Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

Non-Verbal Communication of Metal Gong (Ukela) and Bamboo/Wooden Drum (Okpokro) in Ogba Traditional Setting

Dr. Ben-Fred Ohia*

[*]Department of English and Literary Studies, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Haracourt, Nigeria.

Corresponding Email: [*]ben-fred.ohia@ust.edu.ng

Received: 04 September 2023 **Accepted:** 22 November 2023 **Published:** 03 January 2024

Abstract: ***Communication is the process of passing on of information from one person/group to the other. It is the process by which one person or (a group) shares and imparts information to another person or (a group) shares and impact information to another person or (group) for better understanding. Therefore, it is the transfer of an understandable message hence it is an integral part of life. In Ogba, Ukela and Okpokro are clear means of information used locally just like emerging types of communication such as the internet, e-mail, facebook, and other modern means of communication. This paper explores this local non-verbal means of communication, with a view to strengthening the communication skills non-verbal without involving writing and speaking. The paper finds out that 'Ukela' and 'Okpokro' are used to disseminate information effectively. The Ogba people have the capabilities to decode the message of the metal gong Ukela and bamboo/wooden gong Okpokro and the innate ability to understand and interpret the message passed through the sounds; eliciting a possible feedback and effective communication. The study adopts the interview method for both primary and secondary data collection. Consequently, the purposive sampling technique is used to select the respondents and the primary and secondary data are qualitative in nature. This study finds out using popular culture and situational approach as a theoretical framework is apt. This paper strongly recommends this non-verbal means of communication for effective communication in the rural and uneducated population who can neither read nor write. The work therefore recommends the use of these non-verbal communication instruments in the locality given the high level of illiterate persons in the local settings in addition to the non-availability or epileptic supply of electricity in the rural environments.***

Keywords: Non-Verbal, Communication, Ukela, Okpokro, Ogba Traditional Setting.

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

1. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of Ogba, Ukela and Okpokro as a means of communication has been in existence even before mass communication and it is a vital tool in human life in Ogba. It functions like the radio, television, satellite, internet, etc. Before the advent of the modern means of mass media communication, Ogba people in the local settings communicated with traditional means of Ukela and Okpokro. In Africa, we do communicate through the traditional means and this is known as the indigenous (oral) communication. Akinbile (2008) sees indigenous communication as that which involves local communication methods that are unique to a given culture or society. Anunike (1990) states that "before the advent of the modern mass media and their introduction to rural dwellers, various forms of traditional media existed, they were and still are very powerful, popular and useful to the people such that the modern means of communication pose little or no threat to them; use and respond to them more than they do to the mass media" (p,173).
Traditional communication also has been defined as forms of communication emanating from the interplay or synthesis of the traditional costumes and conflicts of the community: Its harmony and discord, its cultural specific values and practices, its cultural affinities which include among others, rituals, proverbs, music, dance, masquerades, ikoro, ekwe (Ugboaja 1974, Ikoro – Wikipedia 2021).

The Okpokro is a wooden/bamboo drum/gong that produces idiophonic sound when struck with two shoot sticks of about eight inches to one foot length. It is well carved like the wooden drum, wood-block with incision in the hollow inside. This ensures a particular sound with the help of two short sticks. A handle is put in place to ensure easy handling as the user carries it along. Okpokro sounds better and lasts longer. It is used for masquerade performance for the sole purpose of disseminating information among members of the cult and non-members. "It is used side by side with bell and the metal gong. It is metaphorically referred to as a wife of loud voice that does not agree with her husband awniyna okno olu la di agba a.

Similarly, the Ukela is used to pass information and used in the masquerade performance from the stage of proclamation ikpo-ekwe to invite spectators to the dance drama at the arena up to the end of the celebration. It is a complex idiophonic instrument which is sometimes made double or triple for higher production of sounds.

