

LANGUAGE AS ENERGIZER: A PHONO-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF BRIDAL CHANTS AMONG THE OYO YORUBA OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The human language as a receptive, an expressive and a performativity tool has been discussed extensively in literature. This paper focuses on the attribute of language to stimulate, spur or energize an individual or a group of individuals in times of celebration or joy on the one hand, and in distress, sorrow or emotional shock on the other hand. The bridal chant, “Ekun iyawo” among the Oyo Yoruba of Nigeria, is analyzed in this paper to reveal the capacity of language to create stamina and the willpower to go through a distressful situation with courage, nerve, through the effective deployment of oratorical skills. Sample chants are discussed, highlighting their psychological impact, sociological relevance, stylistic renditions and phono-structural balancing for artistic effect. As a cultural medium, Ekun iyawo is also seen as a veritable platform to display Yoruba oral poetry. The Oyo bridal chants are capable of creating moral armament for the modern bride, who often faces various challenges in handling the pressures and harsh realities of marriage, which she hardly or hurriedly prepares for, before crossing the nuptial divide. The practice of this art is believed among the people to help the new wife adjust better to marital shocks which often lead to crisis or sometimes divorce. In this paper, emphasis is laid on the re-awakening of this custom through the electronic medium for its revitalization, propagation and dissemination.

Keywords: Language, Phono-stylistics, Chants, Yoruba, Marriage, Culture, “Ekun Iyawo”

Introduction

The human language is a very powerful instrument; it has a force. This force has a potency that can do great things. Language power is akin to the current of a great river that sweeps everything in its path. It is also like a huge fire that licks whatever lies in its way with the venom of its inferno. The strength of a spoken language lies in the tongue that utters it; sweet or sour. According to a Yoruba proverb: “effective language use can make us receive the gift of kolanut just as it also can cause the quiver to unleash its arrows.” *Oro rere nii yo obi lapo, to ba se buburu, a yo ofa lapo.*

History is replete with great characters that used the spoken word to perform great feats in personal, local and international affairs among the Yoruba. Also, on a global plane, vibrant and lively language in its oral form can be, and is actually used, to intervene in very important matters. Words, and the right words, are needed in diplomatic realtions, to negotiate the use or disuse of weapons of mass destruction, wage war against terrorism, charge the fighters to plunge into battle, create peace moves in war-torn areas, settle communal disputes, placate an angry husband, soothe a crying baby, incite a mob or sway the electorate on the eve of an election, etc. All these are made possible when people are influenced by the power of the spoken word.

This paper examines an aspect of the Yoruba oral poetry, bridal chants, as an important sub-genre in preparing the soon-to-be bride for the great marital transition. The act of leaving home has been elevated to a melodramatic event in literary and stylistic performance. This ritual fulfils three purposes in its enactment. First, the bride re-enacts (in mournful tones) all the care, affection and certainties of her parents’ home, all of which she is soon to lose. Secondly, she gives a resounding assurance to her parents that she would be a worthy wife in her new home, having mastered all training for good character and home making. Finally, she displays verbal prowess in songs and multiple recitations in mellifluous and thrilling tones.

She seizes the opportunity to display sound intellect, good memory and a firm knowledge of her family history and panegyric. This is a sign of being culturally well-bred and an open indication that she is ready for marriage: the singular act that takes her away from her family home for ever. It is indeed a bittersweet landmark in the life of a Yoruba damsel.

