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THEMES AND FORMS OF AFRICAN FOLK MEDIALISM: THE EXAMPLE OF NIGERIA IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

This article is a review of the existing oral components in a typical African society like Nigeria. Through the use of the pragmatic approach in literary analysis, this article does not only expose the codes of African medialism purposely aimed at communication, but also reveals the functional use of the channels of communication within the African setting. And since context and content are inseparable in oral literature, it is believed that the contextual analysis of the indigenous media will give a clearer and vivid comprehension of the traditionally coded media aimed at communication between the native speaker and his/her audience. The article discovers that the codes and practices of African medialism include: names of persons, proverbs, folktales, songs, music, the town crier, the market place, festivals, traditional theatre performances, drums, costume, dance etc. They stand as the socio-cultural properties that enable the pragmatic relevance of African medialism.

Introduction

The Asian Institute of Journalism (1983) defines community oral media as:

"Those media which are developed and managed by people sharing common values and aspirations in small geographical areas and which promote participation for development". The type of media here is an unprinted one but one that promotes the Nigeria cultural values, aspirations, content and coverage. This type of oral

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media is the voice of the people of the Nigeria community, emphasizing their interests, needs using their own language, negating their dislikes for the progress of their community. The media therefore can be simply seen as the roots of communication. Hence, the word 'folk' in oral tradition means a group of people living together and sharing common features. Folklorishness is the collective consciousness that fosters the use of the historical word; 'folk' to specify what is African.

CONCEPT OF PRAGMATISM

Pragmatics is the study of how context influences interpretation. Sentence meaning and the speaker's meaning are two different things. Sentence meaning is the concept that the speaker is trying to convey through signs, local expressiveness and symbols according to his/her understanding, i.e his/her intuitive background situation. Therefore, pragmatic concept is better understood in the notion given by B. F. Whorf (1939:63) as follows: "we dissect nature along laid down rules by our natural setting, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic mind – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds."

Whorf (1939) would have better said "in our intuitive or folkloric minds"

Pragmatics is a distinct level of linguistic investigations that deal with utterances and the meaning of these utterances in their social context (Korint, 1992:3). As a result of this, the practical angles to the application of pragmatics can be through a detailed observation of societal elements since pragmatics is "how communicative codes acquire meaning in the context of their use". (Adegbija (1988).

The media is the vehicle or channel of communication. The purpose of the media is to transfer ideas and knowledge from one entity to the other. This means that communication is a dual

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process where someone says something or passes information that is received by someone else. It is only when the listener responds or demonstrates his/her understanding of what has been communicated to him/her by the speaker that we say that communication is successful and the communication process is complete. Medialism involves the transformation of messages from one source to another, the receiver). Bavan (2003) adds that, communication is actually the medium of transmission of information, feelings, ideas, facts, beliefs, emotions, skills, knowledge through the use of symbols, words, pictures, figures, graphs, drawings, recreations, and illustrations. It can therefore be safely asserted that communication is the mechanism through which human relationship exists, develops and is sustained. And despite technological advancement the oral communication tools have remained dynamic to suit all traditional changes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of related literature reveals that works on African communication are numerous. The channels for African communication have been variously listed as observed. But, the recognized channels are not realized by the earlier scholars as societal dictates and codes, well institutionalized for everyday, bi-annual and practices, for there establishment of the rural togetherness, cooperation, unity, harmony, continuity, co-existence, collectively, native sensitivity and stability. The various literature on our subject matter; Codes and Practice of African Folk Medialism are as evident on the list of references attached to this write up: Bernth (1977), Dorson (1979), Amadi (1982), Adegbija (1988), Davis and Schlefer (1989). Etc.

Wilson (1981) in Africa media refers to drum of various sizes and shapes as membranophones which he also strongly realized as "one of the media through which sounds are produced to get the desired effect of communication. This means that Wilson (1981) agrees with the effectiveness of African drums for communication. We should however, note that this article titled codes and practices

of African folk medialism," pays particular attention to Nigerian setting in terms of the functional use of the media of communication. The media here is deliberately tagged as codes in order to emphasize their legal spiritual religious and civil functions within the Nigeria community. The drums in sizes and shapes therefore, have their different functions and named as such; each one used specifically at different occasions of naming, title-taking ceremony and installation of new kings, marriage ceremonies annual ritual festival, occupational festival of the farmers and fishermen etc. For some examples.

In a further review, the need for an improvement of the traditional systems of communication in Nigeria has been agitated by Lucky C. Aziken and Frank C.A. Enemi (2010). They advocate for the stability of the Nigeria political system for the improvement of the folk tradition and medialism. According to them, political stability will strengthen communal activities and practices and promote its unity, growth, sustenance and progress. In addition, there would be better preservation of the indigenous hardwares and inter-cultural participation may be encouraged within a multi-cultural setting, like Nigeria instead of the present intra cultural use of the hard wares. This article recognizes these hard wares' as the elements of traditional codes.

