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Traditional Segregation: Encoded Language as Powerful Tool. Insights from *Okati Umwakpo-Lejja Omaba* chant

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Abstract

Language becomes a tool for power and segregation when it functions as a social divider among individuals. Language creates a division between the educated and uneducated, an indigene and non-indigene of a place; an initiate and uninitiated member of a sect. Focusing on the opposition between expressions and their meanings, this study examines Umwakpo-Lejja *Okati Omaba* chant, which is a heroic and masculine performance that takes place in the *Okati* (masking enclosure of the deity) of *Umuakpo* village square in Lejja town of Enugu State, Nigeria. The mystified language promotes discrimination among initiates, non-initiates and women. *Omaba* is a popular fertility Deity among the Nsukka-Igbo extraction and *Egara Omaba* (*Omaba* chant) generally applies to the various chants performed to honour the deity during its periodical stay on earth. Using Schleiermacher's Literary Hermeneutics Approach of methodical practice of interpretation, the metaphorical language of the performance is interpreted to reveal the thoughts and the ideology behind the performance in totality. Among the Findings is that the textual language of Umwakpo-Lejja *Okati Omaba* chant is almost impossible without authorial and member's interpretation and therefore, they are capable of initiating discriminatory perception of a non-initiate as a weakling or a woman.

Keywords: *Omaba* chant, *Umuakpo-Lejja*, language, power, hermeneutics

Introduction

Beyond the primary function of language, which is expression and communication of one's ideas, language is also a tool for power, segregation and division in a society. According to Sourgo (2013), Sik Hung Ng and Fei Deng (2017, p. 1), "language creates influence through words, oratories, conversations and narratives in political campaigns, emergence of leaders, terrorist narratives, and so forth." Sourgo emphasises that some categories of individuals and groups "use language as their main tool for maintaining status and power." Also, Fairclough (1989) posits that "Power is not only built and sustained via coercive means (by force), but also via indirect ways (use of language). Succinctly, Fowler (1971, p. 61) argues that "language is delineated as "social practice" by which power relations

are established and sustained.” The domineering effect of a language cannot be over emphasised as it brings about a “feeling of superiority” and it also becomes “an important instrument of oppression” (Naudorf, 2001). This study investigates the language of *Ūmɔakpo-Lejja Okati Omaba* chant and the use of obscure language for indirect communication among the initiates, which is geared towards gaining influence, protection of the sacredness of the *Omaba* Deity and its participation rituals. Using Schleiermacher’s Literary Hermeneutics Approach of methodical practice of interpretation, the metaphorical language of the performance is interpreted to reveal the thoughts and the ideology behind the performance in totality. The findings revalidate the influential role of language in the segregation of the language users from the initiates, non-members and the womenfolk.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a critical theory, which although originated from Plato and Aristotle, became more prominent in the 17th century. It began with Maurincio Beauchot and was basically concerned with the art of interpreting, discovering the truth and values of biblical exegetists. In other words, its concern was how to ascertain meaning with regard to; ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘how,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ ‘by which means’ of a text. However, the major bone of contention among the early scholars of hermeneutics was whether the bible should be given literal, moral, allegorical or analogical interpretations. And the major controversy among the pioneers; St Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, John Colet, Martin Luther and John Calvin was the approach that best portrayed the truth of a text.

Modern Hermeneutics began with Dannhauer in 1974 and he was significant for introducing the general application of hermeneutics to all texts other than the bible. His remarkable contribution was a systematic textbook (*Hermeneutica Sacre sive Methodus Exponendum Sacrum Utteranum*) in general application of hermeneutics which helped to distinguish between the true and false meaning of any text. This contribution of his was as a result of a proliferation of texts in that century.

The principle of authorial intention was another major input made in hermeneutics studies by Clauberg in 1654 and it was further popularised by Schleiermacher and Whitley in the 19th century. The authorial intention principle however generated so much controversy that it was accused of authorial and intentional fallacy. Among the scholars that fiercely criticised the principle were Derrida, Heidegger, Gadamer. These critics felt that authorial intention limits viable textual interpretations and most of them opted for neutral close-engagement-interpretation because the authorial history makes interpretation subjective. Although Gadamer rejects the authorial intention interpretation principle, he, however, maintains that the historical traditions of a text are indispensable in unravelling textual meanings. For him, no one can enter a dialogue neutrally or

without a point of view. He therefore proposes the dialogical interpretation model, which emphasises engaging dialogue with persons and subject matters. Despite the criticisms against the authorial intention model, this study finds Schleiermacher's model indispensable in the analysis of *Okāti* Ụmụakpo-Lejja *Ọmaba* Chant because that is the only approach that can ascertain the real meaning of the chant.

***Ọmaba* chant**

This refers to the half-sung-half-spoken utterances that contain elements of praise for not only *Ọmaba* and his qualities but also for his participants. These various renditions, which are often ritualistic and sacred, are only heard when *maa nọ n'alā* (*Ọmaba* is on earth) in all the Igbo *Ọmaba* cultural areas. The *Okāti* (the Deity's village square enclosure) variety which is performed by an individual or the deity and *ụmā maa* (the deity's children) for the community, feature most prominently on the eves of the fall/return (*Odida maa*) and the departure (*Ula maa*) of the deity. While the tones are elated and happy in the former, they are, however, sorrowful and moody in the latter (locally described as *ikwa emeri*) and such expressions as these are usually portrayed; *Orie egwa egwa! Anyi amiri--- emi hororo!* (The *Orie* market day should approach fast! We have escaped---*emi hororo*) The *Orie* market day which is the *Ọmaba's* favourite day is as well chosen for its departure day and that is why the utterer pleads for the swift approach of the day. They, according to him, henceforth would be exonerated from any evil misfortune that would befall either the village or the indigenes of that community.

