**“The Uniqueness of the Language of *Ugo Uzo* Festival in Emekuku, Imo State**

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**Abstract**

This paper focuses on the analysis of language of Ugo-uzo song. Ugo-uzo is an annual cultural festival of Emekuku community, in Imo state. The song is a reenactment of peace and unity in the life of Emekuku man. The uniqueness lies on the lyrics of the language of the songs in which this work captured and depicted. The song is organized in stanzas and the lyrics are characterized by imaginative manipulation of metaphors, idioms, exaggeration, repetitions, humor, among others. The song calls for reflection on historical origin and the preservation of cultural values. The work adapts Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL). His inspirational knowledge was recorded by others linguists. It states among others things that; “language is not an autonomous being but an entity which depends on the society that uses it and/or in relation to the demand of the society that uses it” … context dependent (Cf Malinowski, 1946p.309). It underscores the significances of song in sustaining cultural values that build them together, enhance peace and development.

*New words: Elicited, SFL, Inspirational and Reenactment*

**Introduction**

Language is the most potent ingredient of the Arts in whatever genres, form or shape that is presented. Languages is the glory and icing of the creative arts. To this extent, this research seems to employ, evaluates and dissect the language employed in the song of Ugo-Uzo festival. This is because the realization and success of these songs can only be conveyed and accentuated through language. The data for the work is got through audio records, observation and oral interview from the key organizers of the festival. The song is downloaded and analyzed stanza by stanza. Songs on the other hand, is a function of oral poetry. To discourse the song, we have to look at its level of orality. Language is the hallmark or basic ingredient of poetry. It dexterous use or employment of language gives bit or life to any song. The work highlights the strong unity among Emekuku which is traceable to the historical song of Ugo-uzo Festival. Despite the rapid technological expositions, socio-political and economic development, consistent inconsistency of policies that have thwarted peace and unity in most towns and communities, Emekuku remains solidly intact. Emekuku like every other community experienced a historical pre-colonial status. Her customs and traditions faced with degeneration. Some of them are fast becoming obsolete coupled with the blow dealt on them through contact with the Europeans and it’s attended Christianity which saw nothing good in indigenous culture and worked relentlessly to eliminate most of them. However, it would be recalled that Emekuku pre-colonial structure were rooted in traditional belief system and superstition like “Ofo na ogu, itu mmii, ipa nshi, ikwu ala, Ugu-uzo, among others”. The lyrics of the songs invoke the psych of the people into cordiality. Like Okoson’s song/music titled “Nigeria Unite”, the song calls to the mind of every well meaning Nigeria the spirit of oneness and same is applicable to Ugo –Uzo song to an Emekuku man. Apart from instilling peace, unity and love, it is through culture that our natural values can be reiterated particularly, now that crisis is in evitable among men. Again, the religions (Christianity) which we embraced wholly are not helping matters rather they contributed to the destruction of peace in most towns and communities. Therefore, one of the solutions for peace and sustainability is going back to those cultural values and ethics that define a better man for a better society.

**Statement of the Problem**

Language changes for myriad of reasons basically, it often accommodates many needs of the users. For diverse reasons, people listen to songs/music with little or no interest. Songs can make mar the peace of a person, group or community it’s addressed. Often time people are castigated or praised through songs/music and the effect thereafter. Therefore, attempt to highlight and analysis Ugo-uzo song provide literature on the cultural values of song vice-versa the usefulness in reinforcing a positive change in the life of Emekuku.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Systemic Functional Linguistics**

SFL is a frame work of Halliday which took its roof from anthropological linguistics. The works of Bronislaw Malinowski, John Firth and Benjamin whorf formed the background of Halliday’s Inspirational Knowledge. Vande-ciume (2014) summaries the vision of the three scholars had on Halliday. Vande-ciume claims that Malinowski misrepresented the texts of the people of Trobriand Islands of south west Pacific and got to realize that language is not an autonomous being rather an entity, which depends on the society that uses it. The context sensitive nature of language exists in two planes; language change in relation to the demand of the society that uses it and the context of situation which implies the meta-textual social environment, was first coined by Malinowski to distinguish it from the syntactic environment of lexical items within linguistics strings. Malinowski introduced the term “context of culture”. This phrase refers to the cultural environment in which the language is used for communication. Halliday believed that language has three functions namely, ideational, Interpersonal and textual. These grammatical phenomena are known as metafunction. Ideational among other things deals with field aspect of the texts; the subject matter and the context of use. This theory was expanded by post Hallidayan.

