Linguistic Analysis of Selected Folk Ballads of Mike Ejeagha

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Abstract

Some earlier studies on Igbo folksongs focused mainly on the thematic and literary study of Igbo folksongs with little attention paid to the linguistic study of Igbo folksongs. To this end, this paper examines some linguistic properties of nine randomly selected works of Mike Ejeagha (ME) that are popular among his audience, with a view to identify and describe the linguistic quality of Igbo folksongs using ME as instance. Data used in the study were collected from ME's records, transcribed, translated and subjected to descriptive linguistic analysis at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. Two phonological processes; vowel assimilation and syllable elision, were identified in the selected works of ME. Reduplication was identified at the morphological level. The syntax of ME arts reveals four syntactic process in his works, such as, topicalisation, negation, question formation and ellipsis to be instrumental in the aesthetics of ME's art. The study showed that ME employed these linguistic processes repeatedly and consistently to show creativity and achieve stylistic effect in his folk ballads.

Key words: Mike Ejeagha, Folk ballad, Igbo and Linguistic

1.0 Introduction

Folk or traditional ballad is commonly defined as a song that tells a story which is orally transmitted (Abrams and Harpham, 2012: 23). This definition captures the whole nature of the folk ballad, which is also a form of narrative poetry, alongside the epic and the romance (Martins 1943). As a form of the ballad, folk ballads vary in length and style across cultures. Igbo folk ballad is considered a form of oral narrative poetry of the Igbo (Oraegbunam, 2018), bearing in mind Uzochukwu's content-cum-performance classification of oral Igbo poetry which classifies all oral Igbo poetry into three broad categories; chants, recitation and songs (Uzochukwu, 1981; 1982). Each of these classifications has other sub-genres or categories of oral Igbo poetries that fall under it. For instance, categories belonging to the Igbo chant (mbem) include; funeral, title, divination, hunting and masquerade chants respectively. Oral poetic categories classified under recitation include: incantations, funeral recitation, masquerade recitation, proverbs and riddles. Songs, which is the domain of the present study has different sub-genres such as: birth, marriage, funeral, lullaby, title, moonlight, festival, masquerade and war songs respectively (Uzochukwu, 1982:37-38). These traditional songs are also known as folksongs. It is important to note that, in categorising ME's works as Igbo folk ballad in this study, the form is subsumed under the broad category called Igbo folksongs. (See Oraegbunam, 2018).

Igbo folk ballads (story in songs) are said to be one of the subgenres of Igbo folksongs (Nwafor and Obuka; 1993:90; Azuonye; 2014) that tells a dramatic story to promote moral commentary, through action and dialogue, paying minimal attention to the characters and setting in a version of the ballad (Ikwubuzo and Oraegbunam, 2016). In some occasions, Igbo

folksong gives room for audience participation, but the way the audience would experience the folk ballad depends on how the artist utilized language in his art (Oraegbunam, 2018). One of the key ways to differentiate the work of an artist from another is to investigate the role of language in their works. This is why the study of the language of literature will continue to remain relevant and constantly a place of convergence between linguistics and literature.

It is pertinent to note that the knowledge of a language should not be restricted to knowledge about the grammatical rules in the language alone, rather such knowledge should include the basic discourse rules or conversational routines of the language (Mmadike & Okoye, 2015:9). Over the years, linguistic analysis of folksongs (folk ballad in this case) has attracted little attention. Some earlier studies on folk ballads, such as Goller (1988), Kumer (1991) and Onwuegbuna (2015), focused on its structure, nature and performance, with little attention paid to the linguistic devices employed by artists in the ballad.

Again, the popularity of ME's art has also attracted the attention of researchers such as Ezeafulukwe (2013), Onwegbuna (2015), Nwobu (2017) and Oraegbunam (2015; 2018), who focus mainly on recognizing ME for his contributions towards the development of Igbo oral literature, philosophical and literary analysis of selected works of ME, with little or no attention paid to the linguistic study of ME works or the works of oral singers in general. For this reason, the present study examines the linguistic features of selected ME's folk ballads, with a view to identifying and describing their phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties and how same were used creatively to render the folk ballads.

