

A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Igbo Oral Poems

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Abstract: This study documents and analyzes oral poetry of traditional Igbo society in the aim of discovering how language is manipulated to create the poems, and what the patterns, forms, and variants of the language convey, and reveal about the nature of the traditional society which produced them. The main thrust of this study is to explore into the role of language in elucidating the meaning of poems in the context of the socio-historical realities of the traditional society which created them. It is argued here that understanding the linguistic resources of poems is instrumental to appreciating them as works of arts. Though Eme and Nwankwere, (2020) carried out a stylistic analysis of Igbo folktales in musical rendition, little has been done to analyze Igbo oral poetry stylistically. A total of eight poems were recorded from the writer's introspection and used for this study. Formalism and sociological theories are the theoretical frameworks guiding the work, while Simpson's 2004 framework is adopted for the analysis. The analysis reveals that such devices as repetitions, neologisms, figures of speech, unique word choices and parallelism are used to create stylistic effects in the poems. The study, therefore, concludes that the beauty of poetry is in understanding the meanings communicated by the nuances of its language.

Keywords: Igbo, traditional society, oral poetry, language, formalism, repetitions.

INTRODUCTION

Africa remains the place for songs, dance and music; activities that not only frequently express the heart of the continent, but are veritable components of traditional life. (Okoh 140)

Poetry is an essential property of all human societies. It dwells in the realm of feelings and emotions, and is expressed in specially crafted language. It has "been pivotal in shaping humans, their behaviour, and society at large from the beginnings" (Tannela Boni). Poetry affords the poet an opportunity to vent his/her strongest emotions on issues of eternal truth, life, fears, uncertainties, love, commitments, disillusionment, death, friendship, as it affects him or her and his/her society.

Poetry has no generally acceptable definition. Wordsworth sees it as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" (Umeh 14). For Percy Bysshe Shelley, it is "the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (Umeh 14). Poetry has also been defined as the "imaginative expression of strong feelings, usually rhythmic... the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility" (William Wordsworth in Maduakor 1). It is deeply embedded in human life and living; tongue, clime, tribe, class, level of literacy, notwithstanding. Poetry is in nature. In fact, poetry is nature itself for everything in nature renders itself to poetry.

The oral poetry of the traditional Igbo society is the focus of this paper. By oral poetry, we mean poetry which is part of the folklore in societies that are not yet touched by writing. Oral poetry is a genre of oral literature.

"Oral Literature or folk literature refers to a heritage of imaginative verbal creations, stories, folk beliefs and songs of the preliterate societies which have been evolved and passed on through the spoken word from one generation to another" (Akporobaro 33).

But 'literature' and 'oral' are viewed as opposites based on some Western thinking; the stance from which Ong, 1982 wrote, and in which he traced literature down to the Latin root "litera" (letter of the alphabet), and referred to 'oral literature' as "a strictly preposterous term" (11). He goes on to liken it to a "wheelless automobile" (12). But defining literature as a writing tradition based on etymology has been challenged by many writers like Bauman, 1986, Bahr, *et al.*, 1997, Webster, 2006, Okoh, 2008, Finnegan, 2012, Chadwick, 1939, to mention but a few. Bauman refers to it as a "weak argument for eliminating "oral Literature" (Webster 297). Webster goes on to cite Bahr, *et al.*, as pointing out that:

"Oral literature, including song, arose as a means to fix those thoughts in memorable, recoverable, keepable forms...namely 'stretches of language (discourse) kept in memory or (later) writing;' or more simply, 'kept language.'" He adds that "by 'keeping' I mean 'keeping for reenactment,' including retelling and rereading." (Webster 297).

Chadwick insists that "writing is unessential to either the composition or the preservation of literature (cited in Finnegan 17), while Finnegan refers to the attempt to differentiate the verbal art of literate from that of the non-literate people as "misleading as well as unfruitful" (17).

So folk tales, myths, legends, poems and songs, epics, proverbs, lullabies, tongue twisters, riddles, jokes, children's oral songs, as they exist in non-literate societies are imaginative literary creations in their own rights. Writing or speech are simply ways of preserving them. Literature exists in all human societies. It generally reflects and communicates the heartbeats of the community that owns it. Its form, style and manner of rendition are a mirror of the socio-historical cum moral and religious lives of its owners. Meanwhile, the oral literature of any community is largely conditioned and influenced by the nature, circumstances, histories and experiences of that community. A farming community has its oral literature informed by its farming experiences; a herder community has its own wound around pastoral and related experiences, while “a community that is sustained by fishing will have its oral literature studded with water imagery and experiences”. (Umeh 26).

Though urbanization and inventions in ICT are threatening oral performances with extinction in different parts of the world, some forms of oral poetry in Igbo society, especially the *Ima mbem*, incantations, chants, prayers, have remained resilient. Poetry is a way of life to the Igbo. It is implicated in everything they do, from greetings, whistling, signalling, and other things they do in informal settings, to the most formal gatherings and most adverse and challenging circumstances of life. The traditional Igbo oral poet is the repository of the wisdom and ancient knowledge of his society. He recites them both in formal and informal situations; entertaining and educating the people in their customs, norms and tradition.

