

Language use in Anaañ women's marital play songs

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Abstract

Women's play songs are vital aspects of African verbal art. These songs are developed by women to reflect the cultural values of African society as well as the acceptable and deviant behaviour of the people. Since women are denied the opportunity to express their feelings in the traditional Anaañ, they devise a way of communicating their grievances and appreciation to society using songs. Language plays a very important role in the transmission of songs, while songs preserve the language/culture of the people as they are passed down from generation to generation. Songs promote values and evoke emotional reactions and sentiments in the minds of the listeners through language. This paper seeks to x-ray language use in Anaañ women's marital play songs. Materials used were elicited from female adult consultants from Anaañ-speaking communities in Akwa Ibom State. Findings reveal that the language of women's marital play songs serves as a pathway through which the community's cultural values are x-rayed. The songs are didactic in nature. The study recommends that much documentation of the songs should be preserved because they are almost going out of existence.

Keywords: Anaañ, marital play songs, language use, cultural values.

1. Introduction

The term *Anaañ* refers to both the language and cultural/ethnic group of people that live in the south-eastern region of Nigeria, occupying the north-central region of Akwa Ibom State. Anaañ is a homogenous group of people with a common linguistic background but with variations as recorded in Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Ukanafun, and Ika. The Anaañ people are in the former Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions of the Anaañ province in the former Eastern region of Nigeria.

Language is a system by which humans communicate. It is a way people in a particular linguistic community interact with one another and share their linguistic experiences. It expresses ideas, feelings, and thoughts. One way to test a language is in its usage. Using language, the creativity of the speaker or user is displayed. The creativity of the singer is made manifest in the symbolic expressions of the songs. These symbolic expressions x-ray the cultural heritage of the people which is transmitted from generation to generation. According to (Okafor, 2008) songs are integral to life. Songs bring life's activities closer to the people because, through the lyrics, people are informed, enlightened, rebuked, praised, etc. Language is dynamic, it can be manipulated to create new utterances which the speaker creates from his/ her linguistic ability, sometimes with codes peculiar to that speech community. Singers communicate their feelings through songs in a unique way. His/her intention determines how he/she says what. This makes women's songs highly metaphorical. Songs are conveyed through spoken language. Songs are organised within the framework of recreational, social, cultural, and political institutions. Ekong (2001, p 40) posits that certain attributes qualify a spoken piece as a song, and they must be:

1. organised meaningfully;
2. originate from the people and their culture;
3. continuously handed down from generation to generation, and this, when patterned in a meaningful way, forms a universal language of expression.

The sociocultural and traditional life of the Anaañ people is x-rayed in their cultural activities like songs, traditional events, festivals, etc. Bashir (1982) sees culture as a state of development in arts and thoughts existing in society and represented at various levels by its members. Bashir's viewpoint encompasses all human activities like songs, customs, dances, food, religion, language, tradition, and way of life. Culture, therefore, plays a very important role in the understanding of life in any given society, the feeling, beliefs, thoughts, and desires are modelled based on the pattern of expression of life's activities of an individual's community. In the olden days, people gathered by moonlight to give credence to their rich heritage. This heritage was expressed in terms of various performances including tales, narratives, riddles, songs, games, and other forms of performances. Most of these performances were accompanied by songs and dances. Women played a leading role in these performances. Besides this scene, the performances were also used at work, war, planting, harvesting, domestics, and other informal contexts. Today, such performances are eroding. Play songs are used for various purposes such as the description of characters, traditions that are not acceptable, vices, norms, and values. Women are good observers than their male counterparts. They use songs to communicate their feelings since women are not expected to be expressive. Women's songs range from day-to-day human activities to fundamental thoughts and beliefs crucial to the people's culture. Women's songs are seen as an agent of

change in the society. Folk songs are traditional songs. Women's songs are often poetic and contain a lot of rhymes and rhythms. They are rich in proverbs and stories about people's ways of life and moral lessons. Iwokedok (2009) classified play songs into Adult and child lore. She explains that women sometimes use songs to teach children basic values. Women teach children songs right from the cradle. Blacking (1976) explains that the lyrics of a song are appreciated through verbal presentations. The intelligibility of a language depends on the correct interpretation of the symbols of the language, hence, (Essien 2010) posits that language is a system of rules and principles in which sound, structure, and meaning are integrated for communication. This makes it a body of signals for communication by a whole community. To further explain this, (Iwokedok 2005) in her study stresses that African child lore promotes cultural continuity and language growth.

