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Linguistic and Literary (Artistic) Devises in the Composition, Performance and Aesthetics of Ogba Funeral Songs

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Abstract: ***Composition and performance are interwoven in Ogba funeral song. This means that there is performance when the funeral songs are composed. Composition can be oral production while performance is a reproduction and dissemination. The artistic productivity of the artist is exposed at the pre-performance and insitu composition (new creation) stages. Scholars such as Malinowski and Bascom pursue the interest in social context with regard to the physical and cultural circumstances in which tales and songs are performed. Through the composition and performance of Ogba funeral songs, aesthetics – the common and peculiar qualities of the songs which make them beautiful are harnessed. The paper explores and describes composition, performance and aesthetics of Ogba funeral songs. A total of seven (7) songs were used to explicate this topic, and it was discovered that composition of Ogba funeral songs is in three phases of; pre-gestation, gestation and post gestation. Performance has the pre-performance or rehearsal stages: performance stage comprises of opening and closing formula. All of these lead to aesthetics of how art in the performance conveys the Ogba cosmology, rites of transition and worldview, as vehicles for the principle and philosophy, especially in the songs. The paper adopts the quantitative/descriptive design method of analysis pinned down on Dell Hymes' Ethnopoetics and Schiegel's historicism propounded in 1850 as theories because they exhume the cultural aspects of the Ogba funeral songs. The paper concludes that Ogba people have a process of composition, performance of their funeral songs and they also enjoy the beauty of the composition and performance. The paper recommends an improvement in the composition and performance of these songs in order to x-ray the beauty embedded in them.***

Keywords: Composition, Performance, Aesthetics, Ogba Funeral Songs, Pre-Performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ogba funeral songs are highly valued from their pre-composition to performance stages. The songs depend fundamentally on the very context within which they are created and performed. Literary scholars such as J.P. Clark and Harold Schuss emphasise the physical elements of performance. Performance reveals the various actions of the performer and the audience; dramatisation of the various moods in the text. Ogba funeral songs thrive on these to make a landmark in the life of the people during funeral performance. According to Okpewho (1990): "it is therefore in the study of performance that we are able to see the essential character of oral literature as distinct from written literature, that is, as an art form created in the warm presence of an audience as against the cold privacy of the written work" (p.42).
In all, performance is the hallmark of oral literature and audience participation is its ingredient. Mills (1991) states that: "Audience involvement is a significant aspect of the oral art". He also points out that: "this is so important that its removal will render any oral performance meaningless" (p.24). Through performance, in Ogba funeral songs, the deceased's name is immortalised, his/her achievements are recounted, his/her relationship with the great ancestors and the living relatives are traced and his/her spirit is laid to rest in peace. It is necessary to point out that if these rituals are not performed, the spirit of the deceased will continue to haunt the living with dire consequences until the appropriate ceremonies are performed. The performance of the rites or rituals is therefore part of the social significance and aesthetics of Ogba funeral songs.

2. RELATED WORKS

A lot of works have been published on Ogba oral literature, especially in the areas of funeral songs, folktales and folklore generally. For instance, Ohia (2023) published a work on the "The Values of Oral Literature in the Society: The Study of Folktales of Ogba in Rivers State". To him, "the most cogent need for oral literature particularly Ogba oral literature is the exposition it affords to the rich indigenous tradition that nurtured the refreshing vigorous creative genius of modern Nigerian writers" (p.10). Similarly, according to Ben-Amos (1974): "Genealogies and legends function towards the promotion of social stability because they are symbolic expressions of political power and historical truth, parables are effective in settling personal disputes due to their capacity" (Pp.10-12). Ohia (2017) discusses content, style and aesthetics of Ogba funeral songs where he avers that: "works of art cannot be appreciated purely on the surface level. Literature (written or oral) is more than mere speech, discourse or writing and its vehicle (language) is coated with deep connotative meaning" (p.131).

