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## Text and Context: A study of the Proverbs and Folksongs of Akpor kingdom, Rivers State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Folklores are forms of oral literature that are very important to the Akpor people as they serve as ways through which the Akpor traditions, cultures and customs are made known to the people. Presently, the use of proverbs and folksongs have been greatly reduced due to the influence of western culture as people hardly engage in these cultural practices from whence these forms of oral literature are elicited. The objectives of this study is to identify the various types of folksongs and proverbs existing in Akpor kingdom, analyse these songs and proverbs and examine the roles context play in deciphering the meaning of these oral forms of literature. The major source of data collection for this study is oral interviews, particularly unstructured interviews. The study adopts the use of contextual theory of meaning for its framework. The findings show that context influences, but does not determine meaning. In other words, proverbs or folksongs used in similar contexts could have distinct meanings, depending on the societal needs they are meant to address. Folksongs can be modified by singers to suit their personal taste and through these forms of oral literature, abstract elements such as ideas, emotions and values are represented. This study also identified that the active participants of these forms of oral literature are mostly elderly men and women. Children of the present generation barely speak their language and therefore rarely participate in these cultural activities where these forms of oral literature are elicited. This is because they believe that they are fetish. It therefore recommends that the cultural activities from where these oral forms of literature can be elicited should be restored and modified to meet the needs and acceptance of the present generation rather than neglecting them. This is because if these cultures are not being practised, the language imbibed in that domain gradually dies off.

### Keywords:

Text, Context, Proverbs, Folksongs, Akpor kingdom, Rivers State and Nigeria

### Introduction

In Akpor, various forms of oral literature exist. These forms of literature are variously named according to the Akpor tradition. They have elulu (proverb), eri diali (folksongs) which also include eri ognu (war song), erinnwo (birth songs), eri rumutakiri (children songs), eri egelege (wrestling songs), eri owii (masquerade

songs) ruwhere (tales), kanum kanum (riddles) etc. Proverbs are forms of oral literature in African societies in general, Akpor kingdom in particular. Very often, local languages act as vehicles for the transmission of these unique forms of cultural knowledge. Oral traditions that are encoded in speech forms become threatened when elders or those who can

transfer such knowledge die without passing it on to the next generation. Since literature in its oral form lacks tangibility and is ephemeral in nature, except through enacting, re-enacting and proper transmission from generation to generation– there is no other way in which it can be realised as a literary product Finnegan, (1977: 1).

It is of uttermost importance to note that some aspects of this oral traditions are dying off. As was earlier stated, local languages act as vehicles for the transmission of unique forms of cultural practices, and as such, if those cultures are not being practised, the language imbibed in that domain gradually dies off. Children no longer gather for moon lit tales, instead they spend time watching movie series (from Zee world and Telemundo), or paying money to watch football which does not teach them any moral values. According to Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) “Forgetting the various forms of oral literature is to forget the place where the rain began”. It is on this basis that this study seeks to identify the various forms of proverbs and folksongs that exist in Akpor kingdom, examine the meaning deciphered in each of the forms in relation to their contextual use and elucidate the need for the moral values embedded in these oral traditions to be inculcated in the younger generation. This research revolves around the Akpor people of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State.

### **A Brief History of the Akpor Kingdom**

Akpor is located in Obio/Akpor local government area of Rivers State. Akpor is bounded on the north by the Ikwerre clans of Aluu and Igwuruta, on the east and south by Obio and Port Harcourt city and on the west by the Choba River Called (New Calabar River). There are 10 communities in Akpor kingdom namely: Rumuokparali, Ozuoba, Rumuosi, Rumualogu, Rumuokwachi, Alakahia, Rumuekini, Choba, Akami (Ogbogoro) and Rumuorlumeni (Iwofe).

Akpor has a low-lying landscape and high arable land. There are streams and mangroves.

According to Eze (1999), Iwhuruoha, the founding father of Akpor, migrated from Benin.

He left Benin because of the excesses of human rituals by Oba of Benin. He said that the Oba made use of his relations when he found no one. As a result of this, Iwhuruoha left Benin with the founding fathers of Ekpeye and Ogba.

