

Ambiguity: Its Derivational Sources in Yoruba Poetry

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ABSTRACT:

Ambiguity occurs when a word, phrase, or sentence is open to more than one interpretation. Language cannot exist without ambiguity as it is an inherent property of every natural language. As a literary feature, ambiguity appears to be more pronounced in poetry than in any other literary genre. This paper therefore investigates the sources of ambiguity in Yoruba poetry and further examines its derivational source as deployed by Yoruba poets. Fourteen texts from the works of nine poets were purposively sampled based on the sufficiency of ambiguity. They are Fálétí's *Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí apá kíní àti kejì*; Afólábí Olábímtán's *Àádóta Àròfò, Ewì Oríshírísi*; Àtárí Àjànàkú's *Orin Ewúro*; Akinwùmí Iṣòlá's *Àfàimò àti àwọn àròfò míràn*; Débò Awé's *Èkún Elédùmarè*; Olátúbòsún Oládàpò's *Àròyè Akéwì Apá kíní àti kejì, Èmí Ìn Mì Èmí Rẹ*; Olúránkínṣé Olánipèkun's *Ìjì Ayé*; Ṣayò Àlàgbé's *Ìjálá Ògúndáre Fóyánmu*, and Wándé Abímbólá's *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ènu Ifá Apá kíní àti kejì*. Data were subjected to syntactic and content analyses. Sources of ambiguity identified are Idiomaticization, Metaphor, Homonym, Polysemy, A range of word's meaning, Punctuation, and Irony. This paper also posits that in Yoruba poetry, ambiguity is derived largely from idiomaticization, metaphor and irony.

Keywords: Ambiguity, Yoruba poetry, idiom, metaphor, irony, literary feature

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I. Introduction

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. Poetry is one of the three genres of Yorùbá literature, that is, prose, poetry and drama. 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. Ambiguity as a literary feature appears to be more pronounced in poetry than in any other literary genre. Hence, in this paper, our intention is to investigate the sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry and its derivational source as deployed by Yorùbá poets.

II. Derivational sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry

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. Sources of ambiguity may be difficult to locate though people are said to be ambiguous sometimes in how they use language. Cann (1993:8) 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:

- (ai) Ènikéni kó máṣe *yà* wón
No one should separate them

- (a) Enikéni kó máṣe **yà** wón
No one should take their photograph

From the foregoing, ambiguity can be achieved through the following:

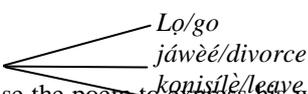
- (1) Idiomaticization
- (2) Metaphor
- (3) Homonyms
- (4) Polysemy
- (5) A range of word's meanings
- (6) Punctuation
- (7) Irony

1. Idiomaticization

Idioms are a fascinating phenomenon in language and the interest in them has a long tradition (Cacciari and Tablossi 1993). 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.

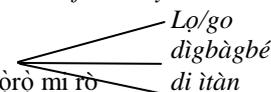
Idioms are established, accepted and used by native speakers of a language with a fixed structure and meaning. One of the difficulties that may face poets during the poetic process is the variety of meanings a word, phrase and sentence may have. Poets, in trying to be economic with words, choose the 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:

1. (a) Èni tó fẹ̀ ọkọ
 Èni tó fẹ̀ aya
 Láti inú abàa Fòtèdó
 Ọ̀tẹ̀ ni yóò fi kó délèè rẹ̀
 Ọ̀tẹ̀ ni yóò fi **kèrù sòkò**
 Ìyàwó táá fò igànná fẹ̀ (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 'Nūkan ti N Sọ 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) Ọ̀lájú n wọlé dé
 Ìwà rere n **kèrù sòkò**
 Fínnífínní n kógbá silé
 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 mí rò
 Ṣe 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).

2. Atérígbadé, Ọba tó ju Ọba lọ
Àgbà oyè t'ó f' àgbà mèrindínlógún dúró
T'ó f' ọ̀rúnmilà ẹ̀ ẹ̀ itèsẹ̀ oyè (Ọlábímtán, 1969:12)
Atérígbadé, a king who is superior to other kings
His Royal Highness that makes sixteen chiefs standing/surety
That makes Ọrúnmilà the supporting chief

The verb **Dúró** is an idiomatic expression 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. **Dúró** in the excerpt could also be interpreted as:

- (i) In a standing position
(ii) Used as surety
3. Ojú mi là lóní, mo tẹ
Nwọn gbé díjí sí mi níwájú
Mo wá rí'ra mi gedegbe (Ọlábímtán, 1969:52)
My eyes were opened today, I was disgraced
They brought before me a mirror
I saw myself clearly

The underlined phrase, **ojú mi là**, is an idiomatic expression which may mean:

- (i) - *Opened* (a literal meaning)
(ii) - *Exposed* (a connotative meaning)

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.

2. Metaphor

Metaphor also can be an important derivation/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.

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. 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 (Kaufman, 1981).

