to him, the utterance has been given another meaning due to the obscure sense which leaves us wondering whether he intends the first interpretation or the second. The stylistic import of the ambiguity is humour and comic effect. The sentence, when uttered, is on the surface and this surface structure may hide the presence of two or more deep structures, as indicated in (b) above. However, when attention is paid only to the surface structure one would fail to notice some important distinctions. The above discussions make it

undoubtedly clear that there are two syntactic structures, namely a surface structure and a deep structure. Moreover, the motivation for those concepts comes from the inquiry into ‘what the speaker knows’ that is the speaker’s perception of ‘ambiguity’.

Ọlátúbòsún uses the poem ‘Èèbó Dúdú’ to lament the injustice and discrimination of the white against the black in their country. He explains in the lines below:

- (d) Ó légbé òun o leè rinnà  
 Kígba Ọ̀yìn bó má fadúláwò gbá yèyè  
Olórí burúkú won  
 Lẹ̀ni ba ńbá dúdú jẹun lójú tiwọ̀n (Ọlátúbòsún,1975:44)

*He said his mates cannot walk in the street  
 And wouldn't be mocked by some white men  
 It's the bad **ones/bad** leaders  
 Who dine and wine with the black*

The ambiguity in the above excerpt is due to the different interpretations the underlined expression has, which are:

- (i) Adarí ti kò dára (*A bad leader*)  
 (ii) Alàìnilárí tàbí ẹ̀ni tí kò wúlò (*A worthless person/one with bad luck*)

What the poet intends to say is that any white man that associates with a black man in their country is considered by his fellow whites as a bad or worthless person. But in the course of being creative, unknowingly he has given the audience or reader different interpretations. The ambiguity in the phrase can be solved when the semantic features are considered thus:

- (iii) OLÓRÍ BURÚKÚ = + ANINILÁRA (VILLAIN)  
 + ALÁÌŞESÚNMÓ (UNPLEASANT)  
 – DÁRA/WUYÌ (GOOD/PLEASANT)  
 +LEKOKO (TOUGH)

In the poem ‘Kìnniún d’agbèlèhe Èkúté’, Ọ̀lábímtán talks about the bad influence civilisation has on the custom and tradition of the Yorùbá people. He laments that people no longer accord respect to the culture thus:

- (e) Mo délé Alára, ńwón l’Alára jáde  
 Mo l’èrùwò, Alára kò gbòdò jáde  
 Ẹ̀wón ní ilàjú inú ayé  
 T’ó nmú Títílojá rìn hòrìhò

T'ó nmú iyàwó ògá wọ pátá  
 Òun l'ó mú Alára bọ sí gbangba  
 Mo láyé nýí, ayé n fò lọ bí eye  
 Nwón ní ng kó'ra dà sóhun, **ará oko**  
 Nwón l'ójú mi dúdú, kí n máa lọ (Ọlábímtán,1969:28)

*I got to Alára's house, they said he went out  
 I said abomination, Alára must not go out  
 They said its civilisation  
 That made Titilọlá walked about nakedly  
 That made the boss's wife wore paint  
 Made Alára to go out  
 I said the world is changing, it's flying like a bird  
 They said I should go away, **bush man**  
 They said my eyes were dark, that I should go away*

'Ará oko' is ambiguous and can be given the following readings;

- (i) ẹni tí kò kàwé- an illiterate person
- (ii) Ẹni tí ó n gbé lóko - Someone who lives in the village
- (iii) Ẹni tí kò lajú - Uncivilized person

What the poet meant with the ambiguous phrase is that the referent is being referred to as an uncivilised person for seeing the changes in custom and tradition brought about by civilisation as barbaric. With this, we can say the poet is creative, using one expression to give various meanings. The stylistic effect of the ambiguity is to mock the personality being referred to. One's intuitive knowledge of the Yorùbá language helps in disambiguating the phrase above, as observed in the semantic features:

ARÁ OKO = + ALÁÌLAJÚ - ÀGBÈ +ALÁÌKÀWÉ  
 BUSH MAN = + UNCVILISED - FARMER +ILLITERATE

ÀGBÈ (farmer) is assigned a negative sign, being a farmer does not translate to being uncivilised or 'illiterate'

In 'Èèwò Ọriṣà', Ọlátúbòsún advises everyone to be cautious of the way he/she lives and not look down on anyone:

- (f) Ọta kí í roròròrò  
 Kó pàbọn jẹ  
 Idà kíí roròròrò  
 Kó pàkò mì  
Ìkìlò àwon àgbà  
 Ajá kíí roròròrò  
 Kó sì polówó (Ọlátúbòsún,1973:28)

*No matter how strong a bullet is  
It can't kill the gun  
No matter how strong a sword is  
It cannot kill the sheath  
The elders' warning  
No matter how wild a dog can be  
It cannot kill its owner*

The ambiguity is caused by the different interpretations 'Ìkìlò àwọn àgbà' represents, whether it is:

- (i) ìkìlò láti ọ̀dọ̀ àwọn àgbà fún ẹnìkan  
(the warning from or given by the elders to someone) or
- (ii) ìkìlò láti ẹnù ẹnìkan sí àwọn àgbà  
(warning given/directed from someone to the elders)

In essence, the uncertainty in the poet's message is the root of the ambiguity. Maybe its the elders that should exercise caution in their dealings with people both young and old, because power does not rest with the elders alone or it is a warning directed by the elders to someone, which is equally acceptable. Again in 'Òṣùwọ̀n èké', Awé expresses the way people cheat one another in their day-to-day activities, marketplaces, government offices or schools thus:

- (g) Mo fẹ́ fojú ikà hàn  
Kẹ́ le màwọ̀n lékèélékèè èyàn  
Kẹ́ le mohun wọ̀n ẹ́ níkòkò (Awé, 2009:31)

*I want to expose the evil ones  
So you can know the bad/pleasant person  
So that you know their secret/hidden character*

The ambiguity in the underlined phrase above lies in the two meanings that can be given to it. They are

- (i) lékèélékèè èyàn - a falsehood or evil person
- (ii) lékèélékèè èyàn – metaphor for a pleasant/honest person

The first meaning could be achieved through a reduplication process of:

ní + èké + ní èké = lékèélékèè  
in hypocrisy + in hypocrisy = In falsehood

(adapted from Yai 1976)

While the second interpretation could be a metaphor coined from the cattle egret to mean an honest person as white connote honesty and purity. The poet here is referring to falsehood, dishonesty and unfaithful people who pretend to be good outside but are bad within. But he has unconsciously given another interpretation of a pleasant

trustworthy person whose character metaphorically denotes cattle egret. The stylistic import of the ambiguity is for comic effect and sarcasm.

In 'Oríkì Oyèníyì', Òlábímtán describes Oyèníyì as a powerful chief, an influential personality and a successful business man whose physical appearance alone makes others shiver.

(h) A kì í forí w'éri k'á digbò l'eégún  
 A kíí f'èniyàn w'èniyàn k'á digbò l'òòṣà  
 Èni ó ní jọjọ kíí dásà, 'Mo kí ọ kí ọ  
 Afínjú Olóyè tó sò 'lú ró  
 Arógunmátidi, ọkọ Ìdòwú  
 Adék'àyà-ó-já omọ awo (Òlábímtán, 1975:61)

*We don't compare head with head and fell on masquerade  
 We don't compare people to one another and fell on deities  
 Whosoever had goiter do not greet for long  
 An enlightened chief that holds the town  
 The one who is not afraid of war, Ìdòwú's husband  
 The one whose presence frightens other, an initiate/ocultic*

The ambiguity in the underlined phrase above is due to the different interpretations it has, which are:

- (i) Omo tí awo bí – a child of an initiate
- (ii) Omodé tí ó jé awo – a young initiate
- (iii) Omo tí ó n gbé lodo awo – an apprentice to an initiate

The poet wants to metaphorically describe the personality being praised as someone whom the initiate fear probably because his 'awo' personified. Or it could be that he has wine and dined with the initiates; he thereby refers to him as **omọ awo**

(i) Ọjọ Adárúdurùdu d'élèyí  
 Mo m'asọ t'o mu bora  
 Sẹ gogoro ni imú eku edá  
 T'ó wa dá wa sí mēta láidógba  
 T'o sọ wa di mēta òkò  
 Tí kò fí inú han'ra wọn  
 L'a bá di mēta èsù  
 Ìgbà tí Adárúdurùdu dé'lè yí  
 Mo mọ 'sẹ t'ó kókó sẹ  
Isé òwò àtí èsìn igbàgbó  
 L'Adárúdurùdu fí s'atẹgùn (Òlábímtán, 1969:6)

*When the Adárúdurùdu arrived this land  
 I knew the cloth he wore  
 His noise was pointed like that of rat  
 He divided us into unequal three parts*

*He turned us to triplets  
 Who didn't trust anyone  
 So we became triplets like devil  
 When the Adárúdurùdu arrived this town  
 I knew the work he first did  
 Commerce and christianity  
 Were Adárúdurùdu's stepping stone*

The ambiguity in the underlined phrase has to do with its different syntactic structures, which are:

(i) *Iṣẹ̀ òwò nìkan tàbí ẹ̀sìn ìgbàgbò nìkan* (business alone or christianity alone)

(ii) *Iṣẹ̀ òwò àti ẹ̀sìn ìgbàgbò papò* ( business and christianity together)

It is not clear whether Adárúdurùdu did business alone or christianity alone or he did both business and christianity together.

Example (i) above is ambiguous, and its ambiguity is due to the different structures which are permitted by the rule of syntax, rather than to any ambiguous word (Fromkin and Rodman (1993:77). In Yorùba syntax, the structure of a noun having a qualifier, be it nominal, adjectival and many others is HN + Q.

This type of ambiguity is referred to as structural, grammatical or syntactic ambiguity (Fowler, 1987:7) because the “ambiguity has to do with the syntactic structure of the sentences” (Hurford and Heasley, 1983:125) equally note that: A sentence which is ambiguous because its words relate to each other in different ways, even though none of the individual words are ambiguous is structurally (or grammatically) ambiguous. In example j below:

(j). *Díẹ̀ ọ̀kùnrin kò tó*

The constituents of the underlined NP are in reverse order. The adjective placed before the Head Noun it is supposed to qualify. Which contributed to the ambiguity in the phrase above lies in its structures and these are:

(i) HN + Q

*Díẹ̀ ọ̀kùnrin + kò tó*

(ii) HN + Q

*Díẹ̀ ọ̀kùnrin + kò tó*

In each case, one has to do with number **iyẹ** – *Wọ̀n ò pò tó níye* (to mean few men were not enough) and the other concerns efforts **akitiyan**- *È ní láti sápa gidi gan an ni* (you have to improve on your efforts) this could be an idiomatic interpretation.

(k) Ìyá Kúejó l'òun òò filé baba han Kúejó  
 Ìgbà tí yòò kó rí  
 Ìyá Kúejó l'òun nlòó b'òkọ òun  
 Ó pe Kúejó ó tọka s'áségi Ìwóro  
 Ó lèni l'omọ l'o fẹ gb'omọ  
 Ó kó 'gbá ká 'gbòn ó filú sílẹ̀  
Ni kúejó bá domo aségi  
 Òkú igi kìi lóje nínú (Olábímtán, 1974:7)

*Kúejó's mother says she will point Kúejó's father's house to him  
 The first thing he saw  
 Kúejó's mother says she's moving to join her husband  
 She calls Kúejó, and points to the man/ firewood seller in ìwóro  
 She says the owner of the child seeks him  
 She packed all her belongings, and left the town  
 Then kúejó became the child of a wretched man/firewood seller  
 Lifeless/Dry trees do not possess fluid*

The ambiguity in the underlined phrase above, arises due to the interpretations it has.  
 They are:

- (i) Kúejó di omọ ẹni tí ó n ta igi ( Kúejó became a firewood seller's child)
- (bii) Kúejó di omọ akúšẹ̀ẹ̀ ( Kúejó became a wretched man's child)

In 'Títílogbón', Ìṣòlá uses the poem to express his love for the lady and how much he desires to have her thus:

(l) Títílogbón;  
 Títínìwà,  
 Títílẹ̀wà,  
 Njẹ́ kìn ló dé é?  
 Tí mo dárin tó o fowó dití  
 Síwó létí, orin mi dùn,  
 Ó kúkú ẹ́ é jó.  
 Ìwọ lo nilé tí mo fẹ́ ẹ́ gbé,  
 Ìwọ ló nilẹ̀kùn tí mì n kàn.  
 Má f'ifẹ́ pamọ́  
Sílẹ̀kùn fún mi  
 Mo fẹ́ ẹ́ wọlé (Ìṣòlá, 1975:27)

*Títílogbón;  
 Títínìwà,  
 Títílẹ̀wà,  
 What happened?  
 That I sang and you pretended not to hear  
 Come of it, my song is enjoyable/alluring  
 It is also danceable  
 You own what I want to have  
 You own what I am desiring to have  
 Don't hide your love*

*Give me a chance  
I want to have you*

The underlined phrase above exhibits structural ambiguity as it accommodates two interpretations, a literal meaning and a figurative meaning. They are:

- (i) Şilèkùn fún mi (*open the door for me*)
- (ii) Şilèkùn fún mi (*open up for me*) a metaphorical way of asking a lady to give him access to have sexual relationship with her.

To sum up the definition of structural ambiguity, Akmajian et al (1984:530) says structural ambiguity is the situation in which a sentence has two or more different linguistic meanings even though none of the individual words is ambiguous; the ambiguity of such sentence resides in their different constituent structures. The ambiguity in the sentences above, is undoubtedly not attributable to the fact that some particular lexical items (words) have more than one meaning; rather, it is structural in nature.

These definitions have one thing in common, namely, the ambiguity which is due to sentence construction, that is, the arrangement of words within a sentence. This means that the sentence is paramount in this type of ambiguity. This does not mean we should overlook syntax since 'knowing a language includes the ability to put words together to form phrases and sentences that express our thoughts' (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993:73). Radford (1981:46) asserts that 'syntax is essentially concerned with the distribution of words and phrases: that is, specifying which words or phrases can appear in which positions in which types of sentences'. Since syntax deals with the acceptable arrangement of words within sentences it 'implies that words cannot combine arbitrarily with one another to form larger units' (Louwrens, 1991:13).

### **4.3 Scope ambiguity**

It is still under debate whether this type of ambiguity is a form of syntactic or lexical ambiguity or whether it represents a unique class of ambiguity. Scope ambiguity involves operators and quantifiers, for example:

Old men and women were taken to a safe location. The scope of the adjective (that is the amount of text it qualifies) is ambiguous. This is whether the structure is:

- (i) old men and women were taken together
- (ii) old men separately, old women separately.

Scope ambiguity is discussed by Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1993) among others. It could be distinguished through its single surface syntactic structure. Chierdila and McConnell's example for this category is 'someone loves everyone' which can either mean: Everyone is loved by (at/least) one person or there is a person and this person loves everyone. The scope of quantifiers is often not clear and creates ambiguity.

In the example below, Olábímtán uses the poem to praise *L'óogun L'Ékòò*. In the oríkì, he describes the personality of L'óogun l'ékòò as a wealthy, courageous, brave, and intelligent man whom no one can cheat:

3(a) L'óogun l'Ékòò  
L'óogun l'ékòò  
Okùnrin jìgan jìgan  
Aṣebélé-sòkè-d'ilè  
Atidí-aláṣejù-b'epo-'gbóná.  
Abánijàmáfaniya-bí-aṣo.  
Òdógungbéyáwó  
Akérémaséyànje  
Omo òdò àgbà  
Ayó mèrẹn-wọ'nú-ití (Olábímtán, 1974:49)

*The warrior of Lagos*  
*The warrior of Lagos*  
*A hefty man*  
*He who stylishly leveled the mountain*  
*He who deals with the stubborn ones*  
*He who fights without tearing ones cloth*  
*The one that marries at the war front*  
*The one with smallish stature and cannot be cheated*  
*The child who lives with the elderly one*  
*The one who stealthily enters the cave*

The interpretations that can be given to the underlined sentence above, is the root of its ambiguity. It is not clear whether *omo* qualifies *òdò àgbà* to give this interpretation:

(i) HN + Q  
Omo[ òdò àgbà]  
The child who lives with the elderly man

Or, *àgbà* qualifies *omo òdò* to give

(ii) HN + Q  
[Omo òdò] àgbà  
The older house help

The third interpretation could be idiomatic:

(iii) Omo-òdò-àgbà

A wise/clever or mature child, that is, a child who as a consequence of living with an elder has acquired the wisdom of elders.

In Dèbò Awé's 'Èébú Mèta', where he admonishes on the need to accord elders some degree of respects. He says that whoever wants to attain an elderly position or get to that level must acknowledge and reference the elders. He says:

(b) Gbogbo ẹni tó bá fẹ dàgbà láyé  
Kó múra jojo, **àgbà kì í ọhun àmúşéré** (Awé, 2004:49)

*Everyone who wants to become an elder/attain leadership position  
Be well prepared, old age/leadership position is not a joking matter*

In example (b) above, the ambiguous word àgbà in **àgbà kì í ọhun àmúşéré** could be referring to

- (i) Ojọ orí àgbà (age)
- (ii) Ipò olórí (leadership position)

The ambiguity in the underlined sentence above is due to the uncertainty in the range of word's meaning, whether **àgbà** in the expression connotes 'age' or 'leadership position'. The former (in *dàgbà láyé*) has to do with age, whereas the latter may denote leadership position.

