

A Study on the Form, Structure and Functions of Igbo Work Songs

John Odo ONU (Ph.D)

Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City
onujohn6@gmail.com; 08065193744

and

Priscilla Ebere UGWUOKE

Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ebere.ugwuoke@unn.edu.ng; 08037786613

Abstract

The study examines Igbo work songs to identify their forms, efficiency and roles in the Igbo society. In recent times, globalization seems to have made so much inroads into Africa and its culture as to relegate traditional lore, indigenous mores and values to the background. This paper therefore: aims at documenting Igbo work songs in a bid to identify and preserving Igbo: work songs so that future generation will benefit from them. The paper is premised on functionalism theory which has its mayor assumption that literatures is and naught to be relevant to the society that has given birth to it as well as nurture it. Data for study were collected from Afikpo in Ebonyi state, Nsukka in Enugu state, Onitsha in Anambra state and Imo state. The study used interview and participant observation methods. An unstructured self-administered questionnaire was used for one category of respondents who were thought knowledgeable enough about Igbo work songs. The data collected using electronic devices were transcribed and translated from Igbo to English. The literal and deep structure meanings were carefully analysed by using an elderly Igbo speaker as an informant. Data were further evaluated and triangulated according to themes that emerged, by employing narrative method. The major findings of the study reveal that joint singing of work songs coordinates the action and leads the workers to feel and work as a co-operating group, not as separate individuals. The rhythm of the song encourages the people to work harder, faster, and with more enjoyment. Furthermore, the findings of the study reveals that some of the work songs comment on life in general, on local events and express ideas of love and friendship and thus lighten the labour and give an opportunity for poetic expression in the midst of work.

Keywords: *Song, work song, form, structure and functions*

Introduction

The Igbo people delight in communal activities like group farming, hunting, cooking, dancing, and even burials. There are songs that accompany such occasions. The occasions for work songs include almost all contexts in which monotonous labour is involved.

It is believed that manual workers often sing such songs to make the work easier. Every worker involved in such labour participates in the singing. Most of the songs are rendered in simple, straight forward language with many gibberish words just to maintain a particular rhythm. It is worthy of mention here that the rhythm and the melody of Igbo work songs are

the most striking aspects of them. The audience, which consists of anyone around enjoys the melody produced by the workers. During the communal activities people coin varieties of jokes in their songs regardless of whether they are obscene or simple grave-yard humour.

The work song is an aspect of oral literature. Oral literature is intricately related to the social environment of the people who create and perform it. As a creative expression of a people's culture, it manipulates language to express their values, beliefs, traditions and entire world view. No culture is static. Culture develops alongside the progression of history. Oral literary works include traditional poems and stories that had been preserved and passed on to the younger generation by word of mouth. It is believed that a lot of wisdom is preserved in proverbs and songs.

The song is perhaps the most powerful genre of oral literature because of its versatility and communicability (Chesaina, 1997). It is distinguished from oral narrative not only by its mode of performance and use of verse, but also by its extensive use of imagery and symbolic language. Songs have permeated so many areas of Igbo people's social existence that they require extensive study and work songs, lullabies and children's songs, songs for childbirth and child naming, ceremonies, praise songs, ballads, epics, funeral and ritual songs and songs on cultural transition.

Manual worker whether solitary or communal, sometimes sing songs to accompany their hard physical labour, as well as routine or monotonous activities (Nketia, 1962). For instance, it is common to hear an Igbo woman singing while doing solitary work like grinding maize, weeding the farm, cutting firewood in the bush or drawing water from the well. In Igboland, communal farming is a popular occasion for performing work songs. Farming undertaken by one individual is usually slow, wearisome and boring. To alleviate these problems, farmers who live in the same community or village form farming groups so as to make the work they do on their farms faster, less tedious, less wearisome and relatively exciting. Each farming group may consist of three, four, five or even more people. However, in most cases, people group together in twos, threes, or fours as they work on each member's farm on a rotational basis. The farming group may also work as paid farmers on the farms of individuals in the community and be paid with money.

Annually, members of a particular Igbo community or village may also organize an ad hoc community farm group and work on the farm of their community leader such as chief or *Igwe* or village head as a mark of their loyalty or support. This kind of farming group is no longer popular as it used to be about twenty years ago. In some cases, especially today, it is no longer considered inappropriate or not lady-like for Igbo women to participate actively in men's communal work such as tilling, planting, weeding or harvesting on a community leader's farm. Perhaps, this is an indication of the changing roles of women in Igbo society. Women are increasingly being recognized as important and equal members of the society as their male counterparts.

According to Kirman and Kirman (2002), work song sung while working is a unique genre in oral literature. They postulate that work, especially physical labour ceases to be boring

when it is accompanied by a song and music. There is a song for almost every type of work as earlier mentioned and people are always creating new songs out of new jobs or working situations. It is always true that work provides an opportunity for performance of satirical songs that may not be appropriate in other contexts. The song becomes a rhythmic outlet instead of a monotonous drudgery. This means that the tempo of work is dictated by the speed and rhythm of the song. The higher the speed, the more rigorous the workers work. If it is too low, the work slows down tremendously.

Finnegan (1970) points out that the songs to accompany rhythmic work seem to occur universally in African societies. These songs are extreme examples of “special purpose” poetry in that they have a direct connection with a specific occasion and with action itself, to an extent not found in most hunting and war chants, the sort of work that these songs accompany usually consists of routine tasks such as weeding, hauling, sowing seeds, cultivation of yam, cassava, maize in the fields. Unlike in hunting poetry, the work thus provides the occasion rather than the subject matter and the song depends on the rhythm of the work rather than an audience for its point of departure.

The occasions for these work songs include almost all contexts in which monotonous labour is involved, though conventions as to their use vary in different societies. There are cooperative songs for hoeing, weeding, sawing, pounding, grinding maize, pounding rice, pulling trucks, as well as for road work.