Songs convey messages, and the messages are expressed through language. Songs make use of certain elements like tone, length, stress and intonation. This gives rise to style of song. This element affects the meaning as any slight change in pitch results in a change in meaning. Language affects songs because of the speech tones which must be adhered to in songs. For a song to be appreciated, the language of the song must be understood.

This study examines the use of language in selected women's play songs in Anaañ, analyse the concept of the songs under review, and demonstrate the relevance of songs to the culture of the people. The scope of the work is restricted to seven Anaañ women's marital songs.

The data for the study were elicited from women's socio-cultural groups in three local government areas in Anaañ speaking community. Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara and Essien Udim. A non-participant approach was used for data collection for the primary data, while the secondary data were drawn from printed text. The glosses of the lyrics of the songs were also presented for the reader's understanding of the songs. The significance of this study is to contribute to the development of the Anaañ language for posterity.

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the conceptual metaphor theory. This theory explains how the brain gives rise to thought and language, and how cognition is embodied in women's marital play songs. It is a figurative comparison in which one idea is understood in terms of another. This theory proposes that metaphor is not just an aspect of language, but a fundamental part of human thought. These metaphors are seen in language of everyday life. Language used in women's play songs is metaphorical and highly symbolic. For example, Uboñ ama ikot awum adedede. The fluted pumpkin is very productive when it likes the soil. Meaning love thrives in choice.

2. Anaañ women’s marital play songs

Anaañ women’s marital play songs portray Anaañ culture. The songs are very appealing. They address familiar issues in the society like immorality, greed, insecurity, pains, etc and reflect the beliefs, culture and tradition of the Anaañ people, with regards to humans social, cultural, emotional, intellectual, and perceived encounters in life. The songs are quite symbolic, and offer refreshing insights into the socio-cultural values, moral implications and the language relevance. Women sing these songs with dexterity. Some of the songs present journey through life that demonstrates life’s adventure and hazards. The selected satirical songs exemplify the plight of women who are subjected by men to the life of oppression, suppression and exploitation. The songs are very emotional and symbolic. They describe the predicament faced by the commoners in the society. The songs act as a window into cultures, values and language usage in the Anaañ community. The songs present a catalogue of incidences of life that people must learn from, that, life is a very important and long journey that must be undergone in stages, whether bitter or sweet, till death. It is believed that songs evoke strength when uttered in any context.

1.	Song	Gloss
i.	Uboñ ama ikot awum adede	The fluted pumkin grows better when it likes the soil
ii.	uwo iya iya o oo uwo iya iya o oo	(ideophonic sound)

The concept is: “*ubon*” which depicts human, *Ikot* depicts choice, “*awum adede*” depicts freedom/prosperity. This means human has the choice to follow you, not based on your action or size. The song centres on choice. A man prospers in his area of interest. The song metaphorically uses the concept to connote man’s desire for freedom. A man will love, care and cater for the woman he loves and cherishes. Love naturally does not thrive on a platform of hatred. This song mimics men who shower much love on their spouses. Women who are envious of their contemporary’s well being in matrimony usually use songs like this as avenue to express their envy on their female counterpart. The song uses features like assonance- “*ama, awumadede*” to portray the growth magnitude brought about as a result of the choice of (woman/man). The tone of the song is sarcastic. The song has an undertone of envy; the size is perhaps ridiculous hence the use of “*adede*” i.e., filling the space.

Women’s songs are often very symbolic. The choice of words here depicts one who is an opportunist. The person here has seen an opportunity to utilize beyond the expected limit. The mode of the speaker is that of that of envy.

2. Song

Gloss

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| i. Ebe akebo ke ndaa kpa akañ ami ooo | my husband said I shall not survive
this famine |
| ii. Ñkanika itiaita etok uduñ asio uyo | at eight oclock my mortar sounded |
| iii. Abuud amum ebe | my husband became ashamed |

The expression *ebe akebo ke ndaa kpa akañ ami* portrays a very mean and wicked husband. *Etok uduñ asio uyo* signifies life. *Etok uduñ* will not pound without the human hand. *Etok uduñ* is also a metaphor of the olden days’ practice of the ancient traditional institution where the gong will sound to signify important happenings in the community. The song x-rays the feeling of a very mean and stingy husband, who refuses to care for his wife. He rather wished his wife should die, than care for her. The husband felt he was the wife’s only means of livelihood but was proven wrong by his wife’s ability to survive a period of hardship. The wife, on the other hand, may have had a very negative attitude that may have warranted the husband’s desire for misfortune to befall her. Contrary to his expectations, the wife became exonerated by the gods, and the gong sounded in her favour, to his chagrin. Women use this song to make men understand that they can thrive independent of the husbands. The song uses personification to exemplify the talking motar-“*etok uduñ asio uyo*”. The time frame is very significant. Eight o’clock, the early hours of the morning, which signals the break of day. A new dawn. There is also the use of assonance /a/ “*ndaa kpa akañ ami*”, to add beauty to the song.