Also in 'Èni àìgbòn pa ló pò', Olábímtán admonishes ignorant people to be cautious of the way they live their life as ignorance can lead one to destruction thus:

(c) Adiyẹ níbẹ níwájú, lámurín kò lè na'wó  
Òròmò níbẹ nílẹ kò gbodò nàgà  
Nwón f'íkà joyè àwòdi òkè  
Ìkà balẹ kò le è gb'ádiyẹ.  
Èni àìgbòn pa ló pò  
Èni ọgbòn pa kò tó nkan  
B'áyé bá nfẹ ọ bí ẹni nífẹ'ná  
Máa sọra ẹ, omo orí Adé (Olábímtán, 1969:61)

*There was a chicken in the front, he can't raise his hands  
A chicken is at the front he must not raise his hands  
The wicked one was made king  
The wicked could't hold a chicken  
Those that died of ignorance are many  
Those that died of wisdom were few  
If they sing your praises  
Watch yourself, the prince*

The ambiguity here is in: **omọ orí Adé**. It is not clear whether the head noun **omọ** qualifies **orí Adé** to give:

Omọ orí Adé  
 HN + Q  
 Child head crown (prince)  
 [Omọ] orí Adé

(i) Omọ tí wón bí nígbà tí baba rẹ jẹ ọba

*(The child given birth to during his father's reign as king)*

Or Adé modifies omọ orí

Omọ orí Adé  
 HN + Q  
 Omọ[orí Adé]  
 To mean king's child

(ii) Àrẹmọ ọba tó gorí ìtẹ baba rẹ

*(King's son/Prince)*

Àlàgbé in 'Ọba omọwónúọlá Oyèyodé Oyèşosin Eléjìgbò Ti Èjìgbò', use the poem to praise the king's peaceful reign and His personality:

(d) Afàìgùn o sì şe rògbòdò kanlẹ  
 Omọkùnrin ròdòrodo bí olú-ògán  
 Adára-títí-déyín -enu, dúdú pupa là n ta  
 Olójú arédè tí rebinrin lọ lójú agbo  
 Ọkọ Rúùtù Àniké, Ọkọ Rúùtù Àsùké  
 Oníkànga àjípọn  
Ará ilé Àwẹní (Àlàgbé, 2006:13)

*He was not tall but handsome  
 A fair complexioned man  
 He whose handsomeness gets to his teeth, dark and fair we desire  
 One with sexy eyes that attract women  
 Ruth Àniké's husband, Ruth Àşùké's husband  
 He who owns the well fetched in the morning  
 Àwẹní's relative*

The ambiguity in the underlined sentence above arises from to the scope of qualifiers, whether **Ará ilé** qualifies **Àwẹní** to be:

(i) [Ará ilé] Àwẹní  
 Àwẹní's relatives or  
 Ará modifiers Ilé Àwẹní to give us

- (ii) Ara [ilé Àwèní]  
*A tenant in Àwèní's house*

In the poem cited below, titled 'Kábiyèsí Oyèkàn Keji', Olábímtán appraises the patience and perseverance of Oba Oyèkàn before he was installed as the king which earned him a prestigious and reputable position among his chiefs and subjects.

- (e) Nígbàtí o ñjagun oyè l'ájùlé òrun  
 Òrúnmilà ni ewé ñlá kíí rú wéwé  
 B'ógòmò pé lókè a dàgbà imò  
**Adéyínká àgbà oyè** (Olábímtán, 1969:11)

*When you were struggling for title from heaven  
 Òrúnmilà says tick leaves don't shed  
 The longer ògòmò stays up the older it becomes  
 Adéyínká the powerful/eldest one*

In the above example, it is not clear whether **Adéyínká** is qualifying **àgbà oyè** and thus giving the following interpretations:

- (i) Adéyínká [ àgbà oyè]  
 Adéyínká ni olóye tí ó dàgbà jù  
*Adéyínká is the most senior among the other chiefs*  
 or  
**Oyè** is modifying **Adéyínká àgbà** to mean:  
 (ii) [Adéyínká àgbà] oyè  
 Àgbàlágba kan tí ó ñ jé Adéyínká ni olóye  
*One elderly person named Adéyínká is a chief*

In 'Oríki Omọ Àlàdó', Olábímtán uses the poem to eulogise the physical appearance, his handsomeness and other qualities the referent possesses as follows:

- (f) Dáraníjo  
 Ajògbòdòléwà  
 Alágbára bí erin  
 Abijàwàrà bí olóólà  
 Ó bímọ doşù méfà  
 Omọ d'ogbó, omọ d'atọ  
 Omọ di baba  
Omọ di baba  
 A-gun-òkè-àgbà-má-sò (Olábímtán, 1974:43)

*The handsome one  
 The most handsome  
 Powerful like the Elephant  
 He who fights like the python*

*He begets for six months  
 The child survives, he becomes an adult  
 The son has become a father  
 The son has become a father  
 He assumes a leadership position and did not fall*

The ambiguity lies in the scope of quantifiers, whether **omọ** qualifies **di baba** to mean:

- (i) [Omọ] di baba to mean that the child having achieved greatly is now referred to as a father. Or

**Omọ** modifies **di baba** to be:

- (ii) Omọ [di baba] to mean having becomes an adult, the child has his own children and has become a father too.

- (g) Olólùfẹ omọ Fásànyà (Ọlátúnbòsún, 1969: 38)

The uncertainty in the scope of qualifiers caused the ambiguity whether: Olólùfẹ omọ qualifies Fásànyà and give us:

[Olólùfẹ omọ] Fásànyà

*Fásànyà's well pleased child* or

Olólùfẹ modifies omọ Fásànyà to read thus:

Olólùfẹ [omọ Fásànyà]

Fásànyà's child's lover/sweet heart.

Scope ambiguity arises when there is uncertainty in the range of word's meaning, that is, when a reader or listener can reasonably interpret the same sentence as having more than one possible structure. From the examples cited above, scope ambiguity can be said to belong to syntactic/structural ambiguity class.

#### **4.4 Morpho-Phonological ambiguity**

Phonology is concerned with the ways in which the phonetic elements of a language are grouped and exploited by speakers of that language to effect communication (Traugott and Pratt, 1984:56). Phonological ambiguity is a subtype of lexical ambiguity that usually arises at the surface level of surface structure rather than the deep structure. Instances of phonological ambiguity abound in Yorùbá poetry. Some examples are listed below:

In the anthology of the poem, Ọlábímtán talks about steps to take when consulting the gods for success in life. This he explains thus:

- 4(a). Bá a b'égún, b'òsà, borí eni ò fọ're  
 Dá f'Ọlásùmbò, ọmọ Dàmólá  
 Tí nwón lówó rẹ ò ní tó're  
 Nwón ní ó **b'égún** ilé  
 Nwón ní ó **b'òsà** ọjà  
 Nwón ní ó dábọ àlùpàyídà awo òde (Ọlábímtán, 1974: 14)

*If we appease the masquerade, deities, if ones destiny disagrees  
 Ifá divination was performed, for Dàmólá's child  
 Whose hands they say will not touch good thing  
 He was asked to appease/offer sacrifice to the family masquerade  
 He was asked appease/offer sacrifice to market deities  
 He was asked to offer sacrifice to other deities*

The elision of the vowel of the verb 'bẹ' or 'bọ' in b'égún and b'òsà at the phonological level caused the ambiguity and the uncertainty, whether the poet meant to plead with god/masquerade or to worship god/masquerade. The back half open vowel /ɔ / is replaced with its front counterpart /ε/. We assume that the possibility of this is the fact that the two vowels ɛ and ɔ have common half open features.

In the subsequent lines of the poem, it is revealed that after the client has offered sacrifice to the masquerade and gods, yet his problems were not solved. This shows the high intensity of the ambiguity; whether the diviner/poet wants the client to plead with the masquerade and gods but ends up offering sacrifice or to do both, that is, offer sacrifice and also pleads. In the latter parts of the poem the client was asked to offer sacrifice as well as plead with the masquerade and the gods. And there was solution to his problems. The poet employs these ambiguous words for articulatory ease and aesthetics.

In 'Baálẹ Apeji', one of the poems in the anthology of *Àkọjọpọ Ewì Àbáláyé àti Ewì Àpílẹkọ*, the poet Adébámbò talks about a man **Àdisá** who was contemplating giving his only daughter Morólábí out in marriage to Baálẹ Apeji (the community head). Àdisá shared this idea with his friend, Yésúfù who was astonished at his friend's decision to give Morólábí to Baálẹ Apeji in the quotation below:

- (b)Baálẹ Apeji, ọkùnrin pàpà-pópó bí idí ibon  
 Àdisá yóò sin 'Rólábí fún baálẹ Apeji  
 Eni ọlá, eni ọlá  
 Àdisá wá fi ọrò yí lọ ọrẹ rẹ  
 Yésúfù tí wón tí jọ wà láti 'gbà iwásẹ  
 Yésúfù ní kí ni Àdisá **p'èrò** láti ẹ yí?  
 Àdisá yóò fi Morólábí fún baálẹ Apeji, àbí 'nla? (Ọlábímtán,2005:108)

*Chief Apeji, a powerful man like the gun  
 Àdisá wants to give 'Rólábi to chief Apeji  
 The wealthy one, the honoured one  
 Àdisa discussed this with his friend  
 Yésúfù his childhood friend  
 Yésúfù asked what Àdisá is planning/gathering people to do?  
 Àdisá wants to give Morólábi's hand in marriage to Apeji's chief,  
 or what?*

The underlined word 'pèrò' is ambiguous, with the meanings below:

- (i) pèrò -gather people together
- (ii) pèrò - plan/thought

For instance, when uttered, both sentences sound ambiguous due to the identicality of both èrò (thought/idea) and èrò (people) at the phonological level. Such sentences however, can be disambiguated on the basis of the context within which they occur.

Considering its semantic features thus:

- (iii) PÈRÒ= + ÀKÓJỌPÒ (+ASSEMBLED)  
 - ÀRÒJINLÈ (- DEEP THOUGHT)  
 + ÀPÉJỌ (+ GET TOGETHER)

can resolve the ambiguity. Some words are pronounced the same way and only non-linguistic contextual information could tell the hearer which meaning is intended, this is exemplified above. The linguistic competence of a Yorùbá native speaker will help the hearer to disambiguate it. Though the ambiguity was not intended, there is stylistic elegance and creativity in the poem.

In the poem 'Oríkì Oyèníyì', Olábímtán talks about the popularity and influential quality of Oyèníyì among his friends:

(c) B'Arógunmátídí mbá ọ ş'òré, tẹ ẹ jẹjẹ  
 Ntorí a kì í báwo jẹ, b'áwo mu, ká dawo  
 Abinú bí omi urèn (Olábímtán, 1974:61)

*When Arógunmátídí befriends you, be careful  
 Because you don't wine and dine with the initiates and  
 betray/become an initiate  
 Whose belly looks like the urèn water*

The elision of the vowel 'a' or 'i' in d'awo caused the ambiguity above, which may be rendered as;

- (i) Di + awo = dawo (become an initiate)
- (ii) Da + awo = dawo (betray the initiate)

The ambiguity lies in the fact that one is not certain of the **Dawo** the poet intends, maybe to wine and dine with the initiate or to betray the initiate. Also in ‘Orí mi Àpé’, Awé talks about **orí** (destiny) as one who determines both the success and failure of an individual. He explains that no good can come to anyone unless his/her **orí** permits it and that man chooses his **orí** (destiny) before he comes to the world:

(d) A n jọ́ rìn, àà morí olówó  
 Èdùmàrè ló **morí** olólà lágbigbo  
 Èmi ò jẹ sààgùn mọ  
 Orí ni n ó máa sà  
 Sarí má sààgùn (Débò Awé, 2004:21)

*We dine together, we do not know the rich head  
 Èdùmàrè knows/mould the head that will be rich from infancy  
 I shall not make medicine any longer  
 It is orí I shall worship  
 Worship orí and not medicine*

Morí is ambiguous due to the following meanings:

- (i) Mọ + orí – mọri (mould the head)
- (ii) mọ + orí – morí (knows the head)

The identity in the word ‘**morí**’ caused the phonological ambiguity one is not sure if the poet intends the interpretation in (i) or (ii). The intuitive knowledge of a Yorùbá speaker in the language helps in resolving the ambiguity. What the poet intends to say is that whoever will be rich has been designed by God even from the mother’s womb.

These ambiguities help in compression, articulatory ease and add to the stylistic elegance of the poems.

In ‘Ìkà Èké’, Obasá use the poem to advice liars and evildoers that even if no one sees them, God is watching hence, they should desist from the bad ways:

(e) Èké kò pe’ra wọn l’órúko,  
 Ìkà kò pe’ra rẹ n’ikà  
 Bílẹ n gb’òsìkà  
 Bí kò gb’olóótó  
 Bó bá pé tíí  
 Oore a máa sún ni í ẹ (Obasá, 1982:10)

*The liars do not call themselves by name  
 The evildoers do not call themselves evil  
 If the wicked thrives in the land  
 If the righteous don’t  
 Sooner or later  
 We may be discouraged of doing good*

The deletion of ‘a’ or ‘e’ in gb’òṣìkà and gb’olòòtò in the above caused the ambiguity.

These may mean:

- (i) Gba + òṣìkà – support the wicked
- (ii) Gbe + òṣìkà – accepts evil ones/favor the wicked

Same goes to gb’olòòtò:

Gba + olòòtò – support/accepts truthfulness

Gbe + olòòtò – favor the truthful

In the poem, ‘Èdá’, the poet, Ṗbasá advice people to be contended and avoid immitating others.

- (f) Onídà, ìdá  
‘un l’Qlòrun i dá ni  
Èdá l’ògo  
Orí l’olówó (Ṗbasá, 1982:58)

*Differently we were created  
God created us  
God is the highest  
Richness is luck/richness makes the leader*

The morpho-phonological identity of the sounds in ‘l’olówó’ above give us the ambiguous interpretations below:

- (i) Níní owó wà lówó orí – being rich is a coincidence/luck
- (ii) Èni tí ó lówó ni ó n ṣe olóri – the rich man is always the leader/head

Spelling often obscure the fact that utterances may be ambiguous in spoken language even through the written forms of the utterances they correspond to are quite ambiguous. For instance, *l’olówó*, when uttered, sound ambiguous due to the identity on the phonological level.

In (f) above, the ambiguity is prompted by the ambiguous nature of the Yorùbá verbs. In most cases, it is possible for a verb of the same segmental and suprasegmental features to have different meanings based on the contextual complement. Morpho-Phonological ambiguity abounds prominently in Yorùbá poetry. It should also be added that deletion, elision or contraction some of which result in ambiguity constitutes great difficulties for the readings and understanding of poetry. ‘Difficulty’ is believed to be one of the great attributes of poetry anyway.

#### 4.5 Pragmatic ambiguity

Pragmatic ambiguity refers to any occurrence of two different speech acts performed by a linguistic expression instantiated by its effect rather than its semantic meaning. Pragmatic ambiguity arises when the context of a phrase leads to multiple interpretations.

For instance, in Olátúbòsún's poem titled 'Nibi ité òkú', he condemns people that are rich but could not assist the less privilege around them and how those they left behind mismanaged their wealth after their death. He says:

5 (a). Olówó ànikànḡ òkè òhún  
Ó ti wó lójú owó,  
Ó ti dolówó inú u pòsí (Olátúbòsún, 1975:139)

*The stingy man at the other end  
He is dead even with his riches  
He has become a rich man inside the coffin*

Even though none of its constituents is ambiguous, the underlined expression exhibits pragmatic ambiguity. The ambiguity lies in the fact that one cannot say if the expression is merely a warning to be helpful to others when one is in a position to assist others, an assertion or an expression of grief for the dead rich man. The linguistic competence of a Yorùbá speaker helps in resolving the ambiguity. The underlined sentence above can function as a declarative sentence, expression of grief or an assertion.

Olúránkinṣe, in the poem, 'Olú Ikán', admonishes whoever is aspiring to a leadership positions to be prepared as such a position comes with many problems and inconveniences. He says:

(b) Fífẹ́ tí aráyé n fẹ́ ọ  
Fífẹ́ ti inú kó  
Gígẹ́ tí èniyàn n gẹ́ ọ  
Gígẹ́ ti adiyẹ ni  
Orí ikú ni orí Adé  
Orùn ijàgbòn ni orùn oyè (Olúránkinṣe, 1987:9)

*The love shown by man  
Is not genuine love  
The acknowledgement accorded you by man  
Is like the love they have for chicken  
the crown head is like death  
Trouble abounds for the one wearing a crown*

The underlined sentence above exhibits pragmatic ambiguity, as we are not certain whether it functions as an assertion, a warning or both. The poet intends to warn whosoever is aspiring to a kingship or chieftancy position of the difficulties and risks involved. We may also say the sentence is an assertion from the poet of what to be expected from the title. The stylistic import of the ambiguity is that the poet is ironic.

Ọlátúbòsún, in the poem ‘Àgbà ẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀’, admonishes elders and anyone in the position of authority not to use the position to defraud the helpless. He explains further that some elders will not allow those serving under them to rise to the top:

(c) Àgbà ẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀  
 Bájá bá ní fojoojúmọ̀ gbó ní  
 Ajá ọ̀ gbóni lásán, ẹ̀ jẹ́ ká fura (Ọlátúbòsún, 1975:68)

*Elders be careful  
 If a dog keeps barking on sighting someone everyday  
 It does not bark for fun, let us be watchful*

The ambiguity in the underlined sentence above is due to the uncertainty in the function the expression performs, whether it is a declarative sentence or a warning. What the poet intends to do, from a pragmatic point of view is to advise the elders to use their leadership positions wisely. In essence, pragmatic ambiguity arises when the statement is not specific and the context does not provide the information needed to clarify the statement but rather opens up the sentence to other pragmatic interpretation.