Bridal Chants

This genre of oral poetry has been referred to in different terms by different authors. For example, Raji and Ajadi (2013) call it bride's chants, but Olupona and Ajibade (2005) refer to it as bridal tears. In the words of Faniyi and Ladele (1979), it is known as nuptial chants. Whether tears, chants or even songs, this concept refers to an aspect of the corpus of wailing poetry or lamentation among the Yoruba, where the poet actually sheds tears. Another example is the *alasantu/alagbasun*, commercial wailers, who move from place to place seeking bereaved families needing the services of professional tear makers. *Ekun iyawo* is a maidens' dirge often used by the bride and a few of her selected associates on the days immediately preceding her departure into matrimony. These chants are melodious rendition couched in esoteric euphony. Like most genres of Yoruba poetry, it is a celebration of sound and emotion as well as a careful balance between admonition, and entertainment. The wife-to-be is the central character in the presentation of the many facets of the chants. She is spurred by a couple of persons to go into the actual display of intellect and artistry in her famous wail as she delivers her lines in actual weeping. It is a melodramatic presentation of nostalgia and anxiety; hope and fear. This sub-genre is full of panegyric invocation and exhortation. The beauty of Yoruba oral literature is most palpable in this form. During the actual presentation, many onlookers are often seen to dab tears from their own eyes too when they hear such soulful renditions which she has memorized and practised over the months and years of spinsterhood.

Many Yoruba adages and utterances, especially during wars, communal fights, festivals and such like, emphasize the importance of words and their appropriate psycho-emotional deployment. For instance, speeches like:

<i>Oro lomorogun gbo, to tori bomii gbona</i>	-	The stirring rod was incited to plunge into boiling water.
<i>Oro ni igbin gbo, to pon le e sehin</i>	-	The snail was incited to mount his house on his back.
<i>Oro lalabaun gbo, to bora e mo posi</i>	-	Same words the tortoise heard and buried up himself
<i>Oro lagbanrere gbo, to yowo lori sarasara</i>	-	The same words made the deer to sprout horns.
<i>Omo Abilesoro kile yanu!</i>	-	The one who commands and the ground opens her mouth!
<i>Oo lee se bii tawon baba re ni ndan? (abbl)</i>	-	Can't you repeat the deeds of your fathers? (etc),

can be intensely sublime and are capable of generating energy, enervating the hearer into unusual acts of heroism and invoking sudden courage. Utterances like these are common at rituals and festivals.

Words and Tears in Yoruba Marriage

Marriage among the Yoruba is a very important custom and a major landmark in the life of every individual. It is considered as a sign of maturity, progress and a desirable part of adult life. It is also one practice that provides ample opportunity for talk and counseling. Weeks and days before the actual event of marriage serve as the closing moments of crucial talks between parents and their daughter or son who would soon be married. The bride's parents seize this opportunity to round off talk with her about public conversation, general conduct, character, patience, humility, service, endurance, comportment, hope, love and child rearing in matrimony.

As they bid her farewell at each of the sessions of counseling, both mother and daughter can hardly hold back their tears. As they discuss both the pleasant and the unpleasant realities of marriage and going-away, tears freely flow. Moreover, when the bride-to-be goes from house to house to greet the members of her extended family, and then more matrimonial matters are raised and discussed, she would weep the more. These are tears of sorrow and joy. The bride essentially switches from singing to chanting and then to talking as she responds to admonition. Amidst her symbolic tears, she seems to be telling the counselors and her elders that she has a deep understanding of those precious truths. She commits herself to the full realization of the implications of her decision. Also, the tears express the deep sense of nostalgia settling upon her. Much of the speeches and responses could hardly be verbalized. At such occasions, the linguistic import of tears or weeping could hardly be ignored.

Preparing for marriage

In the traditional Yoruba society, rites of marriage are generally similar. Variations exist only in matters of details from one locality to another. It is common practice for the parents or guardians to look out for suitable brides for their male children or wards. It is only in few cases that children would reject the choices of their parents.

The parents would have met and tidied up all arrangement before the children are introduced to each other, or shall we say, before they are encouraged to seek each other's attention in courtship. The parents of the girl pretend they are not aware of the goings-on until the parents of the boy make the first move. If all things go well, the parents of the damsel accept formally the token of request brought by the family of the lad. Henceforth, the two young people are allowed to see each other more freely. The damsel may visit her in-law-to-be to render domestic help on special occasions. Equally, the lad is expected to visit the family of his wife-to-be to render services requiring manly strength or to accompany the girl's father on a special journey or tour. At this stage, gifts may begin to change hands freely.

