WHEN WORDS GROW BIGGER THAN LIFE: HYPERBOLE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstrac: This article looks at hyperbole, the art of purposeful exaggeration, in English and Uzbek literature. It compares how writers in the two traditions use bold language to show love, power, pain, and humour. The examples come from Beowulf, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Marvell on the English side, and from folk epic, Navoiy, Qodiriy, and everyday speech on the Uzbek side. The comparison shows that both literatures share the same basic impulse: to say more than the plain facts so that feeling can be understood. The differences lie mostly in tone and purpose. English hyperbole often moves toward drama, irony, and wit, while Uzbek classical hyperbole is closely tied to the poetics of love and heroism. The article ends with a few ideas for readers, translators, and teachers.

Keywords: hyperbole; mubolag'a; figurative language; English literature; Uzbek literature; comparative stylistics.

Introduction

Every language has a way of making small things large. A tired student says he has waited for ages. A mother says she has told her child a thousand times. Nobody counts, and nobody is cheated. The listener understands at once that the speaker is not giving a number but a feeling. This is hyperbole, and literature has used it for as long as people have told stories.

This article compares hyperbole in English and Uzbek literature. The two traditions grew far from each other, with different religions, histories, and rules of poetry. Yet when we read them side by side, we see writers doing something very similar: stretching the truth so that a deeper truth can be seen. The aim here is modest. I do not try to cover every writer or every period. I choose a few well-known examples, explain how the exaggeration works in each, and ask what the comparison can teach us.

What is hyperbole?

The word hyperbole comes from Greek and means something like "throwing beyond." The Uzbek term mubolag'a came through Arabic and carries the idea of going to the extreme. Abrams (1999) describes hyperbole as bold overstatement that is not meant to be taken literally, and Cuddon (2013) counts it among the oldest figures of speech. Claridge (2011), in her large study of English, adds an important point: hyperbole is not just decoration. It helps

speakers show attitude, build closeness, and catch attention. Colston and O'Brien (2000) approach the same idea from psychology and show that hyperbole makes the gap between what we expected and what happened feel bigger.

The Arabic and Persian tradition of rhetoric, which shaped classical Uzbek writing, studied mubolag'a with great care. It separated exaggeration into levels: some claims are possible but rare, some are possible in theory but never seen in real life, and some are impossible altogether. English criticism has no such official scale, but the idea is useful for both traditions. The further a statement moves from reality, the more it asks the reader to play along.

Hyperbole in English literature

The oldest English poetry is already full of big claims. In Beowulf (Heaney, 2000), the hero speaks of his past fights with monsters and sea creatures in a way that no ordinary warrior could match. Boasting was part of the heroic code, and the listeners in the hall expected it. The exaggeration is not a lie; it is a promise of courage.

In the Renaissance, hyperbole moved onto the stage. In Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (1604), the sight of Helen of Troy makes Faustus ask if hers was "the face that launch'd a thousand ships." One face and a thousand ships: the line works because it turns beauty into history. Shakespeare uses the same tool for pain. After the murder, Macbeth fears that all the ocean of Neptune cannot wash the blood from his hand, and then he imagines that his hand would turn the seas red instead (Shakespeare, 2015). Guilt becomes so heavy that the whole sea looks small beside it.

Hyperbole can also be playful. In "To His Coy Mistress," Marvell (1681) promises a love "vaster than empires, and more slow" if only there were enough time. The speaker is half serious and half teasing, and the reader smiles while being persuaded. In modern English the figure has come down into the street. McCarthy and Carter (2004) found that speakers use it all the time in ordinary talk, with phrases such as "millions of people" or "absolutely starving." American tall tales, such as those about Paul Bunyan, go one step further and make exaggeration the whole story. Everyone knows it is untrue, and that is the joke.

Hyperbole in Uzbek literature

Uzbek hyperbole grows from two roots: the oral tradition and the written classical tradition. In folk epics such as Alpomish, heroes defeat whole armies, and the singer (baxshi) praises a strength no human has. As with Beowulf, the audience knows the form and wants it. A hero must be larger than life if the community is to feel safe. The same love of exaggeration turns toward laughter in the stories of Afandi, where a small event grows into an absurd situation and

people laugh because they see their own weakness in it.

In written poetry, hyperbole reaches its most refined form. Alisher Navoiy (1441–1501) wrote in Chagatai Turkic and brought the rhetorical heritage of Persian and Arabic into his own language. In Farhod va Shirin, part of his Xamsa (Navoiy, 1987–2003), Farhod is given a task that no man could finish: to cut a canal through a mountain in order to win Shirin. A single man against a mountain. The impossibility is the point, because it measures the size of his love. When Farhod dies after hearing false news about Shirin, the poet tells the loss as something too big for one life. Navoiy's ghazals do the same on a smaller scale. In the classical ghazal tradition, a lover's sigh reaches the sky, his tears flood the earth, and the beloved's face shames the sun. Nobody believes these pictures, and nobody is meant to. They are meant to be felt, and educated readers also enjoyed seeing how skilfully a poet could renew an old image.

In the twentieth century, Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar (1926) moved Uzbek prose toward realism, and the exaggeration became quieter. Kumush is still praised with high images, but the story rests on family pressure, custom, and social change. Outside books, hyperbole stays very much alive in Uzbek speech. People say kulgidan o'ldim ("I died of laughter") or ming rahmat ("a thousand thanks") without thinking, just as English speakers say "thanks a million."

Comparison and discussion

Table 1 gathers the main points. It is a simplification, and both literatures have serious and playful examples, but it shows where the weight tends to fall.

Table 1. Hyperbole in English and Uzbek literature: a short comparison

Aspect	English literature	Uzbek literature
Main roots	Heroic boasting, Renaissance drama, wit, and modern spoken language	Oral epic and the Persian-Arabic poetics of classical verse
Common subjects	Guilt, power, time, beauty, desire	Love and separation, heroism, beauty, loyalty
Usual tone	Dramatic, witty, often ironic or humorous	Earnest and ornamental in classical poetry; playful in folk humour
Reader's role	Enjoys the effect, the joke, or the dramatic shock	Expects the tradition and judges how freshly the poet renews an image

Everyday speech	I'm starving; thanks a million	Kulgidan o'ldim (I died of laughter); ming rahmat (a thousand thanks)

Three things stand out. First, both traditions begin in the voice. Beowulf and Alpomish were performed before listeners, and the big language of the performer made the hero feel present. Second, both use exaggeration to measure feeling: Faustus measures beauty in ships, Farhod measures love in a mountain. Third, the difference is mostly one of attitude. English writers, especially after the Renaissance, often let the reader see the performance, so wit and irony enter easily. Classical Uzbek poetry more often keeps a serious face, because hyperbole there belongs to a shared language of love and devotion, and the pleasure comes from fresh variation inside a known pattern. Folk humour, on the other hand, shows that Uzbek speakers enjoy open exaggeration as much as anyone.

Conclusion

Hyperbole is one of the places where literatures that never met can still recognise each other. English and Uzbek writers both stretch the truth, and both do it for the same human reason: ordinary words are sometimes too small for what people feel. What changes is the setting, the tone, and the audience's expectations.

This has practical value. Translators should ask not only whether an image is exaggerated, but also how the original reader would receive it. A literal English version of a classical Uzbek image may sound overly sentimental, while a plain version may lose its beauty. Teachers can use paired examples, for instance Faustus beside Farhod, to help students notice figurative language in both languages. Further research could use larger collections of texts, including modern Uzbek poetry and prose, to test the patterns suggested here.

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