In the poem, ‘Èrù kò b’ejò’, Ọlábímtán says if we commit our ways unto God, we have nothing to worry about:

(d) Ñwón ní kí ng máa lọ  
Ñwón ní kí ng má wèhìn  
 Ñwón ní àyíká odó kò ní p’odó (Ọlábímtán, 1969:22)

*They said I should be going  
 They said I should not look back  
 They said the vicinity of the mortar and pestle cannot kill it*

The underlined sentence above exhibits pragmatic ambiguity, as one cannot say if the sentence is a warning to mean;

(i) Keep moving and don’t look back

Or a statement for advocacy/endorsement which means:

(ii) Dont be afraid/ doubtful

- (e) Èni ayé n fẹ pa l'ayé n fẹ bi iná  
Èni ayé fẹ jẹ l'ayé fí n joyè àgbà (Ọlábímtán, 1969:22)

*It is the person people want to kill that they fan like fire*  
*It is the person they want to kill that they install as senior chief*

The sentence could be an assertion or a warning to someone who feels that the love and affection shown to him by everyone may not be genuine, hence he should be watchful.

Depending upon the situation, the sentences in (d) and(e) above, could be declarative sentences, warning or an insult. Donnellan (1966) suggests that the apparent referential use of some sentences with definite descriptions might amount to a difference that shows up only in pragmatics. A situation where the context of a phrase leads to multiple interpretations is said to exhibit pragmatic ambiguity.

Donnellan, futher says that:

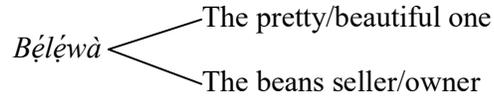
It does not seem possible to say categorically of a definite description in a particular sentence that it is a referring expression (of course, one could say this if he meant that it might be used to refer). In general, whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intentions in a particular case.... Nor does it seem at all attractive to suppose an ambiguity in the meaning of the words, it does not appear to be semantically ambiguous. Perhaps we could say that the sentence is pragmatically ambiguous.

#### 4.6 Pun as a form of ambiguity

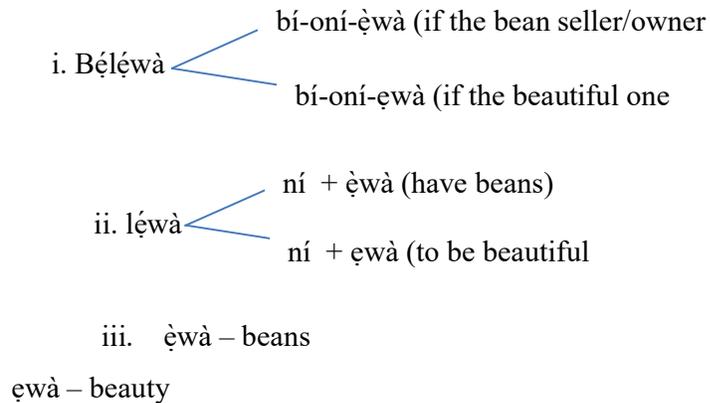
Pun, also called paronomasia, is a form of wordplay that suggests two or more meanings, by exploiting multiple meanings of words or of similar-sounding words for an intended humorous rhetorical effect. (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009). Bergson defines pun as a sentence or an utterance in which 'the same sentence appears to offer two independent meanings, but it is only an appearance in reality there are two different sentences made up of different words, but claiming to be one and same because both have the same sound', Augarde (2003)<sup>2</sup>. Pun is a play with words involving and creating double contexts. In daily discourse, puns make use of homophones and in written discourse they make use of homograph. Instances of pun from Akinwùmí Ìṣòlá's anthology are given below:

- 6(a) Béléwà ò tilẹ lẹwà  
Bẹwà bá ti wà,  
È jẹ kó wá wa wálé  
Akúru rẹrù wẹkú,  
Wẹkú níkú akúru ẹ (Ìṣòlá,1978,69)

*Even if Bẹ̀lẹ̀wà is not beautiful/do not have beans  
 As long as there's beauty/beans,  
 Allow her to come to our house  
 The shortest carries load to the shrine  
 Coincidentally was the death of the short man.*



In the above excerpt, the play is on the tonal contrast between the nominals 'ẹ̀lẹ̀wà' (bean seller) and 'ẹ̀wà'(beauty), which constitute multiple ambiguities and multiple interpretations as analysed below:



With the ambiguities arising from the word-play what the poet seems to be communicating is that good character is much more preferable to him than anything else. The Yorùbá adage: Ìwàlẹ̀wà – character and good character for that matter is beauty.

In 'Ìrètẹ̀ Méjì, ẹ̀sẹ̀ ẹ̀kẹ̀fà', Abímbólá talks about two priests who performed Ifá divination for Ìrẹ̀ and asserted that Ìrẹ̀ would be rich and well established but asked him to offer sacrifice to the gods before his prayer could be answered. After offering sacrifice to the gods, Ìrẹ̀ became rich and well established:

(b) Poro báyií  
 Ààlà báyií  
 A díá fún Ìrẹ̀  
 Tí ó tẹ̀ méjì  
 Tí ó là gbuudu (Abímbólá, 1975)

*Straight as this  
 Boundary as this*

*Ifá divination was performed for irè  
Who is to divine for two or establish two  
Who will be rich*

The play on the verb **tẹ** (create or establish) gives us the polysemous word **tẹ**. This is the cause of the ambiguity in the text as ‘tẹ’ has two possible interpretations:

- (i) Tẹ + Ifá (Divine)
- (ii) Tẹ + ilú + dó (Settle in a place)

According to Chomsky’s linguistic competence, the intuitive knowledge of a Yorùbá native speaker of the language enables him/her to believe that the intended idea in the ifá verse (**tẹ**) is to perform sacrifice. Even though the second meaning is equally plausible, as it can be that **Ìrẹ̀** is to build or establish two towns or homesteads (**tẹ**). From this, we can say the poet is creative. The stylistic import of the ambiguity is to play on words. Similarly in:

(c) béégùn jà, o **dégún**, o bóòsà jà, o sì dòòsà,  
O b’Ọlórùn Ọba jà, Ọlórùn Ọba nìkan ló **dá** ọ  
Èni t’Ọlórùn **dá**ó ẹ í farawé (Ọlábímtán, 1974:14)

*You fought with the masquerade, you threw the masquerade,  
You fought with a divinity, you threw the divinity  
You fought with God Almighty, it was only he who threw you  
He who is thrown by God, should not be copied*

The lexeme ‘**dá**’ in **dégún** (throw masquerade), **dòòsà** (throw the deity) and the verb ‘**dá**’ (throw the God Almighty) is played upon in the text. The pun homonymic nature of the lexeme (syllable) in the verbal expressions are responsible for the ambiguities and the following interpretations in the text.

- Dá – ( dá egúngún) throw in a fight
- Dá–(Ọlórùn Ọba nìkan ló dá ọ) to create
- Dì/dà – (di òrìsà/ da òrìsà) become a deity

In the poem titled ‘Agbòn’ in his anthology- Orin Ewúro, Àtári Àjànàkú prays against evil or calamity for his audience/reader thus:

(d) Agbón oyún ìkara mẹwàà  
Káyé yẹ wa  
Ká yáyé  
Ká mòrán  
Ká má mòròn  
Kágbòn má gbònni!!  
Ìpònrí ẹni gbàààà!! (Àjànàkú, 2004:10)

*Ten basket of honey  
 May things be easy for us  
 That we are enlighten  
 That we won't know evil  
 May evil not befall us  
 May it be so*

The ambiguity lies in the identicality of the tone mark on the verbs 'mòràn'/'mòròn' in the underlined words above, thus making it difficult to determine which meaning is intended in lines 4 and 5:

Ká mòràn  
 Ká má mòròn

Mòràn therefore can be interpreted as:

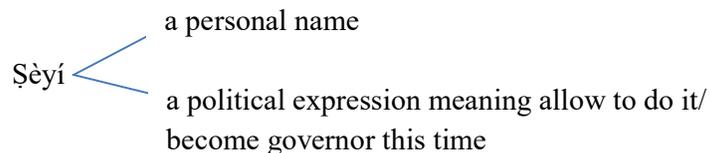
- (i) Mòràn – be enlightened/ became knowledgeable
- (ii) Mòròn - Know evil/calamity

Pun can be considered as a mix of syntactic and lexical ambiguities in which at least two meanings, literal as well as figurative one are created. This is the case in mòràn and mòròn, and the literal meaning could be that we shall be enlightened or informed and figuratively, not to experience calamity.

In literature, ambiguity is treated as ornamental use of language. Often when a poet employs ambiguous language, the ambiguity is not intended. Occasionally, it may be deliberate if the poet wants to be economical with words. It is a fundamental device employed by poets for enriching the expressive power of language by saying two or more statements at once. In other words, with the ambiguity, the poet is able to prove his/her linguistic creativity and ability to communicate different or multiple ideas, using one short expression or sentence.

In the political jingle rendered in song in preparation for the governorship election in Oyo State

- (e) **Şèyí** Mákindé  
 làwa ó dìbò wa fún o  
 Wọn ní **Şèyí** ò **şèkan** rí  
 E sọ fún wọn kí wọn jékí  
**Şèyí** ó **şèyí**



The play on *Ṣẹ̀yí* (a name) and *Ṣẹ̀yí* (to do something/ perform an action) caused the ambiguity.

(i) *Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ sójú ẹ̀*

The play on *ẹ̀* leads to pun ambiguity, which may mean:

(ii) *Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ sí ojú ibẹ̀* – put a mark on that spot (the denotative meaning) and

(iii) *Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ sójú ẹ̀* – vote for a particular candidate ( the connotative meaning)

*Àjànàkú* in ‘*Ìwà Ẹ̀ṣẹ̀*’, talks on the importance of good character in wherever we are as our character to others play a major role in our progress in life:

(f) *Gbénró, gbé n ró*

*Sìnmídélé, sìn mí délé*

*Gbénró, gbé n ró*

*Sìnmídélé, sìn mí délé*(*Àjànàkú*,2004:11)

*Gbénró lift me up*

*Sìnmídélé, see me off to the house*

*Gbénró, lift me up*

*Sìnmídélé, see me off to the house*

The play on **Gbénró** (personal name) leads to the pun ambiguity above. Which may be:

(i) *Gbénró* – personal name

(ii) *Gbénró* – lift me up (*gbé mí ró*)

Also **Sìnmídélé** reads thus:

(iii) *Sìnmídélé* – personal name

(iv) *Sìn mí délé* – escort me to the house

(g) *Ìlá n talá ìròkò níròkó*

*Kùrè rẹ̀ ‘kèrèkù rẹ̀ é reku* (*Ìṣọ̀lá*,1978:70)

The play on **lá** and the tonal contrast in **ìròkòìròkó** caused the ambiguity in the first line. These are

(i) **Ìlá**- a town/ someone from *Ìlá* town

**Ilá**- okro

**Ìròkò**- a type of okro

**Ìròkò**- a town

While the play on **rẹ̀** in the second line leads to its ambiguity.

(ii) **rẹ̀**- dialect for go

**Ìkèrèkù**- a town

**rẹ̀ é**- to get something

### **reku-** bought rat

In a whole, it reads thus:

(iii) An Ìlá indigene sells okro spechie in iròkò  
Kùrè goes to Ìkèrèkú to buy rat

(h) Wón ni irù tìrù bọ́rú  
Irú irú wo nirù firù rú  
Táriwo awó òlá fi wá wọ́lé? (Işola, 1975: 69)

The play on rú (scatter) and irú (locust beans) and irù (tsetse fly), ìrù (wing) and (irú) type result in the pun ambiguity above.

In the first line,

irù – tsetse fly  
tìrù – deep its wings  
bọ́rú – inside the locust beans.

The second line

irú – type  
irú – locust bean  
nirù– tsetse fly  
firù – its wings  
rú – scatter

In a whole we have:

They say tsetse fly deep its wings inside the locust bean  
Which type of locust bean does tsetse fly use its wings to scatter?  
That we have much noise in the house.

Pun creates at least two meanings, literal as well as figurative. It is a special form of ambiguity that is used to create statements with ambiguous-distinct meanings. The emergence of ambiguous words or expressions in literature, poetry especially, is used to perform both stylistic and communicative functions.

#### **4.7Sources of ambiguity**

Sources of ambiguity may be difficult to locate though people are said to be ambiguous sometimes in how they use language. Cann (1993:8)<sup>4</sup> has this to say about the genesis of ambiguity:

Ambiguity can arise in a sentence for several reasons: through the ascription of multiple meanings to single words, ---through the assignment of different syntactic structures to a sentence ...using certain expressions that may have different semantic scopes.

Ambiguity can be accounted for among other things including, the sound of the language, which is ‘the phonetic structure of the sentence’ (Ullman,1970:156). There may be two different words which sound the same. For instance, yà (may mean: ‘separate’, snap, move to one side.

Due to this, a serious misunderstanding may arise. Furthermore, two distinct phrases or sentences may sound very similar but have totally different meanings as illustrated below:

7(ai) Ènikèni kó máse yà wón  
*No one should separate them*

(aii) Ènikèni kó máse yà wón  
*No one should take their photograph*

Ambiguity can be achieved through the following:

- (1) Idiomatization
- (2) Metaphor
- (3) Homonyms
- (4) Polysemy
- (5) Range of word’s meanings
- (6) Punctuation
- (7) Irony

#### **4.7.1 Idiomatization**

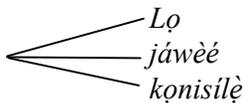
Idioms are a fascinating phenomenon in language and the interest in them has a long tradition (Cacciari and Tablossi 1993). Leverato (1993) claims that idioms are so intriguing because they engage imagination into more concrete ones and enrich the meanings of simple concepts. Yusuf (2002) describes idioms/ idiomatic expressions as terms referring to words whose meanings cannot be predicted or understood from the meaning of the individual collocates whose items must be learnt. In other words, the semantic unity of idioms is so complex that they typically enter collocation and other meaning relationships like single words and are generally treated as single words. Idioms are words or expressions whose meanings cannot be determined by their

individual lexical constituents (Àkànmú, 2014). Idioms and metaphor are not always transparent and their meanings are sometimes ambiguous.

The frequent, spontaneous and appropriate use of idioms by poets is an indicator of a native speaker's mastery of the language. Idioms are established, accepted and used by native speakers of a language with a fixed structure and meaning. One of the difficulties that may face poets during the poetic process is the variety of meanings a word, phrase and sentence may have. Poets, in trying to be economic with words, choose the ones that suit their purpose, thereby creating ambiguous words, phrases and sentences. For example, **kèrù sòkò** figuratively means 'died'. But it has different interpretations as used in the examples below. In 'Níṣulókà' Olátúbòsún talks about ladies that men meet in a party, sometimes don't make good wives:

8.(a) Èni tó fẹ ọkọ  
Èni tó fẹ aya  
Láti inú abàa Fòtèdó  
Òtẹ ni yòò fi kó délèè rẹ  
Òtẹ ni yòò fi **kèrù sòkò**  
Ìyàwó táa fò ìgànná fẹ (Olátúbòsún, 2002:22)

*Whoever married a man  
Whoever married a woman  
In Fòtèdó's village  
Uneasily she will pack to his house  
Uneasily she will pack into the car  
A wife married through the back door*

(i) **kèrù sòkò** 

In 'Ǹhkan ti Ǹ Sọ̀ Nù', Olúránkínṣé use the poem to express his worry on the damages that civilisation has done to the culture and tradition of the Yorùbá people. He laments that good virtue is going into extinction by the day:

(b) Òlájú n wọlé dé  
Ìwà rere n **kèrù sòkò**  
Fínnífínní n kógbá sílé  
Fírífírí n gba òde kan (Olúránkínṣé, 2004:1)

*Civilization has come to us  
Good virtue is going into extinction  
Revering is becoming a thing of the past  
Disrespect is becoming the order of the day*

(ii) **kèrù sòkò** 

- (c) Èdùmàrè dákun gbòrò mi rò  
 Şe mí lólówó kí n tó **kèrù sòkò**  
 Má fowó yàn mí lójú (Awé, 2009:4 )

*Èdùmàrè please consider my plight  
 Make me rich before I die  
 Don't let it be difficult for me to get money*

**(iii)kèrù sòkò – kú**

In the three excerpts above, *kèrù sòkò* has three different possible interpretations. In (i), it means that a wife married through the back door may soon pack her belongings out of the house (divorce), (ii) means that good virtues are vanishing (going into extinction); while in (iii), the poet pleads with God to make him rich before he dies (death). Both the figurative and literal meanings of the idioms above create ambiguity. That is, there is duality of meaning. The foregoing show that, though colourful, idioms are semantically deviant. In most cases, their meanings are not predictable, as they do not derive from the meanings of their lexical components. The meanings of idioms are not the sum of their literal parts. Idioms have surface meaning and deep meanings, hence they can lead to ambiguity.

**4.7.2 Metaphor**

Metaphor also can be an important vehicle/source of ambiguity. (Ọlábòdé, 1981:97) defines metaphor as a figure of speech which transfers to an object an attribute or name which strictly and literally is not applicable to it but only figuratively and by analogy. Ọlátúnjí (1984:51) opines that, in metaphor, an object, action or situation is described in a terminology proper to another. Mokgokong (1975:31-32) avers that a metaphor is transference of a notion into a new sphere where it will glow with a new radiance of meaning. This transfer on the part of the speaker and the understanding on the part of the hearer/reader come about because of the resemblance between the new thing and the old, but the new is a separate thing from the old. The resemblance must be apparent to the mind; that is, it must be affective and functional as well as objective. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:289) suggest that 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or experience in terms of another'. Hoffman and Honeck (1980) describe metaphors as resulting in the creation of perception or an image that need not be filled

in with details, yet has rich potential for detail and appropriate postmodern devices because they are obvious vehicles for ambiguity.