3. METHODOLOGY

In conducting this research, the descriptive method was employed. This method became appropriate because it is aimed at describing the data collected from written texts, oral interviews and observation of live performances during funeral dirges in occasions of burial in the communities. Besides, the data are illustrations of the various components of composition, performance and aesthetics in Ogba funeral song performances. The data especially the ones

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derived from oral interviews and observations of live performances describe the diction, clauses, histrionics, dominant kinds of native language styles used by the performers in cause of the composition and performance of the songs, which make the Ogba funeral song performance unique.
As the data are collected from the various stages of the pre-gestation, gestation and post gestation, attention was given to the linguistic and literary (artistic) devices employed by the performer. This is how the paper arrived at the local literatures and personal idiosyncrasies of the individual artists in Ogba.

This work is pinned down to Dell Hymes' Ethnopoetic theory, using the qualitative/descriptive research design method for the analysis. In all, seven (7) funeral songs were analysed in this paper. Dell Hymes' Ethnography of communication theory as the major analytical framework and the qualitative method describe the linguistic variables such as setting, scene, participant, act sequence, instrumentality and genre as is evident in the data; and how the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis allows this paper to relate its data to aspects of Ogba worldview and culture. This paper establishes that Ogba funeral songs are relevant to both oral and written communication within and outside the Ogba environment. The theory and method mentioned are employed to embellish, spice and beautify oral communication commonly but proudly exploited in Ogba people's interpersonal relations through conversations. Generally speaking, this allows for the comprehensive understanding of the data in this paper.

After collecting the songs, several steps were taken to analyse the data. First, the songs were categorised in accordance with the themes, subject matter, kinds of issue addressed by the performer in the performance based on the adopted theory. Second, the dominant linguistic and literary (artistic) devices were interpreted and then described from each category. Third, the examination of the performers' activities was carefully inserted and finally a conclusion was drawn based on the research finds. Most of the data used in this study were collected during a one-year intensive field trip to Ogba, Rivers State between March, 2023 and March, 2024. During this period, interviews and recordings were made of the speeches by the interviewees and observations of performances in burial occasions for both male and females. The sources were also properly acknowledged in keeping with acceptable academic tradition and standard.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper explores the linguistic and literary (artistic) devices in the composition, performance and aesthetics of Ogba funeral songs. It highlights the use of artistic techniques to express emotions on the death of human beings in Ogba, aimed at motivating participants in the dirges to perceive life and death in a way that when death occurs, the loss is bearable. With the use of these devices, the Ogba oral tradition in the songs is explained with modern poetic forms to enhance the effectiveness of the message in the song. It is noticed that the songs are better composed and rendered in the native language to enhance the grasp of the major ingredients in the songs as pertains the performance. This is so because, native idiomatic expressions are used and in most cases, the idiolectic and idiophonic words do not have their equivalent in the English language.

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The paper employs the qualitative research design. The data consist of observance of real live funeral performances involving artists and audience, participation in occasions of burial. Written texts are analysed to identity patterns of composition, performance and the use of words which comprise literary aesthetics that reveals the symbolic dimension of this paper. The paper finds linguistic factors such as linguistic homogeneity, cultural resemblance which enforce the use of funeral songs in the Ogba communities plausible. This creates a linguistic landscape and literary factors; these influence the performance/rendition of Ogba funeral songs at the pre-gestation, gestation and post gestation stages. All these highlight the ability of the performer to motivate the audience on their perception of death and the place of the deceased through the evocative use of language and style in the songs.

Composition of Funeral Songs

Composition is the act of creating songs to fit a given occasion. In Ogba, it may occur when the performers carry out rehearsals of songs whose composers are anonymous within the arena for already made songs. It is at the point of creation. There exists oral formulaic distinction of creation by the artist, which allows more scope for the creativity of individual composer. The artist composes songs by using formulae and formulaic expressions for the building of material lines. Generally, the composition of funeral songs in Ogba is in three phases namely: pre-gestation, gestation and post-gestation. At the pre-gestation phase, songs are composed and practised; at gestation period, dance steps are learned and perfected and possible errors in the songs are corrected or eliminated; while post-gestation stage of performance, it is a period during the composition, only members of the group are permitted to enter the makeshift house made for that purpose; drummers learn and strive to perfect drum beats in relation to the songs and dance steps. The intention is to form a holistic unit in which the lead-singer and other performers form an orchestra.