Every community requires some form of social and political organisation/institution to function properly. The use of these organisations is determined by the needs of the community. In Akpor, each community has a simple organisation system which serves as an organ of control. The family is the first and smallest unit in the community. Eze (1999) asserts that the family is organised on the basis of patrilineal reckoning of rights and obligations. This implies that children born into a family trace their inheritance which was mainly land either for farming or settlement from their father. Matrilineal links also existed, but it was at a minimal level.

There are two main social organisations in Akpor, they are; the village council (Ogbako Elejiowho) and clan assembly (Ohna Akpor).

The village council (Ogbako Elejiowho) is a very important institution in all Akpor communities. The Ogbako elijiowho council or village council forms the basic socio-political and administrative mechanism in these communities. Therefore, every community has its own ohna council. The village council members are the owho holders of each compound or family. The owho holder (nyejiowho) being the eldest male in the compound heads that compound; he represents the compound at the village or clan level. They believe that the owho had been set aside by Chiokike (God the creator) to symbolise good conduct, sacredness, indestructibility and procreation (Wobasi, 1993).

The second institution is the clan assembly (ohna Akpor) headed by the paramount ruler of Akpor (Nye Nwe Ali Akpor), who is appointed by consulting the oracle (Rukani Akpor). Members of this assembly are the village heads and ohna members (owho holders of each compound). This institution is the highest organisation and its decisions are final.

Culture is the way of life and expression of people, and language serves as a major medium for the transmission of cultural practices. There

is no society without a culture. Culture differentiates a set of people from another. Some cultural practices in Akpor are: marriage, masquerade dance, new yam festivals, cultural dance. The Akpor people make use of the Ikwerre language, which is a major language in Rivers State. The Ikwerre language serves a medium through which the rich culture and origin of Akpor kingdom is transmitted. Language (both spoken and written) serves as a major medium for cultural transmission.

For worship, sacrifice is the major means in Akpor. Akpor people partake in sacrifices to divinities because they conceive them in human terms. Sacrifice is believed to be the primary means of contact or communion between man and the deity. It is also a man's best way of maintaining an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. This is the system of religion through which laws and order was maintained.

Akpor people predominantly engaged in agriculture and fishing as their main source of economic life and livelihood. The environment, in which they inhabited, facilitated this occupation. Fishing was done in large scale especially among the Akpor people of Rumuokparali, Choba, Iwofe, Ogbogoro, living along the New Calabar River. Animals and birds were also hunted for food. Various hunting traps were devised for the hunting of these animals.

It has been observed that language serves as a means for the transmission and preservation of unique cultural practices, and a language is vibrant when it is being used by its speakers. Folk songs form a particular mode of oral tradition; they contribute towards maintaining the history of a people. For instance, Akpor is undergoing a stage of transition due to the influence of western culture, thus causing a neglect of the ethos of traditional culture and the oral tradition. No effort or little effort has been made to retrieve, document or disseminate this wealth of material. According to Okpewho (1992), older people, especially men use proverbs to communicate meaning to the younger generations. It is therefore evident that these oral traditions that are encoded in speech forms become threatened when elders

or those who can transfer such knowledge die without passing it on. This research in its capacity tries to fill this bridge by serving as a living document.

Aside from the aforementioned problem, there are different situations (contexts) in which proverbs and folksongs can be used. These oral forms can be used to show joy, to mourn, to praise, to indicate failure or to warn. When these oral forms are not used in the right context, it could affect its intended meaning. We would therefore, be examining how context helps in deriving the meaning of a particular performance.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Use or Contextual Theory of Meaning**

The use theory of meaning was introduced by a German linguist, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1933) in his book titled *The Blue Book*. He is of the opinion that it is wrong to regard meaning as entities (on its own). He rather opines that the meaning of any linguistic expression, be it word or sentence should be determined by the context in which it is used.

According to this theory, words are not defined by essence to the object they designate, or by the mental representations one might associate with them, but how they are used. This is because for him, "language is part of our behaviour and interactions with others in the society. The way we use it is useful only if it is meaningful to others who share the language with us" (Ejele, 2003).

