

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Gender Differentiation in Yoruba Burial Rites

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on socio-hermeneutic study of gender differentiation in Yoruba burial rites. There are many types of oral genres in Yoruba society. These genres have different functions for different occasion. In essence, Ìrèmòjé eré isipà oḍe (hunters funeral dirge) and isààró (women funeral dirge) are used during men and women funeral rites respectively in Yoruba land. Ogun deity is the founder of Ìrèmòjé chant. Ogun was the first hunter with many adherents who were hunters too. Before the death of Ogun, he ordered his adherents to chant Ìrèmòjé during his funeral rites. He also instructed them to do the same during the funeral rites of fellow great hunters, that is, the hunters that were succeeded by viable children. Ìrèmòjé isipaḍe is specifically for men and not for women. Isààró is the final burial rite for the aged women in Yoruba land. This burial rite marks the exit of the aged women from this world to the world beyond. In essence, isààró is a traditional send-forth for the dead. This type of burial rite was popular in Yoruba land in those days but it was more popular among the Oyo-Yoruba than other Yoruba ethnic groups. Isààró burial rite is often performed by the Alágbàà (chief head of masquerade) from Òjè family (family of masquerades). It is mandatory for the children of the dead to perform this final burial rite for their dead mother because if they fail to do it, things may not be moving well for either the dead in the world beyond or for the children she left behind in this world. The emergence of western civilization has made great changes both negatively and positively on the popularity of Ìrèmòjé and Isààró burial rites respectively. This paper discovered that there is that of valuable documentation of Irewoje/Isipa (Hunting chants and funeral rites for Men) and Isaaro (The final funeral rites for Women) in spite of the existence of enormous works on Yoruba Verbal arts and oral literature. The implication of this finding reveal that if a study of this type is not promoted, Yoruba traditions and valuable oral renditions would be endangered. This could further prompt Yoruba journeys to extinction as many studies have shown that English dominance of Yoruba is changing the language attitude of Yoruba native speakers oral and written discusses. The Yoruba natives have flair for us of English than the use of Yoruba because of the inherent values of English in Nigeria and the world at large. This paper concludes that, despite the negative effect of western education and foreign religions in the foregoing, the technological advancement on Ìrèmòjé and Isààró has shown that the future of both genres are bright as long as the Yoruba race exists.

INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba people have many oral genres used for many festive events at different occasion such oral genres include recitations, chants and songs but it is pertinent to note that there is gender differentiation in the use of some of the genres. For instance, Ìrèmòjé “aré isipà oḍe” (hunters funeral dirge) and Isààró (women funeral dirge) are used in the Yoruba rite of passages for men and women respectively. Some previous writers have written on the functions of various Yoruba genres, such writers include Agbaje (1995), Agbaje (2012), Agbaje (2013), Ajuwon (1981), Ajuwon (1989), Amao (1984), Daramola and Jeje (1975) and Finnegan (1970).

Agbaje (1995) examined folksongs in Ekiti rites of passage. In the work, he dwelled on the functions of folksongs in Ekiti rites of passages, while Agbaje (2012) concentrated

on the analysis of Ogbere (funeral dirge) and Èkun Iyawo (nuptial chant) as farewell dirges in Yoruba society. Agbaje (2013) however focused more attention on the Ekiti people and their folksongs. In the work, he classified Ekiti folksongs into eight (8) categories using functional mode Ajuwon (1981) bases his work on Ìrèmòjé (are isipa oḍe) (hunters' funeral dirge). In the work, he made brief analysis on Ìrèmòjé, differences between Ìrèmòjé and Ìjálá chants. Also, he examines the content of Ìrèmòjé chant. Ajuwon 1989 deals with Ogbere (funeral dirge). In the work, he made a collection of Ogbere chants, without any analysis. Another author is Amao (1984) who examines àròfò òkú pípè (funeral chants) without making reference to gender differentiation in Yoruba funeral dirges, while Daramola and Jeje (1975) concentrates on the compilation of funeral chants without any analysis. Another author is Finnegan R. (1970) who dealt with Yoruba

funeral songs but didn't touch the area of gender differentiation in the use of the funeral songs.

Research Problem

Proper documentation of verbal arts being referred to as oral literature (Orature) in the recent time have not been adequately focused on by many Yoruba scholars as expected though there exists a number of oral literary works in Yoruba among which are the ones on Ifa copus of Abimbola (1969) and Ire-moje Ode of Ajuwon (1981 and 1989). There is the need for more research works on Isaaro, Deperial chants and funeral rites of passage of great dead Yoruba women. The gap also exists in Yoruba scholars efforts on sex differentiation in the use of Yoruba language and other cultural traditions such as the burial rites. It has therefore been established that many literary and linguistic works did not examine gender differentiation in the Yoruba rites of passage.