Inference and context are certainly involved in matters of literal meaning, in resolving ambiguity. For example, with metaphor, there are two meanings, a literal one and a metaphorical one, and the listener is required to infer which one has the intended meaning. Morgan (1979)<sup>1</sup> avers that metaphor is no different from any other kind of lexical ambiguity owing to its duality of meaning. Assessed functionally, metaphor seems to have family ties both with ambiguous and vague language. Because its connection to ambiguity is better established and much better elaborated in literature (Kaufers, 1983).

Like ambiguity, in deciding whether a sentence is a metaphor, a line of poetry or, a literal statement cannot be done on the basis of the sentence alone; it requires accessing the store of the word knowledge as well as discourse context. Some sentences in the Yorùbá language and some other languages are ambiguous because some of the lexemes ‘have both literal meaning and a nonliteral or metaphorical meaning’, (Fromkin and Rodman, 1983:171). The literal meaning is based on the normal semantic properties of the words in the sentences and the metaphorical meaning is based on semantic properties that are inferred or that provide some kind of resemblance. The literal meaning of the underlined expression below illustrates this:

Fálétí in the poem ‘Ikú’, laments on the death of the younger ones that are supposed to survive their parents but died prematurely and the pains their parents live with:

9.(a) Mo rántí òfò  
 Mo rántí àwọn òkú  
 Mo rántí bíkú ẹ é ẹwọ pani  
 Mo rántí ikú àbíkú àgbà  
 Mo rántí ikú àwọn ọdọ  
 Mo rántí ojọ tí ná ọmọ jómọ tó jábiyámọ  
 Bényàn ó ẹfò ọgùrò  
 Wọn a ní k’Ólúwa ó má jágbè ó fọ  
 À á ti ẹ tí a kíí fí ẹì sọ  
 Níjọ tí ládugbó eni fọ tomitomi  
 Ìkàyà bí ojọ ikú àbíkú àgbà (Fálétí, 1982:53)

*I remembered when mourning  
 I rememberd the dead  
 I rememebered the way people died  
 I remembered when the grown up child died  
 I remembered the death of youths*

*I remembered when parents lost their children  
 If one will be at loss in a palm wine business  
 They usually say God do not let the jug break  
 How can someone talk without saying evil  
 Panic like the day a grown-up child died*

‘Ládugbó ẹni fọ tomitomi’ can be literal in one context and figurative in another. Literarily, it could mean a pot for fetching water that breaks with the water in it; metaphorically it could be an expectant mother who dies with the foetus in her.

Another example is seen in ‘Ìjàmbá Odò Ọbà’, where Fálétí laments on the motor accident that happened in Odò Ọbà that claimed lives of many youth:

(b) Èrù Ògún Olùrè bá mí  
 Sùúrù ni kí o ẹ, àgbà Òriṣà,  
 Ká má ẹ ríjà rẹ, Ògún, ọkọ eran,  
 Ká má ẹ ríjà rẹ, àgbà Òriṣà  
 Níjọ tẹrù Ògún ti n bà mí, ko ẹ ni  
 Níjọ tó **palábéré**, tó **fabéré** jóná  
 Tó **peḻeḻe**, tó **fẹḻe** ya gberengede bí aṣo  
 Tó yàkísà tó fi dí ìdí àdán (Fálétí, 1982:1)

*I’m fearful of Ògún the god of iron  
 Be patient, the senior deity  
 May we not see your anger, Ògún the god of iron,  
 On the day that I started to dread Ògún, it was no joke  
 On the day that he killed the owner of the needle (a man)  
 and burnt his needle (penis)  
 When he killed the owner of the vagina (woman)  
 and tore the vagina apart like cloth,  
 When he tore a rag, and used it to seal off the anus of the bat,*

‘Alábéré’, in the example above, denotatively means a medical doctor or a nurse and abéré means needle and syringe. The poet employs it figuratively to mean a man and, abéré, his manhood; while ẹḻeḻe and ẹḻe refer to woman and vagina respectively.

The discussion above clearly indicates that metaphor is another vehicle for ambiguity. In ambiguity we speak of two words resembling one another in form but with different senses (homonymy) or one word with different but related referents of which one is primary (synonymy).

#### 4.7.3 Homonym

Homonym is another source of ambiguity. ‘Homonymous’ was first recorded in 1621 via the Latin homonymous, from the Greek homónymos, meaning “of the same”, (homo + same + ónymos = named). In its strictest sense, **homonym** is a word spelled

and pronounced the same way as another which has different meaning. Some scholars see homonymy and polysemy as a subtype of lexical ambiguity. Among them are Ulman (1975), Lyons (1997), Palmer (1981), Allan (1991), Saeed (2003), Elgin (1979), Bloomfield (1993), Goddard (1998) and Frath (2000), investigated the three types of lexical ambiguities, that is **homonymy**, **metaphor** and **metonymy** and concluded that homonymy and metonymy are at the two ends of a continuum of lexical ambiguity, and metaphor lies in between.

Crystal (1992) defines homonymy as ‘a term used in semantic analysis to refer to lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning’. On the same note, Pei and Gaynor (1954) define homonymy as a word identical in the written form and in sound with another word of the same language, but different in origin and meaning. These two definitions revolve around one sense: there must be at least two distinct words which are identical in structure. These words must be phonetically the same but different in origin and meaning. Fromkin and Rodman (1993) share the same view. If two ‘words’ differ in pronunciation but have the same meaning, such as **Òjògbón** (learned) and **Òmòwé** (educated), they are different words. Likewise, two ‘words’ with identical pronunciation but significantly different meanings, such as **olórò** (wealthy man) and **olórò** (confidant) are also considered different words. Spelling is not relevant, only pronunciation is. Thus, **pèrò** (gathered people) and **pèrò** (think about something) are also different words.

Fromkin and Rodman (1993) try to clear the confusion prevalent between synonym (two different words with one meaning) and ambiguity (two or more structurally similar words with different meanings). This confusion is also noticed by Scheffler (1979:21), ‘Now the general problem of likeness of meaning (or synonym) is the converse of the problem of ambiguity’. The former concerns the conditions under which different words have the same meaning, while the latter concerns the conditions under which the same word has different meanings. While the first asks when two words have the same meaning, the second (we may say) asks when meanings have the same word. Ambiguity would rather be viewed as a case of structurally similar words with different meanings. When two or more distinct concepts share the same name, it is a case of homonymy. This is exemplified in ‘È òlẹ̀ ò’bẹ̀un (ii), **Ọ̀lábímtán** talks about sharing ones problem with those that can be of assistance through good counselling rather keeping such problems to oneself and die in silence:

10. (a) Ajígbó ní ẹ jé ng ẹ ra mi bí mo bá ẹ fé  
 Ajífowólérán ní ẹ fi mí sí bí ẹ ti bá mi  
 Ó ro 'wájú ọ̀rọ̀, ó fowólérán  
 Ajígbó ro ẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀, ó **fẹ̀hìntì**  
 Àşá wá doríkodò, ó n wòşe ẹ̀yẹ (Ọlábímtán, 1969:53)

*Ajígbó says allow me to do to myself as it pleases me  
 Ajífowólérán says live me where you met me  
 He foresees the outcome of it, he was looking  
 Ajígbó looked back, he relaxed/retired*

The homonymous word in the example(10a) above is **fẹ̀hìntì**, which could mean that:

- (i) He rested his back on something having been tired of the whole situation at hand (take a pause)  
 (ii) He retired from active service having worked for the required time (withdrawal)

Also in the example below:

- (b) Gòdògbò-bí-àgbà, dóógó lásán  
 Àyàfi bí agùnmáníyè  
 Ọşẹ lásán nirun orí  
 Bítín èèrà sunwòn jàgbá tiwòn  
 Àyàfariwo bí àgbá gorodòòmù

Wòn kàwè nítóótó

Wòn ọ̀ kàn lákàwé ni;

- Rẹ̀kórí tó **dùn** wòn  
 Ló jé kí wòn ó pòfo rẹ̀kónà

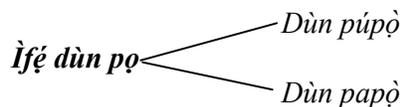
(Àtàrí Àjànàkú, 1998:16)

*They're like an empty drum  
 Just like the Agunmaniye's tree  
 Their hair is artificial  
 Ant is better than their drum  
 Only noisy like an empty drum  
 Truly they were educated  
 But they don't have sense  
 Their lack of record keeping  
 Makes them lose count*

In the poem 'Gòkè Àjàdí Nílé Abèní Mọtélẹ̀', Ọlátúbòşún use the poem to talk on how Gòkè desires to have his lover Àbèní even when they haven't make their relationship legal and Àbèní's reluctance to the proposal:

- (c) Bórí wa bá pé tán,  
 Ká jọ máa ránbi aşọ gbé ya  
 Ìfẹ̀ **dùn** pọ̀  
 Níbi ẹ̀ni méjì bá gbé wèrè pọ̀ (Ọlátúbòşún,1975:54)

*When we are with our senses  
 We shall both sew our cloth where it's torn  
 Love is sweet  
 Where two people are madly in love*



The homonymous word in the two poems above (b) and (c) is 'dùn'. In (b), it means lack, while in (c), it refers to sweetness. Owing to the double meaning of homonymous words, such as the above, ambiguity is the result. This is very common in poetry.

#### 4.7.4 Polysemy

Polysemy is a linguistic term for words with two or more meanings, usually multiple and unrelated meanings for a word or group of words or phrases. Merriam-Webster Dictionary traces the origin of the term to the late Latin polysemous, from the Greek polysémos (-poly - many + séma - sign). Thus, polysemy is a characteristic displayed by some words and phrases that may enjoy multiple yet some new interpretations.

Some scholars see polysemy as a creative origin of ambiguity. Among them are Ullman (1970), Mokgokong (1975), Leacock (2000), Falkum (2011) and Táíwò (2016). Polysemes, according to Mokgokong (1975:31), are different senses of one lexical item. Whenever polysemy is postulated, it should be possible to identify one sense as basic and the other one as derived. A word is said to be polysemous if and only if there are two or more senses emanating from it. For the mere fact that such a word has several senses, it is said to be ambiguous. The WordNet Research Team members regard lexical ambiguity and polysemy as synonymous; lexical ambiguity and polysemy also can be used in different contexts to represent two or more different meanings<sup>5</sup>. It is very difficult to differentiate lexically ambiguous words and polysemous words because they have common points more than two senses. The word 'orí' has different meanings in the excerpts that follow.

In 'Ìjà Ìlara', Olábímtán talks about those that are fond of destroying other peoples image and reputation because of selfish interest using the story of the tortoise as an illustration:

11(a) Ìjàpá ní fiyèdénú, sá maa tẹ̀lé mi  
 Ó tún gbéra ó dòdò kòlòkòlò  
 Ó ní o mà kú ìrònú, o kú iròjú  
 Şé mo ti sọ fún ọ kí o kúrò l'èhìn ọkà  
 O wá ñronú nígbà kò jẹ k'o j'àkùkọ  
 Bí ẹ bá gb'órí fún mi  
 Wéréwéré l'ò ó jẹ àkùkọ  
 Wàràwàrà l'ò jobè t'ò dùn

(Olábímtán 1969:32)

*Tortoise said, just be following me,  
 He proceeded to kòlòkòlò's house,  
 He said, greetings to you, salute for your perseverance  
 Haven't I told you not to support viper  
 You are now in deep thought when he refused you chicken  
 If you can make me the leader  
 Quickly you will start eating chicken  
 Soonest you will eat delicious soup*

In 'Ògúndá Méjì', Abímbólá talks about the problems facing Òrúnmilà, how he was asked to offer sacrifice to his **Orí** (Òrúnmilà), and after offering the sacrifice, the problems disappeared:

(b) Òrúnmilà ní nijó tí èyàn tíí kú  
 Ta ni wọn gé orí rẹ̀ lẹ̀?

Ifá ní **orí** o,

**Orí** nikan

Ló tó alaàsàn bá ròkun

Bí mo bá lówó lówó,

**Orí** ni n ò rò fún;

**Orí** mi ìwọ ni.

Bí mo bá bímọ láyé,

Ire gbogbo tí mo bá rí láyé

**Orí** ni n ó rò fún;

**Orí** mi ìwọ ni,

**Orí** pèlẹ̀ Àtètè niran

Àtètè gbe ni kòòşà

Kò sóòşà tíí danigbè

Léyìn **orí**

(Abímbólá, 1972:60)

*Òrúnmilà says ever since people died  
 Whose head has been cut from the body?  
 Ifá says oh head  
 The head alone  
 Followed the sick person all around  
 If I have money  
 Its the head I will inform  
 It is only my head  
 If I have children in my life  
 Whatever riches I possessed in life*

*All good things I shall achieve in life  
 Its the head I shall discuss with  
 My head its you  
 Greetings to you head that's first aware of one's achievement  
 Who directs one to the deity  
 There is no deity like the head*

In 'Òyèkú Méji', Abimbólá talks about two deities; Àgbà-yèkú-yèkú-orí-ìgbá and ìgbá-ò-wó-àgbà-yèkètè-ò-sòkalè, who consulted their priest for medicine against untimely death, having offered the necessary sacrifices, their request was granted and they were singing praises of the divinities:

(c) Ikú té **orí** ìgbá  
 Ìgbá gbìrànmù òlè  
 Ikú té **orí** apá  
 Apá gbìrànmù òlè  
 Ikú té **orí** ooro  
 Ooro gbìrànmù òlè (Abimbólá, 1968:32)

*Death at the tip of calabash  
 Calabash spread on the ground  
 Death at the tip of an arm  
 Hand spread on the ground  
 Death at the tip of ooro  
 Ooro spread on the ground*

In 1(a), 'orí' means **leader**; in (b), it refers to **head** part of the body; while in (c), it means **tip of a thing**.

As can be seen from the examples above, when a word displays multiple similar meanings as part of a semantic field, it is a case of polysemy. In the words of Táiwò (2016:23), 'polysemy and homonymy create ambiguity in that a single form has two or more meanings'. An interesting fact about a word which is polysemous is that one of its several meanings is central, while the other senses are mere figurative or metaphoric extensions of the core sense as seen in (11a) where **Orí** literally means *leader*, while **Orí**(11b & c) denote ones *destiny*. From the foregoing, one can rightly say that polysemy is another source of ambiguity in poetry.

#### 4.7.5 Range of word's meaning

Uncertainty over the range of a word's meaning can be another source of ambiguity. When two possible structures are alluded to in a sentence, such a text is

equivocal. Ullman(1970:158)calls such ‘equivocal phrasing (amphibology)’. The excerpts below exemplify this uncertainty,

Àlàgbé in ‘Oba Ọmọwónúọlá Oyèyodé Oyèşosin Eléjìgbò Ti Èjìgbò’, use the poem to praise the king’s peaceful reign and his personality:

- 12(a) Ọ̀rànmíyàn ló kókó jAláàfin àkókó  
 N là á pè ni Ọ̀rànmíyàn akin ọ̀tún  
 Akin nílé akin lóko,elénpe iwágún,  
Ó wágún fèrú Ó wágún fómọ  
 O kó ogun sí àpò jinwinni (Àlàgbé, 2006:18)

*Ọ̀rànmíyàn became the first Aláàfin  
 That’s the reason we named him Ọ̀rànmíyàn  
 Powerfulsecond in command  
 Powerful at home and abroad, the elénpe iwágún  
 He gathered property for slaves gathered property for children.  
 He packaged war in his pockets*

The main cause of ambiguity in this sentence is the uncertainty about the range of reference, that is, if properties were shared for the slaves alone or for children alone, or properties wereshared for both the slaves and the children.

Also, in

- (b) Ọlójó làwa á fojọ fún,  
 Ọlójó òní n ò jẹ dákà rẹ ko,  
 Bá a bá porí akọni à sì fidà nalẹ  
 Ọlójó dákun má jẹ ó pé;  
 Ko tún wá jọba  
**Àwọn baba iyá mi ó fowọ̀ tì ọ**  
 Ọgègè bí baba ọmọ ti fowọ̀ tọmọ (Àlàgbé, 2006:19)

*We give the day to the owner  
 The owner of today I can’t dare you  
 We reference a warrior when he is mentioned  
 Ọlójó please don’t let it be late  
 Come and be crowned king again  
 My maternal grandfathers (fathers) shall support you  
 As fathers do support their children.*

This uncertainty in the range of words in the underlined sentence above leads to ambiguity. In which we are not sure if the maternal grandfathers support were being referred to or the support of both parents that is, the father’s support and the mother’s support.

#### 4.7.6 Punctuation

This is another source of ambiguity. A sentence which is not properly punctuated could cause some problems for the reader. Consider the following unpunctuated sentences in: Àlàgbé in ‘Ọba ọmọwónúọlá Oyèyọdẹ Oyèşşin Elèjìgbò Ti Èjìgbò’, use the poem to praise the king’s peaceful reign and his personality:

- 13(a) Sanwó ọtí ọkà tó bá dòru  
Ó dúró léyìn ó sì ọmọ ọşù lẹkún  
Àgòrò a fàdému tọ ọtín wò má à rà  
Èbẹ ọrò kan ni n bẹ yín o Ọmọwónúọlá  
N jẹẹ lẹ mú mi dé èbùrù ọnà àbùjá  
Ilé Ìkirè ibi baba yín gbé n ọ́rìn?  
Àtándá omo ewú filé hàn mí (Àlàgbé, 2006:17)

*Pay for the wine at night  
You were at the back yet you made the child cried  
Àgòrò that tasted the wine without buying  
One thing I will beg of you Ọmọwónúọlá  
Can you take me to through the short  
Ìkirè town where your father lives  
Àtándá's the son of ewú direct me to the house*

And the hypothetical example below:

- (b) Olùkọ Káyòdẹ jẹ àfẹsónà mi  
*Teacher Káyòdẹ is my fiance*

In the statements above, if there is a comma after **Àtándá** and also after **ọmọ ewú**, it means **Àtándá** stands as the HN referring to someone; **ọmọ ewú** which qualifies the HN **Àtándá** to lead him to the house.