Data for the study were drawn from seven randomly selected works of ME, such as, "*Ọmekagụ*", "*Obiakọ*" (Greatest Hits, Vol.2), "*Onye Ori Ụtaba*", "*Ka e si lee Onye isi oche*" (*Akụkọ n'egwu* original, Vol.1), "*Ife ụwa bụ a na-eme, ọ dị ka a dị eme*", "*Elulubelube*" (*Akụkọ n'egwu*, Vol.3) "*Mgba enwude Akpụlụ*" (*Akụkọ n'egwu* original, Vol.2). The works were transcribed and linguistically analysed using descriptive approach. This method is considered appropriate because, the simple linguistic analysis done in this study was done on the four levels of linguistics.

In order achieve the set objectives, the study considers the view of Zwicky (1986:57) as very pertinent. Zwicky distinguishes between linguistic systems and (linguistic) overlay systems. Linguistic overlay systems refer to poetic forms, language games, secret languages, systems of expressive word formation, codes and ciphers, writing systems, and some conventional schemata for borrowing words from one language into another. According to him:

> The characteristics of linguistic overlay systems are, first, that they are *detachable* – it is possible to talk about the linguistic system with which they are associated without referring to the overlay systems (but it is not possible to talk about the overlay systems without reference to linguistic systems which they are associated) – and second, that the principles that appear in these overlay systems are, at least in part, significantly unlike the ones that appear in linguistic systems (p. 57-58).

The point being made here is that, a linguistic overlay system embraces a set of conventional principles involving linguistic materials, though the principles differ in type as well as in detail from the principles by which the linguistic systems are organized.

In the case of Igbo folk ballad, the linguistic features that make ME's work aesthetically pleasing of interest to this study. But then, the reason for focusing on the works of ME becomes very imperative at this juncture.

ME's folk ballad is the most popular Igbo folk ballad and is still prominent in the contemporary Igbo society. He is arguably a prolific folk singer and story-teller whose works have attracted the interest of many Igbo music lovers and scholars alike (see Ezeafulukwe, 2013; Onwegbuna, 2015; Nwobu, 2017; and Oraegbunam, 2015; 2018). Since ME works are popular among the Igbo, the linguistic study of his art will stimulate the interest of scholars towards studying the interface of literature and linguistics which will in turn contribute towards the development of the language. The study is divided into four sections: section one is the introduction, section two briefly describes the nature of ME folk ballads; section three reviews related literature; section four is the linguistic analyses of ME folk ballads; while section five summarises and concludes the study.

1.1 Mike Ejeagha and Folk ballad

ME can be said to be a very good folk ballad performer. His amazing imaginative skill and power to engage his audience as has been observed in his narrative vigour is undisputable. Sometimes ME folk ballads flow naturally through him with so much symmetry and harmony that one remains helplessly captivated while listening to him. It is widely assumed that folk ballads are of an unknown composer, which is a sense of ethics and humility involved in acknowledging reality.

But in the case of ME, it is different because the adaptation, repackaging of folk cultures and folktales, and rendering it in a

new creative composition, gives the singer (ME) all the benefits of copyright to those folk ballads.   ME's folk ballads are so popular in the Igbo society such that when people want to make a joke about someone who loves telling stories, they often say "*Ọ na-akọ akụkọ Mike Ejeagha*" (S/He is telling ME's story). Another reason for ME's ownership of the folk ballads lays in the fact that, he created syncretic urban neo-folk music (Onwuegbuna; 2015) through a traditional homogeneous ethnic songs. Goodman (2008) described it as moving from "Village to Vinyl"; in other words, taking the known cultural practice in its folk nature (oral) to a level of audio recording. Today ME's folk ballads is very popular among the Igbo as a veritable tool for moral education.

2.0 Critical Analysis of Previous Works

Few studies have been done on folk ballads including those on ME's works. This sub-section examines these studies with a view to highlighting the thrust of the works, major findings and relation with this study. Goller (1988) examines the Randal Ballad with a view to ascertaining how it develops, transforms and also functions. Goller found that the promotion of the aesthetics of Randal ballads is occasioned by the similitic denominators that manifests through the symbols, dialogues and characters in the ballad. Kumer (1991) looks at the way Slovenian folk ballads are structured and performed, and its overall nature. For the nature and structure of Slovenian folk ballads, Kumer submits that 42% of the themes of Slovenia are legendry, 24% have theme of family, 14% have love themes and the theme of pre-natural beings completes the remaining 12%. Kumer further upholds that Slovenian ballads often start with an introductory line (remarks).