This theory is relevant to the study because, in analysing these oral forms of literature, the knowledge of the situation in which they are used is very important. Context is therefore a major factor in analyzing any oral form of literature, based on the native speakers' perspectives.

### **Empirical Review**

Different researches have been carried out on proverbs and folksongs, although not specifically on Akpor proverbs and folksongs. Wama (2016) studied the literary and social significance of Omudioga Ikwerre proverb. Among other things, the work is aimed at understanding the manner of performance of

proverbs in Omudioga community. In explaining these concepts, this research has succinctly shown that proverbs play significant roles in expressing the culture and values of the particular group of people that make use of them. He adopted the descriptive survey research design in eliciting his data. Through this research, he was able to dispel the belief that Africans do not have literature or that Africans are barbaric. He discovered among other things that through the use of proverbs, the cultural and moral values of the people that make use of them are imbibed in them. Omera and Inegbeboh (2013) worked on the context of usage and aesthetics of selected proverbs from Southern Nigeria. Through the use of Dell Hymes speaking model of speech, they were able to ascertain that the imagery in proverbs, their forms and context of use as well as the aesthetics reflect the peculiar natural environment of the users. They drew this conclusion by analysing twelve proverbs from Southern Nigeria. These proverbs were randomly but purposively selected and subjected to content analysis. The study suggests that more research should be carried out on proverbs from Southern Nigeria, especially those from the South-South area and that proverbs should be used in schools to instruct and delight the younger generations.

Aluede and Braimah (2005) looked at Edo folksongs as sources of historical reconstruction. These researchers examined five folksongs from Edo speaking area of Nigeria. In doing this, they corroborated the validity of the selected songs with the available treaties, traditions and literature in Edo cultural setting. This genre of oral literature, they said, was worked on because little work has been done on the use of folksongs as historical data in Edo.

Samuel (2013) also studied African folksongs as veritable resource materials for revitalizing music education in Nigerian schools. He analysed folksongs of Egbeda-Egga women. He adopted an in-depth interview and participant-observer method to collect, describe, and interpret the songs. Analyses of the women's repertoire reveal that immediate local environment overlaid with folksongs can serve

as a veritable resource material useful for effective music teachings and also help in tapping and toning learners' artistic potentials to enhance and transform music performance in the classroom setting and beyond. This paper, submits that it is high time Nigeria embarked on school reforms to make school music reflect the culture of the local communities.

Although series of researches have been done on this literary genre in different parts of Nigeria, much attention has not been given to it in the South- South geopolitical zone especially in the Akpor kingdom of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, the largest local government in Nigeria. While other reviewed works variously centered on the different roles this genre play in the lives of the members of the communities understudied, this present work has gone deeper to look at the relationship between a text and the context in which it is used. The work discovered that context is the major determinant of the particular text to be elicited. The degree of the consideration of the concept of decorum in the application of proverbs and folksongs determines to a great extent the meaning to be deciphered from it and the extent at which the cultural and moral values contained in them will be imbibed to the audience it is meant for.

### **Data Presentation And Analysis**

The data is presented in two parts. Part 'A' is folksongs, while part 'B' is proverbs

#### **Part A: Folksongs**

Eight selected folksongs sung at five different contexts are analysed.

#### **(i) Context: folksongs used in marriage ceremonies**

Marriage occupies a very important space in the social life of the Ikwerre society at large and the Akpor kingdom in particular. It is perceived to be a blessing, not just between the two families, but the communities as well. The importance of marriage is visible in the rigorous process that tradition demands to be met, before the bride is handed over to her husband. Before the bride goes to the husband, she is being taught how to be a good wife, aside from being submissive; being a good wife also means giving birth to children. A woman is regarded as a full wife only

when she has given birth, especially to a male child, who will continue the lineage, after the

**Text 1****Nnwerne bu iwai**

Owe nnwerne bu iwai

Owe e

Owe nnwerne bu iwai

Owe e

I whnuna mma nnwerene bu nnwo

Owe e

Okpu eze nwerinya bu nzi a

Owe e

Nnwerne bu iwai.

