

Figures of speech in the Dogon oral poetry of the *baja ni*

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Among the many renditions of Dogon texts now available, the poetry of the *baja ni* stands out, for several reasons. It is one of the longer texts, but more important these songs are crucial inside the *yu yana* funeral rites, occupying a pivotal place in this five day spectacular. The status of this song cycle is yet enhanced by the figure of its purported author, Abirè Goro, the poet/prophet that roamed the Seno and the Falaise area in the mid-nineteenth century, whose huge reputation still reverberates in the present. One rendition of this long cycle of songs, which needs at least seven hours for a single performance, has become available now, both in print and online, a source open for exploration and data mining. In this contribution I zoom in on one particular figure of speech, called *tanniye* in Jamsay Dogon, a broad category of figurative, allegorical and hyperbolic expressions that grace the lyrics of the *baja ni*. Together with the ideophones, the *tanniye* convey emotions, express gratitude and respect, and forge unity among the singers and their audience. Also, these figures of speech tie in the personal feelings of loss and mourning that are habitual in funeral songs, with both the cultural environment and the generalized human condition of mortality, and help in construing agency in the face of fate and destiny.