

VERBAL FOLKLORES AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION THROUGH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

by

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Abstract

Every society has forms of folklore which contain the indigenous knowledge of people where such resources are produced. The folkloric forms are verbal and non-verbal, customary and material that transfer thoughts, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and cultural practices of traditional Africans of successive generations. In this study an attempt was made to examine the major types of verbal folklore as means of communicating African customs and traditions through indigenous languages where such materials are produced. The paper also explored the effort made by African writers in preserving folklore forms through their literary works. The researchers argued that through linguistic resources like folktales, folksongs, folkmusic, dances, myths, legends, oral history, riddles, proverbs, chants and incantations, superstitious beliefs, and so on, African cultural heritages are being preserved and transmitted and the main channel of communication is the language, an integral part of culture. Folklore materials whether verbal or non-verbal are property of the community from primordial era and so there is no authorship.

Keywords: *Folklore, communication, language, culture, heritage*

Introduction

Folkloric materials are culture-based and they are usually transmitted verbally and/or non-verbally by performers from one generation to another through the indigenous languages of the society where they are produced. The term, Folklore is sometimes used interchangeably with *Orature, Oral Tradition, Oral Literature or African Oral Literature* by some scholars across Africa. *Folklore* is the body of expressive culture which includes

folktales, folksongs, music, dance, myths, legends, oral history, riddles, proverbs, chants and incantations, superstitious beliefs and so on. Folklore is naturally the oldest and most predominant aspect of culture whose creators and consumers are rural dwellers, agrarians and uneducated. According to Darah (2014:41), the term, “Folklore” was coined in 1846 by the English archivist, William Thoms to refer to endangered elements and expressions of oral/popular culture under the pressure of capitalist industrialization.” It was therefore used to replace “popular antiquities” and “popular literature” in his research.

Folklore could be defined in various ways and in this article, a few definitions were considered. Folklore entails oral traditions such as folktales, proverbs, *material culture* (traditional building style, handmade toys, craftworks) customary lore, forms and *rituals* of ceremonies (folk dances, initiation rites, funeral rites, circumcision rites, chieftaincy confirmation, among others). According to Brunvand (1978:2-3), folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understanding, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples. The scholar further states that Folklore manifests itself in many oral and verbal forms (menifacts), in kinesiological forms (customary behaviour or social facts) and in material forms (artifacts). The definition of Bascom (1953:283) implies that Folklore refers to “part of culture, but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, the text ballad and other songs.” In corroborating the foregoing, Okpewho (1992:5) who is another famous scholar in African oral literature affirms that “the folklore of a people consists essentially of two kinds of activity: what these people *traditionally say* (such as songs, proverbs, folktales) and what they *traditionally do* (weaving, dance, rituals). Other aspects of folklore mentioned by folklore include traditional methods of cooking, architecture, medicine, and dressmaking as well as religion or ritual, art, instrumental music, and dance. Okpewho’s view correlates with that of William John Thoms who established the constituents of folklore to include manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, and so on. The above implies that the constituents of folklore include what people traditionally say, make and do. To Brunvand (1978), folklore comprises of; (i) The unrecorded

traditions of the people; (ii) The form and content of these traditions (iii) Their style of technique of communication from one person to another. However, Brunvand's research has shown that folklore is classified into three major forms and these include:

(i) **Verbal Folklore:** These are oral products such folktales, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, riddles, ballads, folk epics, chants, incantations, tongue-twisters, instrumental music, oratory, jokes, among others. These forms of folklore are orally realized, composed and transmitted from one generation to another.

(ii) **Customary Folklore:** These are folkloric things that people do in society. These include ritual rites, initiations, folk dances, pouring of libation, chieftaincy confirmation, coronation, funeral and marriage ceremonies, festivals, ancestral worship, religious activities, and so on.

(iii) **Material Folklore:** These are activities people traditionally carryout in societies and they include folk and arts like textile designs, musical instruments, weaving, carving, moulding, sculpture, masking, traditional building style, methods of cooking, architecture designs, folk medicine and dressmaking, to mention a few.