Stages of Marriage

Soon after, the introduction or the engagement and the marriage proper are conducted after extensive consultations, and adequate preparations. How elaborate each of these events is, depends on the two families involved and the duo concerned. Any two of the stages could actually be collapsed into a few days interval of each other, if not held on the same day. However, the engagement stage, known as *idana* is very important.

Certain items must be provided by the family of the groom-to-be as engagement items. The items in the list are cultural and symbolic. After all protocol has been satisfied, the stage is set for the damsel to be taken to her husband's house as his lawful wife. The going-away stage is usually carried out in the night. A group of damsels, who are usually her unmarried friends and a couple of old wives in her family, would bring her to the house of her husband with dancing and singing. In those songs and chants, her mates would challenge and provoke her on issues related to matrimonial responsibilities, hopes and expectations. She would promptly respond in chants similar to each of the questions and issues raised, to prove to them that she is not only ready physically for marriage, but also ready intellectually, psychologically and socially. This is the final day of the series of public presentations of her chants.

However, the interest of this paper is not entirely on the marriage custom among the Yoruba. Rather, it is on the chants of the bride as she undergoes her departure rites and ceremonies. The paper now departs from here to look into the chants per se.

As the actual date of her departure draws near, usually between ten to fifteen days of leaving, she is mandated by custom to pay a final and symbolic visit to certain members of her nuclear and extended families. At each of these places, she is expected with much excitement as a message would have gone ahead about her impending visit. People like her maternal and paternal aunts and uncles, distinguished elders in her neighbourhood, close friends of her parents, parents of her close friends, likewise her own father and mother, her personal friends as well as all her well-wishers are all present with many of them bringing gifts for her.

The Dramaturgy of *Ekun Iyawo*

This cultural practice has a high value for performance and ceremony. The ritualistic essence is greatly underscored in the fact that certain responses must follow certain questions and promptings. As the bride visits each of the people mentioned above, (since she is already being expected), her unmarried mate gleefully announces her presence as soon as they enter the threshold of any house. This announcement is made in sing-song tone. The response expected is of course a chant in return. Nearly every place visited, every person spoken to, in any house or on the way, everything is done in poetic renditions. The beauty, complexity and fluidity of Yoruba poetry can hardly be seen on any other better occasion than in the nuptial chant or the bridal wail. It is perhaps in this performance that Adekoya (2004) observes that:

It is very difficult to make a fine distinction between poetry and prose in (Yoruba) oral culture, precisely because, in it, speech itself is largely poetic....

Everything that is said, whether in answer to a question or a question in itself, is prosodic. In making a request, an appeal or an admonition, or in making an invocation or an incantation, musicality shows a mature command of the language. In offering a mere greeting or giving a prestigious salutation, phonostylistic qualities that make it soothe the hearing membrane are profusely deployed. This is why we hear Yoruba names and appellations such as, *Enu-dun-ju-yo*, mouth sweeter than salt; *enu-to-rofo-*, making soups out of mere words”, *enu-tan-baje*, etc, “repairing ills with placatory words etc. Concerning this attribute, Finegan (1976) remarks that:

The kinds of factors which seemed helpful to consider include musical settings, the intensity and emotion of expressing... the rhythms, tonal and syllabic rhyme, special vocabulary style and syntactical forms.

On each day of these epic bridal journeys, the wife-to-be has a song or chant ready for everyone she meets on the way or visits. Such people include her own friends, former suitors, rivals, and her step-mother(s) including those who may like or dislike her own mother, her grandparents and her detractors alike.

It can be imagined that the young woman has a long list of songs and recitations to do. Such is the task ahead of the traditional Yoruba damsel who could be adjudged fit and ready to go into marriage. The quantity of songs needed is much. Therefore a lot of time must be devoted to the training and mastery of those songs-spanning over months or years. The task of mastering the chants takes an interesting dimension because of the possibility of encountering a troubadour bride on the way who also is on a similar itinerary. A contest would always ensue between the two parties. This is why it is necessary sometimes, to have hired professional wailers to train the bride and also other girls in the family who might be nearing their time of departure too.