As: Àtándá, ọmọ ewú, filé hàn mí = HN + Q

Àtándá + ọmọ ewú filé hàn mí

Again in (b) if a comma is inserted after **Olùkọ** (teacher), we assume that someone is telling **olùkọ** (teacher) that **Káyòdẹ** is her fiance.

Olùkọ, Káyòdẹ jẹ àfẹsónà mi. *Teacher, Káyòdẹ is my fiance* (introducing Káyòdẹ to the teacher as the fiance).

But as it is, it looks like **Káyòdẹ** is the teacher and the fiance. Talking about the problem of punctuation, Fromkin and Rodman (1993:12) have this to say:

When we speak we usually have a certain message to convey. At some stage in the act of producing speech we must organize our thought into strings of words. But sometimes the message gets grabbed. We may stammer, pause or produce “slips of the tongue”.

Any sentence without proper punctuation can be a major cause of ambiguity.

#### 4.7.7 Irony

Many scholars have defined irony. Among them is Holman (1980) who defines irony as a figure of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning. Characteristically, it speaks words of praise to imply blame and words of blame to imply praise. Olatúnjí (2005) sees irony as a figure of speech which involves saying one thing while intending another, which is incompatible with an overt meaning. It is unpleasant meanings that are couched in a sentence. In irony, contextual evaluative meaning of word is directly opposite to its dictionary meaning.

In Ermidia's(2005:23) view, irony is a situation when speakers' communicative intention is not conveyed in a straightforward way. In Fákéyẹ's (2014:13) opinion, irony arises from contrast, a difference from what is and what ought to be the use of words to signify the opposite of what is said. On the usefulness of irony in poetry, Korg (1960:39) notes that, 'Another way in which a poet may use connotation to augment the ordinary resources of language is by making his words carry an undertone that expresses a feeling contradictory to their denotation. Hence, by saying two contradictory things at once, the poem really expresses, through irony, a third meaning'.

From the above scholar's views, we can say that irony is an incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs. Therefore, irony is considered as another source of ambiguity, as the surface meaning is often different from the deep meaning. Examples are given below.

Ìṣòlá in 'Ikú Òjògbón Oláṣùpò Òjédòkun', laments on the death of the referent and how he struggled so hard to be educated and died when he was supposed to reap all his sweat:

14(a)      Èni tírú èyí bá yé kó fún ni làbàrè  
            Kín ni ká ti wí bá a bá dé'lé èni?  
            Oláṣùpò Àrẹ̀mú fi làákàyè kàwé,  
Òkọ Olú gbégbá orókè nígbà igba  
            Baba Fọ̀lášadé ò fesẹ̀ko rí  
            Tó fi dọba l'ẹ̀gbé afọ̀gbón-jeun                      (Ìṣòlá, 1978:11)

*Whoever understands this let him explain to us  
What shall we say when we get home  
Oláṣùpò Àrẹ̀mú studied with sense  
Olú's husband was outstanding on several occasions*

*Foláṣadé's father has never hit his legs on ground  
Until he became a king among the elites*

In example 14 (a) above, rather than the poet saying Foláṣadé's father has never failed to be promoted for once in his profession, in a straight forward way he ironically says he has not hit his legs on ground, making the audience/listener to give different interpretations of what he intends to say. Which are:

- (i) He has never hit his legs on ground
- (ii) He has never be in trouble in his line of duty

In 'Nínú ỌgbàAyò', Ọlátúbòsún uses the poem to express love advancement between two lovers:

(b) Bẹ'ẹ bá wá'únjẹ wógbà yíí wá  
Ká pèjì pọ  
Aféfẹ ifẹ lee yó'kùn-un wa  
Bá à wẹ lógún ódún  
Ká fi fẹná ifẹ jó  
Omi ifẹ le wẹ wá nù  
Bá à kọ yààrá nílá  
Ifẹ se yàrá bò wá  
Kóşùpá ifẹ ó máa ràn lódòdò wa

**Ká dáná ifẹ**

Ká wá kòkò ifẹ síbí  
Ká díra wa mú pé (Ọlátúbòsún, 1973:9)

*If you're looking for food in this compound  
Let us add two together  
We can be satisfied with love's breeze  
Even if we don't bath in twenty years  
To make the fire of love burning  
Love's water can make us clean  
We may not build a house  
Love can serve as room for us  
Let the light of love shine towards us  
Let us make love's fire  
Let us look for love's pot  
And hold ourselves for long*

In example (b), the poet is being economical with words by ironically saying 'ká dáná ifẹ', rather than saying let us be in a relationship.

Ìşòlá in 'Ikú Ọjògbón Ọláşùpò Ọjédòkun', laments on the death of the referent and how he struggled so hard to be educated and died when he was supposed to reap all his sweat:

- (c) Àní Oláṣùpò Àrẹ̀mú ọ̀mọ̀ Ọ̀jẹ̀dòkun  
 Tó ẹ̀bí idán tó **yo** nínú ẹ̀gbé wa  
 Tó gbọ̀nà ẹ̀bùrú, ó yóni sílẹ̀ láítójó (Ìṣòlá, 1978:11)

*I say Oláṣùpò Àrẹ̀mú son of Ọ̀jẹ̀dòkun  
 Who like magic left our club  
 Who stealthily, leaves us prematurely*

Also in (c) above, the poet did not want to say that Oláṣùpò Àrẹ̀mú died prematurely among the members of the club but ironically says he left like magic.

Ọ̀látúbòsùn use the poem ‘Àjòdún Òmìnira Nàìjíríà’, to congratulate Nigerians on the attainment of independence and also to admonish on the need to avoid things that can cause disunity among them:

- (d) A ti fira wa lògbòlògbò  
 A ti dara wa nídàkudà tán  
 A ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀ kúkú ọ̀dún púpọ̀ lẹ̀hin òmìnira  
 Kídẹ̀ra ó wá wòlú dé  
 Ká jọ máa gbádùn  
 Njẹ ẹ má mà jẹ ó **dogbè**  
 Kẹẹ má sì jẹ ó **dòfún** oòò  
 Bó bá ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀ tó bàjẹ̀  
 Gbogbo aṣíwájú orílẹ̀ èdè yí  
 Yòò dorí ẹ̀yin nìkan (Ọ̀látúbòsùn, 1973: 64)

*We have troubled ourselves so much  
 We have inconvenienced ourselves  
 So this is how it will be after independence  
 Let there be peace in city  
 That we all enjoyed  
 Please don't allow it to turn to Ogbè  
 Do not let it turn to Òfún  
 If it eventually gets bad  
 All the leaders in the country  
 You will bear the consequences*

In (d) above, the poet wants to be mild in giving advice to the leaders about the situation of the country. Rather than using the word bad or worst, ironically employed the Odù names; ogbè and Òfún to mean a bad situation. He believes that his audience/listener who operates within the same contextual background should be able to decode the message.

Ìṣòlá in the poem ‘Ọ̀yinyin’, advised youths mostly girls on the need to live a decent life to avoid giving birth to a fatherless child in the future:

- (e) Bóyinyin bá relé ẹ̀yẹ  
 Wuruwuru a jẹgi

B'ó tún relé eku  
 Èlẹwírí a tún koná  
 Kò tójó, kò tóşù  
 Kirindin gbanú òyinyin  
 Èèmò lukutu pẹbẹ  
 Oyún larí ọkọ dà? ( Ìşòlá, 1978:42)

*If òyinyin visits the bird  
 Wuruwuru will consume the tree  
 If it gets to the rat's house  
 It will spark fire again  
 Sooner or later,  
 Òyinyin's tummy starts swelling  
 Wonders shall never end  
 Its pregnancy we saw, where is the husband?*

In (e), the poet is ironically talking to young ladies that jumping from one man to the other, who when pregnant may not be able to identify the person responsible for their pregnancy.

In 'Mo ju ayé lọ', ìşòlá talks about the freedom we enjoyed as a child and the restrictions that follows as we grow older:

(f) Bí mo ti géndé tán ni mo wówó yá  
 Mo gbàwin èwù, gba ti sòkòtò,  
 Modişu dèlùbó, mo gbágbòn, ó dilé àna  
 Mo láya tán, mo bímọ tán  
 Mo **tòjàngbòn lọ beere**  
 Nítòrì kìn ni? ( Ìşòlá, 1978:15)

*As I became an adult I borrowed money  
 I bought cloth on credit, and trouser as well,  
 I packed yam, yam flour, to my in law's house  
 I married, I have children  
 I have much to cater for  
 Because of what?*

Lastly in (f), ironically, the poet sees the many children he had as trouble, as taking care of their needs may be difficult for him. It is believed from these examples that, in irony, there is an underlying meaning to what is being said. Hence, it serves as another source of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry.

#### **4.8 Summary**

In this chapter, we have looked at types of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry, the analysis of the ambiguities found in the selected texts and the sources of such ambiguities. In the next chapter, ambiguity in routine and literary communication will be the major focus.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- (1) Quoted in Mackay and Bever (1967:196)
- (2) Cited in Chiara Bucaria's paper presentation: Lexical and syntactic ambiguity as a source of humor: The case of newspaper headlines
- (3) Quoted from Syal and Jindal, (2010): *An introduction to linguistics, language, grammar and semantics*. Second Edition.
- (4) Cited from Sekaila, J.C (2000) Linguistic Ambiguity in Northern Sotho: Saying the unmeant. A Ph.D thesis
- (5) Cited in Springer-Verlag Berlin (2015) Verb sense discovery in Mandarin Chinese - A corpus based knowledge - Intensive approach

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AMBIGUITY IN ROUTINE AND LITERARY COMMUNICATION

#### 5.0 Introduction

It has been stated earlier, though briefly, in this study that ambiguity is not a feature of poetry alone as it also occurs in our everyday conversation as well. However its use in ordinary discourse is limited because the exigencies of everyday life dictate clarity and transparency. This is because ambiguity belongs to the literary/poetic language which allows for multiplicity of meanings or interpretations. Hence, ambiguity is classified as literary language. As reiterated by Olatéjú (1998), the real essence of literary language is aesthetics. This is unlike the standard language that has effective communication as its hallmark. Even at that, people are said to be ambiguous in how they use language in routine communication. To this end, this section discusses ambiguity in day-to-day discourse or everyday language use. Consequently and in the light of the following, our discussion in this chapter is going to be in two parts. The first discusses ambiguity in everyday language use, that is, in routine communication, while the second deals with ambiguity as a stylistic device in poetic discourse. This also leads to ambiguity as a foregrounding device

#### 5.1 Ambiguity in routine communication

Many linguists, such as Peck and Coyle (1984), Fowler (1987), Greenbaum (1991) are of the opinion that ambiguity is a fault to be avoided, especially in routine communication, because it may cause confusion and misunderstanding. On the incidence of ambiguity in routine communication, Lutz ((1996) claims that ambiguity cannot be wholly eliminated from languages mainly because words have multiple meanings:

If words have only one meaning, we could well eliminate all ambiguity from the language. However, since each word in a sentence can have multiple meanings, we must sort out all those possible meanings to arrive at the one meaning that we think works. We do this everytime we use language and usually we're not even aware we're doing it. Without context, we might not know what the words mean.

(1996: 98)

In actual fact, ambiguity thrives mostly in jokes, cynism, criticism and comic remarks in our everyday language use, and most of them have become part of our daily lives. A good illustrative example is the one used at the opening of this study. The expression is repeated for convenience:

1 (a) Ìbàdàn ò gbonílẹ̀ bí àjòjì

*Ìbàdàn does not favour the indigene like it does strangers*

This expression is often used jokingly by non-ìbàdàn indigenes to taunt or mock Ìbàdàn indigenes. The ambiguity in the extract arises due to deletion of some vowels in the verb phrase these are:

- (i) gba + onílẹ̀
- (ii) gbe + onílẹ̀
- (iii) gbo + onílẹ̀

the deletions of vowels **a** in (i), **e** in (ii) and **o** in (iii) and the contraction that followed caused the ambiguity, which resulted in ‘**gbonílẹ̀**’ thereby making the expression ambiguous with the following interpretations:

- b. Ìbàdàn kò gbe onílẹ̀ bí ó ti gbe àjòjì

*Ìbàdàn does not accommodate the indigene like it does strangers*

- c. Ìbàdàn ko gba ọmọ bíbí Ìbàdàn fún ẹbọ rírú bí ó ẹ n gba àjòjì.

*Ìbàdàn does not accept the indigene for sacrifice as it accept strangers*

- d. Ìbàdàn kò gbo onílẹ̀ bí àjòjì

*Ìbàdàn does not inconvenience the indigene as it does the strangers*

The interpretation in (a) is used by non-natives to taunt the natives to elicit comic remarks during light jokes and to express the minds of non-natives that Ìbàdàn is a home for all, both the natives (indigene) and non-natives (non-indigene) as well, and is for this reason that the city (Ìbàdàn) keeps expanding everyday. Another example of an ambiguous expression found to be common among youths, especially friends is this:

2. Sẹ o ti ẹtán ká jọ má a lọ, kí ọkò ó **pa wá pọ̀**  
(Have you finished so that one car can kill/join us together).

Èèwò! Ọkò kò lẹ **pa wá pọ̀**  
(abomination, the car won't kill us together)

As stated earlier, the ambiguity lies in the verb phrase **pa wá pọ̀** in the expression which could be interpreted as:

- (i) Kill us both or together
- (ii) join us together.

3. È bá mi fi si

*Help me add to it/penetrate*

A lady having bought meat from the meat seller asked the man to add extra meat as gift to the one she bought, and the meat seller jokingly replied “**mi o le fi si níta gbangba**” (I cannot penetrate outside). What the lady wanted was for the meat seller to dash her meat, but he has taken the utterance to mean sex. Although the lady did not recognise the ambiguity, the meat seller did. The ambiguity in 2 and 3 above, is used for jokes and comic remarks.

4. Şe kí n şì?

*Should I open it?*

This question was asked by a waitress in a club house after serving the customer a bottle of beer. Rather than answering in a simple manner either ‘yes or no’. The customer replied **şé gbogbo ẹnì tó bá ra ọtí lo máa ‘ń şì fún ni** (*Do you open up for everyone you serve beer?*). The waitress is referring to the beer while the customer has misinterpreted her to mean opening her lap. This is employed to pass light joke and humour.

5. O ò ní gòkè

*Will you not rise/come up*

Two friends were going to a shop at the supermarket which happen to be a two-storey building. As one of the friends climbed the staircase, the other was standing downstairs. The one climbing the staircase enquires from her friend thus: O ò ní gòkè ni? (Won’t you come up?) The one downstairs flared up and responded **Ìwọ ni ò ní goke** (*it is you that will not rise up*). Although she did not plan the ambiguity, the other friend noticed it to mean a curse. The ambiguity could mean to tell off an unwanted fellow or to insult.

6. Şe ẹyin ló gbẹ̀yìn?

*Are you the last person?*

A boy who wanted to join a queue asked the last person on the queue the question above to enable him to know whom he was next to, but he landed in trouble as the person misinterpreted the question to be an abuse and responded: **Ìwọ ló máa gbẹ̀yìn** (*It is you that will come last*) meaning he will always come last in any good thing.

7. O ò ní dọla

*You will not wait/ see tomorrow*

In a conversation between two people, one is asked if the other would wait till tomorrow, and the other responded **màá dọla mà á tún ju ọla lọ**. The first friend did

not meant to be a curse, but the second friend termed or translated the utterance to mean a curse, that 'he will not live to see tomorrow'. The ambiguity in 6 and 7 are sometimes used to insult, taunt or pass a comic remark.

Among apprentices, expressions like this are common which oftentimes resulted in misunderstanding:

8. *Şé o kúrí ni?*

*Were you dead before/are you a dullard?*

This literally means: **kúrí** Are you a dullard? **Kúrí**. It could be used ironically when any of the apprentices is not paying attention to what he is being taught, maybe owing to loss of mind or wandering thought.

9. *Apòdà ni baba ẹ*

*Your father is a nonentity/ a painter*

The ambiguity in the sentence above is due to the two interpretations of the word *apòdà*:

(i) *Ẹni tí kò ní làákàyè* (Nonentity)

(ii) *Ẹni tí ó ń pò ọdà pò láti kun ilé* (A house painter)

Hence, the statement could be to abuse someone or describe the father's profession.

10. *Şé Òtu ni ẹ ni, tí àlàyé wa ò fi yé ẹ?*

*Are you a native of Òtu/rustic person that you didn't understand our explanation*

(i) Which can be a native of Òtu (town)

(ii) A rustic or uncivilised person from the village

The ambiguity in 8, 9 and 10 could be used as sarcasm or to castigate, mock, taunt and can also be used as joke.

11. *Kí là ń kó?*

*What are we packing/ celebrating*

In a naming ceremony, some people were asked to help in arranging certain things. Someone came in to assist in the packing and asked the baby's mother the question: **kí là ń kó?** ( what are we celebrating/arranging). She unconsciously responded **omọ ni** (*it is a child*). This kind of ambiguity can be to castigate, taunt or for humour.

12. Wòn jísòró ẹ

- To mean: (i) Hausa language meaning to fear  
(ii) Interpreted to mean gba tiẹ/fẹràn based on its phonoesthetic sound.

This kind of ambiguity can be to castigate, taunt or for humour.

