

Title: Function words in oral poetry: their use and meaning

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In my presentation I study the role of function words in the oral tradition of the *Jbala* (Northern Morocco) by using an interdisciplinary approach: I combine principles of the Oral-Formulaic theory (Lord, 1960) with the methodology of the current usage-based linguistics, especially cognitive linguistic approaches such as construction grammar, frame semantics, conversation analysis and other approaches to the online structuring of speech (Fillmore 1982; Goldberg 2009). Previous research in the field of oral poetics and cognition and the role of function words and their use has suggested that the role of function words is not purely decorative, they should rather be analysed from the semantic-function perspective (Bonifazi, 2016; Minchin, 2016; Antović & Pagán Cánovas, 2016). This previous research, however, has been carried out on the poetic material from already extinct or nearly extinct oral traditions - Homer and Serbo-Croatian epics, i.e., the researchers had very limited or, in the case of Homer epics, no access at all to **authentic, unmodified** by later editors poetic texts produced in the course of composition-in-performance.

To verify the results of previous research and study the degree to which metrics, meaning and function condition the use of function words during composition-in-performance, I will analyse a corpus of the oral poetry of the *Jbala* - a thriving oral tradition from northern Morocco. I collected the corpus during my fieldwork in Morocco in 2017-2018 during which I interviewed both professional and amateur oral poets. The corpus comprises 160 quatrains totalling in 1280 poetic lines. The texts constituting the collection have been recorded in two modes: first they have been performed live (authentic performance) and then dictated to me by the same poet. I assume that when an oral poet performs live, he is creating his poetry under stressful cognitive circumstances, while when dictating, he has enough time to work on his poetry and 'polish' it. By running a comparative analysis of all occurrences of function words that start a poetic line in performed and dictated texts, I aspire to prove two hypotheses. I expect to show that: (1) the use of function words - especially those that occur exclusively in the beginning of a poetic line - launches a set of possible semantic structures that a poet can use to trigger certain cognitive operations; and (2) that in terms of satisfying metrical requirements, the poet has a wide range of function words - first of all, conjunctions and vocative particles - to choose from and that if function words were only used to fill empty slots, poets would have used them differently.

Keywords: oral poetry, formulaic language, frames, function words, *Jbala*.

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