

ANALYSIS OF CONTENT AND FORM IN IGBO ORAL POETRY

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines the analysis of content and form in Igbo oral poetry. Igbo oral poetry is the totality of verbal expressive form evolved in traditional society for social events, which are passed on orally from one generation to another. Oral poetry was relied upon as a way of preserving stories, histories and values. It was as old as man, and a crucial tool for outpouring of one's emotional feeling using language. Igbo oral poetry is gradually abandoned by Igbo people due to foreign culture. This is a survey research. This paper realized that content in Igbo oral poetry usually has themes and emotion while structure in Igbo oral poetry contains rhythmic pattern and figurative language. It recommended that Igbo people should not allow their oral poetry to be in danger list because, Igbo oral poetry entertains, amuses, instructs and educates, as most oral poems contain deep reflections about society and man's position in it.

Introduction

Every society has its own forms of poetry irrespective of its state of economic development. Oral poetry is the determination of cultural milieu, habit and occupation in which everyday life is conducted. Oral poetry varies from society to society, from environment to environment. Evaluation of oral poetry must base upon and derived from the society in which these poetic forms emulate. Oral poetry is an expression of African artistic sensibility emanating from a primal vision of life. It includes chants, songs, incantations which are transferred from one person to another through the word of mouth.

In oral poetry, each poem has its own points of interest, relevance and meanings in its environment. Each one expresses a specific idea formulated by local imaginaries and symbolisms, animals, trees, spirits, households and emotions such as love, grief, sorrow etc. which form fabric of the life of the people.

Oral poetry can be sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument such as guitar, gong and lute, its subject matter is very often of a very personal nature and expressed usually in a language full of emotions.

Oral poetry according to Akparobaro,(2007:29), "... is the folk song of pre-literate societies which have been evolved and passed on through the spoken word from one generation to another." Oral poetry which includes, songs, recitations, chants e.t.c are modes which construct and deconstruct the social cultural milieu of the people. Its works compose mentally for illiterate people, stored in their memory and then spoken, recited, chanted or sung on specific occasions. According to Egundu (1981:38), "Traditional or oral poetry is an artistic verbal expression of the poet's thought, feelings about an event or series of events, or an experience or series of experienced perception involving thinking and feeling. The occasion on which oral poetry is performed in Igbo society are usually ceremonial one, they could be festive or funeral occasions. A festive occasion has the emotion of joy, and funeral which has the emotion of sorrow. All these occasions have patterns of thought that go with them. Finnegan(1965:23) in a similar way, opines that oral poetry "... is composed in oral performance by people who cannot read or write." It is found all over the world .Oral poetry circulates essentially by oral rather than written means, This means that the poems are performed through oral composer-performer and has the audience before him. This shows that the performer cannot perform in isolation. Igbo people have their ancient poetic tradition which has no authorship. The poems they composed are owned by the community and sometimes by groups. That is group ownership. This is not peculiar to Igbo oral poetry alone but could also be found in other culture in the world.

Types of Oral Poetry Are:

Moonlight poem, funeral poem, marriage poem, lullaby etc.

In the analysis of content and form in selected Igbo oral poems, the format given by Uzochukwu (1981:1) will be adopted with some modifications. In this paper, poems were kept together, their types, themes and emotions were kept under contents-while the structure 'of the poems, their rhythmic pattern and their figurative language are under forms.

Igbo Oral Poems

Example 1

Moonlight Poem

Mụ na oke kwụ ọhịa akụ
Mụ na oke kwụ ọhịa akụ

Chorus

kwangogiri
kwangogiri

Mụ atụta nwa akụ m
 Si oke takeere m
 Oke a taa ya takee ya
 M si oke taperenu
 Oke ataa ya tachaa ya
 Si oke bụ onye ohi
 Oke si m bu onye ụkpa
 Asị m ohi gi bụrụkwa gi
 Osi ụkpa m kparakwa m
 Olee anụ bi n'igwe
 Oke oke
 Oke oke

kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri

I Went To Pick Kernels With The Rat

I went to pick kernels with the rat
 I went to pick kernels with the rat
 I picked a kernel
 I told the rat to crack it for me
 The rat cracked it
 I told the rat to take or eat a part
 The rat ate it all
 I told the rat you are a thief
 The rat said I have a long throat
 Let your thief take you
 He said let my long throat take me
 Where is the animal which lives in heaven
 Rat rat
 Rat rat

kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kwangogiri
 kswangogiri

Example 2: Nwa Nnụnụ Were Isi Kwe M Ekele

Nwa nnụnụ were isi kwe m ekele
 Nwa nnụnụ were isi kwe m ekele
 Nwa nnụnụ kwe nke m na-ekwu
 Nwa nnụnụ kedu ebe l na-eje?
 Nwa nnụnụ nye m ihe di n' akpa gi
 Nwa nnụnụ kwe kwe kwe
 Nwa nnụnụ kwee.