13. Kí lo fẹ ẹ?  
*Mo fẹ jáwèé*

The conversation above was between a husband and wife who just had a disagreement. The wife wanted to tear a sheet of paper to make a scale of preference of things she wanted to buy from the supermarket, while the husband asked what she wanted to do: **kí lo fẹ ẹ?** She simply answered *mo fẹ jáwèé* (I want to tear a sheet of paper). The response angered the man so much that he beat his wife. When people intervened, the angered husband said his wife wanted to divorce him. He misinterpreted the woman's utterance to mean divorce. This could be used as a sarcasm or taunting.

Unconscious use of ambiguous expressions is not only limited to conversation among people but also in religious settings. The expressions below illustrate this.

14. Mo ní idí láti dúpẹ  
*I have reasons/buttocks to be thankful*

What the preacher meant was that he has reasons to be thankful, but some people have misinterpreted **idí** (reason) to mean buttocks and give the sentence the reading: ***I am thankful because I have buttocks.*** The ambiguity is for comic and joke.

15. Ẹmí ó gbà á já

The Muslim prayer often rendered during fasting means that those who started the fasting will see it to the end but which has been misinterpreted to mean **ẹmí o gbé ajá** (someone will steal a dog). (One may wonder how can **Ẹmí** (spirit/life) steal dog). Even though the ambiguity has no stylistic import, it is used to create humour and entertainment.

16. Olúwa ni olùşọgùntàn mi  
The Lord is my shepherd

The ambiguity lies in the scope of qualifiers that is, whether Olúwa ni Olùşọ qualifies Àgùntàn mi to be:

- (i) Olúwa ni Olùşọ [ Àgùntàn mi]  
*The Lord is [my shepherd]*

To mean: The Lord is the shepherd guarding me/watching over me as His sheep where Olúwa jẹ olùṣọ fún èmi àgùntàn rẹ or

Àgùntàn mi modifies Olúwa ni Olùṣọ to mean:

- (ii) [Olúwa ni Olùṣọ]àgùntàn mi.  
[The Lord is]my shepherd]  
giving us the interpretation:

Olúwa jẹ olùṣọ fún àwọn àgùntàn (**eran ọsin** ) tí mo ní. *The Lord is the keeper of my sheep*

When people use ambiguous expressions, most times, ambiguity is not intended. Sometimes, ambiguity is deliberate. When this happens, ambiguity can be accounted for using grammar and nature. For instance, the inscription below was cited on a signpost

17 Enikéni Èyànkéyàn kò gbọdò tò síbí yí mó

The underlined words are ambiguous because of the different meanings that can be given to it. **Enikéni** has the interpretations of:

- (i) Èyàn lásán, aláḡàná èyàn – unreliable, worthless or insane person
- (ii) Èni yówù – someone or anyone

Same goes for èyànkéyàn, which can be:

- (i) Èni tí kò wúlò – a worthless person.
- (ii) Èni yówù – whosoever

The ambiguity could be to insult, pass comic remarks or castigate.

18 *Şé kí n run?*

*Should I peel it/perish*

This question was asked by a groundnut seller asking the buyer if she should squeeze the groundnuts and blow out the particles. Instead of answering the seller a yes or no reply, the buyer answered, please if you want to perish, it won't be here. The groundnut seller was embarrassed with the response. Even though what she meant was to peel off the groundnut and blow it away, the buyer misinterpreted her utterance to mean perish (**run**).

19. Èyìn ẹ ò dára.

*Your back is not good.*

A driver was reversing his car. The person directing him uttered the statement above, which literally means that the driver should be careful because there is danger at his back. But the driver was annoyed with the person for that statement, which ironically

means his back is not good, although the ambiguity was unconsciously used. The ambiguity in 18 and 19 above could be used to taunt, castigate or for mockery.

Ambiguity also abounds in songs, as song is a poem or other sets of words meant to be sung. It is among the cultural heritage of the Yorùbá which features in almost all aspects of Yorùbá life. It is being rendered to reveal what is in their inner mind which may be hidden to other people. Olúkòjù (1973:3) notes that in the Yorùbá society, like most other traditional African societies no discussion of oral poetry is complete without reference to melody or music in a way. Songs are poetry in themselves but rendered in song mode. In one of Dayò Kújòrè's songs go thus:

20, Oṃodé yì n jò **ṣéṣèṣè**  
Oṃodé yì n jò **jágbajàgba**  
Kò ṣe pa  
È gbòdò ran nísé oo

*This child is dancing unsteadily/wonderfully*  
*This child dances nonsensically/beautifully*  
*He's unbeatable*  
*Do not send him an errand*

**Ṣéṣèṣè** can mean 'unsteadily' or a bad situation, at the same time, it can be interpreted to mean he danced wonderfully or beautifully, professionally. The same goes for **jágbajàgba**, which has both positive and negative interpretations. It can be nonsensical dance.

The language of journalism must be 'causal, unexamined, uncritical and devoid of ornamentation.' Olátéjù (1998:136). However, journalists unconsciously use ambiguous words, phrases and sentences in their communication. Below are some instances of unconscious use of ambiguous expressions in radio and television programmes;

21. Kí ló gbe yín wá<sup>1</sup>?  
What brought you here?

This question was asked by the anchor of a programme *Jòkó ọ̀jògbòn* (The elder's forum) a television programme in Ondo State Radiovision Corporation from one of the complainant. Instead of telling the anchor the purpose of coming to the programme the complainants answered thus:

Ọkò nì, sir.  
It was a car sir.

The anchor of the programme wanted him to explain his purpose of coming to the programme, but he interpreted the question to mean mobility or transportation. (The

response got the anchor angry but it was learnt that the complainant is not a Yorùbá native speaker but just learning the language). In using the kind of ambiguity in 20 and 21 above, the complainant wants to be sarcastic and pass humour.

Another example is from a radio presenter. In the opening of the programme, he said: **irú m̀eta ló wà** and goes further to explain them thus:

- 22. Irú wooro (unmashed locust beans)
- Irú p̀et̀e (*mashed locust beans*)
- Irú k̀ileléyì! (*a kind of expression of misery*)

The ambiguity above is used as joke and criticism. In routine communication, language use must be handled properly so as to avoid problems. An unconscious use of language may lead to ambiguous expressions, thus making it possible for the hearer to misinterpret it.

- 23. Kí ló k̀an yín? (*What is your involvement/point of view*)
- Response: Àgbò ni (*it was a ram*)

The questioner asked someone what his/her involvement is in an argument or his own point, but it was misinterpreted to mean: What hits (k̀an) you? The ambiguity could be for comic effect, insult or rudness.

- 24. E da epo si lára (*pour oil on his/her cloth*)

The sentence can be interpreted as:

- (i) Stain his/her cloth with oil
- (ii) tarnish his/her image

The second interpretation could be metaphorical, to mean they should do anything to destroy someone's image or reputation

- 25. Bí o ti lọ, lo ó se b̀o (*You will return as you go*)

The expression above can be interpreted thus:

- (i) yóò lọ láyò, yóò tún padà láyò (*Compliment that one will go well and return well/safely*)
- (ii) Lọ/b̀o lówó lásán (*go and return empty handed*)

While the first interpretation may be a compliment, the second can be idiomatic, to mean the person will not be prosper. The stylistic import could be metaphorical, to pass a cynical comment or for light joke.

- 26. Še o ti šetán (*Are you ready*) This may mean:

- (i) O f̀e k̀u (*Do you want to die*)
- (ii) O f̀e máa lọ (*Do you want to take exit*)

27. *Şé o ti ñ lọ?* (*ready to leave*) can also mean:

(i) *lílọ* (*take an exit*)

(ii) *kú* (*death*)

As stated earlier, when used, this particular expression *şé o ti ñ lọ*, usually elicits the response *mi ò tí ì lọ, ẹni tó lọ ló kú*, which could be used as a joke, mockery or insult, ambiguity is a feature of everyday language use. When carefully used, it engendered comic effect, entertainment and fun, it can also be used in other ways as well. For example, it can be used to pass insult, criticise, castigate or tell off an unwanted fellow. Though a veritable means of communication, ambiguity should be carefully handled to avoid confusion, misconception and bad blood.

## **5.2.0 Introduction: Ambiguity as a stylistic device**

For a better understanding of our intention in this sub-section, ambiguity as a stylistic device, it is pertinent to first discuss ambiguity as a foregrounding device. This is because such devices as metaphor, euphemism, irony, hyperbole and personification are known to have a link with ambiguity in their roots and manifestations. So we discuss foregrounding first.

### **5.2.1 Ambiguity as a foregrounding device**

Foregrounding has its roots in the Czech language (**aktualise**). Leech (1965) states that ‘the obvious illustration of foregrounding comes from the semantic opposition of literal and figurative meaning’. A literal metaphor is a semantic oddity which demands that a linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation. In stylistics, the notion of foregrounding, a term borrowed from the Prague School of Linguistics, is used by Leech and Short (1981:48) to refer to ‘artistically motivated deviation’.

Foregrounding theory generally assumes that poetic language deviates from the norms characterizing the standard language, especially at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels, and that these deviations interfere with cognitive principles and process that make communication possible. (Shlovsky, 1965; Short, 1996). Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act. The more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely consciously does it become. Objectively speaking, automatization

schematizes an event; foregrounding means violation of the scheme.(Mukarovsky, 1970). Crystal (1997) asserts that foregrounding is an art that results in defamiliarization which is also synonymous to enstrangement whose fundamental function as an art is to make people see the word in a new way.

Ambiguity as a foregrounding device has both aesthetic (stylistic) and communication as its essence. Three factors make ambiguity a foregrounding or stylistic device. The first is that ambiguity is a poetic vehicle, an operative factor that makes the language of poetry beautiful. The second is that ambiguity presents a weak norm of the standard language because it violates the norm of the standard language. It has been argued by Mukarovsky (1970) that a systematic violation of the norm of the SL, such as the one exhibited in ambiguity, is a poetic utilization without which there will be no possibility of poetry. In other words, ambiguity is a reflection and expression of intuition and creativity of the literary artist. Thirdly, before William Empson's publication, Seven types of ambiguity, an ambiguous text was viewed as a faulty text or one that failed to produce a precise reference to a desired meaning. Why a particular poem (text) is felt to be beautiful was not a sociological and psychological reason; the key lies in recognizing ambiguity as the operative factor. Ambiguity as a foregrounding device also functions as a means of entertainment, humour, mockery or sympathy in Yorùbá poetry, as exemplified in the poems below:

28. Òbèjé- ò- yéké  
 Elésè Osùn  
 A bi tan-an p'ológún erú  
 A b'ètipá p'ológbòn iwòfà  
 A bi yànjà paláàárù tantan (Olábímtán, 1974:10)  
 Òbèjé- ò- yéké

*Òbèjé-ò-yéké*  
*The one with smooth leg*  
*Whose lap attracts the owner of twenty slaves*  
*Whose leg attracts the owner of twenty slaves*  
*The one whose arguments supercede others*  
 Òbèjé- ò- yéké

The underlined ambiguous words 'p'ológún, p'ológbòn may be interpreted thus:

- P'ológún erú- (i) pe eni tí ó ní ogún erú  
 (ii) pa eni tí ó ní ogbòn iwòfà

Same goes for **p'ològbòn**. The ambiguous expressions: **p'ológún erú/pòlògbòn iwòfà**, function as a means of entertainment because of the seemingly false claims and exaggerated importance.

In poetic language, foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication to the background. Just the poetic language which is a distortion of the norm of the SL, ambiguity has the potential of pushing communication to the background, and this is the very essence of poetry or poetic language. For instance, in Qlábímtán's anthology below, 'Ewì Oríşiríşì', he talks about sacrifices Qlásùnbò was asked to offer in order to succeed in life and the positive outcome after offering the sacrifice::

29. B'á a b'eégú, b'òòşà; b'órí ẹnì fọ're  
 B'á ò bá dábo Àlùpáyidà, ire a máa bó lówó ẹnì  
 Dá f'Qlásùnbò, omọ Dàmólá  
 Tí nwón l'ówó rẹ ò ní tó 're  
 Wón ní kóbeégúnilé  
 Óbeégún ilé  
 Wón ní kóbbòòşà ojà  
 Ó bòòşà ojà (Qlábímtán, 1974:14)

*If we offered sacrifice to the gods, deities, if ones Ori accept it  
 If we do not offer the evil ones, good things may elude someone  
 Ifá divination was made for Qlásùnbò, Dàmólá's child  
 That was said will not achieve good things  
 He was asked to offer sacrifice to his lineage masquerade  
 He offered sacrifice to his lineage masquerade  
 He was asked to offer sacrifice to the gods  
 that dwell in the marketplace  
 He offered sacrifice to the market deity*

In standard language, these (beégún and bòòşà) would have been written thus:

- (i) beégún = bó + eégún (to offer sacrifice to the masquerades)
- (ii) beégún = bẹ + eégún (to beg or appease the masquerades)

Also, bòòşà ojà could be:

- (iii) bó + òòşà ojà = bòòşà ojà (offer sacrifice)
- (iv) bẹ + òòşà ojà = bòòşà ojà (to appease)

These words have been foregrounded in the poem due to the different interpretations they possess. For instance, in the above excerpt communication is being pushed to the background because the addressee is at a loss as to what to do, whether to offer a sacrifice (**bọ**) or to beg/appeal (**bẹ**) the mentioned principalities. The immediate effects of foregrounding is to make strange, to achieve defamiliarization, Shlovsy

sees defamiliarization as accompanied by feeling, noting, that stylistic devices in literary text emphasise the emotional effect of an expression' (Shlovisky, 1967:9). Ambiguity as a foregrounding device evokes a greater richness of feelings in poetry than when they occur in communicative utterance. The poetic lines below in the poem titled 'Adárúdurùdu' capture this:

30 Àsíá Òyìnbó d'òrìṣà kékeré  
 T'a péjò lẹ̀ òbẹ́rí fún  
 Ọḍoḍún l'a ñṣe Ẹ̀mpáiyà l'òko wa (Ọlábímtán, 1969:7)

*The whiteman's flag thus became a small god  
 For which we all assembled and offered a sacrifice  
 Every year we celebrate the Empire Day in our village*

The two ambiguous words in the poetic lines above are **bẹ́rí** and **Ẹ̀mpáiyà**, and can be interpreted thus:

- (i) bẹ + orí = bẹ́rí (salute in the military fashion)
- (ii) bẹ + orí = bẹ́rí (behead or cut someone's head as sacrifice or ritual to the gods. The

word Ẹ̀mpáiyà has these two interpretations:

- (iii) Ẹ̀mpáiyà – a loaned word from the English word 'Empire', which has the connotative meaning of the 'Empire Day', that is, British independence anniversary celebration day.

- (iv) Ẹ̀mpáiyà – A fearful day; phonologically, the word sounds like - ẹ̀ni tí ó ń páyà. From the way it sounds, Ẹ̀mpáiyà, is like a day that people are affraid, fearful and worried. Hence, metaphorically we can say Ẹ̀mpáiyà Day was not a day of meriments; rather it was a day of panic.

The message or information, it is assumed, which the poet seems to be conveying to his readers is the annual celebration of the British Empire, usually characterised with military parades that is, marching and giving salutes when Nigeria was a colony under Great Britain. However, this message is being pushed to the background or distorted with the foregrounding. The underlined words above have been foregrounded owing to the deletion of certain elements in the verb, which make them ambiguous. **Bẹ́rí** (salute/behead) and **Ẹ̀mpáiyà** (celebration/panic) thus leading to a new interpretation of ritual and panic which the Empire day celebration portends. The poet could have foregrounded the ambiguous words in the poem for certain effects which could be for humorous, satiric or mockery effect.

Some critics see ambiguity as an obstacle to communication especially when it is not carefully handled. We have made this point before when we inferred that literary

language has the tendency to push communication to the background. In literature, it is the ornamental use of language that makes the language of poetry beautiful. One of the difficulties that may face poets during the poetic process is the variety of meanings a word, phrase or sentence may have.

There is some evidence that foregrounding in literary texts strikes the readers' interest and captures their attention. Hunt and Vipond (1985) investigated the effects of textual features that they refer to as 'discourse evaluation'. These are described as words, phrases or events that are 'unpredictable against the norm of the text' and that convey the narrator's/poet's evaluations of story characters or events. They found that readers were more likely to report story phrases that 'struck them' or caught their eyes when those phrases had been adapted so that the same story events were described in relatively 'neutral' terms. Ambiguity as a foregrounding device contributes to poetic elegance and taste.

### **5.2.2 Ambiguity as a stylistic device**

Many scholars, such as Ìṣòlá(1971), Bámbóṣé (1974),Hendricks (1974), Ọlábòdé (1981),Ọlátúnjí (1984), Adébòwálé (1998),Crystal (1997), Ọlátéjú (1998) and Ọjó (2013) contend that the importance of stylistic devices in the works of art cannot be undermined. Stylistics is a part of linguistics which studies different aspects of language variation, Crystal (1997). Sometimes in poetry, a word diverges from its intended meaning, and a phrase may have a specialized meaning that is not based on its literary meaning.

Ambiguity is a poetic vehicle which cuts across all languages. Yorùbá poets, like poets of other languages, employ ambiguous words, phrases or sentences in their works. Empson 1930(1960) considers ambiguity as a literary device and points out that different views can often be taken of what the words mean in a line of poetry. Yorùbá poets creatively and skillfully make use of different stylistic devices to enrich their works for artistic effect. This point is further elaborated by Ọlátéjú (1998) when he notes that the ambition of any literary writer is to achieve two things, namely "message" and "entertainment".