In Ogba, the Ukela and Okpokro means of traditional communication involves local communication methods that are unique and crude when compared with other means of communication. They play important roles in the lives of Ogba people. The other roles they play include sending messages across to the entire community either for information, music and dances which is done in ceremonial activities. The sounds of these two instruments penetrate the listener's mind based on the occasion involved. They are seen as total instruments of experience and knowledge for communication and decision making in the face of familiar and unfamiliar problems and challenges. Ukela and Okpokro have been found to possess the powers to perform such roles in Ogba rural setting.

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

Ukela and Okpokro: Signs and Symbols

These instruments are symbols of unity in Ogba kingdom. Ukela and Okpokro are non-verbal communication instruments used effectively to disseminate information to the rural dwellers. So, as non-verbal as Ukela and Okpokro are, they send signals which rend the air while communicating to the heart of those present and listening to the pieces of information passed by them.

Man is a story-telling being, who loves singing, dancing, and religious worship being. Story-telling, dance, songs and drumming and poetic recitations are amongst the quintessential elements of his being. (Akporobaro 2012, p.211).

First, from his views, communication has been ongoing from the creation of the world; some of it which is in the form of storytelling is being passed orally from generation to generation. Second, communication in the traditional societies influenced the lives of the people in a positive way in form of songs, drum-beatings, religious worships, myth-making, legends, etc. They are seen as total instruments of experience and knowledge for communication and decision-making in the face of familiar and unfamiliar problems and challenges. Ukela and Okpokro have been found to perform such roles in the community settings. Given Nigeria's advancement problem in the area of electricity, they cover a wider area by reaching the nooks and crannies of the communities more than the electronic and print media which are limited by some inhibiting factors.

This paper explores the silent non-verbal communication of Ukela and Okpokro as means of effective communication in Ogba kingdom of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Though a non-verbal means of communication, everybody in Ogba understands the message being passed across by the instruments. So these messages are strong; sometimes they are stronger than some of the mass media communication. The messages leave undeletable/indelible marks in the hearts of the people. Unspoken and voiceless sounds that are stronger than man's heartbeats when they are sounded to the receptive ears.

Like the sounds of strong waves, the sounds of Ukela and Okpokro toss listeners to and fro like in frenzy dancing moves. The people believe in it, go with it, listen to it and mostly, take it more seriously than what they heard from mass media communication.

Similarly, the Ukela and Okpokro are used to communicate people on the passage of a great man in the community. Ogba people listen to the various messages in the instruments and could easily decode the messages encoded in their sounds. Each sound gives a message to the listener. The same is seen in Umuofia in Things Fall Apart. The people understood the non-verbal message of the ekwe as they realized that it communicates to them the death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu. "Go-di-di-go-go-di-go. It was the ekwe talking to the clan. One of the things every man learned was the language of the hallowed-out instrument. Di-go-go-di-go-di-di-go floated in the message laden night air… and the esoteric language of the ekwe" (Achebe 1958, p.84).

In Ogba, the Ukela and Okpokro transfer an understandable message to all the people that decode the encoded message in the sounds of the instruments. "Communication is not just the giving of information, but the transfer of an understandable message; in other words,

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

communication is the transferring of information to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon (Eyre 1983, p.1). The word information is pertinent. It refers to a body of facts that gives in the knowledge which helps us to take appropriate decision. The message may take the form of thoughts, ideas, opinions, or attitudes. All these roles are performed by Ukela and Okpokro communication instruments in Ogba. The non-oral/non-verbal communication is not used in interpersonal and group communication situations. It involves the use of body language, paralanguage, distance, etc.

It is interesting to listen to the sounds of Ukela and Okpokro so that much attention has to be paid to these instruments used by Ogba to communicate. This to a large extent will clarify the Christian faithful who see them as fetish. We should strive to revitalise and redirect the minds of young ones to appreciate this culture of communication. This paper ascertains that Ukela and Okpokro are means of communication in Ogba kingdom. It reinforces the mind and body response of the people present to the stimulus of Ukela and Okpokro sound beat.

