An Analysis of Phonostylistic Devices in Some Selected Itiang (Proverbs)Bette

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Abstract

Bette is a predominant ethnic group in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria**.** Obudu is located at the foot of the Cameroun mountain, a part of which constitutes Obudu Ranch Resort**.** Linguistic activities in this community are still basically oral because the orthography of the Bette language is still being harmonised, hence the people are still predominantly unlettered. Such linguistic activities are carried out as part of traditional rhetoric. The proverb is a rhetorical art form commonly used in this traditional society as a means of communication. This paper which focuses on a phonostylistic analysis of Bette proverbs believes that the study of linguistic activities in traditional societies is relevant to the situation when it focuses on the aesthetic and functional role of language and regard language texts like proverbs as verbal manifestation of the wisdom, socio-cultural and sociolinguistic sensibilities of the folk. A proverbial performance exhibits certain phonostylistic qualities which illustrate the ingenuity of the oral artist. The paper examines these qualities in selected Bette proverbs which give certain artistic and cognitive effects, and which endeared the proverbs in the memory of the folk. The paper contributes to the study of Linguistic Stylistics of folk languages in traditional societies.

Keywords: Proverbs, Phonostylistic devices, traditional societies, Nigeria

Introduction

Bette Adie-Utim Nwandor originated from the Bantu in South Central Africa and he settled at the foot of the Cameroun Mountain a part of which today constitutes the Obodu Ranch Resort. The Bette language therefore is of the Bantu stock and a sub-group of Ekoi. The Bantu languages commonly referred to as Bantoid are spoken across the Niger-Congo basin. The name "Bette" refers to both the name of the ethnic group and her language. The structure of the Bette language as it migrated from the Bantu has not changed. After a careful analysis of the grammatical features of the language it is observed that Bette is highly idiomatic, metaphorical and tonal. It is this tonal variation that gives the language its creative flair (Ashipu,2005).Linguistic activities in Bette community are basically oral because the orthography of Bette language is still being harmonsied, and hence most Bette speakers are predominantly unlettered. Linguistic activities are carried out as part of traditional rhetoric (Albert, 2004). Bette Proverbs (commonly called **Itiang**) are such items of linguistic activities which function as rhetorical devices of persuasion. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the faculty of discovering all faculty of persuasion. In about the second century B. C. when Aristotle wrote The Rhetoric, the rhetorical theory became well defined as a theory in Linguistics that examines various forms of linguistic activities of the folk(Ennis,2000). As a concept in Language, rhetoric is a method of identifying and isolating the linguistic features that constitute style and function of an oral performance. It is an oral performance that functions in various ways and situations. This analysis therefore aptly belongs to aspects of Stylistic Linguistics which Berry(2007) points out that,

> when discussing the sociological interests of Stylistic Linguistics the key words are behaviours, function, style and situation. Stylistic Linguistics views language as a function of behaviour, as something that we do. It views language as a form of behaviour which functions as something we do with a purpose or more often in fact with more than one purpose. It views language as a form of functional behaviour which is related to the social situation in which it occurs, as something we do purposefully in a particular setting.

This paper which focuses on an analysis of phonostylistic devices of Bette proverbs believes therefore, that language study is more relevant to the situation when such a study focuses on the functions of language in context and regard language texts like proverbs as verbal actualisers of intrinsic human feelings and behaviour which is often exhibited in a proverbial performance. The Roman Rhetorician, Cicero (106-43B.C) remarks that there is no difference in the aims of proverbial maxims… they are linguistic devices commonly used in oratory as persuasive techniques. Longinus (210-273) in his work One the Sublime points out that the proverb is a rhetorical device for the discovering of word-order in stylistics. The proverb indicates the essentials of a noble style, nobility of diction and word order. The study of stylistic techniques was introduced into linguistic studies by the Classical rhetoricians who classified the way words can be arranged in order to achieve special socio-stylistic effects. These elements as called forth in the course of creative performance make the oral art form unique, lively and easily remembered in order to sustain the interest of the audience and attain maximum effectiveness in a social context. Linguistic critics of oral renditions have long discovered that the use of

rhetorical devices in proverbs gives a certain artistic and cognitive effect, one of which is memorability. Mclaren(2012) observes that the linguistic features enable the proverb to be striking in form, so as to be easily remembered. It strikes the intelligence by the truth as much as the ear by its sound. Oladeji(2011) further stresses the importance of sound in Nigerian proverbs as a stylistic device thus,

