Stylistic analysis of Igbo folksong: A case study of Mike Ejeagha songs

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Abstract
The language and style employed by an oral artist is as important as the theme of his work. This is because he meticulously adopts the appropriate language register to suit his performance, so as to give the desired meaning. Through systemic functional grammar approach, this study reveals some of the stylistic value of Igbo folksongs which are represented in Mike Ejeagha songs. Nine of Mike Ejeagha songs which are popular among the Igbo were randomly selected for this study. The data used in this study, which emanated from the recorded C.D's of Mike Ejeagha, were transcribed and translated for analytical purposes. The analysis is divided into two major levels. The first analysis deals with the rhythm of Mike Ejeagha songs while the other part deals with the figurative devices and how they were utilized by Ejeagha to achieve stylistic effect. It was observed in this study that Mike Ejeagha uses language not only for stylistic effect but to also to give his art aesthetic qualities. Recommendations were made as to how folksongs can be further appreciated.
Key words: Folksong, Igbo, Rhythm, Systemic functional grammar, Stylistics

Introduction
The folksongloric experience at the audience level is shaped and promoted by the folk singer use of language, which is the primary means of communication in the performing arts. The artist here carefully uses his language to evoke certain emotive responses from his audience (both immediate and extended). This is one of the specialties of talented folk singers, and Mike Ejeagha exudes such attributes.

The word 'Folksongloric' is a new coinage in analogy with the word 'folkloric'. This word goes ahead to explain the feeling the audience gets when they listen to any folksong. This feeling can either be a good or bad feeling. It is all dependent on the artist creative use of language for stylistic effect.

Mike Ejeagha is a well-known icon of Igbo culture. Mike Ejeagha is arguably a prolific folk singer and story-teller. He has not only gained prominence in Igbo land as a

major folk artist, known for his outstanding way of delivering his folksongs to his audience as an oral performer, he has also left his works to act as a tool for correcting the ills in the society, by stating the moral lessons in each story he tells. This helps young ones listening to him to understand the meaning of each story.

This study is interested in characterizing the way Mike Ejeagha uses language as an oral artist to determine the features of his language which distinguish him from other oral artists. To achieve this, the principles of systemic functional grammar are applied to occasion an insightfullook at the various stylistic devices evident in some randomly selected songs of Mike Ejeagha. The selected songs form the basis fro data dertermination. Some of the songs are downloaded from the Internet while some others are in CDs. On the whole, nine songs are selected. They are, "*Ọmekagụ*", "*Obiakọ*" (Greatest Hits, Vol.2), "*Onye Ori Utaba*", "*Ka e si lee Onyeisioche*" (*Akụkọ n'egwu* original, Vol.1), "*Ife ụwa bụ a na-eme, ọ dị ka a dị eme*", "*Elulubelube*" (*Akụkọn'egwu*, Vol.3) "*Onye nwee, ọ na-ebe, onye enwerọ, ọ na-ebe.*" "*Mgba enwudeAkpụlụ* " and "*Ebinu Nwe Ude*" (*Akụkọn'egwu* original, Vol.2). As already noted, the data in this study have been subjected to a stylistic analysis.

Systematic functional grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), put forward by Halliday (Halliday 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004), also pays great attention to how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings (Lin & Peng, 2006:332). It applies the concepts in linguistics in studying literary texts (Malmkjær, 1991; Chapman, 1973; Brumfit & Carter, 1986) cited in Cunanan (2011:76). When people speak or write, they produce text; and text is what listeners and readers engage with and interpret. The term 'text' refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language; we can characterize text as language functioning in context (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976: Ch. 1; Halliday, 2010) cited in   (Halliday 2014: 3).

M. A. K. Halliday is one of the text linguists who sees "grammar" as a network of systems of relationships which account for all semantically relevant choices in language, which is as well the standpoint of stylistic analysis (Song, 2009:117). Song further asserts, Halliday's Linguistic Function and Literary Style, a functional theory of language is proposed, acknowledging three major functions, which he calls "ideational", "interpersonal" and "textual". All the three metafunctions are reflected in a huge system network, which specifies all the meaning potentials. The system network consists of several subnetworks, such as the Transitivity network, the Thing network, and the Quality network. A network is made up by a number of the so-called 'systems', each consisting of a set of semantic features (Liy & Peng 2006:332). In his insistence that the smallest detail of language can unlock the "soul" of a literary work, he maintains the task of stylistics is to provide a hard-and-fast technology of analysis.