Composition can be oral production while performance is an oral reproduction. According to Okpewho (1983), “composition and editing of songs take place simultaneously before performance is done to the public” (p.102). From this assertion, it is obvious that the (original) composer’s creativity is refined by others during the composition stage before it is performed for public consumption. This can also affect the composition of Ogba funeral songs in general. Finnegan (1970) proposes that: “the scope of the artist to improvise or create may vary, but there is almost always some opportunity for composition...” (p.9). Okpewho adds that this involves adaptation and compromise between inherited art and creative art. Perhaps one fundamental point about the oral composition should be grasped: it always involves some amount of compromise between tried and tested techniques and new elements invented or substituted of a specific occasion or purpose. In Ogba, composers adopt devices from older artists and use them in variety of situations; it may be the technique for opening a story. In Okpewho (1985), “the song sung by the chorus (refrain) in the text may not change even though the content of the verses is modified or influenced by the audience” (p.92).

It appears to us that to arrive at a satisfactory determination of the composition of genre in African oral literature, we have to bear in mind Okpewho’s comment on the composition and performance of oral narratives. The composition of Ogba funeral song is in a way analogous with this explanation. Since composition is aptly manifested in the performance, that is, the production stage in any oral or verbal art; five criteria are considered in the life of African oral

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literature toward the generic determination. These according to Opata and Okaegbu (1986) are: "the artist, the language, the mode of delivery or performance, the audience and the raison d'être of the performance" (p.78). The artist in Ogba funeral songs is at liberty to eulogise or celebrate different individuals in the same song he renders or to freely comment on a specific aspect of human behaviour and make references to the current issues in the community. For instance, in song 1 the artist may metaphorically drop names of the killers of the deceased to satirise the dastardly act.

Song 1: "Olende Nu Ube Eje – Who are the People Going with Ladder?"
L: Olende nu ube eje? – Who are the people going with ladder?
R: Ayni nu ube eje – We are the people going with ladder
L: Olende enuwo ube eje? – Who are the people not going with ladder?
R: Nde gburu ochnu enuwo ube eje – Murderers are not here, they are not going with ladder.
The disclosures made in this song reveal the identity of the killers and serve as deterrent to others who would have otherwise been tempted to perpetrate such dastardly acts in the community. One of the artistic creations in the performance of Ogba funeral songs is found in the paralinguistic resources deployed by the artist. The words spoken by the artist are given life in expertise bodily movement of the artist. These words add aesthetic qualities to the composition of the songs. As pointed out by Finnegan (1977): "the bare words cannot be left to speak for themselves" (p.295). The movements of the song leader (lead-singer) in Ogba funeral songs, the use of facial expressions, eye contacts, gestures and gesticulations provide a dramatic demonstration of the actions being foregrounded in a particular song and account for the text being newly created.
Of course, these movements are carried out differently with different songs. Song 2 "Ajadi, iye wu ajanma iye – pond bailer", the performer demonstrates with his hands, eyes and legs at a rather fast pace, underlining the swiftness of pond bailers, an act that the deceased performed in his life time.

Song 2: "Ajadi, Iye Wu Ajamma Iye – Pond Bailer"
L: Ajadi, iye wu ajamma iye – Pond bailer
R: Iye wu ajamma iye – Pond bailer, exercise more power
L: Ajaka ka umu nkwo – The pond of umu nkwo
R: Iye wu ajamma iye – Pond bailer, exercise more power.