Onwuegbuna (2015) examines Igbo philosophical symbols and thoughts that were embodied in three songs of ME. Onwuegbuna's study was focused mainly on the thematic examination of ME songs, namely: *Omekagu*, *Nwa bu Onyinye Chukwu* and *Udegbunam*, with a view to interpreting various Igbo traditional symbols implied in the folk ballad and their philosophical symbolism in Igbo worldview. Some of the philosophical symbols identified in the three folk ballads of ME studied by Onwuegbuna are as follows: in the song 'Omekagu', *Opu* (musical horn) symbolizes voice and power of the Spirits; *Ọfọ na Ogu* symbolizes justice and fair-play; *Ebini* (ram) symbolises forbearance and resilience. Some symbols identified in *Nwa Bu Onyinye Chukwu* by Onwuegbuna, includes *Di* (husband) symbolizing patience; *Nwa* (Child) symbolizing succession, perpetuation of lineage and true wealth while *Ịsaa* (seven) symbolizes fullness of a major cycle in Igbo numerology. The philosophical thought promoted in ME's *Udegbunam* according to Onwuegbuna is anchored on the need for younger ones to always respect the counsel of elders. The study concludes that for one to truly understand the philosophical codes in Igbo oral literature there is a need for the investigator to have a sound understanding of Igbo language and culture. Onwuegbuna's study varies from the present study in that it focuses on the messages encoded in the symbols employed by ME in some of his works mentioned.

Nwobu (2017) carries out a musical analysis and transcription of two folk ballads of ME- *Udenze Nwanne M* and *Onye Ori Ụtaba.* Using these two works of ME, Nwobu (2017) briefly examines ME's compositional techniques, basic form of ME's musical, melodic and harmonic compositions. Nwobu posits that Ejeagha's melody is repetitive and fragmentary, while the harmonic structure is involuntary. Commenting on the basic form

of ME's musical compositions, Nwobu asserts that ME employs the use of forms that interplay between his voice as an artist and musical instrument which the guitar is Ejeagha's favourite. The study concludes by stating that music will continue to play a huge role in life of the Igbo. Nwobu's assessment of selected ME works was from a musical standpoint as h/she did not make any comment on the linguistic qualities of ME works.

Oraegbunam (2018) through the lens of formalism literarily analysed six folk ballads of ME with a view to harnessing their literary qualities and how those literary features contribute to the aesthetics of ME art. In his study of six works of ME Oraegbunam examines the narration structure that underlies majority of ME folk ballads. The study found that, structurally, Ejeagha arranges his folk ballads to begin with a refrain that introduces the prelude and moves to the interlude, while he ends his folk ballads with a postlude. Oraegbunam observes that ME employs figures of rhetoric and created imagery. Some of the figures of rhetoric observed in his works are: wellerism, assonance, alliteration repetition, parallelism, proverbs and rhetorical questions.

On the other hand, the figures of imagery and sound devices employed by ME in his arts include simile, onomatopoeia and phonaesthetic ideophones. The study concludes that these literary qualities are what promote the aesthetic quality of ME's art. It is observable from the foregoing that the linguistic features of Igbo folk ballads and other forms of Igbo poetry have attracted little or no attention, hence the need for this study. Although Oraegbunam's (2018) study of ME works can be said to have explicated the literariness of ME's since it brought to the fore, the stylistic features that makes ME's works aesthetically pleasing and acknowledged the creativity of ME which is a position shared by

the present study, the study did not account for the linguistic features dominant in ME works.

3.0 The Linguistic Analysis of ME's Selected Works
The linguistic examination of ME folk ballads can be done at three levels
i. Phonological level
ii. Morphological level
iii. Syntactic level

3.1 Phonological Level
Phonology is "the branch of linguistics which investigates how sounds are used systematically in different languages to form words and utterances" (Katamba 1989:1). It studies the organizational structure of speech sounds across languages. Mbah & Mbah (2000:17) confirm the importance of phonology to literary analysis by asserting that the prosodic feature which account for rhythm in literature especially in poetry are within the ambit of phonetics and phonology. This implies that any poetic analysis, be it literary or linguistic analysis that is short of the description of the sound patterning should be termed incomplete, because the effective use of phonological processes contributes to its aesthetics. Some of the phonological features observed in ME folk ballads are vowel assimilation and syllable elision.

