

Linguistic Features and Symbolic Communication in Àgídìgbo Music of the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria

Olaolu Emmanuel Adekola *

Abstract

Music and language are inseparable, their relationship manifests in various contexts. *Àgídìgbo* music is one of the traditional music through which Yorùbá language is expressed and preserved because musicians usually deploy certain linguistic elements and communication devices in navigating their artistic creativity. Existing studies on music have not sufficiently examined how language, text and interpretation make sense in *àgídìgbo* music. This paper therefore, examined how language, text and interpretation in *àgídìgbo* music are used in expressing linguistic features, symbolic communication and nuances in African language. Ethnographic design was used and a purposive sampling technique was deployed to select three notable *àgídìgbo* exponents in Èrúwà (Oyo state), Abeòkúta (Ogun state) and Ìwó (Osun state) all in southwest Nigeria where *àgídìgbo* music performance is prevalent. Observation and In-depth interviews were employed as methods of data collection during social ceremonies of the key informants. Musical excerpts were recorded from live performances and data were subjected to content analyses. The findings revealed that the linguistic elements used in *àgídìgbo* music were proverbs and figures of speech such as hyperbole, metaphors, simile, fable, parables, repetition and digression clearly expressed communication device and nuances in Yorùbá language. The versatility and musical prowess of *àgídìgbo* musicians are not only measured by their virtuosity on the instrument but also by their ability to use the right and appropriate language elements such as *òwe* and other figures of speech in driving home their points thereby making *àgídìgbo* music to serve as repository for future generation.

Keywords: *Àgídìgbo* music, drum surrogacy, figures of speech, proverbs, owe, Yorùbá

* Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; adekolaolaolue@gmail.com

Introduction

Àgídìgbo, just like Dùndún, Bàtá, Bèmbé, is both an instrument and a musical genre. As an instrument, àgídìgbo is structurally constructed as a set of graduated rows of keys made of metal, mounted on a wooden frame box resonator and played through the means of plucking technique using the index and the middle fingers with occasional hand-beaten of the body to create percussive effect (Adekola, 2016), its variants across Africa include *likembe*, *kalimba*, *Mbira*, *sanzhi*, and *ubo-aka*. Adekola (2018) gives concise information on àgídìgbo as band:

As a genre of music, *Àgídìgbo* is a social/recreational music that is rooted in the proverbs, aphorisms, parables, customs and traditions of the Yorùbá people. The meaning inherent in the messages of the songs and the instrument requires deep understanding of Yorùbá language and culture as a whole. *Àgídìgbo* musical performance is done through vocal with instrumental means and it is presented in symbols of skilled language that employs figures of speech, imagery and other poetic elements expressing Yorùbá philosophical nuances. Other instruments which constitute the traditional *àgídìgbo* ensemble are *Agogo* (bell), *Sẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (gourd rattle), *gangan* (a small sized hourglass drum believed to predate the *dùndún*) and *àkùbà* drum (tall single-headed tapering drum, played with both hands, sometimes placed on the drum stand or held between player's legs). Each of these musical instruments performs certain musical functions in the band (Adekola, 2018:3).

Recent innovation in the construction of Àgídìgbo has been documented by scholars such as Akere (2023) who discusses innovation in the construction of wireless Àgídìgbo, through experimental design approach; the author elucidates the pivotal steps in the innovative construction process of what has been hitherto referred to as traditional àgídìgbo musical instrument. The music is named after the principal instrument of the band – *Àgídìgbo* (Adekola, 2018). Àgídìgbo music is often presented in a skillfully crafted language including figures of speech, imagery and other poetic elements in expressing deep Yorùbá philosophical nuances and messages which are often coded in terms of language presentation., Their symbols are more usually fragmented, leaving listeners to reason deeply in order to deduce the full meaning of the music (Adekola, 2016, Samuel and Adekola, 2018). Àgídìgbo, as a principal instrument in Àgídìgbo ensemble and as a communicative instrument, is used in the company of other musical instruments by the Yoruba people for musical, socio-cultural and linguistic communication. The instrument is most popular in places like Eruwa, Ibadan, Iwo, Ilesa, Abeokuta, Ijebu among other areas in Yorùbá society and musicians like Fatai Rolling Dollar, Adeolu Akinsanya, Haruna Ishola, Ebenezer Obey were among many others who fostered its popularization few decades ago. Olupemi (2017) summed this up quaintly when he notes that:

It is the major melo-rhythmic instrument of Apala music of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, which serves a dual function of maintaining a rhythmic ostinato with the song as well as providing melodic accompaniment and interludes. It was first used as the principal instrument in the indigenous Àgídígbo music of the Yorùbá in the 1920s, from which the genre got its name (Vidal, 2012). However, with the decline of the music and the emergence of popular genres such as Juju and Apala music in the 1930s, the Àgídígbo players ventured into other musical styles, with the instrument finding solace and eventually incorporated into Apala music due to its tone quality and melo-rhythmic role matching the nature of Apala music (Olupemi, 2017:123).