Folklore has several distinctive characteristics which this study shall identify for the sake of documentation. The first feature is that it refers to oral traditions that can be passed informally and verbally (through instructions and demonstrations) as in the case of proverbs, myths, legendary stories, folktales, riddles and so on. It can be transferred through non-verbal channels (craftworks, dress style, cloth designs, among others). Folklore connotes elements of culture that are unpopular among urban dwellers and so it relates to the rural, poor, uneducated peasants. All forms of folklore especially those that are orally realized and transmitted by the people are community-based but not individualistic (proverbs, songs, riddles, folktales). This implies that there is no authorship and protection by copyright law. It helps to differentiate between one ethnic group or the other (especially in the non-verbal forms clothing, weaving, fishing, carving and singing. There is no formal instruction or instructional direction. There are three main constituents: what you traditionally say, do and make.

Folklore and Culture in African Society

The concepts of *Folklore* and *Culture* are closely related in the field of Oral Literature. In this study, attempt would be made to show their areas of convergence and divergence in relation to the aim and objectives. In the first place, folklore is embedded in the culture of people whether Africans or Non-Africans. The concept, “Culture” can be explained in various ways by scholars across the world but it could simply be defined as the total way of life of a group of people. Idang (2015) observes that “culture embraces a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners, morals and so on. It is the patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people that claim to share a single or descent (98). In every traditional society, the culture of the people could be broadly divided into two: Material and Non-Material culture.

Material Culture refers to aspect of culture that are physical and tactile, and these include: food, artifacts, sculptures, textiles, buildings, art and craftworks, musical instruments, and so on. The *Non-Material Culture* involves elements of culture that cannot be seen nor touched but they are being experienced, expressed and transferred from one generation to another. Instances include; norms, customs, language, music, dances, games, puppetry, proverbs, riddles, masquerading, festivals, ritual rites, ceremonies (funerals, marriages, coronations), folktales, and folksongs, to mention a few. One could deduce from the above submission that the folklore and language (spoken or written) of a particular group of people are vital aspects of their culture, however, language plays a significant role in promoting culture and folklore. Idang (2015) in his study affirmed that:

Culture has been classified into its material and non-material aspects. While the material culture refers to the visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of human survival; non-material culture comprises of the norms and mores of the people. While the material culture is concrete and takes the form of artifacts and crafts, non material culture is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture (100).

This classification of culture covers various aspects of oral traditions which include those that appeal to the images of sight, touch, feelings, and those regulating the lives of people in society. All these are expressed through the indigenous languages of the people where they are created. The thrust of this study is to explore folklore materials particularly the verbal forms as means of expressing indigenous knowledge of people in traditional African communities.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims at examining various ways of expressing indigenous knowledge and practices in African societies, using verbal arts. Apart from the foregoing, there are specific objectives which include exploring: (i) language as a vehicle of cultural transmission (ii) folklore in African languages (iii) indigenous languages and expression of folklore, and (iv) folklore forms in African literary works.

Methodology

The study adopted both field and library-based approaches. As field research, oral data were purposively collected from natural settings. The oral texts were transcribed and translated from the indigenous language of certain Urhobo communities where they were gathered, translated into the English version and qualitatively analysed to achieve the objectives of the current study. However, secondary materials that are relevant to the subject matter were consulted, reviewed and also employed to corroborate arguments and discourse in the study.

Theoretical Framework: Functionalist Theory

The study adopted the Functionalist Theory which focuses on the utilitarian functions of oral materials produced in traditional society. These include folksongs, proverbs and proverbials, riddles, folktales, myths and festivals, to mention a few. This theoretical underpinning is of great relevant because the study explored the culture of a society vis-a-vis the functions or roles performed by any oral product such as those mentioned above, how they are practised in the society and the ways in which these

functions help to ensure the survival of the society (Okpewho,1992:173). Functionalist theory of oral literature or folklore was proposed by Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown and it expounds the view that any cultural activity must have a utilitarian value for its people. In this study, various forms of folklore shall be examined to show how they are used in expressing indigenous knowledge and practices of Africans in socio-cultural settings.

