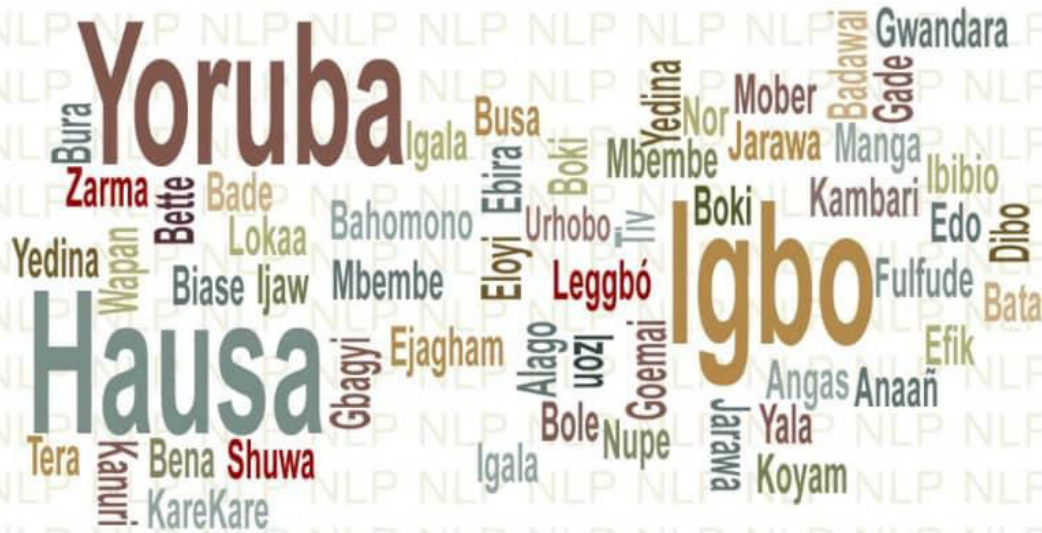




Nigerian Languages Project (JNLP)



JNLP

Volume 1, December 2019

ISSN: 2705-411X

The Contributions of Oral Literature to the Development of Ibibio Language

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Abstract

Oral literature is a form of verbal art that houses different forms of arts. Poetry, prose and drama were first performed orally before they were given permanent mark through documentation. The three genres of literature have captured the oral traditions of the Ibibio society with language for different purposes. This research seeks to advance the contributions of oral literature to the development of the Ibibio language. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Secondary data were most essential for this study. The study objectives bring to light the preservative, educative, aesthetic beauty of oral literature in revitalizing the Ibibio language. It evaluates how oral literature boosts the language content and competence of Ibibio language users as well as promotes the social identity and intellectual ingenuity of the people. The result shows that literary artefacts are great boosters of indigenous language performance capacity. They add flesh to language skeletons as well as to attenuate social identity and intellectual creativity of the language.

Keywords: verbal art, oral literature, communication, language, culture, society.

1. Introduction

Oral literature is a form of verbal art communication that existed before written literature. It is transmitted verbally in face-to-face contact. The phrase, oral literature, encapsulates many aspects of verbal art communication which include fables, ritual chants, epic poem, ballad, folksongs, tongue twisters, riddles, idioms, proverbs, folktales, and incantations to mention but a few. Oral literature is one of the disciplines in the humanities which explores the use of language for communicating thoughts, cultural norms and values, societal ills or vices for correction, instruction and sensitization of the people.

Emenyonu (1973:3) defines literature as a creative literary art, which means that both oral and written literature use language in a creative manner to drive home their message. The word 'creativity' connotes the use of literary skills/ability in creating words, phrases and sentences through different ways and styles in a pleasing manner. The creative nature of oral literature gives room for new words; heighten speeches and terse literary conventions that boost the aesthetic communication strength or the fundamental value of the language. In Syal and Jindal (2010:5) definition of language, they support the view that language (i.e. oral literature) is a medium through which different aspects of culture is

expressed as well as developed; “Languages are the principal systems of communication used by a particular group of human beings within a particular society and culture (linguistic community) of which they are members.

The presentation of oral language in all forms of oral literature cannot be overemphasized, how the various techniques of presentation are exploited and examined by the presenter and the audience assists in making language an essential commodity in a communication situation. Oral literature is a vehicle by which traditions, customs, philosophies, and norms as well as the civilization statues of a community are presented to the present generation and preserved by passing them to the next generation. Oral literature can not thrive without language and vice versa. Hence, oral literature is a flexible form of communication and language can be shifted and twisted for communication of some concepts and ideas.