Aims and Goals of the Research

This research was set to fill the vacuum in the field of Yoruba linguistics through a comparative study of gender differentiation in Yoruba burial rites. The goal of this research among others is to promote scholastic documentation for preservation and promotion of Yoruba traditions with specific focus on Ire-moje (Hunting chants and funeral rites for men) and Isaaro (Yoruba women funeral rites and chants). The paper also intends to make a comparative study of Yoruba funeral rites along gender distinctions. It is also the objective of this research to serve as reference point for more laudable efforts on sex differences in the use of African and Nigerian languages through more meaningful socio-linguistics article publications. In all, the paper is to promote linguistic studies focusing on preservation of African oral literature and protection of African languages, culture and traditions from going to extinction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Direct observation and participatory approaches were adopted in guiding the relevant data for this research. The research involves the use of few existing works of Ajuwon (1981 and 1989), Abimbola (1969), Adeoye (1979 and 1989) as well as Agbaje (1989 and 2000) among other relevant reviewed literature. Reference to few published works on Yoruba oral traditions was combined with attendance at the male funeral rites of dead Yoruba hunters in Oyo town and the female funeral rites in Ekiti and Oyo ancient towns respectively. On the strength of our reference to existing works and participation in the Yoruba male and female funeral rites of passage. The following data obtained are hereby presented and discussed:

Ìrèmòjé

In Yoruba land, Ogun deity is known as the god of iron and war. Ogun deity is the founder of Ìrèmòjé chant which he often chant during a period of calamity. While alive, Ogun told his followers to use Ìrèmòjé chant when he dies. Ogun

deity was a great hunter with powerful charms which he used during hunting expedition. Besides, it is apparent to note that, Ogun was the first hunter with many adherents who were hunters too. Before the death of Ogun, he ordered his adherents to chant Ìrèmòjé during his funeral rites. He also instructed them to do the same during the funeral rites of fellow great hunters. That is, the hunters succeeded by viable children.

Ìrèmòjé is one of the genres of Yoruba oral literature. It is used by Ogun devotees/worshippers and specifically for men hunters. Ìrèmòjé chant is usually for a specific purpose, it is not what you can chant any time you like. It is usually chanted to perform the funeral rites of a great hunter and the final burial rites often take place in the mid-night in a far away bush outside the town. When a renowned hunter dies, all other hunters usually gather at his house, that is, at the grave-side to chant in honor of the dead. During this time, hunters who are not well armed with charms and versed in Ìrèmòjé chant do not participate because during the night, incantations are used to test whether a hunter is powerful and well versed in Ìrèmòjé chant.

Ìrèmòjé chant takes place at the grave of the renowned hunter for good seven days with merriments, Food and drinks are usually provided for the participating hunters but the seventh night marks the end of the burial rites. During this night, a statue is normally made inside the far bush outside the town and the hunters regalia known as gberioḍe is put on the statue with the cap on, then all the materials used by the hunter during his life such as cutlass, cloth, cap, charms etc. are also put in one basket and the materials are taken one after the other to pray for the dead hunter so that he may be well received by the co-hunters in the world beyond. So, this particular ceremony known as *ìṣipà ḳḳe* is to send-forth the dead hunter in the world here so that the dead hunter will not trouble the co-hunters and his family he left behind. It is to be noted that Ìrèmòjé, "aré *ìṣipà ḳḳe*" (hunters funeral dirge) is specifically for men and not for women. In essence, this particular burial rite is for great and renowned hunters who are men. It is a taboo for women either to participate or witness the final event of rites of passage of men hunters.

Ìrèmòjé aré *ìṣipà ḳḳe* (hunters funeral dirge) is very compulsory during funeral rites of great and renowned hunters in Yoruba land till date.

Ìsààró

Ìsààró is the final burial rite for the aged women in Yoruba land. This burial rite marks the exit of the aged women from this world to the world beyond. In essence, Ìsààró is a traditional send forth for the dead. This type of burial rite was popular in Yoruba land in those days, but more popular among the Oyo-Yoruba than other Yoruba ethnic groups. Ìsààró is often performed by the Alágbàà (chief head of masquerade) from Ojẹ family (family of masquerades). Ìsààró burial rite is usually performed to celebrate and honour the aged women who lived a honorable life, that is, women who had lived a worthwhile life and left good children behind.