The chant performed by the deity and its children is highly ritualistic, sacred and believed to be sung by the *maa* (deity). As a result, in some areas like Umunengwa in Nru - Nsukka, the chant is neither played openly nor danced to by the women and the uninitiated ones. Participation is therefore, highly restricted to the initiated members and the young initiates. But in some areas like Lejja, the women are given the liberty of listening and dancing to the melodious performance. The chant was formally performed on every *Orie* day but now as a result of the changed era of white-collar jobs and academic commitments, it is performed occasionally by a representative of a community who doubles as the deity and the deity's children. This representative's selection is neither by social class nor age. It is rather by a sonorous voice and, compulsorily, a well-versed knowledge of on-the-spot figurative composition as each performance is a totally new event. In the world of the *Ọmaba* chant, knowledge of figurative expressions is the beginning of wisdom as the chants are rendered in highly figurative languages that will be very difficult to unravel by the non-initiates and women. The representative must be able to keep the rules of not revealing the instruments and the cast of the performance to non-members, essentially, protecting the sacrosanct nature of the institution. Obiechina (1978: 384) succeeds in capturing the euphoria

that surrounds the *Omaba* chant and its recitation: „As the day for the festival comes closer, the general preparation and anticipation reach fever pitch, people begin to exchange visits and to become more generous with their drinks, foods and Kola nut. Ballads and minstrels rove around entertaining small audiences with **songs, poetry and music**... announcing the expected arrival of the spirits and setting the scene for the paltic effusion which is to characterize the entire *Omabe* festival“ (emphasis mine).

Just as he has argued, *Omaba* chants have that great quality of highlighting the unique music of the Nsukka people, whereby the maraca, *Uhwie*, metal gong and other instruments combine to produce sounds that are peculiar and uniquely Nsukka. In other words, once the sounds are heard, they are quickly connected with the Nsukka cultural group.

Omaba chants also are relevant to society in the sense that they are raconteurs of a town's history. This idea is made manifest when the chant documents the genealogy of the participants' history. Mrs Regina Ude, one of the interviewees and a one-time *Oyima* (a revered title taken by elderly women of substance in the *Omaba* culture) from *Obukpa* in Nsukka, recounts how the chant traces the history of a participant who comes in as the chant is being performed. It goes thus: “Okoro the son of Ude I greet you, Ude, the son of Ogbonna” - a man who performed majestic tasks.

In the traditional setting where there are no academic institutions that stand as standards of measuring an individual's intelligence, the chants are the distinctive yardstick for measuring the creative and intelligent ones. This is because the chants make room for personal expression, the application of intelligence and creative imagination which are displayed in the on-the-spot fabrication of idioms, symbols and imagery used. This, of course, easily makes an individual stand out from the crowd. Also, the ability of a performer to compel response from the audience through the gestures he makes which are both dramatic and entertaining add to the unique creative prowess of an *Omaba* chant performer.

Omaba chant, no doubt, is a uniting factor among the members in the sense that it allows both the royal and the poverty-stricken members of society to participate in it. Since the major requirement of the *Omaba* chant performance is creativeness in figurative language to qualify as a performer, all the other societal distinguishing qualities like age, royalty and wealth are relegated to the background and there is room for all classes of men to participate in it. As a result of this classlessness there is free mingling among all the members.

Contexts for *Umụakpọ Okāti Omaba* chant performance

There are three major occasions for the *Okāti* performance rendered during *Omaba's* stay on earth. The first performance of this chant takes place three

months after *Omaba's* return and the particular date is fixed by a group known as the *ogba maa* (the deity's age grade). *Ogba maa* is made up of selected young men born within the period of *Omaba's* last departure and the year of its next return that is, two consecutive years. Traditionally, the year for the deity's return is known as *ahwa maa* (the deity's year) and those born within that period are known as the *umu maa* (the deity's children), who consequently form the *ogba maa* with the age grade that precedes them. The reason for the initial outing is mainly to commemorate *Omaba's* peaceful entrance into the community. After the first and the general performance set by the *ogba maa*, the *Omaba* leaders from Ebara and Ugbele quarters of Lejja fix theirs to observe the *Obuegba* (the official announcement of the date for the deity's departure from Earth). A month after the *Obuegba*, the deputy leaders of the deity (Dunoka) agree on a date to fix their own performance which is later followed by that of Amankwo. After these latter performances, then, the *Omaba* deity prepares for its departure from earth which comes up within two months' (traditional) time.

Language interpretation and analysis of *Umụakpọ Okāti Omaba* chant performance

In all the performances, the audience is made up of the *Ogba maa* (Deity age-grade) and some other participants who support the rendition in the form of making responses and chanting of refrains to the recital. The crux of the rendition is a greeting to every male member of the community, both the *Omaba* devotees and Christians alike; and anyone who hears his name proceeds to present his gifts to the performer who represents the deity in this rendition. The gifts usually presented could be snuff, kola nut or drinks of any type. Whether one has any gift to offer or not, the deity summons everyone to come forward and collect his own gift which is a piece of kola nut. The performer mentions titles and epithets that could easily be played out musically. Also, an individual is identified by mentioning both the paternal and maternal pedigrees, or by mentioning either of them.

In another sense, by identifying an individual through the lineage, it could be said that the performance is an enactment of a communal gathering that is presided over by the deity itself. This action could signify a ritualized conferment of respect to the individuals' family lineages. Significantly in the chant, each person's family is traced and paid tribute to as seen in the citation (lines 66-67), where the first line refers to the paternal lineage while the second refers to the maternal origin:

Imanuẹl Nwolu nwa Ugo nwa Ugodi O
(twice)

Emmanuel Nwolu, the son of Ugo, son of Ugodi O!
(twice)

Evəralə-nwa-Ugwele-Echara

Evəralə, the son of Ugwele-Echara)

On the other hand, the performance which takes place inside the *Okati* is structurally divided into four sections or divisions that glide into one another during the rendition. The first and the second sections refer and give honour to the spiritual and ancestral heads of the clan, the supernatural beings and the long dead ancestors, while the last two segments pertain to the living since they refer to those who are still alive and their accomplishments. Symbolically, there is a depiction of a convergence between the living and the dead for a ritual communion where the first three sections, on a general note, deal with the recognition and payment of tributes while the last is the entertaining part that conjures everyone to laugh, participate actively and enjoy the musical ecstasy of being part of the performance. This final stage is the story telling session where short symbolic stories are told for the relaxation of all and it goes on till the end of the performance. The end of every movement is significantly marked by a change in the beating of the musical instruments.

