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## The Poetics of Oromo Blessing Expressions: A Stylistic Analysis of a Verbal Art Genre

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### Abstract

This study argues for the poetics of Oromo blessing expressions through presenting a stylistic analysis of the verbal art genre. It describes the overriding concerns of the blessing expressions, and analyzes the dominant stylistic devices employed. Hence, the study is descriptive and analytical in its approach. The data for the study are obtained both through fieldwork among the people, and review of secondary documents. The framework of literary stylistics applicable to oral literary texts has been employed to conduct the analysis. The analysis reveals that Oromo blessing expressions exhibit recurrent poetic features at three levels. At phonological level, stylistic devices like rhyme, alliteration, assonance and consonance are dominantly employed to give musical quality to the expressions. At syntactic level, the blessing expressions exhibit recurrent stylistic features like parallelism, anaphora and antithesis as devices for creating literary effect. And at lexico-semantic level, the explication reveals that the verbal art predominantly employs symbols, metaphors, imagery and simile to foreground the ideas addressed in the performance. Based on the analysis conducted, the study argues that this verbal art genre of the Oromo employs rich stylistic devices comparable to the devices a poet employ in the written genre. If given a serious scholarly attention, the treasure with such literary merit will have a significant contribution in the study of Oromo (African) literature.

**Keywords:** Blessing; Verbal art; Oromo; Poetics; Stylistics; Eebba; Waaqa.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background and Rationale

Africa has rich oral tradition that embeds the peoples' long held wisdom [1, 2, 3]. This tradition accommodates an immense knowledge conveyed to generations through words of mouth. This vast field of knowledge is dubbed as a "complex corpus of verbal arts" [4] fashioned to express acumen from history. These verbal arts are argued to share common ground with written works, as they employ 'artistic language' and 'images'. The fact that they blend the instructive and entertainment elements is also thought to create a social mirror. Oral tradition indeed is "an encyclopedia of the various peoples' histories, cultural experiences, traditions and values; a record of their feelings, attitudes, and responses to their experiences and environment" [3] used as a means to safeguard and spread indigenous wisdom in space and time. The vast reservoir of African verbal arts can be classified into the broad categories of 'literary' and 'historical' [2]. Those that fall under the category of literary are the ones that embed poetic qualities which the scholar names 'poetic genres'. In the list under this genre are, "sacred chants, songs, and the verbal formulae like incantations, parables and proverbs" [2]. Such genres can be an important site for conducting a stylistic analysis due to the nature of their use of language. The Oromo blessing performance, which is part of the oral tradition of the society, exhibits such features. Indeed, for African societies like the Oromo, whose traditions used to be conveyed dominantly through words of mouth, oral literature is an important medium for transmission of wisdom and history.

The Oromo are one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the Horn of Africa, predominantly in Ethiopia. They are one of the most populous nations in Africa [5, 6] and their language, *Afaan Oromoo* (literally 'mouth of Oromo'), is one of the major indigenous African languages that is widely spoken and used in most parts of Ethiopia and some parts of the neighboring countries [7]. The people own age old complex wisdom transmitted dominantly through oral tradition. Scholars who have made extensive study among the society have attested that life philosophies (secular and religious) of the people are engraved in their oral tradition [8].

Yet, the oral tradition of the Oromo, like most of African societies has not been getting much attention in literary circles; particularly from the perspective of stylistic analysis. Concomitantly, the literary merits of the verbal arts of the Oromo have not attracted much attention [9]. A similar perspective has been forwarded about African societies that "there is still a tendency to regard the African oral tradition as not warranting that much serious study because it is still being branded as so simple and primitive, and not so relevant in the global arena" [3]. But contrary to the misconceptions presented by the West on its simplicity and primitiveness, African oral tradition presents a good arena for scholars interested in literary analysis.

Blessing, termed as '*eebba*' among the people, is a genre of Oromo verbal art performed in every aspect of the people's life. Like the proverb genre, it is a ubiquitous experience performed in both formal and informal contexts. Culturally speaking, blessing is a highly valued act among the Oromo that it comes as an introduction and a conclusion to all life aspect of the people. The study conducted among the Boran Oromo states that "the Boran starts the daybreak with formal prayer and close the night with informal individual prayer of thanks giving" [10]. As a result, among the people, blessings come before proceeding to every gathering or ritual and at the end of the occasions.

The performance of blessing is also an emblem of identity for Oromo. Though the religious dynamics in the society and the concurring Western values have altered the uniformity of the practice currently (especially in towns), it is part of the indigenous worldview the people cherish. Hence, an Oromo saying or receiving the blessings normally believes in the philosophy behind the act, i.e., what the expressions entails. The belief among the society is that the good wishes in the blessings remain with the receiver- *'ebbi haphee ta'ee nama qabatee hafa'* (data presented in the writing system of the people's language which is phonemic except in few cases. The letters and their equivalent phonemic symbols are listed in the appendix section.). The expression literally means blessings are attached to the receivers like glue. Blessing as well as cursing is also believed to be transferred from generations to generations. The blessing of Oromo elders is said to go across generations, and his curse too. This is embedded in an Oromo proverb *'Jaarsi du'uu ka'e si hin abaariin, daa'imni guddatu si hin jibbiin'* which literally means let not a dying elder curse you, and a growing child develop hatred towards you.

Blessings performance among the Oromo must be understood within the ambit of the Oromo worldview housed in the Oromo culture. And Oromo culture must be seen from the aspects of "the way in which the Oromo personality, cultural identity, belief system and worldview interact and the extent in which these features are inter-woven to form a unity of meaning" [11]. Accordingly, discussions that aim to elaborate any cultural element must be contextualized in the underlying philosophies and belief systems in the culture. This works for the deliberation on blessings which this study aims to undertake.

Accordingly, it is important to recognize from the outset that the base of the Oromo culture in general is founded on the underlying values in the religious and philosophical systems of the people which the indigenous term *'ayyaana'* signifies. Studies indicate that in contrast to other cultures, among the Oromo "the cultural boundaries of personhood, nationhood and religion are so coextensive that they are rendered practically interchangeable" [11]. As a result, the performance of blessing, which has both the personal and national dimension, shares this "coextensive" feature. Every element of rite of passage among the Oromo has blessings. This depicts that the indigenous religious worldview of the Oromo is intertwined with the daily social/communal or individual life of the people.

Though the goal of this paper is to analyze the poetic feature of blessing expressions of the Oromo, it is important to understand that the performance of the blessing is guided by the religious and philosophical worldview of the people. Particularly, the indigenous religion, as it evolved with the people, guides the life of the people. It is attested, in this regard that, "the religion not only proclaims belief and dictates behavior, but also imposes itself on the minds of the people as a vocation, life-giving purpose and guarantee of existence" [11]. Hence, the appropriateness condition of the blessings needs to be understood from such perspectives.

As has been indicated above, the Oromo people have a very rich oral tradition which is worth literary investigations. Like other African societies its verbal arts, including blessings, have "rhetorically rewarding chest of treasures with tantalizing rhetorical devices" [3] worth consideration. These rhetorical devices embedded in the verbal art genres of the continent have not received enough attention. The lack of such studies might have also contributed to the misconception about the simplicity of the forms claimed by Western researchers discussed earlier. Hence, critical appraisals of these verbal arts provide a rewarding literary

experience, and add evidence to proofs so far deliberated by African scholars on the misconception pertaining to the verbal arts. This study is an attempt to reveal this rewarding experience by taking the case of Oromo blessing.

In spite of the ubiquity in the context of performance of Oromo blessing, it appears to be underappreciated. Particularly, the poetic features recurrent in its expressions have gained no attention so far. Blessing expressions exhibit poetic quality worth a stylistic analysis, but there are no works that addressed the features prominent in them. This study, then, attempts to fill the gap by conducting a stylistic analysis of the blessing expressions focusing particularly on poetic features dominantly realized in the blessing expressions. Concomitantly, the study seeks to argue on the literary merit (poeticism) of the Oromo blessing expressions based on the stylistic features recurring in them.

### ***1.2. Objectives of the Study***

The main objective of this study is to assess the poetics of Oromo blessing through conducting a stylistic analysis (phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic) of the expressions.

The specific objectives that guide the study are:

- to describe the overriding concerns in the performance of Oromo blessing;
- to examine the phonological stylistic devices contributing to the poetics of the blessing expressions;
- to identify the syntactic stylistic features contributing towards poeticism in Oromo blessing expressions;
- to bring out lexico-semantic stylistic devices as evidence for poetics in Oromo blessing expressions.

### ***1.3. Delimitation of the Study***

As part of the verbal art of the people, Oromo blessings can be studied from various perspectives. This study, however, is delimited to a stylistic analysis of the expressions used through focusing on the dominant stylistic devices observed at phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic levels. The study also involves a descriptive appraisal of the overriding concerns of the blessings together with the stylistic qualities. Yet, all stylistic features are not treated in this article for the sake of manageability. Hence, the issues that get emphasis in this article are sound features like rhyme, alliteration, consonance, assonance; syntactic features such as parallelism, anaphora (repetition), and antithesis, and lexico-semantic features such as literary tropes, imagery, symbols, metaphors, and simile. Blessing is performed at every rite of passage in Oromo culture, but the data used in this article does not address all as it is picked from only some of the occasions. Hence, part of the limitation for this study emanates from this restriction of the scope.