But poems sang by women and children as part of everyday living, usually, at dusk as they sit by firesides preparing supper, or picking palm nuts for processing, or cracking palm kernels, or doing many of their other night chores, or even sit leisurely enjoying the brightness of moonlit nights are almost going out of currency. Their roles have been taken over by smartphones, televisions, FM radio stations, computers, the internet, the cinema. A few of the poems have been documented by Igbo poets, but many have not, and may be lost forever if not documented now that they can still be retrieved from the subconscious minds of some adult members of the society.

This researcher observed that little has been done to analyze oral poetry of traditional Igbo society as

literary artistic creations. Very little has been done stylistically to highlight the techniques of creativity and innovation in the language in which Igbo poems are crafted. This study, therefore, sets out to analyze some of the oral songs to show how the communicative resources of Igbo are artistically exploited and manipulated in the poems to create special literary effects, and how they inform the meaning and interpretation of the poems in the context of the social historical realities of that traditional society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. Are Igbo poems foregrounded?
- ii. What figures of speech are dominant in Igbo oral poetry?
- iii. What stylistic devices are used in Igbo poems?

Igbo Oral Poetry

Igbo oral poetry refers to the unwritten poetry of the traditional Igbo society, that is the poetry that is part of their folklore and transmitted from one generation to another. Unwritten poetry is ubiquitous in traditional Igbo societies. It is intricately woven into their social life as every situation renders itself to poetry, and provides fresh material for recreating it. It embodies the essence of life and living for them. Poems are chanted as they worship their ancestors and pantheons, during masquerade festivals, invocations, prayers, incantations, divination, rituals, and in fact every area of life. In fact, social life in traditional African societies is incomplete without poetry. The rhythm that accompanies poetry makes it the most efficient and convenient way to transmit the beliefs, norms, values, and customs of traditional societies, and like all other genres of oral literature, poetry functions to instruct, entertain, and regulate behaviour and social and moral conducts of members of society. Umeh notes that “poetry permeates the human person more easily than formal instruction, particularly where even this formal education is not available, because of poetry’s subtle grip on the emotions, and through the emotions on human consciousness” (41-42). They are fluid, and often parodied to suit specific occasions.

It has to be pointed out here that the Igbo have more flair for music making, with the accompanying drumming and dancing, than they have for recitative poetry. In essence their preferred mode of rhythmic expression falls under what Akporobaro classified as “music poetry forms” (58). To this end, songs that can be danced to abound in all aspects of their life, and exist side

by side with recitative poetry which often takes the forms of prayers, incantations, enchantments, praise, recitations.

Though westernization, and by extension modernity, is threatening Igbo traditional oral poetry with extinction, it still flourishes in Igbo society in *ima mbem* and other communications within the masquerade institution. Chanting, incantations and prayers remain native doctors', traditional medicine men's, and most spiritualists' line of consultation. Poetry is still used to make prayers to different gods, goddesses, deities and oracles, and in praise and eulogistic expressions. In christian religious gatherings in Igbo land, and especially in orthodox churches, poetry plays a major role in lifting the souls of members of the congregation to the mystery of eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus Christ. But poetry that addresses some other aspects of social life, including those sang by women and children are on the wane as their place has largely been taken by popular music and modern technological inventions.

Forms of Igbo Oral Poetry:

Igbo oral poetry occurs in different forms. They include:

The epic: This is a long narrative poem that centres around a hero of extraordinary prowess and guts who undertakes deeds of superhuman dimensions for instance in battles, journeys, wrestling, etc. Epics are woven around legendary heroes to recount their heroic deeds.

Panegyric: Panegyric is a formal praise poetry delivered to extol the achievements of persons, things, or supernatural beings like spirits and gods. It is a formal eulogy in praise of the achievements of people with social and political relevance in society, especially of kings, chiefs and highly placed personalities. At times they take the form of pouring praise names and encomiums on the subject of the poem.

Elegiac poetry: It mourns the death of a loved one and is usually performed during funerals and memorials. Elegiac poetry is very common in Igbo culture. Funeral songs and dirges are some of its examples.

Religious poetry: This is one of the most popular forms of oral poetry among the Igbo. Its form is prayers, invocations, incantations, chants, divination, praises didactic poems that impact morals, devotional poems and so on. The ubiquity

of religious poetry among the people is an evidence of their deep-rooted belief in the supernatural and its powers in controlling the world and human existence. The people, especially the traditionalists among them, are in close communion with their *chi, ani*, ancestors, creator, and other pantheons, and nourish the relationship through poetry.

Special purpose poetry: Many forms of poetry that address different aspects of life in Africa such as hunting, war, farming, initiations, secret societies, and others give rise to a specialized poetry categorized by Finnegan (200-201) as special purpose poetry. They are tied to the occasions in which they are performed. She goes on to observe that "it is the rhythm and the melody, not the words, that are the most striking aspect of these songs" (232).