The Nature of Ukela and Okpokro Instruments

Ukela is a product of indigenous technology. It is forged by indigenous iron specialist blacksmiths who are still found in Ogba through the mentorship of Awka, Abiriba, Nkwerre, Igbokwu, etc. The Ukela instrument belongs to the struck idiophone class of instrumental non-verbal form of African communication system. They idiophone is a type of self-sounding instruments that emits sound when beaten or shaken. Idiophone may be classified as:

Group of self sounding instruments which produce sound when they are struck, scratched, or shaken. They sound they produce is of a different kind from those of other instruments. In this group are all the difference sizes and shapes of gongs, woodblock, wooden drum, bell rattle, earthen ware drum, and other related instruments (Ibagere 1994, p.91).

Structurally, Ukela is moulded in a V-shape and may be constructed single or in pair, the instrument is usually made of iron which is struck with stick to produce desired sound. Depending on how and where it is struck, the Ukela can emit diverse sounds in consonance with the beater's desires. It is known as ogene in Igbo, as Akangkang in Epik; and in Ibibio as Akpongkpong.

Okpokro (wooden/bamboo slit drum (gong). This drum made from wood/bamboo is used as a gong in Ogba. It is used in place of the metal gong for the purpose of entertainment, disseminating information; it is round in shape. The designs may vary from 36cm long, 8cm diameter. It is sometimes referred to as bamboo tongue drum. The tongue drum can be held in one hand. It is generally referred to as ekwe in Igbo. It is used for music. People use it to play a music or when they are bored, especially kids. It is very easy to make.

Functions and Communicative Significance of Ukela and Okpokro

Over time, Ukela and Okpokro have been used as means of communication in Ogba kingdom. It is the position of this paper that civilisation and the recent advancement in technology should not in any way silence the use of these instruments. The importance of the

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

instruments to Ogba people must be emphasised as an ancestral heritage that needs to be transformed in the present time. The instruments should be revitalised and their importance stressed in the communities. By so doing, the current trend in Christianity of waging a war against beliefs and traditions will be reduced and possibly eradicated. "Communication is a process in which an individual imitates messages using verbal and non-verbal symbols to express meanings in such a way that a similar or parallel understanding is arouse in all communicators involved" (Defleur 2010, p.93). In a similar vein, Ndimele (1999) viewed communication from psychological perspective as not just response, but the relationship set up by the transmission of stimuli and the evocation of response. This psychological stimuli which evoke responses from individuals is what this study has discovered in Ukela and Okpokro respectively.

Ukela and Okpokro are musical instruments created and used by Ogba people of South South, Nigeria for communication purpose. They are beaten with stick(s). "Between the Ukela and Okpokro, they appear not to be any physical difference except that Ukela is a metal gong and Okpokro is a wooden/bamboo gong. They are both related in outward appearance as musical and information dissemination devices. However, while Ukela is smaller and could be used by men, women, and children, Okpokro is bigger, male oriented and closely associated with ogudu-mock-war dance, masquerade festivals and other heroic deeds. For instance, in funeral dirges for both male and female the metal-gong Ukela is used but the Okpokro is used for the male performance only. They serve these purposes as communication and musical instruments until date. The instruments: Ukela and Okpokro have grown to become a symbol of cultural identification and they are among the commonly used instruments in Ogba society either for the purpose of information dissemination, entertainment, extra-mundane communication. This study thus attempts to demonstrate through in-depth and history-laced analysis, explore the nature and communication significance of Ukela and Okpokro in Ogba kingdom.

The metal-gong Ukela and the wooden/bamboo gong Okpokro perform diverse functions in Ogba kingdom ranging from entertainment, information dissemination, festivals and major events. They are only beaten (sounded) when a great festival/events that requires special information and attention of the community is in place. When they are beaten or sounded, all adult males in the community must assemble to access special information. They could be sounded to pass special information on a traditional ceremony such as installation of kings/chiefs, announcement of the community's festival in Ogba kingdom and threatening/development issues that will impact the society at large or individuals in particular.