### ***1.4. Significance of the Study***

This study is significant because it will bring to light the poeticism involved in Oromo blessing performances. As has been introduced in the background section, blessing performance among the Oromo has got little scholarly attention. Though the expressions are replete with stylistic devices with literary merits, they have not

got emphases comparable to other verbal art genres of the people. It is significant to embark on the task this article attempts to do, to bring to the table the rich, dynamic and adaptable oral tradition. It is the belief of the writers of this article that such studies widen the scope and enrich the appreciation of African literature if given the attention such genres deserve. Accordingly, the stylistic analysis conducted in the study would initiate a further investigation to be conducted in the area.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

### ***2.1. Design of the Study and Nature of Data***

This study aims to present an argument on the poetics of a verbal art genre of the Oromo through conducting a stylistic analysis. To this end, it attempts to describe the overriding concerns of the blessing expressions, and analyzes the dominant stylistic devices employed. Hence, the study follows a descriptive and analytical approach. The sources of the data for the study are both primary and secondary. Fieldwork among the four major dialects of Oromo: *Macha*, *Tulama*, *Barentu* and *Borana-Guji* have resulted in the collection of the primary data through interview and elicitation. The secondary sources are published and unpublished collections of Oromo blessing expressions. The data was originally collected for a research project entitled “Blessing Expressions in Afan Oromo” funded by College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University. Accordingly, data pertaining to the performance procedures and contexts were drawn through in-depth interview with key informants, and those that are used for the stylistic analysis in this article are from texts collected while fieldwork and published documents. The data needed for the analysis are translated into English. But, only data needed to address the objectives stated above are used in this article.

### ***2.2. Theoretical Framework***

This study focuses on analyzing prominent poetic features in blessing expressions of the Oromo through the framework of literary stylistics. Hence, it relies highly on the method of textual analysis. Textual analysis dwells on linguistic forms exhibited in a text or their distribution across texts [12]. This scholar suggests the diversification of focus both on the purpose and levels of analysis. The current study, basing on this suggestion, digs into the linguistic forms at the different levels of stylistic analysis. Stylistics refers to the analysis of devices in language that are taken to produce literary effect. As scholars in the area put forward, stylistic study conjoins literary criticism and linguistic study of texts. It is seen as a bridge discipline between linguistics and literature [13]. This section is devoted to elaborating concepts that guide the framework of the stylistic analysis of a verbal art genre in Oromo oral tradition. As the models of stylistic analysis forwarded by various scholars dwell most on written literary texts, the current study has focused on selected features applicable to oral literary texts.

Oral literary genres, similar to the written ones, employ linguistic features which characterize the creativity or literariness of the style through which ideas are communicated. Hence, an appreciation of how these linguistic resources are used to create literary effect demands conducting a stylistic analysis. As has been stated in the introductory section, African verbal arts (Oromo verbal arts in the context of this study) exhibit very rich rhetorical devices the study of which significantly contributes to advances in the study of African literature [3]. It is in line with this argument that the study attempts to decipher the recurring literary devices in Oromo

blessing expressions through the interdisciplinary framework provided by stylistics [14]

In studying style, the target is discovering meaning through appreciating the linguistic characteristics of the text. The study is not usually conducted just for the sake of appreciating the language used [15]. Some have also suggested a definition that indicates the approach saying that stylistics is “an approach to the analysis of literary texts, using linguistic description” [16]. Hence, stylistic analysis takes into account the distinctive usage of linguistic expressions in literary works. Very often, and especially in written texts, deliberate disruptions, and high concentration on some aspects of language patterns result in literary effects desired. When conducting analysis of the literary works, then, linguistic evidences for the effect are inevitable [17]. These linguistic evidences can be derived from the different levels of stylistic analysis.

The stylistic analysis can be conducted at five levels of style: phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic and artistic levels [18]. The phonological level addresses such features as the use of sounds, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, consonance and assonance. The lexical level deals with specific choice of words, synonyms and related words, antonyms and other semantic relations between words. The morphological level focuses on the ways in which the grammatical categories are exploited, while the syntactic level of analysis uses as an input the relation between words and the way structures are handled. The artistic level, on the other hand, deals with the employment of stylistic devices and figures of speech. The last level is also referred to as lexico-semantic, and involves devices such as piling of usual collocates, archaic words, particular parts of speech and the different figures of speech [19]. These levels have link to the text as a signifying system but combines linguistic information with contextual and general world knowledge.

A deeper insight on the multiple levels of analysis that can give shape to stylistic analysis of texts has also been forwarded by other scholars [16]. In this case, the focus is on the argument that language signifies a complex web of levels, layers and links. Hence, a piece of text is organized through the distinct levels of Phonology/Phonetics, Graphology, Morphology, Syntax/Grammar, Lexical Analysis/Lexicology, Semantics and Pragmatics. These basic levels of language can be identified in the stylistic analysis of text, which in turn makes the analysis itself more organized and principled. Interaction between levels is important as one level may complement, parallel or even collide with another level.

The framework of this study combines the levels suggested by these scholars but focuses on the features applicable to oral literary texts, For instance, it is not possible to apply graphology to the analysis of oral texts as it depends purely on the manipulation of features as it appears in written texts. Again for the sake of manageability, this study focuses on phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic features contributing towards the stylistic effect in the verbal art. At the phonological level the focus is on rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance. While the syntactic level is limited to the feature of parallelism, anaphora (repetition) and antithesis observed, Lexico-semantic features dwell on the analysis of tropes and various figures of speech employed in the oral text.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### ***3.1. The Performance and Recurrent Issues in Oromo Blessing***

The discussion on the poetics of Oromo blessing expression would not be complete without giving highlight on the performance context and procedures, and discussing the recurrent issues addressed during the performance. This section attempts to deliberate on these aspects through presenting the data from fieldwork and the scholarly discussions in published works in that line.

### 3.1.1. The Performance of Oromo Blessing

Among the Oromo, all blessings are believed to come from *Waaqaa* (God) who is depicted in the people's worldview as compassionate towards human beings and nature. Blessing is a ubiquitous experience in the culture performed at almost every life occasion whether formal or casual. It happens at various occasions and the issues addressed in the blessing are guided by the kind of ritual or gathering on which it is performed. This section deliberates on the procedures and context of performance. As it is not possible to address all the contexts on which the blessings are conducted, the discussion is delimited to only some selected ones.

Depending on the context of their performance, we may generally classify Oromo blessing into two broad categories which we referred to as general context blessings and special context blessings. In the interest of saving space few examples of the broad classifications will be used to deliberate on the performance procedures and contexts.

General context blessings are the ones that are performed anytime, and under any informal circumstance without the need to attach the acts to certain group of people or ritual. These blessings address contents which are applicable to everyone. Their performance may not also require the right people, material or contexts usually needed for a formal type of blessing. Like the special context blessings, however, these blessings are performed in a call-and-response procedure in which the elders among the participants say the expressions, and the audience (chorus) repeats the last word/ phrase/ clause to receive the blessing. In some areas people are heard to use the word 'amen', which is considered by our informants as a borrowing of other religions' way of receiving the blessings. The call-and-response procedure of the performance is exhibited as in the following lines.

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<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Nagaan nu bulchite, nagaan nu oolchi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> As you did at night, help us pass the day in peace
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Nagaan nu oolchi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> Help us pass the day in peace
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Irraa-gora nu oolchi, dogoggora nu oolchi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> deliver us from evil and committing mistakes
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Nu oolchi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> deliver us
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Hamaa nurraa qabi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> spare us from dangers
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Nurraa qabi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> spare us
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Tolaa nutti qabi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> Direct good things towards us
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Nutti qabi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> direct them towards us
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Xiqqaa nuu guddisi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> let the young grow
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Nuu guddisi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> let them grow
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Guddaa lubbuu dheeressi</i>	<b>Elder:</b> let the old live long
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Dheeressi</i>	<b>Audience:</b> let them live long
<b>Manguddoo:</b> <i>Barri quufaa gabbina</i>	<b>Elder:</b> let the year be of satisfaction and prosperity
<b>Jamaa:</b> <i>Gabbisi Waaq</i>	<b>Audience:</b> Make it prosperous, God

The above data show the common procedure in the performance of blessing in Oromo culture. The performance usually begins with the praise of *Waaqaa*, though that part is cut out from the above lines. What follows from that is the appeal for peace/‘*nagaa*’ and protection for the people. Peace and protection from the act of evil deeds and evil doers come at the top of all the wishes. The ambition to face good things in life and the growth of the little ones to maturity as well as the wish for long life for the matured ones are among the concerns repeatedly addressed in this blessing. Hence, the contents are not restricted to special occasions. The issue of who does the blessing may not be seriously taken when the context is informal, but from among the attendants, it is led by a senior one. The participation of the audience through a call-and-response procedure makes the performance of Oromo blessing similar to that of other verbal art genres.

General context blessing expressions address issues which are common. The blessings offered in a household every morning, before the family members depart for the daily routines, for instance, address general concerns which dominantly designate the good wishes for the day. The following lines are usually recited to proclaim good day favors and the bestowal of luck to the members from God.