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:

4. (a) Mo rántí ikú àwọn ọ̀dọ
Mo rántí ọ̀jọ́ t́nà ọ̀mọ́ jómọ́ tó jábiyámọ́
Béniyàn ó sòfò ọ̀gùrọ́
Wọ́n a ní k'Ólúwa ó má jágbè ó fọ́
À á ti ẹ̀ t́ a kíí fí s̀ì sọ́
Níjọ́ t́ ládugbó eni fọ́ tomitomi
Ìkàyà bí ọ̀jọ́ ikú àbíkú àgbà (Fálétí, 1982:53)

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
When ones pot breaks with water
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 ‘Ìjámhá Odò Qbà’, where Fálétí laments on the motor accident that happened in Odò Qbà (Qbà river) that claimed lives of many youth:

5. Níjọ tẹrù Ògún tí nì bà mí, kò ẹ̀ẹ̀ ní
Níjọ tó **palábéré**, tó **fabéré** jóná
Tó **pelele**, tó **fẹlẹ** ya gberengeḡe bí aṣọ
Tó yàkísà tó fi dí ìdí àdán (Fálétí, 1982:1)
*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 ‘**Alábéré**’ figuratively to mean a man and, **abéré**, his manhood; while **ẹlẹlẹ** and **ẹlẹ** refer to woman and vagina respectively.

6. Mo fẹ fojú ìkà hàn
Kẹẹ le màwọn **lékèlékèè èyàn**
Kẹ le mohun wón ẹ ńíkòkò (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 metaphorical expression underlined above can be interpreted to mean:

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

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

ní + èké + ní èké = **lékèlékèè**
in hypocrisy + in hypocrisy = In falsehood

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.

7. Arógunmátídi, ọkọ Ìdòwú
Adék’áyà-ó-já **omo awo** (Olábímtán, 1977:61)
*The one who is not afraid of war, Idòwú’s husband
The one whose presence frightens other, an initiate/ocultic*

The underlined metaphorical phrase above can be interpreted thus:

- (i) **Omo tí awo bí** – a child of an initiate
- (ii) **Omodé tí ó jé awo** – a young initiate
- (iii) **Omo tí ó ń 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 **omo awo** (a young initiate).

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).

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, Fromkin and Rodman (1993) see 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. If two ‘words’ differ in pronunciation but have the same meaning, such as **Ọ̀jọ̀gbọ̀n** (learned) and **Ọ̀mọ̀wé** (educated), they are different words. Likewise, two ‘words’ with identical pronunciation but significantly different meanings, such as **ọ̀lọ̀rọ̀** (wealthy man) and **ọ̀lọ̀rọ̀** (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 the poem, ‘È òlẹ̀ ò’bẹ̀un, **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:

8 *Ajífọ̀wọ̀lẹ̀rán ní ẹ̀ fí mí sí bí ẹ̀ ti bá mí*
 Ó ro ’wájú ọ̀rọ̀, ó fọ̀wọ̀lẹ̀rán
 *Ajígbo ro ẹ̀yìn ọ̀rọ̀, ó **fẹ̀hìntì***
 Àsá wá dorikodò, ó ò wòşe ẹ̀yẹ (Ọ̀lábímtán, 1969:53)

Ajífọ̀wọ̀lẹ̀rán says live me where you met me
He forsees the outcome of it, he was looking
Ajígbo looked back, he relaxed/retired

The Eagle bowed its head, observing the activities of the Birds

The homonymous word in the example(1a) 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:

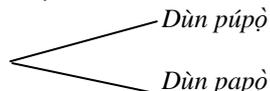
9. *Wọ̀n kàwè nítòótó*
 Wọ̀n ò kàn lákàwé ní;
 *Rẹ̀kórí tó **dùn** wọ̀n*
 Ló jẹ́ kí wọ̀n ó pòfo rẹ̀kọ̀nà (Àtàrí Àjànàkú, 1998:16)

Truly they were educated
But they don't have sense
Their lack of record keeping
Makes them lose count

In the poem ‘Gòkè Àjàdí Nílẹ̀ Àbẹ̀ní Mọ̀tẹ̀lẹ̀’, **Ọ̀látúbòsún** use the poem to talk on how Gòkè desires to have his lover Àbẹ̀ní even when they haven’t make their relationship legal and Àbẹ̀ní’s reluctancy to the proposal:

10. *Bórí wa bá pé tán,*
 Ká jọ́ máa ránbi aşo gbé ya
 *Ífẹ́ **dùn** pọ́*
 Níbi ẹ̀ni méjì bá gbé wèrè pọ́ (Ọ̀látúbòsún, 1977:54)

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

Ìfẹ̀ dùn pọ̀ 

The homonymous word in the two poems above (9) and (10) is 'dùn'. In (9), it means lack, while in (10), 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. 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. 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 Ìlára', 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) Šé mo ti sọ fún ọ kí o kúrò l'èhìn ọkà
 O wá ñronú nígbà kò jẹ k'ò j'ákùkọ
 Bí ẹ bá gb'orí fún mi
 Wéréwéré l'ò ó jẹ àkùkọ
 Wàràwàrà l'ò jòbẹ t'ò dùn (Olábímtán 1969:32)