3.1.1Vowel Assimilation
Vowel assimilation is known to always occur in fast speech. It is a process whereby a vowel acquires one or more features of an adjacent vowel. **.** There are two major types of assimilation in Igbo; progressive and regressive assimilation. Progressive

assimilation is the type of assimilation whereby one speech influences another following it, to make it appear like itself (Mbah & Mbah, 2000.98). For progressive assimilation to occur there must be sound deletion as shown in Mbah (2011:38).

(1) a. ego + gi = ego i – your money.
     b. ísí + ya = ísí e – its head.
     c. ùdé + ya = údí e – her pomade.

Instances of this phonological process (vowel assimilation) were observed to characterise ME's articulation of certain phrases in Igbo. Let us take a look at this excerpt from "Omekagụ",

Excerpt 1

> *O rue ka ọ fụsịalụ nya bụ opi, Ọmekagụ wee si n'ọnwụ wee binie. **Nnie** na **nnịa** wee fichasịa anya mmiri, aṅ ụrị ju fa obi. Ndị niine nọ ebe ahụ wee soro fa na-aṅ ụrị...*

> (And after he finished blowing the flute, Omekagụ awoke from death. His mother and father wiped away their tears, and joy filled their hearts. All the people there present rejoiced with them.)

(ME., Greatest Hit, Vol. 2)

In the above excerpt (1) there are two instances of progressive assimilation as exemplified by the bolded elements-*Nnie* (his/her mother) na *Nnịa* (his/her). These are analysed below.

(2) a. /nne/   +   /ya/ /je/ ➝   /nnje/ Ńnie☐ (his mother),

          Mother   3SG Acc pronoun
     b. /nna/   +   ya   /ja/ ⟶   /nnja/
                                     (his/her father)

          Father   3SG Acc pronoun

The assimilation in the above examples occurs in everyday speech of the Igbo during fast speech. But in the case of ME as

seen in excerpt 1, vowel assimilation promoted fast rhythm, making the production of these words flow with the rhythm of the ballad. Three phonological processes occurred in the above examples. First is the elision of the word final /e/ and /a/ *nne* and *nna* respectively. Second is the palatalization of /y/ in both examples and lastly, the progressive assimilation of vowels of the pronoun, /ya/ in both examples. The resultant items are *nnie*□ 'her/his mother' and *nnia* 'his/her father'. A similar case is observed in ME's opening remarks to the same folk ballad (Omekagụ) as shown in the excerpt below.:

Excerpt 2:   *Ndị be anyị, onye sị nwatakịrị jide nkapị, ya
               dobekwara ya mmiri ọ ga-eji waa kwaa aka. Ọ
               bụkwazị ihe jọgburu **onwie**, na mmadụ ga-afụ oke
               lulu onye ọzọ, ọ **welịa** jee nye onye ọ sị na ya fụlụ
               n'anya.*

               (Our people, he that asks a child to catch mice,
               should also keep water which he will use to wash
               his hands. It is also a terrible thing that somebody
               will take another person's right and give it to the
               person he said he loved.)

               (ME., Greatest Hit, Vol. 2)

Just like the progressive assimilation that was noticed in excerpt (1), two instances of progressive assimilation as exemplified by the bolded elements are observed in excerpt 2, - *onwie* (himself/herself) and *welịa* (took it). There are three phonological processes involved in the construction of the progressive assimilation observed in the two words written in bold. The first one is the elision of the word final /e/ in the *onwe* and also in *wele* (dialectical form of *were*) respectively. The second phonological process that follows is the palatalization of /y/ in both examples

and lastly, the progressive assimilation of vowels of the pronoun, /ya/ in both examples, as shown below,

(3)   a. onwe (him) + ya (self) = onwie (himself/herself)
                /onwe/   /je/ ⟶ /oŋʷje/
                Self   3SG ⟶ Reflexive pronoun
                b. welị (took) +ya (it)   = welịá (took it)
                  /welụ/   /ja/ ⟶ /welịá/
               Take   3SG ⟶ Acc pronoun

The foregoing shows that assimilation, as a phonological process, manifests in a significant way in ME's arts and it contributes to the rhythmic effect achieved in the folk ballads.