The Ukela and Okpokro are percussion instruments that combine the metal, wooden/bamboo and sticks to produce sounds when struck. While the Ukela is a flat, circular metal disc that is typically struck with a stick to produce diverse sounds, the Okpokro is a hallow-slit percussion drum that is also struck with stick(s) to produce different sounds. Ukela and Okpokro are also used for spiritual divination hence they are useful instruments in the hands of diviners and sorcerers, for the purposes of connecting with the extra-mundane world. They

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

are two important key tools found in most shrines and other places of divination in Ogba kingdom.

Therefore, the Ukela and Okpokro are non-verbal communication instruments which are used for both physical and spiritual communications. In Igbo, Ukela is known as ogene while the Okpokro in general term is referred to as ekwe, small slit wooden drum. It is very clear that they are used for communication. The communicative significance of Ukela and Okpokro in traditional Ogba society is highly invaluable. Accordingly their music also enjoys tremendous popularity among Ogba people of the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. This study reveals that Ukela and Okpokro retain essential communicative function in Ogba kingdom. The content of the lyrics are meaning-filled and could be very useful in the promotion of indigenous culture. For instance, Ukela and Okpokro are used in almost every traditional music in Ogba such as traditional pop music, masquerade festivals, royal music in the palaces, funeral dirges, etc. of importance is the fact that Ukela is used to call out the kings.

So, the Ukela and Okpokro perform musical functions as demonstrative nonverbal African communicatiōn sȳstem̄. They are also used in raising morale of warriors to go into battle courageous and resolved. According to Ibagere (1994) concerning Ukela (ogene), "in the ancient Igbo culture, ogene is considered an instrument of war used to rouse the adrenaline of the warriors" (p.30). The Ukela and Okpokro are veritable instruments in the hands of diviners. The diviners use them to hail the gods and the ancestors while invoking them to provide answers to a given challenge. The instruments are used for security purposes in Ogba kingdom. They replace the whistle in modern security operations used for sounding warning of alertness to security partners. "While in pursuit of criminals, the Ukela (ogene) is sounded to give situation report to other men on watch" (Nzewi 1991, p.63).

All these are non-musical functions of Ukela and Okpokro instruments in traditional Ogba society away from music. The messages of Ukela and Okpokro cut across diverse communities in Ogba especially in promoting the traditional values of traditional method of information dissemination. Through the use of these instruments, respect for tradition and culture is promoted as their use advocates strict compliance with traditional method of disseminating information. As earlier stated, the instruments are often employed during wars. Accordingly, they equally appeal to the youths of nowadays who love to show off their strength. The instruments also promote traditional wit in Ogba kingdom, especially in the wisdom of decoding the messages inherent in the sounds of the instruments.
However, it is pertinent to state in unequivocal terms that the introduction of mass media communication has reduced, to a large extent, the salient point of these traditional communication instruments in the rural areas. It is either because the participants and the people who control or perform it are locals or because of the impression and the propaganda being carried by Christians has marred the use of these traditional communication devices. They tried as much as possible to discourage their members from listening to the information passed through these traditional methods. Notwithstanding, they still listen whenever Ukela and Okpokro are beaten. Most communities in Ogba still hold firm the traditions inherited from their ancestors like the use of Ukela and Okpokro as one of the major means for

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

dissemination of information during great events such as festivals, masquerades, funerals and other gatherings. They maintain that all announcements in the communities must be carried out using Ukela and Okpokro and not radios and televisions as the case maybe.

Ukela and Okpokro are used by town-criers otherwise known as messengers or news agents for communication in the performance of their duties. They found them easier to use as technical waves which produce sound without the addition or use of intermediary medium. The sound or message emanates from the materials which the instruments are made. These communication instruments announce the promulgation of laws and regulations, meeting arrangements for official communal works and generally spread "official information to the community" (Wilson 1981, p.90).