**Emekuku and Its Historical Context**

The name Emekuku was derived from “Umu-Ome-Ke-Ukwu” (Sons of great doer) which was a name given to them by their neighboring towns due to the exploits of their fore fathers both in war and prosperity. The whiteman’s inability to pronounce the world with meanings decided to shorten it to Emekuku to facilitates pronunciation for communication purposes. Emekuku is in Owerri North local government area of Imo state. It has its boundary with Awaka, Enyiogugu Mbaise, Uratta, Uzagba, Avuvu, Emii, respectively. Emekuku people are called “Umu-Oshiudela, a nickname given to them by their father, Ezelukwu. The name literary means one that can transform into a beautiful giant Bird, “Udela”. According to Opara-Ndudu (2012), “The beautiful Vulture, “Udela” resembles an eagle (Iche or Ugo) adorned with white feathers with rings round its neck. It is an ancestrally related emblem by which Emekuku people are known. Its presence in the air signaled the imminent death of a notable citizen. It appeared rarely and whenever this totem bird is sighted, people beckoned and shout at it “Udele, yuo yuo!” meaning “Udela come back, come back”, in an apparent plea for the departing citizen to come back to life.

Contemporarily, there is an egotic expression and colloquial chanting in festive time during merriment, “Umu Oshiudela”. This is usually made among Emekuku people themselves particularly, their women say it to express pride among non-indigene. Whenever an outsider makes this reference outside Emekuku, they must surely investigate to know his or her link with Emekuku because it is a peculiar name to them. Their culture is showcased in their persistent nature of agriculture. Ibeole (2012) stated thus “Emekuku could be likened to the biblical Bethlehem. The smallest, unpopular, unrecognized ancient town where our Lord Jesus Christ was born” He continued that Bethlehem became renowned in history because God purposely chose it for his divine will” p.12. The town is made up of ten villages (Umuocham, Azaraegbelu, Umuakuru, Azaraowalla, Akalovo, Ubowalla, Uboegbelu, Ezeogba, Ezedibia and Okwu) which implies the ten sons of Ezeleukwu. Conflict is inevitable in a community, society, or among nations but can be managed when communication, dialogue and mutual understanding prevail. In the case of Emekuku, the creation of new autonomous community is a child of circumstance, which result to the decision of the Imo state government. This development could not thwart the cultural import of the town. That is why it is regarded as the most peaceful town in Owerri North LGA and Imo state at large. Also, that is why Ugo-uzo cultural festival remain unchallengeable and unchangeable in the face of time. However, it is worthy to note that the church missionaries did well in sustainable development and Christianizing not only Emekuku but many other neighboring towns in this part of the country. Apart from physical development, the purification of Emekuku culture (by eliminating those suspected fetish practices) became paramount.

**Ugo-uzo and its Position in the Face of Time**

In recent times, the era of too many born again and self righteous Christians, who see nothing good in their own culture, categorically belief that all elements and artifacts of Emekuku in particular and Igbo in general are idols and forever evil.