The meaning of Ìsààró is removing aaro (cooking pot stand) of the dead old woman from this world which is gen-

erally believed by the Yorubas that the dead need to cook in the world beyond. It is compulsory for the children of the dead to perform this final burial rite for their dead mother because if they fail to do it, things may not be moving well for either the dead in the world beyond or for the children she left behind in this world.

Ìsààró final burial rite covers a full day, that is, it starts from morning till mid-night. It is to be noted that all the children and members of the family of the dead must take active part in the final ceremony. The families of the dead believes that their dead mother should make brief and final appearance to them during the final ceremony. Ìsààró final burial rite proper usually takes place on the third day after the death of the deceased. During this time, ritual materials are prepared into two containers. That is, one new big calabash with cover and one new medium pot with cover. Different ritual materials are prepared into each of them. Alágbàà (chief head of masquerade) takes the lead during the preparation of the ritual materials, Alágbàà is in full control of the final ceremony. When it is about 11pm in the night, on the day of the final ceremony, Alágbàà must ask the eldest child of the deceased to carry the calabash while the second child in rank carries the pot and move straight to Igbó Ìgbàlè (shrine). On getting to the shrine, Alágbàà calls the dead three times. For example;

Lágbájá o o o
 Àwọn ọmọ rẹ lówá ọrò fún ọ ọ
 Orò tí wọn ẹ fún Olúgbọ̀n Agbẹ
 Ọmọ ọbajamù
 Orò tí wọn ẹ fún
 Arẹ sàájèyè ọjútíl'alo
 Ọ̀un ni wọn ẹfún ọ
 Kí ó má ba à hun wọn
 Èkín ní tí n ó pè ọ ní yì ọ
 Bí mo bá pè ọ, bí o kò bájẹ
 Bí mo bá pè ọ tí ó kò bá dáhùn
 O di Àdán
 O di Oyo

C.L. Adeoye (1982:334)

Somebody !!!
 Your children come to perform burial rites
 The burial rites that were performed for Olugbọ̀n Agbe
 The offspring of Ọba Yamu
 The burial rite performed for
 Aresa Ajeje the offspring of Ojutíl'alo
 The same is performed for you
 So that it may not affect them
 This is my first time of calling you
 If I call you and you don't answer
 If I call you and you don't respond
 You turn to bat
 You turn to Oyo bird

Alágbàà, the head ritualist makes these pronouncements three times consecutively. It is the belief of the people that the deceased must answer the call after the third time and will come out from the shrine to pray and accept the ritual materials from her children. After that, the deceased is expected to dance back to the shrine while the children and

other members of the family continue to pray; chant Ogberè and dance back home.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Similarities

1. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are genres of Yoruba oral literature.
2. Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are used during the Yoruba rites of passages.
3. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are used during the burial rites to mark the exit of worthy old people from this world to the world beyond.
4. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró takes place in the bush outside the town during the night.
5. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró involves great merriment for children, families, friends and well-wishers of the deceased.
6. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are traditional ceremonies for promotion Yoruba cultural values and heritage.
7. Both involves iwúre (prayer) both for the dead and the living.
8. Both Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are used to appease the dead so that the living can obtain favour from them.
9. Both are used to pave way for the dead ones so that they will be accepted by their ancestors in the world beyond.
10. There is a specific èwò (taboo) that is attached to each of them and if this taboo is violated, it may lead to disaster. For an instance, it is a taboo for people to meet the Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró performers on their way to the bush at night during the last day of the burial rites.
11. Both involves offering of ritual to the dead for peaceful co-existence between the living and the dead.
12. Both involves the recitation of orikiorilè (descriptive poetry of Yoruba lineage) and songs.

Differences

1. Ìrèmòjé belongs to the traditional hunters who are devotees of Ogun deity while Ìsààró belongs to the Egúngún adherents, that is, the Ọjẹ families.
2. Ìrèmòjé is used by the hunters to mark off the exist of great colleagues who are men while Ìsààró is used by the Egúngún adherents to mark off the exit of the worthy old women.
3. Ìrèmòjé activities last for seven days while Ìsààró activities last for three days, that is, the seventh day of Ìrèmòjé activities and the third day of Ìsààró activities mark off the end of the burial rites of passages.
4. Ìrèmòjé burial rites are performed by hunters only and no specific roles are given to specific children of the deceased while Ìsààró is performed with Alágbàà as the leader and specific roles are given to the first born and his/her immediate younger ones.
5. Ìrèmòjé is not a chant that can be chanted anytime by anybody, that is, Ìrèmòjé is chanted at night by who is among the hunters while Ìsààró can be chanted in the daylight by women, children and family of the de-

ceased, that is, Ìsààró chant is for women for specific occasion.

