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**The Aesthetics of Amaeke Item Oral Performance**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Songs are integral part of oral performance which gives oral literature its total integrity, impact and full realization. Poetry, one of the genres of literature (written or oral) is a performative art whose nature lends itself to linguistic (literary) and paralinguistic (non-literary) modes of communication. Therefore, for an effective communication of desired meaning to be realized in this art, there is much need for the analysis of the features that brings to lime light the beauty of this genre. It is on the basis of this that this paper was carried out to explore the phonological features inherent in the Amaeke- Item war songs. To realise the objectives of this study, a descriptive survey research design which uses random sampling technique was used. The analysis of the linguistic features of the text revealed instances of parallelism whereby words and phrases which are denotatively distinct were drawn together thereby providing a basic structuring principle analogous to meter in metrical poetry. From the analysis of the data, it was discovered among other things that there are lots of dialectal variations in the pronunciation of many lexical items as opposed to that of the standard Igbo. Very common in the lect is the preponderant use of the voiceless alveolar fricative/s/ being replaced with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in the standard Igbo. It was also observed that anywhere Labio-velar approximant /w/ appears at the end of a lexical item, what usually follows it is the half- closed unrounded vowel /e/. This applies also in some lexical items containing the labialized velar nasal/ nw/. one of the recommendations was that research on the analysis of our indigenous literature and culture should be encouraged as this will help to unravel the richness and beauty of our cultural heritage.*

**KEYWORDS: Aesthetics, Amaeke Item and Oral Performance**

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**Introduction**

Songs are the expressions of the minds of the people. Songs are naturally composed based on the events that took place in the lives of the people. It could be for

merriment, for the celebration of new yam festival, for the birth of a new baby, for the coronation of a king and for a host of other celebrations. They are generally cherished worldwide. In Africa, as in most other parts of the world, traditional songs serve as tools that portray socio-cultural identity most of whom have gained recognition internationally. For instance, the South African war songs, the Zulu song the Biafra war songs etc. The Fulani of Northern Nigeria are well known for their saro (Sharo) songs performance, the Efik Ibibio people of the South South Nigeria are known for their Ekpe songs, and the Umuahia people in Eastern Nigeria also known for their Okonko dance etc.

A careful listening to the lyrics of these songs calls for an examination of the aesthetic values and the language used in the construction of these songs. Hence, a look at phonological features inherent in the Amaeke – Item war song.

A look at the history of Amaeke and their war songs will greatly give us a better understanding of the subject. History had it that Item people of Abia State from South Eastern Nigeria, migrated from Abala Egbe/Potopo in Akwa Ibom. The Item people were led by four brothers namely: Uwani, Eke, Okwe, and Akpa. They arrived to a point that they became tired and needed rest. They called the place Ozuitem (A place where Item people rested). Some of their people who could not continue the journey settled at this place called Ozuitem. The rest of the Item people continued their journey and settled at the present day village called Item.

Uwani moved down to the area now called Apuanu Item, Eke settled at the place called Amaeke Item, Okwe settled at a place called Amaokwe Item and Akpa settled to the present place called Okoko Item. These four brothers possessed ‘Otosì Spirit’ as their common ancestor which served as the instrument of authority binding the four families together. Item is currently made up of eight villages; The Akanu, Amaekpu, Amaokwe, Apaanu, Okoko, Okagwe, Ikai and Umuakpa. These eight villages are the off shoots of the four brothers; So the entire item people are blood relations. The communities or villages in Item are called Ovuum family.

Amaeke Item is located almost at the centre of Item, bounded on the south by Abiriba and Igbere on the west by Amaokwe Item, on the East by Apuanu while on the North, by Akanu and Amaekpu Item. The people of Amaeke are renowned for their gallantry and bravery. They are determined and strong-willed warriors of old, feared by neighbours especially within the old Bende division of Abia State.