Work songs contain simple words with many rhythmical words such as *iyaa*, *ee*, etc., to fill up the rhythm effectively, and there is alternation between the leader and chorus. The leader leads certain lines in the song while the chorus sometimes echo the leader or may sing completely different lines from the leader. Work songs stand out from other types of songs such as birth songs, marriage songs, etc., in their functional relationship to the activity they accompany. The joint singing of work song coordinates the action and leads the workers to feel and work as part of a cooperating group, not as separate individuals. The rhythm of the song encourages collaboration and control within the group, a pressure on all to take part equally within the given rhythmic framework.

Rhythm according to Igbo is, as stated by Senghor, an indispensable ingredient of word-force, it activates the powers of the word and thus gives it the desired effectiveness. This explains why, when a traditional society is engaged in a task such as *ikwu ogwe* (moving heavy logs from one place to another) or *ichu nta* (hunting) for sacrificial purposes, the service of professional drummers and singers are copiously used. In recognition of the power of the word, any log in the onerous task of *ikwu ogwe* or failure to capture the desired game in the case of *ichu nta* is attributed to the inability of either the drummer or the singer to provide the appropriate rhythm or the song. In consonance with the words of Senghor, if they want to proceed faster, this they effect through the type of song or chart they raise with its accompanying rhythm. This remote control of the efforts of the workers is achieved not only through being at grips with the psychology of the team on the part of the artists, but more importantly, through the magic power of the word. Consequently, sluggishness on the part of the working group is often, among the traditional Igbo, attributed to the adjudged poor

performance of either the singer or the drummer, or even both. One or both may have failed to energize the group with the requisite word force as and when due.

According to Mtshali (1991), poetry reawakens and reinforces our real, innermost strength, our spirituality it is the force that makes us decent people, empathetic with those in need, or pain, those suffering from injustice and other societal ills. However, it is disheartening to note that the current times seem to have alienated the youths from the traditions of their ancestors. For instance, the youths do not seem to take interest in the traditional work songs but have opted to modern and global songs and dances as Rap, Hip Hop among others that have distanced them from their traditional roots. Moreover, Igbo work songs have not received adequate scholarly attention. Igbo work songs have been neglected by researchers in oral literature. It is this scholarly gap that the present study intends to fill.

Methodology

In the course of gathering information for this study, the researchers have to rely on two main types of Data. These are the primary and secondary Data. The primary Data has not been collected from the documentary sources but from the Igbo speaking communities in the South Eastern Nigeria. To collect this data, the researchers had to interview five professional work Song performers from different states in Igbo land. The choice of the five work Song performers has been motivated by two factors: the level of popularity or the level of appreciation that listeners show for the performances of the performers. Secondary sources such as journal articles, dissertations and internet sources were consulted to illuminate the broad field of study.

Data for the study were gathered via interview and participant observation methods, information on work songs were also collected through secondary source such as books, dissertations and journals. The instruments used for collecting data included a cassette recorder and writing materials. These instruments eased the collection of the needed data at various points in time such recording songs and taking down notes and answers to questions posed for subsequent transcription, translation and analysis. The key informants were men, women and youths in various communities in Igbo land engaged in various occupational works. A total of twenty Igbo work songs were collected from the informants in the five core Igbo speaking states. These states are: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. All work songs and vital information collected was verified by questioning some elderly men and women in the sampled communities in Igbo land. The work songs collected were transcribed in the native language and then classified under form, structure and functions from the transcription of the songs, the English language version was given. Data collected using electronic devices were transcribed and translated from Igbo to English and coded. Literal and deep structure meanings embedded in the collected Igbo work songs were carefully analyzed by using an elderly Igbo speaker as an informant.

Literature Review

The related literature to this study is reviewed under conceptual, theoretical framework and empirical studies.

Conceptual Framework

Song as form of Oral Literature:

The genre of oral literature are seemingly endless. They include proverbs, jokes, myths, songs, poems, folktales and historical narratives. Song may be described as a short pieces of music with words of singing or poem suitable or prepared for singing to music. Poetry and songs being part of people's culture are as old as people's culture. They were composed through inspiration by some gifted individuals. The authors of songs and poetry are said to be unknown. Songs and poetry deal with issues of life such as love, bitterness, war, jealousy, success, failure and they are found in every society for everyone's use.

Songs are often described as the natural human means of musical self-expression (Kennedy,1994).Songs were transmitted orally from one generation to the next, a situation that prevails in much of the world.. Farmers stay longer at work sometimes because the songs used are carefully selected to stimulate workers into action. Men clearing roads always make use of Work songs while working.

Work Song

The Igbo people like their counter parts the world over earn their living through hard work. In order to get relief from monotonous labour, they usually sing various songs. Such songs are called work songs. According to Finnegan (1977), work songs are songs that accompany collective work, she asserts that the joint singing coordinates the action and leads the workers to feel and work as part of a coordinating group, not as a separate individual.

Work songs are accompanying songs used to aid group or cooperative jobs where strict rhythms or coordination of multiple hands enhances performance such as in paddling. There are also solitary work songs serving either as inspirational tonics or to kill monotony, embellish labour.

Performance

Performance is an element in all oral art, and some of the controversy about style can only be fully understood by reference to performance. According to Jakobson (1974), performance is defined as a form of expression which uses poetic language of which body is the vehicle that gives form to that which one wishes to communicate.

Performance is an artistic and creative process through which oral poetry comes alive. Derrida (1978) describes performance as repetition of action. Schechner (1982) in his own view considers performance as retired behavior. Despite this, each performance is unique in its own way. It is not a repetition of another one like it, it is collective, which involve one or more performers and an audience. As an activity, performance of oral poetry arises within its social context. It is creative, realized, achieved and transcendent of the ordinary course of events. Performance is amoral and its amorality comes from its subject and transformation. In the context of this study, performance is used to mean a collective activity which involves one or more performers and audience.

