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Elements of Synecdoche in Hausa

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Abstract:

This paper examines elements of synecdoche in Hausa. Synecdoche is a literary device by which a part is put for the whole (as fifty sails for fifty ships), the whole for a part (as society for high society) or the name of the material for the thing made (as boards for stage). The method used in generating data for this study are observation and interview. At the level of observation, participant and non-participant approaches were employed. At the interview level, some Hausa native speakers, representing diverse individuals were randomly selected and interviewed. The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis is the Speech Act Theory as profounded by Austin (1962) and advocated by Searle (1979) and Adebija (1982) among others. Findings show that Hausa synecdoche that relate to the container for the contained are mostly vague. This is because, it is often difficult for a person to pinpoint the actual item that is contained in a container as in the Hausa sentence, Maryam ta sha kofi biyu, meaning, Maryam drank two cups. In this regard, the content of what Maryam drank could be water, tea, milk, gruel, etc. The lack of specification of what has been taken makes the action vague. Furthermore, the paper finds out that synecdoche is often used as a kind of personification by assigning human attribute to a non-human, as exemplified in the sentence, ya fa]a mugun hannu, meaning, he has fallen into wicked hand. Hannu (hand) which stands for wicked person is, thus personified by assigning human attribute to it.

Keywords: *Synecdoche, trope, metonymy, macrocosmic, microcosmic, hausa*

1. Introduction

Synecdoche is a rhetorical trope, thus, a type of figure of speech in which a part of something represents the whole or it may use a whole to represent a part. The term which originates from Greek, literally means *Simultaneous understanding*. Nordquist (2006:1) defines synecdoche as:

→ A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole (for example ABCs for the alphabet or the whole for a part) and it can be defined as a word or a phrase in which a part of something is used to represent a part of something. As in the Example, Australia lost by two goals.

Synecdoche may also use larger groups to refer to smaller groups or vice versa. It may also call a thing by the name of the material it is made of or it may refer to a thing in a container or packing by the name of that container or packing. Writers often use synecdoche in order to create realistic dialogue for their characters that sound more natural and realistic. Not only that, the literary device is often use in casual language as exemplified in the following sentence, *Maryam saved up eight hundred thousand Naira to purchase some new wheels*. In this case, Maryam did not literally buy only wheels for ₦800,000; what she actually bought was a whole car. However, people often use part of the car (which are the wheels) to stand in for the whole thing, the word car. This is an example of Synecdoche.

2. Synecdoche vs Metonymy

Synecdoche is often misidentified as metonymy, another literary device. While Brook (1958:178) maintains that Synecdoche is a device by which the name of the part is used to denote the name of the whole or vice versa, Almajir (2013) perceives the figure as a subclass of metonymy. In an article entitled, *shortening conceptual Distance: A case of Hausa Metonymies*, Almajir identifies with cognitive linguists like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Langacker (1991) in maintaining that synecdoche is a subclass of metonymy and not a separate entity. Hornby (2015) shares a similar view when he contends that metonymy is the act of referring to something by the name of something else that is closely connected with it. He exemplifies this using *the white House for the US President*. Some scholars have even gone beyond this postulation. Larson (1984) for instance, believes that a metonymy is in some ways like euphemism, considering the use of the word *tongue for language*.

It is indeed, easy to confuse synecdoche and metonymy because they both use a word or phrase to represent something else. They could also both be considered metaphors because the word or words used are not taken literally. Both may resemble each other to some extent, but they are not the same. A Synecdoche refers to the whole of a thing by the name of any one of its parts. For example, calling a car *wheels* stands for the whole car. However, in metonymy, the word we use to describe another thing is closely linked to

that particular thing, but is not necessarily a part of it. For example, *crown* that refers to power or authority is a metonymy used to replace the word *King* or *Queen*. Another example of metonymy is the phrase *The pen is mightier than the sword*. The word *pen* substitutes for written work, and the *sword* substitutes for violence or warfare.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis of this work is the speech act theory profounded by Austin (1962). Advocators of this theory include Sadock (1974), Searle (1979) and Adegbija (1982).

This theory is based on the study of utterances that serve as an action. If a husband tells his wife “you are the apples of my eyes”, the locutionary act means that the man has apples in his eyes. The illocutionary act is that the wife is so dear to the husband. The excitement and the closeness demonstrated by the wife to her husband on hearing the positive remark constitute the perlocutionary act. Thus, the locutionary act is the literal meaning of what is being said. The illocutionary act/force takes what is being said and expresses the literal meaning and action. The perlocutionary act is how the receiver is affected by the utterances.