Language as Vehicle of Cultural Transmission

Every living organism has their distinct ways of expressing their thoughts, feelings, and actions in their community. This mode of expression is what humans refer to as language. Language is an integral part of culture that serves as a medium of communication and a symbol of identity in society. According to Agha and Obianike (2019), “language is a distinctively human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is the vehicle through which people’s culture is transmitted. It is an extremely important aspect of a community. It is an index of identity which serves as a repository of people’s culture, industry and exploits”(39). This definition implies that language is a means of expressing indigenous knowledge and through it people can be identified in any part of the world. It correlates with the view of Korharen (2006:6) that asserts that “language is an essential part of cultural identity, and Inuit want to keep Inuktitut as a living language.” Barcelonia (1996:10) asserts that “Language is the key to the heart of a people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. A lost language is a lost tribe, a lost tribe is a lost culture, a lost culture is a lost civilization. A lost civilization is invaluable knowledge lost...the whole vast archives of knowledge and experience in them will be consigned to oblivion” (cited in Ekeh, 2005:530).

Also, Aziza (2005:539) on her part defines Language as “an invaluable instrument for human communication, the chief means by which human express their thoughts and ideas to others, and through which they share in the mental process of their fellowmen. It is the custodian of a people’s culture and tradition, that is, an inalienable part, through which they are able to identify themselves and transmit their culture from one generation to another. Language is both a component of culture and the central network through

which the other components are expressed.” This implies that language is both an integral part of culture and as a means of communicating other elements of culture including folklore which is the primary focus of this study. Negash (2005:5) noted that “Language is the primary instrument of people’s access (or non-access) to education, technological know-how, and scientific and intellectual knowledge, which, in turn, determine the state of the economic wellbeing, identity and culture of nations/communities.” According to Oderinde (2005), there are four components of culture which language cuts across, namely; creative component (people’s literature); philosophical components (ideas, beliefs, and values of the people); material component (artifacts like tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, housing); institutional component (political, social, economic and legal structures, among others). The foregoing components are communicated through language either in verbal forms or non-verbal media of communication. Korhoren (2006) establishes that “Today, the maintenance of language and tradition is essential for prideful identity; and the oral transmission of values, history and knowledge plays an important role in identity, socialization and learning”(1). Without language, the oral traditions or folklore of a group of people can never be expressed and transmitted to other generations. Through language, people are able to express their thoughts, emotions, beliefs, norms, cultural values or heritage. In broad terms, the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) of the people is also transferred from one generation to another through language. The concept, *Indigenous Knowledge* (IK) refers to knowledge that is orally-transmitted or transmitted through imitation and demonstration (Harris, 1998). It comprises of skills, philosophies, thoughts, perceptions, cultural practices, oral histories and verbal arts such as myths, legends, folksongs, riddles, and proverbs. It also includes traditional medicine, divination, ritual rites, masquerade dances and musical instruments, to mention a few. Indigenous Knowledge is also known as Traditional Knowledge, or Local Knowledge. At this point, we shall examine some definitions of language in human society as provided by researchers.

What are African Languages?

African languages are those languages that are indigenous to Africans which they use in daily communication in their various communities. The languages can be spoken by Africans within and outside their continent. This corroborates Agha and Obianike's (2019:39) view that "An indigenous language is the language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people often reduced to the status of a minority language." The concept also refers to the languages of the Sub-Saharan Africa. But on the population of the speakers that utilize these indigenous African languages in communication, Akinyemi (2011) found that "Africa is also a home to about 2,000 of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world today and many of these languages are used mostly in the oral, unwritten form. Therefore, the plurality of languages in Africa and the primacy of oral communication imply that the bulk of literary activity in the continent is created in the oral media"(27). A distinctive feature of African languages is tonality (based on pitch levels). This implies that they are characterized with "native accent" (tones) and according to Ojaide (1995), the *Tonality* of African indigenous languages cannot be overemphasized. Since *orality* is still much alive in Africa, even when secondary, the poetic voice is more demonstrative than the Euro-American poetic voice, many Africans speak and write English, French, and Portuguese from the tonal standpoint of their own languages.