Context

There must be an occasion that necessitates the performance of oral literature. This occasion could be an important moment in the life of a community or an individual – a work song, an installation, a funeral, a marriage celebration or village festival. Oral literature is important but without the context, it is lifeless. Context as a concept is what comes before and after a word, phrase, or statement helping to fix meaning. Webster (2006) defines context as “the whole situation, background or environment relevant to some happening or personality”. Mbah and Mbah (2007:81) say context is the setting of oral performance, which helps to explain what is being done.

Style

Simply put, style is the manner of expressing one’s thoughts. Just as there are various ways of doing things, there are stylistics variations in language use. Holman (1980) says style is, the arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the author and the idea and the intent in the author’s mind. The best style, for any given purpose is thjk of its purpose and effect. Stylistics studies and describes the formal features of text, that is, the level of expression vis-à-vis the content, thus bringing out their functional significance for the interpretation of the work.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on functionalism theory. Function in this literary form seems to fall under functionalism as a theory propounded by a French sociologist, Emile Durheim (1917). This theory emphasized that in order to explain a social phenomenon one must first discover the cause that produced it and then function that it fulfills in the total social activity. Functionalism is conceptualized as a principle used architecture, design and literature, that the purpose and use of an object should determine its shape and construction. so the function of work song is really to draw the attention of the workers and the society and show them that work is not easy but perseverance must be observed to see the job to its logical

completion while acknowledging the hardships encountered during the process of executing the hard work.

Proponents of functionalism theory such as Goldschmidt (1986) argues that functionalism theory analyses and examines the social significance of phenomena, that is, the function they serve a particular society in examining the whole. Various components of men's social existence are stressed in order to reveal how they promote the wellbeing of society. The functionalism theory contends that literature is and ought to be relevant to the society that has given birth to it as well as nurture it. The theory examines mental processes and how they relate to human behavior. By so doing, literature plays a major role in effecting and affecting social and intellectual changes within the community. This theory is relevant to the present study because it focuses on the function of the work song to the society that produces it.

Empirical Studies

Not much has been done in occupational songs in Igbo land. The few available works on work songs are sketchy materials that briefly define work song and its functions in the society. Such works include Offor (2008) and Nnamani (2014). Other scholars are Porter (1992) and Matere (2013).

Offor (2008) investigates some Igbo folksongs in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study focused on the documentation and analysis of Igbo folksong. The paper categorized Igbo folksongs into dirges, birth songs, marriage songs, work songs, satirical songs, recreational songs title taking songs, cradle songs, war songs, hunting songs, praise songs and lamentation songs. Most of these songs are selected mainly with reference to content of the song text.

Nnamani (2014) examined the role of folk music in traditional African society in the context of Igbo experience. The paper observes that the various stages of the life cycle of an individual and the life cycles of the society are all marked with music. The paper identifies the role of music in the society as a means of social control among the citizens and a way of stamping out communal vices.

In his own study, Porter (1992) investigates the English occupational song. The discussion is song-based, concentrating on the occupation group rather than, as in several studies of recent years, the repertoire of a singer or the dynamics of a particular performance. The finding of the study reveal that occupational songs clearly come into the category of music of necessity made to fulfill some specific social function which is achieved in the act of making.

Matere (2013) conducted a study on the form and content of Chiswa harvesting songs in the Bukusu Community. The study seeks to understand the multi-functionality of Chiswa harvesting songs by investigating this sub-genre in order to determine the themes tackled in

these songs, features of style as well as the paralinguistic strategies employed by the artists during performance in order to determine the aesthetics as well as social functions of these songs. The study moreover, investigates meaning, performance and symbolism attributed to these songs by the Bukusu community. The finding of the study revealed that harvesting songs are invaluable assessment tools in evaluation of the past, present and future perspectives of Bukusu community.

From the literature reviewed, we could see that work song has not received adequate scholarly attention in Igbo land. Justification for this study stems from the fact that so far, no major study has been conducted into the rendering of work songs among the Igbo in the South Eastern Nigeria. Besides this, most of the work songs have been conducted outside Igbo land. There are, however, some marked differences between work songs from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and those from Igbo land. This is the gap the present study intends to fill.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses the work songs collected from the field work under the following sub-headings: themes, structure, stylistic features and functions of the work songs.

Themes of Communal Work Occupational songs

Moving heavy logs from the place of cutting to the place where they are needed to construct, for example, a footbridge across the river requires more than several strong men. These men might be needed to lift and carry such heavy logs shoulder high, moving fast while singing the following song:

Song 1: O No N'ihu Gba N'uzo

O no n'ihu gba n'uzo	– you in front clear from the way
Ne ogwe oshishi na-abia	– a heavy log is coming
Ne ogwe oshishi na-abia	– a heavy log is coming
Ne ogwe oshishi na-abia	– a heavy log is coming.

Work songs are usually accompanied by collective rhythmical movement. A common form of Igbo work song is that of a leader and chorus. The chorus tends to be particularly often, simple and rhythmical or involve repetition from the solo part. It is the rhythm and the melody of the songs and not the whole words that are the most striking aspects of the work songs. The rhythm of the work provides fixed framework within which the song must be developed. The rhythm is likely to continue for a long time during which the song and the work is repeated again and again. Igbo work is a free one to which one cannot beat time regularly.

Sometimes, some logs used in constructing a foot bridge may be too heavy even to be lifted by five strong men. In this case, more than this number will be required to drag or pull the log along the ground from the place of cutting to where they are needed. In order to be able to pull together in unity and harmony and good timing so that if they want to rest, they should know when to rest according to the movement of the song is illustrated by the song below:

Song 2: Ka Anyi Niile Tinye Aka Kwawa ya

Ka anyi niile tinye aka kwawa ya	– lets together drag the log.
Anyi ma na-aguu na-agu anyi	– we are aware we are hungry.
Ka anyi nwaa oke nke anyi kwawa ya	– lets try and pull the log.
Anyi ma na-aguu na-agu anyi	– we are aware we are hungry.
Ka anyi nwaa oke nke anyi kwawa ya	– lets try and pull the log.
Na-agbanyeghi na o nweghi nri di anyi n’afu	– although our stomach is empty.
Na-agbanyeghi na onye otu anyi nwuru na aguu	– although one of our colleagues died of hunger.
Mgbe o na-akwa ogwe osisi	– while dragging this log.
Nke gburu onye otu anyi	– which killed one of our colleagues
Anyi ga-akwawa ya	– we will continue to drag it.