Small bird salute me with your head
 Small bird salute me with your head
 Small bird consent to what I am saying
 Small bird where are you going to?
 Small bird gives me what is in your pocket
 Small bird consent consent consent consent
 Small bird consent

Example 3: Funeral Poems

Ugegbe e tiwago na o tiwago

Ezigbo ugegbe e tiwago na o tiwago
Na o tiwara n'ike

Mirror has broken
Mirror has broken ;
Good mirror has broken, it has broken.
And it broke accidentally

Example 4: Marriage Poem

Ada o bu ka -i ghara anyi?
Ada o bu ka -i ghara anyi?
Lawa be di gi?
Ada o bu ka l gharanu anyi
Lawa be di gi?
Ada Chukwu gozie gi
Ma I lawa be di gi
Ada Chukwu gozie di gi
Bu ogo anyi nwoke
Ada Chukwu nyekwa gi nwa
Ma i ruo be di gi

Ada are you leaving us?
Ada are you leaving us?
To go to your husband house's?
Ada are you. leaving us?
To go to your husband's house?
God bless your husband
Who's our in-law
Ada let God give you children
When you reach your husbands' house.

Example 5: Lullaby

Kwusi Akwa Kwusi Akwa
kwusi akwa
kwusi akwa
Kwusi akwa ka nne gi lota
kwusi akwa
Kwusi akwa ka nne gi lota
kwusi akwa
Zutara gi nwa ite nwa oma
kwusi akwa
Zutara gi nwa ite nwa oma
kwusi akwa
Were ya siere nwoke nri
kwusi akwa
Were ya siere nwaaanyi nri
kwusi akwa

Nwoke si na nri ajoka
kwusi akwa
Nwanyi si na nri amaka
kwusi akwa
Nwoke buru tufuo
kwusi akwa
Nwanyi gbaje tuturu
kwusi akwa
Umununụ racha aka
kwusi akwa
Uno nje megbuo ha
kwusi akwa
Leekwa ya ka odi n'ite
kwusi akwa
Ori ihe nwa ijiji be kwa ya n'onu
kwusi akwa
Ori ihe nwa ijiji be kwa ya n'onu
kwusi akwa

Stop crying so that your mother will come back
stop Crying
Stop crying so that your father will come back
stop Crying
She will buy beautiful pot for you
stop Crying
He will buy beautiful pot for you
stop Crying
Which will be use to cook for man
stop Crying
Which will be use to cook for woman
stop Crying
Man said that food is bad
top Crying
Woman said that food is delicious
stop Crying
The man threw away food
stop Crying
The woman went and picked the food
stop Crying
Little birds have something to eat
stop Crying
Uno njenje is about to killing them
stop Crying
Look at it in the pot
stop Crying
One who eats baby's food let fly perch at his mouth
stop Crying

One who eats baby's food let fly perch at his or her mouth
stop Crying

Analysis of Content of these Poems

Content of Poem 1

The Type of Poem: Moonlight poem

Theme: Moonlight poem is for leisure

Emotion: The emotion of this poem is emotion of disappointment. Rat betrayed his friend that went in his company to pick kernel, by eating all the kernels that was meant for both of them. Rat's friend trusted him and chose him when he was going to pick kernel but got disappointed.

There are some cases of rat in our society, the friend betrayed friends; politician betrayed masses who voted them into power. They ignore their principles or belief in order to achieve something or gain advantage for themselves. When one is involved in such situation, there will be pain and bitterness like the case of rat and his friend. Rat's friend was very annoyed that he went further to complain to other animals about what rat did but no one seems to respond. In our society, individuals should be honest in their dealings in the society. They should speak out against any evil act without minding the consequences that might result from giving their opinion.