> Although special stylistic devices play a crucial role in the efficacy of proverbs, it is in their basic phonostructural patterns that one must look for the essence of their soothing euphony. The proverbs are short sentences, rarely exceeding the length of a complex sentence and the interlineal phonological arrangements are often of the most simple nature. In nearly all cases a number of consonantal and assonantal phonemes are selected to feature in the corpus to acknowledge that the adult listener will derive joy from the complex phonological arrangement.

These qualities make Bette proverbs striking and lend themselves to memorability. The composition of some of the proverbs is such that one proverb may combine as many as three qualities namely; alliteration, brevity and rhyme. Bette like other Nigerian proverbs depend for their effect on the aptness with which they are employed in a given situation and the style and form of words with which they are created. The pattern of choice and combination of these words give the proverb a unique sound characteristic of a traditional folk song. Nwoga(2011) observes that,

> the pattern of sound, clauses and sheer linguistic beauty are characteristics of most Nigerian proverbs, and this is perhaps why one comes across many proverbs in traditional songs. It is also this more than the content that accounts for the case which proverbs are memorized and often used to enliven and beautify oratory.

The efficacy of phonostylistic devices in proverbs is further emphasized by Albert(2010) who asserts that the proverbs appeal to the ear and emotion as the chief technique of rhetoric which add beauty to the speech. Most rhetoricians have observed that the use of rhetorical devices in composing proverbs varies with regions. For example, parallelism characterises the composition of most Yoruba proverbs ands according to Thompson(2012) of all the characteristic features of Yoruba proverbs, the one that most strikes the listener is parallelism. Burton(2008) on his part observes that Yoruba proverbs exhibit the form of couplet and they are hyperbolic in content, a style of some of the poetic books of scripture. Milner(2012) and the other hand, writing on the formal structure of Igbo proverbs maintain that,

> and Igbo traditional saying in its most typical form is a quadripartite structure divided into two halves, each consisting of two quarters… the structure of each quarter is in such a way that the combined values of the quarters and their segments match the value of each half.

The Bette proverbs and those of the Middle Belt are of the Bantu stock because the languages that are spoken within this region are traced to the Bantu. Mbiti(2011) therefore, describes the phonostylistic structure of these proverbs as,

> alliterative in nature and characteristically rhythmic. They repeat near-by words and are thus alliterative and lyrical in style. They exhibit different characteristics that are different from ordinary prose utterances. They are trite and concise. In them no words are wasted and all propositions are stated shortly and succinctly. They are clearly identified by their sound qualities.

The Hausa proverbs according Skinner(2010), are patterned along the Arabic proverbs which employ hyperbolic as well as colourful pictorial form of expressions. Apart from the socio-linguistic functions of Nigerian proverbs, it is indeed, their sound qualities that have sustained them in oral tradition as rhetorical devices. These qualities of proverbs have continued to endear them to the memory of the folk, the educated and the intelligent. The sound qualities of a proverb is achieved through the process of repetition as Rowlands(2013) observed of Yoruba proverbs,

> as is the case is all Yoruba proverbs, repetition-clausal, morphemic or phonemic are mutatis mutandis is the pivotal factor in the phonostylistic make-up of the proverbs. Importantly, is the compulsory phonological repetition of the component phonemes of a line, a clause, a lexical item, or a word is repeated. The significance of such repetition lies in the fact that it serves cohesive purpose and aids memorability.