Furthermore, the Yoruba matrimonial structure being “largely polygamous” Olatunji (1998), the damsel is likely to encounter a rival wife on getting into her new home or shortly after the marriage. The fierce verbal warfare that goes on, on a daily basis, is sufficient to warrant a sound training in musical artillery and matrimonial polemics.

Ladele and Faniyi (1979) are of the opinion that the rigorous and lengthy academic training is mainly done by rote learning. It is also not uncommon to find girls who are exposed to metaphysical assistance in the use of charms and means to boost their ability to remember their verses accurately. Such means are also meant to give them boldness in the presence of their adversaries. The event turns out sometimes to be a quiet demonstration of the dovetailing of cerebral endowment and supernatural fortification just like the *egungun* or masquerade chanter fortifies himself with heavy doses of charms.

Types of Chants

An intensely musical people and a characteristically poetic race, the Yoruba have songs, chants and poems for almost every tree, plant, beast, food, drink, status, event, occasion, attitude, behaviours, mistake, failure or achievement. Chants are different from songs; invocations are different from incantations. Since the purpose of this paper is not to do a classificatory matrix, an attempt shall not be made to draw absolute distinctions between chants and songs here. Rather, we shall dwell mainly on the poetics. According to Beier (1970), “the basic form of Yoruba poetry is *oriki* that is, the panegyric or praise poetry”. Almost everything has a poem to its praise. In rendering *Ekun iyawo*, much of it is directly panegyric and eulogic.

Adeoti (2007), in his preview of Soyinka’s *Gastronomical Rhapsodies*, highlights the numerous praise names given to different things among the Yoruba such as objects or foods and drinks like *pounded yam*, *amala* and *palm wine*, etc. Even abstract phenomena such as appetite, hunger and so on have exaggerated appellations. There is certainly an attribute worthy of attention in every person or object. So, whether a piece of poem is sung, chanted, recited or just rapidly said, we are taking everything together based on the poetic quality. Let us take a sample chant here and attempt an analysis. The bride sings most often but first and foremost, the praise of her parents, alluding to the care and nurture she has received from them from infancy. She would then thank them and bid them farewell before adding other matters. At such moments, it is not uncommon to find a mother joining her daughter in weeping.

(Sample chant by Ladele & Faniyi 1978, as adapted, modified and translated by this author)

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|---|---|--|
| 1. Babaa mi, Iyaa mi, e seun lae | - | My father, my mother I thank you |
| 2. Eku kike ti e ke mi | - | I thank you for caring for me |
| 3. Eku gige ti ege mi | - | I thank you for nurturing me |
| 4. See so pe o ya kin maa rele oko? | - | You say I should go to my husband's house? |
| 5. Eni o tasiko ki n kuo loode? | - | You say it is time I vacate the homestead? |
| 6. Ki n lo file onile sele? | - | To seek my abode in another person's home? |
| 7. Kin lo feni eleni se baba? | - | To find a father in another man? |
| 8. E sure fun mi, ki n ma kelesu lohuun | - | Say me a blessing that I meet no evil person |
| 9. Ki n ma kagbako nile oko | - | That I come to no ill in my husband's house |
| 10. Orogun ti mo ba ba | - | That the senior wife |
| 11. Ki won o fe mi bi omo won | - | Should love me as her own child |
| 12. Ki n ma fabiku se wo | - | That my children never die |
| 13. Ki n ma bi mo abigbin bi ogede | - | That I bury not my kids as plantain suckers |
| 14. Omo ti mo ba bi, ko sehin bo wa sonike eyin | - | That my kids shall repay your goodness. |

She could continue in many choice expressions. Then she would change over to praise herself in mellifluous candour and sonorous tone extolling her own virtues of beauty, obedience, hard work, virginity, chastity and love for children. These verses might as well be for whoever cares to listen. She would ordinarily say this to appreciate her parents' investment in her, but largely it is an opportunity to advertise herself as a rare find for the family of her husband-to-be.