3.1.2 Syllable Elision

Syllable elision is another phonological process identified in some works of ME but only few instances will suffice here. Crystal (2008) defines elision as the omission of sounds, syllables or words in spoken or written discourse. Just like vowel elision, syllable elision in most cases, is not the deliberate attempt of the speaker, but a linguistic process that occurs as speakers of language engage themselves in fast speech. There is syllable elision in the way ME pronounced some words as observed in the folk ballad '*Ọmekagụ*', where he says:

Excerpt 3:   Ndị be anyị,
                  Onye sị nwatakịrị jide nkapị,
                  Ya dobekwara ya mmiri ọ ga-eji waa kwaa aka.
                  Ọkwazị ihe jọgburu onwie, na mmadụ ga-afụ oke lulu onye ọzọ,
                  ọ welịa jee nye onye ọ sị na ya fụlụ n'anya.
                  (Our people,
                  He that sends a child to catch the mice,

Let him keep water which he will use to wash his
hands,
It's also something terrible itself, that one takes
another's portion,
then gives it to the one which he loves)
(ME., Greatest Hit, Vol. 2)

There is syllable elision in the fourth line where ME says
"Ọkwazị", instead of "Ọ bụ kwazị".

(4)   *Ọkwàzị̀* ihe jọgbu☐ru☐ ònwie...
                    (It's also something terrible itself)
                    (It is also a terrible thing)

In the above example, the syllable '*bụ*' was elided to ease
pronunciation, because instead of saying '*Ọ́ bụ̀ kwàzị̀*'… he says
'*Ọ́kwàzị̀*'… thereby eliding a syllable. Another instance of elision
in ME works can be found in the story in '*Ka e si lee onye isi oche*'
(How the chairman was sold), where ME was narrating how the
tortoise deceived the elephant, and (the tortoise) says to the
elephant,

Excerpt 4:   Mbe wee kunyie jebe na be Enyí, wee jee gaa gwa
              Enyí sị ya na eze ga-agbakwanụ ọfala. Eze sịkwu
              ya zie gị na *ọọ gị* ga-abụ onye isi oche.

              (The Tortoise arose and went to the Elephants house
              and told him that the king want to do the *ọfala*
              festival. The king also says that you will be the
              chairman of the occasion.

              (ME., Akụkọ n'Egwu Original, Vol.
)

From the above excerpt 4, the syllable elision in,
(5)   … *ọọ*☐ *gị́* gà-àbụ́ ónyé ísí óche☐

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(…It's you will be him head chair)
(…you will be the chairman)

…becomes very striking as ME's characteristic way of easing pronunciations in his works. In the above example, there is elision between the words 'ọ́' and 'gị́'. The syllable '*bụ*' was deleted here also for stylistic effect and for word economy.

3.2 Morphological Level

At the morphological level, emphasis is placed on how morphemes are combined to form words. Aronoff & Fudeman (2006:2) define morphology as the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure and how they are formed. They also define morphemes as the smallest linguistic pieces with a grammatical function. Some of the morphological (word formation) processes are reduplication, compounding, clipping, blending, loan words, back formation and slangs. However, few of these morphological processes have been observed in ME's folk ballads, such as, reduplication, loan words and the use of derived nouns.

3.2.1 Reduplication

Reduplication as a morphological process takes place at the base, root, stem of a lexeme. (Spencer & Zwicky, 2001:130). It the process of forming new words by repeating or copying a part of or the entire root, base or stem of a word as the case may be. In some of ME folk ballads, several words were reduplicated for the purpose of emphasis. It is important to point out that the reduplicated expressions in ME works are mostly adverbs. This can be extended to mean that, in Igbo language adverbs are often reduplicated. Let us instantiate this claim by looking at some examples of reduplication that were observed in the works of ME.

In, '*Ebinu nwe ude*', the reduplication of the verb "anaba" as shown below

Excerpt 5:

Udeeze nwanne (2x)	(Udeeze brother (2x)
Ife melụ be anyị	Something happened in our place
Nwoke atụrụ ime	A man became pregnant
Akwụ chara n'ọmụ	Palm fruit grew on the palm font
Ji e siri n'ite epuo ome	Boiled yam has grew stem
Udeeze na anyị *anaba anaba*	Udeeze we are going..

Response:

Ebinu nwe ude!	*Ebinu nwe ude*!)