The use of language for not just stylistic effect but for also aesthetic functions is very crucial, if the oral artist is to carve out a stage specially meant for him in the heart of his audience. Mike Ejeagha understands this, hence the special way he uses of language in his art. Halliday's approach provides a plausibility of the activity in which we wish to engage in this paper: stylistic analysis of Mike Ejeagha songs.

Overview of folksong

Folksong scholars like Lloyd (1968), Agu (1990), Alude & Brimah (2005), Haruna (1998), Nnamani (2014), Ojukwu, et.al. (2014:73) have all defined folksong in various ways, but we shall adopting the view of Ojukwu and Esimonye (2014:165) which asserts folk music can be referred to as the expression of the totality of a people's way of life, their tradition, indigenous practices which are peculiar to them without the interference of other cultures. This definition, informs that a folksong is a kind of song that is associated with the culture, tradition and history of a particular community or society which draws its lyrics from the folklores of that community. Samuel (2003) cited in Odejobi (2014:1787) asserts,

> *Folksongs used to be predominantly found among peasants or country dwellers, but have since spread to towns and urban cities where they chronicle the people's lives in terms of design, melody and rhythm; hence they have become traditional among them.*

We note that the terms folksong and folk music are used interchangeably. Haruna (1998:60) states, "folklore scholars vary in their definitions of the term 'folksongs' or what is referred to in the West as "folk music".

In a society where majority of them are not literate, folksongs there, are composed and also transmitted orally. But in elite inclined societies, folksongs may also be composed and transmitted by written notations among people who share the same socio-cultural values, goals and interests. An example would be Christian hymns. Certain elements of the songs of a particular cultural or ethnic group are often borrowed by other groups as a result of culture contact and acculturation. Within the context of African oral literature, Igbo folksongs can be classified under oral poetry, Babalola (1974:11) asserts thus:

> *Within the context of African oral literature we regard as oral poetry any material that is recited or chanted or sung. The justification of such material consists in that poetry may be simply defined as strikingly rhythmical expression of elevated thought or feeling in figurative language*

Olajubu (1978:83), Uzochukwu (1992:1) and Ezikeojiaku (1996:1) cited in Oraegbunam (2015) in their works, all agreed with Babalola's definition and forms of oral poetry both in Igbo and Yoruba. Based on this knowledge, this study justifies the attention given to Mike Ejeagha's use of language in the Igbo folksongs that featurein his works.

Since folksong is associated with the culture and tradition of the community where it is used and draws its lyrics from the folklore of the same community, one cannot but agree that the language and style of the performer is very crucial, if the performer is to be seen as an outstanding performer.

In every speech community, members of that community make use of language for communication. This language is always easy to speak and to learn by the members of that community. However, in few cases a speaker may deliberately deviate from the ordinary use of language to a higher use of that same language by adopting a proper language register that suits the occasion he or she is writing or commenting on. This deviation is commonly known as figurative language. In oral literature, language and style are inter-related. Alaba (1985:205) asserts thus, 'While the language of literature primarily consists of the linguistic resources employed by the literary artist, style is how the literary artist manipulates the linguistic resources at his disposal for his particular purpose.'

From Alaba's assertion, it is quite glaring that indeed one cannot talk about style without talking about the language use. Consequently, one task of stylistics is to determine how far and in what respect an artist's language use reflects his style and shows deviant features. Mike Ejeagha is a seasoned folksong singer whose works reveal much about his language and style. To determine his style which is the characteristic use of his language we shall be looking at the rhythm of his songs and the figurative use of language in his works (stylistic devices).

