

# PARALLELISM IN THE YORUBA NAMING CEREMONY “EWÌ (POEM)

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The paper undertakes a study of parallelism in the Yoruba naming ceremony Ewì. Parallelism is ‘sameness’ between two sections of a text and can be structural or semantic. This incantatory poem which involves extensive prayers for the child, the parents, the pregnant, the barren and well wishers is always chanted. The goal of this paper is to show how the poet uses parallel names, structural parallelism, semantic parallelism, morphological parallelism, lexical parallelism to make an outstanding performance.

Elaboration through repletion of lines, stanzas, and whole verse is also common in traditional oral culture. The effect of parallelism and meter are salient very noticeable to the hearer with the result that the poem revealed the structural principle of the language. These drawing attentions of the poem to itself reveal the poetic function. The poetic is a characteristic tied to overt formal structures Fabb (1997:144) “on every level of language, the essences of poetic artifice consist of recurrent returns” Jacobson (1987: 145). The poem however has parallelism but no regular musical meter as found in conventional European poems.

The paper also discusses animals, birds and plant metaphors as use in the poem. Yoruba is a tonal and metaphor saturated language. The world view of the Yoruba people is established in the strong sense of African religion. This is in line with another important function of parallelism that expresses cultural thinking with stylistic effect of drawing hearer attention to a

particular important part of the poem communicating a particular meaning. This is metaphysical parallelism.

Yoruba Ewì poets are greatly admired for the richness of their words, the artistry of their use of idioms, proverbs and their deep knowledge of Yoruba language. Abiodun Adepoju the Ewi poet is widely known in the Washington DC area and is often asked to sing at naming ceremonies of the Nigerian Yoruba-speaking community. He inherited praise singing from his father and grandfather. The poet adapted the style of linguistic opening of African stories by introducing himself “Abíṣódún ajíkugba orin Èrúwà níle baba mi” (I am Abiodun the singer of two hundred songs, Eruwa is my father’s town). In the poem he addresses himself as the parrot that crows instead of cock in his town Eruwa. Effective public speaking is an art in Yoruba land that is why they often hire praise singers or musicians for occasions such as this. The poem reiterate the social status of art as it talk and advance the cause of humanity

Hayes (1997) said that repetitions are hall mark of rhythms and provide measure of time for rhythmic activities. Parallelism thus added to the rhythm and flow of the poem. .”Pattered repetition is the aesthetic foundation of many works of verbal, visual and performing art. However, it is not the pattern itself, but its manipulation by the artist that made the piece memorable Hunter & Oumarou (2001: 73). The poet exploited this to the uttermost as will be explained later in the poem.

There are Parallel names in the poem. The poem is about naming a child, so the word “ṣmṣ” child is consistently repeated over twenty times in the poem. Sometimes the child is assigned sets of different names which are synonymous in that they have the same reference. Examples are ṣmṣ tuntun, ìkókó, àlejò (newly born baby), ṣmṣ ṣwṣ (small baby), ṣmṣ rere

(good child), ɔmɔ wɛɛɛɛ (many babies). There are some pronouns used to refer to the baby like Ó, Kòun (the child), ɔmɔ yín (your child), ɔmɔ wa (our child).

There is much structural and semantic parallelism in the naming ceremony 'Ewi'. There are some proverbs that could be divided into two sections of equal or nearly equal length and by length the number of syllables in each section. Example in the poem is the proverbs in stanza 3, lines 1&2

ɔmɔ ɔwɔ kɪ́ kú lójú ɔwɔ, (The child will not die while in the hands)

Bèè ni ɔmɔ ɛsè kɪ́ kú lójú ɛsè 11/14 syllables (the child will not die while across the laps)

Apart from having similar structures, these two sentences are proverbial prayers to plead with God to spare the life of the baby. The first tension is the fear of death by the parents of the baby and well wishers. The prayer is to relieve the tension. The two sentences are structurally and semantically similar.

Èruwà nilé nilé bàbá mi (Eruwa is my home town, my father's town)10/9 syllables

Èrúwà Òjoko agbe dúdú ( Eruwa Ojoko with a black parrot)

These two statements fit in with Tae-Sang's paper on bipartite structure of Hausa proverbs Jang (p. 86). They are both divided into almost two equal parts with structural similarity. The syllable structure is 10/9. They are semantically similar. The second statement help to balance the first by the mention of the town's proverbial bird of identity "agbe" (parrot) which crows instead of cock.

Clear examples of morphological parallelism is in stanza 4, lines1-4 ɔdɔdɔdún (every year) repeated three times and was ended with lɔdúnlɔdún (every every year). This morphological

parallelism embedded in the syntactical and the semantically parallelism of lines 1-4 stanza below expose the aspect of the rhythm and meter.

