

LANGUAGE AND MUSIC: THE INSEPARABLE COMBINATION OF ARTS

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Abstract

Music is life and life is music. Every day to day life of an average human being, irrespective of gender, race or culture revolves around music. Its importance and relevance in ceremonies, festivals and diverse occasions can never be over emphasized; its uses and benefits to man and space is of great importance. On the other hand, language is life, humans are created to communicate since life is built and maintained on communication. Any day that goes by without any communication is best never existed. Man and animals are created that way hence no man is an island. Music and language are inseparable since there is no music outside sound and sound is language. When music and linguistics combine together, they infuse in man a harmonious and rhythmic feeling that helps us change the way we feel, think and react to situations. The combination of the duo provides us with a means to share our intentions and emotions regarding our lives. This review ex-rays the ethos and pathos on inseparable combination of Music and Linguistics.

Keywords: Music, Linguistics, the language of music, inseparable combination of Arts

Introduction

Music is life and life is music. Music is communicative because it is expressed by words. Dewey and Anderson in Dobrian (1992) assert:

If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence. Talking about music is like dancing about architecture. People talk about music in an effort to discover to what extent their experience of it and the significance they attribute to it are personal, and to what extent its significance is actually “contained” in the sonic information (and thus available to others who receive the same information). Interest in this question comes from a desire to communicate knowledge, to share knowledge (possess common knowledge), and perhaps even from a desire to impose knowledge on others. We choose the medium of verbal language because we are uncertain of the extent to which music is a shared system of communication and what we actually wish to communicate, share or impose is not music but ideas about music ... ideas evoked by music. (p. 2)

Furthermore, Dobrian (1992) explained the above when he said “we will never successfully communicate music in any medium other than music. However, not all ideas expressed by music are solely musical ideas. Musical symbols or clichés may refer to extra-musical ideas, or music may, by its very formal construction, express abstract or visual concepts. Such ideas can be and are much discussed. Music does not exist in a vacuum; it exists in and reflects a society and a culture, and thus can refer to a whole world of ideas. Indeed there is hardly any idea or concept which has not at some time been, or could not potentially be, related to music” (p. 2).

All the above is telling us how much music deals with all works of life. Every known subject has a great and good relationship with music because of its uniqueness. And in the context of this research work, music and linguistics are an inseparable combination. What then is music?

Music is a code; it is a universal language of the soul. A language understood by all from cradle to grave. Music is the combination of organized sound that appeals to the ear. Music is as important as life and a gift from God. Agu (2006) believes “it is an aesthetic art of combining or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear” (p.1). Music is very beneficial to all round development of man. Its benefits surpass human understanding and it is a subject that cannot be relegated to the background. Researches abound on the importance of music in all round benefit of man. Esimone (2012) observed:

Many things tend to influence life and reveal clear changes in character, and music is so effective and very prominent at such. It goes beyond organized sounds that please the ear to penetrating the innermost being of man, to cause a conspicuous change in the attitudes of man. (p. 1)

Music is performed in every nook and cranny of the world and in Africa, it is the bedrock of entertainment, no occasion or ceremony or activities happen without music in African. Ibekwe (2009) asserts “Music in the African context can be summarized as human intent expressed into action to communicate ideas, portray culture, symbolize event, socialize people, stimulate emotion and other related functions” (p. 182). Music is a necessity to life; because it empowers, instills and involves with it the necessary qualities an individual needs to explore the world around him. Music is sound, but spoken sound, though the instrumental section of it is unspoken, yet the beating of the instruments itself is spoken, because the instrument is communicating; and that is why music is linguistics, it is communicative, there is no meaning in music without its communicative ability, that’s why music and linguistics are two inseparable arts. Music communicates; it is its communication ability that gives it the power to penetrate the human emotions that in turns causes the changes that occur in man, as a result of what the ear heard and the emotions feel.