Also any unmarried female person within ear-shot is meant to be instructed by her bold and open declaration of virtues and cultural assets which are greatly treasured by the Yoruba. She chants further:

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| 15. Mo nie jade wa e wa wo mi na! | - | I say come out and behold me! |
| 16. Mo ni e rin kasakasa kee wa wo mi o! | - | Quickly come and see me! |
| 17. Emi Ibronke Aduni omo Ajenifuja, | - | Ibronke Adunni, the daughter of Ajenifuja, |
| 18. Omo Animasaun | - | Child of Animasaun |
| 19. Emi lomo peleyeju, omo Ibadiaran, | - | Daughter of Peleyeju, Velvet-Round-the-Waist , |
| 20. Omo Muniratu | - | Offspring of Muniratu. |
| 21. Kin ni mofi seja | - | How did I offend the fish |
| 22. To ni n ma we ninu ibu o? | - | That bars my swimming in the ocean? |
| 23. Kin ni mo fi se konko | - | How did I offend the frog |
| 24. To ni n ma we lodo? | - | That forbids me a river bath? |
| 25. Kin ni mo fise legbenlegbe? | - | How did I offend the tadpole |
| 26. To ni ki n kuro lale omi. | - | That banishes me from the deep? |
| 27. Kin ni mo fi se Baba mi Akanmu o? | - | How did I offend Akanmu my father? |
| 28. Kin ni mo fi se Iya mi Muniratu o? | - | How did I offend Muniratu my mother? |
| 29. Won ni ki n jade n le, won ni ki n maa lo! | - | They have banished me from this house, away! |
| 30. Emi Eyinmenugun, Aponbepore, | - | Even-Teeth-Befit-the-Mouth, Fair-as-Oil. |
| 31. Mo mo lese bi olele awe | - | Clean heels I am, comely as breakfast <i>olele</i> . |
| 32. Baba ko mi lare mo mare; | - | Have mastered the humour father taught me. |
| 33. Iya ko mi lowo mo mowo | - | I have learnt the trade of my mother. |
| 34. Mo mo ka aro, mo mo lee tunse | - | I can make <i>oka</i> and tidy the house. |
| 35. Mo lamu laya ti mo le fomo mu; | - | I have breasts to suckle my infants. |
| 36. E weyin mi pele | - | Behold my supple back. |
| 37. E wo badii nu bebere, | - | My hip is broad. |
| 38. Mo le gbomo pon doja | - | I can nestle my babies to the market square. |
| 39. Mo kuro lomode agbekorun roko. | - | I have come of age. |
| 40. E je n maa lo! | - | Do let me go! |
| 41. Idaro mi o sela, idaro mi o sekan, | - | The okro and the garden egg will surely miss me. |
| 42. Idaro mi o sadie okoko | - | The newly-hatched chick shall long for me. |
| 43. Idaro mi o seran iso. | - | The pets on the tether shall miss me dearly. |

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| 44. Sugbon no pada wa wo yin. | - | But I shall soon return to pay you a visit |
| 45. Ma gbomo wa fun yin jo | - | And show you my baby. |
| 46. Omo ti mo ba bi o sonikee eyin | - | My children shall grow to support you. |
| 47. Atare o kuku di tie laabo! | - | Atare pod is never found half full! |

Having praised herself extensively, she switches over to the family of her husband. She assumes a higher pitch of wail as she sings:

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| 48. Ilo ya mi, o dile Ajibola | - | Off I go, to the house of Ajibola |
| 49. Ajibola omo Baba Alaso | - | Ajibola, son of the textile dealer |
| 50. Omo Iya Onileke nita oja | - | Son of the bead merchant at the market square. |
| 51. Odede Akanmu lemi re, omo | - | I go to the house of Akanmu, the son of Olateju, |
| 52. Olateju, omo Popoola | - | Son of Popoola. |
| 53. Won ni ki won o pe mi wa ninu ile, | - | As I go to answer the call, |
| 54. Mo ni koree mi bami kalo | - | I bid my mate come along |
| 55. N o sehun ekufu, ki ni n kiye sekule si? | - | I've done no wrong, why should I fret? |
| 56. N o loju sile Asipa; | - | I flirt with neither Asipa |
| 57. N ee sore alagbede Ofiki | - | Nor with the smith at Ofiki. |
| 58. Akanmu omo Po'ola, mo n bo loode re! | - | Akanmu, son of Po'ola, to your house I come! |

This is how she would keep changing the song, chant or wail as her subject or audience changes. Amidst tears and sobs she would request the blessing and benediction of her parents, who would invoke her ancestral spirit of grace and benevolence to go with her on what Ajai (1997) calls “the adventure of destiny”. After bidding all parties farewell, she would step in front of the convoy of maidens. These are her burden bearers. It is their duty to carry all her gifts and utensils. She would continue in her chant and vary the theme and purpose according to the people they meet on the way. One or two of the maidens in her convoy would prompt her as occasion may demand to change her subject; this also, by chanting. The subject could range from a mere greeting, to a challenge to a contest, satirical comments, a lampoon or praise. She could make a show of her prowess, discipline and courage even in the face of lurking uncertainties in this market of indeterminate merchandize. She bursts into tears from time to time as her memory is prodded on certain issues touching deeply on her emotions. Ladele and Faniyi (op cit) say:

The matter has reached a climax for the bride when she begins her chant. It is the beginning of a new phase in her life. She is leaving all the certainties in her family for the uncertainties of a new family. She surely needs all encouragement, consolation and exhortation. (Translation mine).

Phono-structural Analysis

In this part of the paper, an attempt shall be made to exhibit the sound pattern of the chant to reflect tonal play for acoustic effect in an attempt to heighten the gravity of the message therein.

Lines 1-3 are an introductory invocation upon her parents and also a mixture of the **high** and **middle** tones (*mi* and *re*).

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|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Babaa mi, Iyaa mi, e seun lae | - | My father, my mother I thank you |
| 2. Eku kike ti e ke mi | - | I thank you for caring for me |
| 3. Eku gige ti e ge mi | - | I thank you for nurturing me |

In this same portion is the preponderance of the /e/ sound which is an open vowel. So many open central vowels within such a short piece, so early in the chart is a reflection of disbelief as she leaves her lips open in total surprise. Apart from the vowel play, there is also consonantal play within lines 1-3. The high presence of /m/ a bilabial nasal is indicative of murmuring and sobbing. As the sobbing continues, words get stuck in her throat making her talk like a stammerer. That is perhaps why the glottal plosives are so many in /k/ and /g/ between lines 2 and 3.

When she eventually manages to bring the words out, the next four lines (4, 5, 6, 7) are pure rhetorical questions; every line bearing a question.

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| 4. See so pe o ya kin maa rele oko? | - | You say I should go to my husband's house? |
| 5. Eni o tasiko ki n kuo loode? | - | You say it is time I vacate the homestead? |
| 6. Ki n lo file onile sele ? | - | To seek my abode in another person's home? |
| 7. Ki n lo feni eleni se baba? | - | To find a father in another man? |

All the four line endings are a mixture of the middle, low and high tones to produce a musical effect. The opening of the lips continue in line 4 in /e/ and /ei/ but quickly changes to a rounding feature in line 5 in the /eu/'s and as if she now resigns to her fate, since the questions are rhetorical. The fricatives /f/ in 6, 7, 8, 11 & 12 are a device for her to let out some pressurized breath as she sobs.

