

THE OCCURRENCE OF HYPERBOLE IN DIFFERENT SPEECHES

***Abstract:** This article examines the occurrence of hyperbole in different speeches. Hyperbole has been studied in rhetoric and in literary contexts, but only relatively recently in banal, every day contexts. It is often related with irony. The paper emphasizes the interactive nature of hyperbole: listener reaction is crucial to its interpretation and the success of hyperbole depends on the listener entering a pack of acceptance of extreme formulations, the creation of impossible words. Hyperbolic expressions usually pass without challenge by listeners, who accept them as creative intensifications for evaluative or affective purposes such as humor and irony, and who often make their own supportive contributions to the figure of speech. In this paper, examples of hyperbole are included that occur in ironic contexts and illustrated the importance to theory-building.*

***Key words:** hyperbole, exaggeration, irony, trope, rhetoric, speech, literature, humor.*

Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. It has a long history of study as a rhetorical figure of speech in written texts, and has been, since the time of ancient Greeks. Rhetoric, in the ancient world, was associated with persuasive speech and the exercise of power, and centuries of treatises on eloquence and techniques of expressions testify to this. Only Fontanier (1968) shifted the study of figurative rhetoric into the domain banal, common language. However, not a great amount of researches exists into everyday spoken hyperbole, and much of the literature on hyperbole in spoken

language is subsumed within studies of verbal irony and humour (e.g. Gibbs, 2000). In Smith's (1657) *Mysterie of Rhetorique Unvaild*, for example, hyperbole is defined as: "when the tope is exceedingly enlarged, or when the change of signification is very high and lofty, or when in advancing or repressing one speaks much more than is precisely true, yea above all belief" (p. 54). Smith identified two kinds of hyperbole: auxesis and meiosis (ibid: p. 55), the exaggerated intensification, expanding or enlarging of an entity and the exaggerated reduction or attenuation of it, respectively.

Hyperbole and irony

Much useful conception to hyperbole may be found in the literature on irony and sarcasm. Irony is a literary device in which contradictory statements or situations reveal a reality that is different from what appears to be true. There are many forms of irony featured in literature. The effectiveness of irony as a literary device depends on the reader's expectations and understanding of the disparity between what "should" happen and what "actually" happens in a literary work. Gibbs (1994) notes that both hyperbole and understatement are closely related to irony in traditional rhetoric "in that each misrepresents the truth" (p. 391). Roberts and Kreuz (1994) found that irony and hyperbole co-occurred in discoursal contexts where the goals were humor, emphasis and clarification. One linking characteristics between hyperbole and irony is what Kreuz and Robers (1995) call 'nonveridicality', a difference between utterance and reality, what we refer to as contradiction. A important distinction in the study of irony has been made between 'use' and 'mention', where use is defined as reference directly to what an expression refers to, while mention involves reflexive reference to the expression itself.

Walking into an empty theater and asking, "it's too crowded".

Telling a rude customer to "have a nice day".

Entering a child's messy room and saying, "nice place you have here".

Telling a quiet group, "don't speak all at once".

Hyperbole in every day language

A significant contribution to the linguistics of hyperbole is offered by Spitzbardt (1963), who supports the need to look at hyperbole in everyday speech (as opposed to its occurrence in literature) and who focuses on the lexico-grammatical repertoire for hyperbole. In general, hyperbole is often used for emphasis or effect. In casual speech, it functions as an intensifier: saying “the bag weighed a ton” simply means that the bag was extremely heavy. The rhetorical device may be used for serious or ironic or comic effects. Understanding hyperbole and its use in context can help understand the speaker’s point. Hyperbole generally conveys feelings or emotions from the speaker, or from those who speaker may talk about. It can be used in a form of humor, excitement, distress, and many other emotions, all depending on the context in which the speaker uses it.

“The car went faster than the speed of light”.

“His new car cost a bazillion dollars”.

“We’re so poor we don’t have two cents to rub together”.

“That joke is so old; the last time I heard it, I was riding a dinosaur”.

In popular culture hyperbole is one of the most widely recognized and used forms of figurative language in everyday life. It is used heavily in advertising and entertainment. Advertisers use hyperbole to exaggerate the benefits of products to boost sales. Repetitive hyperbole is used in public relations to increase the popularity of a person or product.

Hyperbole in literature

Hyperbole is a literary device and we use this device in our daily conversation to include a certain effect. However, the translation of the example of a hyperbole is not actually true, rather it is an embellishment and it highlights an emotion. It is applied to accentuate the thoughts, ideas and images presented in the literature and it dramatizes the overall text. The objective of using hyperbole is to add an amusing effect in the text. In literature, it carries a great

significance as it allows the writers to present something common in an intense manner. In short, by applying hyperbole, one can turn a common feeling into a remarkable one. Most importantly, the use of hyperbole provides a contrast as with this technique, something is explained by giving an extra stress and on the other hand, the other descriptions remain normal. For this reason, it attracts the reader's attention and makes the literary work memorable for a long time.

Hyperbole is an extreme, extravagant and impossible exaggeration, such as when Flannery O'Connor writes in his essay, *Parker's Back*: "*And the skin on her face was thin and drawn tight like the skin on an onion and her eyes were gray and sharp like the points of two ice picks*".

Jonathan Swift has been famous for employing exaggeration in his writings, to provide social and political commentary. Through his story, *A Modest Proposal*, Swift elevates the politic of society to an extend of barefaced absurdity. In this essay, he exaggerates by suggesting that the only way to save Ireland from poverty and overpopulation is to kill the children of the poor families. He further suggests that their meat would serve as a delicacy for the nobles of Ireland. He continues to exaggerate, considering ways and recipes to make their skin into handbags and gloves by saying: "*Those who are more thrifty may flay the carcass, the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies and summer boots for fine gentlemen*". In fact, Swift exaggerates resolutely this idea because the people of Ireland have failed to find a logical solution to reduce poverty and overpopulation.

Song by John Donne:

*"Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep of envy's stinging,*

And find

What wind

In this song the author directs a listener to do a number of impossible things: to catch a falling star, to impregnate a mandrake root, to find what happens to time that has passed, to discover who divided the devil's hoof in two parts, to teach him to hear the songs of mermaids or to avoid ever feeling envy and finally, to discover the favorable wind that might push a truthful and faithful person onward.

To sum up, we can say that by definition, a hyperbole is nothing but trope composed of exaggerated words or ideas used for emphasis. In every area of our lives we encounter exaggeration to make the speeches more effective. Hyperbole is commonly used not only in prose and poetry but also in every day communication among people. However, although valued in creative writing, hyperboles are avoided in formal writing or business writing.

References

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