Lyric: it refers to short poems that are designed to be sung. It is the commonest and most important form of oral poetry among the Igbo because it addresses all aspects of their lives. It is sung in the festivities which abound in the lives of the people.

Children's Songs: Igbo children have songs appropriate for their ages and roles. They include lullabies song by mothers or others to infants, and the ones children themselves sing for different purposes including plays/games, school, mischief making, and others. The second group is graded according to age. Some of them fall under the category of nursery songs, while others are lyrics aimed at, among other things, educating them on acceptable conducts in society. There are some that are absolutely nonsensical but are accompanied by rhythms and melodies that are pleasant to the ears and suit the emotions and sensibilities.

Style and Stylistics

Style in a literary piece refers, generally, to the manner of expression used in it. It is the way in which the artist or composer uses language to give expression to his/her thoughts. "Style has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse - as how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say" (Abrams and Harpham 384). The concept of style is best explained by Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, where *langue* is the actual system of rules common to all speakers of a language, and *parole* is the actual use of this common system. That is, the selections individual users make from the common system at the

different occasions they use language. The poet “does ‘interesting things’ with language” because in poetry “aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code” (Leech and Short 2). Every genre of literature has its distinct style and manner of expression, and every individual artist has his/her distinct signature in linguistic expressiveness.

Style is expressed by diction, sound patterns, rhetorical situation, figurative language, semantic associations, tone, voice. In the context of oral poetry, style also incorporates the performer’s gesticulations, facial expression, vocal expressiveness, voice range, and all extra-linguistic tools he/she uses to arrest and hold the audience’s attention.

Stylistics is the branch of applied linguistics that is concerned with the study of the techniques of language use in literature. According to Simpson, “stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language” (2). He goes on to remark that language is placed at the centre of stylistic analysis because the various ways in which it is exploited is a significant “index of function of the text” (2). Stylistics can broadly be divided into literary and linguistic stylistics. Linguistic stylistics is interested in analyzing the language resources of a literary work, while literary stylistics carries out a textual analysis of the work. It is similar to literary appreciation.

Stylistic analysis is conducted to explore the linguistic features of a literary work so as to aid a better understanding of the work. Literature is fully language use. Exposure to literature is simply exposure to the organization of language at its various levels: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic, pragmatics, in that work, and the literary effects of such organization. An exposure to the techniques of the linguistic choices made in a literary work is an invitation to fully understand its style and respond to it. Conducting a stylistic analysis of selected Igbo oral poetry means drawing attention to the linguistic choices made in the poetry as distinct from language use of everyday life. It establishes that Igbo oral poetic genre can, and should also be subjected to critical literary analysis just like the literature of other climes.

Foregrounding

Foregrounding is at the core of stylistic analysis. It means giving prominence to linguistic items in

such a way as to make them stand out from the background to create some literary- aesthetic effects. According to Yankson, “the normal language code is the background. Any deviation from the norm - the code - is the foreground, because it brings the message to the forecourt of the reader's attention” (3). Every language has rules guiding acceptable usage to which its users must abide by to produce acceptable and grammatical expressions. The rules are known to operate at all levels ranging from the level of sounds and their patterning to the level of meaning in discourse. In imaginative literary creativity, these rules are often violated to create some sort of freshness and strangeness around the literary work so as to bring it to the reader's attention. Foregrounding distorts linguistic norms in two major ways which include intentional deviation and repetition/ replication through parallelism. Whichever way, the ultimate goal of foregrounding is to draw attention to the foregrounded linguistic item.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Formalism

Formalism as a literary theory was developed in Moscow and St Petersburg in the 1920s. It has Viktor Shklovasky, Boris Tomashevsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson as its major proponents. Formalism pays attention to the structural patterns and techniques of presentation writers choose for their work, and relegates contents and social significance or values to the background. “Formalism views literature primarily as a specialized use of language, and proposes a fundamental opposition between the literary (or poetical) use of language and the ordinary, “practical” use of language” (Abrams and Harpham 139). They continue to observe that ordinary language communicates message or meaning by reference to the real world, while literary language concerns itself with “the qualities and internal relations of the linguistic signs themselves” (139). Language use in literature is geared towards bringing out the literariness of the work of art. In literature, language is foregrounded so that it deviates from the ordinary language of day to day discourses. Those linguistic features which deviate from regular usage are brought into prominence as stylistic devices in the literary work. This theory fits well because the paper is targeted at discovering the stylistic features deployed in the oral poems under analysis.

Sociological Criticism

The sociological criticism of literature was introduced by Kenneth Burke in his "Literature as Equipment for Living". Literature plays active roles in the welfare of human beings in society and should be rightfully placed in "a general 'sociological' picture" (Burke 296). Sociological criticism thus aids in understanding literature in its wider social context. Works of art perform social functions for society, and work for it. For instance, oral poems reflect the character of the society from which the inspiration to compose them are drawn. They address their social, historical, economic, religious, political situations, and mirrors their ills for corrective purposes. They console, admonish, direct, purify, and forecast. They are strategies for naming situations in society, and those strategies facilitate a better understanding of the situations and their peculiarities, and enable humans to plan and take full charge of them in running their day to day living.