It must be noted however, that despite the decline of Àgídígbo music and the emergence of popular genres, a quantum of àgídígbo music is found in some local areas of the Yorùbá society as revealed during the research work for this paper. The level of adaptability and retention of àgídígbo core practice has enhanced its sustenance despite evolving changes in the Nigerian musical landscape (Adekola, 2018).



Plate 1. A copy of Àgídígbo sighted at National Museum, Ibadan, Nigeria (fieldwork 2024)

Music and language are inseparable, their relationship manifests in various contexts but discussion on how musicians deploy certain nuances in navigating their artistic creativity has not been given due attention in scholarly writings. The preoccupation of this paper is to explore how language elements and nuances as communication devices are deployed by musicians in various contexts such as politics, religion, social events and ceremonial functions among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, using *àgídígbo* music as a point of reference. Since what a musician sings is more important than how he sings it (Adegbite, 2023) in terms of

meaning making, this paper examines the content of selected *àgídìgbo* music with the aim of analyzing the linguistic elements, nuances and communication devices deployed by the musicians. This was investigated through ethnographic design approach in selected Yorùbá communities in southwest Nigeria.

Àgídìgbo Music as a Communicative Device and Cultural Identity of the Yorùbá

Àgídìgbo music is one of the traditional Yorùbá music through which Nigerian language is expressed and preserved because musicians usually deploy certain linguistic elements and communication devices in navigating their artistic creativity. Olupemi (2017) notes that:

The Àgídìgbo is a major melo-rhythmic instrument of the Apala music, used by Yoruba musicians to achieve speech surrogate due to the tonal inflection of the Yoruba language. While it is somewhat easier in Yoruba vocal music to employ the three phonemic tones - low, mid and high for word intelligibility, the musicians must however adapt these tones in playing the melo-rhythmic instruments for adequate communication (Olupemi, 2017:123).

Àgídìgbo, as a melo-rhythmic instrument, communicates its audience through surrogacy, the instrument is used as speech surrogate in place of human voice just like *dùndún*. As far as musical performances are concerned among the Yorùbá people, emphasis is not only on verbal nuances but usually placed also on non-verbal communication as it is believed that “intentions are not completely verbalized”. Non-verbal communication therefore becomes a convincing component of communication in Yorùbá day to day discursive engagement as people tend to speak with various parts of their bodies as well as musical instruments in music performances (Akangbe, 2017:47). Musical instruments such as drums are used as means through which non-verbal communication is achieved or enhanced and intentions are verbalized as drumming is usually seen as “a loud non-verbal communication medium” in African traditional society and in Nigeria in particular (Akangbe, 2017:47). One particular drum symbol signal can communicate different meanings depending on the prevailing context. The message of each of these symbol-objects is manifold as they can communicate certain meaning in one instance and something else at another instance, therefore, it necessary that the receiver should have a full understanding of the communication context for a proper interpretation as this will determine the interpretation that will be given to the drum signal code, this is common in *àgídìgbo* musical performances. The importance of African languages, as expressly seen in *àgídìgbo* music, is multifaceted and significant for several reasons: for preservation of cultural heritage, enhanced communication and understanding, cognitive development, promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity among others. Àgídìgbo music promotes rich cultural heritage, traditions, and values and thereby preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, folklore, and historical narratives unique to Yorùbá linguistic activities.