* They belief that it is not enough to denounce an idol and reject idol worshipping without completely destroying everything related to it. There became a question whether or not the culture should be wiped out or not. Contrary to the views of the new-wave extremist born again warriors, more liberal Christians who we henceforth refer to as the progressions, insist that reformation not destruction is the answer to the ongoing dispute over supremacy and legitimacy between Christianity and culture in Emekuku. If this is not done, it will endanger religious and cultural crises of immense proportions not only in Emekuku but in other places. In accessing people’s minds, Ohala (2010) opines that the meaning of culture varies from people. “it is a people’s way of life which distinguishes them from others. The embodiment of a people’s way of life, ideas, beliefs and views” Okoye (2020), defines culture as the fabric of ideas, beliefs, skills, tools, aesthetics, patterns of thinking, eating, talking as well as artifacts shared by people and society transmitted from generation to generations”. According to him, Ugo-Uzo is a cultural heritage and should not be eliminated. The crises between religion and culture brought in factions; those who believe that Christianity and culture cannot mix and those who insist that the two coexist in harmony. Based on the second view, the Catholic Church which is the first church in Emekuku saw it as the only source through which religion could permeates deeper into the people and embraced it wholly. Both work well to instill values on the people. That is why today, before the ceremony begins, Mass is conducted to usher the activities into the good hand of God for care and protection.

**Ugo– Uzo Festival**

This is the most celebrated festival in Emekuku that unit the ten villages despite separation and formation of new autonomous communities. The festival is an amalgam of Nkwa Ukwu and communal effort of clearing the major pathway Ezi – Uzo through which Aluma Iherimma took in search of her two brothers. It is an oral tradition just like we rightly stated earlier some academics have written the history down to enable researchers to highlight the significance of this cultural values. During the institution of Nkwa Ukwu, one of the festival in Emekuku, Ezelukwu, the father of Emekuku being old and might have seen signals of imminent death summoned his ten sons with definite instructions, “Nwuru Ovu akabia echi”. Eight out of his ten sons understood the idiomatic expressions of their father’s message to mean “come very early tomorrow”. The other two, took a literary interpretation to mean “catch a dove by hands as you come tomorrow”. He adviced the former (namely; Umuocham, Azaraegbelu, Umuakuru, Azaraowala, Akalovo, Ezeogba, Ezedibia and Okwu) to live in unity and love one another; no quarrel/fight, no shed of blood., among others, for their betterment. The other two, (Ubowala and Uboegbelu) were in the bush in search of dove “Ovu”. On the process, they saw nuts of valued specie of palm called” Osukwu” which has nuts that are easy crack. Suddenly, quarrel and fight erupted over the ownership of the nuts and that led to their death. When the tale of woe got to their sister, Aluma Iherimma, the only daughter of Ezelukwu she sang dirge from Ezedibia to Okwu through the Ezi – Uzo pathway. Unfortunately, on her way back, she disappeared and never seen again. The ceremony is in commemoration of the eight (8) sons of Ezelukwu who were alert and articulate to have understood their father’s message. The dirge is embedded in the song which singled its’ language as unique for Peace. This festival is celebrated every eight month of the year as soon as the new moon is sighted. It commences on Nkwo Emeke Market with feasting and commitments. The ceremony attracts participants from wilder segments of the neighborhood, old and young alike. Ugo– Uzo signifies peace sustainer and communion with ancestors which the Emekuku believe strongly in.

**The Song** Chorus

Aka mmamma nu I yaa !

Emekuku mmamma nu I yaa

Oshiudela mmamma nu I yaa !

I yooo!!!

`A chi agbala, Chi agbal anyi anya

Ome a afo anyi Ome n’afo anyi eruole

Ihi ihe anyi Ihi ihe anyi, erile anyi

Oha na eze Oha na eze ka agba

Mgboto anyi Mboto anyi ka abga

Ndomi anyi Ndomi anyi ka agba

Umu nwa nwa Umu nwanwa ka agba

Anyi bu ndi oma eleele Aaayi maa!

I mara agba, gbara bama ime Aaayi maa!

Gi amaghi agba, gbara puma ama Aaayi maa!