As earlier discussed in chapter four under sources of ambiguity, some of the well-known stylistic devices are linked to ambiguity. In other words they share some degree of relationship in their roots with ambiguity. Here below is a list of such stylistic devices and they will be discussed shortly:

- (i) Metaphor
- (ii) Irony
- (iii) Euphemism
- (iv) Personification
- (v) Hyperbole

### 5.2.2.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is transference of meaning based on the associated likeness between two objects, on the similarity of one feature common to two different entities, based on the possession of one common characteristic. Metaphor is an important vehicle for ambiguity.

Many scholars have considered the significance of metaphor as a stylistic device. Among them are Pei and Gaynor (1954), Bámgbóṣé (1974), Brook and Warren (1976), {lqb0d3 (1981), Fromkin and Rodman (1983), Olátúnjí(1984), Traugott and Pratt (1984) and {lqt1j5 (1991).

Pei and Gaynor (1954:135) define metaphor as figure of speech in which one word is employed for another. A method of description which likens one thing to another by referring to it as if it were the one. Bqmg9x3 (1974) opines that like the similes, metaphors are equally concrete and visual; Brook and Warren (1976:206) describe metaphors as any replacement of one thing, concept or person with any other. In the same vein, {lqb=d3 (1981:97), following Encyclopedia Britannica's definition, describes metaphor as a figure of speech which transfers to an object an attribute or a name which strictly and literally is not applicable to it but only figuratively and by analogy. {lqt5nj7 (1984:51) contends that, in a metaphor, an object, action or situation is described in a terminology proper to another. Traugott and Pratt (1984:117) say metaphor is traditionally considered characteristic of poetic diction.

According to Fromkin and Rodman (1983:71), some sentences are ambiguous because they or some of their words/lexemes 'have both a literal and a non-literal or metaphorical meaning'. (Fromkin and Rodman,183:71). The literal meaning is based on the normal semantic properties of the words in the sentence and the metaphorical meaning is based on semantic properties that are inferred. In the selected poetic texts, examples abound of ambiguity being used as a literary or stylistic device. The excerpt below from Ìṣòlá's poem titled 'Àbú Olódodo' illustrates the point:

31. (a) Orúkọ rere lèrè ayé (Ìṣòlá, 1978:7)  
 Kí baba ó kú  
 K'órúkọ rere ó máa bẹ  
 Òun l'Òjọ fi níyì.  
 Òun l'Òjọ fi ta ará ìyókù yọ gedegbe  
B7 a bq ê wo ir5 inq t7 Zb5 tzn  
 Tá a bá n woşé tí baba ti fowó şe  
 Işé òdodo tí ó jé gidi

*Good name is the benefits of the world  
 That the father is dead  
 And good name still exist  
 That was the reason for Òjọ's prestige.  
 That was the reason Òjọ stand out  
 If we considered the kind of children /work Zb5 left behind  
 If we considered all that the father laboured for  
 That were good works*

Semantically, the underlined sentence has nothing to do with fire, but with the work or the children Zb5 left behind after his demise. Without the knowledge of the Yoruba culture of comparison, one will not quite understand the relevance of the metaphor (**inq**) employed in the sentence. The ambiguous word in the text is *iná* (fire) which is a metaphor. In other words, *iná* (fire) metaphorically stands for *Àbú's* children and the great works of art that *Àbú* left behind. Metaphorically, these can be interpreted to mean that the fire (*iná*) which *Àbú* had ignited will be the torch bearer for the good legacies he left after his demise.

The same metaphor is evident in the poem below titled 'Ikú':

- (b) Wón a ní k'Ólúwa má mà jágbè ó fọ  
 À á ti şe tí a kíí fí í şì sọ  
 N7j- t7 lqđugb9 cni fọ tomitomi (Fálétí, 1982:53)

*They said oh God do not let the pot break/ evil befall us  
 How can we avoid talking rudely  
 The day one's pot breaks with water*

Literally the sentence means that someone's pot used in fetching water breaks, but the figurative meaning is the loss/death of one's pregnant wife with the foetus. Here, **ládugbó** metaphorically stands for the water fetching pot and a pregnant mother. While **tomitomi** (together with the water container) refers metaphorically to water and foetus respectively.

The interpretation for this is that both the pregnant mother and the unborn child (foetus) are both lost (a double loss that is pitiable).

Also in:

- (c) A n fójú dídàwó wòkùtù  
Igi gbígbe ò wó mó  
Igi tútù ní nówó (Ọlátúbòsún, 1975:93)

*We expected the dried tree to fall  
Dried trees refused to fall  
Fresh trees are falling*

The poet metaphorically refers to the rate at which the younger ones died as falling of fresh trees rather than the dried ones (old trees). He sees the elderly ones as the dry tree that are supposed to die and be succeeded by the fresh trees, that is the younger ones. This is where the metaphor lies, comparing the youths with fresh trees and old trees as old persons. In metaphor, the comparison is usually implicit. In the poem titled 'Bẹ Ẹ Dé Bodè Ẹ Ó Rojò', Rájí admonishes everyone to do good while alive and that whatever we do while alive will be recorded in heaven:

- (d) Ẹ jáwó nínú àpòn tí ò yò  
Ẹ lọ gbómi ilá kaná  
A n kígbe pé kẹ ẹ má so wèrèpè mó  
Ẹ lé ò ní gbó  
Gbogbo wèrèpè tẹ ẹ fèsín fidúnta şe  
Ò kúkú mówó wá. (Rájí, 2003:10)

*Abstain from unprofitable business  
And pursue a profitable one  
We keep warning you to desist from evil deed  
You refused the warning  
All the evil perpetrated last year and before  
Did'nt bring any profits*

Bad character is metaphorically used by the poet as 'wèrèpè', (*devil's bean*) that hurts when it touches someone in the bush. He advised those with such characters that hurt others to desist from such. In 'Ayé N Dayé Obinrin', Olúránkinşé talks about women taking over some men's responsibility and what will likely be the outcome should it continue like that:

- (e) Bí a bá ti yọ ọwọ kílànkó owó nínú odó,  
Tó tún le kojá ti obinrin lọ?  
À láyé n di tiwọn sé  
Ẹ tún n wí ohun miràn

*If we removed money issue from it  
That is greater than women's issue  
The world is changing to theirs  
You are saying another thing  
A person that encounters woman's war encounters devil's war*

Metaphorically, the poet refers to a troubled woman as devil

(f) Ojò Adqr5dur6du mbò wá 'lẹ̀ yí (Ọlábímtán, 1969:5)  
Mo maṣo t'ó mú bora  
Mo maṣo t'ó mú bora  
Ojò Adqr5dur6du mbò wá 'lẹ̀ yí  
Mo maṣo t'ó mú bora

Adqr5dur6du w'2w6 ẹ̀ha  
Gégé bi ti Ajíbóde  
Bii kékeré Àkàrà-Oògùn

*The day Adqr5dur6du arrived this town  
I knew the cloth he wore  
I knew the cloth he wore  
The day Adqr5dur6du arrived this town  
I knew the cloth he wore  
The Adqr5dur6du /white man wear-tight fitted cloth  
Like the hunter returning from hunting  
Like the youngest Àkàrà-Oògùn*

**Adqr5dur6du**  $\begin{cases} \text{a confusionist} \\ \text{a white man} \end{cases}$

Name of a person

In a literal sense, Adárúdurùdu as used in the poem is a person's name, but the poet metaphorically compares the white man who wears suits on a sunny day to a confusionist (Adárúdurùdu). In 'Àdáàkó Àjò', Àjànàkú use the poem talks about the bribe some police men collected from commercial drivers on the highway:

(g) Awakò lójú pópó  
E kú àmúmóra  
E kúu sùúrù  
Nítorí àjò àdáàkó  
Tẹ̀ẹ̀ n dá fáláso dúdú irònà  
Àjò tipátipá Ìgbà igba lẹ̀ẹ̀ dájò  
Fáláso dúdú (Àjànàkú, 2004:10)

*Drivers on the road  
I salute your patience*

*I laud your perseverance  
 For the uncollectible contributions  
 That you paid to the men in black uniform on the road  
 Compulsory contributions  
 The continuous contributions  
 For the men in black uniform*

- (i) *àjọ àdààkó* 
 ↗ *unpaid thrift*  
 ↘ *bribe*
- (ii) *aláṣọ dúdú* 
 ↗ *black-clothed*  
 ↘ *the corrupt policemen*

The compulsory bribe collected from the commercial drivers by Policemen on the road is metaphorically compare with unretrievable contribution and the poet euphemistically refers to the policemen as the men in black uniform. In all the above cases, the underlined words/expressions are ambiguous in certain ways and are loaded with both surface/denotative and metaphorical interpretations as earlier explained.

### 5.2.2.2 Irony

Irony has been a predominant stylistic device in Yor5bq poetry. Many scholars have looked at it from different perspectives. Among them are Ar9gb-fz (1978:51), who defines irony as a situation where words and sentences are so expressed to mean the exact opposite of their literal meaning. {lqt5nj7 (2005:56) opines that irony as a figure of speech involves saying one thing while intending another, which is incompatible with the overt meaning. {lqg0k4(2013:70) views irony as an implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. Fqk1yc(2014:13) suggests that irony is a term in which we desire more than what is said to know the real meaning.

Fowler, posits that:

Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one part that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both more and of the outsides incomprehension.<sup>2</sup>

In the words of DasyIva (2005:13), irony is a situation or a use of language involving some incongruity or discrepancy. Irony is a stylistic device in which the

contextual evaluative meaning of a word is directly opposite its dictionary meaning. The context is arranged so that the qualifying word in irony reverses the direction of the evaluation, and the word positively charged is understood as a negative qualification and vice versa. {lqt5nj7 (1982:93) in his analysis of poems of Ad3bqy- Fql3t7, contends that irony as a stylistic device provides the reader with a kind of ambiguity or multivalence which is aesthetically stimulating. Instances of irony are given in the extracts below: in the poem titled ‘WÀÍDÌ’, laments on the death of his youthful friend, that with all their efforts to see that the said friend lives failed as death took him away:

- 32 (a) Abúké-tèje-tèjo ònà Ìjèbú  
 Tó kólé mólé, tó ralè mólè  
 Jagun kólé tán, ó tún kan áásé  
 Abúké-tèje-tèjo-ònà Ìjèbú  
 \*gbz t9 o m= p3n5 8k0k0 y87 lo 9 s6n  
 Emi lo ní kólé ká bí eyè (Rájí, 2003:22)

*The rich hunchback man from Ìjèbú  
 The one that build many houses, and has plots of land  
 After building the house, he equipped it  
 The rich hunchback man from Ìjèbú  
 When you know it's inside this pot you will sleep  
 Why are you building houses like bird*

- (b) \$t4 0 n7 r8n wq n7h00h0 wøjà  
*Lips will not make us walk nakedly into the market;*

The underlined words above are clear cases of irony and provide a kind of ambiguity in the poetry. The Yorùbá do not believe in saying all they intend bluntly, they prefer the variant of the actual word meant. For instance, in 32(a), the poet employs a mild word for **p9s7** (coffin) and uses **8k0k0**(pot) when lamenting the death of his dead relative. While in (b)madness is ironically expressed as walking nakedly(**níhòòhò**). This is apparent as it is a mad person that can walk nakedly outside or to the marketplace. Olátúbòsún in ‘Odún Iléyá’, advise people to be careful as they embark on journey during the festive period:

- (c) Bórèé ayé bá ndà ó,  
 Òrè Qbalókè ni ò leè dà ‘mùlè  
 Wọn ò ní porogbó bọrí wa nínú odún Iléyá  
 Èran àgbò odúnìí  
 Kò ní dèran àkúfà èyàn (Olátúbòsún, 1975:170)

*If a friend is betraying you.  
 Only God as friend doesn't betray friendship  
 They shall not offer bitter cola as sacrifice for us this year  
 This year's ram*

*Shall not turn to human death.*

Traditionally, Yorùbá do not use bitter cola to offer sacrifice for **Ori**, when the poet prays that bitter cola shall not be broken to offer sacrifice for us, he ironically meant we shall not be used or killed for sacrificial purpose at the festive period.

Irony as a stylistic device in Yorùbá poetry not only adds aesthetic pleasure but also makes the reader to be an active participant by encoding the ironic words.

### 5.2.2.3 Euphemism

In the opinion of Allan and Barridge (1991:13), euphemism is ‘an expression that seeks to avoid being offensive’. Wardhough (1992:237) considers euphemism as ‘the result of dressing up certain areas in life to make them more presentable’. Euphemistic words and expressions allow us to talk about unpleasant things and neutralize the unpleasantness. According to {lqt5nj7(2005:57), euphemism is ‘an alternative roundabout mode of expression used in preference to a blunter, less delicate one’. Fqlad3 (2012:64) asserts that euphemism is a mild or indirect word or expression for one that is too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant. {lqg0k4 (2013:1) admits that euphemism is indirect reference to objects, situations and things. In his work on the poems of Ad3báy= Fql3t7, {lqt5nj7 (1982:94) says euphemism in Yorùbá poetry serves as a substitute for a blunter or more precise word and can be used to avoid socially undesirable words.

In Yorùbá poetic discourse, poets, in line with Yorùbá traditional norm, avoid the use of taboos by employing euphemism in their poetry to avoid direct sexual references and abusive words. Instances of euphemism are given below.

In the anthology of the poems, Adébísí talks about students protest in the campus and how policemen that are suppose to maintain peace shot at the protesting students killing some of them:

33. (a) Ìgbé à á fẹ́'wé , oko là á wá òkan ọ̀bẹ̀  
Ogun dé, ìjàngbón dé t'Ọ́lápáá  
Akékòò ò mò págbára jagbára lọ  
Olùkò ti sá wọ̀lé  
Ọ̀gá pátápátá tó yídó borí  
Aládúúgbò tilẹ̀kùn mórí gbọ̀n-in-gbọ̀-ingbọ̀-in  
Ọ́lópáá bá'kékòò fìjà pẹ̀ta  
Èdùmàrè nìkan ló sẹ̀kẹ̀ta wọ̀n  
Ó di pàààà, ìbọ̀n dún  
{l-pzq pcran, w[n 0 d5r9 gb3 e (Ọ́lábímtán, 2005:124 )

*Prevention is better, than cure  
 Here comes war, trouble is for the policemen  
 Students do not know that there are superior power  
 The teachers ran away  
 Head teacher had escaped  
 Everyone around locked themselves inside their houses  
 Policemen engaged the student in a fight  
 God is the only witness  
 There was pandemonium; sounds of gunshot  
 Policemen killed meat; they did not wait to carry it.*

(b) Akadq ti ê gb33g5n [j- ti p1  
*Students have been putting on the masquerade outfit it's been long*

Ọlábímtán in 'Kínla Ọgbàgbà', talks about being modest in the course of struggling for survival:

(c) Kínla ọgbàgbà  
 Kínla ọgbàgbà  
 O wọ lé-èwé o ò gbésé  
 O kéwú o kùnà  
 O f'abẹ t'ó mú bu'su je (Ọlábímtán, 1969:15)

*Incredible  
 Incredible  
 You gained admission, you didn't cheat/go into prostitution  
 You prayed but fail  
 You cut your yam with sharp knife*

In (a) above, the person shot dead by the policemen was euphemistically referred to as ẹran, and in (b), cheating among students during examinations is referred to as gbéégún, while in (c), the poet euphemistically referred to either cheating in the examination or getting involved in prostitution as gbésé

(d) Mo ra sányán,  
 Mo ra kíjipá lówó Abíódún  
 Ọré loun ò joyin,  
 Mo wólóyin lójà  
 Ọré loun ó jòsùpá, ọwó ò tókè  
 Ọré ibá gbewúré nílá,  
 À bá fun un léwúré nílá  
 Ọré ibá gbàgùtàn bọlòjò,  
 À bá f'àgbò fún un  
 Ọré ò gbowó, kò gbobi  
 Ìdòwú ògbo ló fẹ  
 E má pè mí mọ Ojú n ro mí (Rájí, 2003:21)

*I bought damask  
 I bought an expensive cloth from Abiódún  
 Friend demanded honey, I went searching for honey  
 Friend demanded for the moon, hands cannot get there  
 If friend had demanded for a big goat  
 We would have offered it  
 Friend would have demanded for a big sheep  
 We would have offered it  
 Friend rejected money, he rejected kolanut  
 It's Idowú it desires  
 Don't call me again I'm grieved*

The poet euphemistically refers to death as a friend whom he persuaded to take money or material thing as replacement for Idowu; his blossom friend that died but refused.

The use of **ikú** death as **òrẹ** friend above caused the ambiguity.

- (e) Èmi ti **d'Ádó** rí,  
 Mo si ti **d'Óndó** rí,  
 Mo ti wòlú Agbádó àimoye  
 Mo sún móba Òmùò Ọbádóore  
 Mo si mọwọ Ìgbàrà Òkè méjèèjì  
 Títí lọ delúu Ìgbàrà Odò  
 Bó o bá gbá Adó mú,  
 Lojú ogun abéelé,  
 Wọn a máa rúnjú:  
 Wọn a máa rúnmú

*I have been to Adó before,  
 I have been to Ondo as well  
 I have been to different Agbádó town  
 I am close to the king of Ọbádóore  
 And I know how to handle the two Ìgbàrà Òkè  
 As far as Ìgbàrà Odò  
 If you handle Adó  
 Under the room war,  
 They will be squeezing eyes:  
 They will be squeezing nose*

The excerpt above is more than questions about travelling, the elision of the vowels 'o' and 'e' in d'Ádó and d'Óndó and the contraction that follows caused the ambiguity and different interpretations of the verb phrases. Which are:

Dó + Adó - d'Ádó

Dé + Adó - d'Ádó

Dó + Óndó - d'Óndó

Dé + Ondó - d'Óndó

In actual fact, the interest of the poet is the similarity between the Yorùbá verb **dó** to have sex with the syllable **dó** in the name of the two towns under reference **Adó** and **Ondó**. Also, the poet euphemistically refers to parts of the woman as different towns he mentioned in the poem above, for instance, the two breasts are referred to as ‘Ìgbàrà Òkè’, while having sexual relationship is euphemistically referred to as ‘lójú ogun abéle’. In all the above, the poet is preoccupied with issues or matters that relate to sex and sexuality.