Burke used proverbs analogously to emphasize what literature is and does for society. In relation to proverbs, he notes that, "everything is 'medicine'. Proverbs are designed for consolation or vengeance, for admonition or exhortation, for foretelling" (293). Sociological criticism draws insights from New Criticism, but unlike New Criticism which calls for close reading of the literary text, with little or no emphasis on affectations, it pitches its tent with the sociological component of the Frankfurt School.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data used for analysis were eight oral poems recorded in writing from the researcher's quiet introspection and translated into the nearest English expressions. They were deliberately selected for analysis based on the way language is patterned in them so that through them we can see how language is patterned differently in poems as opposed to ordinary practical language of everyday use. From the way language is manipulated in them we can arrive at a fuller understanding of the poems and the society they portray. The poems are recorded in the appendix, and labelled poems 1 to 8 respectively for easy reference. The analysis is conducted in such a way that it provides answers to the research questions raised earlier in the paper. Below is a summary of the poems:

Poem 1: *Gini Mere Nweke Njeliona (What Happened to Nweke Njeliona)* is a long poem of

eight stanzas often categorized as a tongue twister. Only stanzas one and eight are recorded to economize space. Stanza 1 introduces the poem, while 8 concludes and repeats the receding stanzas. The song begins by asking what happened to a woman named Nweke Njeliona, and tells us that she was crushed by the head of breadfruit that fell (from a breadfruit tree). Breadfruit trees of traditional Igbo society are usually tall and large, with spreading branches. Fruits at different levels of maturity attach themselves to the branches, with some growing so big and hanging menacingly; giving a picture of death trap. People keep away from breadfruit trees with mature fruits for fear of being crushed by them. In this poem, the report that the head of breadfruit fell and crushed the woman led to further questions as to what is more powerful or superior than the head of breadfruit that can punish it for its action, and it continues like that, in the form of power imbalance analogous of social life, until it peaks at God as the all powerful, indestructible creator of all things in stanza 8.

Poem 2: *Udala mu Fuo (My Apple Sprout)* narrates how an orphan watched his stepmother and her children eat up all the apples she bought from the market. He took a seed and planted it. Then he sang to it to sprout, grow, fruit, ripe, mature, and fall for him in the six stanzas of the poem.

Poem 3: *Nwa nnuu Nwa Nnuu Nta (Small Bird Small Little Bird)* is a children's song in which a conversation ensued between a child and a small bird. The child asked the bird which is picking pepper on a pepper garden what it is doing. The bird responds that it is picking pepper for its mother. The child demands to know how it does it. It is a short poem of nine lines.

Poem 4: *Onye na Onye Jere Be Enyi ya Oma (Who and Who Visited his Good Friend)* is a short poem that highlights the essence of good friendship. The poem is among the many Igbo poems in which rhythm and melody is placed above meaningfulness.

Poem 5: *Ojaadili* is a song sang intermittently in the narration of the Igbo epic, Ojaadili. It is taken to be the wording of the sounds made by his flutist. Ojaadili was so strong and skillful in wrestling that he won in all his contests in both the human and spirit worlds. The spirits conspired against him and brought his *Chi* for him to wrestle with. His *Chi* was smallish and seemed very easy to defeat. He

readily accepted to to fight with him. But his flutist pleaded with him not to wrestle with his god because nobody does that and survives. The spirits were bent on making him fight that small person and kill himself. They kept mocking him until he was moved by pride to wrestle with his god. No sooner had he rushed into the contest than he was lying stone dead on the ground. The spirits were overjoyed and left the arena satisfied. His flutist wept bitterly. Later, some benevolent spirits plucked off some leaves from a plant nearby, mashed it, and dropped some liquid from it into his nostrils. Immediately, he sneezed noisily and woke up. The two of them hurried back to the land of humans with his flutist pouring praises on him using his flute..

Poem 6: *Nwannem Oge Nine ka I Na-acho Mma* (My Sister you Are always Adorning yourself) is a song that captures the vanity of human beauty which is likened to a flower that blooms in the morning and withers when the sun rises.

Poem 7: *Nwa Nnunu No n'ikpele Mmiri* (Small Bird by the River Bank) is also a children's song featuring a conversation between a child and a small bird. In the song melody and rhythm are valued more than the message.

Poem 8: *Ndooo Ndooo* (Sorry Sorry) is a cradle song used to calm a crying infant and lull it to sleep. Adult women and girls used to sing it to infants in Nsude area of Igbo land, so it is recorded in Nsude dialect.