“ọdọdún là ńrórógbó (Bitter cola appear every year)

ọdọdún là ńráwùsá (Yearly does awùsa herb appear)

ọdọdún là ńrọmọ obì (colanuts surface every year)

Hasty (1997) also said that articulation, regularity, repetition, pattern, alluring form, expressive gesture as can be seen in the above example in the poem are attributed to rhythm. The notion of meter mentioned by Hasty is that of classical scientific doctrine-a homogenous evenly flowing time. On the relational, it is not time that flow but events or occurrences that flow or succeed another. The appearances of bittercola, colanuts awùsa nut flow or succeed one another on yearly basis.

Parallelism between sequences of sounds altering ordinary language to make it fit the tonal requirement termed phonological or sound pattern parallelism are in the poem. There are stresses on the vowels and every syllable in line with Yoruba tone pattern.

Wẹrẹwẹrẹ lewé ń bọ lára igi (leaves falls from the trees easily)

Gbẹdẹ ní rọ kókò lágbalá (Cocoyam is comfortable in his palace)

There are also cases of syllables doing action of musical instruments or what we call non-sense syllables. For example:

Àkùkọ gagaraga (cock gagara)

Gagaraga has no meaning it is play on sounds or what we call non-sense syllable. There is special patterning of the poem based on alliteration. In line one of stanza one the consonant “l” is repeated “ọlọmọ ló layé” (to have a child is to have joy)

There is also deliberate use of words and syllables to produce musical effect “kúlùkùkúlùkùkùkù (every, every, every) wẹrẹwẹrẹ léwé (easy, easy, easy). The repetitions of k, l, w in the syllable are to produce drumming effect

Words that may be paired, lexically parallel having various kinds of semantic relations are common in the Ewi poem. The words have the same reference, relate as part to whole or belong to the same semantic field. In stanza seven lines 1&2 the pregnant mothers are paired with igi (tree) and the dislodgement of the baby from the mother at birth to the falling of ewé (leaves) from the tree. The stylistic effect is to draw the hearer to the importance of that particular part of the poem as it communicates a particular meaning. Moreover the words igi (tree), Aboyún (pregnant mother) ewé (leaves) and ọmọ belong to the same semantic field and same syntactic class ‘nouns’. Two other words ‘agbe’ and ‘àlùko’ refer to birds while olókun and Olósà refer to the owner or gods of ocean and sea.

Animal metaphors involve transference of meaning and whatever meanings or interpretations are assigned to a particular animal metaphor, are culture and context dependent. Metaphoric use of language is therefore deeply rooted in semantic parallelism. Stylistically animal metaphors contribute to aesthetics and poetic elegance of literary texts through their lexical tones which can be stylistically manipulated. This is in line with the theory of Leo (1993: 575) that pragmatics is directly interested, not in language but what people do with language.

The domestic animals which are of service or source of interest, and economy to the Yoruba are cat, dog, goat and sheep. As a result of their close contact and keen observation of

these animals, they have a sound knowledge of them. Therefore, the information about the nature and characteristic traits and behavior of animals form an essential part of some of the Yoruba poetic genres, such as oríkì(the Yoruba praise song), ìjálá, ìjìnlẹ̀ ẹ̀sẹ̀ ifá and others. Gibbs therefore said that theories “must consider not only how metaphor understanding creates new mode of conceptual understanding but also how it exploit pre-existing metaphoric ways of understanding experience that are a fundamental part of the poetic mind Gibbs (1994: 264)

The use of animal metaphors goat and sheep is use of language extension. They are structural and semantic parallelism and fit in with bipartite structure of Hausa proverbs.

Akìí gbẹ̀bí ewúré, Akìí gbẹ̀bí àgùtàn 8/8 (No midwife deliver goats)

Ka gbohun ìyá, Ká gbòhùn ọ̀mọ̀ tuntun 5/7 (No midwife deliver sheep)

Birds metaphor also stretched people imagination beyond the ordinary. It is traditionally believed that these two birds' agbe and àlùkò brings good luck to the sea and ocean.

Agbe ní gbére pàdé olókun, àlùkò ní gbére pade olòsà 11/12

(Agbe brings good to the ocean; Àlukò brings good to the sea)

Finally, the naming ceremony EWÌ is an incantatory poem which involves extensive prayers for the child, the parents, pregnant women, barren women and well wishers. It is always chanted. It is always chanted with alteration of tones and intonation. The rhythmic and tonal features set it apart from other language event. The poet through the use of parallelism exploited pre-existing metaphoric ways of understanding experience that are a fundamental part of the poetic especially of the Yoruba.

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