The history of oral literature is as old as the existence of man. It is a common phenomenon present in every human society, and so holds the elementary value of language as its uniform. It also seems to conform to the phenomenon at hand, based on the skill of the narrator or artist or talent and the needs of the audience.

1.1 Background of the Study

The Ibibio people are found in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. They are the major occupants of Akwa Ibom State. The word Ibibio stands for the people as well as the language. Following Essien, (2008) assessment of the Ibibio people and their language, Ibibio is the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria after Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The language is spoken by about six million people following the 2006 National population enumeration exercise. The people of Ibibio are found in other parts of Nigeria and the Diasporas.

The Ibibio language is characterised by a unique phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structures and rules as well as rich literary artefacts. Following dialectal divisions, the Ibibio language is subdivided into six regional dialects: Eastern or Proper Ibibio, Anaang or Western Ibibio, Enyong or Northern Ibibio, Eket/Oron or Southern Ibibio, Andoni/Ibeno or Delta Ibibio and Efik or the Riverine Ibibio. Therefore, this paper concerns the Eastern or Proper Ibibio found in areas like Ikono, Uyo, Ibesikpo-Asutan, Nsit Ubium, Nsit Atai, Ibiyono, Itu and other places.

2. Brief History of African Oral Literature

The history, as well as the origin of African oral literature, is as old as the existence of the African people themselves. Many scholars in Africa like Cole-Beuchat (1965), Chukwuma (1994), Finnegan (2012), Akporobaro (2012), and others have traced the history of different African verbal arts, to ascertain their unique features as they manifested within the societies they were understudied. But none of these authors, to the best of my

knowledge, have been able to decipher the sole authorship of any form of verbal arts, but specific cultures and tribes have been identified for their unique forms of verbal art communication.

Before the advent of the writing system, verbal arts were only transmitted from one generation to another for the preservation of culture for posterity purposes. The tradition of oral communication was common among the Africans generally and Ibibio in particular and was so documented when writing systems were introduced to the people. The most documented form of oral literature in Africa is folktales. It houses many literary forms within its content such as proverbs, riddles, songs and musical accompaniment like the clapping of hands, dancing and even the playing of drums and other musical instruments, depending on the creativity of the narrator and the cooperation of the audience. The importance of oral communication to the survival of mankind is worth exploring, which is why the study on the “*Contributions of Oral Literature to the Ibibio Language*” is of interest and necessary to us, as we seek to bring to light the enormous benefits of oral literature in the Ibibio language.

3. Types of Oral Literature

As mentioned earlier, oral art cuts across the three genres of literature. It harbours various styles of verbal discourse and controls different artistry contents of both semantics and aesthetics. Akporobaro (2012) has subdivided the corpus of verbal arts to include the following: Prose – riddles and proverbs, folktales, myths, and epic narratives. Poetry – chants and lyrics, myths, epic, praise poetry and heroic recitations. And dramatic performance manifest as – festival, ritual ceremonies, and dances. All these forms are visible in most, if not in all, African cultures. Their imaginative creativity and conventional structures are visible in Ibibio oral performance. Oral literature shares with written literature the use of heightened language in various form of communications (such as lyric, epic, chant, etcetera), but it is set apart by being actualized only in performance and by the fact that the performer can (and sometimes is obliged to) improvise so that the oral text constitutes an event. The areas of oral literature that we will explore in this study to deduce their contributions to the study of Ibibio language are Riddles, proverbs, idioms, folktales, parable, ballad, panegyric and folksongs. It is important to mention that the list is not exhaustive, but for the sake of this paper, we want to dwell on the forms of oral literature listed.

3.1 Riddle

Moses (2018:1) defines riddles as “a literary artefact that is closely related to proverbs because, it is generally short, verbally transmitted and easily committed to memory due to its shortness in length and method of transmission.” It is usually composed and performed in the local language of the people. Riddles are a metaphorical statement that makes use of imagination and assist in the development of logical reasoning ability among young people. Ibibio riddles are full of terse language and figurative conventions which add beauty to speech when it is employed during communication.