<i>Kolfaaf gammachuun isin hin baqatiin</i>	May not joy and laughter depart from you,
<i>Lafaaf waaqni isin wajjin haa ta'u</i>	May the earth and the sky be with you
<i>Gara deemtan hundatti Waaqni isin haa eegu</i>	May God protect you wherever you go.
<i>Jireenya keessan hunda nagaaf eebbi haa guutu</i>	May peace and blessings be abundant in your lives
<i>Nagaan oolaa galaa</i>	Pass the day in peace, and return in peace
<i>Inni obboroo uume nu haa dammaqsu</i>	May the God of dawn awaken us
<i>Inni biiftuu uume ifaan nu haa oolchu</i>	May the God of sunrise make our day bright
<i>Inni waaree uume cimina nuuf haa kennu</i>	May the God of noon renew our strength
<i>Inni dukkana uume nagaan nu haa galchu</i>	May the God of sunset bring us home
<i>Waaqni dukkana uume afuura nu haa galfachiisu</i>	May the God of dusk soothe our soul

These blessing expressions concentrate on the aspiration for abundance of joy and laughter, success and triumph in the daily life of the family. The elder blessing the family in such manner is setting the spirit of the day with good fortunes every person demands to meet. The compound, the floor and roof of the room, the environment and people are all wished to reside in the abundance of peace and stability. The blessings of *Waaqaa* are to be received in abundance through the metaphorical door which is wide open to let the blessings in. The horizon of peace surrounds the person when the earth and the sky are at peace with him/her. Peace, stability, protection, strength amidst of troubles, and comfort are the requirements one needs to have with him/her during the day. A safe passage of the day and a peaceful return from the daily routines are the things one need to wish for early in the morning. The expressions are very powerful and poetic. In short, common blessings such as the ones used above are not restricted to a single context and address universal issues like peace, abundance and prosperity for individuals, family, homestead and nature.

Special context blessings are performed in a definite context in the rite of passage of the people. These contexts include birth rites, wedding ceremony, the dawn of new season, *ateetee*, *garanfasaa*, *dhibaayyuu*, *irreecha*, *baallii*, to cite only few of the many rituals at which blessing is performed in Oromo culture. These blessings are



formal and are performed by elders based on the seniority of their clans. Among the different clans and dialectical groups of the Oromo, there are appropriate turns given to elders coming from different clan based on their seniority. The Borana is considered as the elder (*hangafa*) and in the blessing occasion, the Borana takes the first step as an elder from there is considered as a senior. Such seniority is reflected today among the Macha Oromo in different sayings and proverbs where the Borana are considered *hangafa* or ‘the elder group’: *Angafa namaa boorana/ hangafa ifaa booruu diima /The hangafaa of man is Borana/ the hangafa of light is dawn* [20]. *Hangafa* refers to the first born or the senior, and blessing is first performed by the clan because of the seniority. As for ritual and social precedence in daily life, the following is an eloquent testimony of Borana’s seniority:

<i>Boorana dura hindeemin</i>	Do not step in front of a Borana
<i>Isatu dura deema</i>	It is he who goes first
<i>Qalmiifi Eebbi kansaati</i>	Slaughtering and blessing are his
<i>Namni utuu hin hofkaliin</i>	Unless one is allowed
<i>Boorana dura darbee hindeemu</i>	No one should pass in front of a Borana
<i>Yoo inni hofkali jedheen dura darba</i>	(But) if he allows the other can pass by
<i>Booranni ana dura hindeemiin hinjedhu</i>	A Borana will never say ‘don’t pass in front of me’
<i>Isa adeemutu sodaata</i>	It is the other who is afraid to pass. [20]

The notes above depict the tradition of respect among the society. Such weight is given to the clan among the Macha Oromo because of the attribution of purity and that they are “people of blessing” (*mana eebbaa*) [20] Hence, they are the ones who are considered as people of power. As the goal of this study is not to exhaustively address the blessings in all the contexts, a sample blessing from wedding ceremony is used to discuss the performance context as follows.

Wedding is one of the major cultural occasions at which blessings are performed among the Oromo people. This has been the practice in the indigenous tradition of the people, and it is also in place currently. Today, at every wedding occasion, the Oromo conduct rituals to bless the bride and the groom, wishing them peace, offspring, health and wealth. The blessing on this occasion is formal and carried out by the mothers and fathers of the couples. Our fieldwork data reveals that blessing is offered at three instances during the wedding occasion .The first is when the groom sets for the bride house, in which case, his parents blesses him and sends him to bring his bride. The second is performed at the house of the bride’s parent before the bride is given to the groom. And finally, it is also performed at the house of the groom when he takes her to his parents’ home. The following is just one instance of the blessing during wedding taken to describe the issues addressed in it. It is the one which is said when the groom and the bride meet at the bride’s parents before she leaves for her husband’s.

1. <i>Waaqa uumaa, Waaqa abbaa hundumaa</i>	God the creator, God the master of all creation...
2. <i>Gaa’ela kana eebbisi, gaa’ela nagaa godhi</i>	Bless this wedding, make it a peaceful union
3. <i>Gaa’ela milkii taasisi</i>	Make it a lucky union
4. <i>Hamaa oolchi</i>	Save it from bad incidents
5. <i>Tokkummaa bara dheeraa taasisi</i>	Make this union, the one that sustains most
6. <i>Gaa’ela maatii walitti fidu taasisi</i>	May the marriage promote the tie between both sides
7. <i>Gaa’ela tikfamu haa ta’u</i>	May this marriage be protected
8. <i>Waliin jaaraa, badhaadhaa ijoollee horaa</i>	May the couple live long in unison, prosper and beget children
9. <i>Turaa, ijoollee ijoollee argaa</i>	May they stay long to see grand children

10. <i>Aannan tahaa, eebuu wal baasaa</i>	<i>May you satisfy each other as milk satisfies thirst</i>
11. <i>Daraaraa tahaa, walitti urgaa'aa</i>	<i>May you perfume each other as flowers perfume the air</i>
12. <i>Damma tahaa walitti mi'aawaa</i>	<i>May you be delicious to each other like honey</i>
13. <i>Wal danda'aa</i>	<i>Be patient towards each other</i>
14. <i>Qaroomaa, gorsitoota tahaa</i>	<i>Be wise to be able to advise others</i>
15. <i>Badhaadhaa rakkataa gargaaraa</i>	<i>Prosper well so that you could lend money to others</i>
16. <i>Loon horaa, ilmaan horaa</i>	<i>Breed many cattle, have many children</i>
17. <i>Akka hurrii samii uwwisaa</i>	<i>Cover the sky like fog</i>
18. <i>Akka coqorsaa lafa uwwisaa</i>	<i>Cover the earth like coqorsaa</i>
19. <i>Akka odaatti daddagaagaa</i>	<i>Bloom ever like oada tree</i>
20. <i>Humni keessan hindadhabiin</i>	<i>May you be not weakened</i>
21. <i>Kan halkan dalagdan ilma haa tahu</i>	<i>May what you do at night become a child</i>
22. <i>Kan guyyaa dalagdan bu'aa haa ta'u</i>	<i>May what you do at light become a profit</i>

Similar to the general context blessings, the performance of special context blessing is carried out in a call-and-response style. But the contents in the expressions are specific to the context of the wedding. As a result, the expressions address only about the union of the groom and the bride. In the above one, the union of the couples is wished to become successful and long-lasting. The first thing needed in the union according to this blessing is 'peace'. In the above lines, the parents wish for the couples: fortune, protection from evil, everlasting unity, cohesion, prosperity, fertility and wisdom. The need for agreement/cohesion between the bride and groom is described through the metaphors of "aannan tahaa" (line 10), "daraaraa tahaa" (line 11), and "damma tahaa" (line 12). These expressions dwell on the wish for the establishment of harmony.

Protection from evil, accomplishment in life, shining amidst challenges, wellbeing, strength and courage to face challenges in life are all wished for the couples. Besides, on wedding ceremonies the couples are blessed to beget children that sustain the line of decent for both families of the bride and groom as in the following lines.

1. <i>Hamaan isin hin argiin</i>	Let no evil challenge you
2. <i>Akka qilxuu lalisaa, dagaagaa</i>	Be green, and huge like sycamore tree
3. <i>Akka ibsaa ifaa</i>	Spark the surrounding like a night torch
4. <i>Akka roobii fayyaa tahaa</i>	Be healthy, as healthy as rhino
5. <i>Akka karkarroo jabina qabaadhaa</i>	Be strong as warthog
6. <i>Akka leencaa goota tahaa</i>	Be brave as lion
7. <i>Kan ariitan qabadhaa</i>	Catch what you pursue
8. <i>Kan sin ari'u jalaa miliqaa</i>	Escape from a pursuant
9. <i>Ilmaa fi intala horaa</i>	Beget baby boys and girls
10. <i>Walgargaaraa, waliif dhaabadhaa</i>	Support each other
11. <i>Waaqni jireenya gammachuu siniif haa kennu</i>	May God make your life smooth and pleasant

Similar to the previous blessings used in the analysis, the above one addresses powerful ideas about the couple's future life which are wished to be bestowed from God. Generally, wedding is one of the occasions at which blessing is performed. The blessings are all addressed to the couples, and all the attendants of the

ceremony who are engaged in the performance participate to wish for the success of the marriage. Hence, the issues addressed in these blessings are all specific to the context.