### **A Brief Discussion of Item War**

The year 1916 fell within a period of global military conflict; the first world war (1914-1918). It was within that period that a military force called the Royal West African Force (RWAF) besieged Amaeke Item and commenced a military campaign that was very deadly. Generational narratives on the cause of the invasion and massacre of Amaeke Item citizens by the RWAF stemmed from the fact that the Amaeke Item community flouted the orders of the then District Officer sent on a

mission to the community. They attacked the emissaries of the district officer sent on an enforcement mission to enslave the entire community. As a result of this disobedience, the military force on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1916 attacked the entire village. Amaeke Item was in shambles. They killed many men. Women, and children were littered everywhere. The entire community was plunged in disarray. Fruits and farm produce were destroyed. It became a shadow of itself and reduced to mere wasted land

The great warriors of Item known as ‘Mmaku’, the war lords of Item, did not keep quiet. Even though they were not prepared for any war, history had it that the fearless patriots rose gallantly and stood against those military men that pulled their triggers and killed from a distance. For three months, it was a blood bath. With cutlasses and bare hands, the heroes of this community defended their land against those with great weapons and were able to chase them away.

The people of Amaeke Item renowned for their gallantry and bravery. They are determined and strong-willed warriors, feared and revered by neighbours especially within the old Bende Division in Abia State.

The wars they fought has led to the composition of some of these war songs that are analysed in this work.

Today modern forms of entertainment have taken the hearts of the youths. This has weakened the strength of traditional songs. We have failed to cherish the foregrounded elements employed by our traditional performers in embellishing these songs. The younger generation are rather embracing western songs such as reggae songs as against the traditional songs. The stylistic purposes of the song are being relegated to the background. In order to rescue the aesthetics of these songs from the brink of extinction.

This study sets out to discuss the stylistic features in Amaeke Item war songs, throwing more light on the features of parallelism at the phonological level.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks to adopt socio-linguistic functional stylistics theory.

The theory considers how to develop an orderly or systematic framework for the stylistic analysis of linguistic deviations that are found in African oral songs. Ngara argues that in every African literature, the culture, history, language are the major issues to the national differences in literature. This means that every literature is based on the people’s culture.

According to Ngara (1982: 6) “The African critics should look for African solutions in criticism... such solutions to study the language of the African writers in relation to their socio-cultural context”. This is true in the sense that every literature in Africa is based on the socio-cultural experiences of the people. Ngara states that an African Critic should employ general standard criticism which are at once universal and being

able to do justice to the oral literature of his particular nation. His theory of stylistics is an adaptation of Halliday's theory of social semiotics, which recognizes the social function of language. From Ngara's view it can be seen that "stylistic criticism seeks to make use of the principles of general linguistics to bring out distinctive features of a variety of the peculiarities of a song writer to identify the features of language which are attributed only to the particular social context" (11-12). He believes that style has a lot to do with social value and is related to Halliday's theory of social semiotics which also regards context as a very important factor in the study of style. Ngara's model does not only identify features of language in a song, it as well examines the role language plays in the description of these functions. According to Ngara "stylistic criticism is not merely concerned with aesthetic and formal aspects of songs. It does not overlook the political, social and moral issues raised in contemporary literature. The focus on linguistic format will lead us to greater understanding of content and character"

According to Ngara, (1982:17) a work of art is made up of content and form. Content being the subject matter of the song and form comprising "the narrative structure" and "the linguistic format". He defines the linguistic format as "the sum total of minute linguistic features proper and para-linguistic affective devices" (1982:17) By "Para-linguistic affective devices", Ngara means 'such features as symbolism, myth, allusion, allegory, which cannot be analysed in terms of normal linguistic description. As for linguistic proper, Ngara notes several levels of description such as:

- i. The grammatical level which focuses on syntax.
- ii. The phonological level which include rhythm, alliteration, assonance etc.
- iii. The lexical level, which considers the writer's choice of words, the collocation of words, metaphors, similes, their effects and their meaning, etc
- iv. The graphological level, which looks at how the arrangement of the song, punctuation and paragraphing contributed to the aesthetic value of the song (17)

The Ngara's model of Sociolinguistic Function Theory of Stylistics is very relevant to this study because the model emphasises on the cultural context of the performance, the experience of the people and their language. This is what informs their songs. The theory also stress the importance of using linguistic tools in the stylistic analysis of the song such as looking at the phonological features and the syntactic and semantic deviations seen in the song. All these factors work together to bring out the aesthetic values in the war songs being studied.