The nature and structure of riddles have given rise to different categories of riddles which have come to add value by increasing the communicative strength of Ibibio language, Moses (2018). Since riddle is a form of poetry, different figurative language has been adopted and adapted to express ideas in a profound and creative manner. Thus, a riddle is a form of oral literature that corrects, entertains, educate, and instruct. Let us consider the example below:

Example 1

Ques.: Fìfìfìòk òsídá ké íkód *ifáák áyìn ké ñkàñ?*
 L/t: Knowknow what-stands in bush holding child on side?
 F/t: What stands in the bush and *holds a baby on its side?*
 Resp.: Àkpàkpà
 l/t: Corn
 f/t: Corn

(Moses 2018:61)

The italicized part of the riddles above reveals literary convention which is personification. The maize plant that is full of ears of corn is described as *ifáák áyìn ké ñkàñ* - holds a baby on its side.

3.2 Proverb

A proverb is a short witty statement that employs heightened language to press home a point in the mind of its hearer. Ibibio proverbs are a rich storehouse of metaphor used to admonish, inform, instruct, correct, and entertain, Finnegan (2012). The proverb is a literary artefact that is composed of the people, for the people with animate and inanimate characters. Ibibio proverbs are verbal arts that employ creative competence. Ibibio proverbs encapsulate the different aspects of the people's way of life; hence, they cover various themes and are used to correct social vices like greed, laziness, envy, parental negligence, promiscuity, disunity, and etcetera. African proverbs are a storehouse of wisdom.

Let us examine the proverb below:

Example 2.

Orth.: Awo adippe imọ anam inua ke akikere
 l/t: A person hide wealth do mouth in thought
 f/t: A man that hides his wealth can only boast in his thought

The Ibibio proverb reveals a hidden truth. A secretive person is always cautious of what he says lest he makes known his deeds. If the person is rich, he can only boast of his wealth in his thought.

3.3 Idiom

An idiom is a short clever saying that is shorter than a proverb. It is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words. The Cambridge Dictionary of idioms defines an idiom as “a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meaning of each word understood on its own. An idiom is a phrase which has a different meaning from its components. Idioms are fixed expressions, which mean that you cannot change the word order or the grammatical forms in the same way as you can change non-idiomatic expressions. An idiom can be found in every language as an essential part of the general vocabulary. An idiom has a figurative meaning which is different from the literal meaning. The literal meaning of an idiom usually does not make much sense and it cannot be possible to understand unless you have learned or heard them before. It is an expression that can be understood only as a whole and not by analyzing its constituent’s parts. Ibibio idioms manifest in a phrase as well as sentence forms. They are used on daily discourse than a proverb. Let us examine the following idiom.

Example 3.

Orth.: Abeen mbọọñ

l/t: It carries kings/chiefs

f/l: It awaken the consciousness of people in authority

The idiom above is used to insinuate that, a particular matter has attracted the attention of people in authority. Issues like crisis or epidemic cases like a disease outbreak, flood, or drought can be said to *been mbọọñ*, that is, they have affected the relevant authorities. Looking at the wording of the idiom above, one cannot deduce the meaning of the entire idiom from any of the individual words. Also, the idiom offers the people a synonym for expressing this thought in an ordinary way like “*Atuuk mme ikpọ-awo idem ndion* – It has drawn the attention of the elders or *mme ikpọ-awo ekop ebaña* – the elders (people in authority) have heard about it.

3.4 Ballad

Ballad is a poem composed in straight forward language for entertainment and socialization. They are rhythmic narratives written in stanzas. Ballads are generally composed of full time and part-time poets to tell a story of what had taken place in society or events that are ongoing. Ballad reports prevalent issues that affect the society in a humourous manner making their piece interesting and attractive to the common people.

Today, ballads are regularly presented at funerals and marriage ceremonies in Ibibio communities. Most traditional events have witnessed the presentation of a ballad than panegyric. This is because ballad is composed in simple and straight forward language as compared to panegyric and epic poems. It is written in a “free verse unrhymed” pattern, Akporobaro (2012:57). That is why an amateur poet, who is driven by passion and pleasure, can compose a ballad by forming story around his character (s), object, person, occasion, or event using different literary conventions. Let us illustrate with the ballad below:

Example 4.

