

LANGUAGE AND MEANING OF WORDS IN IBIBIO MUSIC COMPOSITION

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Abstract

In every culture or society of any geographical location, with characteristics of norms and values system 'language', is a driving force that propels communication. It is widely used and accepted as a means of expression. It influences the general life styles of the people through music. In music 'Texts' are words that help the listeners (audience) appreciate the message passed across by the singer or better still, the composer of a song. Music composition is language driven, and this is peculiar to Africans as it aid verbal communication amongst its tribes and also communicates emotions. This paper therefore, in looking at language as it relates to music and the society, examines the roles of language and some meaning of text (words) in Ibibio music composition.

Introduction

Language is a very important tool amongst humans of any given geographical location. It gives recognition and identity and also nationality to a particular race in a given country. According to Hall, in (2005) he sees language as: 'an institution for communication'. For him and others, language, exist for the expression of or ideas. As a human institution, language is used in society and is seen as part of

the society's culture. Okon, also in (2003) sees language as: 'the cultural embodiment of a particular group in that, the group's language is used to portray ideas, emotions, desires and the thought pattern of the people'. This, then, presupposes that language, music and culture are all related and interwoven. According to Webster Dictionary (1998) - language is viewed abstractly as a system of forms and conventions used for communication in a community. It could be the use of words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them to make meaning to the community where it is established. It could also be in form of signs (arts) or symbols adopted by communities, and professionals for easy communication. In other instance, language and music are used as means of documentation and also as a means of expressing their values. In doing that, language becomes a major symbol of their communication. Akpabot (1986) asserted that: African music borrows much from vocal music which in turn is tied to speech melody and speech rhythm. Speech melody and speech rhythm are inter-related. Language or its speech rhythm then becomes a major factor of consideration in music composition in Africa. In Africa cultures, languages promotes traditions, customs, norms and values; it is an avenue through which a people of a culture identify and also constitutes themselves which are in turn passed from one generation to another. According to the assertion as asserted by Okon (2007), he stated that: there is no society without a culture and language must and, does perform its function as a vehicle of cultural transmission.

Every culture of a geographical location reveals the identity of the people within with a number of things shared in common which of course includes their belief system, their language, their costume, and their music. Thus, language and music are one of the core characteristics in a culture. Corroborating this, Adesina (2008) assert that: you cannot have core value if you do not have culture.

Language and Music

In Africa and diaspora, music is used for several purposes as it is part and parcel of a culture of a society. It is used as a medium through which the norms and values of a community are passed from one generation to another generation for the sole aim of preserving culture. These communications are verbal, which are, in music, the composition and/or the arrangements of words that characterize its texts (lyrics). The meaning of the words as used in a composition determines how much communication is enhanced and understood. Accordingly, Vidal (2002) stated that: music is a play with sound, a paragon of the experience and activities of man; a reflection of those experiences and activities as well as a model to both. To the Africans, music is an art; and there is hardly an activity or ceremony of any sort without music as it constitutes expression of emotions and feeling being the function that characterizes man and his environment. It communicates cautions, corrections, warning, and even war hence the choice of words used if not appropriate can be misleading because its meaning is not well or properly construed. Yekini-Ajenifuja (2004) corroborated this when he stated that:

music involves all other areas of interaction in the communities such as religion, recreational and rites, among other. However, music remains the application of sounds that reflects the values of the society where it is established in order to stimulate the emotion of its audience to a reaction.

As stated earlier, language is a very important identity of a particular people within a geographical location. It influences all the aspects of life such as - belief, norms, values, socials, styles and ways, dressing including music. It is a major factor and character of music whether vocal or instrumental as both are 'sound' inclined. Hornby (2000) defined language as: The system of sounds and words, used by human to express their thoughts and feelings. The means in a given ethnic

language is used in composition, and also expressed in music. It is used in music to properly communicate the emotions, beliefs and customs of the people. The meanings of every words used communicates a proper understanding thereby building confidence and strength and foster relationship amongst the people. Encarta (2009) defines language as: communication among spoken or written symbols with agreed upon meanings. These spoken-gesture-signaled communication involves the same process for all humans, and any human language can convey any human thought; nevertheless, the actual languages spoken in the world are numerous, and they differ vastly in their sound systems and grammatical structures. In his views on the relationship of language and culture Kramsch (2010) stated that:

Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. The words people utter refer to common experience. They express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. Words also reflect their author's attitudes and beliefs, their point of view that are also those of others. In both cases, language expresses cultural identity.