In the first section, while paying tribute, the chanter, first of all, recognizes the hierarchical leadership of the town, starting from the highest (supernatural beings) to the lowest (all the men of that community). The *onyishi*, who is the eldest man in the community, is recognised after the super naturals and the kola nut implicitly comes from him as a mark of respect. The kola nut being a unifying symbol as well as a ritualistic food that reinforces interactions in both the physical and metaphysical worlds is used by the performer to symbolically bind the community in one whole piece. The unification is reinforced further by the tribute paid to all the living and supernatural beings of the community that is, the deities, the ancestral heads and every adult male in the clan. Every adult male who is a member of that community is specifically identified in order to make the membership bond stronger; as it is always believed among the Igbo that, '*Umunnabubike*' (there is strength in brotherhood).

Also, the performance portrays a profuse embellishment of its characters with hyperbolic pseudonyms, sobriquets, and every other epithet of praise conceivable at the moment of rendition. The dialect of the recital is quite distinct from the standard Igbo used as a formal language and this goes on to the extent that an outsider, a non-member as well as women find it difficult to understand the language of the performance.

The first section of the performance is a litany of the ancestral spirits and fathers in their order of hierarchy. This is symbolically and structurally portrayed in their invitation to collect the *Odo's* kola nut by the reciter. The chant, on the overall, is a symbolic recognition of pedigrees of a particular clan as each clan's spiritual deity and the ancestral fathers are invoked and paid tribute to. These greetings and paying of tributes are explicated in the excerpt below, (lines 1-57).

Dìmogwùma, alá ibe nẹ chi, oji Odo---O! *Dìmogwùma-* land of kin and god, Odo's
kola nut Oh!

Dìmogwùma, alá ibe nẹ chi, werá oji Odo---O! *Dìmogwùma-* land of kin and god, collect
Odo's kola nut O!]

In line 1, the chanter first of all recognizes the founder of his community, / *Dìmogwùma- aláibenechi* / the land of kin and the deity, with the clan's ancestral name. It is a land of peace where the community members co-exist peacefully and live a life of brotherhood. The land is also complimented because it is respected as the people's ancestral burial place. The land's boundary is clearly marked by a native tree known as *ojirooshi* (traditional boundary - demarcation tree) which connotes that the land is spiritually guarded by *Ndà ushi* / (the founding fathers). These spiritual guards are then acknowledged in line 5. The next tribute goes to, *Idenyi Qhom*, who is the (spiritual deity of the community). The / *Umụ ada Qha, werá oji Odo---O!* / (female ancestors of the community) are greeted in line 4, in order to acknowledge the gender completeness of the community. Likewise, / *Dìmóká ónyé nwe alá*, (the overall ancestral head of the *ushi* people) is acclaimed in line 5. Line 6 invites the whole of the community members to join in the spiritual communion. The deity and the overall head of the spiritual messengers are heralded in line 8. It is also noteworthy that the use of 'it is kolanut / *nọgbá oji* / means an invitation for a spiritual unification which is symbolised in the sharing and eating of the kolanut. However, since the ancestral and spiritual beings own the people and all they have, the chanter just emphasizes what is being presented to them, which is kolanut.

In the second section, the ancestral deities and heads of all the communities that make up the '*Ókéękwùma*' quarters of Lejja are greeted. '*Dulugwunye*' (line 11), the spiritual deity of the '*Uwalá* clan, is mentioned in line 10 while '*Ézèlekwu Omeji*' (line 12) is the ancestral head of the Amube village. '*Ezèlāmenyi*' (line 13), is Amube's spiritual deity and '*Ézikè- Nwèzè,*' (in line 16) is the ancestral head of the '*Ishiemelu*' village in Lejja. While '*Ézikè Nnevà dā Uga*' in (line 17), the oldest community in Lejja town, is hailed too. '*Qmẹko-Ugwunye*', (in line 18) begets Umuefi village while '*Ézikè-Tim*' (line 20), heads the Nwiyi clan of Lejja. '*Ézèlèkwu Ézè-Ohe,*' (line 21), gave birth to Amankwo village and '*Urókò-Nkwọ*' (line 23), fathers the Amegu clan. In like manner, '*Amábunękwà*' (in line 24), traditionally heads the Mbiamonye village. '*Ézikènebo*', (Amebo village - line 25), *Ezèbānųgwú* (Ameze-28-29), '*Ndā Ushiokpārā,*' (Mbiamonye village-line 30), '*Ézikèlęgwè* (Amogbu)', '*Ézèųgwọcha-Ezikebíkò* (Umuorugbogou - line 35), '*Ézikènemóké,*' (Ugo), '*Uvārā* (Owere alá-line 38), '*Ézikè Qbiameji* (Ejarija), '*Ólúbé* (Úgbèlè, line 42) '*Ézikè Dúlųgwu, Ézikèahum* (Upata, line 44) '*Áyogalọ* (Umụ Óbeke, line 46), '*Dìmshinne,* (Umụnwugweja) '*Úgwoke ne Ugwunye,* (the ancestral parents of *Qmaba* deity, (line

50), *Úgwú Éshà dā Úgbèlè Úwaalā*, (the ancestral abode of *Ọmaba* deity) are all listed for recognition and paying of tributes in the first section of the chant.

The third section of the chant deals with the identification and greeting of all the men of that particular village. The Deity, who doubles as the chanter, announces his arrival and asks those whose names he has mentioned and the rest of the participants how they are; ‘/ *Ọmaba abia—O-’Unu emee agaa-O?* (*Ọmaba* has come—O, How are you), line 59-61. Then, in lines 62-64, the chanter refers to *Dịmọgwụma* as / *Dịmọgwụma anāgā egbā agā / Mē agā koyirā baanyi nē nkpọ eja O!* (*Dịmọgwụma* who does not kill a lion / yet a lion hangs on the wall pins in our houses) /. The metaphor of ‘killing of a lion’ is recognised as ‘bravery’ and the inability to do so conversely depicts ‘weakness.’ The chanter creatively employs what Claude Levi-Strauss terms ‘theory of binary opposition’ when he uses ‘the killing of a lion’ to represent bravery and the inability to kill one to denote weakness. On the overall, the chanter ingeniously makes reference to the clan’s brave, strong, and intimidating fighters, designated in the chant as ‘the lion that hangs on the walls of their different houses.’ The fighters ensure that none of the community-members’ rights are carelessly trampled upon. The *Ezenwagagadē* lineage in *Ụmụakpọ* village, for example, ensures that every stolen item by a member of another community is returned to the owner within hours of such a report to them. The chanter, in essence, boasts of the endowment of these strong men (who fight for their weak community members) for he sees such as an awesome blessing from the deity. He connects this amazing providence from the deity with line 112 where he refers to the *oyimas* (female initiates) who bring food to him as / *Ụmụ Chi n’edokwueze* / (offspring of God-crowned lineage). For the performer, obviously, without the supernatural aid, such a gift would not come.