Ibibio

English

Ata Eti Enọ

Nsinem owo esịd nte enọ

What pleases one as a gift

Enọ-Abasi Urua eyen Uruan Inyang
Enọ-Abasi Urua an indigene of Uruan
Inyang

Ndadmanna ifiọk unam ñkpọ

you have an inborn wisdom to act

Ñkpọ amọ anam ke ekeme ini

She does her things on time

Enọ-Abasi Urua eyen Uruan Inyang Enọ-Abasi Urua an indigene of Urua Inyang

Afo amebiet ete mfo tutu

You resemble your father so much

Ke idaha ye ke ndufiọk

In height and in wisdom

Nti ñkpọ itakko ubon mfo

Good things do not get lost in your lineage

Akpabio (2016:34)

3.5 Folktales

Folktales are a common phenomenon in society. It is a silo for other forms of verbal arts, used to preserve the different aspects of a culture, by forming an imaginary story around it. Both myths and legendary narratives are captured in the folklore of the land and transferred originally or with slight adjustment from generation to generation. Akporobaro (2012:51) defines folktales as “an imaginative narrative in prose form which captures real-life experiences.” He avers that folktales are created through imaginative memorable experiences which are intended to entertain rather than record history or social experience. The reality of folktales is that they capture folk lives as manifested through struggles and interactions within the environment, and give records of history and social customs for entertainment, education and preservation of social customs Myeong, Do Hyeong (2011). African folktales are used to teach morals.

Example 4.

Ibibio

Akedo ke obio mme unam, emaeñim mbed ete awo akpekama awo efen ison, awo ekamake ison ekpekid nte andikikama anye ison adia ñkpọ ke anye ibip. Mme unam emaeñim mbed ami anye ofon. Odo ini keed ñkpọ amaaditippe. Ebod amaaba ke ataa ekamba ukuud mme nnanenyin akenamma anye akewuod nda Ikid okak. Isoñ

ami amaadod usen adoodo, ebod ikanna ikpe. Ntodo ntodo isua keed adiboiyo. Akedo usen keed, Ikid amaadakka adikibip ebod ison. Ebod akedaakid Ikid nte edi ke anyan enen omọ anye amaakere se imọ ibinam, sia okak ikibaaha. Ifiok amaadifeghe odak Ebodiwuod. Ebod amabekke ikim anye aketaaha nkpeene usen amaana ata. Adido ataa obop anyen, ata ofuuñ iwuod. Ebod akenam ami mme akikere, odionno ke Ikid amaadikid nte imọ idia nkpo ke anye iboho ibip imọ ison.

Interpretation

The story above centres on two friends the goat and the tortoise. The goat borrowed money from the tortoise to solve a problem he had. He was unable to pay back his debt for more than one year. For this reason, he decided to take advantage of the law that was made in the land which was that, no creditor should ask his debtor(s) for his or her money if he finds him or her eating. One day, the tortoise visited the goat to ask him for his money. When the goat sighted the tortoise from a distance; he regurgitated his cud and started to munch again. The tortoise was disappointed because his mission was thwarted. He could not ask the goat for the loan he gave him. Therefore, the tortoise went back. That means that the goat is indebted to the tortoise till today.

This folktale is often used to entertain children and to instruct them to refrain from dishonesty and cheating behaviours that can jeopardise their reputation in the society.

3.6 Parable

Another name for the parable is an allegory. It emanates from the Greek word 'parabole' which means "comparison". It is a succinct narrative that propagates a universal truth <http://literary devices.net>. Parables analogously tell stories for the sole purpose of teaching morals at the end. They refer to the ordinary life of the people. It incorporates elements of surprise and exaggeration just like panegyric. They are usually presented as food for thought to the audience. Audiences are usually forced to see the truth in a concrete rather than in an abstract pictures www.learnreligion.com.

A parable is a story within a story. It is a simple story that is used to elucidate a complex issue to give in-depth understanding and apt explanation to a thought. WiseGEEK explanation of allegory sums up the composition and literary significance of parable as presented below:

The main function of an allegory in literature is to mask an idea through a clever series of symbolic meanings so that in the context of extended metaphor, the idea can be understood more deeply. Stories or poems which are allegorical can be thought to have two levels, one literal and one figurative. m.wisegeek.com

The story below illustrates what an Ibibio parable does:

Example 5.

Adiṣṣṣṣṣ Idem Awo ye Idaad

Ete keed akekaa idim adiyie idem. Anye akesim idim atat afoñ amọ akọp ke mben idim adak idim ayie idem. Idaad asaña ifed adikoppo afoñ amọ afeghe. Ete ami awuọ ifed ke idim abinne idaad ami. Mbon awo se ikid ammọ iba ebo, “se idaad iba efegheke ekaa ko”.

Translation

A man went to the stream to have his bath, He undressed and entered the stream and started bathing. Suddenly, a mad man showed from no way and made away with his clothes, the man came out of the stream and ran after the mad man. Passersby saw them and said, “see two madmen running”.

This short storyline above admonishes people to always consider their actions especially when they want to copy what others have done. The plot above portrays the true nature of Ibibio parable. It usually presents thought succinctly and leaves the people with the ideas to ponder on.