Performance of Ogba Funeral Songs
As earlier highlighted, performance is interwoven with composition in Ogba funeral songs. Performance refers to acting, rendering and performing with an audience in an occasion. The occasion of use in any oral art is one of the features of oral literature that gives birth to performance. In this paper, performance refers to the composition in performance and rendering of the funeral songs in an occasion, with the audience participating in line with Chukwuma's (1994) postulation that: "funeral songs are sung on funeral ceremonies and wake-keeping; these occasions dictate their use. Singing funeral song out of season is ominous and is strongly discouraged. Oral genres are not only occasional, they also dictate their times of use (p.7).

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In Ogba funeral songs, the performance is often a total act that involves song and dance as well as chants, lamentations and recitations before a live audience. The audience participating in the song may create a comic relief by shouting "kwo, kwo, kwo and the lead-singer often dramatises the scenes he considers very important hence this paper accepts performance as a feature of Ogba funeral songs. It is noted that any presentation of a performance involves a formulaic pattern. There must be a beginning of the song, the body or middle of the song and the end. Sekoni (1988) posits that "aesthetic experience in oral narrative is made up of three inseparable components: captivation of audience, retention of audience and the transfer of cognitive experience" (p.140).

This is equally applicable in Ogba funeral songs. The performer chants alone; all attention is kept on him/her and later the chorus joins in. The other song type is that in which there is abundance of music. This is a usual song pattern. This is exemplified by song 3 "Agwu leje agwu – Let us visit the tiger"

L: Agwu leje agwu – Let us visit the tiger
R: Eleje agwu – Let us visit the tiger
L: Ka ye leje agwu na obi – Let us̄ visit the tiger̄ at his residence
R: Eleje agwu – Let us visit the tiger

The last type is the narrative pattern that is closely akin to chant and the artist might even employ this method in rendition. The three types of the songs are: the speech pattern (chant pattern), the song pattern and the narrative pattern and they share some similarities in their rendition, such as the choice of a nonsense-like beginning and a sensible beginning vice versa. The initial/beginning of the female funeral song in Ogba takes on the speech-song pattern. The lead-singer remarks as the performance is about to start in a female funeral as follows:

Song 4: "Egbla Himma"

L: Egbla himma, umu egbla himma – All women come "together", children of egbla (fish) come together.
R: Ihni, himma – Yes, we are together

The opening formula of song 4 is the same for the opening of every female funeral song in Ogba. The speech pattern has the advantages of verbalised utterances and singing. The speech mode enables the lead-singer to address as many members of the song group as he/she desires. He/she greets each member by title. The members respond in unison that they are present; this implies their alertness to the performance. He/she also gives a verbal signal about the performance and declares the performance open by saying so.

In some cases only the voice of the lead-singer is heard from the beginning of the song to the end, until he calls off the speech with a verbal signal for every singer to join in the chorus. This singing formulaic pattern of rendition at once expresses sense and nonsense. The last sound "ihni" is a nonsense sound. The only sense deduced out of the nonsense is cohesiveness, which it gives the singsong pattern. The sound means nothing and does not have decipherable meanings. They are used by lead-singers and chorus to elicit and reinforce emotional responses to a performance. Singers use machetes, bottles, branches of trees and sticks for the performance.

The tonal nature of the Ogba language is exploited; it is analogous to rhythm in European poetry, as Finnegan has rightly observed. Tone is used as a structural element in the song. In

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song 5 entitled "Olende", the lead-singer's utterance of the first word, is a call to attention the other singers that he is about to start. They respond and confirm their readiness to take part in the performance. Usually, this exchange captivates the audience. The lead-singer while singing asks in the song "who are they?" which may involve audience participation. The song is performed for a deceased warrior or at the celebration of any rites by any member of the Igbu-anu society, who invites the song group. Okposi and Obieti in the song are names of town; Obieti went to war and triumphed over their enemies, while Okposi was not victorious. Their performances are being interrogated by the lead-singer.