### 3.1.2. Recurrent Issues Addressed in Oromo Blessing Expressions

Oromo blessing expressions recurrently address universal human values. The most common issues articulated in the expressions include praise to *Waaqaa*, and aspiration for abundance of peace, protection, fertility and prosperity. The blessings are believed to bring good fortunes and protection- the people say the performance is inevitable to receive the good fortunes delivered from God- '*Waaqni akka milkii tolchuuf*' and to get his protection- '*Tiksa waaqaa argachuuf*'. Peace and security of the people, homestead, cattle and nature in general is at the center of the issues. Indeed, several reasons can be listed for why the people are engaged in the performance of blessing. It could be to thank God for the dawn of new season, for the peace of the kraal, for the safe journey, etc. Especially, the new season (*Birraa*) is symbolic among the Oromo and the people thank *Waaqaa*/God for the passage of the dark and rainy season, and for the coming of a season wherein they begin to see the fruits of their hard work. It is in this season that the Thanksgiving ceremony *Irreecha* is celebrated. One of our informants, during the fieldwork has reiterated the following:

*Birraa booqaa waan nu agarsiiseefis laga buunee Waaqa, margaaf jiidhaan ni galateeffanna. Bara haaraa akka nagaa nuuf taasisuufis kadhanna. Kormis ni qalama. Akka aadaa keenyaatti namoonni hedduun birraa birraa gara laga Bisil deemuun sirna kana haala baay'ee ho'aadhaan kabajna. Namoonni hin dandeenye gara laga dhiheenya jirutti deemuudhaan kabja ayyaana birraa taasisuun eebba jaarsolii fudhatanii deebi'u. Barri haaraan kunis bara eebbaa, bara nagaa, bara gammachu akka ta'u abdatanii galu [21].*

We go to rivers to praise/thank God for letting us see the new season (*Birraa*). We pray to him for His peace in the New Year ahead. Bulls are slaughtered. In our tradition people go to the Bisil River to celebrate this performance. The new season celebration is decorated with the blessing performed by elders of the society. The society, after the blessing, returns with the hope that the New Year will be a year of blessings, peace and joy [21].

The blessings performed in such context usually present a praise of *Waaqaa* for keeping the nation, homestead and nature in peace and tranquility. It is at this point that the blessing and prayers (*kadhata*) come together. For instance, the following lines are said first before the elders bless others. The expressions used are powerful and symbolic.

<i>Tokkicha maqaan dhibbaa</i>	O' the monolith with multiple names
<i>Gurraacha garaa garbaa</i>	Black one with infinite cosmic span
<i>Yaa Waaqa Waaqa hinqabnee</i>	O' God of all gods
<i>Yaa gooftaa gooftaa hinqabnee</i>	O Lord of all lords
<i>Mooticha giddii hinqabnee</i>	O' king, bounded by no humanly obligation
<i>Gungumaa garaa roobaa</i>	The roaring one with belly full of rain
<i>Jaarsa garaa dabbasaa</i>	Noble one with woolly chest
<i>Waaqa hundaa ol jirtuu</i>	O' God who exists above all else
<i>Abbaa ifaaf dukkanaa</i>	Master of darkness and light
<i>Si kadhee na dhagayi...!</i>	I so beseech you heed to my prayers [22]

These lines are directly addressed to *Waaqaa* and begin with His praise. It is only the last line “*si kadhee na dhagayi*” that becomes a request from the person addressed to God. The other lines praise Him by defining symbolically the character the culture assigns to *Waaqaa*. The people say *Waaqaa* is referred to in multitudes of names but is only one. His depth and breadth are beyond understanding and He is above all. Nobody orders Him as He is not bound by any humanly obligations. He reigns over light and darkness.

Similarly, in the following lines, the blessing employs metaphorical expressions to address the request for peace and protection from God.

1. <i>Karaa Waaq darbee</i>	The path <i>Waaq</i> took
2. <i>Eenyu abbaan argee</i>	Who has ever seen?
3. <i>Yaa qara eeboo</i>	O’ the edge of the lance
4. <i>Waaq garaa beekoo</i>	<i>Waaq</i> knows of the heart, mind
5. <i>Humbaa, humbaa yaa Waaq</i>	Lo and alack <i>Waaq</i> !
6. <i>Uumtee nun gatiin</i>	You created us, do not cast us away
7. <i>Humbaa, humbaa yaa Waaq</i>	Lo and alack <i>Waaq</i> !
8. <i>Dagattee nunbuusiin</i>	Do not forgetfully abandon us
9. <i>Humbaa, humbaa yaa Waaq</i>	Lo and alack <i>Waaq</i> !
10. <i>Obbo abbaa hiyyeessa nu callee keeti</i>	O’ father of the poor, we are your beads
11. <i>Ijaartee nun diigiin yaa Waaq</i>	You have constructed us, do not demolish us, O’ <i>Waaq</i> !
12. <i>Ija boo’u nu oolchi yaa Waaq</i>	Deliver us from weeping of the eyes, O’ <i>Waaq</i> !
13. <i>Garaa na’u nu oolchi yaa Waaq</i>	Deliver us from grief of the heart, O’ <i>Waaq</i> !
14. <i>Gargar ba’uu nu oolchi yaa Waaq</i>	Deliver us from disunity, O’ <i>Waaq</i> !
15. <i>Nu dhaabi kaa yaa Rabbi</i>	Deepen our roots O’ <i>Rabbi</i> !
16. <i>Akka mukaa yaa Rabbi</i>	Like a tree, O’ <i>Rabbi</i> [22]

Powerful expressions demanding the intervention of divine power are used in the blessing above. The first four lines praise God by indicating that God understands what is haunting someone inside ‘*garaa beekoo*’ (line 3) and that His ways cannot be known as He does things in his just ways. Following that the lines present a humble request addressed to God for protection and peace. In the above data ‘*Waaq*’ is a simplified version of ‘*Waaqaa*’ used in speech, and ‘*Rabbi*’ is a loan word from Arabic representing the same Supreme Being.

As several scholars have previously discussed in their extensive research among the Oromo, the most important concept in the daily life of the Oromo is ‘*nagaa*’ (peace). This concept is expressed, “in the songs they sing, in the prayers and blessings they offer, in the ritual and ceremonial activities they undertake, in the speeches and narrations they deliver in the administrative and legal actions they perform and in the proverbs, folktales and stories they cite or tell” [23]. Issue wise, the blessing expressions used above address concerns like praise of ‘*Waaqaa*’ (lines 1-4) and request for protection and peace (lines 6, 8, 10-16).

Every Oromo household says blessings/prayers calling for peace in all aspects of their lives, from their own families to the community, along with prayers for fertility for themselves and for their means of livelihood and sustenance. A similar conclusion has been forwarded by another scholar who puts forward that “Peace, fertility and abundance – of children, of crops, of cattle and of wealth—were prominent themes in the prayers and blessings of the *gadaa* system.

They are also what most other rituals sought to attain.” [24] This concept of *nagaa* (peace) is based on the indigenous values and beliefs enshrined in the indigenous egalitarian system of the people. *Gadaa* system is a democratic system of the Oromo which defines the totality of the people’s life (administrative, political, religious, economic, etc.) recognized in 2016 as an intangible cultural heritage of the world by UNESCO.

### 3.2. The Poetics of the Expressions: Evidence from Stylistic Analysis

Beyond expressing powerful universal human values, Oromo blessing expressions exhibit diversified poetic devices which give power to the language used in the performance context. This section deals with a stylistic analysis of the expressions at phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic levels so as to present the evidence for the poeticism inherent in the verbal art genre.

#### 3.2.1. Phonological Stylistic Devices in Oromo Blessing Expressions

Oromo blessing expressions exhibit several phonological stylistic features that indicate the poeticism involved in the performance. The speech sounds in the expressions used form a recognizable system that adds musical quality in the acts of the blessing.

This section elaborates some of the features focusing on the operations of rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance. In the expression, these sound devices are employed to give a musical quality to the performance of the blessing. The devices commonly observed in the blessings are presented as follows using only few introductory lines.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Tokkicha maqaan dhibbaa</i>       | O’ the monolith with multiple names       |
| 2. <i>Gurraacha garaa garbaa</i>        | Black one with infinite cosmic span       |
| 3. <i>Yaa Waaqa Waaqa hinqabnee</i>     | O’ God of all Gods                        |
| 4. <i>Yaa gooftaa gooftaa hinqabnee</i> | O’ lord of all lords                      |
| 5. <i>Mooticha giddii hinqabnee</i>     | O’ king, bounded by no humanly obligation |
| 6. <i>Gungumaa garaa roobaa</i>         | The roaring one with belly full of rain   |
| 7. <i>Jaarsa garaa dabbasaa</i>         | Noble one with woolly chest               |

.....

.....