3.7 Folksong

Folksong has an important place in African oral literature. They are common verbal art in African society used to communicate information. African folksongs are means, through which the people talk, preach, invoke and worship, sale, work, play, dance, dedicate, ridicule, solemnize, instruct, counsel, educate and so on. Almost every aspect of the African communal activities is captured in the lyrics of their songs to include activities like burial, wedding, religion, politics, commerce, economics, social, medicine, art, and laws. Folksongs are the dynamic medium used in Ibibio society for the propagation of Ibibio cultural values and language intricacies. They are performed at real live events.

Example of Ibibio folksong that depicts its role is shown below.

Example 6.

Ibibio

Ebe’ òh!

Àbó ònám dìé òmàn áyén?

Ìbàk ùsèn àfò àsàñà isàñ ǹtè éwúá

Àkónòyò àfò áwùnné ànàà ǹtè étì’ m

Translation

My husband

How do you want me to bear children?

In the morning, you walk around like
a dog

At night, you curl in bed like a
millipede

Ebe' òh!

My husband

Àbó ònám dié òmàn áyén?

How do you want me to bear children?

The song above is rendered by a woman who is going through a lonely state in her matrimonial home. She is querying her husband's inability to take care of his responsibility as a man of the house which includes procreation. She expects that the husband should make procreation a priority. She is lamenting her frustration which is caused by her husband nonchalant attitude to reproduction. Barrenness in Ibibio is often blamed on the woman even if the problem is caused by her husband. The woman here is afraid of the stigma associated with childlessness and she is lending her voice.

4. Functions of Ibibio Oral Literature

Means of Entertainment: Like a verbal tradition, the elementary function of oral literature is to entertain. Even though we live in the digital age with all forms of entertainment at our disposals, many folks still use verbal arts such as riddles, proverbs, tongue twisters, folktales and folksong to ease tension and relief themselves from stress. Some of the verbal arts contain words and messages that cause people to laugh thereby helping their body and the brain to relax and remain active and strengthened. This is affirmed by Cole-Beuchat (1965:p187) who says that "The main function of a riddle is entertainment, and this is consciously recognized, whereas other functions of riddles like the creation of bond and boosting of logical thinking ability are not recognized by some people." This idea is also applicable to other forms of oral literature as well.

Some examples of Ibibio question riddles below illustrate the entertainment function of oral literature.

Example 7:

Ques.: Fiòfiòk òsíbòbò mbòbò ékòñ ímà íkààhá ékòñ?

l/t: Knowknow what-wrap wrap war finish go-not war?

f/t: What dressed/adorned for war yet does not go to war?

Resp.: Úkòd

l/t: Wine

f/t: A raffia palm tree

Example 8:

Ques.: Fiòfiòk òsísíné ké íkòd íyíé òdòm?

l/t: Knowknow what-stay in bush rub white clay?

f/t: What stays in the farm and rubs white clay?

Resp.: Ùbòqñ

l/t: Pumpkin

f/t: A pumpkin fruit

Ibibio question riddles are usually descriptive and do not hold serious themes. Therefore, it is commonly used by children for jolly and joke making. To task the imagination of children, Ibibio question riddles employ literary conventions such as metaphor, simile, personification, and imagery as projected in the riddles above. In examples (7, and 8,), the objects talked about have been given human qualities. *Úkòd* (raffia palm tree) and *Ùbóòṅ* (pumpkin) have been personified. *Úkòd* (raffia palm tree) is described as “something that is dressed for war yet does not go”. While the white coloured of the *Ùbóòṅ* (pumpkin fruit) is personified. The plant is given a human attribute of being able to rub white clay on its body, which is impossible. This kind of sensual descriptive tickles the fancy of children in a comic way. And that is the reason children likes to perform riddles.

Memory Boosters: Most forms of oral literature are short and easy to memorise. Therefore, they are used to build memory retentive strength, enhance logical reasoning and creativity among young people. For instance, during riddle sessions, people especially children are expected to memorise and recount the riddles whenever the need arose. This learning exercise is a very useful tool in boosting a child’s intellectual capacity. Since the people did not have written laws that spell out the acceptable norms and values of the land, riddles and other forms of folklores served as sensitization mechanisms in most literate societies. Cole-Beuchat (1964:p118) affirms that a riddle is a memory booster when she points out that, “riddle acts as an exercise of intellectual skill and quickness of wit. It becomes a test of memory with those riddles whose answers have to be learned by heart, to be known.” The riddles are given in example (1) are a good illustration of memory-booster. Children are expected to learn those riddles by heart and recite them when they play. Riddling is a good mental exercise that enhances the brain to develop.