Content of Poem 2

The Type of Poem: Moonlight poem

Theme: Moonlight poem is for leisure

Emotion: The emotion of this poem is emotion of pride. The singer is greeting the bird but the bird failed to respond. Greeting could be a smile, waving of hand or message of good wishes for somebody's health, happiness et cetera. In our society today, some people exchange greetings with suspicion or ignore it like the case of the bird.

Content of Poem 3

Type of Poem: Funeral poem

Theme: Funeral poem for the dead

Emotion: The emotion of this poem is emotion of sorrow. In Igbo tradition, mirror "ugegbe" represents death, and once is broken, it is broken, and it is irreparable. Death is both terminal and seminal though tragic; it compensates with memories and hope that litter the broken worlds of loved ones. Death is also transitional; it marks the end of life and the beginning of another life. When it knocks, it leaves tears flowing. To the living, death is a personal experience.

Content of poem 4

The Type of Poem: Marriage poem

Theme: The Blessing of a new Newly Married Wife

Emotion: The emotion of this poem is emotion of joy. In Igbo culture, it is the duty of, the parents to bless their children's marriage, by wishing them well in their marriage. In Igbo tradition, any marriage song must have the following message: to give a piece of advice to the new couple, consolation to the bride's parents for losing their daughter and congratulating the family of the bridegroom for winning such a precious gem.

Content of Poem 5

The Type of Poem: Lullaby

Theme: Lullaby for nursing a baby

Emotion: The emotion of this poem is emotion of pity. This type of poem is sung by the maids while nursing a baby. It can be used to lure a baby to sleep or to stop him or her from crying especially when the parents were away. Married women also sing song during the period of child nursing.

Forms in selected Igbo oral poems;

Structure of poem 1.

The poem is written in a stretch. It has thirteen lines of unequal length. This is a narrative poem in which the ideas occur in logical sequence of syntagmatic relationship. It means that any interchange of position of any line or lines would automatically distort the sequential flow of ideas. Lines 3 and 7 bring in how people betray others especially their friends. Though a layman will say that lines 10-11 are the only ones that occur sequentially but a critical look will reveal that lines 12 and 13 are an appeal to other animals about the ugly incident.

In this poem, the emotion created are greediness, pity and suffering. Also, in this poem one line of the poem was repeated "mụ na oke kwụ ọhịa akụ" this added emphasis on the ideas being conveyed.

Structure of poem 2

This poem is arranged in paradigmatic order. Some line of this poem can interchange position without affecting the logical or sequential flow of ideas. There is repetition in lines 1 and 2. Also, "in lines 1 and 2, the bird was expected to respond to the greeting. In lines 4 and 5, question was asked to the bird. In lines 6 and 7 the bird was expected to say something but he made no comment. In this poem, the end can be used as the beginning for example Nwannụnụ kwe kwe kwe Nwannụnụ were isi kwe m ekele.

This poem is written in one stanza. It has seven lines of unequal length. The image created in this poem is pride.

Structure of poem 3

This poem is written in one stanza. It has three lines of unequal length. The poem is also arranged in paradigmatic order. It is made up of two ideas which tell the listener that someone was bereaved. The emotion created – is shock or pity, deep thought, sorrow and disappointment.

Structure of poem 4

This poem is arranged in paradigmatic order. It means that some lines of the poem can interchange position without affecting the logical or sequential flow of ideas. In this poem, Ada the newly married is being blessed by the singer with the words of goodwill. The repetition of line 1 shows that although the people want Ada to be married, yet they feel the impact of her leaving. The emotion created here are pity and joy, beauty, praise, sadness and advice. The image above shows Igbo's view about marriage.

Structure of poem 5

The poem is written in one stanza. It has seventeen lines of unequal length. In this poem the use of repetition to achieve emphasis is very high, furthermore, the emotion created in this are pity, reward, hope, promise, possession and enjoyment.

Figurative Language of poem 1

There are alliteration and assonance in:

lines 5 oke at ava takee ya

Line 7 oke ata ya taachaa ya

Line 11 ukpa m kparakwa m

In these lines, there are occurrence of /a/, /y/, /t/ and /m/. There is also occurrence of anaphora or repetition e.g lines 1 and 13.

Line1 Mụ na oke kwụ ọhịa akụ

Mụ na oke kwụ ọhịa akụ

Line 13 oke oke

Oke oke

In addition, there is repetition of the chorus in each lines, “kwangogori”. The poem is rich in figurative language with the occurrence of alliteration, assonance and anaphora.