**Table 1:** Phonological stylistic devices in Oromo blessing expressions

Alliteration	Consonance	Assonance	Rhyme
<u>G</u> urraacha <u>g</u> araa <u>g</u> arbaa	<u>G</u> urraacha <u>g</u> araa <u>g</u> arbaa	tokki <u>ç</u> ha, dhi <u>ç</u> baa	dhibbaa (a)
<u>W</u> aaqa <u>W</u> aaqa	<u>W</u> aa <u>ç</u> a, hi <u>ç</u> gabne	<u>W</u> aa <u>ç</u> a, <u>g</u> ar <u>aa</u> , <u>g</u> ar <u>baa</u>	garbaa (a)
<u>G</u> ooftaa <u>g</u> ooftaa			hi <u>ç</u> gabnee (b)
<u>G</u> ungumaa <u>g</u> araa roobaa			hi <u>ç</u> gabnee (b)
			roobaa (a)
			dabbasaa (a)

The lines presented above are the introductory ones which the elder who performs the blessings say alone before the audience start to participate in a call-and-response procedure. The repeated occurrence of the sound devices: alliteration, consonance and assonance as presented in the above example give musical quality to the performance of the blessing, and hence, contribute to the poeticism involved in the verbal art of the Oromo. The example also presents the regularity of rhyme observed in the text of the blessing. The last syllables rhyme in the first two lines, and due to the repetition of same words at the end of the next three lines (3-5), there is an instance of full rhyme. The remaining two lines involve an end rhyme because of the last syllables in the two words. The rhyme scheme for the lines above has the form AABBBAA. In the blessing expressions that follow from this introductory stage, however, there is a rhyme scheme of coupling which comes as a result of the call-and-response performance between the elder (E) who says the expressions and the audience (A) who receives and partakes in the blessing. This feature is evident in the following lines:

*M. Kolfaaf gammachuun isin hin baqatiin* E. May not joy and laughter depart from you

*J. Hin baqatiin* A. May they not depart

*M. Lafaaf Waaqni isin waliin haata'u* E. May mother earth and God be with you

*J. Haata'u* A. May they be with us

In the above blessing expressions, as the last words are repeated by the audiences, the rhyme scheme becomes AABB. In cases where the last words in the different expressions of the elders become similar (have a similar syllables at last), the rhyme scheme in such performance is extended to become four lines rhyming together like AAAABBBB. Though the claim for the a strict form for the rhyme scheme of Oromo blessing expressions

demand a further and independent study, it is possible argue that the repetition of the last words of the person who says the blessing made by the audiences adds a musical quality to the poetic performance of Oromo blessing. Indeed, one might take longer lines like the following to see how far the expressions used by the elders, one after the other, itself creates a rhyme scheme of similar syllables throughout.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Waliin jaaraa, badhaadhaa ijoollee hora</i> | May the couple live long in unison, prosper and beget children |
| 2. <i>Turaa, ijoollee ijoollee argaa</i>          | May they stay long to see grand children                       |
| 3. <i>Aannan tahaa, eebuu wal baasaa</i>          | May you satisfy each other as milk satisfies thirst            |
| 4. <i>Daraaraa tahaa, walitti urgaa'aa</i>        | May you perfume each other as flowers perfume the air          |
| 5. <i>Damma tahaa, walitti mi'aawaa</i>           | May you be delicious to each other like honey                  |
| 6. <i>Wal danda'aa</i>                            | Be patient towards each other                                  |
| 7. <i>Qaroomaa, gorsitoota tahaa</i>              | Be wise to be able to advise others                            |
| 8. <i>Badhaadhaa rakkataa gargaaraa</i>           | Prosper well so that you could lend money to others            |
| 9. <i>Loon horaa, ilmaan horaa</i>                | Breed many cattle, have many children                          |
| 10. <i>Akka hurrii samii uwwisaa</i>              | Cover the sky like fog   |
| 11. <i>Akka coqorsaa lafa uwwisaa</i>             | Cover the earth like <i>coqorsaa</i> (grass)                   |
| 12. <i>Akka odaatti daddagaagaa</i>               | Grow branches ever like Sycamore tree                          |

The last words in all the lines above have similar vowel sounds at the end and hence show the phenomena of rhyme. Indeed, the rhyme in the above lines is not restricted to end-rhyme as most of the lines involve internal rhyme. This can be seen in lines 1 to 5 above: '*jaaraa*' rhymes with '*horaa*' (line 1), '*turaa*' rhymes with '*argaa*' (line 2), '*tahaa*' and '*baasaa*' (line 3) rhyme together, '*tahaa*' and '*urgaa'aa*' (line 4) rhyme together, and finally '*tahaa*' and '*mi'aawaa*' (line 5) rhyme together.

Beyond the regularity in the rhyme scheme discussed above, the repetition of consonant sounds making alliteration, consonance and assonance as presented in the table above adds musical quality to the blessing expressions. Hence, the sound devices recurrently observed in the expressions used by the elders and the audiences in the performance of Oromo blessing give a poetic quality to the verbal art genre. As a result the phonological stylistic devices presented above (limited only in the interest of saving space), present evidence of a comparable literary merit of the genre to other genres which have received much scholarly attention

### 3.2.2. Syntactic Stylistic Features

Oromo blessing expressions are poetic also because they exhibit a rich syntactic stylistic features adding to the literary effect the verbal art genre displays in its performance. This section dwells on presenting evidences of these stylistic devices focusing on parallelism, repetition (anaphora) and antithesis.

Parallelism involves the recurrent syntactical similarity where several phrases are expressed alike to show that the ideas are equal in importance [25]. It has the effects of becoming force of organization which attract attention, adding emphasis and providing musical rhythm. Every parallel element sets up a relationship of equivalence between two or more elements [26]. Hence, the consistent use of equivalent constructions is a key feature of parallelism. Parallellism can occur at different levels and may take various forms, but its final goal is to put emphasis on the harmony of the construction.

The Oromo verbal art of blessing involves expressions full of parallel constructions signifying the syntactic stylistic feature of parallelism. Dominantly, formal types of parallelism in which ideas are presented in pairs are recognized. This pairing in Oromo blessing expressions is formed through coordinating conjunctions. Lines from the data presented above can be used to reveal this feature. The translation presented above is reworked to show the parallel structure in English.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Aannan tahaa, eebuu wal baasaa</i>       | (You) Become milk, and satisfy each other          |
| 2. <i>Daraaraa tahaa, walitti urgaa'aa</i>     | (You) Become flower, and perfume each other        |
| 3. <i>Damma tahaa, walitti mi'aawaa</i>        | (You) Become honey, and be delicious to each other |
| 4. <i>Qaroomaa, gorsitoota tahaa</i>           | (You) Become wise, and counsel others              |
| 5. <i>Badhaadhaa, rakkataa gargaaraa</i>       | (You) Become rich, and help the needy              |
| 6. <i>Akka hurrii samii uwwisaa</i>            | Like cloud, cover the sky (horizon)                |
| 7. <i>Akka coqorsaa lafa uwwisaa</i>           | Like <i>coqorsaa</i> (grass), cover the earth      |
| 8. <i>Akka odaatti daddagaagaa</i>             | Like Sycamore tree, grow many branches             |
| 9. <i>Kan halkan dalagdan, ilma haa tahu</i>   | What you do at night, let it yield a baby boy      |
| 10. <i>Kan guyyaa dalagdan, bu'aa haa tahu</i> | What you do at noon, let it yield a profit         |

The above data presents the identical structure used in the blessing expressions to form parallelism. The first five lines presents parallelism through pairing clauses using coordinating conjunction. All the pairings in the first five lines have the form '*become x, and do y*'. The next three lines (6-7) form parallel through the repetition of the use of simile (figure of speech) and has the formula '*like x, do y*'. The last two lines also form parallelism as the clauses in each line present the same syntactic arrangement. Only the time indicating expressions '*halkan*' and '*guyyaa*' vary in the first clauses, and the result indicating expressions '*ilma*' and '*bu'aa*' vary in the result clauses. Each line contains a first clause that presents activity with duration, and a second clause that presents the product of the activity. The similarity in syntactic arrangement adds emphasis on the issues to be addressed and gives a musical rhythm of harmony in the use of the expressions during actual performance. This quality of the blessing expressions of the Oromo adds to the poetic nature of the verbal art. There are other examples which present evidence of the rich syntactic stylistic devices in Oromo blessing expressions. The following lines for example involve the parallel structure formed through the repeated use of noun phrases at the beginning of each line.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Inni obboroo uume nu haa dammaqsu</i>      | The one who created Dawn, may He awaken us              |
| <i>Inni biiftuu uume ifaan nu haa oolchu</i>  | The one who created the Sun, may He make our day bright |
| <i>Inni waaree uume cimina nuuf haa kennu</i> | The one who created Noon, may He renew our strength     |
| <i>Inni dukkana uume nagaan nu haa galchu</i> | The one who created Evening, may He bring us back home  |

The identical structures observed in the above lines have poetic significance as they foreground the issue and maintain the musical rhythm. This coincides with the argument that the effect of parallelism is "to foreground



the relation between parallel words and phrases which fill the variable position” [15]. The parallelism seen in the following lines also add to the discussion made above:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Uumtee nun gatin</i>     | You created us, do not cast us away          |
| 2. <i>Dagattee nun buusiin</i> | Do not forgetfully abandon us!               |
| 3. <i>Ijaartee nun diigiin</i> | You have constructed us, do not demolish us, |
| 4. <i>Ija boo'u nu oolchi</i>  | Deliver us from weeping of the eyes          |
| 5. <i>Garaa na'u nu oolchi</i> | Deliver us from grief of the heart           |