The sound quality of a proverb is patterned by its alliterative rhythm. Alliteration is repetition of consonants, vowels and or syllables in close proximity within a line for the purpose of melody(Chukwuma,2004). When two or more words which lie close enough in a line of poetry or prose begin with the same letter, usually a consonant then we have an alliteration. Alliteration evokes tremendous sound effect in any piece of writing or spoken words. It gives some melody or musicality to the ear when we listen to a poem or a proverb because the listener hears the same sound over and over as we usually have in most songs. It can also attract attention to certain important thoughts in a passage, poem or proverb. With this attention, such words or thoughts tend to receive greater emphasis than all other words or thoughts that go with them(Newman,2008). Some illustrations may

suffice our assertion. However, it is important to point out that since proverbs are creative utterances of the folk they are often rendered in vernacular and their translation given in second language which in this discussion is English language. Therefore, our analysis of their phonostylistic components will be done on their vernacular texts (not English).

The specimens used here are in Bette language. Bette is one of the languages that has remained unwritten because the orthography of the language is still being developed. This is traceable to the late arrival of western education in Obudu, the Local Government Area of Bette. The writer has chosen Bette as a representative of all other languages within the Niger-Congo region that have not been written to illustrate the creative wisdom of the people. More so, proverbs are ubiquitous. A proverb that is said in Bette has a general application among Bette speakers and those who speak the dialects of the language within the region. By doing our analysis on the vernacular version the philosophical ingenuity of folk language will be fully illustrated.

What is Phonostylistics

Phonostylistics is an emerging aspect of Stylistics just like its counterpart—Stylostatistics which began in the wake of the twentieth century(Skovict, 2011). Phonostylistics is the critical evaluation of a work of arts in order to discover its sound qualities. The sonnet as a genre of poetry for instance, was written to be enjoyed as a device of music and this was enhanced through the use of phonological devices. Phonology as branch of Linguistics according to Gimson(2008)

> concerns how sounds function in a systemic way in a particular language. The traditional approach to Phonology is through phonemics which analyses the stream of speech into a sequence of contrastive segments….The phonemic system of a language is relatable to the writing system: the relationship between the phonemes of a language and the letters used in its writing system. A phonemic description makes it easy to describe the combinatory possibilities of the sounds.

When these sound segments are combined in a sequence with the aid of the writing system in the language to form an utterance which constitutes a text they generate music in the text. This assertion is further supported by Halliday2004) who points that

> If we listen to any of these texts—to any text--, in fact—in its spoken form we will hear continuous melody with rising and falling pitch, and with certain moments of prominence marked by either relatively rapid pitch changes or extended pitch intervals. These moments of prominence define a snatch of melody—a melody unit, or **line**; and within this melody progression we will be able to pick up a more or less regular beat, defining some rhythmic unit, or **foot**. We can perhaps recognise that the line and the foot of our traditional verse metres are simply regularised versions of these properties of ordinary speech.

The vernacular proverb which behaves like a one stanza poem is composed in this metrical pattern to form a text which has continued to be remembered because of its musical quality occasioned by the sound segments. Perine(2002) as quoted in Ashipu(2005) asserts that,

> the composer of music therefore repeats certain musical tones, he repeats them in certain combinations of sounds, and he repeats them in certain patterns or melodies. The poet likewise repeats certain sounds in certain combination and arrangement, and thus give organisation and structure to his verse…. Sound in poetry is produced by vowels, consonants and consonant clusters.

This aspect of stylistic criticism of a work of arts falls within the domain of Phonostylistics. Hence, this paper sets out to examine the sound qualities of Bette proverbs to establish why the proverbs have continued to thrive without alteration in the memory of Bette speakers from generation to generation.

Analysis of data

Ka kpee ashi ke ndieb kita keteh assumable ka yi lina.