Vocabulary Builders: Narrating and teaching oral literature especially to children help them to build their vocabulary base and become fluent in speaking and communicating effectively. The teaching of oral literature helps people to acquire communication skills. For instance, good orators who are acquainted with a vast knowledge of Ibibio proverbs, parables, and riddles, used few words to drive home their messages without prejudice or rudeness. Words not used in daily discourse are embedded in different forms of Ibibio oral literature. Therefore, people become familiar with them and use them in logical sentences.

Let us expatiate in the light of the proverbs below:

Example 9.

Orth.: ufòk anyòòṅ akeene **mboi**

l/t: house long follow mboi (pillar)

l/t: the height of a house is determined by the length of the pillar

Example 7.

Orth.: asoñ iwuod unam asedañ ekpene **ñkwooño**

l/t: stubborn head animal used to live farm thorn

f/t: a stubborn animal used to live in the mist of thorns

The above-emboldened words are not common to young folk in Ibibio. Some may know the word but are not familiar with the ordinary usage not to talk of the figurative implication. Hence, these proverbs offer people the opportunity to learn of these words, if they are exposing these proverbs and use them appropriately when they find the need to so. *Mboi* is a long pole/pillar that is used to support the roof of a house. *Mboi* is used figuratively in this adage to mean that the length a pole/pillar determines the height of the house because it is the pole/pillar that bears the weight of the building. On the other hand, the *ñkwooño* that is mentioned in the second proverb is a short plant with thorns all over the leaves and stems. *Ñkwooño* usually appears in a small plantation. It is difficult to walk through an area it abounds. It is also impossible to search for an object where *ñkwooño* plant grows in large number.

Bond Creators: Riddle gives children the impetus to form relationships and breakthrough any social barrier they may have encountered, making it easier for them to form social relationships in the future (Zablocki, 2003). Ibibio riddles make a huge impact on children as they encourage children's full participation in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the Ibibio community in which they live. This takes place especially by fostering critical thinking and transmitting indigenous knowledge. Also, the various themes that Ibibio riddles cover advocate for cordiality, unity and harmony among people.

Development of the Thought Process: The study of oral literature helps us to reflect on processes, events, and ideas that are culturally approved, discuss issues as well as solve problems that affect us in our societies. The use of oral literature allows the knowing and understanding of something about our environment as well as, culture, and the people. For the literate societies, oral literature was seen as an imperative tool for inculcating good morals and ethical standards that were recommendable among the people. It was also a means of scorning bad virtues. As a cultural form, verbal arts were used to transfer customs, beliefs, philosophies, phenomena observed, ideas, laws, knowledge and other capabilities to the younger generations. By this, cultural traits were preserved, and their messages were kept alive in the minds of the people since there were no durable means of documenting these forms. Oral literature introduces Ibibio folks to Ibibio literature and critical thinking. Let us consider the proverb below as it reflects the artistic core of the Ibibio:

Example 10.

Orth.: edim isideppe ke okom keed

l/t: rain does not on roof one

f/l: the rain does fall on one roof

This proverb is metaphorical. It portrays social relations with some advice on human reactions to situations. The Ibibio believe that catastrophe does not afflict one person, family or clan, alone - others too have a share of it from time to time. It is therefore believed that anyone suffering from problems that someone else may have been similarly afflicted, hence, there are some lessons to be learnt from the experience(s) of others. Problems are meant to be shared so that other people experienced could help to manage the situation. The proverb above explains the Ibibio philosophy of life which agrees with what Ukpong (2007:12) says “an individual does not exist alone ...when he suffers, he does not suffer alone. Similarly, when he rejoices, he does so with his kinsmen.”

Economy: Oral literature as a field of study has provided a source of livelihood for many. Different folks within Ibibio society have come to specialize in different aspects of verbal arts. Some are masters of ceremony, teachers of various areas of oral literature, writers of texts which cut across oral prose, poetry and drama. Many earn their living from being ordinary entertainers at events through the knowledge of oral literature that they have acquired. For instance, traditional poets and singers are no longer seen as ordinary people in society anymore. Their skills are appreciated, and services are demanded at traditional, political as well as religious events in the society.

Also, the following authors have benefited from the economic well of Ibibio oral literature by producing the following books:

Example 11.