Instances of African Languages and nations where they are spoken include the Swahili (or Kiswahili) language is spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, to mention a few. The Oromo language is spoken in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and some parts of Egypt, Zulu is speakers reside in South Africa and Lesotho. Also, Berber or Amazigh is spoken by the Berber people in North Africa just as Somali is regarded as the official language of the people of Somalia. Shona as an indigenous language is spoken by the Shona people in Zimbabwe and it is among the official languages in Zimbabwe. Speakers of Shona language are also found in South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique. The Akan has some ethnic languages in Ghana which include Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi and Fante. While the Ewe, Abbron, and Dagbani among others are also among the major languages in Ghana. It is worthy of note that in Africa, there are other languages such as the Xhosa (South Africa), Gikuyu (Kenya),

Sotho (South Africa), Kanuri (West Africa), Kirundi (Central Africa), Lingala (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Malagasy (Madagascar), Chichewa (Malawi), Amharic (Ethiopia) and Swazi (Swaziland and South Africa). In Nigeria, there are three major languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa) and over three hundred and fifty other ones spoken by minority ethnic groups. These include Edo, Urhobo, Isoko, Ika, Izon, Ibibio, Idoma, Ikwere, and other minority languages.

Folklore in African Languages

The concept, “folklore,” could be traced to the early 19th century in Europe and it involves rural peasants who are mostly uneducated and groups that are untouched by modernization, civilization or technological advancement. Apart from the larger groups like the European folklore, Asian folklore and the African folklore, there are various categories of folklore across the world and these include American folklore, Brazilian folklore, British folklore, Chinese folklore, Egyptian folklore, English folklore, German folklore, Indian folklore, Italian folklore, Japanese folklore and Portuguese folklore, to mention a few. In this study, our focus was on Africa folklore expressed in the indigenous languages of the people in various communities. In African societies, there are different folkloric forms expressed by the indigenous people which researchers have made several attempts to explore and document. These include the Akan folklore, Zulu folklore, Yoruba folklore, Hausa folklore, Igbo folklore, Efik/Ibibio folklore, Izon folklore, Urhobo folklore, Edo folklore, Ika folklore, and Isoko folklore, to mention a few. According to Akinyemi (2011);

Contemporary African literature is written in many different languages, including indigenous literary languages and languages derived from the European colonization of Africa. The three main languages of colonial derivation in Africa are English, French, and Portuguese. Literature written in these languages is respectively called Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone.

The submission of Akinyemi corroborates the folklores that abound in the various African ethnic groups stated earlier and their means of expression. Though the foregoing

foreign languages, “English”, French” and Portuguese” have gained much more recognition across the world, there are still some that are viable if government and scholars are willing to develop them to international standard. Literary writers have made several attempts to convey themes and images of their experiences to readers through their indigenous languages. In affirmation of this, Akinyemi established that “The major indigenous languages of Africa with important written literature are Amharic, Gikuyu, Hausa, Somalia, Sotho, Swahili, Xhosa, Yoruba, and Zulu; and there are many more African languages that sustain actual and potential readerships larger than those available to writers in the smaller single-language European countries like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark” (32). The best way the folklore of a particular culture can be expressed and appreciated by readers and scholars is through indigenous languages but the reverse is the case with African folklore which literary writers often introduce into their creative works.

In traditional societies, the folkloric forms are translated from indigenous languages into foreign languages like the English, French, Arabic, German and Portuguese, to mention a few, in order to gain international recognition. This affirms Ojaide’s (1992:43) assertion that

Modern African literature is written in indigenous African languages and in European languages used in Africa. Written African literature is very new compared to the indigenous oral tradition of literature which has been there and is still very much alive. While there are literary works in Yoruba, Hausa, Zulu and Sotho, among others, this literature in African indigenous languages is hardly known outside its specific linguistic frontiers. Writers such as Mazisi Kunene, Ngugi Wa Thiongo and the late Okot p’Bitek first wrote some of their works in African indigenous languages before translating them into English.