Àgídìgbo, a box-type thumb piano and a musical genre among the Yorùbá, is one of the means through which the musicians verbalize their intentions during musical performances. Its

performance is richly crafted in different speech styles in which proverbs and other linguistic elements are frequently employed for aesthetic and communicative purposes. *Àgídìgbo* music, originating from the Yoruba culture especially of the southwestern Nigeria, incorporates various linguistic elements and communicative devices to convey messages and engage listeners. It employs the Yoruba language for its lyrics, allowing for direct communication with Yoruba-speaking audiences and this linguistic choice enhances cultural authenticity and facilitates a deeper connection between the music, the musicians and their audience. *Àgídìgbo* often deploys proverbs and idiomatic expressions, which are integral parts of Yoruba culture, these linguistic devices carry hidden or layers of meaning and wisdom, enriching the lyrical content and resonating with listeners familiar with Yoruba traditions. This is usually done through call and response pattern which is a prominent communicative device in *Àgídìgbo* music, where a lead singer (caller) initiates a phrase or melody, and the audience or a chorus (responders) echoes or responds. This interactive element fosters audience participation and creates a sense of community and shared experience.

Àgídìgbo music usually incorporates storytelling elements, narrating tales of everyday life, historical events, or cultural myths. Through vivid imagery and narrative techniques, these songs captivate listeners and transmit cultural knowledge across generations thereby promoting Yorùbá language. In terms of rhythmic patterns and percussion instruments, *Àgídìgbo* music serves as communicative devices, conveying emotions, energy, and cultural nuances. Drumming styles performed by *dùndún* (talking drum) and *Àgídìgbo* (a large thumb piano) add depth and texture to the music, enhancing its communicative power. Therefore, *Àgídìgbo* music utilizes linguistic elements and communicative devices to express cultural identity, convey messages, and foster social cohesion within the Yoruba community and beyond. As a band leader, *alàgídìgbo* has the repository knowledge of the various forms of poetic vocal recitation such as the spoken poetry, the chanted poetry and the sung poetry. The *àgídìgbo* player performs the same role of the *iyaalu* player in the ensemble; who, as the master drummer, must have an absolute command of intrinsic performance technique and be able to give stage directions to other members of the band and correct discernable artistic lapses so it will not be obvious to the audience (Ogunsanya, 2024).



Plate 2. Àgídìgbo ensemble led by Pa Iroko Atanda from Eruwa, Oyo state (Adekola, 2016)

Linguistic Elements in Àgídìgbo Music among the Yorùbá of Nigeria

The language of *àgídìgbo* is full of praise, satire, entertainment and amusement which are presented in form of proverbs (*òwe*) and Yorùbá philosophical statements to impress the intended meaning in the heart of the audience. The versatility and musical prowess of an *àgídìgbo* musician are not only measured by their virtuosity on the instrument, but they are also measured or assessed by their ability to use the right and appropriate language elements such as proverbs (*òwe*) and other figures of speech in driving home their points either verbally or as a speech surrogate on the instruments (Adekola, 2018). This point corroborates Echezona (1982) who posits that:

Many Nigerian songs embody statements which are nothing but pronouncements of the basic philosophy of Nigerian minstrels such as the *obiligbo* of *igbo* and their counterparts in the North and West who sing virtually all their songs in proverbs. Proverb is a special figure of speech which contains or combines similes, metaphors, alliterations, onomatopoeia, puns, allusions, and even short anecdotes. Minstrels may use narration or witty or interesting tales in simple direct or indirect prose (Echezona, 1982:223).

Proverbs and figures of speech used as language of delivery in the composition and performance of *àgídìgbo* music are further discussed in this paper.

Owe (proverbs) in Àgídìgbò Musical Performance

Owe are short, pithy saying, meaningful and well-known sentences or phrase that explains general truth about life. Metaphorically, proverb and word cannot be separated. This confirms a Yorùbá adage: *Òwe lẹsin ọrọ, ọrọ lẹsin òwe, bọrọ bà sọnu, òwe la ó fí wa* (the horse on which words ride and proverb is the only instrument through which lost words can be traced). Proverbs and adage are employed by musicians in form of advice, entertainment and encouragement to the targeted audience. They may come in form of satire, variation and for coded messages. The Webster Reference Dictionary of the English Language defines a proverb as a short, pithy, popular saying long in use, embodying some familiar truth, practical precept or useful thought in expressive and often picturesque language. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes it as a traditional technique of verbal expressions consisting of a compressed statement often in a figurative language and noted for its wit in the selection and arrangement of the verbal item end for the wisdom of its total meaning. The indirect characteristic of proverbs among the Yorùbá necessitates the need for a sharp perception of audience so as to really understand and decode the intended message. It must be noted that the ability to use proverbs appropriately is evidence of wisdom and intelligence as far as cultural intelligence is concerned. One characteristic feature of the proverb used in the excerpts below is that they are usually in ternary form (AABA) which is sometimes called song form. This is a three-part musical form where the first section (A) is repeated after the second section (B) ends. Examples of some of *òwe* (proverbs) employed in *àgídìgbò* music as deduced from the fieldwork include:

