

CHAPATER FORTHY-EIGHT

MUSIC AND LANGUAGES: AN X-RAY OF THE NIGERIAN ETHNIC BIAS

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of music and language as a necessity for human existence in all societies, especially in Nigeria. It saw language as possibly the most important and powerful of mankind's unique endowments, the means through which we regulate our social and interpersonal behaviour and build up to stabilize our intellectual engagement with the world. This simply means that language is an important factor in the formation of concepts and a sin-qua-non for effective communication. It examined Nigerian Music which includes many kinds of folk and popular types of the various ethnic groups and their techniques. The ethnic groups include Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba.

Keywords: Music. Language languages, Communication and Ethnic bias

Introduction

The definition of music varies according to culture and social context. For instance, Idolor (2002) quoting Apel (1973) states that music is derived from the Greek word "Muse" which originally meant the art of technique of all cultural endeavours. Hoffer (1985) also defines music as a combination of sounds that are organized and meaningful occurring in a prescribed span of time and usually having different pitches. Olopade (1988) also see music as one of the verbal arts that enrich the individual in understanding the nature around him. Critically looking at these submissions, therefore we can say that music is a combination of sounds of different pitches, made by man which, is to be sung or played on musical instruments in order to please the emotions and stimulate the intellect in accordance with the society's theoretical framework. Music is also a medium by which ideas are fixed in the minds of the audience.

Furthermore, music is a vehicle for the assertion of identities and roots. It plays vital roles in human life, awakens feelings, thoughts and emotions. It enhances communication, enforces conformity, facilitates cultural transmission and provides a congenial atmosphere for solidarity. Music-making is an essential part of many activities in many parts of the world in general and in Africa in particular. Festivals, contests, anniversaries and worship at the local, state, national and international levels involve music. (Merriam, 1964; Egbo, 1997; Mbanugo, 2000; Ukpana, 2004; and Onuora-Oguno, 2004). Music deepens understanding with no barriers and is often said to be an international language, a universal language indeed. Ekwueme (2001:18) expressing his view on this said:

Music can be understood across linguistic barriers. Purely instrumental music, for example, can convey messages to all and sundry, irrespective of colour, race or creed/even if it is not necessarily the same message that gets conveyed to all at the same time by the same pieces of music.

In a similar vein, Tracy (1969) sees the music of Africa as: "vocal participation and physical manipulation of instruments and the rhythmic or dance movement associated with music" (p.10). Although indigenous music in the African society is expressed in vocal forms, that could employ chorus and solos of different grouping, for example, group of boys, group of girls, group of men and women or a combination of both groups. The instrumental forms also include instruments from the different groups of idiophone, membranophone, chordophone and aerophone. Some of these instruments include Udu, ichaka, xylophone, drums of various types and sizes, Une, Dundun, Sekere, Kakaki, Flutes etc and also dancing.

Language

The Encyclopedia American, Grolier (1995:727) described language as;
The faculty and the ability possessed by normal human beings and by no other species of using a spoken or written utterance to represent mental phenomena or event. Most fundamentally, it is the association of speech sounds with thoughts, concepts or images in the mind, and the ability both to produce and to interpret such sounds in the current patterns.

The primary purpose of language, therefore, is communication among persons. The ability to communicate through language is a unique characteristic that separates man from other animals. What this implies in effect is that language used by a community of individuals as their mother tongue is to interact with one another. This feature has a universal application because there is no individual that does not belong to a linguistic group. More interestingly, language is the means through which human communities are organized for the smooth handing over of their culture from one generation to the other.

Language involves the use of interpretative schemes which makes sense of not only what they mean but also of how they understand issues and concepts. To clarify this, Giddens in Ezenibe (1998) opined that:

The constitution of "senses" as in intersubjective accomplishment ongoing exchange; and the use of contextual cues, as properties of setting, is an integral part of the constitution and comprehension of meaning.

He, therefore, contended that language is not "processed" by any particular speaker or group but can be conceptualized only as characteristics of the community of speakers and can be conceived as an abstract set of rules which are not mechanically applied, but are employed in generative mode by speakers who are members of that language community.

There can be no gainsaying therefore that for all intent and purposes, language is a complex system used to express the totality of human thoughts, ideologies, feelings and emotions. In an African setting, therefore, language, arts (music), culture and society are inter-related.

The Inter-relationship between Music and Language

Music is a language and a form of communication. This simply means that there can't be music without a language. Music to contemporary African suggests the relationship between music and humanity. Sociologically, the concept of music is defined by the society where it

exists and it is concerned with the organized ways in which people behave towards one another when they listen, produce and reproduce the sounds which they perceive as music.

In a direct relationship, language is man's most prized possession, an integral component and at the same time a product of culture. Since culture determines the education of a people, then through language and music, the culture of a given people is sustained. Language and music as a human phenomenon have forms which can be described in terms of sound-words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Music without a language lacks truth. In summary, language is for human beings as well as music. Music and language are systematic, first spoken and conceived and then written by a child. Music and language are symbolic, pictorial as well as highly effective. Confirming this, Agu(2009;12) said:

Music is one of the strongest tools for cultural uniqueness and self-identity in the life of any society and as such, there is need for a drastic review of and adjustment in approach to and method of music education in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. Ask employers of labour what they look for in an employee, they will tell you they need people who understand teamwork, people who are disciplined, and people who understand the big picture. Do you know what they actually need? They need musicians. The life of arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation is close to the centre.