In the song above, the singers have expressed many ideas about the dragging of the log. They have for example, registered unhappiness in the line “although our stomachs are empty” which means although we are hungry. They have also indicated that their friend had died of hunger while pulling the log. The image depicted in this song is that the work is dangerous, workers are forced to do the work and that supervisors are either inconsiderate or are cruel. The song’s function seems to encourage the members of the gang to keep working although the circumstances are not favourable. This is probably to show the men’s perseverance and pride as achievers of tough things under difficult conditions. Function in this literary form seems to fall under functionalism theory. So the function of the above song is really to draw the attention of the workers and the society and show them that the work is not easy but perseverance must be observed to see the job to its logical completion while acknowledging the hardships encountered during the process of executing the hard work.

The long heavy log symbolizes the long human life and the burden that a human being must go through. As expressed in the song “let us together drag the log although our stomachs are empty” meaning although we are hungry and “although our friend died of hunger while dragging this log” symbolizes long life and indicates that while some human beings can live longer, others must die. Even if one dies, the rest of the people must not be discouraged and stop the zeal of living. The round shape of the hard heavy log also symbolizes the wholesomeness of life. Only those who take life seriously survive the hardships inherent in human life. Those who succumb like the workers’ friend who died in the process of dragging the log may be described as weak and the weak cannot withstand obstacles in life. The song, in essence, is encouraging the people in the society that no matter what happens in the process of life and living, they must persevere, concentrate in whatever tasks they are involved in and bring their plans in life to a meaningful conclusion without complaining or begrudging their lives.

Themes of Communal work

Ugwu nwa Eze, one of the informants has this to say about communal work in Enugu Ezike in Enugu state "In Enugu-Ezike community, people organize themselves into work groups. During farming season, these people work as a cooperative group from one person's farm to another on different occasions. They move from field to field until all fields owned by the members have been planted. Because some groups contain so many people, some are not active. They would do a little bit of work and stand to watch others work or look at something else. Instead of telling them to go home, they sing a song in unison to advise the stand-bys to go home otherwise other workers would emulate them and thereby derail the progress of the work being done. The song below expresses this idea."

Song 3: Umu Egali Ka Anyi Lusibe Olu Ike

Umu egali, umu egali	– young men, young men
Ka anyi lusibe oru ike	– lets work hard
Ee, ka anyi kowa ala	– yes, let us dig the ground
Hapuru ndi ume ngwu n'azu	– leave the lazy people behind
Ee, ka anyi kowa ala	– yes, let us dig the ground
Hapuru ndi ume ngwu n'azu	– leave the lazy people behind
Ee, ka anyi kowa ala	– yes, let us dig the ground

This song is sung by workers themselves to acuf young men tilling farmland in preparation for planting seeds. Apart from making reference to the work they are doing, the song reflects certain Igbo social and cultural values, and social behaviour. An example of behavior admired in Igbo society is hard work, especially by young men. The young men doing the work are enjoined and encouraged through the song to work very hard. The lead singer warns that anyone of them who is lazy will be left behind by those who are hardworking. When a group of Igbo young men are working in the farm they usually arrange themselves horizontally in single file. Any one of them who is left behind is considered lazy and weak. Every young man in the group will work hard to keep pace with the other workers so as to avoid being left behind and considered a lazy man.

Usually, no matter how large the farm is, the working group is expected to finish hoeing the farm in a day. If the group fails, the members will be ridiculed. Therefore, the young men encourage themselves to work hard and complete the work they are doing early. To further spur the group to work hard, the lead singer tells them to work so hard as to cause sweat to flow from their noses and fall on their hoe.

The example below also illustrates work song for planting of crops such as cassava, yam, maize, etc. it also involves cooperate work.

Song 4: I Gaghi Ano Nkiti

I gaghi ano nkiti	– you should not stand idly at work.
Onye ike gwuru ya lawa	– you should go home when you are tired.
I gaghi ano nkiti	– you should not stand idly at work.
Onye ike gwuru ya lawa	– you should go home when you are tired.
I gaghi ano nkiti	– you should not stand idly at work.
Onye ike gwuru ya lawa	– you should go home when you are tired.

In cooperative work, such as planting cassava, yam or maize, the gang must move at one pace. If one or some of the group members stop work, stand and aimlessly look at others or just be there, it discourages those who are working hard. Because others don't appreciate laggards, they would sing the above given song. We can notice that the lead singer starts the song as "I gaghi ano nkiti" (you should not stand idly at work) and others reply "onye ike gwuru ya lawa" (when you are tired just go home). The laggard is being despised by the other workers singing the song in unison instead of telling him to go home and rest rather than discouraging those who wish to continue to work hard.

The implication of the above song is that it serves as an advice to members of the society that one should work hard in whatever one is doing especially if the work involves many workers working together. It is better to continue the task in unison with the group rather than stay idly and disturb others from working hard – the function of this song being analyzed is to give constant reminders to workers that whenever they have to do something in group, they should not seem to discourage others. It also goes down to making sure that good working habits and individual values are upheld, individual commitment and reputation in the village or wherever one is should be exhibited in tandem with societal values, if these sentiments expressed above are entrenched in an individual, the song then would have achieved its function. The song symbolizes the societal standing and values the people would like to keep and transmit to the younger generation.

There are other songs that accompany work. A case in point is the song which was sung by a woman when grinding maize on a grinding stone in her kitchen at night as the excerpt below illustrates.