It was noted that the sound produced by the instruments was supposed to have represented human voice. The most striking aspect of it all is the distance covered by the nonverbal communication which is greater than articulated speech. Ukela and Okpokro drum communication methods are not languages on their own right per se; they are based on spoken languages. "The sounds produced are conventionalised or idiomatic signals based on speech patterns" (Wikipedia, 2023). It is note-worthy that the sounds transmitted send psychological trills and stimulus to the listeners which had the resultant action taken by the listeners. The action could be either positive or negative depending on the message communicated.

2. CONCLUSION

Ukela and Okpokro are the hall mark of Ogba (African) culture and means of communication from the foregoing; it is evident that communication is of great significance in the Ogba culture. Beyond the uniqueness of the instruments, they serve multifarious functions ranging from information dissemination and security, extra-mundane communication to entertainment. Ukela and Okpokro as evidenced in dissemination of information are highly meaningful, and may be used to encourage and empower warriors as well as for entertainment. Indeed, the Ukela and Okpokro instruments have grown to become a thing of Ogba identity and thus well treasured in the traditional Ogba society.

The summary of the above study is that the Ukela and Okpokro instruments occupy a significant status in the traditional Ogba society. As a highly useful artifact and product of African indigenous technology, the instruments reflect the ingenuity of the African mind. Sadly, not many of Ukela and Okpokro beaters receive adequate exposure compared to their mainstream counterparts. Most of the drummers have to wait only for funerals, masquerade festivals, weddings and other events to have audience.

Recommendations
However, with the trend of events, it is worth mentioning that many of the youths do not know the value of these instruments for dissemination of information. Hence, all hands must be on deck to revitalise the instruments and re-orientate the youths to accept the use of these

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance
ISSN: 2799-1180
Vol: 04, No. 01, Dec 2023-Jan 2024
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.41.41.48

instruments to ensure that they will not go into extinction. It is the recommendation of this paper, that state governments in Nigeria, especially in the South-South region of the country should as a matter of urgency promote the use of these instruments for the dissemination of information. The main stream media need to incorporate the functions of these instruments in their programmes and give them airplay from time to time. The Ukela and Okpokro instruments are indeed invaluable instruments in Ogba culture.

3. REFERENCES

1. Achebe, C. (1958). Things Fall Apart. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
2. Akpabio, E. (2003). African Communication System: An Introduction Text. Lagos: B-Print Publications
3. Akporobaro, F. B. O., (2012). Introduction to African Oral Literature. Lagos: Princeton Publishing Co.
4. Defleur, M. (2010). Mass Communication Theories: Explaining Origins, Processes and Effects. New York: Allyn & Bacon.
5. Eyre, E. C. (1983). Effective Communication Made Simple. London: W. H. Allen.
6. https://ibiene.com Entertainment Functions of Ogene Music.
7. Ibagere, E. (1994). "Taxonomy of African Traditional Modes of Communication"; Mass Communication: A Basic Text. Tosanwumi J and Ekwuazu, H. (eds.). Ibadan: Caltop Publishers.
8. Ndimele, O. M. (1999). Semantics and the Frontiers of Communication (Second Edition) Port Harcourt: University Of Port Harcourt Press.
9. Nzewi, M. E. (1991). Musical Practice and Creativity: Bayreuth. Germany: Iwalewa-Haus University of Bayreuth, p.63.
10. Ohia, B. F. (2021). African Art Perspectives in Ogba Masquerades and Totemic Performances. Omoku: FCE (T) Printing Press.
11. Onuora, C. (2016). Ikoro Drums among the Igbos: Iconology and Design Symbols. UNN-Fajh49.Pdf.
12. Walter, J. O. – https://doi.org//10.2307/468293.
13. Wikipedia, - en.m.wikipedia.org July 2023.
14. Wilson, D. E. (1981). "From the Gong to Electronics: A Study of Trado-Modern Mass Communication Techniques in the Cross River State" M. A. Thesis, University of Calabar.
15. Wilson, D. (1998). "Taxonomy of Traditional Media in Africa". Perspectives on Indigenous Communication in Africa: Theory and Application. Ansu-Kyeremeh (ed.).

Copyright The Author(s) 2024.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license.(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)