This song shows how expensive marrying a wife is at the surface structure. At a deeper level, it implies that a wife brings wealth and good fortune into the home, but this is only possible if she has the right upbringing. To do the final child training, this song is sung by women of the

**Text 2****Nzi karila mkpam**

Nzi karila mkpam we e

Owe e

Nzi karila mkpam we e

Owe e

Nzi karila mkpam we e

Anuwa nyegam tonji mo otnurnu nzim o Please give me lamp; let me look for my husband

Okarila mkpam we e.

At the surface level, the picture of a lady asking for lamp to search for a husband is portrayed. The darkness in this song portrays old age. Since old age is drawing closer, with the woman being unmarried and questioned for it, she is begging to be guided on how to search for a husband.

This song depicts the importance placed on marriage in the Ikwerre society. In the traditional Ikwerre society, any woman ripe for marriage and is not yet married, is being questioned and tagged irresponsible. Therefore, the traditional Ikwerre society sees marriage as a blessing every woman should partake of. This belief also applies to the Akpor people of the Ikwerre language.

**(ii) Context: songs at the graveyard and in burials**

girls are married. The song that best portrays this theme is:

**Wife is wealth**

Truly, wife is wealth

Truly

Truly, wife is wealth

Truly

Have you seen that a woman's beauty is her children

Truly

A woman's crown is her husband

Truly

Wife is wealth.

bride's community or immediate family, to remind the new bride of her roles in making or breaking her home. Another song that depicts the importance of marriage in Akpor kingdom is:

**Husband is my priority**

Husband is my priority

Yes

Husband is my priority

Yes

Husband is my priority

Please give me lamp; let me look for my husband

He is my priority.

No man is ever ready to die and leave their loved ones, but death is inevitable. People feel great pain when their loved ones die and so they mourn. In Akpor kingdom, when a person dies, the town crier goes round to inform members of the community. In the olden days, those from the same compound or family as the deceased are not expected to go to work (farm). They go in their mass to mourn with the bereaved. The oldest man in the family also calls for meeting (only for men) to discuss the way forward. From the day a person dies, the husband or wife is expected to mourn. Mourning is signified in the Akpor kingdom by remaining unshaved and wearing black clothes. The mourner, knowing full well the responsibility, deprivation and sometimes mockery that come with mourning, sings this song:

**Text 3****A zne lekiri we e**

A zne lekiri we e  
 A zne lekiri we echei  
 Ba ka nye nwurnu anwu zookwulizo  
 A zne lekiri we e  
 Nye nwurnu anwu zookwulizo berere  
 Ba ka nye nwurnu anwu zookwulizo.

**Let us go and see**

Let us go and see  
 Oh Let us go and see  
 They said the dead will rise  
 Let us go and see  
 The dead will rise again  
 They said the dead will rise.

This song depicts the wailings of a person who lost a loved one and is being consoled by people to take heart because the bereaved will not see his/her loved one again. It also expresses the great pain which the young men of the community feel about the demise of their friend and age mate. It is mostly sung when these young men believe that the death of the deceased is not natural. In the traditional Ikwerre society, when a person dies, efforts are made by the elders and youths of the community to ascertain the cause of the death; if it is natural, caused by defilement of the land or if the deceased was killed by someone. There are two ways vengeance is carried out in Akpor

kingdom. It is either the accused swears at the shrine and being let to be punished by the gods, or s/he is banished from the land, with all properties destroyed.

**(iii) Context: song sung during wrestling**

In Akpor kingdom, after a wrestler succeeds in getting his opponent to fall on the ground, the masquerade singers always raise songs of victory to celebrate the winner. While the song is being sung, the winner is carried on the shoulder of some men as they dance round the circle created by the audience. This theme will be portrayed by the song below:

**Text 4****Dimgba diali**

Dimgba diali bialam  
 Oturu tudu n'ali (repeat as many times as possible)  
 the

**Strong son of the soil**

A strong son of the soil has come  
 He has thrown his opponent to ground.