Musical example 1:

Proverb



<i>Ojú ajá ni ò to</i>	it's because dog has not seen it
<i>Ojú ajá ni ò to</i>	it's because dog has not seen it
<i>Íjímèrè, to l'ohun ò léré sá</i>	monkey that says he does not want to run
<i>Ojú ajá ni ò to</i>	it's because dog has not seen it

The import of this proverb is to advise and warn people against pride and arrogance. When a man claims that he is important and that there is nobody who can put him on the run, the musicians use the proverb through the help of his musical instrument to advise that no one can claim superiority as everyone has his/her master or superior.

Musical example 2:

Dagunro o se e je



<i>Dágunró ò séé jẹ</i>	<i>dágunró</i> (<i>Alternanthera nodiflora</i>) is not edible
<i>Dágunró ò séé jẹ ò séé jẹ</i>	no one can eat <i>dágunró</i>
<i>Ìjẹ tí ẹ jẹ tẹ̀tẹ̀ ẹ má jẹ dágunró</i>	the way you eat <i>tẹ̀tẹ̀</i> (Amaranth Greens)
<i>Dágunró ò séé jẹ</i>	don't eat <i>dágunró</i> like that

The musician usually uses the proverb to warn the evil perpetrators that power is hierarchical and that human being cannot be treated the same way. The musician metaphorically referred to himself as *dágunró* (*Alternanthera nodiflora*) which if anybody eats, such will suffer dysentery or death. This means that the musician has some spiritual backing from the unseen world and if anyone tries to disrupt his performance as they do for other musician, such should get ready for the unwanted consequences.

Musical example 3:

Ohun ta a mo la a mo



<i>Ohun tá à mọ̀ la à mọ̀</i>	we may not know everything
<i>Ohun tá à mọ̀ la à mọ̀</i>	we may not know everything
<i>Eni tó ń singbà owó ní ò ní lówọ̀</i>	we know that a pawn is not a rich person
<i>Ohun tá à mọ̀ la à mọ̀</i>	we may not know other things

The above proverb is used to deride people who pretend to be rich but who are really not. The musicians use such proverb to discourage the act of pretense among the community people. The proverb explains that one may not know everything, but everyone knows that a pawn is a poor person because if he is rich and did not owe, he would not have been a slave to another person.

Yorùbá people rely on proverbs as one of the means of preserving their culture and educating their youth on their religious belief, tradition, philosophy and moral; they are fond of using proverbs when they have to make speeches or music. And indeed, it is a pleasure to see how their proverbs blend harmoniously with the point they treat thereby driving home the point so vividly that the audience enter very fully into their feelings. The ability to know, apply and use proverbs succinctly and aptly depends on experience and association with the elder who are regarded as the custodians and the ones only competent enough to use proverbs at will. Thus, at the beginning and at the end of every proverb constant reference is made to them thus: *tótó se bí òwe ẹyin àgba* (sirs, I give respect to you for this proverb), this receives proper answer from the elders present as *wà á pa òmiràn* (you will say another one). Osoba (2014) posits that, in Yorùbá language, there is a distinction in terminology between proverbs and other linguistic forms and expressions. But even here, there is often a practical connection between proverbs and other literary forms of language as some Yorùbá proverbs are connected with stories while others are closely related to anecdote, so much that anecdotes are sometimes just illustrations of proverbs and vice-versa.

There is an enduring relationship between *owe* and other Yorùbá “linguistic formulae” such as *orin*, *itàn*, *àróbá*, *ààlò*, *oriki*, *ewi*, *rara*, *ijala* and so forth. *Ìtàn* is regarded as relating to history, myth, legend which has important messages which have implications for the shaping of individuals’ lives, places, towns, group, and nation and could also be addresses to animals and non-living things. This may come in form of *Ààlò*- folktales that contain songs; riddles, puns in form of *Àróbá* (*baba itàn*- literally father of story) i.e. weighty statements, it is the history called upon for lessons; *oriki* - panegyric with historical contents, this could be brief or epic length. *Orin* according to Euba (1988) can be described as having pitches that are more discrete, and are in strict rhythm and accompanied with instrument and dance.