In Webster Dictionary (1998), language is viewed abstractly as a system of forms and conventions used for communication in a community. Primarily, it could be the use of words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them to make meaning to the community where it is accepted. In some societies, language and music are used as means of documentation and also as a means of expressing their values. In doing that, language becomes a major symbol of their communication. Corroborating this, Akpabot (1986) stated that: African music borrows much from vocal music which in turn is tied to speech melody and speech rhythm. Speech melody and speech rhythm

are inter-related. Language or its speech rhythm then becomes a major factor of consideration in African music composition. It is worthy of note to state that language and music are practically intertwined in that, language is often times set into music and in the same vein music is also often set into language as the case may be. This is because language in music to the Africans, express deep meanings

Language and the Society

According to history, there are many African languages indigenous to the African continent. More than 2,000 different languages according to Microsoft © Encarta © 2009 are spoken in Africa. Apart from Arabic which is not confined to Africa, the most spoken African tongues are Swahili (about 35 million speakers) and Hausa (about 39 million speakers), both of which are used over wide areas as lingua franca. Several languages (often inaccurately termed dialects simply because they have few users or are under-researched) are spoken by only a few thousand people. Although very few African languages have written literature, the majority have long-standing traditions of oral literature. Nigeria is known for a heavy proportion of languages in comparison to other African countries of an estimated 2,058 languages in Africa, 500 are thought to be spoken in Nigeria. The official language is English (first taken to Nigeria by European traders before colonization), used in educational, governmental, business, the media, and other official domains.

Multilingualism is common among Nigerians through daily interactions and trade. The names of the three main peoples in Nigeria (the Hausa, the Igbo and the Yoruba) correspond to the languages spoken by these people. Yoruba and Hausa are the most widely spoken languages (with over 18.5 million speakers of each in Nigeria itself), followed by Igbo (around 18 million), and the Fulfulde (over 7.5 million) and Kanuri (3 million). Ibibio among others are the minor national languages spoken in

Nigeria. Many Nigerians also speak Nigerian Pidgin English (creolized in some areas), which is mutually intelligible with some other West African pidgins. This acts as a lingua franca across the many languages spoken in Nigeria and its use is growing in literature, advertising, television, newspapers and radio. Language as it relates to the society could be in form of communication (verbal), symbols or signs. The socio-cultural norms and values of man in his social environment, is the concept which deals with specific forms of organized pattern of interaction which occurs within the society. In the words of Charles (2003) he noted that:

cultures would not exist without language. He views language as a guide to social reality and argues that in every human society, people are very much at the mercy of the particular language which is the medium of expression for the society.

He further opined that: the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built on the language habit of the group. Corroborating this, Smeets (2006) asserts that: as human kind's principal means of communication, language do not merely convey messages, they also express emotions, intentions and values, confirm social relations and transmit cultural and social expressions and practices. Hence, in every society like the Akwa Ibom, there is a common language that is peculiar and related to that of other related society. Though, Ibibio language is a general language, there are still some other ethnic within Akwa Ibom with their peculiar dialect. According to Merriam (1964), he assert that: music is a universal phenomenon just like language. It exists only in terms of social interaction and it is a learned behaviour. It involves the behaviour of learned individuals and groups of individuals. Owing to this assertion, a group of individuals who in the course of searching for greener pastures have come to stay in the same society other than theirs, are opportune to learn other languages and even their music which are basic characteristics of a society.

Language and Music of Ibibio and Society

According existing literatures, the Ibibio migrated from the Central Benue Valley into the present South-Eastern Nigeria (Inyang 1991). The Ibibio are found predominantly in Akwa Ibom State in the South-South geo-political zone. Ibibio is identified by a people and their language. Ibibio is spoken predominantly in Akwa Ibom State and in the neighbouring States where Ibibio people reside. The language originally belongs to the Benue-Congo family. A further sub-classification shows Ibibio as belonging to the lower Cross. Ibibio and other genetically related languages have been classed under what Essien (1990) refers to as Ibibiod, a term which in essence, captures the common origin/history of the language and the people (Urua 2000). As we have noted earlier, language and culture are closely related. We would want to state that without language there will be no culture and vice-versa. Okon (2007) asserts that culture is the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society.