(ME. Akụkọ n'Egwu Vol. 2)

The reduplicated words in the above excerpt (5) are in the sixth line, where ME says *Udeeze na anyị ànábá a☐nábá* (Udeeze we are going going). In the above data the new word "anaba" was formed by reduplicating an existing word "anaba" with the aim of emphasis on the action. It is important to note that adverbs are often reduplicated in Igbo does not imply that all reduplicated expressions are adverbs Another example of reduplication can be found in '*Mgba e nwude akpụlụ*', where ME reduplicated free morphemes for the purpose of providing additional information on time. ME says:

Excerpt 6:

> Ya ka emekatazịrị, ọ bụlịa bụ na Nkịta enyeedị Ọmekaọtụrụkpa efe ọbụna. Bịa na bie, tiwara ụzo na bie, manyie ọgụ ***ozigbo ozigbo***. Ya na ya gburugburugburu! O welụ isi tunyie Ọmekaọtụrụkpa tụọ n'ana. Welụ eze gbado ya n'akpịlị, tawaanya nko akpịlị, tarie ya nkọlọ ***ozigbo ozigbo***, ọ nyeroọdịa efe. Welụ aka naabọ gbudo ya n'ọnụ, welụ eze nyaa ya agba, wee kpụlụzia

Ọmekaọtụrụkpa wee pụtaba, kpụlịa ***alụmanị alụmanị.***

(The dog did not give Omekaoturukpa any breathing space. He broke his way into his house and started fighting him immediately. Both of them started fighting. He jacked Omekaoturukpa up with his head and threw him on the floor. He grabbed Omekaoturukpa's throat with his teeth and tore his glottis immediately, he did not give him any space. He put his two hands in his mouth and dragged him out carelessly.)

(ME., Akụkọ n'Egwu Original, Vol. 2)

The reduplication of "ozigbo" (immediately) and "alụlụmanị" (wickedly) in the above excerpt (6) provides more information on the time and manner of action. The words were all reduplicated for emphasis purposes. "Ozigbo" was reduplicated to give the listener information on the readiness of Nkita (dog) to defeat his adversary Ọmekaọtụrụkpa, when he says:

(6)   Ṅkịta àmanyie ọgụ ozigbo ozigbo

         (Dog fought him immediately immediately)

         (The dog started fighting him immediately)

On the other hand, "alụlụmanị" was reduplicated to create an image of the manner of action taken by the Nkita, after defeating Ọmekaọtụrụkpa and for emphasis.

(7) ...kpụlịa ***alụlụmanị alụlụmanị***

    (...dragged him wickedly wickedly)

    (dragged him carelessly)

By emphasizing on the manner at which the dog dragged Ọmekaọtụrụkpa (alụmanị alụlụmanị), the listener connects with the shame that fell on the character in the story.

3.3 Syntactic Level

Syntax is the branch of linguistics that studies the internal structure of sentences (Agbedo 2000:97). Crystal (2008:471) also defines syntax as the study of the rule that governs the way words are combined to form sentences in a language. At the syntactic level, some syntactic processes were observed in ME's folk ballad. They were used to convey meanings that appeal to the audience at the phrasal, clausal and sentential level. Prominent among them are: focusing, negation and question formation.

3.3.1 Topicalisation

Topicalisation occurs when a constituent of a sentence is moved from its position to the front of the sentence so that it functions as the topic of that sentence (Crystal, 2008); while topic itself is the entity that a speaker identifies about which the information, the comment, is given Krifka (2007:40). Topicalisation is observed in M.E's '*Obiakọ*', where he says:

Excerpt 7:

Obiakọ obi nwa m,	Awanzenze! (2x)
Nyekene mụ ijele mụ	Awanzenze!
Ijele mụ ji agba mgba	Awanzenze!
Ọ bụrụ na be mmụọ	Awanzenze!
Ijele mu na-akpa ike	Awanzenze!...
(Obiako obi my son,	Awanzenze!
Give me my Ijele	Awanzenze!
The *Ijele* that I use in wrestling	Awanzenze!
If it is in the home of the spirits	Awanzenze!
My *Ijele* is Active	Awanzenze!
	(ME. Greatest Hit Vol. 2)

When we look at the boldened utterance in line 3 where ME says:

(8)   a.   *Ìjèlè mú̩ jì àgbá m̄́gbá*
                     (Ijele that I use in wrestling)

It can be seen that the mystical element, *Ijele* is topicalised as it conveys the most relevant information in the discourse, while the rest of the proposition comments talk about the topic. The base position of *Ijele* prior to its movement is shown in the reconstructed structure below:

(8)   b. Mú̩ jì *Ìjèlè* àgbá m̄́gbá
             (I use Ijele while wrestling)