Also, scholars in folklore studies in societies where their languages are undeveloped and underdeveloped made several attempts to produce their works in their vernaculars but such research outputs could not be masse produced because majority of the readers are illiterates in their indigenous languages. In spite of the fact that several

folkloric studies have been published in African languages like Ewe, Akan, Fante, Swahili, Gukuyi, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Mendel, Izon, Urhobo, Ibibio, Idoma, and so on, most readers and critics still focus more on works written in foreign languages. Nevertheless, the expression of folkloric resources in indigenous African languages should be encouraged in order to preserve, project and develop African folklore and culture in general as well as the language of the people. This attests to the view that “the culture of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity”(Idang, 2015:97). The study of folklore and African languages in society is thus a great opportunity to promote our rich culture and tradition in traditional settings. It is against this background that African writers introduce folklore forms into their literary works for onwards transmission and education of the people in contemporary societies.

Indigenous Languages and Expression of Folklore

Forms of folklore in Africa can be expressed through various indigenous languages and channels (verbal or non-verbal arts), however, this study examined these verbal arts with a view to bringing their utilitarian functions to the fore. These verbal folklore materials are briefly discussed as follows.

I. Folktales or Moonlight Tales: Folktales are stories about daily life affairs and they are usually meant for entertainment. They contain metaphors, allusions, similes, humour, exaggerations, rhetorical questions, idiophones, pauses, interludes, onomatopoeia, tonal changes, among others. Every ethnic group has their folktales which they transmit through their languages for various purposes: entertainment, education, validation of culture, morality, social cohesion, and so on. the Yoruba, Ibibio, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ika, Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, Akan, Ewe, Gikuyu, Idoma, among others, have forms of folktales which they narrate to their audience in the evenings. However, storytelling in most African societies has been replaced by the new media/technologies such as the television, radio, youtube, video, and so on.

II. Myths and Legends: These forms of folklore abound in every African culture because of their significance to people. **Myths** are stories about gods and superhuman heroes, creation of a deity and the origin of a race; they are set in a timeless past. **Legends** on

the other hand, are about human heroes and the narratives are handed down from the recent past. They often involve stories about migrations, conquests, wars, family dynasty, kingship, and so on. Myths and Legends are common forms of oral narrative that people employ in transmitting oral histories, cultural values, beliefs, primordial practices and so on, to successive generations. They are verbal modes of communication in traditional communities.

III. Folk Epics: These are narratives that deal with heroic exploits such as founders of communities, a race, and so on. the central character in folk epics has the following qualities; extraordinary ability as a child; outstanding attributes (size, height, intelligence, commanding voice, strength, handsomeness); high mental development, patriotic and courageous with uncontrolled love for adventures, wars, violence, among others; receives power from supernatural agents; boastful, arrogant and daring. Instances include the Ijaw Ozidi Saga documented in John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *Ozidi*. This is a demonstrative and verbal mode of communication

IV. Folksongs: Songs are performed by Africans in every society using indigenous languages and these folksongs are of different forms: war songs, marriage songs, dirges, coronations, work songs, circumcision and initiation songs, and so on. Traditional songs are performed by men, women, boys and girls in different contexts. They are rendered during funerals, marriages, coronations, wars, initiation rites, and so on. Songs are verbal mode of communication, utilized in expressing thoughts, feelings, cultural values and beliefs of the Africans in their respective societies.

IV. Proverbs: The proverbs of African people are means of expressing their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, observations and modifications, to mention a few, in socio-cultural settings. Some of the utilitarian functions of proverbs include counseling, conflict mediation, healing, moral education, social consciousness, social cohesion, and so on. This is a verbal mode of communication which elders mainly utilize on daily basis to lace their utterances, thoughts and arguments.