**(iv) Context: Folksong in naming ceremony and where a child is born (birth song)**

Procreation or childbirth is an important phenomenon in Akpor kingdom because every man wants his generation to live on. When a child is born, especially a male child who will stand as the head and continue his father's

lineage when the girls are married, there is great jubilation. Male children in Akpor are given more preference. This is shown in the distribution of properties as females only take pots, plates or even clothes, while male children take the other important properties like lands, houses e.t.c Giving a woman land in Akpor kingdom is by choice not a tradition.

**Text 5****A teru ratnu oma**

A teru ratnu oma  
 A teru ratnu oma  
 O bu eri omumu nnwo  
 A teru ratnu oma  
 O bu eri omumu nnwo

**Let us rub powder**

Let us rub powder  
 Let us rub powder  
 It is a song of child birth  
 Let us rub powder  
 It is a song of child birth.

In the traditional Ikwerre society, when a child is born, one object that must be available is a powder. This powder is poured on every woman or visitor who comes to see the new born baby. The powder is believed to be a

blessing from the new born baby to those women seeking for the fruit of the womb. This song is sung by women who come to visit the new born.

The birth of a child comes with great responsibility, starting with providing the child with the basic needs of life to emotional support and Godly upbringing. This great task is carried out by a good parent with love and care, knowing full well that the child will also take care of them when they are old. This theme is supported by the bible verse, train up a child in

**Text 6****Sobula ma nnwo**

Sobula ma nnwo  
 Nyeele zeenyem?  
 Sobula ma nnwo  
 Nyeele zeenyem?  
 Aznu okpotokpo  
 Nyeele zeenyem?  
 Ikpo okpotokpo  
 Nyeele zeenyem  
 Sobula ma nnwo  
 Nyeele zeenyem?

This song portrays the joy of a parent, being blessed with a child, because they know they have got someone to take care of them in old age. This song serves as a way of letting the child know that s/he has a responsibility to carry when s/he grows up.

**(v) Context: songs sang during masquerade festivals.**

**Text 7:****Chehia nye mernu i eze**

Owii le e owii le e  
 Chehia nye mernu i eze  
 I zi n' okwu oka jiri onu yo o  
 Chehia nye mernu I eze.

The masquerade song above passes a message to listeners about being cautious of what they say and how they treat others because no one owns and knows anybody's future. A person who is insignificant today can become prominent in the future. This song, therefore, admonishes that we should always remember that people also helped us become who we are.

**Text 8:****Akinima mini**

Akinima mini dohiala oka  
 O zoovuru a we e  
 Akinima Mini dohiala oka

the way he should grow and when he is old, he will not depart from it, proverbs 22: 6. This shows that, what parents give to their children is what they will receive when their children become adults. If love was planted, love will be received. A song that depicts a child's responsibility to his or her parents is:

**If not for my child**

If not for my child  
 Who will give to me?  
 If not for my child  
 Who will give to me?  
 Big fish  
 Who will give me?  
 Expensive wrapper  
 Who will give me?  
 If not for my child  
 Who will give me?

Masquerade songs perform roles amongst which is to inculcate societal values and communicate religious meanings. Sometimes, people after attaining certain heights forget whom they were before their success and end up becoming proud and arrogant. To address this issue and other social issues affecting the citizens of Rumuokparali of the Akpor kingdom, songs are devised as means to admonish

**Remember who made you king**

Masquerade, masquerade  
 Remember who made you king  
 Bridle your tongue when talking  
 Remember who made you king.

A person does not remain a child forever. There is a stage in a child's life that he would no longer be regarded as a minor and as such would be held accountable for any act, whether good or bad. The Rumuokparali masquerade dancers of the Akpor Kingdom portrayed this, with the song below:

**Crocodile**

If crocodile starts trouble  
 He will stand for it  
 If crocodile starts trouble

O zoovuru a  
Owa magwu a we e  
Aye aye owa magwu a we e  
Aye aye owa magwu a we e.

He will stand for it  
The world knows this  
Oh yes, the world knows this  
Oh yes, the world knows this.