In the construct above (9b), *Ijele* is moved from the object position as in example 9a to the sentence initial position for the purpose of emphasis. In the folk ballad, *Ijele* is a good luck charm used by the protagonist (Omekagu's father) in the story. Another example of this linguistic feature is observed in *Ife U̩wa bu̩ a na-eme o̩ di̩ ka a di̩ eme,* where ME was describing the thick forest Nti̩ajo̩okwu has gone to commit suicide, he says;

Excerpt 8:   O̩ wee jee n'ebe nwannie nke okenye a na-enyibe efi
                     o si ebe a chi̩li̩ ofu u̩do̩ wee jebe n'ime o̩fi̩a jebe
                     n'okotoko o̩fi̩a a na-adi̩ aba aba na mbu̩. *O̩fi̩a a bu̩
                     o̩fi̩a a na-atu̩fu ajo̩ ife oge gboo na be fa*.
                     (He went to his brothers' ranch and took a cow rope
                     and headed for a deep forest that no one enters. This
                     forest is where their people dispose evil things in
                     the olden days.)
                     (ME., Aku̩ko̩ n'Egwu Vol. 3)

In the italicised utterance *Ó̩fi̩á a bù̩ ó̩fi̩a□ a□ nà-àtú̩fù ájo̩□ ífe□ ógè gbo□o□ nà bé fa□* (This forest is where their people dispose evil things in the olden days), *O̩fi̩a* is topicalised because it is the entity which the rest of the proposition is talking

about in this context. The sentence is also rendered in a topic-comment structure. Note also that *ofịa* was moved from the lower part of to the sentence initial position even though the lower copy is retained. ME seem to employ topicalisation as one of the strategies of describing the characters in his ballad.

3.3.2 Negation

Another syntactic process employed in ME folk ballads is Negation. Negation is a process in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence's meaning (Crystal 2008:323). It is a universal principle of human language because it has been discovered that all human languages have a way of negating an affirmative sentence. Although the main strategy of marking negation in Igbo is through the use of the negative inflectional suffix –ghị and its variants (e.g. rọ,) , there are other strategies such as the use of inherently negative auxiliary verbs; tonal alternation and contrastive focus. (Ndimele, 2009: 122).   Consider the following examples from *Elulubelube* one of the folk ballad by ME, where he said

Excerpt 9:   Elulubelube Elulubelube Elulubelube (2x)

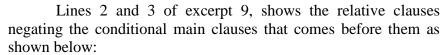Ọ bụ na nna m nọ nso na *nna m agaghị ekwe m jee ya bụ egwu*

Ọ bụ na nwanne m nọ nso, *nwanne m agaghị ekwe m jee ya bụ egwu*

Ọ bụrụ na aka dị nne m, nne m aka eme ife a sị sị mee

Ife a sị sị mee ma ya bụ na ebutere isi nwa ya.

Elulubelube Elulubelube Elulubelube (2x)

(ME., Akụkọ n'Egwu Vol. 3)

Lines 2 and 3 of excerpt 9, shows the relative clauses negating the conditional main clauses that comes before them as shown below:

(9)   a.   …ǹná m☐ àgà**ghị́** ékwé m☐ jeè yá bụ☐ égwu☐

         (…my father will not permit me go for the dance)

        b.   …nwánne☐ m☐ àgà**ghị́** ékwé m☐ jeè yá bụ☐ égwu☐

         (…my brother will not permit me go for the dance)

The formation of negation in the above examples (9a) and (9b) is indicated by the presence of the negative marker '–**ghị**'. Another instance of negation is found in between the narrative of the same folk ballad *Elulubelube* as shown in the excerpts below.

(10)   a.   ... *ọ́ bụ☐rụ☐ ọ́gwụ̀ nà ọ́ **méelè**,*

        (That it will never work)

        b.   *Agbaizu an**ọọ**zịkwanụ̀ ńdụ̀*

        (Agbaizu is not even alive)

        c.   ... *ọ̀ nwér**ọ**☐ ónyé ga☐-e☐sò yá weé rié éwu☐ á*

        (Nobody will eat the goat with her)

In (10a)' negation is expressed by use of the negative auxiliary verb *me.* On the other hand, in (10b&c), it is achieved by the use of the negative inflectional suffix *–rọ* which is a variant of '-ghị'. In (10b), however, the 'r' in *–rọ* is partially elided by a process of syncope but it the negative morpheme is fully expressed in (11c) **.**