3. Song

Gloss

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|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| i. Bachelor oh ohoh bachelor oh | Bachelor oh ohoh bachelor
oh |
| ii. Bachelor oh ohoh bachelor oh | Bachelor oh ohoh bachelor |

	oh
iii. Caterpillar anam usuñ ayieyie bachelor oh	caterpillar made the roads beautiful bachelor
iv. Eba ñkaifere adoñ mkparawa itoñ bachelor oh	youthful breast attracts young men bachelor oh

Bachelor in the song stands for an unmarried man, caterpillar represents technological innovations, while “*eba ñkaifere*” portrays moral decadence that is prevalent in the society in today’s world. The song addresses youthful lust. It is a very sarcastic song that ridicules the lustful desires of the juvenile folk. This age range (adolescence) lust after what the eye sees. The expression “*caterpillar anam usuñ ayieyie*” is a metaphor of technological advancement that has brought immorality to bear in the lives of the youths. The song cautions uncontrolled greed, and appeals to the male folk to look beyond the canal display of the female immoral outlook. “*Eba ñkaifere*” can also be seen as distractions. What could distract a man from realising his goals. The western culture has opened doors to many forms of civilization that has given rise to moral decadence in the society. This song is informative of the immoral devices that are prevalent in today’s world. The song uses ingredients like alliteration as seen in “*bachelor, bachelor*” /b/ for emphasis, and Repetition - *bachelor, oh oh*, to stress on the age category that is mostly affected. The song is a combination of indigenous words with English to demonstrate the effect of decadence brought about by technology.

4. Song

Gloss

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| i. Idikene ikpeiye ebe ami innọ oh | Come and join me to beg my husband |
| ii. Nno nduñ ufọk ufọk mbọk ayen oh | to allow me to only stay in the house to
groom my kid |

This song is an appeal to the audience to persuade the husband to allow the wife in question to stay on in matrimony, for the sake of the kids, to groom them. In the olden days, women were not allowed to be independent or expressive in marriage. They were subjected to men’s autocratic rule. The reason for this wife to have cried out, may have been out of the husband’s attitude, or inability to cater for the family. Sometimes, the wife may be the cause

of her misfortune. In practical terms, men fantasize over women, when they are not within reach. After marriage, the man assumes full headship and the bull in him is let loose. It is commonly believed that women usually project the children as the reason to stay in a bad marriage. The metaphor here is marital frustration and deceit. The song is usually sung by women for entertainment. It projects the theme of hopelessness. Joy has departed from the home, the only source of hope is the kids, and so the woman would not accept defeat, she resorted to cry out for help. The tone and the mood is that of despair. The words are carefully combined to evoke pity.

5. Song

Gloss

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| i. Ebe ansad agwod | My husband is discriminating against me |
| ii. Kop adusad ebe | Hear his discrimination. |

The concept of the song is discrimination. The wife here is probably performing below the husband's expectation. She may have assumed the husband is so much in love with her, and so she stopped doing the things that may have endeared her to her husband. On the contrary, the husband may be having some distractions. The wife feels despised and begins to complain. All she is asking for here, is his attention. A woman can do anything to get her husband's attention.

6. Song

Gloss

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| i. Uwopo ukeñ ebe eh | good for nothing husband |
| ii. kab bop ufok anyoñ nte ñka afo | try and build a storey building like your mates |

Uwopo ukeñ literally means good for nothing. The concept here is that of somebody who is living in abject poverty. The woman in this song is aggrieved. The song is used to taunt the husband, to ridicule his poor state. Every respect she ever had for her husband is gone. She makes bold to challenge him to wake up to his responsibilities, by calling him derogatory names.