Song 5: A Raghughi m Ura

Oh, a raghughi m ura	– oh, I deny myself sleep
Wee muru anya abali	– and stay up all night
Wee na-eche ihe a ga-eri	– to think about what to eat
Oh, a raghughi m ura	– oh, I deny myself sleep
Wee muru anya abali	– and stay up all night
I gwere nwa nwoke nwunye di m oka	– to grind maize for my co-wife's son
Oh, a raghughi m ura	– oh, I deny myself sleep
I kutere nwa nwunye di m nwoke mmiri	– to fetch water for my co-wife's son.
Oh, a raghughi m ura	– oh, I deny myself sleep
Wee muru anya abali	– and stay up all night
N'eche maka nwa nwunye di m nwoke	– to think about my co-wife's son
A nabataghi mmiri onunu m	– my drinking water is not appreciated
A nabataghi nri m	– my food is not appreciated.
E nwebeghi m nnabata n'aka nwa nwunye di m nwoke	– no appreciation from my co-wife's son.

In the above song, the singer refers to the work she is doing – grinding maize. At the same time, she reflects on the other pressing issues bothering her. She seems to suggest that she is unhappy with her marriage. Her husband has two wives, so she is a co-wife. The singer is frustrated with the competition for their husband's love and attention. To make the matter worse for her, her co-wife's children do not show any appreciation to her for the food she cooks and the drinking water she fetches from the wells for them. The singer is unhappy with her co-wife's son's ingratitude so she expresses her frustration and displeasure through a

work song. It is assumed here that she is supposed to feed and take care of her co-wife's children as she does her own children.

She feels the boy should appreciate what she does for him even though it is her marital responsibility. Ingratitude is one of the attitudes most Igbo people dislike because it cripples one's desire to continue to serve or to help others. The tone of the song suggests that the singer holds other things up her sleeve. It seems the husband favours the other wife and her children more than herself and her own children so she is jealous and unhappy about it. She indirectly complains against this neglect through the song.

In the song she reveals that she feels so unhappy and frustrated because of the neglect and lack of appreciation that she sometimes stays up all nights and ponders the essence of life in general and of her marriage in particular. She sings the song in the quiet of night when her co-wife's son, her co-wife and their husband are at home in their beds because she wants them to hear the content of her song.

There are also different types of songs sung during other work activities. Each work has its own peculiar song such as hunting, harvesting, wine tapping, sawing wood, cultivation, clearing bush in preparation for planting and palm oil processing. For instance, in clearing bush in preparation for planting, the song below is sung.

Song 6: Onye Gbuwe Achara

Onye gbuwe achara	– as one clears bushes
Onye gbuwe	– let him clear
Onye akpola ibe ya	– let one not call his neighbor
Onye ikoli	– a weak person
Kotima otule ntu	– a foolish court messenger
Onye elebere ka ya n'uwa a	– one in position of authority hears many things.

In the song above, “onye gbuwe achara” shows that they are clearing a bush in preparation for the planting season.

The song below is used for pounding palm nuts in a mortar.

Song 7: Enyi M Okoroida

Enyi m Okoroida – Okoroida	– my friend Okoroida
Enyi m Okoroida – Okoroida	– my friend Okoroida
A si gi suwa nwku – Okoroida	– if you are told to pound palm nut
I naghi asuli nwku Okoroida	– you cannot pound palm nuts
A si gi riwe nri Okoroida	– if you are asked to eat
Ike adinu gi – Okoroida	– you will have the strength to eat.

In the above song, the singer is satirizing Okoroida who seems to be weak and could not pound palm nut. In the song we were told that Okoroida only show his strength in eating.

Another song for processing palm oil in Afikpo is shown in the excerpt below.

Song 8: O Gburu Ekwu Suee Ekwu Ya.

O gburu ekwu suee ekwu ya
– Ujim
O gburu ekwu suee ekwu ya – whoever cuts the palm nut should pound it.
Ujim – Ujim
Mayi laa – so that we should go home.
Ujim – Ujim
A si m mayi laa – so that we can go home
Ujim – Ujim
Gbaa ume oo – put your strength on it
Ujim – Ujim
Gbaa ume oo – put your strength on it
A si m gigbaa ume oo – I say you put your strength on it
Ujim – Ujim
Mayi laa – so that we can go home
Ujim – Ujim
Ujim, Ujim, Ujim – Ujim, Ujim, Ujim

In the above song, the singer is calling on her colleagues to put more effort in pounding the palm nut so that they can finish the work and go home. The pounding of palm nut in a mortar is solely women's work in Afikpo. The word "Ujim" represents the sound of the pestle on the mortar during the pounding.

Also, below is an example of song used at the oil press.

Song 9: Okoro Igwe Nkwu.

Okoro igwe nkwu – young men of the palm press
Hm mbroda – my brother
Okoro igwe nkwu – young men of the palm press
Hm mbroda – my brother
Biko suwa nkwu – please pound the palm nut
Hm mbroda – my brother
A si gi suwa nkwu – if you are told to pound palm nut
Hm mbroda – my brother
Gi elewe anya n'elu – you begin to look upwards
Hm mbroda – my brother
Gi bu heedi – even if you are head
Hm mbroda – my brother
Heedi I naghi asu nkwu? – head don't you pound palm nuts?
I buru tiicha – even if you are a teacher
Hm mbroda – my brother
Tiicha I naghi asu nkwu? – teacher, don't you pound palm nuts?
Hm mbroda – my brother
Gi buru miisi – even if you are a mistress
Hm mbroda – my brother
Miisi I naghi ewere odu? – Mistress, can't you hold pestle?
Hm mbroda – my brother
I buru poliisi – even if you are a policeman
Hm mbroda – my brother
I buru klaki – even if you are a clerk
Hm mbroda – my brother
Klaki I naghi ewere odu? – clerk, can't you pick up a pestle?
Hm mbroda – my brother

Okoro igwe nkwu	– young men of the palm press
Hm mbroda	– my brother
Okoro igwe nkwu	– young men of the palm press
Hm mbroda	– my brother

The young pounders, at the palm press pound, abandon and pick up pestles in circular relays around the mortar and in obedience to the rhythm of the song. The different job of lifting the pestle and pounding the palm nuts becomes an interesting circular movement accompanied by the shaking of the body.