In these lines as well several words and phrases are constructed in a parallel structure adding beauty to the use of the expressions in speech. In the first three lines the first words ‘*uumtee*’, ‘*dagattee*’ and ‘*ijaartee*’ form a parallel through presenting ideas in sequence, and so does the phrases that follow them. In the last two lines the first phrases ‘*Ija boo'u*’ and ‘*Garaa na'u*’ also form a parallel structure followed by the repetition of the same words afterwards. The occurrences of these and other parallel structure have stylistic significance as they add to the literariness (poetics) involved in the performance of the Oromo verbal art under consideration. Anaphora is also another syntactic feature the analysis of which in Oromo blessing expression presents an evidence of poetic quality. It involves the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive expressions (two or more lines). This technique adds emphasis and unity to the clauses. The example used for parallelism above is a good evidence for anaphoric repetition in Oromo blessing.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Inni obboroo uume nu haa dammaqsu</i>      | The one who created Dawn, may He awaken us              |
| 2. <i>Inni biiftuu uume ifaan nu haa oolchu</i>  | The one who created the Sun, may He make our day bright |
| 3. <i>Inni waaree uume cimina nuuf haa kennu</i> | The one who created Noon, may He renew our strength     |
| 4. <i>Inni dukkana uume nagaan nu haa galchu</i> | The one who created Evening, may He bring us back home  |

This involves the repetition of the phrase ‘*The one who created...*’ at the beginning of each line, and hence involve an instance of anaphora in Oromo blessing. Similarly, the repetitive use of simile indicating expressions at the beginning in the following blessing expressions indicates the use of anaphora as a syntactic stylistic device employed in the performance of the blessing.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Akka qiltuu lalisaa, dagaagaa</i>   | Like fig tree, become green, grow many branches |
| 2. <i>Akka ibsaa ifaa</i>                 | Like a night torch, flicker                     |
| 3. <i>Akka roobii fayyaa tahaa</i>        | Like a hippo, become healthy                    |
| 4. <i>Akka karkarroo jabina qabaadhaa</i> | Like rhino, develop strength                    |
| 5. <i>Akka leencaa goota tahaa</i>        | Like lion, become brave                         |

The repetition of the word ‘*akka*’ successively in the lines above create a driving rhythm and add emphasis making the expressions memorable. This poetic device then endows the blessing expressions with artistic effect.

The third syntactic stylistic device commonly observed in Oromo blessing expressions is antithesis. Antithesis refers to the presentation of two terms, phrases or ideas that contrast or have opposite meanings. The two complementary ideas are purposely juxtaposed and usually form a parallel structure [27]. Antithesis creates a definite and systematic relationship between ideas. In short, antithesis signifies the aligning of opposing ideas in adjacent phrases, clauses or sentences within parallel grammatical structure. The combination of a balanced structure with opposite ideas serves to highlight the contrast between them. Such features are very common in Oromo blessing expressions as could be understood from the following examples.

- |                                       |                        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. <i>Kan ariitan qabadhaa</i>        | Catch what you pursue  |
| 2. <i>Kan sin ari'u jalaa miliqaa</i> | Escape from a pursuant |

These consecutive lines/expressions in the performance of Oromo blessing present a sequence of two antithetical elements. The first opposing ideas that a contrast between a pursuer and a pursuant. The blessing expression wishes the target to get hold of the thing he/she is running after, but to escape from the thing/person that pursues him/or her. The contrast is again seen in the expressions '*qabadhaa*'/get hold of, and '*jalaa miliqaa*'/escape. This syntactic arrangement of the opposites describes the phenomena of siding with both the prey and predator when the roles are held by the same person. A person can hold both roles at different times, and the expressions wish for the person success in both roles.

The antithetical syntactic arrangement is also formed with the arrangement of binary opposites in successive lines of the blessing expression of Oromo. As can be seen from the following examples, the opposite pairs arranged one after the other exhibit a stylistic feature that gives poetic quality to the performance of the blessing.

- |                                   |                               |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Hamaa nurraa qabi</i>       | Spare us from evil            |
| 2. <i>Tolaa nutti qabi</i>        | Direct good things towards us |
| 3. <i>Xiqqaa nuu guddisi</i>      | Let the young grow            |
| 4. <i>Guddaa lubbuu dheeressi</i> | Let the old live long         |

The Oromo terms '*hamaa*' and '*tolaa*' form a pair of opposites and their use in the blessing expressions in way of request for directing away the '*hamaa*'/evil from the people and directing the '*tolaa*'/good towards them form an antithetical syntactic pattern. This pairing of opposites in the next lines '*xiqqaa*' and '*guddaa*', and in the following lines: '*abdi*' and '*shakkii*', '*ifa*' and '*dukkana*', '*eebba*' and '*abaarsa*' with a similar claim of attracting the positive and repelling the negative ones shows the recurrent use of antithesis as a syntactic device of poeticism. The arrangement of the opposites in such manner form a parallel construction which adds poetic quality to the expressions used.

- |                                      |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Abdi nuu kenni</i>             | Give us hope (in life)        |
| 2. <i>Shakkii nu keessaa baasi</i>   | Banish doubt from among us    |
| 3. <i>Ifa nuu kenni</i>              | Give us your light            |
| 4. <i>Dukkana nurraa qabi</i>        | Keep darkness away from us    |
| 1. <i>Abaarsi isin hin qaqqabiin</i> | Let curses never touch you    |
| 2. <i>Eebbi isin haa marsu</i>       | Let blessings always veil you |

In short, as could be understood from the above discussions, Oromo blessing expressions exhibit recurrent syntactic stylistic features of parallelism, anaphora and antithesis as devices for creating stylistic effect. They recognizably create definite and systematic relationship between ideas expressed in the expressions. These features, therefore, are among the evidences for the claim of poetics involved the performance of the verbal art genre.

### 3.2.3. Lexico-Semantic Stylistic Features

Blessing expressions of the Oromo demonstrate abundant features of style at lexico-semantic level as well. This level looks at the analysis use of words and their meanings in the expressions. Lexis involves study of the vocabulary of a language in all its aspects [28]. Semantics, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the study of meaning. A lexico-semantic analysis calls for the explication of word meanings with emphasis on lexical relations and dimensions of meaning (connotative, figurative, idiomatic, etc). This section attempts to unearth the recurrent stylistic features observed in the blessing expressions. Focus has been made on the tropes (figurative languages) employed in the expressions and the effect that results from that. Figures of speech denote the departures made in meaning from standard in order to achieve poetic meaning or effect [29]. There are several types of figures of speech, but this section is delimited to the recurrent figures observed in Oromo blessing expressions contributing towards the poetic effect at lexico-semantic level. As has been discussed in the part that deliberates on the performance and overriding concerns above, Oromo blessing expressions involve several metaphors, images and symbols. The expressions used are mostly not literal and involve associating several things to arrive at the meaning imparted in the blessing. God, human beings, nature and things around can be described with the figurative languages. In few lines of the blessing expressions, we can find several figurative expressions used. *Waaqaa* (God), for instance, is addressed through symbolic and metaphorical expressions like '*Tokkicha maqaan dhibbaa*', '*Gurraacha garaa garbaa*', '*Mooticha giddii hinqabnee*', '*Gungumaa garaa roobaa*', '*Jaarsa garaa dabbassaa*' and '*Abbaa ifaaf dukkanaa*' in the introductory lines of Oromo blessing expressions.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Tokkicha maqaan dhibbaa</i>      | O' the monolith with multiple names       |
| 2. <i>Gurraacha garaa garbaa</i>       | Black one with infinite cosmic span       |
| 3. <i>Yaa Waaqa Waaqa hinqabnee</i>    | O' God of all Gods                        |
| 4. <i>Yaa gooftaa goofta hinqabnee</i> | O lord of all lords                       |
| 5. <i>Mooticha giddii hinqabnee</i>    | O' king, bounded by no humanly obligation |
| 6. <i>Gungumaa garaa roobaa</i>        | The roaring one with belly full of rain   |
| 7. <i>Jaarsa garaa dabbasaa</i>        | Noble one with woolly chest               |

*Waaqaa* is characterized as having multitudes of names to represent that the many ways people refer to Him cannot fully define His essence. This shows that His identity is beyond human comprehension. The first expression involves a kind of paradox which emphasizes the difficulty of understanding of the essence by presenting the idea that *Waaqaa* is one and many (identified with many names) at the same time. This is

semantically linked with the symbol that represents Him as 'gurraacha'/black and the metaphor 'garaa garbaa'/belly of the Ocean. In the first case what makes the understanding complex is the identification with many names, and in the case of the color symbol, the difficulty arises from the infinite cosmic span that surpasses human understanding. Something black in this case represents something that is huge and difficult to decipher. As what exists in the belly of the ocean is not easy to understand, so does the unfathomable depth and breadth of *Waaqaa* to human understanding. The next figurative expression (*Mooticha giddii hinqabnee*) involves a metaphorical description of God as a king who holds no grudges against humanity.