V. Chants and Incantations: These are often expressed by diviners, herbalists and chanters (priests/priestesses) in their various indigenous languages in Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Urhobo and other traditional societies in Africa. This is among the verbal modes

of communication that traditional adherents utilize usually during ritual rites and ceremonies. The utterances are unfamiliar to the listening audience but they contain hidden meanings that could help the diviners to proffer solutions to the problems facing those seeking the protection, mercy and provision from the gods and ancestors.

VI. Riddles: These also belong to the verbal forms of folklore that are primarily performed for entertainment in social-cultural settings. A riddle could be defined as a question, statement or phrase that has a meaning that is known through critical thinking. Riddles are common in every traditional society and their answers are expected to be guessed by audience. They are part of the African culture which must be preserved by the people. Riddles have the following characteristics:

- They are puzzles that must be resolved by the audience.
- They require careful thinking to get their solutions
- They have two parts or sections that may be in opposition.
- The two sections of riddles are: the question and the answer.
- The referent of the elements of the riddles must be guessed by the audience.
- They are usually performed in social contexts.
- They may describe a person or thing.
- Riddles are usually short and instructive.
- They are formulated based on environment, animals, vegetations, parts of body, fish, incidents, and so on.
- They are performed by both old and young people in traditional societies.

Examples:

(i) Question: The towel of our father never dries; it remains wet.

Answer: The tongue

(ii) Question: The woman has not been to the riverside for water, but there is water in her tank.

Answer: Coconut

(iii) Question: It goes on four feet in the morning, at lunch-time on two and at evening on three.

Answer: Human being (that is a crawling baby, a standing person, and an old person with a walking stick)

(iv) Question: Who becomes pregnant without conceiving, who becomes fat without eating?

Answer: Raincloud

(v) Question: Nothing hurts it but it groans all the time.

Answer: A pig

(vi) Question: When you use it you throw it away, and when you do not use it you bring it close.

Answer: Anchor

(vii) Question: who makes a noise on seeing a thief?

Answer: A dog

(viii) Question: There is a green house. In the green house, there is a brown house. And in the brown house, there is a white house. And in the white house, there is a pool.

Answer: Coconut

Riddles are formulated and structured into questions and answer as could be seen in the examples above. Riddles as form of verbal arts cut across every culture in Africa and they are usually expressed through indigenous languages of people. They belong to the verbal modes of communicating African experiences and knowledge to the public.

VII. Tongue-Twisting: This is also a verbal form of folklore that exists in every society. A tongue-twist is a group of words or a phrase that is often difficult to express or utter quickly because of its contents: containing similar consonants or alliterations. A tongue-twister is a play on words or sounds where the syllables of a word are usually subjected to a variety of tonal and other changes to produce different meanings that are meant to create humour. Tongue-twisters are a form of speech play that exists in every culture along with riddles, myths, legends and other oral narratives. They are often games for children in social-cultural settings and they help children to remain focused and become imaginative.

Examples:

(i) She sells sea shells on the sea shore.

(ii) I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice-scream!

The above expressions are examples of translated tongue-twisters. Like the riddles examined above, tongue-twisters are a verbal mode of expression of African cultural values.

VIII. Children Lullabies: These are also known as cradle songs and they are soothing songs that are performed for children. Lullabies are usually short with generally slow

tempos. They do not require instrumental accompaniments and they are mostly performed in rural areas. They are soothing in nature and serve the following purposes or utilitarian functions in traditional societies;

- They are used to stimulate the emotions of children.
- They relieve emotional stress of children.
- They help to regulate the behavioural patterns of children.
- They are performed to capture and sustain the interest of children.
- They are used to calm children's anxieties.
- They are rendered to regulate sucking or feeding behaviours of children.
- They are also performed to help children sleep better.
- Lullabies help in nurturing caregiving bonds between mother and child.
- They are utilized to regain the attention of children.
- They are used to increase the feeding rates of infants.
- They are meant to lure children into sleep.