Figurative Language of poem 2

There are repetition in lines 1 and 2 of this poem example

Nwa nnụnụ were isi kwe m ekele

Nwa nnụnụ were isi kwe m ekele

Personification, the bird is personified in lines 4 and 5 example

Nwa nnụnụ kedu ebe ị na-eje?

Nwa nnụnụ nye m ihe di n'akpa gi

Figurative Language of poem 3

There is alliteration in lines 1 and 3 of this poem. For example, in lines 1, ugegbe etiwago na o tiwago and in lines 2 Na o tiwara n'ike. Some consonants sound at the beginning of the underlined words are alliteration. Alliteration according to Umegbolu (2009:65),”... is the

repetition of consonants sound at the beginning of words, in a line of a poem especially the stressed words”. In a similar way Okodo (2011:2) in his own view says “alliteration is the repetition of the first consonants sound at the beginning of two or more words at successive or at close intervals”. This means that alliteration concerned with the consonants sound at the beginning of a word that are close together. Alliteration is based on sound rather than spelling.

In this poem also there are assonance in all lines of the poem for example

Ugegbe etiwago na o tiwago.

Ezigbo ugegbe e tiwago na o tiwago

Na o tiwara n’ike

Some vowel sounds in the underlined words are assonance. Assonance according to Meyer (1997:562) “is the repetition of the same vowels sound in nearby words”. According to Kirsznar and Mandell (2007:982) assonance is the “repetition of the same similar vowel sound especially in stressed syllables”. This means that assonance when used more subtly however, can enhance a poem’s effectiveness. Assonance sometimes unifies in the entire poem; it also emphasized the thematic connections among words and thus links the poem’s ideas

In this poem, there is metonymy in line 1 and 2 for example. Lines 1 Ugegbe

Line 2 Ugegbe.

Ugegbe signifies death

Figurative Language of poem 4

Rhetorical question is a statement or an interrogation put in the form of a question, and for which an answer is not given nor expected, but for the reason of making the statement more emphatic, more effective or clearer. In this poem, there are rhetoric questions in lines 1,2 and 3 for example Ada ọ bụ ka ị ghara anyị? Ada ọ bụ ka ị ghara anyị? Lawa be di gi? The singer expects no answer from Ada rather the answer is implied.

Figurative Language of poem 5

In this poem, there is alliteration at the beginning of the lines of this poem

Line 1 Kwụsị akwa

Line 2 Kwụsị akwa

Line 3 Kwụsị akwa ka nne gi lota

Line 4 Kwụsị akwa ka nna gi lota

Line 5 Zụtara gi nwa ite nwa oma

Line 6 Zụtara gi nwa ite nwa oma

Line 7 Were ya siere nwoke nri

Line 8 Were ya siere Nwaanyị nri

Line 9 Nwoke si na nri ajoka

Line 12 Nwaanyi gbaje tụturu

Line 12 nwaanyị agbaje tụturu

Lines 16 and 17 on ihe nwa ijiji be kwa ya n'onu.

Line 7 nwa/nnu/nu/kwe/ee

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u/ge/gbe/e/ti/wa/go/na/o/ti/wa/go.

Rhythmic Patterns of Poem 4

The poem has an average of eight breath pauses.

Ada/o/bu/ka/i/gha/ra/anyi/. The lines are broken into two the second complimenting the first so as to bring out the ideas and for sense balance. The /gi/ sound, coming at the end of the lines helps in the rhyming of the poem.

Conclusion

The writer has revealed through the study that the problem of Igbo oral poetry is not only how it is built but also how the nature of the oral poem is separated into parts for easy understanding. Furthermore, through this study, it was revealed that the arrangement of the lines in Igbo oral poems were either in syntagmatic or paradigmatic order. This is necessary, because emotions in poetry draw the readers or audience close to the facts or ideas, and also gives room for more appreciation on the literacy piece. Igbo oral poems are endowed with the figures of speech.

Moreover, most of Igbo oral poems are by nature short, because of this, the use of repetition is made to supplement the shortness of the poems. This leads to the repetition of the poem as many times as wished by the soloist or performer. This is necessary because if such poems are recited once, the beauty and nature of the poem will not be achieved. Igbo oral poems are arranged in lines rather than stanzas. Igbo oral poetry should not be measured in the same yardstick with Igbo written poems which mostly appear in stanzas. As such, Igbo oral poems should be treated on the basis of their own features.

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