When buyers and sellers meet the bargin is different; to send someone is trouble

This proverb which is often used to encourage dialogue generates sufficient sound because of the sequence of the consonantal alliteration. There is the repetition of **K** sound in **ka, kpee, ke, kita keteh.** The alliterative **k** appears at the initial letter of each of the six words on which the proverb is composed. There is also an interjection of the vowel alliterative **a, y,** in **ashi, assumable** and **yi.** There is a great deal of musical rendition emanating from the speaker. There is also tonal variation between the words that begin with the consonantal alliterative **k** and **a**

Ka ashua ken ka kwa isusu ife ye

A single cutlass cannot have two handles.

The consonantal alliterative **k** appears at the initial position of four words as in **ka, ken, ka, kwa.** This is followed by the vowel alliterative **I** also in the initial position of **isusu and ife.** The vowel alliterative **a** and **e** appear successively at the terminal position of the first four words and the last two words. This arrangement gives rise to a musical sound that is distinct and different from that of the first example above.

Kibang kiwhuorshi ki le shi ki ke undi ngwu u ke kima

What has the blind to give to someone in return for his.

The proverb whose theme is on poverty echoes a unique sound effect. The alliterative **k** prefixes the initial position of **kibang, kiwhuorshi, ki, ke, kima.** This is moderated by the vowel alliterative **I** and **e** at the terminal position of all the words except **ngwe** which is also a vowel. Because of the repetition of **k** and **I** in the same stretch of utterance, the proverb has given rise to a booming sound akin to that of the talking drum.

Kibgong ken ki kung kutoo ye
One shoulder cannot life a roof.

Used to elicit co-operation, the proverb is a perfect example of alliteration. That alliterative **k** is repeated successively in all the words of the proverb. The terminal position of all the words of the proverb produces a nasal sound when **ng** and **en** are articulated. The combination of these consonants and vowels produces sound effects.

Kitee kitia kutsu kiyi utan-a ye
Long beans do not cross boundaries, for they are not short beans.

The consonantal alliterative is repeated in the first four words of the proverb. The last three words contain vowel alliteration. That the alliterative **k** commands the attention of the listener or reader is certainly unquestionable. What with melody or musical rendition that the words beginning with the alliterative **k** give to even the untrained listener.

Taking a more prominent place in the phonostylistic analysis of Bette proverbs are words or lexical items that serve ideophonic purposes. They constitute sound that is symbolically linked with certain semantic referents, physical attributes in Nigerian cultures. Ideophones constitute a fundamental class of linguistic items that enhance the rendition of sound in most Nigerian musical instruments(particularly the talking drum) and proverbs in particular. Samarin(2009) acknowledges the semantic role of ideophones in sound production thus,

> If the semantic fields of all words in a language can be in 'relation', it is certain that
> ideophones are qualificative, it is their function to qualify some other parts of an utterance,
> like qualificatives in other languages, they cover sound, colour, smell, manner,
> appearance, state, motion, texture, intensity etc. What distinguishes them from other
> qualificatives known in West Africa however, is the degree of their specificity.

An ideophone is one of the two devices (onomatopoeia inclusive) that enables the listener to decode proverbial drum messages. It is defined as idea-in-sound in the sense that from the sound of the word one can get an idea of the nature of the event or the object being described. According to Nketia(2005), ideophones are not like normal words, they are simple sounds used to convey a vivid impression. Chukwuma(2004) observes that ideophones are features of oral language. They are similar to some major categories of grammar such as verbs, adverbs, or both adjectives, adverbs and modifiers. When Newman(2008) analysed Hausa and Tera ideophones from the syntactic approach, he found that they function as adjectival intensifiers and adverbs of manners. It is a descriptive sound which gives an added dimension and flair to the word. Smith(2011) captures their spirit when he writes of ideophones that they stand midway between the gesture the articulated sentence. Kunene(2009) is much more picturesque in his definition of ideophnes when he remarks that,

> The speaker-turn-actor represents to or recreates or dramatizes for, his audience by means
> of ideophone alone (i.e.linguistically) or of ideophone and gesture (i.e. linguistically and
> imitation simultaneously) or by gesture alone, event or situation which he wishes
> observe… (Therefore), the ideophone is a dramatization of actions or states.