Then, he further calls on *Nkwoda Ugwuoke Obatē* (lines 65-67) whom he refers to as, / *Èzè-anāgā-egbā-agā-n’ọha* (the king that does not kill a lion in the public) and commends him for / filling his mouth with *àjààrì* /. *Àjààrì* is the fibrous remains of the bread fruit after the seeds have been separated from the head and that is the deity’s mysterious representation of meat. It is also used to feed the cows during the dry season when fresh grasses are difficult to come by. The reciter only links *àjààrì* with meat because of the similar quality of ‘dryness’ at the moment of consumption. Since the villagers do not have the modern means of preserving meat like the refrigerator and the freezer, they usually put the meat in *ngaga* (traditional iron baskets) and hang it over the fire or above the cooking pot so that as the meals are prepared, the meat is smoked and preserved. The meat, after series of smoking becomes very dry and is called *anā kpọr nkā n’aju ọnu* (the dry meat that fills the mouth). It is these metaphors of ‘dryness and over-filling-of-the mouth’ that the chanter echoes in the rendition. The image portrayed is such that *Nkwoda*, the son of *Okwume*, has presented him a gift of a mouthful of meat and he is overwhelmed with such gesture of generosity. The same effect is

encountered in lines 79 and 109 where the performer declares that “he feels dizzy,” even when he has not tasted “the drinks.”

In lines 74, the Deity introduces himself as: / *Ọ bā nya ụdara nwa Òbòdòike Èzè'* (It is me, *Ụdara*, the son of Obodoike Eze) / *Ụdara* is biologically known as *Chrysophyllum Albidum* fruit and to some people, it is the peach fruit or the star apple fruit. *Ụdara* among the natives stands for ‘fertility’ and ‘sweetness’ not only among the Ụmụàkpọ community of Lejja, but also in many other Igbo communities. It is also in the same sense that he transfers the connotations to himself as both the giver of many children and a melodious performer.

Furthermore, in line 75, the chanter mentions the setting of his performance by designating the place with the two most outstanding trees found there. He says: / *A nọm nẹ be egbā nā be ụvārā* (I am in the house of *egbā* and *ụvārā*) / . This reminds us of the following observation of Mead (1969, pp. 383) that: “Symbols and images in Maori chants are not just creations which they have imagined for purely aesthetic reasons but... are rather symbols which underlie some cultural value. For example, the ‘mountain’ symbol represents a group as well as its geographical domain. In other words, the symbols can serve the purpose of identity in the chants as rivers, lakes, and a well-known ancestral figure can establish the name of a tribe without its name being mentioned”.

In the same manner, *egbā* (a medicinal plant traditionally used to cure malaria) and *ụvārā* (Spondias Mombin) are symbolically used by the chanter to designate the particular setting of his performance. *Egbā*, biologically known as *Alstonia Boonei*, *Ahun* in Yoruba and *Ụvārā* (*Putaa* in Hausa, and *Sapo* in Yoruba) are the two ancient trees that stand out in the Ụmụàkpọ village square that houses the *okati*, which is the chanting abode of the performer. These two trees in the chant represent the village, Ụmụàkpọ, which the performer skillfully employs to make his language difficult to understand by the majority of his audience.

In lines 76-78, the chanter identifies / *Ịmanụel Madu* / (Emmanuel Madu) by both his paternal / *Nwolu, nwa Ugo Nwugodi* / Nwolu, the son of Ugo, the son of Ugodi) and maternal / *Evārālā nwa Ugwuele Echara* / *Evārālā*, the son of Ugwuele Echara / pedigrees. Emmanuel is further hailed as / *Ọ chīrā agbā werā nwa òbèlè* / (one who has just collected the *agbā* and *nwa obele*). *Agbā* means the natively woven rope which wine tappers use to climb palm trees while *nwa òbèlè* is a small native wine gourd. The chanter presents an image of a man going off to his work which completely deviates from the real meaning of the expression which is that Emmanuel has presented a gift of wine to him. This action of Emmanuel’s immediately attracts the chanter’s response; / *manya evagadem eju* / (wine makes me feel dizzy) from the performer.

John Nweze’s father, Agāgāde, as a title-holder bears the name / *Ézè-Ọ-gbāe-íshí-Ọ-yarā-àgbàányá O!* / ‘The king that kills a head and leaves the jaw behind’ / (line 81). This is a title he bears as a result of his magical powers. By killing

someone and leaving the jaw out, the king succeeds in hiding the identity of the deceased. In other words, he is brave and courageous enough to withstand any circumstance or strong individual from the neighbouring villages. This attribute earns him respect and admiration from the clan members.

Afterwards, attention shifts to / D̄onatus Ọ̄zo, the son of É̄zè-Ọ̄kà /, (lines 82-85). The referent's father used to be the clan's spokesman at *oha* (village elders) meetings in the past and that is why the deity recognises Donatus by his father's profession which is / É̄-rik̄et̄e-okwu-É̄zè-Ọ̄kà / [voracious eating (not eater) of words]. The father who served the function of *it̄a okwu* (pronouncing the verdict of any ruled case), did such with so much expertise and rhetorical prowess that he was known far and wide. *It̄a ókwú* among the Lejja people could be likened to the role of 'Evil Forest,' a member of the *Egwugwu*, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when it addresses both parties (Uzowulu and his in-laws) involved in the marriage dispute with a view to resolving the row between them:

"We have heard both sides of the case," said Evil Forest. "Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute..." To Uzowulu he says, "Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman. Then Evil Forest turns to Odunukwe, the eldest among the in-laws and says: "...If your in-law brings wine to you, let your sister go with him. I salute you" (p. 82).