Rhythm of Mike Ejeagha songs

Some scholars such as Egudu (1975:203) and Uzochukwu (1981:41) have observed that rhythm is one of the major elements of oral poetry. Uzochukwu (1981) supported Abercrombies (1967:96) definition of rhythm, who stated thus, "Rhythm arises out of the periodic recurrence of some sort of movement, producing an expectation that the regularity of succession will continue". Uzochukwu (2004:9) noted that the difference between rhythms in two languages is the basis of the rhythm. Uzochukwu (2004) further assert that the basis of rhythm in English poetry is meter. However, Uzochukwu (1981) upholds the view that Igbo poetic rhythm is non-metrical, he asserts that Igbo poetic rhythm depends on some factors, which are:

1. The regular recurrence of breath purse.
2. The regular recurrence of equal time duration in consecutive utterances.
3. The regular recurrence of sense balance.

Rhythm is observed in few refrains to his folksongs and in-between the story sometimes. The analysis of the rhythm of Mike Ejeagha folksongs will be based on these three factors as identified by Uzochukwu (1981).

The regular recurrence of breath pause

Uzochukwu (2001:77-78) on 'The constituents of the rhythm of Igbo funeral poetry' asserts that the importance of regular recurrence of breath pause as a rhythmic factor in Igbo poetry is to be appreciated when it is recalled that the basis of Igbo poetic rhythm which is the line is delimited by the breath-pause. And the line is essential distinguishing feature not only of Igbo poetry but poetry in general. Uzochukwu further stated that the short breath pause delimits short lines which results in low-laboured rhythm. When the line of poetry is short, the rhythm is fast, but when the lines are long the rhythm is slow. Example of short breath pause in the rhythm of Mike Ejeagha folksong can be found in '*Ka e si lee onye isi oche*'

> *Di nke izizi abia, ị jụ*
> *Nke ịbụọ abia, ị jụ*
> *Nke ịtọ abia, ị jụ*
> *Nke ịnọ abia, ị jụ*
>
> *'The first suitor came, you refused*
> *The second came, you refused*
> *The third came, you refused*
> *The fourth came, you refused'*

Uzochukwu (2001:79) in explaining the difference between the long and short breath-pauses used double strokes for the normal breath-pause which is a type of breath-pause that is neither too fast nor too slow and single stroke for short breath-pauses. In the above excerpt it is observed that the lines have a single stroke which indicates that these breath pauses delimits short lines resulting in quick tempo or fast rhythm.

The regular recurrence of equal time duration in consecutive utterances

According to Uzochukwu (2001:82) consecutive utterances may or may not contain equal number of syllables in Igbo poetry and yet rhythm is maintained. This is because Igbo being a syllable-timed language, an utterance can be split into segments which are in some sense of equal time duration. This segment, according to Leech (1969), is the syllable. Example of this can be found in the opening refrain of the folksong '*Onye nwe o na-ebe, onye enwero o na-ebe*':

No. of Syllable		No. of Beats
Onye nwee ọ na-ebe	8	8
HH HH L H SS		
Onye enwero ọ na-ebe	9	9
HH HLL L H SS		
Onye mụta nwa, o na-ebe	9	9
HH HH H L H SS		
Onye amụrọ ọ na-ebe	9	9
HH LH L H SS		

Onye	arụ	siri	ike	na-ebe	11	11
HH	LH	LL	HH	H SS		
Onye	arụ	esirọ	a	na-ebe	11	11
HH	LH	HLL	L	H SS		

'He who has cries
He who has not cries
He who has children cries
He who has none cries
He who is healthy cries
He who is not, cries'

According to Uzochukwu (1981) regular recurrence of equal time duration is enhanced by both 'repetition' and 'parallelism'. In the above excerpt, the recurrence of equal time duration is enhanced by 'parallelism'. It is also observed that although the syllables in the lines of the folksong are not equal yet the rhythm is maintained, indicating equal time duration in consecutive utterances.