Anyi wu ndi oma elele Aaayi maa

Onye ajaja atula ntu

O ji mbe ahala mbe Ihiia

Oshi udela ibem lee Ihiia

Emekuku o no ngaa Ihiia

Okporokporo ijiji erigbuola onwu ya Ihiia

Onye shi imo ataala, ya zonye nu ya ukwu Ihiia

Anyi wu ndioma elele Ihiia

onye aja aja, atula ntu Ihiam

Ee egwu ji muo! 2x Ihiiaa

Ogba egbe a chi abuola ooo!

Bia lee nga Bob nwanne nta nwuru! √

Bob nnem!

Bob uwa niile!

Obara asachiela anyi anya!

Obara awurula idi!

Ezelukwu anwuchaala1

A nnu seturu ya aka!

Ekereke ekwuola!

Egwurugwu atuola!

Ndi amuma aman

Kpowana m obi nnem! Odo nnem! Okere nnem! Ehee! Ehee!! Eh hee Ehee!

Uratta bakwara ima anyi aka ooo! Ehee! Ehee!! Eh hee Ehee!

Ori ji ori ede! ori anu, ori azu ee ! ”

Utu achala anyi aka Ehee! Ehee!! Eh hee Ehee!

Umu nneji ejisiela onwe ha ike ”

Onye eji eji enwe ikpe! ”

Onye anyi nyere ngiri agbala oso

Anyi wu ndi oma elele

Onye aja aja atula ntu

English Translation

Greetings on both sides!

Greetings to Emekuku!

People that transform to Udela!

A day has broken!

Our yearly activity has come!

Our own things will never kill us!

Our daughters, wives and !

Grandchildren are comparabledancing we!

We are the envy of others because we are unique and beautiful!

Those who know how to dance, should dance in!

Those who don’t know how to dance, should dance out

We are the envy of others.

We should be mindful of ourselves

Whoever sees tortoise, should grip it firmly!

People that can transform to vulture (Udela) are here!

Emekuku you are here

Flies have eaten too much

Whoever said that Imo has dried, let him enter into it

We are the envy of others.

We should be mindful of ourselves!

I am afraid

The gun shooter, the day has broken

Come and see where Bob, my blood brother, is lying dead

My own dear brother

His blood is every where

The blood has become flood

All Ezeleukwu have gone

Some people are responsible for the act

all signs, including natural, supernatural and spiritual have testified that!

Call me Obi, Odo, Okere, my blood brothers

Uratta has come to challenge us

It has been clearly see

Our people have held themselves together

Those we held hostage has no say

Those we gave ribs cannot run away.

We are the envy of others.

We should be mindful of ourselves!

**Analysis**

The song is arranged in four stanzas or phases but for the purpose of logistics, the work will select the key areas that depict uniqueness in the use of language. In the first stanze, lines 1-3; the waving of both sides in greetings, “aka mmamma nu repeatedly with the response “Iyaa!!! It depicts language accommodation. Halliday (1976) states, that the “Linguistic system is a set of environmental or contextual opinions with input constrains” “aka mmamma nu” is a dialectical variant of language use. It is a sign of love and appreciation and confirmation of accommodation and acceptance for rallying around for joy. Language is a social phenomenon and the most powerful emblem of social behaviour.

Njemanze (2013:49) see language not only as a vehicle of communication but a powerful tool used to impact positive orientation and thought processes. Lines 9-12; “Anyi wu ndi oma elele, onye aja aja atula ntu”, were also repeated in all the stanza, meaning that we are the envy of other because of our unique qualities. Lines 12 and 13; “gbara bama ime and puwa ama” meaning dancing ‘in’ and ‘out’ is connotative. ‘In’ and ‘out’ are prepositions. which implies wisdom, intellect, togetherness and stupidity or prodigal respectively. Sapir-Whorf pioneered within the period uphold the cultural relativity hence Emekuku’s demand, use and meaning of language vary from other context. This implies that that language of people determines their culture and system of thought.