This song tells humanity that in one way or another, we get to bear the consequences of our misdeeds and therefore we should keep off from activities that could lead us in trouble.

#### **PART B: Proverb**

We analysed nine proverbs. The selected proverbs were placed under five different contexts and then analysed for better understanding.

#### **(vi) Context: Family gatherings and community meetings**

In Akpor, the first social or political institution is the family. The small family (Oromati), made up of the husband, wife and children and the big family (oroagida) made up of the husband, wife, children, aunties, uncles and grandparents. Once in a while meetings are called in the family hall (obiri) to discuss important issues for the harmonious coexistence of all. Two proverbs elicited from these meetings are:

**Text (9) Chinchị kannụ rụmu a, ba nwernụ ndidi nihninụ nhna zị bakwnụ ya-ajị iyi.**

**Translation:** The bedbug told her children to be patient that what is hot will be cold.

#### **Analysis:**

When a bed is infested by bedbugs, it is usually sunned to get the bedbugs out. At the surface level, a situation where the mother of the bedbugs is letting her kids know that it might be hot for sometime but it must surely become cold when the bed is sent inside, is created. At the underlying structure, this proverb suggests that there is a time for everything. A time of trials (hot sun) and a time of merriment (cool room temperature) but at any time, we should learn to be patient. This proverb performs a semantic function of teaching humans the importance of patience.

**Meaning:** There is always a chance that something good might happen even in a bad situation.

**Text (10) Otu aka rụhiala mọno o zulem ọhna.**

**Translation:** When one finger touches oil, it spreads to the others.

#### **Analysis:**

For this proverb, a context where a finger touches oil and it spreads to the other fingers is created. The reason for the spread of the oil is as a result of how close all fingers are to each other. At the deep structure, the fingers represent people who are very close to each other (friends). This proverb indirectly suggests that "birds of the same feathers flock together", therefore we must be very careful about the kind of friends we keep, because the bad reputation of one person among a circle of friends could tarnish the image of all, even when they are not all bad.

**Meaning:** Avoid associating with people that would stain your good image.

#### **(vii) Context: Marriage ceremony**

Marriage is a very important aspect of Akpor Kingdom and during the period of the marriage ceremony, the couple, especially the bride, receives advice from lots of people, beginning from her parents to friends and well wishers on how to have a happy home. Two proverbs were elicited during marriage ceremonies.

**Text (11) nhna wowu whnurnu me te e bidim, nkita whnuna a ọ na-abna.**

**Translation:** What the goat saw and kept quiet, when the dog sees same it starts barking.

#### **Analysis:**

A situation where a goat and a dog can actually speak with these animals having their individual problems is shown at the surface level. The goat is seen to mind what it lets people know about its situation while the dog lets out everything happening to it to people without reservations. At the deep structure, these animals were made to personify human beings; those that say everything that happens in their lives to people and those that know when to stop. This proverb is mainly targeted at the bride to let her know that she must not let



people know about everything happening in her home, to avoid destroying her home.

**Text (12) Wokani nnwerne karu nye rnakworu nwa lowhume izu berere awhnu yogwnuhna a berere.**

**Translation:** The old wife said he who sleeps with her and discards her will still be hungry.

**Analysis:**

At the surface, a picture of where a woman who has been married for a very long time and is not being treated properly, obviously by her husband who is only concerned about having sexual contact with her, without actually caring about her wellbeing, maybe because he has other women around is created. The old wife makes it known that no matter how he flirts with other women, he will definitely need her one day. In the traditional Akpor kngdom, a man is allowed to marry as many wives as he can carter for and even have concubines. But this proverb is targeted at the groom, to let him know that, no matter the affairs he has, he should learn to respect the wife whom he brought into his home. At the deep structure, this proverb performs a social function of advising people to treat others with love, care and respect, because one day, they might actually need their help for something.