The Language of Music

Language is a structured system of communication used by humans, based on speech and gesture (spoken language), sign or writing. The main function of language is communication. Thus, linguistic communication encompasses widely diverse uses of language. So also is music. Music is a language. Like spoken language, music is rhetorical. The language of music has grammar and punctuation. It has phrases and sentences, loud and soft, fast and slow, accents and dramatic silences. In speech and music alike, timing is everything. As Rousseau (1993) noted, music and language share some common ancestor. Rousseau (1993) stresses further that language evolved out of music for the sake of a rational organization of human societies. Rousseau’s view above is in support of Spencer (1857) and Brown (2000) argument that both language and music are used to express emotive meaning through variations in the intonation of the voice (intonational prosody) and rhythm. In both language and music, therefore, emotional excitement is expressed through fast, accelerating, and high-registered sound patterns (Besson and Schon, 2006). In Besson and Schon’s (2006) view, just as rhythm and the temporal ratios delineate a piece of music by the formalized segmentation of time and sound continuum into discrete pitches that form the musical scales so also is language composed of sequential events that unfold in time with a specific rhythm and specific segmental (phonemes) and suprasegmental (prosody) information.

Language and music, therefore, are universal and inseparable arts in that both involve organized acoustic sequences and engage complex cognitive and motor processes (Patel and Daniele, 2003). A number of scholars have examined the relationship that exists between language and music across different disciplines (Palmer & Kelly, 1992; Besson *et al.* 1998; Besson and Schon, 2006) and have come to terms that there are two identified areas of interest. First is the prosodic structure, which examine the way duration, pitch and intensity create structured rhythmic and melodic patterns in speech and music (Jusczyk & Krumhansl, 1993; Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1983) and secondly, the syntactic structure which focuses on the way discrete elements are combined in hierarchical fashion to form coherent sequences in the two domains (Patel, 1998; Swain, 1997).

On this note, Fedorenko *et al.* (2009) argued that the domains of language and music share a number of similarities at the sound level, at the structure level, and in terms of general domain properties. First, as Handel (1989) and Patel (2008) noted both language and music involve temporally unfolding sequences

of sounds with a salient rhythmic and melodic structure. Secondly, from Bernstein (1976) and Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) view, both language and music are rule-based systems in which a limited number of basic elements (words in language, single tones and chords in music) can be combined to generate an infinite number of higher order structures (sentences in language, harmonic sequences in music). And finally, in the words of McDermott and Hauser (2005), both appear to be universal human cognitive abilities, and have been argued to be unique to our species. All these are in support of the fact that music and linguistics are two inseparable components. The question now is, what is linguistics, what relationship and/or similarity exists between music and linguistics?

Linguistics

Linguistics is the systematic study of the structure and evolution of human language, and it is applicable to every aspect of human endeavor. It deals with the investigation of how people acquire their knowledge about language, how this knowledge interacts with other cognitive processes, how it varies across speakers and geographic regions, and how to model this knowledge computationally. The study of linguistics thus involves how to represent the structure of the various aspects of language (such as sounds, be it musical sound, or meaning, musical and linguistics), how to account for different linguistic patterns theoretically, and how the different components of language interact with each other (Aronoff and Rees-Miller (2000), Sinha (2005); Akmajian *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, according to Sinha (2005) and Halliday (2006), linguistics is a field of study that applies scientific approach to the study of language. The most popular definition of linguistics therefore is that it is a scientific study of language. The two significant key words here are “scientific study” and “language”. Linguistics applies the general methodology of science to the study of language. Its application of scientific approach involves the analysis of every aspect of language methods employed in studying and modeling them. (p. 48, 262)

Going by the further explanation of linguistics and its similarity to music; music itself is a branch of science that studies the movement of sound from its inception to the medullar oblongata of the human brain, through the medium of air that gets to the ear drum and then to the brain where the sound gets selected, organized and interpreted. Sound in itself is a language hence the importance of Linguistics or components of language cannot be over emphasized especially when combined with music.