Àgídìgbo music makes use of *òwe* more than any other linguistic formulae in its performance so often, a proverb among the Yorùbá lends credence to this assertion: “*Lówe lówe làá lù’lù àgídìgbo, ọlọgbón ní jo, ọmọràn ní mọ́* (the *Àgídìgbo* is beaten in a proverbial way, it is only those who are intellectually, artistically competent and knowledgeable that can understand the messages and dance to it).

The Use of Figures of Speech in *Àgídìgbo* Music

The figures of speech play a major role in musical performance and expression. It has been used variously by traditional musicians over the years to improve the quality of musical rendition. It gives a different and beautiful look to the piece of writing by exposing the inherent inert

qualities (Idolor, 2001). The figures of speech represent an important element in music as it enhances it by adding variety, beauty, flavor and various colors and shades to musical performance. Figures of speech make music very interesting to the audience as musicians use it to criticise, make comment on others; they also use it to express their feelings in a novel and precise manner contrary to a long narration which will be boring and dull. A specific use of figures of speech therefore, improves versatility of music and makes its messages more effective. It is a mode of expression in which words are used out of their literal meaning or ordinary use to create an effect, often where they do not have their original or literal meaning. It is also used to add beauty, intensify emotion and present a meaning familiar to audience by comparing one thing with another. Common figures of speech in *àgídìgbo* music include hyperbole, metaphor, euphemism, simile, fables, parallelism, repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia among others.

a. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an extravagant statement; the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect. It is overstatement or exaggerated language that distorts facts by making them much bigger than they are if looked at objectively. It is a language technique obviously and deliberately exaggerated for effect in the work of art such as music. When a musician employs language magnification or when the text of music is inflated, hyperbole is employed in the music. There are instances when the use of hyperbole occurs in the course of performance in *àgídìgbo* music. This is done to lay emphasis on certain statement. For example:

<i>Agboluaje n ko gba orin,</i>	Agboluaje sings two hundred songs
<i>Akanni oolola se ko si beru,</i>	Akanni from oolola ¹ village, I hope no problem?
<i>Agboluaje n ko gba orin.</i>	Agboluaje sings two hundred songs

In the song above, the musician made use of hyperbolic statement so as to showcase his musical prowess to the audience. How possible is it for a musician to sing two hundred songs at an outing? However, the musician just made use of two hundred songs as a means of explaining his talent and versatility in musical performance. The musician actually wanted to say that he sings well.

b. Metaphors

A Metaphor is an implied simile and a comparison, between two dissimilar things or persons on all points. Metaphors implied comparison between two unlike things (such as a man and an animal or an inanimate object) that actually have something important in common. These

¹ Oolola village is located close to Lagun along iwo-Ibadan express road. It is one of the villages where this research was carried out in 2015/2016 where the research met and conducted interview with Pa Ganiyu Dakaje (80years)

describe objects, actions or situations imaginatively to show that they have the same qualities and to make the description more forceful. Comparison is evoked metaphorically in *àgídìgbo* music for beauty, imagery, symbols, allusions and avoidance of pitfalls. Yorùbá believe that *eyin l'oro, to ba bo sile kii see ko* (Words are eggs, when they fall and hit the ground, they cannot be made whole again). The significance of this metaphor is that words are both delicate and fragile like eggs, they should be handled with care because once they come out of the mouth; they cannot be amended like broken eggs. Therefore, musicians usually escape the pitfalls of careless statements through the careful usage of metaphors in their music.

Musical example 4:

Ijimere so'gi gun



<i>Ìjímèrè s'ó'gì gùn</i>	monkey, be careful in climbing tree
<i>Ìjímèrè s'ó'gì gùn</i>	monkey, be careful in climbing tree
<i>Kó o má baa gungi aládi</i>	beware so that you will not climb tree with ants' house
<i>Ìjímèrè s'ó'gì gùn</i>	monkey be careful

The excerpt above is used to warn especially against illicit sexual behaviour in the society which is capable of causing untimely death. The music is presented metaphorically to advise a man to be careful so that he won't have affairs with a woman who has been protected with charm by her husband as consequence of adultery could be shame, sickness or even death. Metaphorically, the man is compared to monkey who is fond of climbing trees, women are compared with trees while climbing is used to mean sexual act between a man and a woman. Tree with ants' house represents a woman who has been infected with charms that can cause sickness or death. Metaphor in this song is to escape direct warning which is common in Yorùbá society.