The rhythm of the work provides a fixed work within which the song must be developed. Manual workers sing such songs to accompany the hard physical labour they do. This is because there is a central rhythm or beat that agrees with the work movement such “Ujim” and “Okoroida” as contained in songs 8 and 9 as pounding in a mortar. As the labourers strive to keep to the rhythm of a song, the pounding becomes a mere attempt to conform, the initial rigour and pain of labour is lost in the attempt to keep the rhythm. Song distracts the labourers and labour is no doubt achieved unconsciously less painfully and more pleasantly. These songs may not have any serious thematic content or subject.

Rhythm is emphasized as a tapestry on which improvisation in words, sentences and phrases can be made. Some of the songs may contain instructions as to how best the labour could be executed. Some may contain philosophies on labour and reward. That work creates wealth and only the hard worker can obtain the good things of life are some of the philosophical contents of work songs. Some of the songs contain invitations to others to join in labour irrespective of their social statuses. The soloist manipulates and subjects words and sentences to the rhythm while the chorus provides responses that are known in the community as shown in excerpts 8 and 9.

There are other work songs used to invite all and sundry to come and participate in farm work as the excerpt below illustrates:

Song 9: Ruonu Oru Ugbo.

Ruonu oru ugbo	– do farm work
Ka unu rie nri	– so that you will eat
Ka unu rijuo afo	– so that you can eat to your fill
Wetanu mma unu	– bring your knives
Wetanu shovelu unu	– bring your shovel
Bianu ka anyi ruo oru	– come let us work
Ndi be anyi kwenu ekwe	– my people please applaud
Enyimba enyi	– enyimba enyi

The above song is an invitation to all and sundry to come and join in the cultivation of land and planting of food crops. The ultimate result is the production of enough food for all which the singer considers a worthy objective.

In the next song, the poet emphasizes the point that farming is the primary profession of man. For the young man, and woman, and indeed everyone who as yet has not found a niche in

the modern professions, the song insists that farming is still a worthwhile undertaking as illustrated below.

Song 11: Okorobia Na-Enweghi Oru.

<i>Lead singer:</i> Okorobia na-enweghi oru	– young man who has no job
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Agboghobia na-enweghi oru	– young girl who has no job
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Nne nwanyi na-enweghi oru	– mother who has no job
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Onye obula na-enweghi oru	– whoever has no job
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Weta mma, weta ugu	– bring knife, bring hoe
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Onye nkuzi, kapinta	– teacher, carpenter
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Klaki, loya	– clerk, lawyer
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job
<i>Lead singer:</i> Onye obula jisie ike n'oru	– let all and sundry work very hard
<i>Chorus:</i> Oru ubi bu isi oru	– farming is the first job

We also have hunting songs as shown below:

Song 12: O Wunu Ele oo (*Collected from Ubakala in Abia State*)

O wunu ele oo!	– It is an antelope
O wunu ele oo!	–It is an antelope
Ogbamife	– hunter
Ekwela ya la oo	– don't miss the game
I na-anukwa uda ikpo nkita	– do you hear the sound of the dog bell
Ya na anu eruola ukwu ebelebe oo	– they have reached ebelebe tree
Anyaruo gi ala	– be careful
Agbachie	– once they shoot
Egede eshirile oo	– the animal is shot
Chuei! Chuei!	– to complement sound
Ono nga o no	– it is still in the same position
Noshie ike oo	– be still (don't move)
Onye ekwela ya la oo	– do not allow it to escape
Pie! Pie! Pie!	– rhythm
Ntielu	– listen
Gude ye oo	– catch it
Gude ye oo	– catch it
Gude ye oo	– catch it

(Okebalama, 1980)

Hunting chart is used to praise hunters and raise their morals. This helps them to perform better during hunting. Another example of hunting song is shown below.

Song 13: Dinta Gbalu Enwe.

<i>Call</i>	<i>Refrain</i>
Dinta gbalu enwe n'ohia	– eee iya, ee iya oo
Dinta gbara enwe n'ohia	– eee iya, ee iya oo
Nkpakara ikwelu nchi omago	– eee iya, ee iya oo
Ajuju aju mama agba ba onye	– eee iya, ee iya oo

Ama agbapulo o bulu

Stanza 2

Oo ho iya oo

Dinta gbalu enwe n'ohia

O maghi na ihe o gburu bu nwa

Oo ho iya eee oo

English translation: 1st Stanza.

A hunter that hunt the monkey in the bush

A hunter that hunt the monkey in the bush

A trap you set in the bush for grasscutter has it caught any?

A tale bearer without asking revealed what they cannot defend.

– oo ho iya oo

– the hunter that killed the monkey in the bush

– never knew that what he killed was a child

– oo ho iya eee oo

There are other work songs that have call and refrain structure as the examples below illustrate:

Song 14: Anyi Na-Ako Ede

Call

Anyi na-ako ede

Anyi na-ako ede

Ndi be anyi na-ako ede

English translation:

Call

We plant cocoyam

We plant cocoyam

Our people plant cocoyam

Refrain

ede mara mma okuko

ede mara mma okuko

ede mara mma okuko

Refrain

- we derive joy in planting it

- we derive joy in planting it

- we derive joy in planting it

Song 15: Ero Muo, Ero Mu oo

Call

Ero mu oo, ero mu oo

Ero mu oo, ero mu oo

Ero m togboro n'ukwu ose

Ero mu oo, ero mu oo

English translation:

Call

My mushroom, my mushroom

My mushroom, my mushroom

The mushroom I kept under the pepper plant

My mushroom, my mushroom

Refrain

– ero m kpara aka n'ala foro

Refrain

– mushroom I got by toughing the land

– mushroom I got by toughing the land

– my mushroom I got by touching the land

– mushroom I got by touching the land

The structural design applied in the two songs above (song 13 and 14), the musical ideas are combined into a unified block. The song text is often short and repetitive so as to achieve an extended performance. This is in agreement with the view of Nketia (1962) which states that the form of an African song is derived partly from the context in which it is used and partly from the form of the verbal text on which the melody is based or from which the melody springs.