Kottak (2004) on the other hand, views culture as: a set of control mechanism, plans, recipes, rules, instructions for the governing of behaviour. Wardhaugh (2000) asserts that: language forms a vital aspect of the socio-cultural behaviour which in turn forms part of the society's value system and patterned way of life shared by the people. In the Ibibio society, therefore, Ibibio language is tightly knit with Ibibio culture and together, they identify the individual or group as being distinctly Ibibio. The Ibibio society is an organized society. A number of social institutions are put in place which Ottong (2004) noted, are seen as: the principal instruments whereby the essential tasks of social life are organized, directed and executed. This, therefore, insinuates that, the established ways of behaving and/or ways of life lies within. These social institutions which form part of the Ibibio culture are embodied in the Ibibio language and reflect in the

ethics of their norms and values. According to Agawu (2003) he submits that:

Language and music occupy different levels in the hierarchy of modeling system. As the primary means of communication in the society, language is higher because it has conceptual priority over music. On the other hand, music, because it remains indispensable, and because it includes and at the same time transcends languages more pragmatic function, often lead us into realms that are experientially higher than language.

Hence, just like the language and music of other African countries, the language and music of Ibibio are inseparable arts that cohabit in three domains of man which are - cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains which becomes active and functional to both the performer and the audience alike. Ibibio language used in a music composition creates an avenue to help in the understanding of the text (words) and its meaning as this drives home the emotional thoughts, and also the interpretation it carries as intended by the composer/writer. This, also, presupposes that for any information to be disseminated effectively through music, the role of language is inevitable; an in-depth meaning of every words as used must well ascertained. This if not properly researched especially by the non-Ibibio music composers, may become ordinary discourse, non-sense or even a taboo.

Language and Meaning of text (Words) of Ibibio Music Composition

Subject to the context of this paper, it is important to establish that Ibibio people are seen in the light of the ethnical relatedness of the traditional Northern Ibibio, Southern Ibibio, Western Ibibio, Central Ibibio, and Riverine Ibibio. The Ibibio people are distinctive ethnic group found predominantly in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria with a population of about four million people. They are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, according to Ukim, (2020);

Demographic Nigeria (n.d); Okonofua and Ukim, (2016). The Ibibio has several networks of independent sub-groups comprising Efiat, Okobo, Andoni, Efik, Ibeno. Oron, Eket and Annang communities. Udo (1983; Ukim, 2020; Minahan, 2002 and Ekanem, 2000). The traditional art exhibition of these sub-groups which is an affiliate of a people's cultural practices and language of communication are similar in context. This is so because they are ethnically related (Udo, 1983). Their economic, religious, aesthetics and political institutions are all reforms enabling.

The music of the Ibibio people is uniquely rich in dance, songs and instruments, and symbols play very important roles. The songs in Ibibio are sung and played in social gatherings such as marriage, feast, coronation, birth, and so on. It is also used as a means of communication, warning, abusing, and treatment. The concept of Ibibio music is pre-determined and not by reactions; the mood and character of most of Ibibio music is cheerful and lively as expressed in bright melody. The tempo and dynamics often express bright mood, except in the case of death. According to Hugh (1963): The way African conceive music is different from the way Europeans do; to the Africans music is a word, meaning - vocal participation, the physical manipulation of instruments and rhythmic or dance movement associated with music. Furthermore, the traditional make-ups of Ibibio music are not entirely different from other ethnic groups in African, this is because compositional characteristics are not exclusive to one community, culture or country; one can extract the dominant musical concepts and procedures in a given area. Scholars like Agordor (2002) refer to this as: 'culture area concept', defined as geographic units whose inhabitants share a relatively homogenous cultural style. The song text is a medium for creative verbal expressions that reflects both personal and social experiences. Akpabot (1998), in looking at style and content of Yoruba and Hausa music states that: Ibibio oral poetry is most

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commonly found in song texts and invocations during ritual or non-ritual ceremonies.

Furthermore, he also highlighted 14 categories of song texts easily recognizable in African music, and they are - historical, communication, social, insult, obsessed, praise, children, funeral, work, war, humorous, women, philosophical, and ritual. All which he said can be grouped under three main headings: Praise Songs; Songs of Insult; and Songs for Entertainment. These song-texts, which are the exactly words used in music composition are the very focus of this paper; and will thus be examined.