RESULTS

The poems under analysis displayed the following features:

Repetition: In Poem 1, there is a repetition of "gini mere" (what happened), at the beginning of each of the eight stanzas. Verbatim repetitions of many lines are observed in all the stanzas of poems 1 and 2. Poems 1 and 7 contain a similar pattern of repetition, in which a word that ends a line or occurs towards the end of a line begins the next line or is placed towards the beginning of the next line (anadiplosis), and this runs through the two poems. Poems 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 have their first lines repeated. Also repeated are the refrains in Poems 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 which are *ee Nweke njeliona, nda, turuzanzan turunza, merere mme, Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo, ochomma* respectively. In line two of the six stanzas of poem 2, *fuo fuo fuo, too too too, mia mia mia, kaa kaa kaa, chaa chaa chaa*, and *daa daa daa* were repeated respectively. Also repeated are *lachaa lachaa lachaa* in line six

of all the stanzas of poem 2; *gbachaa nwude* in lines three and five of poem 5; *ololololoo ololololoo* in lines three and ten of poem 8, *n'aka n'aka* in lines two and three of Poem 4, and *mpio mpio* in line four of poem 4.

Neologisms: This is a common feature of Igbo oral poems. It involves the coining of new words by splitting existing words or affixing or compounding two or more affixes or words to form a new word. Some of the words so coined lack specific meanings, but they contribute immensely to melody and rhythm in the poems. Examples abound in *E-e-e-e* in Poem 1, *nda* in Poem 2, *turu zanzan turunza* and the whole of lines five - nine (from *tuiii tuiii* to *pilo pilolo piiii*) in Poem 3. They are simply used to make reference to the vocalization of the small bird in a pepper garden. The rest are the refrains in Poems 4, 5, and 6.

Figures of Speech:

Alliteration/Assonance/Consonance: These are poetic sound devices that use repetition of sounds to set the mood of a poem. Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of successive words or syllables. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in words or syllables in a line of poetry. Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in multiple words in a line of poetry. They help to foster harmony of sounds in poems and songs and make them pleasant to the ear.

Instances of their use include:

- i. *mkpo mawara ukwa* (Poem 1, stanza Eight, line eight)
/m/ alliterates while /a/ assonates.
- ii. *pilo pilolo piiii* (Poem 3, line nine)
/p/ is an alliteration, /l/ is a consonance, while /i/ and /o/ are assonance.
- iii. *egbe gbagbulu egbe* (Poem 1, stanza eight, line four)
/gb/ constitutes a consonance, while /e/ is an assonance
- iv. *okuko tara akika* (Poem 1, stanza eight, line six)
/k/ is a consonance and /o/ and /a/ are assonance.
- v. *kpoo ya merere mme* ((Poem 4 line line)
merere mme o-o-o merere mme (Poem 4 line ten)
Here /m/ is an alliteration, /t/ is a consonance, and /e/ is an assonance.

vi. *onye na onye jere be enyi ya oma* (Poem 4 line one)

Here /ny/ is a consonance, while /o/ and /e/ are assonance.

vii. *uzu kpulu egbe* (Poem 1, stanza eight, line three)

/u/ is an assonance.

viii. *lachanwo nwa enwe nne* (Poem 2, line seven)

lachanwo nwa enwe nna (Poem 2, line eight)

/nw/ is a consonance, while /a/ and /e/ are assonance

ix. *nwa nnunu nwa nnunu nta* (Poem 3, line one)

/nw/ is an alliteration /n/ is a consonance, while /a/ and /u/ are assonance.

x. *akwa okuko mpio mpio* (Poem 4, line four).

/m/ aliterates in *mpio mpio*

xi. *ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo* (the refrain of Poem 5)

/n/ is an alliteration, /g/ , /l/ and /d/ are consonance while /o/ and /i/ are assonance

xii. *ololololooo olololo ooo* (Poem 8, lines three and ten)

Here /o/ is an assonance while /l/ is a consonance. etc.

Simile: It uses such words as “like ” and “as” to compare two distinctly different things. *Uhla na-acho khu maya* in line five of Poem 8 compares the pleasure that derives from sleeping to the sugary taste of freshly tapped palm wine. Also, in the last line of Poem 7, *osikapa jolof ...o na atoriri ka beans* , the taste of jollof rice is compared to the sweet taste of beans. Also in Poem 6, line two, *I na-acho mma dika flawa ututu* is a simile which portrays human beauty as ephemeral, and likens it to the temporality of flower which blooms in the morning and withers at noon.

Metaphor: It refers to one thing as another without making a comparison. *Enu uwa bu olili* in line nine of Poem 2 is a conceptual metaphor; life is journey. Also line seven of Poem 8, *a balu ghu mba a na-abala agu dooo* sees scolding the child as daring a lion.

Hyperbole: This figure of speech blows things out of proportion. Line three of all the stanzas of Poem 2 contain the words *fujuolu m igwe, tojuolo m igwe, mijuolu m, kajuolu m, chajuolu m igwe* and *dajuolu m igwe* which are hyperbolic because an apple tree cannot; for instance, sprout and cover the sky, or grow and cover the sky. Also, Lines

two, three 4, and five of Poem 5 where Ojaadili is presented as having wrestled with and defeated humans and spirits is hyperbolic and amounts to excessive praise-singing aimed at getting the person to do more. Meanwhile, his Chi which killed him is a spirit too.