The pertinence of the speech act theory lies in the figurative nature of synecdoche, where meaning of expressions goes beyond their denotative interpretations. The term *wheel*, which literally refers to the round object under an automobile, means car in synecdochic interpretation.

4. Methodology

The methods used in collecting data for this study are observation and interview. Both *participant* and *non-participant* observatory methods were used to generate data from Hausa conversations in Azare town of Bauchi State. Utterances containing synecdoche that were heard were immediately jotted down and afterwards validated intuitively. Data were also obtained through interview from some Hausa native speakers representing diverse individuals. The respondents were randomly selected and interviewed.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

Data are presented and analyzed under two sub-headings: microcosmic Synecdoche and macrocosmic Synecdoche. A microcosmic synecdoche occurs when a part of something is used to refer to the entirety. A macrocosmic synecdoche occurs when the entire structure of something is used to refer to a small part. For the presentation, the citation forms of the synecdoche are shown, followed by denotative meaning, synecdochic meaning, analysis and findings.

5.1. Macrocosmic Synecdoche

Expressions	Denotative Meaning	Synecdochic Meaning
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1. Mu wasa ne?	Do you joke with us?	I cannot be taken for granted
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Mu is a pronoun plural of the first person. An individual sometimes uses such pronoun plural to puff himself as shown in the above expression. Often the construction comes in a rhetorical question form.

2. Gayu ba kwa son } azanta	Cocky young guys don't like dirtiness	A cocky young person always wants to be clean
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Cocky young persons who are fond of wearing Western dresses are referred to as *gayu* or *yan gayu*. An individual can be addressed using the plural form, *gayu* in order to quiz such a person.

3. Manya naku daban	Big men yours is Different	Yours (singular) is special.
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A young person who is neither an adult nor influential can be ironically called *manya* in order to puff him or her.

4. Sannu samari	Hello young men	Hello young man
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A young man (*saurayi*) or a young woman (*budurwa*) are sometimes addressed with their plural form as a way of joking with them.

5. Ta sayi itacen girki	She brought the tree for Cooking	She bought firewood
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It is customary in Hausa to call firewood a tree without distinguishing the split form meant for cooking from the tall plant that has branches and leaves.

6. Ta sayi Holan	She bought Holland	She bought printed Manufactured cloth from Holland
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The popularity of the printed manufactured cloth from Holland is simply called *Holan* by most Hausa women, thus using whole to stand for part.

7. Ta siya Kwadebuwa	She bought Cot d'voire	She bought printed Manufactured cloth from Cot d'voire
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Popular manufactured cloth imported from Cot d'voire is simply called by the name of the manufacturing nation

8. Ta siya Ingila She bought England She bought strong-patterned European cloth.

Printed manufactured cloth made in England and imported into Nigeria is not called by any name, but by the name of the producing country, which is England.

9. Iyalina ta yi tafiya My family travelled My wife travelled

The Hausa term *Iyali* is a collective noun comprising wife, parents, children, brothers and sisters. The Hausas often use *Iyali* to mean wife. In this context, the word *Iyali* is a euphemism.

10. Najeriya ta sha Nigeria defeated The super eagles defeated
Kamaru a }wallo Cameroonians in football the indomitable lions

Country's name is used to stand for the national football team as seen in the case of Nigeria and its national team of eleven players.

11. Ta sayo galan biyu She bought two gallons She bought two gallons of
na tuya for frying cooking oil for frying

The gallon container is hereby used to represent the content as shown in the *Hausa* sentence, *ta sayo galan biyu na tuya*. The liquid content can be groundnut oil, beniseed oil, etc.

12. Ta dafa kwano biyu She cooked two She cooked two measures of
measuring-bowls rice

It is a Hausa custom to refer to rice, corn and other grains as measuring-bowl.

13. Musa ya shanye kofi Musa drank two cups Musa took two cups of water
biyu

A cup is used to refer to water as indicated in the above sentence. In fact, the content might not be only water, as it can be other types of liquid such as tea, yoghurt, milk, gruel, etc.

14. Ya zuba cokali He puts two spoons into He adds two spoons of sugar
Biyu a shayi the tea to the tea

Here, spoon is used as substitute for sugar, which is a clear case of the use of whole for the part.

15. Tifa biyu ya juye He poured two trucks He off-loaded two trucks of gida
for him at home sand for him at home

As noted above, truck or lorry is used to stand for sand. Infact, the content can also be the earth, gravel or small stones.

16. Ya noma buhu talatin He cultivated thirty sacks He cultivated thirty sacks of corn.

A sack, is here, used to stand for the content. The content in this context can be rice, millet, guinea-corn, maize or beans.