**Meaning:** Always learn to appreciate and keep carefully what you have because you might need it in future.

**(ix) Context: Settling disputes**

There is no society without any form of conflict; Akpor kingdom is not left out in this circle. In this situation, proverbs can be used by the plaintiff to capture the attention of the elders presiding over the case and by elders to show the intricacy of an action, to point out an important piece of information and to pass verdict. Some of these proverbs are:

**Text (13) Ite okani kannu ite ikne nhna mowhnurnusu me ne-eji na, i yowhnumasi a jimasị riji.**

**Translation:** The old pot told the new pot, the thing I saw that made me black, you will also see it and become black.

**Analysis:**

This proverb overtly shows where an old black pot is telling a new pot that it would also get

dirty when it starts being used. At the deep structure, the old pots represent people facing challenges or are in difficult situations, while the new pot represents those who are yet to experience or have not yet experienced such situation. This proverb defines challenges as inevitable for humans in their pursuit of life. It is therefore used when settling dispute to let the plaintiff know that circumstances could make someone do something and it is not all the time we point fingers or punish, there are times caution and correction should be used, because we might do worst if we find ourselves in a similar situation.

**Meaning:** We can truly understand a person's situation when we find ourselves in similar situation.

**Text (14) O nwernu nhna mernu su ili ede siri nwị i.**

**Translation:** Something must happen to the cocoyam before it can make a sound.

**Analysis:**

At the surface level, a situation where a cocoyam makes noise as a result of it being squeezed by someone is created. It is obvious that the cocoyam stem on its own cannot make any sound. It is therefore the squeezing or disturbance from a force that can make it to make a noise. At the deep structure, the cocoyam represents people that are not troublesome and as such when these set of people react, it is only because they have been extremely provoked. This proverb teaches that provoking people into anger is bad, as one can never tell how they will respond to it.

**Meaning:** There is always a cause for every action.

**(x) Context: proverbs used when giving advice**

**Text (15) Nye isni zooduli nye isni.**

**Translation:** A blind mind cannot lead another blind man.

**Analysis**

At the surface level, a scenario where two blind men are on a journey and one of them is leading the other but they could not go far because both men cannot see is created. At the deeper level this proverbs emphasizes on the importance of wisdom. Being blind implies being in the dark,

being ignorant and lacking knowledge about something. This proverb supports the claim that we do not know it all and therefore, we should be knowledgeable enough to know when to seek for help.

**Meaning:** you cannot give what you do not have.

**Text (16)** Ochichi kannu rumu a ba n' obo n' oturu ke zi nu ruwhnu, ba leme anya nu ke zi n' aznu.

**Translation:** The mother hen said to her chicks, "keep digging and picking the ones in front and do not worry about the ones behind.

#### Analysis

At the surface structure, mother hen is portrayed teaching her chicks how to search for food. At the deep structure, the food behind signifies our life experience while the food in front signifies the future. This proverb performs a social function of advising humans to be optimistic about the future and not letting their past experiences hinder them from achieving their goals.

**Meaning:** Do not let your past experiences hinder you from achieving the future or do not let your challenges pull you down.

**(xi) Context: Religious setting**

In Akpor, the major means of worship is sacrifice but after colonisation and the advent of Christianity, the traditional mode of worship have been neglected. In any community or big family meetings, before the meetings begin, libation is poured to involve the gods of the land (ali). It is pertinent to note that this practice is not compulsory for the small family. In this religious setting, proverbs are said by the elders when pouring libation during incantations and consultation of the gods.

**Text 17:** nhuna nye oknobadnu whnurnu n'ali, nwotakiri kpene olu isisi oza o whnulia

#### Analysis

A scenario where an old man and a child determine who can see things happening faraway is created. The child, in order to get a better view decides to climb a tree while the old man remains seated but still sees better and farther away than the child. This proverb indirectly supports the claim that experience is the best teacher. The old man did not have to

stress himself by climbing to the top tree because he knows what lies ahead as he has seen them before. To oppose the gods, by letting them know that they are all knowing.