### **Empirical Studies**

This section presents some of the previous studies on stylistic analysis.

Mgbaja, (1987) carried a research work on *A stylistic study of Madubuike's Igbo Poem*. The purpose of her study was to point out the language of the people and how

it can be used as an effective tool in the development of their cultural heritage. She noted in her work that the most excellent way to develop a language is to put it into literary works such as poetry. She looked at the stylistic features in the various poems under study and showed how they have enhanced the beauty of the poetry. She found out that there are some stylistic features that are embedded in the poem such as repetition, metaphor, parallelism, assonance, etc. She recommended that further studies should be carried out in oral tradition in order to arouse the interest of the younger generation in oral tradition.

In the same vein Chibuzor (2008) carried out a research on *Bongo poetry in Uraata Igbo*. The purpose of his study was to examine and rightly document Bongo poetry and various roles it plays in the sociocultural development of Uraata society. He adopted the application of the Rural Profit Theory because Bongo poets depends on their performances for the realization of instructive and emotional effects on the audience. He found out that the origin of Bongo poetry and the role it plays goes beyond that of social entertainment and public education which unites all folks. He recommended that government should take part in funding some of these public enlightenment programmes like *Odenigbo* lecture. He also recommended that well to do people in the society should introduce traditional dance competitions with trophies to attract the interest of the youths.

Awokumaka, (1993) also carried out a research on “A new stylistic reading of Wole Soyinka’s *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* in Rivers state”. The purpose of this study was to explore the artistic principles underlying Soyinka’s choice of language in the translation of D. O Fagunwa’s novel. Also, he integrated the critic’s concern for aesthetic appreciation with the linguistic’s concern for linguistic description in the stylistic analysis of the novel. The researcher focused on syntactic analyses, syntactic deviation, sentence type, semantic analysis, and figurative devices such as simile, metaphor proverbs etc. He suggested that every literary text must use linguistic approach in its stylistic analysis for its aesthetic values to be explored.

Consequently, Chukwudile (2008) carried out a similar research on *Satirical songs in Umuomaku Igbo*. According to him, Satire is a literary genre that is widely used in Igboland and even in the whole world to criticise, correct, mock and exposes the ills of people. The purpose of his study was to bring out the stylistic features that are embedded in the songs and to see how these features such as repetition, parallelism, rhythm, figures of speech have contributed in enhancing the aesthetic values of the song. He found out that satirical songs are mirrors that everybody in the society use to see himself and to stick to good morals. Moreso, he found out that satire is an informant, intended to expose crime, condemn and punish guilty ones for sanity to be achieved in the society. He recommended that government should introduce special allowances to teachers of Igbo literature, moreso, the study and practice of satire should be encouraged in all communities because it contributes to the growth of the communities.

Moreso, Nwanyanwu, (2004) carried out a research on a stylistic analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful ones Are Not Yet Born*. He focused on the basic interlink between the linguistic code and its message. He emphasised that since language communicates human experience, and since literature is language, linguistic codes are message carriers.

In addition, Eze, (2013) carried out a research on literary communication of Igbo culture. Her purpose was to identify and examine the linguistic and paralinguistic elements that assist in communicating Igbo culture, through the use of linguistic features such as proverbs, metaphor, repetition. She found out that Igbo people are known for their regular use of figurative languages in their interactions. Also, she discovered that kolanut is highly regarded in Igbo cultural life and that it is used for many purposes like welcoming guest, sacrifice, prayer etc. She recommends that more works should be done on Igbo novels and that other tribes should research on the culture of their people in order to promote their cultural heritage.