Ibibio Text (words) and Their Meaning

Udoh (2014), observed that less attention is paid to the song text (which is the actual words of a song) in Ibibio music compositions, and it leads to a number non-appreciable sound in Ibibio language and music composition; Suggested guides to help composer of Ibibio music, especially the non-Ibibio composers and they as follows:

Vowel sounds common with the Ibibio are -

a, e, i, o, ɔ, u, ŋ.

a: (short 'a' sound) as in hard. It is pronounced as /ae/;
examples are - afo, abasi, akan, awo akang etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Afo	You
Abasi	God
Akan	Old
Awo	Person
Akang	Potash

e: (short 'e' sound) as in hate. It is pronounced as /e/ without dot(.) underneath;

examples are - ebot, ewa, edim, edi etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Ebot	Goat
Ewa	Dog
Edim	Rain
Edi	Pig

i: (long 'Ee' sound) as in heel. It is pronounced as /i:/; examples are - inua, iwo, ikwo, idem, idip, etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Inua	Mouth
Iwo	Nose
Ikwo	Song
Idem	Body
Idip	Stomach

o: (short 'o' sound) as in go. It is pronounced as /o/; examples are - owo, odudu, obu, obot, etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Owo	Person
Odudu	Power
Obu	Dust
Obot	Mountain

ɔ: (long 'Oo' sound) as in born. It is pronounced as /ɔ:/ 'c' turned the other way;

examples are - obong, ofong, otong, ofiong, etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Obong	Lord
Ofong	Cloth
Otong	Soap
Ofiong	Moon

u: (long 'Uu' sound) as in school. It is pronounced as /u:/; examples are - uwem, utom, udua, ufok etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Uwem	Life
Utom	Work
Udua	Market
Ufuk	House

ŋ: (combination of 'n' and 'g' sound - 'ng') as in hung. It is pronounced as /ŋ/; examples are - mmong, mbang, abong, ikpang, abang etc.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Mmong	Water
Mbang	Cheek
Abong	Mosquito
Ikpang	Spoon
Abang	Basin

Others are:

Iyak	Fish
Ikwa	Knife
Adisad	Comb
Ukwak	Iron
Nkukim	Nail
Afongisin	Wrapper

Umonoren	Mirror
Akebe	Box
Itam	Hat
Ufuk-ayo	Umbrella
Ikpo-ukod	Shoe
Ikpang	Spoon
Nkpo-itie	Chair
Ided	Hair
Usan	Plate
Akpokoro	Table
Afong-ukod	Trousers
Ukod	Leg
Ufok	House
Ataha-afong	Rag
Isin	Waist
Mkpoutank-iko	Phone
Ikang	Fire
Esio	Pot
Esiofere	Pot of soup
Afere	Soup
Ikpa	Cane
Enang	Cow
Enang-ukwak	Bicycle

And so on.

- Some Ibibio Names and their Meaning:

<u>Names</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Ubong (as in UbongAbasi)	Glory (as in Glory of God)

Ese (as in EseAbasi)	Testimony (as in God's Testimony)
Uduak (as in UduakAbasi)	Will (as in God's Will)
Kufre (as in Kufre Abasi)	Don't forget (as in Don't forget God)
Akan (as in Akanimoh)	Victory (as in Victory over wealth)
Imo (as in Imo Abasi)	Wealth (Wealth of God)
Nkeruwem	I'm bearing life
Abasiema	God's blevove
Emem (as in EmemObong)	Peace (God's peace)
Inyang	Sea
Ini (as in Ekemini)	Time (as in when it's time)
Ini (as in IniObong)	Season (as in God's season or time)
Akwaowo	Great man
Iyene	Riches
Ewongo	Covenant
Edikan	Victory
Ime (as in Ofonime)	Patience (as in Patience is good)
Udo	Second son
Akpan	First son
Eka (as in Ekaete)	Mother (as in ones father's mother)
Ete ete	Father's father

And so on.

- Some Ibibio Names with other Meanings:

<u>Names</u>	<u>Other Meanings</u>
Obong	Lord, cane or mosquito
Edet	name or teeth
Ofiong	moon or month
Obot	hill, mountain or creator
Usoro	party or name
Ete	Father, elderly man to say
Ime	Patience or perseverance

Ita
And so on.