An imagery that holds both auditory and sensory aspect is recognized in the expression that follows it (line 6) characterizes *Waaqaa* as a roaring sound of a powerful thunder, and as a being that holds rain in its belly. The image of the thunder addresses the power of God, and that of the belly full of rain (source of life and flourishing) His sympathy towards humanity. In Oromo culture the idiom 'garaansaa bishaani' means that someone is sympathetic and has caring spirit towards others. The latter image is strengthened by the metaphor used in the next expression (*jaarsa garaa dabbasaa*) characterizing God as a noble elder with compassion. This involves personification. The expression 'garaa dabbasaa' is used to indicate the kindhearted nature of God as are the Oromo elders. The last metaphor describes God with the image of a king/master over 'light' and 'darkness'. The light and darkness here are meant to represent the joys and tribulations in life. That could be extended conceptually to hope and despair, life and death, success and failure and all the binaries of existence which are under God's authority. The use of symbols, metaphors, simile, personification and imagery as devices indicating the lexico-semantic stylistic feature of Oromo blessing expressions are apparent in the blessing performances at various contexts. Blessings performed at rituals and marriage ceremonies highly exploit such stylistic features as could be seen from the following examples. The following expressions for instance embed several figures of speech.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Qabattanii?</i>                                 | Did you hold it?                         |
| 2. <i>Aaga qabadhaa</i>                               | Hold prosperity with it                  |
| 3. <i>Raftanii, abjuu gaarii qabaadha</i>             | While a sleep have good dreams           |
| 4. <i>Boqottanii, qalbiin isin haa gabbatu</i>        | When you rest have good thoughts         |
| 5. <i>Diinni keessan akka jirmaa muramee haa tahu</i> | Let your enemy become like a fallen tree |
| 6. <i>Andoodee tahaa</i>                              | Become <i>handoodee</i> (a creeper)      |
| 7. <i>Bonaa ganna lalisaa</i>                         | Blossom throughout Winter and Summer     |
| 8. <i>Coqorsa tahaa</i>                               | Become the <i>coqorsaa</i> grass         |
| 9. <i>Lafa uwwisaa</i>                                | Cover the earth                          |
| 10. <i>Hurrii tahaa</i>                               | Become the clouds                        |
| 11. <i>Samii uwwisaa</i>                              | Cover the sky                            |
| 12. <i>Qilxuu tahaa</i>                               | Become <i>qilxuu</i> (a sycamore tree)   |
| 13. <i>Gabbaadhaa daddagaagaa</i>                     | Extend sideways from above               |
| 14. <i>Jalli keessan haa gabbatu</i>                  | Be thick from under                      |
| 15. <i>Haroo tahaa</i>                                | Become a lake                            |
| 16. <i>Yeroo hundaa calalaqaa</i>                     | Glitter always                           |
| 17. <i>Cirraacha tahaa</i>                            | Become the sands at the side of a see    |

18. <i>Hammaarriin isin hin fixiin</i>	Let you not be exhausted
19. <i>Doobbii tahaa</i>	Become the <i>doobbii</i> (plant, its leaves burn skin)
20. <i>Diina gubaa</i>	Burn all your enemies (become a challenge to them)
21. <i>Abaarsi isin hin qaqqabiin</i>	Let curses never touch you
22. <i>Eebbi isin haa marsu</i>	Let blessings always veil you
23. <i>Saawwi keessan dhaabbiitti haa gaantu</i>	Let you cows mate while standing
24. <i>Ciisichatti haa dhaltu</i>	Let them give birth while resting
25. <i>Manaa adiitti nyaadhaa</i>	In the house, eat white [milk and cheese]
26. <i>Alaa, adii uffadhaa</i>	When going out, wear white [garments]
27. <i>Kanan dagadhe sambanni itti haa guutu</i>	Let Sabbath add the blessings I forgot

As with other blessing expressions, this blessing is full of symbolic expressions which are poetic in their use. The family is wished to become ‘*andoodee*’ (line 6), ‘*coqorsaa*’ (line 8), ‘*hurrii*’ (line 10), ‘*qilxuu*’ (line 12), ‘*haroo*’ (line 15), ‘*cirrachaa*’ (line 17), and ‘*doobbii*’ (line 19). These metaphorical expressions do have cultural significance.

*Andoodee* is a plant that is evergreen, and its leaves were used for washing clothes. It grows both in dry and wet seasons. The wish for the family to become ‘*andoodee*’ then is the wish to profess every time regardless of the change of the seasons. *Coqorsaa* is also an evergreen grass that endures the dry season. This grass also takes wide space and dominates the ground where it grows. As a result, the family is wished to be dominant and evergreen like this grass in the blessing. *Hurrii* is cloud and it is used in this case to indicate the domineering power it has. So the elder says to the family let you dominate your surrounding like cloud does.

*Qilxuu* is a big sacred tree that grows extensively up as well as side-wise. It is very thick and used by many animals and humans for shelter and shadow. Assemblies are also conducted under it. In this blessing, the family is wished to grow wide and thick like this tree and become shelter for many. *Haroo* is a lake, and during day time, it is seen from afar as the sunlight is reflected on it. Here, it is used in a sense to show the visibility and popularity wished for the family due to their good deeds in the ritual. *Cirracha* are sands at river banks or at sea shores and they symbolize multitudes. Here, they are used to mean let you multiply and go beyond numbers, and replenish.

And finally, *doobbii* is a plant the leaves of which burn human skin. It creates ulcer when it comes in contact with human skin. The family is wished in this blessing to become like this plant to their enemy. It, therefore, means that the family becomes trouble to their enemies and become triumphant over them. A simile is also used at the beginning to address the troubles wished for the adversary of the family- ‘*diinni keessan akka jirmaa muramee haa tahu*’. The enemy is compared with a fallen tree that becomes a target of many troubling hammers. It is a wish that the enemies be hammered like the tree that grows no more. The Oromo proverb ‘*Muka jigetti qottootu baay’ata*’/A fallen tree becomes the target of many axes explains the concept involved in

the simile above. The expressions used towards the last lines 'eat with white' and 'wear white' are also metaphorical representing the economic status wished for the family where the blessing is carried out.

The blessing expressions on wedding ceremonies are also replete with figurative languages. The words used by elders to bless the couples are so powerful because they are packed with the lexico-semantic devices which endow the expressions the power to effectively address the issues wished for. In the following lines for instance, nine metaphorical expressions (words and phrases) are used: '*lafa qabadhaa*', '*waaqa qabadhaa*', '*coqorsa lo'aa ta'aa*', '*odaa tahaa*', '*aannaniifi garaa tahaa*', '*dhadhaafi mataa tahaa*', '*cirracha Abbayyaa tahaa*', '*Madda Walaabuu tahaa*', '*Jalduu biikoo tahaa*'.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Qabattanii? Aaga qabadhaa</i>                   | Did you hold it? Hold good things                               |
| 2. <i>Rafaa abjuu qabaadhaa</i>                       | Dream well in your sleep  |
| 3. <i>Adeemaa milkii qabaadhaa</i>                    | May you become fortunate in your journey                        |
| 4. <i>Miillaan lafa qabadhaa</i>                      | May your feet hold the ground                                   |
| 5. <i>Harkaan Waaqa qabadhaa</i>                      | May you catch the sky with your hands (no limit)                |
| 6. <i>Coqorsa lo'aa ta'aa</i>                         | Become like <i>coqorsa</i> (grass) that strolls over the ground |
| 7. <i>Gannaa fi Bona lalisaa</i>                      | May you grow (become green) in both Summer and Winter           |
| 8. <i>Odaa dagaagaa ta'aa</i>                         | May you become like Sycamore with many branches                 |
| 9. <i>Gannaa fi Bona garbaabaa</i>                    | May you cover space in Winter and Summer (like Sycamore)        |
| 10. <i>Aannanii fi garaa ta'aa</i>                    | May you become milk and stomach to each other                   |
| 11. <i>Dhadhaa fi mataa ta'aa</i>                     | May you fit like butter and hair                                |
| 12. <i>Akka Biiftuu aanga'aa</i>                      | May you be visible like the Sun                                 |
| 13. <i>Akka qorsaa ifaa</i>                           | May you shine like stars  |
| 14. <i>Cirracha Abbayyaa ta'aa</i>                    | Become the sands at the banks of lake <i>Abbayyaa</i>           |
| 15. <i>Lakkaa'an isin hin fixiin</i>                  | Let you become multitudes beyond number                         |
| 16. <i>Madda Walaabuu ta'aa</i>                       | Become <i>Walaabuu</i> lake                                     |
| 17. <i>Waraabaan isin hin fixiin</i>                  | Let you not be finished when people fetch of you                |
| 18. <i>Jalduu Biikoo ta'aa</i>                        | Become like the wild Monkey                                     |
| 19. <i>Qomaa fi dugdatti baadhaa</i>                  | May you carry your offspring at your chest and on your back     |
| 20. <i>Goomattuu fi tolfattuun isin hin danda'iin</i> | May you not be challenged by the jealous and evildoers          |
| 21. <i>Bona ongee baraaramaa</i>                      | May you be spared of the droughts of winter                     |
| 22. <i>Ganna balaqqee oofkalaa</i>                    | May you succeed in the muddy season of Summer                   |
| 23. <i>Hamaa fi hamtuu isin irraa haa qabu</i>        | May God protect you of evil and evildoers                       |
| 24. <i>Kumaatama horaa</i>                            | Become multitudes   |
| 25. <i>Kan hortanii wajjin bulaa</i>                  | May you live long with all that you possess                     |
| 26. <i>Walbira oolaa-bulaa</i>                        | Let you be together all the time                                |
| 27. <i>Safuu waliif qabaadhaa</i>                     | May you respect each other                                      |
| 28. <i>Eebbi kun eebba gosaati,</i>                   | This blessing is the blessing of your clan                      |