Again, anyone who had not 'killed a horse' would not enter his *Ob̄a* / *Onye egb̄ag anȳinya ep̄ioḡa n'ob̄a be Dugwu Ọ̄ḡo* / (Someone who has not killed a horse cannot enter Dugwu Ọ̄ḡo's *Ob̄a*), line 85. The killing of a horse used to be the highest form of funeral respect conferred on the dead by the relatives and it is performed only by the wealthy. The chanter therefore captures the practice where those who killed horses for their departed parents hung the skulls of those horses in the *Ob̄a* (the meeting place of a clan) as a way of installing the departed there in the *Ob̄a*. Indeed, the ritual installation of the dead in the *Ob̄a* is apparently the last in a series of funeral rites accorded the dead. It is an invitation into the community of spirits that inhabit each *ob̄a*. As such, it is a ritual of incorporation and in the past, people could point to the skulls of horses or cows killed for specific individuals. By mentioning this experience, the chanter is recalling the past, the historical memory of the people. The statement, therefore, highlights that Donatus's father, whose house is given the attribute of *Obu* is a place where only those who were able to kill horses or cows are welcomed. However, Dugwu Ọ̄ḡo's wealth is over-stated when the chanter makes reference to the man's social class by saying that the poor cannot enter his palace. Obviously, the *ob̄a* cannot be completely shut out to the poor. The hyperbolic expression was made to emphasize the man's social status as a rich man.

Obviously, for the performer, some community members who have not contributed significantly to the community's development which could be in the form of provision of infrastructure, offering of employment and active participation in the community's activities deserve no praises and that is why there are no eulogies attached to their names when mentioned. Their identification simply ends with the naming of their ancestral fathers.

Demianu Ọzọ earns himself the hyperbolic sobriquet, 'one who satisfies both the elephant and the people of Edem /Ọ ranyịma ényí Ọ ranyịma Èdèm / in lines 88-90. 'An Elephant' being a huge animal obviously must have enormous appetite and it has to take a lot of strength and hard work to have it satisfied. The title is therefore used for someone whose yams are inexhaustible. In the same vein, it is always a great achievement for one to continuously satisfy one's in-laws with food during any occasion and that explains why Damian is exceptional in his farm work. That also elucidates the structuring of his in-laws' place of origin, Èdèm, into the creation by the chanter. Also, the action of the birds to acknowledge his hard work and 'give him a name' (*onye ẹnà nà turà ẹha n'egà*) is a skilful infusion of personification into the art because the birds are given a human attribute which is speech. This is seen in line 90 where a non-human object is given human qualities. Damian Ọzọ (88) is such a hard worker in his farm site that the birds too have recognized it and chant his sobriquet. The birds, by giving him a title, have performed the human activity of presenting an award to a meritorious candidate who has distinguished himself from the rest.

In lines 91-94, Ugwokeja, the son of Okpe is designated as, /Ọ mákpọ' agbàgba ndiom anyi / (the breaker of our women's gourds) in line 94. Ugwokeja, as a result of his energetic play of the maraca, keeps breaking the gourds that the women specially provide for the making of the musical instrument. This statement is also ironic because of the discrepancy between the intention of the performer and what he says. Therefore as a result of this discrepancy, the comprehension of the expression may constitute a little puzzle for an audience.

Again, in line 96, by referring to *Ugwutikiri nwa Okpe* (95) as /Agà na-awa èdù/ (a leopard that roams the wild), the performer likens the man's strength and bravery to that of a leopard. Obviously, the reference is in recognition of the man's occupation as a hunter and the risks involved in the profession. This remark does not only highlight the physical prowess of *Ugwutikiri nwa Okpe* but also his courage and fearlessness in fighting for the community's interest. Although there could be a negative connotation of the leopard as a hunter/predator that hunts other animals, Charles Darwin's 'survival of the fittest or eat or be eaten' philosophy of the jungle justifies the lion's actions and that is why this animal is always given a positive attribute with regard to its power to conquer. Also, /Ugwutikiri, the son of Okpe, is acknowledged for his expertise in horn blowing. He is called the /Emerà ntàm Odugwu Ìkàwó / the passionate horn blower of Ìkàwó /-

the *Omaba* deity (line 98). For the chanter, therefore, / *Ugwutikiri nwa Okpe/ Ugwutikiri* the son of Okpe/ represents “the lion” in every ramification.

The chanter commends his humble alliances and their contributions towards the success of the performance as he says to him: / ‘*Onu na-ahwia ga me ukwu na-aji nye* / (Your mouth develops blisters while my waist hurts), (line 76) appreciating their devotion, resilient spirit and the undying love in their performance of this role. The ironical expressions actually mean that the fellow performer’s mouth will never develop blisters and the reciter’s waist will never hurt.

In other words, /*Omakpo agbagba ndiom anyi/* The breaker of the women’s gourds (line 98), /*Emer ntam Odugwu Ikawo* (Passionate horn blower of *Ikawo*) (lines 79/109), and / ‘*Eju n’evə m* (I feel dizzy) are all hyperbolic because they overstate the actions of the bearers and express the contented feelings of the chanter. /*Eju na-evə m/* “I feel dizzy”/ (line 109) could also be a signal to other spectators or listeners that are out of sight to bring much bigger gifts and goodies.

Ekwuelechi, the son of *Alaya Ogbonne Nshi Ogori*, the son of /*Ugwō’narūoyi/* (lines 100-104) is greeted and, in order to be particular to whom he addresses, the chanter also greets the family with their maternal designation from Ozara town, ‘*Q naga egwu uri m’abaga n’aga.*’ (Who does not apply the cam wood until he has transformed into a leopard). The reciter historically draws his idea from the family progenitors who were known for turning into leopards. And for such a family, any native body design with *uri* is prohibited when they are in their human forms because *Uri* is regarded as being similar to the leopard’s dark designs and avoided once the family members are in their human forms as a mark of total change in body form and respect for their source of origin. Evidently, this is the artiste’s native employment of intertextuality to his art, for he draws information outside his performance to substantiate his information. It is also a figuration which means that some situations challenge individuals to actualize their essential selves.