17. Katsinawa ba su Katsina people don't People of Katsina are not
da tsoro fear cowards

Katsinawa is a plural term referring to people from *Katsina* town. An individual person who hails from *Katsina* can be addressed using the plural form: *Katsinawa* as a mark of praise.

5.2. Microcosmic Synecdoche

Expressions

Denotative Meaning

Synecdochic Meaning

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Yatsarka ba za ta ru~a ka yanke ba | You cannot cut of your finger because it has rotten | A person should tolerate his relative |
| Finger which is a body-part is used to refer to a relative, as shown in the above sentence. Some Hausas believe that no matter how bad a relative is, he or she must be tolerated. | | |
| 2. Ya fa}a mugun Hannu | He fell into wicked hand | He encounters bad company |
| Hand is part of the body at the end of the arm. Its use here shows how a person at the hand of someone can be maltreated and/or misguided. | | |
| 3. Sun ha}a kai | They join their heads | They are united |
| Head is the top part of the body that contains the eyes, mouth and brain, among other things. Its use here refers to people coming together on quiet a positive note. | | |
| 4. Ya sa }afa wajen Neman aure | He put leg in looking for the marriage | He is looking for marriage |
| Leg is one of the body parts that is joined to the feet. The word is used here to refer to one who sues for the hand of a woman in marriage. | | |
| 5. Ba ni da }wandala | I don't have coin | I don't have money |

Coin is a round piece of money made of metal and can be in pence or shillings. It is common for Hausa speaker to refer to huge amount of money as }wandala.

6. Findings

The results that have emerged following our analysis of Hausa synecdoche unfolds that, macrocosmic synecdoche has greater percentage of occurrence than its counterpart microcosmic synecdoche. It also shows that, within the macrocosmic class we have other subtypes such as the *producer for product synecdoche*, where Cot d'voire and England are used to mean the oriented manufactured cloth that are produced in aforementioned nations. Another example of the subtype is the *container for the contained*, as exemplified by the sentence *Musa ya shanye kofi biyu*. The intended meaning is, Musa took two cups of water. What is quite normal is utilizing the contained substance.

Furthermore, the findings unfold the role of vagueness in connection with macrocosmic synecdoche. The term vagueness refers to the lack of clarity as to whether or not a word, a phrase or a sentence applies to a state of affairs. In speech or writing, vagueness is the imprecise or unclear use of language. Alson (1964:84) defines vagueness in the following words: "A term is said to be vague if there are cases in which there is not definite answer as to whether the term applies."

It is found that, expressions that relate to *container for the contained* are mostly vague. Example, the use of cup to stand for water as indicated in the sentence, *Musa ya shanye kofi biyu*, meaning, Musa took two cups of water, is vague as far as content is concerned. This is because, judging from the Hausa sentence, what Musa drank is not clear. What is crystal clear, is the cup he swallowed. And this, in natural settings is not humanly possible. As per the content, the list of what could be taken is open and long. What is taken could be tea, yoghurt, milk, coke or gruel. The lack of clarity and precision make this subclass vague.

Conversely, the microcosmic synecdoche which occurs when a part of something is used to refer to the entirety, exhibit a remarkable degree of precision. For instance, the Hausa sentence, *yatsarka ba za ta ru-a ka yankeba*, meaning, a person should tolerate his relative no matter how bad he or she is, has no vagueness attach to it. *Yatsa* (finger) which is a part stands for relative, which is a whole. It is clear from the interpretation that finger simply and precisely means a human being and not any other object, action or abstraction as is the case with macrocosmic synecdoche.

It has also been found that synecdoche is often used as a type of personification by assigning human attribute to a non-human. Personification is a figure of speech which attaches human qualities to things that are not human (Latilo and Beckley, 2008). Previously, we interpreted the Hausa sentence, *ya faJa mugun hannu* as falling into bad company. Hannu (hand) which stands for somebody is being personified by assigning human attribute to it.

7. Conclusion

The paper defined synecdoche and identified it as one of the rhetorical tropes that are used in oral discourse, where a term stands for another, in part or in whole. Synecdoche was also differentiated from another figure, metonymy. Due to the similarities between the two figures, literati have pitched camps as to whether or not the two concepts are the same. The side taken by this paper is that the two figures, though resembling each other to a certain extent, are not the same. It observed that, while synecdoche refers to the whole of a thing by the name of any one of its parts, metonymy points at a thing by the name of something that customarily associate with it.

Furthermore, the paper distinguished two distinct categories of synecdoche, viz. microcosmic and macrocosmic. While the former class has fewer occurrences, the latter has more. It possessed subclass such as the producer for product synecdoche and the container for contained synecdoche.

Consequently, it was found that the container for the contained synecdoche is often vague in the sense that, it is difficult for a person to pinpoint the actual item that is contained in a container.

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