Euphemism: It uses mild, indirect words to refer to harsh, blunt and more serious words so as to lessen their impacts. Consider these:

Lachanwo nwa enwe nne (Poem 2, line seven)

Lachanwo nwa enwe nna (Poem 2, line eight)

The choice of the above two lines which means “ate without giving a child without mother” and “ate without giving a child without father” instead of simply *lachanwo nwa ogbenye* “ate without giving an orphan” is motivated by a need for stylistic embellishment. The choice of the two lines lessens the strength *lachanwo nwa ogbenye* would have had, thereby making the tone milder and more soothing.

Pun: Pun plays on words with identical sounds. Poem 7 is based on many puns denoting bird vocalizations. Consequently, the poem dwells more on maintaining harmony among sounds than in communicating meaning. So, *oma, ikolo, obia, mbe, ekpili, asido, opi, ugbo, ami* which the child in the poem requested the bird to respond to portrays exploitation of relationships of sounds rather than that of meaning. *Ikolo and obia* are presented as separate words but *ikolobia* in Igbo language means boy, but that does not seem to be what is meant here.

Onomatopoeia: It names persons or things by imitating the sounds associated with them. The refrain, *turuzanzan tulu nza*, in Poem 3 denotes the smallness of the bird in question. Also, from line five of the poem, *tuii, tuii to pilo pilolo pii* in line nine are onomatopoeic since they depict vocalizations of the bird. Also, *mpio mpio* in Poem 4 line four is onomatopoeic. It denotes the oval shape of an egg. *E-e-e-e* in the refrain of Poem 1 is a “non lexical” onomatopoeia which echoes a direct imitation of the /e/ in Nweke to produce music (Simpson 167).

Symbol: A symbol is something that represents something else. *Ji* and *ede* in poem 4, *chiri ibe ji n' aka n'aka* in line two and *chiri ibe ede n' aka n'aka* in line three are symbols denoting the most important crops for men and women respectively in Igbo land. Also, *osisi* (tree) in line six of the same poem is symbolic of the world, and climbing

it up and down represents the ups and downs of life.

Word Choice: A good majority of the words used in the poems are disyllabic. Few multi syllabic words are used and they include:

Words of three syllable: *tigbulu*, *mawalu*, *akika* and *tagiri*, *okuko* and *akika*, *gbagbulu*, (Poem 1 lines 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12 respectively), *udala* and *fujuoro* (Poem 2 lines 1 and 3), etc.

Words of four syllable: *akponwucha* (poem 6 line three), and *turuzanza* (Poem 3 line one), *kwuchikweke* (Poem 8, lines two and seven) and *vunwekweke* in Poem 8, line eight)

Words of five syllables: *ngolodindi* in the refrain of poem 5 and *olololooloo* in Poem 8 lines three and ten.

Parallelism: This is the use of pattern repetition to give salience to some sounds, words or lines of poems. Congruity of sounds has been treated in 3a above. Syntactic equivalents involving structures with similar patterns are many in the poems. Let us consider Poem 1:

Gini mere Nweke Njeliona (Poem 1 Stanza one, line one)

Gini mere ukwa Njeliona (Poem 1 stanza two, line one)

Gini mere mkpo njeliona etc (Poem 1 stanza three line one) etc.

The structure, Wh-question form + vp (simple past) + Np (object), is a regular pattern of the lines one of the eight stanzas..

In the subsequent lines a similar pattern of Noun phrase (agentive) + Verb phrase (simple past) + Noun phrase (object) occur. The subject NPs, VPs, and object NPs share a paradigmatic relationship with one another respectively because they fill the same grammatical slot. See the last three lines of poem 1 stanza 8:

Akika tagiri mkpo

Mkpo mawara ukwa

Ukwa dagbulu Nweke Njeliona

Akika, *mkpo* and *ukwa* are in a paradigmatic relationships as subject NPs; *tagiri*, *mawara* and *dagbulu* are the VPs, while *mkpo*, *ukwa* and *Nweke Njeliona* are the object Nps respectively, and this pattern runs through the poem.

Some lexical items used in the poems belong to the same grammatical category and are related as

antonyms used to balance the thoughts in the poems. Example:

i. *Tu nwoke n'ike n'ike* (Poem 3 line six)

Tu nwanyi n'ike n'ike (Poem 3 line seven)

Though the expression lacks specific meaning, *nwoke* (man) and *nwanyi* (woman) are complementary opposites used to introduce comprehensiveness and efficacy in the way the little bird is picking pepper. In Igbo language *nwoke* and *nwanyi* transcend biological sex to gender roles and so are total in denoting the action of the bird in the pepper garden.

ii. *lachanwo nwa enwe nne ...* (Poem 2 line seven)

lachanwo nwa enwe nna ... (Poem 2 line eight)

Nne (mother) and *nna* (father) are relational antonyms used to highlight the pitiable state of an orphan who finds himself/ herself in the custody of an unfriendly stepmother and her children. He/ she is often turned into a slave in his/her father's house.