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| 29. <i>Qabatee isin biraa hin hafiin</i> | Let it stay with you forever |
| 30. <i>Na hoofkalchaa</i>                | Excuse me                    |

The metaphors used in lines 4 and 5 '*miilaan lafa qabadhaa*' and '*harkaan waaqa qabadhaa*' are meant to wish for deep rootedness and expansion without limits for the receivers of the blessing. As discussed in the previous part the expressions '*coqorsaa*', '*odaa*', '*cirraacha*', and '*Madda Walaabuu*' (lake) which the couples are wished to become carry metaphorical meaning. The ones used in lines 10 and 11 above, '*Aannaniifi garaa ta'aa*' and '*dhadhaa fi mataa ta'aa*', symbolize the wish for perfect harmony between the two couples. In Oromo culture milk is the best thing a household offers a guest and is thought to quite down a burning stomach. Oromo women smear their hairs with butter and it is thought to go deep to create a feeling of pleasure. Hence, analogous the harmony between the milk and stomach, and between the butter and hair, the couples are wished to have accord in their life. The metaphor of '*Jalduu biikoo*' (line 18) is used to refer to the wish for begetting many children to be carried at the back and in arms. The blessing expressions above also involve the use of simile in lines 12 and 13. Here, the couples are wished for to become visible to all like the Sun and to shine like the stars. This is a wish for success in all contexts. The Sun shines during the day time and the stars at night; the couples are wished to have such preeminence.

Similar figures of speech are used in different blessing expressions, and what is presented in the form of metaphor in one blessing expression might appear in the form of simile in another. This is observed in the following blessing expressions performed at a wedding occasion to bless the union.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Waaqa uumaa, Waaqa abbaa hundumaa</i>         | God the creator, God the master of all creation...             |
| 2. <i>Gaa'ela kana eebbisi, gaa'ela nagaa godhi</i> | Bless this wedding, make it a peaceful union                   |
| 3. <i>Gaa'ela milkii taasisi</i>                    | Make it a lucky union  |
| 4. <i>Hamaa oolchi</i>                              | Save it from bad incidents                                     |
| 5. <i>Tokkummaa bara dheeraa taasis</i>             | Make this union, the one that sustains most                    |
| 6. <i>Gaa'ela maatii walitti fidu taasisi</i>       | May the marriage promote the tie between both sides            |
| 7. <i>Gaa'ela tikfamuu haa ta'u</i>                 | May this marriage be protected                                 |
| 8. <i>Waliin jaaraa, badhaadhaa ijoollee horaa</i>  | May the couple live long in unison, prosper and beget children |
| 9. <i>Turaa, ijoollee ijoollee argaa</i>            | May they stay long to see grand children                       |
| 10. <i>Aannan tahaa, eebuu wal baasaa</i>           | May you satisfy each other as milk satisfies thirst            |
| 11. <i>Daraaraa tahaa, walitti urgaa'aa</i>         | May you perfume each other as flowers perfume the air          |
| 12. <i>Damma tahaa walitti mi'aawaa</i>             | May you be delicious to each other like honey                  |
| 13. <i>Wal danda'aa</i>                             | Be patient towards each other                                  |
| 14. <i>Qaroomaa, gorsitoota tahaa</i>               | Be wise to be able to advise others                            |
| 15. <i>Badhaadhaa rakkataa gargaaraa</i>            | Prosper well so that you could lend money to others            |
| 16. <i>Loon horaa, ilmaan horaa</i>                 | Breed many cattle, have many children                          |
| 17. <i>Akka hurrii samii uwwisaa</i>                | Cover the sky like fog   |
| 18. <i>Akka coqorsaa lafa uwwisaa</i>               | Cover the earth like <i>coqorsaa</i>                           |
| 19. <i>Akka odaatti daddagaagaa</i>                 | Bloom ever like <i>odaa</i> tree                               |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 20. <i>Humni keessan hindadhabiin</i>         | May you be not weakened                  |
| 21. <i>Kan halkan dalagdan ilma haa tahu</i>  | May what you do at night become a child  |
| 22. <i>Kan guyyaa dalagdan bu'aa haa ta'u</i> | May what you do at light become a profit |

In the above blessing expressions, the need for agreement/cohesion between the bride and groom is described through the metaphors of '*aannan tahaa*' (line 10), '*daraaraa tahaa*' (line 11), and '*damma tahaa*' (line 12). The first one '*aannan tahaa*' shows the wish for making each other happy (to satiate) through agreement. Milk quenches thirst, comparatively the love between the couples is assumed to satisfy both partners. The aroma of flowers as expressed in the next metaphor '*daraaraa tahaa*' is what attracts bees to the flowers, so the two couples are supposed to magnetize each other. The blessing is the wish for that. The third is also of the same predisposition; it is the wish for the two couples to become scrumptious to each other like honey is. Besides, prosperity and abundance in cattle and children is something a successful marriage demands. As a result, the elders bless them to have such abundance and prosperity. The expressions '*akka hurrii samii uwwisaa*' (line 17), '*akka coqorsaa lafa uwwisaa*' (line 18), and '*akka odaatti daddagaagaa*' (line 19), use poetic mechanism of simile. These expressions also show the fertility, abundance and prosperity in life wished for the newly married. The expressions used to perform the blessing at the occasion, again, are not trivial. They appear to be chosen by a poet with an objective of achieving a powerful stylistic effect through employing poetic devices. In short, the blessing expressions of the Oromo show evidence of lexico-semantic stylistic devices which give poetic quality to the performance.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Oromo people have a very rich oral tradition which is a window to their cultural tradition, history and experiences. Blessing, which is a genre of the verbal art of the people, has an engaging poetic quality worth a literary study. Building upon this feature of the genre, this study has attempted to unearth the poetic features through a stylistic analysis. In order to uncover these qualities, blessing expressions collected from fieldwork and published works are analyzed through the theoretical framework of literary stylistics. Besides, descriptive and analytical approaches have been employed to appraise the performance procedure and recurrent issues in the blessing expressions before embarking on the stylistic analysis. The investigation made has revealed that the performance of Oromo blessing can happen in formal and casual contexts but in a call-and-response procedure. In formal contexts, such as rituals, the procedure is strict and seniority of clans is taken into consideration in taking turns to perform the blessing. The blessing expressions recurrently address universal issues like aspirations for peace, unity, abundance, prosperity, fertility and security of human beings and the totality of nature. These ideas are expressed with powerful language that involves various poetic devices. The stylistic analysis conducted in this regard has revealed that Oromo blessing expressions are replete with phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic stylistic features worth literary merit. The phonological devices dominantly observed include rhyme, alliteration, assonance and consonance. These devices have endowed the blessing performance with musical quality through creating harmony in sounds between deferent words. At syntactic level, the Oromo blessing expressions are dominantly seen to exhibit the features of parallelism, anaphora and



antithesis each of which have contributed to the smooth organization, adding emphasis to the ideas expressed and providing rhythm to the performance. Finally, the lexico-semantic stylistic analysis revealed that Oromo blessing expressions involve the use of several metaphors, images and symbols that add to the creative and imaginative nature of the language used in the verbal art. In brief, based on the analysis conducted, the writers argue that Oromo blessing expressions are poetic, and the poeticism involved in the expressions arguably surpass the written poems currently published.

## **5. Recommendation**

As has been deliberated above, Oromo blessing expressions exhibit striking stylistic qualities. Hence, it is recommended that the aesthetic and poetic creations in the oral tradition of the people, such as the one this article deliberated on, should get scholarly attention to reconstruct the vibrant past of the people characterized by dignity and wisdom as well as aesthetic and poetic creations. The current study focused only on the linguistic and literary features as an evidence for the poeticism, and based on the nature of the data, the researchers recommend subsequent studies pertinent to the indigenous philosophical and theological dominantly addressed in the performance of Oromo blessing through an ethnographic method. Besides, the changes and continuities in content and context of performance of the blessings can be a fertile ground for further study.

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## **Appendix**

Afaan Oromoo writing symbols	IPA symbols
(a)	[a]
(b)	[b]
(c)	[ɣ]
(d)	[d]
(e)	[e]
(f)	[f]
(g)	[g]

(h)	[h]
(i)	[i]
(j)	[dʒ]
(k)	[k]
(l)	[l]
(m)	[m]
(n)	[n]
(o)	[o]
(q)	[kʰ]
(r)	[r]
(s)	[s]
(t)	[t]
(u)	[u]
(w)	[w]
(x)	[tʰ]

(y) [j]

(ch) [ç]

(ph) [pʰ]

(dh) [d]

(ny) [ɲ]

(sh) [ʃ]

(ʻ) [ʔ]

When the vowels become double, they represent vowel length; double consonants represent gemination