Children lullabies abound in every traditional society and they are mostly rendered by nursing mothers and other caregivers. This is a verbal means of communicating thoughts, emotions and perceptions about children in traditional settings.

Folklores in African Literary Works

It has become obvious that folklore has various forms of conveying the indigenous knowledge of people to successive generations. This communication cannot be possible without the role of language which of course serves as the vehicle for transmission in every traditional community. Apart from the oral performances that are predominantly employed by people, the emergence of the technology of writing and the new media that later followed, scholars have resolved to document various verbal arts (folklore) through writings. Interestingly, most literary works produced by African writers in the past decades are being expressed in official languages (English or French) instead of the indigenous languages of their homeland. These creative works contain culture and tradition of the people of which folklore becomes an integral part. From time immemorial, writers have been infusing folklore materials into their works as a unique way of showcasing their rich

cultural values to the outside world. Eme and Mbagwu (2011) assert that “the African novels, plays and poems in English or French in particular entail the reflection of the life of African people and their collective imagination”(119). Since African languages are not economically viable, recognized and underutilized at home and abroad, writers resolved to express themselves and also published their works in English or French. Even those that have been produced in vernaculars are still being translated into foreign languages for wider consumption by readers and for commercial purpose.

African writers whose creative works have reflected folklore materials but published in non-native languages are numerous. This affirms Okolo’s (2016) view that “In recent times, there is a move away from the Western techniques of writing to appropriating those rooted in the oral traditions in Africa. This manifests in either thematic intertextuality or technical intertextuality”(51). The scholar explains further that “thematic intertextuality occurs when ideas from oral traditions are transferred into written, that is, borrowing of themes and subject matters from the oral to the written. Such borrowings can be seen in any of the genres of the written literature”(51). In dramatic works, there are writers such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi, Armed Yerima, Femi Osofisan, to mention a few. The literary productions of these playwrights/dramatists are characterized with folksongs, proverbs, folktales, legends, myths, folk epics, superstitious beliefs, mystical creatures, masquerade dances, festivals, textiles, primordial buildings, taboos, cultural practices, folk medicine and healings, and so on. These are various forms of folklore which are common among rural dwellers and they have become part of their existence. They are often discussed and transmitted to successive generations as vital aspects of their culture through their indigenous languages. However, African writers including the aforementioned ones are conscious of their utilitarian importance and the need to transfer such traditional knowledge to the public domain but they acknowledged the fact that the most viable medium of expression is through English and French which a large number of readers have recognized as their official language or *Lingua Franca*.

The study of poetic works from colonial period till date attests to the fact that most of the creative texts contain elements of folklore of their people even though they were

produced to redeem, preserve, ascertain and project African rich cultural heritage and the people of the African continent. The poems capture material, verbal and customary folklores in various ways with some dialectical elements/expressions used to convey their indigenous knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, emotions and languages, to mention a few. Famous African poets whose works convey folklore forms are Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal), Birago Diop (Senegal), David Diop (Senegal), Kwesi Brew (Ghana), Gabriel Imomotime Okara (Nigeria), Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria), Wole Soyinka (Nigeria) and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo (Nigeria). The list also includes Kofi Awoonor (Ghana), Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali (South Africa), Mazisi Kunene (South Africa), Niyi Osundare (Nigeria), Tanure Ojaide, Ademola Dasylva and Remi-Raji Ojelade who are Nigerians, to mention a few.