Song 5 "Olende? – Who/Where are They?"
L: Olende? – Who/where are they?
R: Agha – War
L: Olende? – Who/where are they?
R: Agha – War
L: Okposi jire ognu, mawo ede ogudu – Okposi went for war but does not practice mock war
R: Agha – War
L: Obieti jire ogudu lo – Obieti went to mock war and returned
R: Agha – War
The rhetorical question by the lead-singer is directed at warriors to ascertain how well they fought. The lead-singer implies that Obieti was victorious and therefore had a quality performance while Okposi was not successful. Performance is the act of acting or doing a temporary duty as a professional to accomplish a given role that involves the audience. The act of performance is clearly distinct from the capability of an individual to do a particular thing as say, tell, sing or recite. In Okoh's (2002) view, the concept of performance involves "...some degree of acting out, and some element of performance is demanded whether by the critic-scholar, fieldworker, the audience, or more accurately, the connoisseurs among them" (p.89). From a theoretical examination of the concept of performance, one could state that for the oral artist, performance offers an exciting, exhilarating means of heightening the aesthetic effect of the work of oral literature. In spite of the predominant conception of performance as having a high degree of dramatisation, the tripod on which it rests includes the performer within the context of performer, the audience and performance/audience relationship. A performer situates himself/herself within the social context out of which he/she tells the audience of his/her textual analysis; trying to impress or to affect the audience as to the authoritativeness of his art. The performer in Ogba funeral songs exhibits his/her artistry through histrionics and other oral literary/artistic styles such as idiophones, idiolect and others.
His expertise and skill are displayed in the ease with which he embellishes the song with some humours words and proverbs to arouse deep emotional response in the audience. The artist has therefore shown himself/herself to be a man/woman of many skills, blessed with a sharp natural intelligence. This is evidenced in song 6 "Ogiriri iye, ogiriri iye – Good people accented to go".
L: Ogiriri iye, ogiriri iye – Good people accented to go
Ndeoma kwuru ka wo je, ka wo lo – Good people accented to go and return.
R: Ogiriri iye, ogiriri iye – Good people accented to go

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From the foregoing exposition, it is clear that the artist's creativity helps in making the song a good oral piece hence his artistry is easily noticed in the songs. Ogba funeral songs summarise life's experience in terse and most fitting expressions, by selecting a significant dominant image to foreground specific oral literary style. The structure of the songs is dual in nature as they are divided into two parts of verse and the refrain (chorus). A verse is noticed when the lead-singer sings the lines of the song. During the rendition, the artist uses various names of the deceased to address him/her, describe his/her personality, highlight his good qualities and shower encomiums on him/her as seen in song 7 for instance. The artist in the song refers to the deceased as a "king", "king with riches", accomplished king" and "king with royal regalia".

Song 7 "Eze – King"
L: Eze – King
R: Iyoho – Iyoho
L: Eze – King
R: Iyoho – Iyoho
L: Eze eka la bu – King with riches/prosperity
R: Iyoho – Iyoho
L: Eze ododo – King with royal regalia
R: Iyoho – Iyoho
The refrain or chorus could be a complete repetition of what the leader sang or the wordings could be entirely different. The truth is that the verse and the refrain cannot be separated from each other in an actual song performance. But Ogba funeral song is structured in an antiphonal pattern such that the sound of refrain complements the verse and emphasises the image created – the refrains complete "the rhythm of each line of verse and echo the spirit and tone of the verse" (Chukwuma 1994, p.186). The refrain consists of repeated syllables for easy mastery by the audience. It is observed in the paper that the sound of refrains in Ogba funeral songs end with vowel sound as exemplified in the following songs: "ele je agwu – let's visit the tiger", "ugno le ugno – eagle, see eagle", "ogena ya ye ogena – funeral song, yes funeral song", "oyne la abnani agwu nbna – who threatens the tiger", "ownu ma uglaba kobe-kobe – death carries ladder" and "ayni le le – we are looking". Syllables in the various lines (verses) of the various combination patterns are used to suit each particular song and some of them are mimetic – songs without words, a mere harmony built on separated vowel sounds. For example, the following sounds – "iyoho", "oho", and "aha" respectively.