L. C and Haward (2006) most importantly, pose the question why rural (ICT) information and communication technology is still sustained despite modern technology that has introduced mobile phones and internet use. Can these new communication gadgets stand in for the rural media? The stand of this article is that mobile phones and the internet are for interpersonal purposes through they involve the participatory mode in communication. However, they cannot serve the communal, collective essence of the rural codes of conduct embedded in the culture of the Nigeria culture for a specific African example.

The components of communal communication are not rigidly patterned.

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

- The Culture itself is a source of communication. Culture is the tradition and way of life of the people living in the same geographical area.
- The message is the communication content in this case, originating from memory and individual intuitive knowledge; his/her background.
- The medium of dissemination of information is both verbal and non verbal (visual)
- Audience; the receiver having a stimulator. i.e. An encoded message. The receiver is faced with the task of decoding the message

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Channels of communication in African embraces the individual intuitive psyche and communal history, his/her spiritual essence, functional use of the codes, self identity, patterned lifestyle, cosmology, world view, vision or pre-destined. These channels of communication are however embedded in cultural aesthetic categorized here into verbal and non verbal types with emphasis on their functional uses.

VERBAL TYPES OF COMMUNICATION MODES

NAMES OF PERSONS

These are what people are known to be and are verbally called when their attentions are needed or references are being made to him. The name is a person's first identity. Names are necessities in the African culture; Names reveal certain things about the named person's birth and the events that took place at that point in time. Also, the day of the week of the person's birth is being harboured in people's names.

Hence in African, names have both cultural implications and spiritual codes. This is why the naming of a new child in Africa involves elaborate celebrations. The entire members of the

community gather together in the dissemination of the news of the birth of a new born baby. And during the child's naming ceremony they felicitate with the new born's family, offer prayers, supplications, make incantations, sing, dance, drum, eat and add additional pet names to the names given to the child. This is why a child in Africa has more than one or two names. Sometimes, the name added may be a belief or an adage appropriate for the day's situation. African names can be identified as follows; Personal Name, Family Name or created Name, created name could be out of the child's characteristics, or combination of the child's initials or guyish coinage e.g Kabaka may be called Aka, Yemic, from Yemisi, Zik from Isaac, Abbey from Abiodun, etc

African names therefore, provide a lot of information about a person, his/her family, his/her position in the family, historical traits, family and communal hopes, desires and aspirations, his communal origin, historical recalls.

Africans believe that names have implications for what the bearer of the name would become. i.e wealthy, popular, king/queen. The following are examples of some Nigerian names in West African societies.

Names	Meaning	African sub-setting
Ngozi	God's gift	Nigeria (Igbo)
Oygbemi	The river goddess's reward	Nigeria (Yoruba)
Maigida	House owner	Nigeria (Hausa)

PROVERBS

They are short witty sayings impregnated with meaning. They are effective indirect ways of communication. Chinua Achebe (1972) refers to proverbs as: "the palm oil with which yam is eaten". Proverbs are meant to deliver strong messages. The aim of Nigerian/African proverbs is to correct anomalies against known customary regulations and to warn ahead of pending danger.

Proverbs by Africans are used to make clear, unclear ideas and circumstances and to summarize lengthy explanations and arguments. Proverbs are information carriers of communal values, religious and cultural norms. They are based on past experiences of human activities, on which the present analogies are drawn to explain the present and for spall the future.

Examples of proverbs are as follows:

- Do not trek on a thin line
- If you cannot run, you must jog
- Don't step on a lion's tail

FOLKTALES/STORY TELLING

This constitutes stories told by elders at moonlight times to children at the end of the days work for relaxation purpose and to inculcate the children into every aspect of life. They involve mythical stories of the past societal heroes and heroines like Sango and Oya in Yoruba land of Nigeria. They involve mysteries of life. For example the folktale on "why a tortoise has a shell on its body". With its similar versions in all Nigerian culture. The communal function of folktales is to teach children lessons about human misdeeds. The stories are therefore didactic and the main lessons learnt from them is that the good behaved creatures are rewarded but the bad and greedy are punished. Discipline therefore becomes the key word to be watched by every member/ the individual of the entire community.

SONGS/MUSIC

Songs/music are effective communicative modes in typical African traditional communities like Nigeria. It is one of the major ways of passing information and making corrections of the ills of the society. African songs have meanings that have cultural bearings. Most songs are used to inform, warn, entertain or describe certain

wrong and good circumstances. Songs are highly persuasive and therefore enhance self-sustenance.

THE TOWN CRIER: This is the community announcer of events and happenings in order to keep the general public abreast of what is going on. The town crier moves round the town and announce messages using the traditional gong to call attention. Through the crier, the community member gets the news and reports on communal activities both within and outside their community (the suburbs or neighbourhood). He mobilizes the people of his community and keeps them alert at the grass root level in the participation of communal activities and programmes. The town crier is quite effective in influencing the people in order to promote positive behaviours, negate bad behaviours and effect social change. The town crier therefore heralds legal and approved public togetherness.