3.3.3 Question Formation

Questions are typically used to elicit information or a response. They express a desire for more information, usually requesting a reply from the listener except for rhetorical questions which do not require a response. (See, Crystal 2008: 400). In Igbo language, there are two main types of question: Yes-No question and content

word question (CWQ). Yes-No questions elicit yes or no answers which are marked by low tone, while content questions may elicit yes-no answers in addition to a statement. CWQs are marked by the words like *onye* 'who' *kedụ*, *ebee*, *olee*, *ebee* (see Uwalaka 1991, Mbah 2011, Nwankwegu 2015, Nweya 2016). Instances of this syntactic feature were observed in some of the excerpt drawn from ME's *Onye ori ụtaba* where ME sings

Excerpt 10:   Akụebube akụebube (2x)

          Kedụ ife m mere mmadụ ji akpụlụ m n'ọnụ? (2x)

          Ọ bụ mụ bụ mbụ na-enwerọ ikwu?

          Kaọbụ mụ bụ mbụ na-enwerọ ibe?

          Anya nke onye ka onye (2x)

          Ogbenye dịbụ mbụ adị.

          Aiyoo! Aiyoo!!

          (Akuebube Akuebube (2x)

 What have I done to warrant being on people's lips? (2x)

 Am I the first without relatives?

 Or am I the first without friends?

 I have said it times without number (2x)

 The poor has been around since the beginning of time

 Aiyoo! Aiyoo!!)

From the above excerpt 10, question formation was observed from line 2-4 where ME says,

      (11)   a.   *Kèdụ́* ífé m☐ mèrè m̀mádụ̀ jì ákpụ̀lụ́ m n'ọnụ? (2x)

               b. *Ọ bụ̀* mụ́ bụ mbụ na-enwerọ ikwu?

               c. Ka *ọ̀ bụ* mụ́ bụ mbụ na-enwerọ ibe?

Let us consider another example of question formation in ME's work titled *Ife Ụwa Bụ A Na-Eme Ọ dị Ka A Di Eme*, where Ntịajọokwu asked the cripple he met at the evil forest and said

(12)

a.   Ọ̀ weé jụ̀ọ́ nwá n□gwụ□lọ́ a sị́ yá, "*gị́nị́* kà ị́ nọ̀ ébé a□ e□mé? (He asked the crippled and said, "what are you doing here?")

In the examples above, (11a) and (12a) are CWQs. This is evident by the presence of the CWQ markers like, *kedụ ife* (what is) (12a.) and *gịnị* (what) (13a) all meaning 'what'. In contrast, (11b & c) are yes-no questions. Yes-no questions are marked tonally in the language. Hence, the low tone question marker is borne by the 3rd person singular pronoun *ọ̀* in the two sentences that seem to form a compound. The question constructions add some aesthetic or stylistic effect on the folk ballads.

3.3.4 Ellipsis

The next syntactic process identified in ME folk ballads is ellipsis. According to Crystal (2008:166), it is a term used in grammatical analysis to refer to a sentence where, for reasons of economy, emphasis or style, a part of the structure has been omitted, which is recoverable from a scrutiny of the context. In M.E's folk ballads, there are instances where a part of the structure is omitted mostly for the reasons of economy and style. Consider these examples as observed in excerpt 11, lines 2 and 3 where ME says,

(13)

a.   Ọ́ **bụ**□ nà ńnà m□ nọ̀ ǹsó na ǹná m□ àgàghị́ ékwé m□ jeè yá bụ□ égwu□

b.   Ọ́ **bụ**□ nà nwánne□ m□ nọ̀ ǹsó, nwánne□ m□ àgàghị́ ékwé m□   jeè yá bụ□ égwu□

In the examples above (13 a &b), the **–rv** inflectional affix attached to the boldened verb is omitted. The affix marks conditionality in the statement. The full form is *ọ bụ-rụ…* The reason for ME use of ellipsis in the above example is to economise words and promote rhythm through parallelism.

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

This study has linguistically analysed selected folk ballads of ME at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. From the analysis, two phonological processes: vowel assimilation and syllable elision; one morphological process, reduplication; four syntactic processes: topicalisation, negation, question formation and ellipsis were identified in ME folk ballads. This shows that ME's work does not only possess literary features as suggested by Oraegbunam (2018) but also some linguistic features. These linguistic features have some aesthetic effect in the songs and also expose the creativity of the composer. This study underlines the need for further linguistic analysis of other Igbo folksongs where abundant untapped data exist.

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