### **Data Presentation**

Foregrounding is a method of defamiliarization. Defamiliarization is a form of making a word that is familiar strange in order to bring out the beauty in it. A song writer sings in different ways because he wants the words in the song to be perceived in a new way. By so doing, he has foregrounded the word by deviating from its normal usage that is widely known by the public.

These words are consciously patterned for stylistic purposes using ordinary, everyday language for special effect. Examples are patterned repetitions also known as parallelism. Song writers are interested in employing them in the songs, because of the aesthetic value they create to the listeners of the songs. As we have rightly stated earlier on, these deviant features can be described through the adoption of a series of levels. In this work, we shall look at the foregrounded features of parallelism at the phonological level. They include Alliteration, assonance, rhyme, word play and repetition.

### **Alliteration**

Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sounds within the lines of the stanzas of the song. In the song below, there are lots of alliterations that are being observed. This is a war song of lamentation of the evils that have befallen his people. Evidenced from the following excerpts.

	Fuusa, fuusa, fuusa nde agha
	Fuusa, fuusa, fuusa nde agha
	Fuusa, fuusa, fuusa nde agha
Lit trans	Come out, come out, come out warriors
Non lit trans	Warriors be ready for war
Eng v trans	The war opponent are around.

	Biasaje, bayi, buru nde agha
	Biasaje, bayi, buru nde agha
	Biasaje, bayi, buru nde agha
Lit trans	Becoming enter carry people war
Non lit trans	The warriors should carry the weapon of war.
Eng v trans	The war opponents are around.

In the above excerpts, the song writer made use of alliterative device.

The constant repetition of some sounds such as the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ and the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/ makes the song to be sung with force, also it adds to its aesthetic value.

In the song the Labiodental fricative /f/ is repeated nine times. Also, the bilabial plosive /b/ is repeated nine times as well.

	elee otu anyi si buru obia n'ala anyi?
Lit trans	How did we become another person in the land we
Non lit trans	War has made our land to be desolate
Eng v trans	How did we become strangers in our own land
	ubi anyi nwere erusaghi anyi aka
	anyi ga abu ndi obia nye ha
Lit trans	Farm we have not reaching we hand
Non lit trans	War has made us aliens
Eng v trans	We will be strangers to them

War has made us to loose the possessions of our land we cannot harvest our fruits; we have become slaves to the warlords.

In the above lines of the songs /b/ the voiced bilabial plosive is repeated five times. The alveolar lateral sound /l/ is repeated two times. The alveolar nasal /n/ is repeated eight times. These sounds are used for aesthetic purposes. The songwriter has decided to use the sounds to drive home the message he has for his people. The repetition of these sounds is to create an emphasis on how the war has terribly made the community to be desolate. The combination of the sounds made the song to be melodious. War has really made the people to loose their inheritance. They have become slaves in their father's land. The songwriter is asking a question by using 'elee' meaning who are the people that have made the community slaves? The use of "who" does not mean that he does not know the people he is referring to rather he wants to arouse the interest of his listeners to the songs by the use of rhetorical question.

The song writer also made use of alliterative device in the song below to heighten his artistic intelligence by repeating some sounds. This can be seen in the following excerpts.

	onye oriri korie, yanyo, yanyo
	ónyè orírí korie, yanyo, yanyo
Lit trans	Who it eats, it eats
Non lit trans	War has eliminate our people
Eng v trans	Whoever that die falls victim
	órièlà: ñdè ñmá, órièlà: ñdè ñmá
	órièlà ñde mara mma, iyo wo, iyowol
Lit trans	It has eaten people beauty
Non lit trans	It has eaten people that are beautiful
Non lit trans	War has killed our strong warriors
Eng v trans	Our beautiful ones are killed.