1. Professor Uwemedimo Iwokedok Enobong - *Idib Akpanadiama, Ewod Nsani Ekook Akpo.*
2. Prof. Eno-Abasi Urua - *Yak ikpeeb Ibibio, Edu Uwem ke Ibibio.*
3. Bassey Udoidiong - *Utidefon, Atabrikan.*
4. Mma Nsese Umo Mma Nsese Umo - *Mbre ke Ibibio.*

From the above table, we can see that Ibibio oral literature has not only boosted the mental skill of the people but has also put food on their table. We believe that any language that has not benefited the people financially is not strong, because language is the soul of any flourishing economy.

Shaping the Aesthetic Taste of Ibibio language: Oral literature helps us to form our vision of beauty. It pleasantly influences and changes our behaviour in society and attitude towards people and our environment in general. The sense of oral literature helps us to notice everything beautiful around us. Let us examine the proverb below:

Example 12.

Orth.: nsaad akọọk akedo akpìn

l/t: dry bamboo stick was fresh frond

f/t: the dry bamboo stick was once a fresh frond

The above proverb reveals the beauty of language. When words are twisted in conformity with cultural value, they give aesthetic value to a language. The Ibibio proverb above addresses human relationship in connection to life experience, what looks shrivelled and unappealing now/today was once fresh and attractive. The figurative construction gives beauty to the idea than it would have been if said in a plain language.

Teaching Morals: The teaching of morals is one of the basic functions of oral literature. Different forms of oral literature have patterns with which they sensitize as well as ridicule some social vices. Mostly, because they clearly distinguish between good and evil, it also helps children to understand what is good and what is bad from their early life. The introduction of oral literature such as folktales and folksongs in schools provides didactic lessons that help children to fit into the culture and eschew evil. Due to the fact that they cover several themes such as love, hard work, obedience, responsible living, consequences of gossiping, laziness, hatred, jealousy etcetera, they are seen as cultural tools used to teach moral.

The Ibibio riddle below extracted from Moses (2018:145) propagates the moral of togetherness and unity.

Example 13.

Ques.: Ìnsáád ísìp áyìrè ké óyò.

L/t: dry nut/kernel stays in bunch.

F/t: dry(mature) coconuts stay in a bunch.

Resp.: Ìdíọ́k áyìn édíọ̀n̄n̄ò ké údùòd.

L/t: Bad child known by character.

F/t: A bad child is known by his or her character.

The phrase of the riddle question “*ayire ke oyò*” (stays in a bunch) instructs on unity and togetherness. It teaches on the need for kith and kin to stay together, while the response informs that character traits describe one's attitude. Therefore, an unacceptable character trait can mar unity among people and this is not encouraged in Ibibio culture.

5. The Contributions of Oral Literature toward the Development of the Ibibio Language

Language Preservation: Oral literature is one of the language tools used to preserve and maintain the Ibibio language from generation to generation through the means of storytelling and song performances. Chukwuma (2002:p51) avers that oral literature preserves language information, "...is a record-keeping device and a means of preserving useful and relevant information" Ibibio language would not have been able to compete with other languages of the world if the various aspects of oral literature had not been formed. Also, Ibibio language would be less important if the progenitors did not pass on the verbal art to their children.

Different aspects of Ibibio culture have been captured in oral literature such as marriage rite, a rite of passage, festival ceremonies, taboos, women struggle, Ibibio world view and others. Let us use a proverb to illustrate an aspect of the rite of passage in Ibibio culture.

Example 14.

Orth.: Ñkọ akịd akpọ aduọi mmọọñ ayed

l/t: until see corpse drop water cry

f/t: Until the corpse is seen before tears flow

The loss of a dear one is usually accompanied by wailing and great pain. But some people would not cry except they see the corpse of their relative before they shed tears. The Ibibio proverb above expresses what happens when someone loses his dear one. Thus, language artefacts give voice to the various cultural embodiments practised in Ibibio society.