Regular recurrence of sense balance

In this type of rhythm, we have one utterance balancing the other in logical sequence, thus producing some sort of rhythm that is not tied to the structure but to the sense. An action may be balanced by the significance of some action, and an offense by punishment. Example of this type of rhythm is found in the folksong '*Ife ụwa bụ a na-eme ọ dị ka a dị eme*'

> *Na   nne   mụ   amụọ   mụ   ngwụrọ*
> *L   LH   H   HHH   H   HSS*
> *Tufuemụ   n'ime   ịkpa,   ngele*
> *HSSH   HS   HH   HSS*
> *Na   nna   mụ   amụọ   mụ   ngwụrọ*
> *L   HL   H   HHS   H   HSS*
> *Tufuemụ   n'ime   ịkpa,   ngele*
> *HSSH   HS   HH   HSS*

> *'My father gave birth to me a cripple*
> *Threw me inside the bush*
> *My mother gave birth to me a cripple*
> *Threw me inside the bush'*

In the above excerpt, one can notice that the sense in each action in the lines is balanced by the significance of that action in the next line. The sense in the third line is also balanced by the fourth line. Again the regular recurrence of sense balance was observed in the following lines refrain to the folksong '*Obiakọ*'.

> *Ọ bụrụ na be mmụọ*
> *Ijele mụ na-akpa ike*

Ọ bụrụ na be mmadụ
Ijele mụ na-akpa ike

'If it is in the land of the spirits
My Ijele is active
If it is in the land of the living
My ijele is active'

In the above excerpt, one can also notice the sense in the first action which is the first line is balanced buy the next line. The sense in the third line also is balanced by the fourth line thereby making the meaning complete.

Stylistic devices in Mike Ejeagha songs

The stylistics devices in Mike Ejeagha folksongs can be grouped into two, namely; figures of rhetoric's and created imagery.

Figures of rhetorics

Ukaegbu (1994:104) defined figures of rhetoric as ornaments of speech which do not involve creating an image. They are not attributed to an individual as his own creation. A rhetorical device uses words in a certain way to convey meaning or to persuade. It can also be a technique to evoke emotion on the audience. Examples of rhetorical devices are; proverbs, wellerism, repetition, parallelism, alliteration, etc.

Proverb

Proverb is described by Achebe (1958) as "the palm oil with which words are eaten". Ngoesi (2004:141) defined proverb as wise deep talk that portrays the belief and thought of the Igbo relating to life, character and human relationship. Proverbs have clear poetic qualities and they are employed both in oral and written poetry by artists to add aesthetic qualities to their works. Proverbs abound in Mike Ejeagha folksongs, some of which include:

Onye sị nwatakịrị jide nkapị, ya dobekwara ya mmiri ọ ga-eji waa kwaaaka

'He that asked a child to catch a mice, he should keep water for him to wash his hands'

This proverb is used in *Omekagu*. It portrays the theme of injustice. The proverb means that anyone who supports and encourages someone to do wrong should also be there to support him when he falls.

Efi na-enwero ọdụdụ na chie na-achulu ya ijiji

'The God of the cow without a tail drives flies from him'

The above proverb reinforces the theme of the folksong. The proverb goes ahead to reveal the belief of the Igbo in getting justice at last. It shows that the righteous always prevails at the end of any adversity.

Ntị sị na ya adị anụ ife bụ ebelụ isi o sobe.

'The ear that does not listen goes off with the head when the head is cut off'

This proverb is mostly used to warn and correct someone to desist from a particular act that is alien to the society. The aim of this proverb is to reinforce the theme of this folksong, what happens to the stubborn one that believes that nothing can happen to him.

Ife uwa bu onye kwukalia o zakaria mgbe o su

'The reality is that the person that talks more answers more when anything happens'

This proverb which can be found in the folksong '*Elulubelube*' is used to teach the need to always watch our tongues and be cautious of what we say, so that we don't land ourselves into trouble by what we have said which we didn't mean.

O ji ife nwata wenie aka enu bụkwanụ aka fuba ya ufu o weda aka; nwata ewelukwa ifie.

'He that is holding unto what belongs to a child and raised his hands, when his hand starts paining him he will bring his hand down and the child will take what belongs to him.'

This proverb which is found in '*Ebinu nwe ude*' simply means that no matter how long it takes, justice must prevail.

Wellerism

Ngoesi (2004:143) defined Igbo wellerism as proverbs that are reported through a person or a thing. This type of figurative expression is used to teach moral. This figure of speech is observed in Mike Ejeagha folksongs some of which can be found in the *Ọmekagụ*.

idide ụbọsị na-ekwusi ike na ọ bụ ọfọ ka ya ji awa ana

'The earthworm from the start has been saying that justice makes way for him on the ground'.