6. The materials that are used during Ìrèmòjé ceremony includes dog, kolanut, basket, cutlass, knife, charms, gun and the hunter's apparel while the Ìsààró ritual materials includes he goat, new calabash with cover, new medium pot with cover, okro, egg, yam flour etc.

7. There are some specific use of languages which can only be found in Ìrèmòjé that cannot be found in Ìsààró.

For example:

Àrà̀mò jí eléréé,
Eléréé, baba Àrà̀mò jíèlè
Bí gùgùrú bá b'òḍe dé'jù,
A dè̀sùnpín-ń-pín
Àgbàdoòjò,
B'ò b'òḍe dé'jù
A sidoyinmọ̀mọ̀
Gùgùrúḍe,
Àgbàdoḍe náàrè é oo,
Àrà̀mò jíèlèoo

(Ajuwọ̀n 1981:15)

Keep quiet

Maintain perfect silence

If a hunter takes popcorn to hunting expedition

It has to be economized

If the hunter takes fresh maize

With him on hunting expedition

It becomes a valuable commodity

Here is the hunters popcorn

Here is the hunter maize

Keep quiet

Influence of Western Civilisation

Western civilization has made great changes in Yoruba cultural setting. Before the advent of the European colonialists, Ìrèmòjé aré ̀sípà ḍe (hunters funeral dirge) and Ìsààró (women funeral dirge) were very popular among the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria. This is because the two notable events/ceremonies deal with great Yoruba rites of passages. The two burial rites are not only compulsory but inevitable in the society but advent of colonization has changed things. For instance, western civilization brought three things, namely; education, foreign religions and modern technology.

The effects of education on Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró are very enormous. Many schools were established all over Yoruba land and people sent their children into various schools to be trained like the white men so that they can be employed in various government establishments. It was observed later that those children that were trained in line with western education no longer have interest in the foregoing burial rites because the two major events are regarded as primitive. Also, parents who were engaged in various government works were no longer stable in their places of birth and this has made it impossible for the younger ones to be trained or have the experience of these burial rites of passages. In essence, the cultural values of this heritage were seen as meaningless and of no use to Yoruba native speakers of the younger

generations. Furthermore, the effect of foreign religions are totally negative, that is, the Christian and Islamic religions are against the idea of Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró burial celebrations. The two religions always discourage their followers to disregard anything ungodly such as the aforementioned burial rites. The two religions preach to their members that children of God should not participate in anything that may obstruct their going to paradise. The two religions assume that any of their members who participate in the above ceremonies is regarded as a sinner or child of Satan. As a result of this, members of Christian and Islamic religions are careful so that they may not go to hell fire at the end of their lives. In essence, the emergence of the above two major religions into Yoruba land has reduced the popularity and the good future of the burial rites. Besides, each of the above two major religions has its different pattern of burial ceremony in accordance with each religion. Each religion believes that its own way of burial ceremony as it has been established either in the Bible or Quran is more acceptable to God. Therefore, each of the above religions endeavour to encourage their members to dissociate themselves from local and primitive ceremonies that are not acceptable to God.

It is apparent to note that, modern technology has its own notable effects on Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró burial rites. In the first instance, modern technology has given the two major events wider scope and popularity. This is because, these two events were usually performed locally before but now, things have changed technologically. For instance, video recorders are now used to cover these two major events. Photographs of the two events are taken, recorded cassettes of these two events are seen all over the place. Not only that, the two major events can be heard or seen over the radio or television media respectively. That is, these two events can be watched in different homes and at different locations all over the world. In essence, Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró burial rites are no longer localized events as the two major events can now be regarded as global events.

Economically, technological advancement has made the two major events a viable business. This is because recorded video tapes, cassettes; disks are in recording studios for people to buy. At times, Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró burial events are televised for wider audience at home.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive study of Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró in Yoruba rites of passages has been attempted. The summary of Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró has been done respectively. Also, the similarities and differences of both genres have been examined. Besides, the effect of western civilization on Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró in Yoruba rites of passages has been attempted. It is established in this paper that western civilization has both negative and positive effects on Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró in Yoruba rite of passages. Also, this paper concludes that, despite the negative effect of western education and foreign religions on the foregoing, the technological advancement on Ìrèmòjé and Ìsààró has shown that the future of both genres are bright as long as the Yoruba race exists. The paper has achieved the objective of been a medium for documentation of Iremonoje and Isaaro

verbal arts in Yoruba Oral literature. In the end. A socio-linguistic analysis of the paper has provided expected information on sex differences in Yoruba rites of Passage.

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