A linguist is not necessarily one who speaks several languages but one who is interested in matters that concern human languages and is determined to discover the general principles that underline the speech habits of a people. He is interested in discovery what makes language a unique property of humans particularly, the people that use its and the relationship between language and cognition (thought). Its hope is to study human language as a way of gaining access to the human mind because it is often claimed that languages is a reflection or a mirror of the mind. Lines 8-10; the inclusion of all and sundry “Oha na eze, Umu nwa nwa, Ngboto, Ndiom” respectively is a proof of Unisom. In other word, no one is left behind in the affairs of unity and love. In stanza two; lines 1, 2 and18; there is a kind of warning for those who might castigate them for one reason or the other, should better be beware. In line one, “Oji mbe ahala mbe”, “mbe” is a tortoise and its life is characterized by corny. It is rarely seen around and when people see it, they should grab it. It implies that once you see your enemy around you, should not miss chaining or holding him else your life became risky. In other words, any enemy in their mix particularly, that might seek for their lives or downfall should not be speared “Oshiudela Ibem “, people that transform to vulture implies oneness in character and action. “Onye shi imo ataala, ya, zonye nu ya ukwu”. Imo is a river through which the state got its name. When it seems to have dried by mere observation, its full of strength still retains. It implies that if threatened in any disguise, they will surprise them by their collective strength. Brown and Yule (1993:12) refer to language which is used to convey factual or proportional information as primarily transactional language. They explain that the sole motivation of the speaker/writer in this category is the efficient transference of information which must be understood by the target person(s) to avert some serious consequences. Lines 2, 18 and 5, chanting implies preparedness for any challenges,

In stanza 3, line 4-7; “Nwunnem nta” symbolizes brotherliness in practice and unification from womb. Example, “Bia lee nga bob nwunnem nta nwuru, Bob nnem, A nnu meturu yaaka”. In other words, some people collaborated in killing him. Here, the song expressed intimacy and uniqueness. All signs, natural, spiritual and supernatural have shown that. For example; “ekereke ekwuola, ndi amuma amala, egwurugh atuola,” lines 8 – 10 respectively. Finally, the entire stanza 4; shows summon for collective actions for retaliation. This is also an indication of unity.

**Literary Appreciation**

There is clear indication of repetitions, exaggerations, allusions and connotations. The essence of repetition is for emphasis in order to drive home the message. For example, stanza one; lines 1-3, “mmamma nu”, showing greetings and the last two lines of every stanza states thus: “anyi wu ndi oma elele, onye ajaja atula ntu”, meaning that we should be mindful of ourselves because we are envy of others. We can see exaggeration in stanza three, lines 4-10; “Bob uwa nile, obara asachelaala mu anya, obara awurula idi, Ezeleukwu anwuchaala, ekereke ekwuole, ndi amuma amala, egwurugwu atuola”, among others. Lines 3 and 18 of stanza one and two “oshi udela” connotes one who reincarnates a totem bird and “Imo -” river that never dries rather the reduction in its size during dry season does not in any way implies weakness or reduction in strength respectively.

**Conclusion**

The work shows how language is used to express and communicate people’s feelings, interest, aspiration and vision. Social linguistically, Emekuke is a speech community and as such share a set of norms, rules and expectations regarding the use of language. According to Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the school of thought that pioneered within the period upholds the cultural relativity. Halliday (1976) states; “the linguistic system is a set of environmental or contextual opinions with input constrains” Through dialect, the cultural heritage, interest and the identity of the community is highlighted. The use of dialectical variant of language, such as ‘aka, idi, a nnu shi, udela, nwunne m nta” among others, goes to prove that language of a people determines their system of thought. The use of choruses and chanting is for creativity and musicality style. The work attributed crisis, chaos, persistent quarrel and/or separation to lack of cultural education. It therefore, suggests cultural education as one of the ways to reiterate the unity and good relationship for sustainable development. In the face of all these falsehood, adulteration/ forgery or thwarting of cultural identity, there is need to reiterate our root through cultural education.

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