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 nǐjọ tí èèyàn tíí kú
 Ta ni wọn gé orí rẹ̀ẹ̀ 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.
 Bi mo bá bímọ láyé,
 Ire gbogbo tí mo bá rí láyé
 Orí ni n ó rò fún;
 Orí mi ìwọ ni,
 Orí pẹ̀lẹ̀ Àtètè níran
 Àtètè gbe ni kòòsà
 Kò sòòsà tíí danigbè
 Léyin 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 'Ọyèkú 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 gbìràmu ñlè
Ikú té **orí** apá
Apá gbìràmu ñlè
Ikú té **orí** ooro
Ooro gbìràmu ñlè (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 11(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** literarily 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.

5. A 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 'Ọba Ọmọwónúọlá Oyèyọdè Oyèsọsin Eléjìgbò Ti Èjìgbò', use the poem to praise the king's peaceful reign and his personality:

12. Akin ñlè akin lóko, elénpe iwágún,
Ó wágún fèrú Ó wágún fómo
O kó ogun sí àpò jinwinni (Àlàgbé, 2006:18)
*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 were shared for both the slaves and the children. Also in:

13. Ọlọjó dákun má jé ó pé;
Ko tún wá jọba
Àwọn baba iyá mi ó fowó tí ó
Ọgègè bí baba ọmọ tí fowó ọmọ (Àlàgbé, 2006:19)

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.

7. Irony

Many scholars have defined irony. Among them is Holman (1980 in Falade, 2012) 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. Olátúnjí (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 Ọ̀jògbòn Ọ̀lášùpò Ọ̀jédòkun', laments on the death of the referrent and how he struggled so hard to be educated and died when he was supposed to reap all his sweat:

17. Ọ̀kọ̀ Olú gbégbá orókè nígbà igba
 Baba Fọ̀lášadé **ò fesèko rí**
 Tó fí dọ̀ba l'égbè afọ̀gbòn-jeun (Ìṣòlá, 1978:11)
Olú's husband was outstanding on several occasions
Fọ̀lášadé's father has never hit his legs on ground
Until he became a king among the elites

In example 17 above, rather than the poet saying Fọ̀lášadé'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 Ọ̀gbà Ayò', Ọ̀látúbòsún uses the poem to express love advancement between two lovers:

18. Bá à kọ̀ yààrà ílá
 Ìfẹ̀ ẹ̀ yàrà bò wá
 Kóşùpá ifẹ̀ ó máa ràn lódòdò wa
Ká dána ifẹ̀
 Ká wá kòkò ifẹ̀ síbí
 Ká díra wa mú pé (Ọ̀látúbòsún, 1977:9)
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 18, the poet is being economical with words by ironically saying 'ká dána ifẹ̀', rather than saying let us be in a relationship. \

Ìṣòlá in 'Ikú Ọ̀jògbòn Ọ̀lášùpò Ọ̀jédòkun', laments on the death of the referrent and how he struggled so hard to be educated and died when he was supposed to reap all his sweat:

19. Àní Ọ̀lášùpò Àrẹ̀mú omo Ọ̀jédòkun
 Tó ẹ̀bí idán tó **yo** nínú egbè wa
 Tó gbònà ẹ̀bùrú, ó yoni sílẹ̀ láitọ̀jọ (Ìṣòlá, 1978:11)

*I say Oláşùpò Àrèmú son of Òjédòkun
Who like magic left our club
Who stealthily, leaves us prematurely*

Also in 19 above, the poet did not want to say that Oláşùpò Àrèmú died prematurely among the members of the club but ironically says he left like magic.

Olátúbòsùn 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:

20. A ti fira wa lògbòlògbò
A ti dara wa nídàkudà tán
A ẹ̀ bẹ̀ kúkú lòdún púpọ̀ lẹ̀hìn 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 bẹ̀ tó bàjẹ̀
Gbogbo aşıwájú orílẹ̀ èdè yí
Yòò dorí ẹ̀yin nikan
We have troubled ourselves so much

(Olátúbòsùn, 1977: 64)

*We have inconvenient 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 20 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.

Ìşòlá in the poem 'Òyinyin', advised youths mostly girls on the need to live a decent life to avoid giving birth to a fatherless child in the future:

21. Bóyinyin bá relé ẹ̀yẹ
Wuruwuru a jẹgi
B'ó tún relé eku
Èlẹwírí a tún koná
Kò tójó, kò tósù
Kirindin gbanú òyinyin
Èèmò lukutu pẹbẹ
Oyún la rí ọkọ dà?
*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?*

(Ìşòlá, 1978:42)

In 21, 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. 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.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to investigate the sources of ambiguity in Yorùbá poetry as deployed by Yorùbá poets. It is observed that ambiguity can be derived in Yorùbá 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.

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