The infusion of oral traditions, images or expressions into creative works by the above writers have obviously captured and sustained the interest of readers and also appreciate such literary works. Instances that abound include Leopold Senghor's "I will pronounce your name", Birago Diop's "Vanity", David Diop's "Africa", Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums", Kwesi Brew's "The Executioner's Dream" and "Ancestral Faces", Christopher Okigbo's "The Passage" ("Heavensgate") in *Labyrinths*, Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" and "Animistic Spell". Other oral poems that are expressed in English are John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's "Abiku", "Agbor Dancer" and "Olokun", Kofi Awoonor's "Songs of Sorrow", "More Messages" and "My uncle the diviner-Chieftian", Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's "The Birth of Shake", Mazisi Kunene's "In praise of the ancestors" and Kalu Uka's "Earth to earth". Even some of the poems in Tanure Ojaide's "In the House of Words" and Ademola Dasylva's "Songs of Odamolugbe" contain folklore materials that are expressed in English but carry indigenous knowledge of Africans. Most of the literary writings are inspired by their indigenous practices of oral poetry like dirges, panegyrics, work songs, religious songs, ritual songs and oral narratives such as folk epics, proverbs, myths, legendary stories and so on. Distinctively, some of the poems are composed from popular songs and folktales performed in vernacular languages of Africans.

In drama, there are writers whose creative works draw on folklore resources such as myths, ritual rites, festivals, sacrifices, among others, and instances of these writings

are Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *A Dance of the Forests* and Kongi's *Harvest*, Femi Osofisan's *No More The Wasted Breed*, *Morountodun*, *Women of Owu*, *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *Ozidi Saga* and *Song of a Goat*, Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, *Song of a Maiden* and *The Wizard of Law*, Ahmed Parker Yerima's *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, Efua Sutherland's *Edufa*, Tess Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash* and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjekitile*, to mention a few. A few of these plays were published in indigenous languages and a typical example of Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjekitile* which was written in Swahili. Their subjects are often discussed in various African communities using languages of the rural dwellers.

The genre of prose fiction is not left as a medium of expression and preservation of the African folklores. Investigation has also revealed that African novels and short stories are characterized with myths, legendary stories, proverbs, folktales, masquerades, folksongs and traditional festivals, to mention a few, which are published in English or French but are communicated from one generation to another through the indigenous languages of the people where such materials are produced. Instances of such creative works include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and some stories in his *Girls at War and Other Stories*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Ben Orki's *Famished Road*, Camara Laye's *The African Child*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, Ali A. Mazrui's *The Man Who Came From Back Beyond*, Helen Oyeyemi's *Icarus Girl*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizens* and *Joys of Motherhood* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims*, to mention a few. It is worthy of note that the expression of folklore materials through writings have been the task of both male and female writers who have profound knowledge of African rich cultural heritage and the flair to promote and preserve focusing on their contents, contexts and techniques. All these cannot be published in vernacular languages because of so many reasons and it has become obvious that indigenous languages are facing extinction.

Over the years, thousands of literary works have been published across the world but these are mainly done in English, French or Portuguese languages especially in

formal colonies in Africa. However, the study carried out by Eme and Mbagwu (2011:121-122) stated the factors responsible for the underutilization of African languages in literature and folklore inclusive, to include non adoption of African language as official medium of communication, high level of illiteracy among Africans even in their indigenous languages which could be utilized in expression of forms of folklore, and the large number of languages in Africa particularly Nigeria which government finds difficult to develop. The scholars further observed that the commercial value of literary works is meagre compared to those written and published in non-native languages like English or French. Apart from the above factors, the current research found that there are constraints such as western influence on youths and parents in traditional settings, the inordinate quest for material wealth, inferiority complex or geocentricism among African parents and their children in public gatherings and so on.

Conclusion

The study has showed that folklore materials abound in traditional African communities and they are expressed through English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and other non-African languages in order to gain wider attention and recognition. Though some African writers have produced several literary works that reflect diverse forms of folklore, such writings have not attained international recognition. This paper has revealed that like the folklores that abound in other parts of the world, African ethnic groups have their various folkloric forms which are conveyed to public domain through African indigenous languages. The study established that African traditional societies like several others across the world have verbal forms of folklore (arts) such as myths, proverbs, riddles, folktales, legendary stories and folksongs, to mention a few. These oral products are common among rural dwellers and they carry cultural beliefs, ritual practices, wisdom lore, knowledge, symbols and philosophical ideas. They are however conveyed to the audience in socio-cultural settings through the indigenous languages of the people.

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