7. Song

Gloss

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| i. Ima adiõñño ikpad ebe oh | A lover can detect the husband's foot steps |
| ii. Oh ebe adi | oh the husband is coming |

This song explains the affection there is in intimate relationship. The song x-rays the love between the wife and the husband. The wife is addressed as Ima “a lover”. Ima can recognise the footsteps of her very dear husband “ebe” and therefore could detect his presence without seeing him physically. This song is a metaphor of a true love. The wife seeks to be around the husband always hence she is very sensitive to his footsteps. She begins to exercise the kind of happiness that makes those around her notice the attitude she is putting forth as she suspects the husband's presence.

3. Discussion

Anaañ women's songs portray the Anaañ culture. They address prevailing issues in society. In this study, the scope of the songs is restricted to the kind of songs that women use in their marital homes. They are satirical, they are used to address marital conflicts resulting from infidelity, refusal of responsibility, etc. In the ancient times, women were only seen and not heard. They devised a means of getting attention from the men, and they decided to express themselves through songs. These songs are very symbolic. They use a lot of imagery to connote their intentions. The concept of metaphor cannot be overlooked in women's songs. The songs are metaphorically structured to evoke a deeper understanding of the underlying meanings.

The language used in playsongs is very creative. The ideas are neatly composed with the lyrics expressed with precision, to create desired effects in the life of the chanters. The content is didactic in nature.

3.1 Metaphorical use of language

Women's songs are metaphorical in nature. The Metaphorical meaning is understood differently from the literal meaning. This is used to heighten the effect of a speech, Example,

in song (6), *uwopo ukeñ ebe* - a man with no substance, a poverty-stricken husband. In marriage, a man loses his dignity when he cannot provide for the family, and when this happens, the man is subjected to derogatory names like “*uwoppo ukeñ*”, “*una ubok*”, “*ekpo ebe*”, “*apoi poi ubuene*”. Song (3) – “*eba ñkaifere*” can be described as immoral distractions. Vain attractions can bring woes to the home. The proverbial breast that gives suck to men of the underworld, that proffers ill-gotten wealth, is a departure from moral values. “*Eba ñkaifere*” can also connote glittering things that deprive human beings of their Divine heritage.

3.2 Imageries in women’s play songs

Women song goes beyond the manipulation of words to portray moral decadence in the society. It makes use of imageries to capture reality. These imageries are used to make their insinuations vivid. The symbols evoked in the songs illustrate truth and reality. For example, *etok uduñ* goes beyond the usual mortar used for pounding, to the traditional beats that signals rites of passage. Play song is an aspect of a society’s folklore and culture. Anaañ women’s play songs are enriched with socio-cultural values that equip the citizens with social tools to carry them through life.

3.3 Findings

This article reveals that some play songs in Anaañ are nonsensical, though filled with historical information and moral lessons. Some are satirically used to condemn social vices in society. The primary embodiment of play songs is nature and humanity. The language serves as a pathway through which the community’s cultural values are x-rayed. In Africa, women are generally seen by men as the weaker sex hence man’s overwhelming and dehumanizing attitude which they claim as a birthright, becomes very prominent. On the contrary, the place of women in the society is not contestable. Women play songs are commonly seen as songs used for entertainment, to release emotional and social tensions. On the literal level, the songs can be understood as a social comment on marital inadequacies that are commonly frowned upon. These literal meanings alone are not sufficient. The deeper meaning of the metaphors points to the danger associated with these shortcomings and the risk such a love relationship portends. This explains that the concept of a conceptual framework for this analysis captures the whole essence of the research work.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made regarding Anaañ play songs:

1. They should be shown their prominence over the much-cherished secular songs at social functions, government gatherings, etc. as this will revive the long-neglected fundamental usage of our folklore.
2. Christian, educational, governmental, and other institutions should be made to see the need to re-awaken the indigenous knowledge system to revive the alternative standards and codes of morality to promote standardized human and societal values.

5. Conclusion

This paper on language use in Anaañ women's marital play songs addresses the use of language in songs that deal with issues that affect humanity, such issues as feelings and social vices, etc. These songs are in the form of satires through the choice of words, which are symbolic in nature. The work recommends the use of these Anaañ songs at social functions and government gatherings.

This work reveals that women play songs, like any other form of oral piece, that deal with issues concerning humanity and nature. They address human feelings and also function as satires, and condemn social vices. There is a need for more research on this area of oral literature, as they are fast eroding due to very little attention given to this subject, and the challenge of the fast-growing technological alternative.

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