Ejune wee wee sị na ire ọma ka ya ji wee na-aga n'ogwu

'The snail said that he passes through thorns with good tongue'

These two examples of wellerism as observed in Mike Ejeagha folksongs are used to support the need for justice in the society and the need for people to have an open mind towards other folks. Another example of wellerism is seen in *Obiakọ*.

Nna m gwara m na ọ kwanụ ofu anya ka e ji anụ nwaanyị

'My father told me that you marry with one eye open'.

This simply means that caution is highly needed in a marriage relationship. This also added to the theme of this folksong, which is being alert.

Repetition

Repetition is the absolute duplication of utterances. Dada (2000:67) asserted thus, "Repetition is also a device of emphasis. Matters which carry message of great importance are repeated in speech so that this so-called importance can be hammered and more stressed." Repetition can be used to intensify emotion. It can also be used to create rhythm as exemplified in some folksongs of Mike Ejeagha. This is because in them the equality of syllables and beat which is indicative of equality of time duration is obvious. Repetition is evident in most refrains of Mike Ejeagha folksongs. Example of this can be found in the folksong by Mike Ejeagha titled *Ife uwa bu a na-eme o di ka a di eme*,

> *Odogwu na-arị enu, ngele!*
> *Odogwu na-arị enu, ngele!*
>
> *'The hero that is climbing, ngele*
> *The hero that is climbing, ngele'*

In the above example, the function of repetition here as used by Mike Ejeagha is to achieve rhythmic effect and blend with the sound of the musical instrument that follows. Another instance of repetition in Mike Ejeagha folksongs can be found in '*Ka e si lee onye isi oche*'.

> *Nna m eze akwata m enyi*
> *Nna m eze akwata m enyi*
>
> *'My father king, I have brought the elephant*
> *My father king, I have brought the elephant'*

Repetition here is used to lay emphasis on the action in the story, which is what the tortoise did to the elephant.

Parallelism

Parallelism is a type of repetition, repetition of a structure type or meaning and not that of the same form. There is for instance, repetition of form and structure type in the following lines of Mike Ejeagha's folksong, *Onye nwe ọ na-ebe, onye enwerọ a na-ebe*.

> *Onye nwee, ọ na-ebe,*
> *Onye enwerọ, ọ na-ebe.*
> *Onye mụta nwa, ọ na-ebe,*
> *Onye amụrọ amụ, ọ na-ebe.*
> *Onye arụ siri ike na-ebe,*
> *Onye arụ esirọ a na-ebe.*
>
> *'He who has cries*

He who has not cries
He who has children cries
He who has none cries
He who is healthy cries
He who is not, cries'

Rhetorical question

Ngoesi (2004:147) defined rhetorical question as a type of question that does not require any answer. They are used for emphasis and emotional effect. Examples of rhetorical questions abound in Mike Ejeagha folksongs, some of which can be found in *Ọmekagụ*.

Ndị be anyị , onye ị sị na ị ga-eme ajọ ịfe, gịnị ka ọ mere gị ?

Our people, the person that you want bully, what did he do to you?

The above rhetorical question is employed to lay more emphasis on the need to live right and never offend anyone. Another instance of rhetorical question in Mike Ejeagha folksong can be found in *Ebinu nwe ude*.

…we si na ebe Udeeze ji anu wee na-eme oji ututu, yanwa bu eze kee ife ya ga-emezi?

'…and said since Udeeze uses dry meat to entertain visitors, what will he, the king, do?'

This rhetorical question is used here to stress the theme of envy portrayed in this folksong.

Exclamation

According to Ogbulogo (2005:75), an exclamation is sudden passionate address expressing an emotion. Mike Ejeagha employed this figure of speech in his folksong to heighten emotion. An example can be seen in *Omekagu*.

Hei! Obodo wee delu

'Hei, the town became quite!'