Also, metaphors are used by *àgídìgbo* musicians to evade real name that may be regarded as improper to mention while singing. For instance, Pa Ganiyu Dakaje, one of the exponents of traditional *agidigbo* music and one of my key informants used such words in his performance during interviews conducted with him at his residence in 2016. The excerpt below shows how he named witches, wizards and Ogboni people as *ayé* (the occultic world) that must be referred:

<i>Ayígbiri lorúko ta n p'ayé</i>	the world is called rolling object (unstable)
<i>Ọro yi gbiri loruko ta n p'eeyan</i>	people are called rolling (unstable) word

<i>Iba mi wa dọwọ 'iyá mi Ajibólá</i>	my respect to my mother Ajibola
<i>Ọmọ ẹdun Ábẹnì ọmọ a sẹ l'odò</i>	a child of <i>edun</i> , Abeni, a child from the river
<i>Íyá à mi ògbónì, bàbá à mi imùlẹ</i>	my mother is an occult, my father also an occult
<i>Emi pà á mo kẹgùn mo sògbónì mọwọ</i>	I am also an occult member
<i>Gbogbo yin ní mo ki n o lólódì kan</i>	I greet you all without exception
<i>Mo ki yin tẹsótẹsọ, mo ki yin tológun</i>	I greet you majestically and like a soldier
<i>tológun</i>	
<i>Mo si ki yin tàgbàgbà a bẹ</i>	and I greet you as an elder

From the excerpt above, *ayé* was used metaphorically to mean human being especially the occult powers in Yorùbá cosmology such as *Àjé* (witches) and *Ogboni* (occult people). Drawing from Adeduntan (2016), *ayé* (literally means world) is usually conceived by the Yorùbá artists as “mankind” or “humanity” who could also be regarded as the concentration of diabolic power that is capable of doing both good and evil depending on the prevailing situation. The musician regarded the world as rolling object referring to the ambivalent nature of the “world” that can do well to a person they are in love with and at the same time do evil to anyone they are not pleased with. As a result of this, the musician paid homage to the “world” and thereafter read his own “citation” as a child of occult parents who has also been initiated into the occult world. Since it is believed that *awo nii gbáwo n 'ìgbònwọ, báwo kò bá gbáwo n 'ìgbònwọ awo a tẹ, awo á ya* (literally means the occult people usually assist their members and if this is not done, the entire group will be put to shame) the musician reiterated his initiation into such group which should naturally afford him some privilege of divine backing for his musical performance. The bottom line here is that instead of saying *Àjé* (witches) and *Ogboni* (occult people), the musician metaphorically referred to them as *ayé*.

c. Simile

A figure of speech in which an explicit comparison is made between two essentially unlike or different things, usually by using like, as or than, designed to create an unusual, interesting, emotional or other effect is described as simile. Simile is comparison of one thing with another in the musical performance. They may modify the adjectives or modify the verbs. *Àgídìgbo* musicians made use of this to compare certain objects for an unusual and interesting effect during performance. Excerpt below is an example of such:

<i>Ọwọ kókó l'afi i wọ 'gi</i>	we respect the tree because of its lump
<i>Ọwọ àpàyà l'afi i wọ 'rókò</i>	we respect <i>iroko</i> tree because of its hole
<i>Mo wàyà mì bí i ọkọ ikégùn</i>	I'm confident like the hoe used for planting yam
<i>Ẹ f'ọwọ mi wọ mi o</i>	accord me my own respect
<i>Ìbà iyá l'ẹmí kọkọ jú /2x</i>	I first of all pay homage to the mother

Mo jáde n'ilé mo ti júbà I pay homage before I left home
Ìbà ìyá l'èmi kòkò jú I first of all pay homage to the mother

In the excerpt above, the musician compares himself with hoe used in yam planting which is blunt, solid and which cannot be tampered with anyhow. The musician used these metaphors to describe his in-built strength given by the ‘mothers’ who have prepared him against any hazard which could be targeted towards him in the course of his musical performance. He also used the same metaphoric statement to inform and also warn the evil perpetrators to desist from any dastard venture targeted against him because he has the backing of the “elders”, the “world”. This explains that traditional musical space is like a battle ground of which musicians must equip themselves because of its volatility.