The excerpts reveals how their beautiful ones were killed during the war. The use of the adjective “beautiful” to refer to their warriors is to create deep impression on the type of warriors they had. This is a song of consolation of their past warriors that fought the battle for the survival of Amaeke land. The beauty of the song is mirrored by the repetition of the alveolar approximant /r/. The frequent use of the sound enhances the rhythmic flow of the song. This alveolar approximant /r/ is repeated ten times in the lines of the song.

### Assonance

This is the repetition of vowel sounds in consecutive utterances. Assonance like alliteration is arranged in a song at irregular intervals. In the excerpts below, the song writer effectively and unconsciously used this device to create melody

	ọ̀nụ̀ n’akojo ka-anyi rataha nshii
	ọ̀nụ̀ n’akojo ka-anyi rataha nshii
Lit trans	Mouth that speaks ill let us ignore ear
Non lit trans	Our war opponent that castigate us,
Non lit trans	Let us deal with the people that insult us,
Eng v trans	We should ignore them.
	egbe mụ na nma mụ gbeeka, gbeeka
Lit trans	Gun mine and knife mine sorry, sorry.
Non lit trans	My warriors that were harmed take heart
Eng v trans	My guns and knives take heart.

It also increases the musical quality of the song. The half close front unrounded vowel /e/, is repeated six times. The half close back rounded vowel /u/ occurred three times. The half-close back rounded vowel /ɔ/ occurred six times. The open front unrounded vowel /æ/ repeatedly occurred sixteen times. The half-close front unrounded vowel /i/ occurred three times. The song writer prefers to use the word *gbeeka* meaning “take heart” to address his people. This does not mean that they are weak, but rather he used it to encourage the wounded soldiers in the war front. The use of the word *rataha nshii* meaning ignore them was euphemistically used to mean deal with their war



opponents. The song writer has artistically blended the vowel sounds in the song for aesthetic purposes. This is a war song of revenge by their war opponent. To the people of Amaeke item, it is an insult for them to speak ill of their warriors.

### **Rhyme**

This is a situation where two or more words are similar in sounds. In the excerpts below, there are some rhyming words that have been observed. In line one and two the singer employed rhyming device in the song.

ejere mụ mba chọo nde nwere ụba

Lit trans I walked village looked people have wealth

Non lit trans I looked for rich and great warriors in villages

Eng v trans I went to village to look for wealthy people.

Ma bia Amaeke Item hi nde ọma mara mma.

Lit trans I come Amaeke item saw people nice and beautiful

Non lit trans Amaeke has strong warriors

Eng v trans I came to Amaeke and saw beautiful and nice people.

The word, *mba* meaning “villages” and *ụba* meaning “wealth” in line one rhyme. Similarly, *oma* meaning “nice” and *mma* meaning “beautiful” in line two rhyme.

The rhyme in line one and two are example of internal rhyme. The use of these rhymes in stylistic analysis is to create consciousness in the mind of the listeners on how words can be stylistically used for aesthetic value. Moreso, the song is a praise song, the song writer draws the attention of his hearers to the fact that Amaeke item have strong warriors.

### **Repetition**

This appears at three levels in stylistic analysis namely syntactic, semantic and phonological. We will look at it under the patterned repetition/ parallelism at the phonological level, particularly the lexical repetition.

#### **Lexical repetition**

This means the reoccurrence of particular lexical items in consecutive utterances. The song below depicts instances of lexical repetition. In the appendix below, lexical repetition is seen in all the lines of the song.

Amaeke Item okpi urre rụrụ gi

Lit trans Amaeke Item admiration receives you

Non lit trans Amaeke Item warriors are conquering people

Eng v trans Amaeke people are worthy to be celebrated

Elele nwa agụ

Lit trans Watch baby lion  
Non lit trans Celebrate the warriors  
Eng v trans Admire the lion cub.