Created imagery

According to Egudu (1985:4) cited in Ukaegbu (1994:94) "poetry is a method of expressing thoughts by means of suggestion and invention. What is invented or created consists of images and these are employed by means of pictures for suggesting what the poet wishes to express". But these pictures are produced by means of words only and appreciated by mental power. We therefore see the pictures by the use of our imagination and make the impression created in our minds not to be forgotten easily. Created imagery is employed in Mike Ejeagha folksongs to heighten emotion and make the audience feel the action in the folksongs by creating a picture of the action in their minds. Mike Ejeagha does these by employing the following figures of speech.

Simile

Ogbulogo (2005:78) defined simile as a figure of similarity which shows a comparison between two entities or events which may not be related. The aim of this comparison is to make the hearer or the reader to identify the similarity in the given quality or characteristic of the events or entities being compared. The comparison is introduced with words – *like* and *as*. Simile is employed in Mike Ejeagha's folksong to create a picture of the event happening in the story to the audience. For instance, in the folksong *'Ife uwa bu a na-eme o di ka a di eme'* a simile is employed:

Ọba ji ya nine, fa ncha sụbalu ka akwu

'His yam barn, all of them burnt like palm fruit'

Onomatopoeia

Ngoesi (2004:145) describes onomatopoeia as a figure of speech or word that imitates, resembles or suggests source of the sound that it describes. Ogbulogo (2005:77) asserts that onomatopoeia is the use of words whose sounds suggest their meaning. Mike Ejeagha employed onomatopoeia to create an image in the mind of his audience so as to heighten emotion. Example of this can be found in the folksong *Ọmekagụ*'

Ọmekagụ wee si n'elu ịnyịnya, kata kpii! n'anị, ọ bụrụkwanụ ọnwụ

'Omekagu fell from the horse, katakpii on the floor and died'
In the above example "kata kpii" is used to imitate the sound that emanated immediately *Ọmekagụ* fell to the ground. Another example of onomatopoeia can be found in the folksong *Elulubelube*:

Agbaizu wee chụ ya n'ime ọfịa kiti kiti kiti.

'Agbaizu pursued him kiti kiti kiti inside the bush'

In the above example likewise, "kiti kiti kiti" is used to express the sound coming from Agbaizu's footsteps as he pursued a goat in the bush

Phonaesthetic idiophone

Babalola (1974:23) cited in Uzochukwu (2001:107) described phonaesthetic idiophones as those words in African languages which convey their meaning by their sound. Phonaesthetic idiophones are also words that evoke an idea in sound, often a vivid impression of certain sensations or sensory perceptions. Some idiophones in Mike Ejeagha folksongs can be found in *"Ka e si lee onye isi oche"*

Mbe amagoru, mee ụkwụ tịkọm tịkọm…

'Tortoise jumped, and stretched his leg tịkọm tịkọm…'

'Tịkọm tịkọm' here was used to create a picture in the mind of the listener about how the tortoise tried to climb on the back of the elephant.

From our analysis, we have seen that Mike Ejeagha folksongs are embellished with both linguistic and literary resources which add aesthetics to the folksongs. All resources observed in Mike Ejeagha folksongs clearly indicate that Mike Ejeagha is a creative folksinger. The creativity of an oral artist depends on how well he knows the language and uses it to his advantage to evoke various feeling in his audience.

Conclusion/recommendation

This study has attempted a stylistic analysis of selected songs of Mike Ejeagha, with the view to expose the qualities of Igbo folksongs as exemplified in Mike Ejeagha songs. It was observed that Mike Ejeagha as an oral artist uses language in a special way. The stylistic analysis reveals that the creativity of Mike Ejeagha as an oral artist was largely dependent on his sound knowledge of Igbo language which he uses not just as a language speaker but to also for stylistic effect. The data utilized in this study which emanated from some songs of Mike Ejeagha has proven that Igbo folksongs can further be subject to any type of stylistic analysis.

It was also observed that to fully understand the Igbo folksong, one must fully understand the Igbo language and its peculiarities. It is believed that this study will be a guide to more researchers that my want to carry out further researches on Igbo folksongs, as this study will provide a model for them and make them understand the nature of the Igbo folksongs. Again, efforts should be made by the Igbo to modernize the Igbo folksongs, document them just as Ejeagha has done in his works so as to make them stand the test of time.

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