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|---|---|--|
| 6. Ki n lo file onile sele? | - | To seek my abode in another person's home? |
| 7. Ki n lo feni eleni se baba? | - | To find a father in another man? |
| 8. E sure fun mi, ki n ma kelesu lohuun | - | Say me a blessing that I meet no evil person |
| 11. Ki won o fe mi bi omo won | - | Should love me as her own child |
| 12. Ki n ma fabiku se wo | - | That my children never die |

In lines 12-14, the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ is very common. This sound alone corresponds to the Yoruba verb "put to bed" (bi) and the key meaning of the portion deals with child bearing. The only appearance of /gb/ the Yoruba voiced palate – labial occurs in line 13. Again, this is an instance of a single phoneme corresponding to a whole verb in Yoruba, (i.e. gbin) which means "to push" (as in during birth labour). This verb appearing once is intended to indicate ease and minimum effort as each child birth which is likely to occur many times considering how many /b/'s i.e. "put to bed" are present between line 10 and 14.

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|---|---|--|
| 10. Orogun ti mo ba ba | - | That the senior wife |
| 12. Ki n ma fabiku se wo | - | That my children never die |
| 13. Ki n ma bi mo abigbin bi ogede | - | That I burry not my kids as plantain suckers |
| 14. Omo ti mo ba bi, ko sehin bo wa sonike eyin | - | That my kids shall repay your goodness. |

The foregoing is a brief sample to indicate that the sound structure of the chant is phonological. The choice of the poet in this phonemic juxtaposition and tonal variation is to create parallelism (1, 2 & 3), rhetoric 4-7, repetition 9, 10-13, incremental analogue 11-13 and tonal declension in line 14 is phono-structurally well balanced.

Significance of the Chants

The endless production of the chants and songs, drumming and dancing is all for one purpose: to create a memorable, befitting, energizing and an invigorating stimulus for the bride who is going on a journey of final separation from her own people and friends. It is the height of nostalgia and mixed feelings. Many things would happen to her in her bridal home, that she would nearly consider beating a retreat. All the many songs and chants she has stored in her mind, taught her by her parents, aunties, uncles, sisters, friends and several others, would endlessly resonate in the ears of her mind for years to come. The songs are designed to capture all conceivable situations she might come across in the matrimony and how to handle them.

In the chants, wifely virtues have been embedded which are meant to give her fortitude and endurance in her new home. If she feels homesick or forlorn, these chants serve as her energy booster to carry on. Many of the verses are consolatory and assuring of a better future. Some of the verses project her children (born or expected) as the justifiable reason for all the suffering and indignities she must endure.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Chants

It is crucial to note here that the Yoruba matrimony is male-biased and chauvinistic. This view has been long practised and elevated to an unquestionable level. The wife is not on the same socio-cultural pedestal with her husband. The patriarchy cannot be negotiated and the husband feels justified. In fact, on most family decisions, the wife's opinion is never sought.

The new bride has already been ‘trained’ to be obedient (or subservient) to the husband as this is her only guarantee of a happy or lasting marriage. Failing to remain an underdog to her husband, she risks rejection, separation, divorce or provoking the husband into marrying another woman to be her rival in the home. This systematic ‘taming’ of the woman is believed to be a safety valve against rampant divorce in the traditional Yoruba marriage. The system, in the past, produced wives who were more sober and respectful at home on the one hand. On the other hand, the more westernized philosophy the woman acquires through formal education, the more indomitable she becomes and this has been described as unwholesome in the wife. In this wake of globalization and cultural emancipation, the Nigerian woman is gradually gaining her voice and image. Practices that discriminate against the woman are on the decline. In the case of the bridal chants, as many as the advantages may be, both socio-cultural and intellectual, only the female partner is subjected to the training. It is a skewed practice. There is no equivalent, public declaration of love, faithfulness, endurance and loyalty expected of the man. Here lies the weakness of the chants as a socio-cultural metre of stable homes and lasting marriages. Even when the man wrecks the home, he is almost exonerated from any fault.