The intelligence of Madu Nweze is compared to that of a man who has mastered the art of deception to the extent that he knows who the thief is yet he goes about with a metal gong in search of the thief (lines 107-108). Literally, this expression would have been derogatory because it depicts dubiousness and untrustworthiness, but the deity uses it positively to applaud Madu Nweze’s cleverness thereby making the language strange and difficult to understand. The fact that he hides his knowledge of the criminal effectively is ironically attributed to smartness rather than evil as it ought to have been. Literally, the listener would think the chanter rebukes the man’s behaviour of pretence of not knowing the thief. But on the contrary, the man is being praised for being very clever. Further figurative usage is portrayed as the performer exclaims at this point that /*Eju n’evəm/I* feel dizzy./ This is an expression the performer uses to show his

gratitude to the gift of wine. The statement, obviously, contradicts the literal meaning that he is tired out by the lengthy rendition.

Furthermore, the women who bring food are greeted by the performer and advised thus /*Unu parā ànyàká E zàle oshi*/ (carry *anyaka* and desist from stealing) (lines 110-111). *Anyaka* is the traditional type of rope woven from ribs of palm fronds. It is locally used by women pot traders to bind the pots together for easy carrying on their heads while going to the market. '*Anyaka*,' is used to represent trade. The performer, after thanking the *Oyima* for their gift of food, advises the women to start trading instead of soiling their hands with any corrupt practice to get money. 'To carry *Anyaka*,' also suggests labouring for livelihood.

The audience and readers are in essence compelled to work harder at making meaning out of the text by being totally captivated by it. In the same vein, the *Omaba* chanter applies the figurative language to his art for the effect of concealing the masking activities from the non-initiates and women. The same, we may recall, is depicted in Achebe's (1958, 78-79) *Things Fall Apart*, where the *Egwugwu* (the masking institution of *Ụmụọfịa*) is invited to resolve the marital case among Uzowulu, his wife and in-laws. Uzowulu's in-laws accuse him of beating his wife but he claims that his in-laws took his wife, Mgbafo, from his house and therefore, they should return her bride price to him. The *Egwugwu* salutes Uzowulu as 'Uzowulu's body' instead of his name 'Uzowulu' for the same purpose of mystifying the 'spirit's language.'

Conclusion

Invariably, *Umuakpo - Lejja Okāti Omaba* chant, as it has been elaborated above, employs obscure and local figurative expressions extensively. These infusions, which covertly emphasise the ritual behind the Deity's reverence and the amiable (heroic) deeds of the chant's male characters, protect the sacredness of the masking institution. The interpreted language of *Umuakpo-Lejja Okāti Omaba* chant clarifies its almost impossible coherence without authorial and member's interpretation. The language is, therefore, discriminatory to non-initiates, and women, who in order "to belong" are unconsciously influenced into the membership.

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Appendix:

An *Omaba* chant performed by the 'deity' and his 'children' in the *Umakpo Okati*, *Umakpo* village square of Lejja town on Orië night, July the 17th, 2019. (The dialect is different from the pedagogical Igbo version and that necessitated the use of the symbol 'ə' for clearer presentation of words in Lejja dialect. The text is also numbered for easy references).

Dịmọgwụma, alə ibe nẹ chi, oji Odo---O! *Dịmọgwụma-* land of kin and god, Odo's kola nut Oh!

Dịmọgwụma, alə ibe nẹ chi, werə oji Odo---O! *Dịmọgwụma-* land of kin and god, collect Odo's kola nut O!)

- Idenyi Ohom, werə oji Odo---O!(2X)* *Idenyi Ohom, Come and collect Odo's kola nut O! (twice)*
- Umụ ada Oha, werə oji Odo---O!(2X)* *Umụ ada oha, Come and collect Odo's kola nut Oh! (twice)*
- 5 *Ndā Ushi anyi, bja werə oji Odomagala—* *O! ((2X)) Our Ushi members, Come and Collect Odo's kola nut Oh! (twice)*
- Ndā Umụakpo, werə oji Odo---O (2X)* *(The people of Umụakpo, Come and collect Odo's Kola nut O!)(twice)*
- Dịmọkà ónyé nwe alā, oji Odo--O(2X)* *Dịmọkà, the owner of the land Come and collect Odo's Kola nut O!*
- Adaada oha, bja werə oji Odo---O!((2X))* *Adaada, Come and collect Odo's Kola nut O! (twice)*
- Ndā Uwa alā, bja werə oji,* *The people of Uwalu (downhill), Come and collect Odo's Kola nut O! (twice)*
- 10 *Ama Uwa alā, bja werə oji Odo—O!* *Ama Uwalu, Come and collect Odo's kola nut (twice)*
- Dulugwunye, bja werə oji O!* *Dulugwunye, come and collect Odo's Kola nut O!*
- Ézèlekwu Omeji, oji Odo---O!(2X)* *Ézèlekwu Omeji, Odo's Kola nut-O! (twice)*
- Ézèlimenyi, werə oji Odomagala---O!(2X)* *Ezelimenyi, collect Odomagala O!(twice)*
- Lẹja, werə oji Odomagala---O! ((2X))* *Lejja, collect Odomagala O! (twice)*
- 15 *Dimo-Ugwunye, werə oji Odomagala---O!* *Dimo-Ugwunye, collect Odomagala O!(twice)*
- Ézhikè- Nwéèzè, oji Odomagala---O!(2X)* *Ezike Nweze, Odomagala's kola nut O!)(twice)*
- Ézhikè Nnevā dā Uga, oji Odomagala---O(2X)* *Ézhikè Nnevā of Uga, oji Odomagala--O*
- Omeko-Ugwunye, oji Odomagala!(2X)* *Omeko-Ugwunye, Odomagala's Kola nut! (twice)*
- Ézè nwa ochimā, oji Odomagala--O! ((2X))* *Ezenwochimā, Odomagala's Kola nut O!(twice)*
- 20 *Ézikè-Tīm, oji Odomagala ((2X))* *Ezike-Tīm, Odomagala's kola nut)*
- Ézèlèkwu Ézè-Ohe - oji Odomagala—O! ((2X))* *Ezelekwu-Eze-ohe- Odomagala's kola nut (twice)*
- Èvā dā Uga- oji Odomagala!* *Èvā of Uga Odomagala's Kola nut (twice)*
- Urókò-Nkwọ- oji Odomagala! ((2X))* *Urókò-Nkwọ- Odomagala's Kola nut*
- Àmábunékwà - Mbiamonye- Odomagala!* *Àmábunékwà -Mbiamonye (twice)*
- 25 *Ézikènebò- Odomagala! (2X)* *Ézikènebò - Odomagala! (twice)*
- Ézikè-Tīm- oji Odomagala ((2X))* *Ézikè-Tīm- Odomagala's Kola nut! (twice)*
- Ézikè-Nwèzè-oji Odomagala((2X))* *Ézikè-Nwèzè-Odomagala's Kola nut! (twice)*
- Ezebānūgwú*
- Ezebānūgwú mārā Ama-eze((2X))* *Ezebānūgwú -who gave birth to Nweze)*
- 30 *Ndā Ushi okpārā oji Odomagala! ((2X))* *The Ushi okpārā people- Odomagala's Kola nut! (twice)*
- Ézènebò, Odomagala O!* *Ezenebò, Odomagala's Kola nut!*