The form in all these song texts is a mixed up one. In some cases, we have binary form which involves call and response as seen in examples 13, 14, and 15. The rest of the song text is based on solo and chorused refrain. In call and response types as exemplified in this paper,

it is observed that while the call is variable, the response or chorus is constant as could be seen in song 14 and 15 “ede mara mma okuko” and “ero m kpara aka n’ala foro”.

Another occasion that calls for work song in Igbo traditional society is the sawing of wood as the excerpt below illustrates:

Song 16: Ndi Na-Akwo Osis (Sawyers)

Umuokeke o puo n’udo igwa m oo	– Umuokeke tell me when the saw blade is out of the rope
Ashi, ashi	– rhythm of the saw blade
A na ji bu m udo away a?	– am I using the rope as saw blade?
Okafo o puo n’udo I gwa m oo	– Okafo tell me when the saw blade is out of the line
Ashi, ashi	– rhythm of the saw blade
A na ji bu m udo away a?	– am I using the rope as saw blade?
Mgbafo o puo n’udo I gwa m oo	– Mgbafo tell me when the saw blade is out of the line
Ashi, ashi	– rhythm of the saw blade
Udenkwo o puo n’udo I gwa m oo	– Udenkwo tell me when the saw blade is out of the line
Ashi, ashi	– rhythm of the saw blade

Song 17: O Bu Onye Na-Akwo Mma Odu?

O bu onye na-akwo mma odu?	– Who is sawing the wood?
Hee i – hei	– rhythm
Okafo na-akwo mma odu	– Okafo is sawing the wood
Hee i – hei	– rhythm
O bu onye na-akwo mma odu?	– Who is sawing the wood?
Okonkwo na-akwo mma odu	– Okonkwo is sawing the wood
Hee i – hei	– rhythm
Uche na-akwo mma odu	– Uche is sawing the wood
Hee i – hei	– rhythm.

Also, during the planting of food crops such as yam and cassava, the members of work group sing the following work songs:

Song 18: Ndi Lebor.

Lebora toro toro eyaa, eyaa eya	– Labourers earn three pence a day
Ndi isi nai nai eyaa, eyaa, eya	– leaders earn nine pence a day

Song 19: Onye Na-Achi N’Ogba.

Onye na-achi n’ogba	– Who will start the line first?
Onye na-achi n’ogba-aiyolo, aiyolo	– who will start the line first?
Ezenwuba ga-achi n’ogba-aiyilo, aiyolo	– Ezenwuba will start the line first
Okeke ga-achi n’ogba-aiyolo, aiyolo	– Okeke will start the line first
Akunne ga-achi n’ogba-aiyolo, aiyolo	– Akunne will start the line first
Onye buru uzo luru rue n’isi-aiyolo, aiyolo	– whoever leads to the end
Onye ruru nke oma-aiyolo, aiyolo	– will be the winner
Akiyibe ga-achi n’ogba-aiyolo, aiyolo	– Akiyibe will lead the line
Ya ga-achi n’ogba-aiyolo, aiyolo	– he will lead the line.

Wine tappers also have their own work songs. They sing as they tap wine as the song below illustrates:

Song 20: Oku Ngwo.

Mgbe oku ngwo na-aku ngwo ya	– when the wine tapper is tapping his palm wine
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Obi na-ato ya uto	– he is happy
Mgbe oku ngwo na-aku ngwo ya	– when a wine tapper is tapping his palm wine
Obi na-ato ya uto	– he is happy
Mgbe o rigoro n'elu nkwu	–when he climbs the palm tree
O dakwasi n'ete ya, o kuo ya	– he sits on his “ete” and hits it
Igbanchikichiki Igbanchikichiki	– ideophone for rhythm
Igbanchikichiki Igbanchikichiki	– ideophone for rhythm
Obi na-ato ya uto	– he is happy

Ideophones which literally refers to ideas in sounds are actually sounds in this song that convey vivid pictures, images and impressions is used to convey the compassionate sound produced by wine tapper at work – by introducing ideophone – “Igbachikichiki, igbachikichiki” the singer desires to amuse the audience.

Stylistic Features of Igbo Work Songs

This section examines and analyses the language of Igbo work songs. By so doing, it exposes the fascinating language variety of Igbo work form poetry. This section argues that the structure of Igbo work songs, their chant and antiphonal form, the figurative language employed by the performers that includes lyrical repetition, imagery and allusions etc constitute some of the essential components that are used in the realization of Igbo work songs.

Structure of Igbo Work Songs

The length of Igbo work songs varies with the number of performers determining the length of each song. Some songs performed by single performer or solo performer mainly children are relatively short like song 14 “Anyi na-ako ede”.

Igbo work songs are also characterized by lyrical repetition. The lyrical repetition is not just limited to sounds but also extended to words in the song. The constant repetition of the words emphasizes the reality. At times, the chorus in the songs seems to have limited opportunities for verbal improvisation in contrast to the lead singer who has more flexibility to improvise in the course of performing the song. In like manner, the song performed by the chorus tend to have a relative stable structure since most choruses of Igbo work songs are short and repetitive, they are easy to memorize and master.

The repetition of certain phrases or words in Igbo work song is meant for the intensification of meanings and emphasizing the core images which reinforce their efforts. Repetition is done so as to have an extended performance. An item is repeated several times before it is changed to another one. Again, the performers may want to emphasize some points. The choral singing in response to the lead singer is common in the performance of Igbo work songs. This appears to be a prominent feature of the cooperative song throughout the Igbo community, the choral response technique aims at motivating the members and to make them participate more actively in the work. In this regard, Koelb (1988:170) avers that

“emotions vary according to seasonal and atmospheric changes since all phenomena are mutually resonant. Things call for one another... poetry is a response to this call and is seen as a literal reaction to the external world of which he is a part”.