The Role of Technology

The whole essence of technology is to elevate man from the abyss of squalor to a dignified state of living, befitting his human status. Technology covers the whole gamut of man’s ability, creativity, discovery or invention that can be deployed towards making work done or tasks achieved at less labour, less exertion, with quicker result and better yield for easier living by any means electrical, mechanical or electronic. In the days preceding the explosion of information technology, it was not easy to preserve data in audio-visual mediums. Reproduction and retrieval technology by electrical and electronic means was alien. Work was tedious and learning was a burden. Too much time was spent on memorization. Manpower was severely wasted and abused. Every bit of work that had to be done was herculean and boring. For many decades in Nigeria, tele-texting was unknown, e-mailing was undiscovered. There were no computers and the Internet could not be imagined. The volumes of the chants the bride had to learn were by hard means. Even worse is the fact that very little of the chants could be retrieved or stored for today’s youth. Much of the Yoruba oral art was lost owing to lack of electronic technology.

Therefore, to bring technology to bear on epithalamium, we would find an avalanche of opportunities in the electronic field. For the *Ekun iyawo* practice that is fast going into extinction, we ought to do everything possible to halt the erosion and to cause its re-awakening and revitalization. *Ekun iyawo* will become more interesting and more endearing to the youth if it is fascinatingly re-packaged and re-presented in the electronic media.

This very important cultural material will always be in demand if it can be stored in a retrieval system. Its dramatic quality will make it more entertaining and acceptable to more women. The film industry is booming in Nigeria now and the availability of *Ekun iyawo* on celluloid and compact disc will be greatly rejuvenating to the growth of highly valuable cultural practices and will also showcase our linguistic and poetic dexterity.

Furthermore, parents who value this rich cultural practice can avail themselves of the technology in packaging extensive interesting chants for their daughters prior to and also during their departure and add it as a precious collection to their bridal luggage. This usage will serve as a veritable tool of didactic education for the young damsel going into marriage. By this means, this poetic practice, if subjected to adequate translation, will become very mobile and globally transferable with all its virtues, touching lives everywhere. Holman (2003) stresses that: “*Language is the essence of humanity. Poetry is the essence of language. We can get no closer to touching (human lives?) than through poetry. ...*”

Through this method of new technology, *Ekun iyawo* will go beyond the people of Oyo, Iseyin, Ikirun, Okeho, Ogbomoso, Saki and Ibadan. These are the only places in Nigeria where the remnants of this practice can still be found today. It is actually on the verge of extinction.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have looked at the importance of poetic language in moments of emotional distress and also the various ways in which language affects the psyche of people and more especially young ladies who are going newly into marriage. The symbolic essence of the chants has been discussed and the energetic or preparatory effects they have on their targets. Efforts in this regard will yield no small dividends in teaching the young brides most of the norms and values that they do not know these days as they hurry through the processes of courtship, engagement and marriage in this age of pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancy, girl-child motherhood, live-in partners, trial marriages and all sorts of socio-sexual antics and aberrations that are on the rise in Nigeria. The wise counsel of mothers and the advice of friends and relatives watched in drama sketches, heard over and over in audio and video CD's as well as over the radio or television will continue to provide a constant boost to the morale of the new wife as she navigates through the stormy waters of matrimony.

Observing that the art is dying off, aggressive preservation is advocated, using ICT tools and mass media outlets. As a result of the many derivable useful applications that *Ekun iyawo* can have, it is posited that it must not be abandoned to extinction through the weathering forces of urbanization and civilization.

Biography

Alfred Fatuase, a research student at the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria, holds two Masters Degrees in Curriculum Studies and English Language from two foremost Nigerian universities. His doctoral research is in Literary Translation with specific reference to some of Wole Soyinka's works.

He served as Head, Department of Languages at Yaba College of Technology between 2011 and 2014. He is currently the College Orator and Dean, School of Liberal Studies, a faculty of 66 academics in different areas in the Humanities. His teaching areas include: English Language, Phonetics and Phonology, Literary Appreciation, Business Communication and Discourse Analysis.

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