Miller (1969:760) earlier on commenting on the inter-relationship between language and music maintained that both possess these functions:

1. Language may serve an emotive or expressive function. A person for example in describing his state of mind may express joy, pain or anger and sometimes may seek to manipulate his listener but generally, his interest focuses on the source of the communication. Music as well expresses ideas, emotions, or state of mind in musical performances through the use of terms such as *largo*, *lento*, *adagio*, *assai*, *cantabile* etc.
2. The connotative function of language is amplified by commands or attempts at persuasion in which attention focuses upon the listener and he issues command such as *marcato*, *sforzando*, *majestically* etc.
3. The phatic function of language serves to establish a common bond or literally contact between the speaker and the listener while composers deal with instrumentalists and the audience.
4. We use language itself to teach, do business, discuss, preach or interact. Music, on the other hand, is a universal language of the soul used as a means of communication.

Nigerian Music

Nigerian music is those music genres that have their roots in the Nigerian nation. The lyrical contents are majorly Nigerian but sometimes are intertwined with foreign language such as pigeon English. In most cases, Nigerian music is generally referred to as African music in the global context because African music is used as a concept for any music that has its root in any music of the African countries.

Nigerian music includes many kinds of folk music and popular types, others of the numerous types of various ethnic groups. The styles of folk music are related to the various types of ethnic groups each with their own techniques, instruments and songs. The major ethnic groups are the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Traditional music in Nigeria and indeed throughout Africa is usually functional, that is, it is performed to mark a ritual such as wedding or funeral and not just for a mere achievement of artistic goals. Although some Nigerians especially children play some musical instruments for their amusements but solo performances are rare in the traditional setup.

Work songs are the commonest types of Nigerian traditional music. They help in the fields; Women who are involved in household chores, fishermen who paddle their canoes on the rivers.

Also in the northern part of Nigeria, farmers work together on each other's farms and the host is expected to supply musicians for his neighbours. Music is closely linked to agriculture and there are restrictions on the type of instruments that can be played during the different seasons of the year.

Music Technique

The most common format of Nigerian music is the call-and-response type. Here a lead singer and a chorus interchange the verses and the solo section. Sometimes solo instruments accompany them which either shadow the lead text or repeat the ostinato vocal phrases. In the southern parts, the prevalent technique is features of complex rhythms that interchange with solo melodic instrumentalists while in the north there is the prevalence of polyphonic wind ensembles.

The extreme northern region is associated with solo melodic monodic (single-line music) with emphasis on drums with the influence of Islamic religion. There is also the existence of itinerant performers who sometimes accompany themselves with string instrument known for reciting long poems of unorthodox Islamic texts among the Kanuri and Hausa tribes.

Igbo Music

The Igbos, one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria dominates the once forest zone of southeastern Nigeria and the fringes of the Niger Delta, East of the River Nigeria. The Igbo people are basically farmers, traders, craftsmen and their social life flow with the rhythm of festivals, ceremonies, rituals and work. The Igbo society constitutes what linguistic call a speech community. All Igbo dialects derive from one proto-Igbo language and share common grammatical lexical and phonological characteristics.

Egbule (2006:6) observes that: "Igbo customs basically are similar sometimes with local variations. The kolanut custom, music, art, dance and oral literature, ethics, philosophy, rituals, avoidance and taboo are basically patterned to reflect an identical conception of Igbo social and ritual systems."

Earlier on, Onwuejeogwu(1987) in an attempt to define the cultural area of the Igbos said;
...The Igbo culture area is delimited by an imaginary line running outside the settlements of Agbor, Kwale, Obiaruku, Ebu(West Niger Igbo Area), Ahoada, Diobu, Umuaghayi(Port Harcourt Area), Arochukwu, Afrikpo, Ndiniafor, Isiogo(Abakaliki Area) and Enugu Ezike (Nsukka Area) and Nzam.

This imaginary line encloses an area in which the people speak the various dialects of Igbo language also share typical and significant common cultural traits and pattern up to or above 50 per cent. Geographically, Igbo south is comprised of Imo and Abia states put together.

Okafor (2005) explaining about the music of the Igbos said;

The centrality of music in Igbo life requires that, at one time or another, an Igbo person must participate in dance or music-making either as a performer, spectator, listener, subject or object. In a loose sense, then, every Igbo man is a musician. As in Igbo society, all art is integrated with life and with each other. It is the degree of proficiency rather than dependence on making a living that defines the Igbo musician.

Also, Umuezinwa (2009:128) expressing his views about Igbo music said;

The music of people living in the south-east of Nigeria, who are known as the Igbo has a unique variety of music and instruments used which is associated with them and belongs to them as an integral part of their culture. The music has its own identity. The music has its own identity, which is derived from its essence.