- Ézhikèneḅò Odomagala ((2X)) Ézhikèneḅò Odomagala ((2X))
 Ézhikèḗligwè!
 Ézhikèḗligwè mərə Amogbà!
 35 Ézèugwocha-Ezikebikò oji Odo—O!
 Ézhikè neḅò! ((2X))
 Ézhikène Amóké—oji Odomagala ((2X))
 Úvərə Owere alə- oji Odomagala((2X))
 Ézhikè Obinana - oji Odomagala!
 40 Ézhikè Obi!
 Ézhikè Obiameji- Odomagala!
 Ólúbé mərə Úgbèlè Odomagala!
 Ézhikè Dúlúgwu-u-u! ((2X))
 Ézikèahum Nwalə -!
 45 Ézhikè ne ḅè e-e-ee-O-e-e!
 Áyogalò dā Úmu Óbéké! (2X)
 Evə dā Úga!
 Mkpəmə dā Úpata, nḡḡḡ oji--O!
 Dīmshinne nḡḡḡ oji --O-O ((2X))
 50 Úgwoke ne Úgwunye bja werə oji--
 Qmaba
 Adaada dā Úgbèlè Úwaalə-nḡḡḡ oji -
 O((2X))
 Úgwú Éshà dā Úgbèlè Úwa alə-nḡḡḡ
 oji O((2X))
 Igboḡebe- oji Odo!
 55 Mkpəmə Owelegə-Okekwuma, Nḡḡḡ oji- O!
 Mbiamongye!
 Adaada dā Úgbèlè nḡḡḡ oji-O-O!((2X))
 Qmaba! - - -
 Úmu nwoḅḡ agə--O-O, Unu emee agaa?Unu emee agaa?
 60 Qmaba abja—O-‘Unu emee agaa-O?
 O-O-Úmu Dīmḡgwuma O!
 Dīmḡgwuma anagə egbà agə
 Mə agə koyirə be anyi ne mkpḡ eja O!
 (Another bridge is observed and the tempo of the musical instruments slows down)
 65 Eze- anag-egbu-agə-n’ḡha -
- Ezikeḗligwe!, who gave birth to Amogbà
 Ezeugwocha-Ezikebiko-Odo’s Kola nut O!
 Ézhikè neḅò! (twice)
 Ézhikène Amóké- Odomagala’s Kola nut!
 (twice)
 Úvərə Owere alə- Odomagala’s Kola nut!
 (twice)
 Ézhikè Obinana- Odomagala’s Kola nut!
 (twice)
 Ézhikè Obi!
 Ezike Obiameji-Odomagala!
 Olube-who-gave- birth- to-Ugbele!
 Ézhikè Dúlúgwu-u-u! (twice)
 Ezikeahum Nwalə Okuzu of Upata
 Ézhikè ne ḅè e-e-ee-O-e-e!
 Áyogalò from the Obeke’s family! (twice)
 Evə dā Úga!
 Mkpume of Úpata, this is kola nut—O!
 Dīmshinne, this is kola nut—O! (twice)
 Ugwoke and Ugwunye come and collect
 Kola nut--Qmaba!
 Adaada of Úgbèlè Úwaalə-it is Kola nut-
 O! (twice)
 Éshà hills of Ugbele Uwalu, it is
 Kola nut—O! (twice)
 Igboḡebe- Odo’s Kola nut!
 Mkpəmə Owelegə-Okekwuma, it is
 Kola nut--O!
 Mbiamongye!
 Adaada of Úgbèlè it is
 Kola nut-O-O! (twice)
 (A play of the musical instruments.)
 - - -
 Qmaba has come—O, How are you?
 Qmaba abja- Qmaba abja
 Qmaba has come- Qmaba has come
 (The instrument is played and the horn talks)
 O O! Children of Dīmḡgwuma!
 Dīmḡgwuma does not kill a lion
 Yet a lion hangs at a post in our houses O!
 The king that does not kill a lion
 in the public (twice)