- (a) **Education:** Oral Literature plays a key role in educating and sensitizing the society. It educates the society on the norms and core values of a given culture. Oral literature enables the people to gain ground of the language. It helps people to turn on their imaginative skills to showcase their mental creativity and ingenuity.
- (b) **Promotes Competency:** Oral literature also improves language learning through the rehearsing of Ibibio songs and plays, and children develop their competence and critical thinking by memorizing, reciting and teaching their peers' verbal arts when they have the opportunity.
- (c) **Aesthetic Beauty:** Oral literature adds aesthetic beauty to the Ibibio language. It makes the Ibibio language to be unique through special songs style and lyrics like (war songs, marriage songs, play songs, etcetera) poems, figurative styles and other forms of verbal arts.
- (d) **Language booster:** Oral literature boosts the Ibibio language vocabulary and gives more synonyms to express a thought. Ibibio proverbs and idioms are the storehouses that enrich the vocabulary capacity and functional strength of Ibibio

language. The idioms below explain how literary conventions boost language pragmatic strength:

Example 15:

Orth.: eƒΛd akaa ñkpọ edem

l/t: buttocks go something back

f/t: buttocks that attends functions late (figurative meaning there is - the buttocks refers to a person who is a perpetual latecomer)

Example 16

Orth.: Awo ado aduọ abom

l/t: person is fall anger

f/t: the person is fond of being angry

The idioms above provide alternative ways of expressing the two ideas above from the ordinary statement. The first idiom can be said in an ordinary statement as *afo amesema adikaa ñkpọ edem* (meaning, you are fond of attending functions late) and the second idiom as *awo ado ayadesịd* (the/that person get angry at any slightest provocation). This is one of the major functions of oral literature. It enlarges language by providing an alternative for the expression of a thought.

Apart from the above-mentioned functions of oral literature, it adds more entertaining feature to Ibibio. There are words that you can say in English and people would not find them funny but when spoken in Ibibio, people will find them hilarious. For example, the riddle below would not be as funny in English as it would be in Ibibio –

Example 17

Ques.: Káppó ikàd síó òbù.

l/t: Open basket remove crayfish.

f/t: Open the basket and take out crayfish.

Resp: Báád édèd fát ùbèd.

l/t: Dirty teeth hug your husband.

f/t: Have dirty teeth and hug your husband

Though the riddle response above ridicules (by way of abuse) the behaviour that the Ibibio society frowns at, which is uncleanliness, it is present the idea in a humorous way? A lot of question and tone riddles have added more entertaining language to Ibibio.

- (e) **It reveals who we are:** Oral literature helps us to know who we are, the value of what we do, and how we attended the different stages of development we have achieved and tells us what the future holds for the Ibibio language and the Ibibio culture as well. Since language is the primary propagator of a cultural artefact; cultural knowledge of the past and present has been captured and expressed through different forms of verbal arts. New ideas/thought and values imported through globalization to shape our lifestyle have also been recorded in Ibibio oral literature. Therefore, the future of the Ibibio language is here predicted to be progressing. Let us illustrate the point here using the riddle below:

Example 18

Ques.: Íkǎñ ásàk ké úfòk àfiá áwò.

L/t: Light shines in house white person.

F/t: Light shines in a white man's house.

Example 19

Ques.: Kàtàpílà ásiák mbád áduòk fòdfò.

L/t: Caterpillar splash dirt pour Volvo.

F/t: Caterpillar splashes dirt on Volvo.

Resp.: Íbàán étǎñ útǎñ ékàn ùdédìò.

L/t: Women talk talk more than radio.

F/t: Women talk more than the radio.

The light that is mentioned in the first riddle question is electricity. The Europeans who lived in Government Reserved Areas (G.R.A.) enjoyed amenities like electricity, pipe-borne water, and security, which were not common to the natives of the Ibibio. These innovations have been captured in some Ibibio riddles today. In the second riddle, both the query and answer contain English words 'Caterpillar and Volvo'. Caterpillar and Volvo are means of road transportation that are used to convey goods and passengers. The Caterpillar is Nigerians' coinage for big trucks and open vans. The riddle 'response' compares women's ability to talk to a radio programme. The radio is one of the modern innovations of science and technology. Therefore, we can say that Ibibio oral literature is a good tool that could be used to ascertain the growth and development of the language and the society at large.

6. Conclusion

The paper has appraised the contributions of oral literature to the development of Ibibio language. Several forms of oral literature have been discovered to be a productive storehouse of wisdom/ideas and vocabularies that have boosted/enriched the educational, aesthetic, social, and economic life span of Ibibio language. Oral literature has been proven

beyond doubt in this study to tell us the following: who we are, what we do, what we have, how we do them, where we do them, and why we do them.

The different ideas that the knowledge of oral literature has brought to us, has given us hope that the future of the Ibibio language is bright. Since Ibibio oral literature uses words that are “from the womb of tradition,” (Emmanuel, 2004:104), the importance of oral literature to the development of Ibibio language have been identified to be a profound, beneficial and yielding positive result.

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