iii. *O ridata o rigolu* is analogous to the ups and downs that mark the journeys of human being on earth. It also denotes the role of practice in the acquisition of the skills humans need to face the realities of life.

iv. *chiri ibe ji n' aka n'aka* (Poem 4 line two)

chiri ibe ede n' aka n'aka (Poem 4 line three)

They are not only initiated by the same pattern of participial phrases, *ji* (*yam*) and *ede* (cocoyam) summarize the major food of the Igbo, whereas 'yam' is the chief crop cultivated by men, cocoyam is women's crop. Other crops are an addition to these two.

v. *I gbalu mgba n' mmadu* (Poem 5 line two)

gbaa mgba n' mmuo (Poem 5 line four)

Mmadu (humans) and *mmuo* (spirits) represent two opposing forces inhabiting two different realms of existence: the physical and the spiritual, and which have direct influence on human life on earth. They are complementary antonyms that denote the totality or wholeness of the prowess of the epic hero in conquering both the physical and spiritual worlds.

Inwude I naa (Poem 5 line six)

a nwude gi Inwuo (Poem 5 line seven)

Naa in the poem is synonymous to life because it is only in the land of humans that there is life. So the condition for him to return home is that he is alive. *Naa* (life) and *nwuo* (death) are

complementary antonyms that denote the dilemma the hero was in: avoid the contest with his *Chi* and return unaccomplished to the land of the living or engage in the contest with him at the cost of losing his life if he is defeated.

DISCUSSION

Igbo oral poetry is not cast in plain everyday language. Rather language resources are exploited, in line with the nature of the people and the nature of their language, to meet their literary needs and satisfy their sensibilities. In other words, how language is manipulated to produce poetry is determined by the nature of the society who produce the poems and for whom the poems are produced. Traditional Igbo oral poems are created in Igbo language, and this study shows that it is rich enough to carry the weight of the peoples' literary artistic creations.

It is observed above that Igbo poems are foregrounded using such linguistic forms as repetitions, neologisms, figures of speech, unique word choices and parallelism. In addition to these, the creative ingenuity, facial expression, vocal expressiveness, voice range, body language, tone, instrumentation and others involved in the performance of the poems play major aesthetic roles to satisfy the peoples' literary artistic needs. Those subtleties of metre, accentuated and weak syllables, and their repetitions across a line of poem to produce rhythm as found in the recitation of written poems of the Western world are conspicuously absent in Igbo poems. The reason is that in the Igbo language, equal prominence is given to all syllables. Igbo is a syllable-timed language. Rhythm is supplied by the melody produced by the harmony of the repeated sounds in the syllables used in the lines of the poems. Also, the analysis shows that the lines of oral poems do not rhyme. Thus, they do not have rhyming schemes as found in some written poetry. This is probably why Burton wrote in 1965 that "poetry there is none ... There is no metre, no rhyme, nothing that interests or suits the feelings, or arrest the passions..." giving the impression poetry is all about rhymes and metre (Finnegan 29). The traditional Igbo oral poetry "suits the feelings" and aids the growth of intelligence and sensibility, as well as satisfies the passions through its robust exploitation of the Igbo language, and rich gripping oral performance that leaves you thrilled and fulfilled. This answers research question i which seeks to discover whether Igbo poems are foregrounded.

The analysis above shows that Igbo poetry makes extensive use of figures of speech such as alliteration, consonance, assonance, similes, metaphors, personifications, onomatopoeia, puns, euphemisms, symbols, hyperbole. The poems analyzed here are only those sung by children and for them to inculcate in them societal values, basic traditional knowledge, and lull them to sleep. Like in other climes, the forms of Igbo poems determine the use and frequency of different figures of speech. Since repetition is effectively utilized in children's poems, alliteration, assonance and consonance are the most exploited figures of speech in the poems analyzed.

The stylistic devices deployed in the poems analyzed include repetitions, neologisms, figures of speech, unique word choices, parallelism, simple sentences. Also, since the poems are all oral and involves performance, facial expressions, voice range, and all the other factors that apply to literary creative performance contribute to their overall beauty.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided an avenue to document and preserve some Igbo oral poems used in the context of child upbringing in traditional Igbo society, and which are going extinct. It also attempted a stylistic analysis of the songs to explore the way language resources are manipulated to produce them. The analysis shows that the poems are not cast in plain language of everyday expression, but are foregrounded using repetitions, neologisms, figurative language, word choices and parallelism at different levels. These establish them as literary creative performances in their full rights; capable of fulfilling the purposes for which they are created. The analysis also shows that repetition of different kinds is an essential ingredient in poetry, especially those analyzed here.