- Nkwoda nwa Ókwùmè be anyị* Nkwoda, the son of Okwume
O vərə àjàrì sojue nyọnu O - He has filled my mouth with *ajari*
Ónyūshì anyị e-e-e (twice) (Our clan head e-e-e-!) (twice)
Ónyūshì umụ òkè nwa O(2X) (Clan head of great children)
70 *Ónyūshì anyị rurà eru!* (The clan head is duely yours!)
Ónyūshì weterəm íbè oji ne nwòkwùtè! (Our clan head bring to me one
(2X) cotyledon of kola nut and a snuff
box!)
- Ónyūshì anyị weterə m oji I jirə je gó alá O!* (Our clan head bring to me the
kola with which you bought the
land!)
- Ónyūshì anyị ! magwoda Odo na-ekwu iye ha?* Our head, do you know the Odo
that is saying this thing?
- Ọ bə nya ụdara nwa Ọbòdòike Èzè* It's me, the apple, son of
Obodoike Eze
- 75 *Anọ m nẹ be Égbə nẹ be Ụvərə* (I am in the house of *egbə* and
uvərə)
- Ịmanuẹl Nwolu nwa Ugo nwa Ugodi O (twice)* (Emmanuel Nwolu, the
son of Ugo, son of Ugodi
O!(twice)
- Evəralə-nwa-Ugwele-Echara -* (Evural, the son of Ugwele-
Echara)
- Ọ chirə agbà werə nwa òbèlè- - O -* He has collected *agbu* (a
climbing rope that protects the
wine tappers from falling off the
tree) and a small gourd
- 80 *Manya evugade m ejū O - -* Wine makes me dizzy O
Joọnu Nweeze nwa Agəgədə O (twice) John, the son of Eze, the
son of Agəgədə O(twice)
- Eze-O-gbə-íshí-Ọ-yarə-àgbà nyá O!-* The king that kills a head and
leaves its jaw behind
- Donatus nwa Ọzọ (twice) - -* Donatus, the son of Ozo
E-riketẹ-okwu-Èzè-Ọká - - Voracious eating of words Eze
oka
- Alə ne gə bə Ókóró Ọzara Ugwoji -* Your motherland is Okoro Ozara
Ugwwoji
- 85 *Onye egbagə anyinya epiogə n'obə be Dugwu ogo-* Someone who has not killed a
horse cannot enter Dugwu *ogo's*
Obi
- Charles Nweeze (twice)
Nwa Ugwuezugwu Ụkwuna - The son of Ugwuezeugwu *Ụkwuna*.
Damian Ọzọ
Demianu Ọzọ (twice) Damian Ọzọ
Ọ-rənyima-ényí-Ọ-rənyima-Edem - Satisfier-of-both the-elephant-
and-the-Edem-people-with-
farmwork
- 90 *Onye-ənənə-turu-əha-negə - -* Someone whom birds have given

			eulogized at the farm site
	<i>Ugwokeja nwa Okpe O</i> (twice)	-	Ugwokeja, the son of Okpe O!
	<i>Ugwoke Ekwueme Ugwu</i>		
	<i>Ekwueme Nwa Úgwú nwa Ereje</i>	-	Ekwueme, the son of Ugwu, the son of <i>Ereje</i>
	<i>Ọ mákpọ' agbagba ndiom anyị</i>	-	The breaker of our women's gourds!
95	<i>Ugwutikari nwa Okpe-O</i> (twice)	-	Ugwutikiri, the son of Okpe O!
	<i>Agá na-áwá èdú</i>	-	The lion that forages in the forest
	<i>Nwa-aba-eme Úzà nwa Amẹyà</i>	-	Son of Uzu, who does what he says, the son of <i>Amẹyà</i>
	<i>Emerà ntàm Odugwu Íkàwó</i>	-	Passionate horn expert of <i>Ikawo</i>
	<i>Ọnụ na-ahwia gá mę úkwù na-eji nye-O</i>	-	Your mouth develops blisters while my waist hurts
100	<i>Ekwuelechi O</i> (twice)	-	<i>Ekwuelechi O</i> (twice)
	<i>Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori</i>	-	<i>Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori</i>
	<i>Ugwu Alaya dá Ngwoke</i>	-	Ugwu Alaya of Ngwoke O!
	<i>Úgwọ 'naruoyi</i>	-	<i>Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori</i>
	<i>Ọ nágá egwu uri m'abagá n'égá</i>	-	He does not apply <i>uri</i> unless he is the the forest!
105	<i>Madu Ezea O</i> (twice)	-	(The man's name)
	<i>Madu Nwezeji Amoke</i>	-	Madu, the son of Ezeji Amoke
	<i>Madu Nweeze, Ọ maarà onye bá oshi</i>	-	Madu the son of Eze who knows the thief
	<i>O werà ogele ga na-achọ onye zará oshì</i>		Yet goes around with a metal gong in search of the thief
	<i>Ejù na-evà m, Onye nke anyị abia</i>	-	I'm feeling dizzy, our own has come!
110	<i>Oyima ikpàrkwu</i>	-	The people's <i>Oyima</i> !
	<i>Ndà oma para anyaka e zàle oshì</i>	-	My good people Carry <i>anyaka</i> and do not steal
	<i>O—O Ụmụ Chinaedokwueze</i>	-	the offsprings of God-crowned li lineage

(The Beating Changes Again- Story Telling Session)

	<i>Nẹ nya jeko nye ije nye O!</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	(I am going on my own journey Oh!)	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	<i>Nwaanyi shi n'aga ụzọ fàta!</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	(A woman came out from the corner of the road)	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
115	<i>Nẹ nya zọfàta nne nye nya dàrà nye O!</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	(If I rescue her mother that I should take her O)	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	<i>Nẹ nya zọfàta nna nya nya dàrà nye O</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	(If I rescue her father that I should take her O)	-	-	<i>Jereke---e—Jeke-O</i>
	<i>Nẹ nya azọfàta nne nye bìà je dàrà e Ọ jù</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>
	(I rescued the mother and came to take her and she refused)-			
	<i>Nẹ nya azọfàta nna nya bìà je dàrà e Ọ jù</i>	-	-	<i>Jereke—Jeke-O</i>

- (I rescued the father and came to take her and she refused) - *Jereke—Jeke-O*
 Jereke--- Jeke O Jereke---Jeke O - - - *Jereke—Jeke-O*
 120 ***Nẹ nna nya eze agbaa nya eba*** - - - ***Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke***
huyereke
 (My father, the king, has conferred on me the royal rites *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
Nẹ oheyi oku anarə nya eba - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
 (The hot ogbono soup has taken my rites from me - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
Nẹ utara oku anarə nya eba - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
 (The hot foo foo has taken my rites from me) - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
Uwa ndiom uwa ngəta - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
 (The world of women, the world of dogs) - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*
Ẹba nya nwa Ogiri Iyoke - - - ***Ẹba- - a- nya***
 (My oath the son of Ogiri Iyoke) - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
 125 *Nẹ nya rigwo nke onyeke* - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
 (If I did eat that of a man) - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
Nẹ nya rigwo nke onyenye - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
 (If I did eat that of a woman)
 127 *Ẹba nya gi tigbugwo nye* - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
 (My oath beat me to death) - - - *Ẹba- - a- nya*
Tugworigwodo! (May it be done unto me according to the wishes of the gods!)
 (Further stories go on till dawn)