The most widespread instrument used here is the 13-stringed Zither called *ubo*. The Igbos also play slit drums, xylophones, flutes, lyres, pot-drum (udu) and lutes. More recent developments are the use of foreign brass instruments such as trumpets and cornets.

Court music is played among the traditional Igbos to maintain their royal traditions. The *Ufie* (slit drum) is also used to wake the chief, communicate meal times and other vital information. Bell and drum ensembles are used to announce the departure and return of the chief to his community.

In recent times, many Nigerian hip-hop artists are beginning to explore some Igbo traditional music and use them in their songs. In the forefront of this development are contemporary musicians such as Flavour, Zero and Phino. In the administrative process, Igbo music is deeply involved. Confirming this Egonu (2009:119) said;

Traditional Igbo music serves the means of social control. Folksongs such as “Abigbo” in Mbaise are sung to punish culprits, encourage achievers and challenge young minds. It gets fever heat on moonlight periods and includes festivals and ceremonies. These songs are used to satirize the ills of the society, to punish people who have gone against societal norms and values in villages and to stamp out community vices especially, stealing, and fighting etc. folktales (songs) are also told to condemn the foolishness of the youths.

Also in some communities, the masquerade music is used for the maintenance of law and

order. Confirming this, Acholonu, (1989:36) said that "masquerade music increases the aesthetic quality of dance as a good vehicle for social satire, that is for criticizing and condemning ostentatious vulgarity and all forms of indiscipline in masquerade".

Hausa Music

The people of the North are known for their complex percussion instrumental music, the one-stringed *goje* and an elaborate praise song vocal tradition. Due to the Islamic influence from the 14th century, Hausa music had been used to free-rhythmic improvisation and the use of the pentatonic scale. This is similar to that used by other Muslim west African tribes of Bambara, Kanuri, Fulani and Songhai. Traditionally Hausa is used for the celebration of births, circumcisions, marriages and other life events. The Hausas are dominated by families of praise singers and they play percussion instruments such as *tambura*, drum and talking drum. The most impressive of the Hausa instrument is the elongated state trumpet called *Kakaki* which is more than two metres long and can be easily broken down for ease of transportation.

In Hausa communities, the organization of musicians are relegated to the lower class (Nketia, 1982) and there is active participation in musicianship from the ranking citizens to the highest. Here two main types of musicians exist – those who are attached to the traditional institutions and those that belong to the socio-musical groups.

Yoruba Music

The Yoruba tribe has a drumming tradition with the characteristic use of the *dundun* hourglass tension drums. The ensemble using the *dundun*, play a type of music that is called *dundun* ensemble. It consists of various sizes of tension drums alongside with kettle drums called (*gudugudu*). The leader of the *dundun* ensemble is the *Iyalu*, who uses a drum to "talk" by imitating the tonality of the Yorubas. They have a lot of folk songs and their music are spiritual in nature and is devoted to God.

The place of traditional music in Yoruba land is very important that from the early hours of the day, music is performed till late in the day. Quoting Ajewole (2016), "Traditional religious worshippers, on waking up, begin the day by chanting praises of their *Orias*. Traders and farmers chant incantations for protection and lucky events. Even the children begin their daily life with music".

Yoruba, like other African tribes, has a tonal language and it makes it possible for one to perceive music in every spoken word. A child, on waking up greets his/her father "Baba mi ek'a aro" meaning 'my father, good morning' and the father responds by calling the 'Oriki'(praise name) of the child with the family totem such as *Alabi, Erin O oji re bi*.

The Yoruba being ancestors and hero worshippers, each defined hero or ancestor has his or her own peculiar music and dance which the devotees use in their worship. As a result of this, no religious ceremony is complete without music.

Yoruba music, therefore, is divided into two groups, namely religious and secular. Each group also has two sub-groups, viz vocal and instrumental. Yoruba music has, therefore, become an important component of some modern Nigerian popular composers as a result of its early influence from the European, Islamic and Brazilian forms. These influences stemmed from the importation of brass instruments, sheet music, Islamic percussion and styles brought by Brazilian merchants.

Modern styles such as that of “Alhaji Sikiru Ayinde *Barrister's fuji*, Salawa Abeni's *Waka*, and Yusuf Olanji's *Sakara* are derived primarily from Yoruba traditional music”. (Jayeola and Nwonye, 2017). Yoruba music has come of age and the new generation of Nigerian musicians who are non-singers now sing in their native languages.

Conclusion

Music is an international language pleasing to all classes of people. It is appealing, inspirational, soothing and there is a form of mental nourishment provided by the artiste. Ebo (2009:107) then concluded that when he said;

In every song sang, there is a message or a certain feeling which the musician is trying to share; from the melancholic sway of a rejected voice crying to a lover, to the indigent shriek of displeasure from a rock artiste, music can ignite rebellion, inspiration, sadness or joy... it leaves an impact in whichever form it comes.

It is therefore clear that only through language that music can be meaningful and effective.

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