The following examples may suffice our assertion:

> **Ikelibi kpeli-inim, ikpelibi kpeli-inim, ma ngior inatie ke ke ke**
> **Ikpelibi kpeli-inim ikpelibi kpeli-inim** (drum name of a community) all of you should be alert for
> thieves have invaded the house **ke ke ke**

During the period of the slave trade (and even now) most communities in the eastern part of Nigeria for instance, had drum language which they used to alert one another when the slave raiders arrived. The above example is illustrative of such a proverbial message that is sent to Bedia, community in Cross River State in Nigeria to be alert. Invaders are called thieves in drum language. The typical Nigerian drummer sends messages through the talking drum in proverbs and it requires a trained adult listener to decode such messages. The message illustrates what Finnegan(1970) describes as onomatopoeia-ideophone. It is described as onomatopoeia because the sound **k eke ke** echoes the sound of the drummer's stick on the talking drum or the manner in which the villagers who have been alerted walk like war mongers. It is also ideophonic because the idea described is more than the echo of the sound. The name of the community is an added demonstrative emphasis to the seriousness of the message.

Ikpelibi ipkeli-inim ipkelibi-inim, kpe ashi ke ndieb kita ketee asumale ke yi lina ma ngior kina-tie gudu, gudu, gudu.
When buyers and sellers meet the bargain is different, to send someone is trouble.

The ideophonic **gudu gudu gudu** represents the emphasis that has been added to the seriousness of the message. The message of the proverb is a warning to the community to assemble without delay. The community is warned

that failure to respond to the summon would be trouble. To make the descriptive message clearer, the drummer accompanies it with some aggressive gestures, thus suggesting the degree of the seriousness and the urgency of the message. The message was normally sent out when the slave raiders arrived the community, but with the abolition of slave trade, the message is still being sent out when the community is threatened by a neighbouring community.

The second part of the two devices is onomatopoeia. It is the formation of words which produce or imitate a natural sound which a thing or an animal makes in real life. It is necessary that the words are formed by imitating the sounds that resemble those sounds that are often associated with the animal or object. Oni(2010) points out that in such a situation it is possible to know the meaning or sense of a word from the way the word sounds. This is why onomatopoeia is also called echo verse, particularly when it is used in a piece of writing. Onomatopoeia is one of the twin devices (ideophone inclusive) that enable messages to be intoned and decoded from talking drums. The next example is,

Mewing, mewing imeh, ifeb ikpe ushoum.
No more mewing, mewing in the house and so the rats have taken over.
The onomatopoeia word **mewing, mewing** imitates the cry of the cat which the rat much dreads.
Ke bikung bife biki kukukuru kukukuru kuku bi ha faa kushel.
When two owls hoot kukukuru kukukuru kuku, they instill fear in the weakling
The sound **kukukuru kukukuru** imitates the hooting of owls. In African traditional societies, it is a bad omen for owls to hoot, let alone to the hearing of the weakling.

Conclusion
From the foregoing discussion, there is every reason to believe that there is an abundance of linguistic evidence to prove that Bette like other Nigerian proverbs perform the primary function for which they are created. Since the folk is capable of decoding the meaning in them, is it assumed that their phonological sequences are designed solely to aid easy memorabilty. Bette is predominantly an agricultural society and because of the late arrival of western education in their land their proverbs became a treasure of their oral tradition. Hence, the proverbs are woven around human beings, animals, objects and things that they can see, feel, touch and perceived, and they are couched in alliterative form for easy memorability. A clear and precise identification of the way the human brain processes sound in the folk linguistic activity and transforms them into factors in the processes of aesthetic satisfaction calls for further investigation.

The paper concludes with the observation that the exploration of various forms of linguistic activities in the unlettered societies is still grossly inadequate. One of such aspects is the proverbial language use, which is a major form of communication in the traditional societies. Proverbial language functions in diverse ways- oratorical, political, sermon, philosophical, humorous and language elevation. The paper draws the attention of scholars of African languages to this virgin area of research.

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