d. Fables and parables

A fable is a type of story in which birds, beasts and insects are treated like human beings with an aim to teach some morals. And usually, a short narrative making an edifying or cautionary point and often employing as characters animals that speak and act like humans. The stories composed of supernatural happenings, fables usually employ the personification of animals or inanimate objects and are intended to teach a moral or lesson. Fables illustrate, illuminate and present the message of the theme in a subtle manner to the audience. This makes the message to be indirect to the affected audience ceding the power of interpretation and application to the hand of the audience. A parable is a story that aims at answering a single question and offering a definite moral. Parable is a short, descriptive story that illustrates a moral attitude or religious idea. It differs from the fable in its lack of fantastic or anthropomorphic characters but is similar in length and simplicity. Parables are stories which serve to illustrate a moral point. Parallelism is structural similarities, which appear in parallel sentences and the sentences express the central idea and complement each other ideationally (Idolor 2001). Excerpt below shows an example of fable where land is treated as a being who went for hunting with God. The story had it that, God shows the land that He is superior and that is why He is above and land is below. The story is just to show the power and supremacy of God using fable to drive home the point:

Call: Agboluaje ratayiatu	Agboluaje, (Islamic word)
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i> (Islamic syllable)
Call: <i>Ola Oluwa</i>	God's blessing
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>ko ma a ba Mohamo</i>	goes to Mohamed
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>ni jo ojo kan</i>	one day
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>

Call: ile pelu Olorun	both the earth and God
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>ni won ba loo de'gbe</i>	went for hunting expedition
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>won p'eku emo kan</i>	they killed one rat
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>Oloun lo hun legbon</i>	God said he was elder
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>ile lo hun lagba</i>	the earthen said "I am older"
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>
Call: <i>ata yi a</i>	Islamic word
Res: <i>ila</i>	<i>ila</i>

e. Repetition

The repetition of a sound, syllable, word, phrase, line, stanza, or metrical pattern is a basic unifying device in all poetry and music. It may reinforce, supplement, or even substitute for meter, the other chief controlling factor in the arrangement of words into poetry (Idolor, 2001). Repetition in music connotes singing a word, a phrase, a section, the whole song more than one time. This usually occurs when the musician intends to emphasise a certain idea or wishes to provide clarity in his presentation. Apart from using repetition as a device to emphasise a particular section, it is also one of the compositional techniques through which musicians can achieve elongation of a particular section of music. Musical example and excerpt below reveal example of repetition as it is used in àgídìgbo music:

Musical example 5:

Agidigbo Proverb

O un ni ba ba we re... O un ni ba ba we re e ni to gbon to le ni kan o gbon O un ni ba ba we re ba ba

9
we re ba ba di gbo lu gi O un ni ba ba we re

<i>Òun ni baba wèrè</i>	he is the father of a mad man
<i>Òun ni baba wèrè</i>	he is the most foolish person
<i>Eni tó gbón</i>	he who thinks he is wise
<i>Tó lẹ̀nì kan o gbón</i>	and regards others as unwise

<i>Òun ni baba wèrè</i>	he is the most foolish person
<i>Baba wèrè, baba dìgbòlugi</i>	father of a fool, father of a mad man
<i>Òun ni baba wèrè</i>	he is the most foolish person

The emphasis in the song above is *Òun ni baba wèrè* (he is the chief among the mad people), as it was repeated four times out of the seven lines of the song. Other examples are:

Example 4:

<i>Àti dúró gungi dúró gungi</i>	To climb a tree while standing, while standing
<i>Àti bẹ̀rẹ̀ gungi bẹ̀rẹ̀ gungi</i>	To climb a tree while bending, while bending
<i>Àti gungi ọ̀pọ̀lọ́ ojú ejò ní ó se</i>	The snake will see how the frog will climb the tree

Repetition aids learning and memorisation of certain parts of the entire song. Although, if not properly utilised, repetition can lead to boredom and misunderstanding of the idea but when properly handled, it can bring clarity and aesthetics in singing.

f. Digression

Digression is conceived in music as a temporary wander of the musician from the main theme of the music to provide the spice of variety, a relief from a tragic theme, create suspense or teach morals before returning to the original theme (Idolor, 2001). *Àgidigbo* musicians usually make use of digression especially when they want to praise an individual among the audience who appears on the stage or passing by to eulogise him. This point was corroborated by one of my informants, Pa Sangoyemi², who reminisced on one of his experiences where his band was performing and a man who “snatched” another man’s wife was passing, he suddenly changed his music, using it to vilify/satirise the man. He sang thus:

<i>Ọ̀gá yìbò sì ma a sè tùtù</i>	Yellow man you will make sacrifice
<i>Ọ̀gá yìbò sì ma a sè tùtù</i>	yellow man you will make sacrifice
<i>Iyàwó ifá tí o gbà yí o</i>	the ifa priest’s wife you snatched
<i>Ọ̀gá yìbò sì ma a sè tùtù</i>	you must make sacrifice as an pacify the oracle

The musician referred to the man euphemistically as *Oga yibo* (a fair complexioned man) and referred to the wife he snatched as *iyawo ifa* (wife of ifa priest). This is to scare the man that he will not only return the wife but will do so with appeasement of sacrifice. This explains that his adulterous act will not go unpunished this time but with dire consequences. This was said in a brief moment before the musician returned to his real issue during his performance. This

2. Pa Sangoyemi (age- 75), a native of Abeokuta was one of my key informants who explained how digression usually takes place during musical performances.

shows that digression may occur during musical performance when a musician wishes to praise, greet, or address an issue about a passer-by which is not the main content of the ongoing performance. This sometimes brings about aesthetics, variation and new issue which make the audience to enjoy the performance.

Conclusion

Àgídìgbo music is full of praise, satire, entertainment and amusement which are presented in form of proverbs (òwe) and Yorùbá philosophical statements to impress the intended meaning in the heart of the audience. Proverbs and figures of speech used as language of delivery in the composition and performance of àgídìgbo music include hyperbole, metaphors, simile, fable, parables, repetition and digression. The versatility and musical prowess of àgídìgbo musicians are not only measured by their virtuosity on the instrument but also by their ability to use the right and appropriate language elements such as òwe and other figures of speech in driving home their points thereby making àgídìgbo music to serve as repository for future generation. Since language plays a major role in culture preservation and perpetuation, it can be concluded that linguistic features, symbolic communication and nuances in àgídìgbo contribute to the preservation of Yorùbá language and by extension, Yorùbá culture especially at this time when many African languages are on the verge of extinction.

References

- Adeduntan, A. 2016. "Mouth with Which the King Curses: Abuse and Departicularisation of the Enemy in King Sunny Ade's Jùjú Music". *Research in African Literatures*, 47, 4: 171-187.
- Adekola, O. E. 2016. Changes in performance practice and context of Àgídìgbo music of the Yoruba, Nigeria. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists*, 10, 406-421.
- Adekola, O.E. 2018. Dynamics of Àgídìgbo music among the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria. An unpublished Ph.D thesis. Institutes of African Studies, University of Ibadan.
- Akangbe, C. A. 2017. "Non-verbal communication". In *culture and customs of the Yorùbá*. T. Falola and A. Akinyemi (Eds.), Pan-African University Press, Austin, Texas. 47-58.
- Akere, A. O. 2023. "Innovative Construction of Wireless Àgídìgbo Traditional Musical Instrument: Using Experimental Design". *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Development, Education and Science Research*, 7, 1:150-171.
- Echezona, W.W.C. 1982. "Nigerian music- then and now". *Reading in African humanities- arts cultural development*. Ogbu, U. Kalu (ed.), Enugu, 4th dimension publishers, 222-240.
- Euba, A. 1988. "Essays on music". *African intercultural perspectives*. Bayreuth University, 1.
- Idolor, E.G. 2001. Okpe Disco: a new traditional Nigerian popular music genre. An unpublished PhD Thesis. Institute of African Studies .University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Ogunsanya, A. O. 2024. "(Re) Examining the functions of D6nd5n Talking Drum in the Inter-cultural Music process of Africa and the African Diaspora". *Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*, 12, 1: 1-13.
- Olupemi, O. E. 2017. "Music and tonal communication: decoding and conserving the àgídìgbo in Apala music". *UNILAG Journal of Humanities*, 4, 2: 123-134.

Osoba, J. 2014. "The use of Nigerian Pidgin in media adverts". *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4, 2: 26-37.

Samuel, K. and Adekola, O. E. 2018. "Philosophical Elements in *Àgídìgbò* Music and their Didactic Values for Promoting Effective Educational System for Africa". *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11, 5: 56-74.