Functions of Igbo Work Song

Oral literature as human product must serve the interest of the people who produced it. Its function makes it possible for them to come in terms with the new direction of the world in which they find themselves. Work song provides pleasure because it relieves us of the various social pressure, stresses and tensions. It is also a comparative song which helps to create enthusiasm for the work and lift up the spirits so that the members will be relieved from the physical boredom. The solidarity song of the Igbo work song is intended to make the work of the day more entertaining and delightful. For the Igbo to exist as a unity, its members must share values, which define the distinctive feature of the society. There is emphasis on the importance of collective feelings and interest in the work at hand.

The Igbo people are known for their solid and cultural ties and corporate identities, which are fundamental to them. Besides, the material and ideal interests characterized by corporate affiliations, most activities in the society are carried out on a highly organized cooperative level. The popular Igbo saying “igwe bu ike” meaning “unity is strength” depicts the sharing of common concern and values. The perfect social order and acceptable cultural standards are maintained through egalitarian patterning. Thus, in work song, forging a bond of intimacy, brotherhood and corporate identity underscores the role-relationship.

The Igbo work song is an expression of the people’s collective character. It is sung during cooperative works such as tilling the ground, building houses, sawing the wood, weeding and harvesting agricultural crops as well as constructing local bridges. The major aim of the work song is to create enthusiasm for the work and motivate members of the cooperative group thereby avoiding monotonous labour and facilitating competitive situation.

The rhythmic beat of work song not only keeps the verse together, but also creates a strong feeling of competition and excitement which help members of the cooperative group keep their places and move forward together in balance without lagging behind or faltering. In this friendly manner of mutual assistance and belonging together, any hard work will be easily done with excessive speed and the members of the cooperative work themselves enjoy the importance of the song for the mere fact that it adds both efficiency and delight (Gemedu, 2008). This could be achieved through serious active and cooperative spirits of each member.

The Igbo work song is sung in the form of chorus. The lead singer starts and then everyone joins in the chorus after each verse. The group work song occasion is quite interesting for the mere fact that it helps promote a sense of unity of purpose. It is an activity, which reinforces a sense of deep affection and understanding among the people. On top of creating a happy and friendly atmosphere, the cooperative members are served plenty of food and drinks after

the work. The work song occasion as a symbol of collective action is also a euphoric period in rural Igbo community.

The Igbo work song is also viewed as the basis for solving social and economic problems and facilitator of national feelings and democratic outlook. For instance, the recurring humorous expression “iyaa” “eee” in song 13 is sung to create competitive condition and show the necessity of cooperation in times of need on the one hand, to warn those members of the group work who falter on the other. If a member of the group work fails to demonstrate genuine endeavor and active participation in the work of others, he will not receive their generous help at the time when he organizes his farm work.

The work song as a symbol of oneness is functionally different from other oral narratives in terms of relationship with the work they accomplish. The joint singing in the work song strengthens the unity of the members and organizes their collective work as to encourage them feel and work as active members of the group rather than as a solitude individual. The function of the recurring expression “iyaa” is mainly to encourage collaboration, energize people to work hard and keep them fresh so that they move faster with strong feeling of excitement and interest. This is how the Igbo work song as part of the common good of the society plays an important role in creating pleasure and moral incentives for cooperative activities.

A cooperative activity is essential to effective community work. It facilitates more socialization process, harmonious relations and promotes the spirit of belonging together to produce collective benefits. The same kind of mood of recreational and light-hearted enjoyment is evident in Igbo work songs. Through cooperative endeavor people share common values, acquire unshakeable social life, learn how to accept others and develop a sense of genuine nationhood.

In some songs, lazy people are criticized and at the same time encouraged to work hard for their own betterment. This was communicated through the singing of the song in song 3 titled “ Umu egali ka anyi lusibe olu ike”. In this way then, songs in the pre-colonial period were educative tools which advised people to constantly work hard in whatever task they were involved. This confirms the fact that the Igbo people cherished work above all other things.

Findings of The Study

The study finds that the embellished language in Igbo work songs gives them sophistication as established by the use of imagery and stylistic devices. The language employed in these songs is manipulated to suit the context, given the relevant audience. The analysis of the texts consequently, informs us of the content thereby enhancing the functions of these songs. It has emerged from the study that the foreground stylistic devices constitute the form of Igbo work songs and entertainment functions of these songs. The style and content of the songs further establish the dual purpose of the work songs as they entertain and educate at the same

time. The rhythm of the words and the imagery in the songs brings pleasurable musicality as the work group members learn the thematic concerns espoused.

The study also identifies that the joint singing of work songs coordinates the action and lead the workers to feel and work as part of a cooperating group, not as a separate individual. The rhythm of the song encourages collaboration and control within the group. Some of the work songs comment on life in general, on local events and express ideas of love and friendship and lighten the labour and give an opportunity for poetic expression in the midst of work.

Conclusion

Igbo work songs, like other areas of African oral literature are relaxing, entertaining and educative and act as a moral compass of the society. As much as they are used for work, they also vilify individuals and groups that do not conform to societal values. These songs provide a forum for the expression of diverse ideas and opinions. It can be used to educate or to amuse or abuse people. They can also be used to mobilize people of a given cause or motivate them to face a given cause courageously and fearlessly.

Igbo work songs may be a solo performance, choral or antiphonal. They are contextual with the manipulation of popular tunes to suit the occasion. Igbo work songs are multifunctional. They teach, entertain, act as a record of history, transmit the community's culture to the new generation, and give the individual a connection to the community as well as reflect the society's way of life. The artists employ different stylistic devices when singing work songs, thus making these songs highly appealing to the audience.

The study of Igbo work song is very important because it is a medium of expressing the way of life of a people, it provides adequate and suitable singing materials for the present and future generations. It also helps to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people.

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