**Text (18)** Nyeeme nene, be mene nene, o le anya n'aznu

**Translation:** A person that does not like giving should not look back when he hears take.

#### Analysis

A scene where a person actually wants to call out a few people from a group of people who are about leaving to take their gifts but does not really mention the names of those he actually wants to receive the gift is created. This act makes everyone in the group to turn back in an attempt to take their gifts. At the deep structure level, this proverb displays the pleasure people feel in receiving gifts contrary to the very way they react when asked to give. This proverb performs a social function of admonishing that we should learn to give. It is used by elders when pouring libation to let the gods know that the humans have done their part, it is now left for the gods to manifest.

**Meaning:** Those who do not give should not expect to be given.

#### Findings

- 1) This study identifies that proverbs and folksongs perform different functions, regardless of the fact that they may be used in similar contexts. This is because, even though they occur in similar contexts, they have different societal needs or problems to address. Through the different theme of these folksongs and proverbs, the Akpor people of the Ikwerre ethnic group, which is a minority ethnic group in Nigeria, is able to make the society hear them as well as maintain their history and inculcate values.
- 2) One interesting point discovered from this research is the fact that folksongs can be modified to adapt to the singer's taste or purpose. We also discovered that through these oral forms of literature, abstract elements such as ideas, values,

and emotions can be represented by certain emblems. For example, “obnarna siri rikne karu mini” “blood is thicker than water”, with blood representing family ties and relationship, while water mere friendship with strangers.

- 3) Another interesting fact this study notes is that the active participants of these oral forms of literature are mostly older men and women. Children of the present generation do not use proverbs in their daily conversations and they barely participate in the cultural practices in which these oral forms (proverbs and folksongs) are used. This is the reason we indicated in the statement of the problem that these oral forms may go into extinction.

### Conclusion

Proverbs and folksongs are seen as the epitome of people's cultural beliefs and rituals. These oral forms are influenced in Nigeria by the different socio-geographical inclinations of the different people that make up the country. Based on this, we decided to hinge this work on the use or contextual theory of meaning, which deal with context and how meaning can be derived based on how they are used in these contexts.

We discovered different contexts in which proverbs and folksongs in Akpor kingdom are used, as well as the reasons behind their usage. Some contexts identified in this work are religious, marriage and childbirth, burials, community and family gatherings and wrestling ground. Identifying these contexts was important because not all situation or contexts are appropriate for these forms of oral literature. When a proverb or folksong is used in the wrong context, it is either the wrong meaning is conveyed or it becomes meaningless to the listeners.

This study identified to an extent, the different functions, theme and meanings of proverbs and folksongs in relation to their context of use. Background information about the history of the Akpor people, their occupation, religion, language etc. was given to help the readers get

acquainted with their norms and the different ways they make use of these oral forms of literature.

The lack of interest of Akpor youths or children in speaking the Ikwerre language is the major factor causing the decreasing use of these forms of literature. This is because they cannot understand the embedded meanings of the proverbs and folksongs which are hidden through language, as they do not understand the language. It is therefore safe to conclude that without language, these forms of oral literature cannot be communicated. Also, most of the traditional practices where these proverbs and folksongs can be elicited have been stopped on the basis that they are fetish in nature. We wish to say that instead of neglecting these practices, they should be modified to meet the needs of the present generation, so as not to lose them entirely.

### Recommendations

- (1) Oral literature is ephemeral and could be lost if not documented; we recommend that more works on oral literature should be carried out in order to preserve these oral forms of literature in Akpor Kingdom.
- (2) Since language whether verbal or non-verbal, serves as a means for transmitting and preserving proverbs and folksongs and one cannot use these oral forms without understanding the language from which they are communicated. We therefore, recommend the teaching of the Ikwerre language in schools, most especially those established in Ikwerre speaking communities, to boost the usage and understanding of this language and these oral forms of literature, by all members of the society and not just the elderly ones.
- (3) Well trained teachers should be employed to teach indigenous languages.
- (4) Essential learning materials should be made available for teachers' and students' use.

- (5) We recommend that the cultural activities from where these oral forms of literature can be elicited should be restored and modified to meet the needs and acceptance of the present generation, rather than neglecting them. This is because, if these cultures are not being practiced, the language imbibed in that domain also gradually dies off.

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