Elele nwa agụ

Lit trans Watch baby lion  
Non lit trans Celebrate the warriors  
Eng v trans Admire the lion cub

ure rụrụ gi  
ure rụrụ gi

Lit trans Administration reaches you  
Non lit trans Warriors are to be celebrated  
Eng v trans You ought to be admired

elele nwa agụ

Lit trans Watch baby lion  
Non lit trans Celebrate the warriors  
Eng v trans Admire the lion cub

“Ure” meaning admiration occurred three times, “nwaagu” meaning a cub which represents the warriors occurred three times “elele” meaning watch a cub is repeated three times. This is a song of praise for the victory that the warriors have accorded to the community in the war. As this song is sang, the community dances around in celebration of the victory. The song writer metaphorically calls the warriors cub. This is used because the warriors have displayed the strength of a lion in the war. The singer keeps on congratulating them for their victory by using pet names such as “ure”. The lexical repetition of the words does not only enhances the meaning in the song, but moreso, the phonological appropriateness of the sounds. It also add to the pleasurable tone it gives to the ears of the listeners. This is so because people derive joy when songs are repeated severally. It creates an atmosphere for fast mastering of the song.

In the excerpts below, the song writer employed lexical repetition to create more emphasis on what might befall them in the battle front.

Éyémálà làwùì ñnèmò, ñnèmò  
Éyémálà làwùì ñnèmò, ñnèmò  
Lit trans I will go meet mother and father mine  
Non lit trans Warriors believe in death  
Eng v trans My departure is to meet my fore parents.

ọ bụrụ na egbuo mụ n’agha  
ọ bụrụ na egbuo mu n’agha  
Lit trans If and killed in war

Non lit trans Warriors are victims of death  
Eng v trans Death cannot be ruled out in war

Ibe anyi gahi oḡo bụ n’eligwo  
Lit trans Place we see again is in heaven  
Non lit trans Warriors believes in heaven when died  
Eng v trans We will meet again in heaven.

Most of the lexical items in the songs were repeated severally. *lakwui* meaning “to see” occurred two times, *nnemo* meaning “my mother” two times, ‘*nnamo*’ meaning “my father” is repeated twice, ‘*agha*’ is repeated twice, *oḡurū* meaning if appeared twice. The central idea the song writer is communicating is that the warriors should take a look at them very well, paraventure they did not return from the war, they shall see in heaven. That is their belief.

### Findings

From the analysis of the data collected, it was discovered that even though Amaeke Item is a dialect of Igbo language, there are lots of dialectal variations in the pronunciation of many lexical items as opposed to that of the standard Igbo. The dialect, for instance, allows the use of half-closed front vowel /e/ instead of the open front back vowel /α/. Also very common in the lect is the preponderant use of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ being replaced with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in the standard Igbo. In the dialect also, it is observed that anywhere labiovelar approximant /w/ appears at the end of a lexical item, what usually follows it is the half-closed unrounded vowel /e/. This applies also in some lexical items containing the labialized velar nasal /nw/. These claims are evidenced in the following dialectal lexemes:

Amaeke Item Dialect	Standard Igbo	English
Fusa	Putu	Come out
Phosa	Ghota	Understand
Iwo	Iwe	Anger
Onwo	Onwe	Self
Eligwo	Eligwe	Heaven
Ekwo	Ekwe	Agree

However, despite these variations, there still exists mutual intelligibility among this dialect and other dialects of Igbo language.

### Conclusion

This research work has indeed broadened one's vision on the aesthetic values that lie in our indigenous songs. As a result of this exposure, it was observed that much work have not be done on the indigenous songs in our communities.

### **Recommendations**

The research therefore recommends that:

1. More research work should be carried out on the indigenous songs of our communities so as to enrich our cultural heritage.
2. Research on the analysis of indigeneous songs should be encouraged among scholars. This will enable the younger generation to appreciate their history and past experiences of their people. There is a saying that a people that forgets their past may not handle their future well.
3. Scholars should delve into the analysis of songs in their communities in order to preserve these songs from being rodded away. The documentation of this work will be of great advantage to students of literature and stylistics and linguistics in general.
4. Government should encourage the students, teachers, lecturers that have shown interest in promoting their indigeneous culture by giving them grants to embark on such research.

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