Aesthetics in Ogba Funeral Songs
It is clear that people evidently discuss whether a particular work of art is beautiful or not. By aesthetics or literary aesthetics, the paper seeks to explain the nature of beauty in Ogba funeral songs. Here we are concerned with the common and peculiar qualities of Ogba funeral songs which make them beautiful. Aesthetics takes into consideration how art in the performance of these songs conveys the Ogba cosmology, rites of transition, worldview, as vehicles for the principle and philosophy of Ogba. This finds credence in Carritt's (1931) view of the beauty of art as he states: "Plato makes it pretty clear that, beauty is not just truth or edification. So long as people go to artists for their politics, their science or their religions because the artists' work is beautiful or witty..." (p.xxiv).

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The audience discerns a sense of wonder in the performance which constitutes aesthetics. It is also evident that a sense of wonder permeates the Ogba psyche and the same element dominates the aesthetic sense of appreciation of the funeral songs. It is at this level of perception that one can meaningfully and genuinely talk of Ogba aesthetics, defined by some attitude with which the songs are appreciated.
Therefore, the performance that appeals to the audience is said to be beautiful, that is, it has some artistic values. Aesthetics is the definition of beauty in art; it is the assessment of the totality of art. It is an index of ranking literary works and their writers; it is subtle, yet concrete fluid. The voice resonates as the artist sings song that synchronises with the body movements and gestures; and forms a harmony with the context. This is a blending of form and content; sensual and psychological which is perceived as aesthetics. Little wonder Walter Peter, often considered as the father of aestheticism instructs that: aesthetics is "not defined in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, not find a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (Peter 1935, p.643). The aesthetics in Ogba funeral songs lies in the artist's control and skillful connection of events in the song so that the audience sees the melody and tenor in which the songs flow.

5. CONCLUSION

Dirges are performed in Ogba traditional communities. Ogba funeral songs focus on death, the common denominator shared by all cultures. The paper examined the linguistic and literary artistic devices in the composition, performance and aesthetics of Ogba funeral songs. The paper discovers that the songs are short and repetitive, and the styles of performance are relatively straight forward. Through the performance of Ogba funeral songs during burial ceremonies, knowledge is exchanged and information transmitted through them from generation to generation. The songs are performed through a combined effort of the artist and the audience; they preserve Ogba culture and values as well as serve as a means of entertainment during burial occasion.

The linguistic and literary devices in performance and the process of composition discussed in this paper are of paramount importance. The songs, generally, are composed on patterns of lines, stanzas and refrains. The activities in the performance of the songs are steered by two groups of people: "lead-singer and audience". They are derived from cultural practices and traditional rituals, but are artistic creations of the artist usually in collaboration with his audience. As such, each performance is in a sense, a new creative experience. The literary activities of the artist and the audience explain what is being done and what is desirable in burial ceremonies. This paper also reveals that Ogba funeral songs are occasional. They cannot be performed outside the event of death. Ogba funeral songs are sung by both man and woman artists in Ogba.

Recommendations
As Ogba funeral songs reveal various images of beauty, nobility, bravery, valour and beautiful attributes of the deceased and advice the living on how to live a good life, the young ones

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should be encouraged to adhere to the use of funeral songs. The youths should be disabused of the erroneous misinformation and fear that purely cultural and symbolic practices are fetish. It is through the rendition of funeral songs that the young ones would have emotional cleansing. There is also their need to protect the cultural heritage of the people otherwise it would become extinct. To avoid the eroding and extinction of our cultural heritage, the government should encourage the composition and performance of funeral songs through sponsorship. The people ought to be educated on the advantages of the songs to individuals, families and communities. It is believed that if these recommendations are adopted, the socio-cultural merit of Ogba funeral songs would be accessible to scholars and will improve knowledge of the Ogba oral literature and its enduring capacity and relevance to humanity.

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