VISUAL TYPES OF COMMUNAL MEDIALISM

THE MARKET

The marketers communicate during activities and non activities since the market is a communally institutionalized arena for collective buying and selling purposes. The market is the public centre for all and sundry. It is the place of unity and harmony. From the market, people gather or release information to one another about what is going on which is in negation to communal expectations, norms and custom. Hence, in the African indigenous settings, the market place remains an effective informal channel of dissemination of information more so because the audience and the information communicators involves people from other neighbouring markets of nearby tribes. News circulate rapidly during the process of trading, making the markets to serve dual purpose of being trade centres and at the same time, information and communication forums. Buyers, sellers, visitors and traders are all news bearers. The market place

is also used for ceremonies such as the funeral of a renowned communal member, circumcision, feasts traditional chieftancy ceremony, annual masquerade public outrage, ritual sacrifices, communal rites performances, dances, singing, chanting and drumming (festivities), settlement of disputes, open social gathering etc, all of which characterize the African ways of life, practices and organizations.

FESTIVALS

Festivals are generally known to involve the extra mundane communication Akpabio (2003) says: it involves supernatural beings -ancestors, spirits, gods and the supreme God. They involve ancestral worships, invocations divinations and supplications while divination is used up til today in Africa to satisfy some of the peoples communication needs. Ancestral worships refer to the worship of departed relatives who are believed to have become powerful spiritual beings and guardians since demise.

Festivals are therefore tied to the culture of the people and are predominant in every typical rural African setting and Nigeria communities. Examples are masquerade festivals, annual harvesting of crops festival, funeral festivals for the dead, fishing festival, farming festivals etc.

DRUMS

The drums are used to intensify the intended messages for the audience. There is the Yoruba Nigeria talking drum known as *dundu* and *bembe*; the Hausa *kanangu* drum, the Nupe Gate drum all used for proverbial rhythms. As these drums are being beaten, the audience vocalize along what the drum beaten is saying. The drums are the nerve centre – the xylophone equivalent. The drums are used to satirize evil doings and moral decadence in the society. Hence, they used to appraise the good activities carried out by members of the society according to the norms, practice and expectations of the community. The drum ginger people to act well. When the drums begin to give high pitch tone 'of spiritual

control,' the dancing methods of the general public change, the dancing methods and shout in response to the pitch tone to indicate their joy and collective approval.

COSTUME

The costumes differ from one Nigeria setting to another, depending on the tribe, since Nigeria is a multicultural society. However, the purpose for their use remains the same. Most costumes, the tribe not withstanding include body paintings, facial and chest drawings and masks all serving as cultural representations and symbols. When chains are used on the legs as part of costuming, these chains make the desired sounds of the movement of a roaring bull presently proclaiming laws and enforcing them.

DANCE

African dance involves imitative movements of animals like chameleon, leopard, lion e.t.c. It is followed suit with impressive acrobatics and feats of skills. There is actually the interplay of dignity and honour through rhythmic movements. The dance include voice fingers, gestures, dust raising, claps, fumes of gunshots, signals, use of talisman with some individual misbehaviours, shaking of their 'torso', making psychological diversion and attractions.

STAGE OF THEATRE

The specialized scenery and performance educates the communal members apart from serving the basic entertainment or recreational purpose. The performance provide food for thought for community members and this is enhanced by the face-to-face rapport between the actor and the audience. The theatre brings the people together and enhances their awareness. The stage is an empowerment forum for the individual and the entire group for action. This is what Ruth Fi nnegan (1968) refers to as: "the idea of enactment aided by the linguistic content which gives room for interaction." Rituals are deliberately inculcated in African performances to aid the people

modes of perception and sensibility. African rituals involve spiritual invocations, supplications and divinations serving as the native properties of settlement for the unseen. They stand as the media or portions of spiritual communication

Conclusion

Summarily, traditional/ folk media has the following qualities:

- Promotes use of local language and fens
- Serves as stimulate to communal members as they all get involved in their use of local talents
- It aids the communal development processes as the members are able to express their heeds and through the folk media.

The participatory model of development is evident in the practice of African medialism. Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) opine that the easy way to sustainable development is the individual and collective participation of those who are involved in the task of transforming their society. They also conclude that "participation is necessary in order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment and the right attitude in planning and implementing developmental programmes.

The media of communicating African culture, religion wishes, aspiration, vision, cosmology and metaphysics is through the constitution of certain codes (some of which have been enumerated and categorized in this article) constantly used for practice in order to enhance and sustain societal progress, stability and equally promote the existing collective consciousness of the folk people, using the folk tradition and salient dictations.

Part of the conclusion here is that despite the introduction of technological advancement in Nigeria and the subsequent use of the modern means of communication, the codes and practice of folk medialism in Nigeria has remained unabolished for the above

listed and categorized codes of conduct in Nigeria, serve cumulative purpose of communication.

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