People make different kinds of music through their languages and lingual fracas. In fact, music making is enjoyed more when it is made in our indigenous languages or mother tongue. Nations of the world, towns and villages make different music according to their culture and language, which no doubt educates, influences and imparts on their environment what they desired. All of these show the importance of language in music. To this Nattiez (1973) opined:

Linguistics, that is the method used to describe a language, might be relevant to musical analysis. It therefore becomes pertinent to explore the role of linguistics and music as inseparable since there is no music outside sound, and sound for that matter is language. Thus linguistics representation of music is a symbolic representation; because specific musical compositions can be represented in terms of linguistics through the tools of linguistics concepts. (p. 51)

From all the above, it is obvious that there are strong similarities that exist between music and linguistics which serve as a temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound. There combination no doubt is a state of the Art because they are sources of communication that go beyond the making of a sound through talking but purely making music.

Ethos and Pathos of Linguistics and Music fused together

Ethos could be said to mean the distinctiveness of something when compared to other things. It could mean the peculiarities accrued to something that is not seen in other things. In this case, it means the distinctiveness of linguistics and music when fused together as compared to other subjects. Pathos on the other hand talks on the style of something that has the power to evoke feelings. Music has all the ability to evoke all kinds of feelings because it deals with emotions. Any kind of emotional display can

be seen when music is involved. This therefore implies that, depending on the kind of emotion that an individual wants, music has all it takes to give it; be it positive or negative. In view of the above, Copeland in Dorian (1992) observed:

Music expresses, at different moments, serenity or exuberance, regret or triumph, fury or delight. It expresses each of these modes, and many others, in a numberless variety of subtle shadings and differences. It may even express a state of meaning for which there exists no adequate word in any language. In that case, musicians often like to say that it has only a purely musical meaning. They sometimes go farther and say that all music has only a purely musical meaning. What they really mean is that no appropriate word can be found to express the music's meaning and that, even if it could, they do not feel the need of finding it. (3).

Music has a very unique ability that is absolutely infused inside the emotion of man. This theory according to the researcher is beyond the comprehension of the human mind and that is why, this credit could only be so, courtesy of the Creator. God created music for the man and his all-round enjoyment and gave it as an expressive gift full of power that can do all things. Dobrian (1992) in agreement with the above view asserts: "my own belief is that all music has an expressive power, some more and some less. But that all music has a certain meaning behind the notes and that that meaning behind the notes constitutes, after all, what the piece is saying, what the piece is about". This is a fact, and this fact is real because just the notes without any meaning or source are very incomplete.

Music is grouped into three sections: voice, dance and instrumental music. Each of these three has so many roles it performs on our emotions and our reasoning. Whatever emotion they portray, our voice particularly are performed on different languages depending on our culture, race and even gender and most especially depending on what the performer wants to pass across to his audience. Our vocal indigenous music is performed based on our native languages, and without native languages, be it vocal or performative; our indigenous music will not be heard, known nor preserved. This proves that language and music are very indispensable.

There is no denying the fact that language is very indispensable in music making because there is no voice without language. Even our dance and instrumental music are performed based on linguistics, because such music is enjoyed base on the understanding of the lyrics which though, may be conspicuously absent but indirectly present. Composers write their music with the understanding of semiotic imports they want their music to have on their audience as well as what impart they want their music to have on them. The performers also perform with an understanding of the composer's intentions and make sure the desires of the composer on the audience are achieved.

Conclusion

Drawing from the above reviews, the implication of the facts above is that music fused with linguistics is an inseparable combination, since there is no voice without language, and language is very indispensable in music making. The different stages music undergoes (from composition to performance) is an evidence in support of the resemiotization involved in music as shown in the way meaning is transformed from one semiotic system to another. As a point of reference, composers write their music with an understanding of language and meaning of what they want to pass across to their audience as well as what impart they want their music to have. In the same vein, the performer (singer) performs with an understanding of the composer's intentions while ensuring that the desires of the composer on the audience are achieved. In this way, music and linguistics are projected as inseparable combination.

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