Name or number as in 3

- Ibibio Greetings with their Meanings:

<u>Greetings</u>	<u>Meanings</u>
Mesiere	Goodmorning
Ekom do	Greetings there or Goodafternoon
Asiere	Till morning or Goodnight
K'e nam	Well-done
Daa do	Greeting
Song idem	Be Strong
Isong o*	Greeting
Tie do	Greeting
Meyong	Welcome or Are you back
Abadie	How are you
Idiok o	Not bad
Idem mfo o	How is your body
Asong	I'm well or I'm fine
Ka di o	Safe journey or Go come
Me kom o	I greet you
Bo ekom do	Accept my greetings
Ameyong	You are welcome
Mmeyong	I am back
Ame bak ayong	You are back early
Akpene usen	It's been a long time

Amongst the above Ibibio greetings above, are the highlighted greetings. They are the type of greetings in which the action of a person or group of persons are used to determine the greeting.

Daa do literarily means - 'stand there' but then it is a way of greeting;
Tie do literarily means - 'sit there' and it is also a way of greeting.

The highlighted greeting with asterick - Isong o, is a type of greeting used during a large congregation of Ibibio people; this could be town hall meeting, village meeting or traditional gatherings, which could be weddings, engagements or coronation (which could be installing a king, village head and so on). Same as Ino uyo o, Ufok mma, Idung mma, Mma'm ma de o.

In Ibibio language, a word can mean several things, names, or places and also, depending on the context to which it is used, open to different meanings and interpretations. Inappropriate use of words in Ibibio music composition creates confused tonal inflection especially when the words are not properly accented. Some words spelt and pronounced are to be thoroughly thought of as they can mean and sound different things. For instance, there are some words in Ibibio that end with the letter 't' when spelt, but in pronouncing them the 't' is changed to 'd' thereby replacing the 't'. There are also Ibibio words with tonal contrasts (that is words with more than one meaning):

- Some Ibibio Words with other meanings:

<u>Words</u>	<u>Other Meanings</u>
Edi	to come or pig
Obu	dust or crayfish
Ekpat	sack bag or to shift
Esang	walker's stick or to go ahead
Ikang	fire or gun or light
Abong	mosquito or cane
Udua	market or week
Akang	potash or to lie
Akpo	rubber or bone
Nto	pit or hole
Unam	meat or animal
Uduk	robe or pity

Afiong	moon or month
Ikpong	cocoa or alone
Itam	hat or name of a village
Ayaya	beautiful or name of a person
Ikim	urine or grasses
Ikwo	song or name
Ikot	faeces or bush
Kere	to think or to bear
Iyak	fish or to leave
Mbot	culvert or hill
Ubom	canoe or fatness
Usung	door or way or lump of 'eba'
Unen	right or hen
Edi	pig or to come
Utin	sun or name
Afang	vegetable leaves or space
Ukod	leg or in-law
Ete	father or Mr
Ikpe	judgement or name
Itie	position or to seat
Ese	testimony or to look
Essien	outside or name
Imoh	wealth or name
Idiok	bad or evil
Arit	to turn red or name
Ebong	to call or name
Eka	mother or to go
Ita	number or name
Ntong	saint-leave or dust or ashes
Ini	time or period or name
Ukpong	soul or name
Esit	heart or inside

Eyen	eye or baby
Iwang	farm or freely
Obong	Lord or whip
Eyong	heaven or above
Isong	earth or land or down
Ufang	passage or space
Ufiop	hot or heat
Afia	fair or white
Isin	waist or to put
Idip	stomach or pregnancy
Itong	neck or glutton
Ubok	hand or plead
Udia	yam or food
Afid	cutlass or all or boiled
Anem	sweet or name of fruit
Akim	dark or unripe or mine
Uwa	sacrifice or predicament
Akop	navel or to hear
Anwa	cat or outside
Edong	goat or kneel
Awan	wife or fight
Ufuk	odour or smell
Adu	hole or discussion
Mben	side or to take along
Ata	chew or spice or to stand a ground
Mkpo	mucor or thing
Ebok	monkey or to cook
Iba	pant or number
Uyo	voice or fruit or name of a town
Ikpo	big or great
Ayong	gong or up

Having looked at language as in relation to music and the society and the role of language and some meaning of text (words) in Ibibio music composition, it is strongly agreed that language is a key factor in Ibibio music composition just like other African languages. In conclusion, this paper has shown that to express and communicate with Ibibio language in music compositions, composers will have to devote himself/herself to the study of Ibibio idioms, phrases, and concepts of musical arts and most importantly, meanings of Ibibio words intended in their music compositions. This is in line with Omojola (1999), views that:

an understanding of the conception of music among communities in Africa would have to derive from a combination of factors such as the words used by the people to describe music, the contextual music performance, the organized procedures associated with music, the nature of the musical expression itself and the meaning intended in a musical performance.

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