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APPENDIXES

Gini mere Nweke Njeliona (What Happened to Nweke Njeliona)

Stanza 1

Gini mere Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 What happened to Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 Ukwá tígburu Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 Breadfruit crushed Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona

Stanza 8

Gini mere uzu Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 What happened to blacksmith Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 Chukwu kere uzu
 God created blacksmith
 Uzu kpulu egbe
 Blacksmith cast gun
 Egbe gbagburu egbe
 Gun shot kite
 Egbe buru okuko
 Kite carried chicken
 Okuko tara akika
 Chicken ate termites
 Akika tagiri Mkpo
 Termites ate split
 Mkpo mawalu ukwa
 Split split breadfruit
 Ukwá tígbulu Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona
 Breadfruit crushed Nweke Njeliona E-e-e-e Nweke Njeliona

Udara m Fuo (My Apple Sprout)

Udara m fuo nda
 My apple sprout nda
 Fuo fuo fuo nda
 sprout sprout sprout nda

fujuoro m igwe nda
 Sprout and fill the sky for menda
 Nwunye nna m oooo Nda
 My step mother oooo nda
 Gote udara n'afia nda
 Bought apple from the market nda
 lacha lacha lacha nda
 Ate ate ate nda
 lachanwo nwa enwe nne nda
 Ate without giving a child without mother nda
 lachanwo nwa enwe nna nda
 Ate without giving a child without father nda
 Enu uwa bu olili nda
 Sojourn on earth is an journey nda
 Onye nochaa o nawa nda
 Whoever finishes his/her own goes homenda

Nwa nnunu Nwa nnunu Nta (Little Bird Little Small Bird)

Nwa nnunu Nwa nnunu nta turuzanza turunza
 Little bird little small bird turuzanza turunza (twice)
 I no ebe ahu eme gini ?
 What are you doing there?
 A na m atulu nne m ose
 I am picking pepper for my mother
 Tukene ka I si atu
 Pick the way you pick
 Tuii tuii
 Tu nwoke n'ike n'ike
 Tu nwanyi n'ike n'ike
 Anu mere pipilo
 Pilo pilolo piii

Onye na onye jere be enyi ya oma (Who and who visited his good friend)

Onye na onye jere be enyi ya oma ... merere mme (twice)
 Who and who paid his good friend a visit merere mme
 Chiri ibe ji n' aka n'aka
 Holding slices of yam on his hands
 Chiri ibe ede n'aka n'aka
 Holding slices of cocoyam on his hands
 Akwa okuko mpio mpio
 chic's egg oval oval
 Osis puru n'ohia
 Tree that grew in the bush
 Nwata ji amu enu
 A child uses to learn climbing
 O ridata o rigolu
 He descends and ascends
 Kpoo ya merere mme
 Call it merere mme
 Mere mme ooo mere mme

Ojaadili

Ojaadili Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo (twice)
 I gbalu mgba n' mmadu Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 You wrestled with humansNgolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 Gbachaa nwude Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo

Wrestled and won Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 Gba mgba n'mmuo Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 Wrestled with spirits..... Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 Gbacha nwude Ngolodi ngolodindi ngolo
 Wrestled and won Ngolodi ngolodindi ngol
 I nwude I naa Ngolo di ngolodindi ngolo
 If you win you return home....Ngolo di ngolodindi ngolo
 A nwude gi I nwuṣṣ.....Ngolo di ngolodindi ngolo
 If you lose you dieNgolo di ngolodindi ngolo
 Ooooo oja m na-akpo giNgolo di ngolodindi ngolo
 Ooooo my flute is beckoning on you Ngolo di ngolodindi ngolo

Nwannem oge nine ka I na-acho mma (My sister you are always adorning yourself)

Nwannem oge nine ka I na-acho mma.... Ochomma (twice)
 My sister, you are always adorning yourself... Charmer
 I na-acho mma dika flawa ututu Ututu (twice)
 You adorn yourself like a morning flower Morning
 Mgbe anwu chalu flawa akponwucha.... kponwucha (twice)
 When the sun rises flower witherswithers

Nwa Nnunu No n'Ikpele Mmiri (Small Bird by the River Bank)

Nwa nnunu no n'ikpele mmiri kwem ekene Ekene oma
 Small bird by the river bank respond to my greetingPleasant greeting
 Kwem oma oma n'ikolo
 Kwem ikolo ikolo obia
 Kwem obia obia nwa mbe
 Kwem mbe mbe ekpili
 Kwemekpili Ekpiliasido
 Kwem asido asido opi
 Kwem opi opi n'ugbo
 Kwem ugbo ugbo n' ami
 Kwem ami ami kolo iya
 Osikapa jolof o na atoriri ka beans

Ndoooo Ndooo (Sorry Sorry)

Ndoooo Ndooo (twice)
 Sorry sorry (twice)
 Kwuchikweke onu ghu
 Please stop crying
 Ololololooo olololo ooo (twice)
 Uhla na-acho ghu ucho
 You enjoy sleeping
 Uhla na-acho khu maya
 sleeping is as sweet as palmwine
 Onye na-abalu ghu mba
 Who is scolding you
 a balu ghu mba a na-abala agu dooo
 whoever dares a lion please
 Kwuchikweke onu ghu
 Please stop crying
 Vuwekweke uhlha ghu
 please sleep
 Ololololooo olololo ooo (twice)

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