#### 5.2.2.4 Personification

Personification is a very significant stylistic device commonly used in Yorùbá poetry. Personification refers to the practice of attaching human traits and characteristics with inanimate objects, phenomena and animals. Cudden (1979:502) claims that personification is inherent in many languages with gender and it appears to vary in all literatures, especially in poetry. Nwachukwu (2002:171)<sup>3</sup> posits that personification is an extension of metaphor, especially as it involves non-human things with human attributes with the intention of making them vivid.

{lqt5nj7 (2005:49) asserts that personification is a device where non-human things are endowed with human feelings and attributes. Òjò (2013:134) defines personification as a stylistic device which gives concreteness and vividness to description in Yorùbá proverbs. Instances of personification in Yorùbá poetry are given below:

34.(a) Kqrzbx 9 t5nra m5, od0 ê gbqr4re l[

*The zrzbx tree/powerful ones should get prepared, the river is taking away the big trees/elders.*

‘Ìlú Le’, one the anthologies of the poems, Adébísí laments on the way some politician embezzled despite the austerity in the country:

(b) Ohun tó pamó, ojú Oba Òkè ló tó o  
Owo n bẹ níbi owó wà sá  
Owo epo n bẹ ní báníkì ilú òkèèrè,  
**Ow9 omọ il2 y87 yarọ s7n5 báníkì Òyìnbó.** (Ọlabímtán, 2005:127)

*Whatever is hidden, is open before God  
There is money somewhere  
Crude money is in foreign banks  
Public funds meant for Nigerians have all disappeared into foreign bank accounts*

To mean:

- (i) Most of Nigeria's money were laundered to the foreign banks
- (ii) That Nigeria's money embezzled to the foreign banks by some individuals were not useful for our economy.

The poet personify money as human that has the tendency of being paralysed  
Ọlábímtán in 'Otító pèlú Èkè', use the poem to admonish people to always be truthful  
in all they do that even though liars thrive, they should not let that hinder them from  
being truthful

- (c) Ntorí bí òwè bí òwè  
L'a ñlù ilù ògídìgbó  
Ọlọgbón l'ó ñjọ o  
Omòràn ní í mò ó  
**Òtító dọjà ó kùtá**  
**Owólówọ l'a nrèk'è** (Ọlábímtán, 1969:16)

*It is like proverb*  
*Ògídìgbó drum sounds*  
*Only the wise can dance to it*  
*Only the wise can decode it*  
*Truth gets to the market, it was rejected*

In the poem 'ti-nyín l'ójù, ọlábímtán use the story of elephant and tortoise to talk  
about voting of bad and ineffective leaders to positions of authority

- (d) Gbogbo igbó péjọ wón fèrin sọgá (Ọlábímtán, 1969:37)  
Nwón fí Kìniún s'ọba  
Jàntà inú ìgbè kò bínú àjànàkú  
Ó ní 'àf'erin, àf'erin, àf'Èdùmàrè

*All bushes gathered, they installed elephant as leader.*  
*They made tiger their their king*  
*None of the animals were against the Elephant*  
*They say it's only the Elephant, only the Elephant*

The examples above are instances of attributing human characteristics to non-human. In  
34(a), The Zrzbztree is portrayed as human who should get prepared for a looming  
danger, and Ar4re (a tree) is also described as human whom the river sets to take away. In  
34(b), it is only humans who have the tendency of being paralysed, but here, the poet  
personifies money wasting in the foreign banks as human who is paralysed. In 34 (c),  
truth is equally personified as a human who has legs to walk from one place to  
another; but ironically, on getting to the market, no one is ready to buy it. In 34(d),

bushes were given human attribute of electing a leader, the elephant. Such attributes are not part of the characteristics of non-humans. The poet uses personification to make the poem stylistically elegant and to portray realism.

### 5.3.5 Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a stylistic device employed in poetry, using specific words and phrases to exaggerate and over emphasize the basic crux of the statement to create a grander and more noticeable effect. Often, hyperbole makes use of metaphor and simile to showcase the effect of exaggeration. {lqt5nj7 (2005:55) defines hyperbole as exaggerated description, the attribution to people or things of values or qualities far beyond the state of things.

Hyperbole is often found in poetry. It is used by poets to make comparison and describe things in more embellish term. Examples of hyperbolic statements in poetry are given below. In the poem ‘Àşejù’, Fálétí talks on going the extra miles in whatever we do so that we can have more than enough:

35.(a) Ohun t7 44yzn bq ê xe n7l3 qy3  
 C j1 q f'zxej6 kun  
 W-n s[ p3 zxej6 0 da  
 C j1 q fzxej6 kun  
 K9 l4 t9nijc (Fálétí, 1982:73 )

*What a man does in this life  
 Let him do it in excess  
 People say doing things excessively is not good  
 Let us do whatever we do excessively  
 So that it may be enough to sustain us.*

In example above(i), the poet uses the poem to create a longer-than-life effect and overly stresses a specific point in the exaggerated poem, that, if we want to achieve success and positive result in whatever we do, there is need to go excessive.

(b) Gbogbo 8l5 nqz l9 kqr7 (Olábímtán, 1969:37)

The sentence (b) is hyperbolic, as it is impossible for someone to visit each person/house in a town, even when sharing something (if that is the case); it may not go around each person in the town. It is only an exaggerated sentence just to describe the number of houses the item gets to.

*It went around everyone in the town  
 He visited everyone in the town*

(c) b6r9 mi, j1 q j[ l0S'ql6j-nz p= (Ọlatúbòsún, 2002:12)

*My love, let us go to heaven together*

In example(c) above, my love, let us go to heaven together is an over statement; such a sentence usually conveys an action or sentiment that is generally not realistically possible but only emphasizes the emotion of the poet. Going to heaven of the two lovers, signifies an end to the relationship or love life.

(d) Aya t9 bq moj5 cni  
A 14 y[j5 fun jc

*A wife who cares about us  
We can pluck our eyes for her*

The sentence in (d) is an exaggerated way of appreciating the efforts of a dutiful wife by her husband who feels impressed by the wife's commitment. It is impossible for the man to remove his eyes just because he wants to appreciate his wife's dutifulness. The exaggerated/hyperbolic sentence is employed to express the idea that he can do anything to appreciate the wife.

Fálétí in the poem titled 'Dídáké Akewì', talks about the perspectives of how poets view life which sometimes is different from the way others view it:

(e) Omi ti ko jàgbè lójú  
Ó le dénú akéwì kó dòkun,  
Ó le dénú akéwì kó dọsà,  
Èfùùfù tò sì n mòkun mọsà,  
Ó le dénú akéwì,  
Kó má jooru lọ

In5 ak3w8 gb'isc.

In5 ak3w8 gb'43w5.

In5 ak3w8 s8 gb'omi t9 m- gara (Fálétí, 1982:1)

*The water that means nothing to the farmer  
May be like a river in mind of the poet  
May be like lagoon in the mind of the poet  
The breeze blowing the the river and lagoon  
May gets to the poet's mind  
And be like steam  
The mind of the poet accommodates dregs (of palm wine)  
The mind of the poet accommodate water that has particles in it,  
The mind of the poet accommodates water that is clear.*

The underlined sentences above (e), are clear over-statement, as the poet's mind is neither a pot nor a well that can accommodate dregs, clean and unclean water. The poet

just expresses how accommodating he can be with people of different shades of characters.

In the poem titled ‘Alágbára-Ilé áti Alágbára-Oko’, Fálétí talks about how powerful and mighty Alágbára Oko can be when Alágbára Ilé wanted to challenge him but seeing the wife cracking palm kernel on her kneel, he could not but admits to the superiority Alágbára Oko’s:

(f)\*yzw0 Alqgbqra oko pzpq f2h8n t8  
( na oj5gun s8l2 9 êpa ‘k6r-  
E3san s8 êf0 l[ l9d8l1s=  
B7 9ti êfi [m[ [l[ lu oj5gun (Fálétí, 1982:45)

*Even Alagbarara- oko’s wife rested her back against something  
She stretched out her kneel, and was cracking palm nuts,  
The shells were flying to the right and to the left  
As she struck her kneel with the stone.*

Lastly, in(f), the whole extract is an exaggerated way of describing how powerful and fearful Alqgbqra oko and his wife can be; hence, whoever wants to challenge them must be an extraordinary man.

In all, hyperbole as a stylistic device is employed to add more depth, interest and aesthetic effects to the poems.

### 5.3 Summary

In this chapter, ambiguity in routine communication and the different functions it performs such as aesthetics, elegance, and comic effects have been discussed. We also discussed ambiguity as a foregrounding device and the stylistic functions it performs in Yorùbá poetry. Similarly, stylistic devices such as metaphor, euphemism, irony, hyperbole and personification have been established to have a link with ambiguity in their roots and also noted for their stylistic functions.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. The programme was held in Ondo State Rediovision Corporation on the 14th April 2017
2. Olágòkè (2013) “Euphemism in Yorùbá Poetic Genres”
3. Cited in Òjò, (2013) “A Stylistic Analysis of Proverb in Selected Yorùbá written literature”.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The main thrust of this thesis is the application of linguistic frameworks to ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse, with a view to describing the types and sources of ambiguity, their communicative potential and stylistic relevance. This chapter is a summary of the findings of this study as they relate to the stated aim and objectives. It also focuses on the conclusion and recommendations. Finally, the contributions of the present study to the body of knowledge will be discussed.

#### **6.1 Summary**

This study looked at linguistic ambiguity in Yoruba poetic discourse using sixteen texts from the works of eleven poets. The criterion employed for the selection of the texts was that they have sufficient occurrence of ambiguity. The first chapter presents the general introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study. The significance, the scope of the study and ambiguity as a conceptual framework were discussed. It ended with the discussion of literature and ambiguity. Chapter Two of the study contains the review of relevant literature and the theoretical framework. The study was anchored on Chomskyan Government and Binding theory complemented with Hjelmslev's Componential analysis. These theories explain how the competence of a native speaker of a language enables such speaker to produce an infinite number of sentences from a finite set of rules such that sentences generated are not only grammatical but also meaningful. It also explains ambiguities in words or sentences that appear identical but are transforms from different structures.

Chapter Three elucidated the research design, sampling technique and the methodology adopted in this study. Chapter Four discussed the six types of ambiguities identified and analyzed it as stylistic device in Yoruba poetry. The sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry were also discussed. In chapter Five, we examined ambiguity as stylistics and literary device as people are said to be ambiguous in how they use language in routine communication consciously or unconsciously. Finally, chapter Six which is the final chapter, summarizes research, presents conclusion as well as contribution to knowledge and suggestions for further research.

## 6.2 Findings

The study found six types of ambiguity in the selected texts used for the analysis namely; lexical ambiguity, morph-phonological ambiguity, structural ambiguity, scope ambiguity, pragmatic ambiguity and pun as ambiguity. We also found out that ambiguity expresses two types of meanings, that is, denotative or surface meaning and connotative, metaphoric, idiomatic interpretations. Another important finding is that the poet, when faced with choosing words, the poet may then try his best to choose the ones that best suit his purpose. This trait gives the poet a certain advantage. 'Practically speaking, the wide area of meaning attached to most words is an advantage, for if we had to have a different word for every possible meaning, we would need tremendous vocabularies, and no one word in them would be used very often' (Korg, 1960:33). What then to note is that the significance of a word depends on its environment.

The theory adopted found out how complex sentences are generated and how they are related to simple sentences. Application of Government and Binding TGG makes it explicit that the derived structures of a sentence, that is the surface structure, is transformed according to transformational rules, from the deep structure. The theory helps in resolving ambiguity. Linguistic performance helps the poet to bring out such poetic effect as ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry as the poets use few words to generate many meanings and interpretations. The application of Government and Binding model of Transformational Generative Grammar showed that there exists an interrelationship between the linguistics and literature. That there is a fruitful working relationship between the two disciplines. The linguist working on literature has something to benefit from literary studies just the way knowledge of linguistics is very useful not only to the literary critic or stylistician, but also to the literary scholar.

Studying ambiguity and how we resolve it can give us insight into both thought and interpretation. Although ambiguity is treated as a hurdle in communication, it contributes to aesthetics in poetry. As observed, poets deliberately make their poetry capable of giving more interpretations or meanings and this appears to be one of the primary functions of ambiguity in literature. Oftentimes, the poet takes the denotations of the words he uses for granted and concentrates on exploiting their connotative qualities for artistic and aesthetic effects. Sometimes, they used ambiguity to be ironic, sarcastic, humorous, satiric or contemptuous. One outstanding characteristic of a true

poet is that he uses words which do far more work than could have been done by any ordinary words. In poetry, every word contributes something to the whole.

The study also found out that ambiguity can be derived in Yorubá poetry through idiomatization, metaphor, homonyms, range of word's meaning and irony. Since irony and metaphor are not always transparent and their meanings are sometimes ambiguous, the basic characteristic of idiomatic expression is that the word is used metaphorically. Therefore, the surface structures usually have more than one underlying structure.

The study found that ambiguity is a stylistic device used consciously or unconsciously to achieve such stylistic and communicative goals as humour, sarcasm, entertainment and communicative goals. Since poetry relies on ambiguity for artistic effect, the intended effect the poet wants to convey in a certain situation can be enriched or strengthened when ironically expressed. That through ambiguity and other stylistic devices such as metaphors, simile, irony, euphemism, personification and hyperbole, which enrich the work of art can be generated. The various types of ambiguity in poetry perform different functions, including comic effect, stylistic elegance and communicative effects. It also shows creativity on the part of the author or poet as few words are used in conveying many words. Though ambiguity like any other type of literary language has the tendency of pushing communication to the background, it however, contributes to esthetic and poetic elegance. The work revealed that ambiguity is a powerful tool in poetry.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Even though linguistics has its limitations in literary analysis and interpretation, we have concluded that linguistics contributes to literary analysis, especially at the level of grammar. In the work, Poetry is defined as a method of expressing thoughts and ideas in choice language, was analysed to stylistically reflect or mirror the society which it belongs to. One of the distinguishing factors that characterize the language of poetry from other genres of literature is its connotative power of words. Poetry works at the limit of knowledge, seeking to express the inexpressible. To the poet, two things are paramount, namely message and entertainment. In expressing their thoughts, ideas and imaginations, poets sometimes deliberately make their poetry capable of giving more than one interpretation or meaning.

The poet employs imagery, rhythm and sound in expressing his ideas and thoughts (Egudu, 1977). As Korg (1960) puts it, "One of the distinguishing characteristics of poetry is its use of the connotative powers of words". On the appreciation of poetry, Gurrey (1968) says it appears that the essential equipment for appreciating poetry is the awareness of words.

The study has made it clear that ambiguity as a poetic vehicle is one important feature of human cognitive understanding and interpretative abilities. And conversations in routine communication dictate clarity and transparency, but ambiguity is still very common in routine communication. Therefore, the use of ambiguous expressions may not be wholly eliminated in language as language cannot exist without ambiguity. However, it must be reduced to the barest minimum in communication to avoid confusion and misunderstanding.

As Yorùbá is a tonal language, unpunctuated sentences and careless tone mark could obstruct communication in the language. Therefore, it is recommended that when poetry is written, poet should endeavour to go through over and over to avoid misconceptions.

Finally, this study is an eye opener on ambiguity in Yorùbá poetic discourse. Therefore, there is need for other scholars or students of literature to carry out more research on the topic.

#### **6.4 Contributions to knowledge**

This study is a major contribution to the existing discourse on the role of linguistics in literary studies and affirms the submission of earlier scholars that linguistics can play significant role in literary analysis and discussion. In essence, it established a plausible connection between literature and linguistics, arguing that the two disciplines have something to benefit from each other. This research asserts that the knowledge of linguistics is relevant to literature as it is capable of resolving ambiguity said to be an adverse term wherein words or phrases are used in such a way that alternative meanings are possible and intended meaning may be obscured; Cox and Dyson (1965: 176).

The study has well established that ambiguity is not only a feature of poetry, but also found in the language of everyday discourse. In other words, ambiguity plays significant roles in both routine and literary communication. It also established the fact that ambiguity is not only a universal phenomenon but also a veritable stylistic device

through which humour, entertainment, comic, satirical and other stylistic devices are achieved in literature, poetry especially.

The study also found out that ambiguity is a useful tool in the hand of politicians and administrators who employ it to hoodwink and sway people to their side. Politicians are known for their double speak, during campaigns, political meetings and addresses and so, ambiguity thus becomes a ready and useful tool for them. It is also a useful tool in the hands of administrators as well for dousing tension and anger especially during workers strike or protest, only for the workers to discover later that they are just being deceived because such an ambiguous statements can thereafter be denied.

Lastly, the study demonstrates creativity and originality on the part of the poets in using few words to create various meanings for enriching the expressive power of language to communicate or convey many ideas and information.

#### **6.5 Suggestion for Further Studies**

Following the footsteps of scholars like Bamgboṣe (1968), Owolabi (1992), Olateju (1998) and others who investigated the role of linguistics in literary criticism, this study is a continuation of their contributions to the role of linguistics in literary appreciation or criticism. However the work critically examined linguistic ambiguity in Yoruba poetry or poetic discourse, it is by no means exhaustive. More investigations into the role of ambiguity in poems not included in this study may be carried out by interested researchers while ambiguity in other genres of Yoruba literature such as drama and prose narratives should also be increased.

It is hoped that this research adds to works that creates interest in other scholars on the role of linguistics in literary discourse interpretation.

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