

## SONG TEXTS AS INSTRUMENTS OF COMMUNICATION IN “ALAGA IDURO” AND “ALAGA IJOKOO” MUSICAL PERFORMANCES DURING ENGAGEMENT CEREMONIES

\*Olufunmilola Temitayo OLADIPO

### Abstract

Alaga (*Iduro* and *Ijokoo*) are masters of Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies. Through various musical performances, they conduct Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies. The article notates and examines song texts as instruments of communication in Alaga (*Iduro* and *Ijoko*) musical performances. During traditional ceremonies may be integrated with events, either to set the mood for actions or to provide an outlet for expressing the feelings they generate. Masters of marriage ceremonies, through songs reveal various stages of nuptial performances. The article concludes by analyzing the import of the *Alaga* song texts to Yoruba marriage rites.

**Keywords:** Song texts, Instruments of communication, Musical performances, Engagement ceremonies, *Alaga*

### Introduction

Song texts are very powerful instruments of communication and dramatisation. Song texts are used for communication between masters of ceremonies and couples, masters of ceremonies (*Alágas*) and participants at engagement ceremonies. Through the medium of songs with lyrics (song texts) that describe various activities of engagement proceedings, they reveal their various activities. This has contributed to the effective use of songs in nuptial performances. The *Alága* have in their repertoire different songs for different stages of traditional engagements. They sing songs that fit into every segment of traditional engagement ceremonies. The extent to which music contributes to communication at different stages of an engagement ceremony depends on the dexterity of the *Alága idúró* and the *Alago ijókòó* performing at the engagement. Each *Alága* tries her best to add glamour to each song she sings. Her choices of songs reveal her creativity. The strength of an *Alága idúró* or *Alago ijókòó* lies in her

---

\*Olufunmilola Temitayo OLADIPO is of the Performing Arts Department, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria  
Email: [oladipofunmilola@yahoo.com](mailto:oladipofunmilola@yahoo.com)

ability to sing songs of dialogue that have melodious and convincing lyrics enough to reveal every stage of the traditional wedding (Oladipo, 2015).

The scope and the type of music performed at an occasion depend on the social event. The type of music performed at a social event can be classified into two. There is the music played at the occasion to mark the different stages of the events, for which any music can be played. The second type entails specific musical pieces that must be played for performance (Nketia 1982, p.24). The music performed by masters of ceremonies (*Alágas*) during engagements fall into the first category of music identified by Nketia (1982, p.24). Song texts are instruments of communication. The extent to which it has been employed and how it contributes to dialogues are examined considering different stages of Yorùbá engagement celebration. Song texts, as an instrument of performance, are analyzed as a medium of communication in the stages of engagement ceremonies. The stages of engagement ceremonies in the research are divided into three: the arrival of groom's family members, the arrival of the groom and the arrival of the bride. Different songs are used to negotiate, communicate or reveal these stages.

### **Functionality of Alaga and their Song-Texts**

Music is a shared experience within the framework of cultural experiences. It is an expression of social values and logical reasoning. Music is heard and appreciated by people who have the same culture and experiences. Music, therefore, reveals the culture that exists in any given society. The position of the *Alága* is central in the diverse performances in traditional Yoruba ceremonies. The *Alága* is both a custodian and repository of the diverse traditional songs and poetics of the Yorubas. During traditional wedding engagements, they add pomp to the different sequence or stages of the engagement rites by dishing out different relevant songs to buttress the seriousness of the ceremony being performed. Through their songs, they introduce or reveal the different stages of ceremonies, something that can pass for an opening or closing glees in conventional theatre. For example, in traditional wedding engagements, their songs reveal the presence of different personalities such as the groom's family members as well as other persons of importance in the context of the celebration.

Song texts reveal people's cultural values and they are set to meet the need of the singer. The song text in Nigeria is more important than the melody, they are between speech tone and melody; they are 'logogenic' in nature and perform special functions. Logogenic, melodies are melodies developed from song texts. Amon (1991)

explains that because of the interrelationship between music and language, the meaning of thoughts and expressions are decoded. The lyrics of songs reveal the message which the singer intends to pass across to her audience. The *Alága idúró* leads the groom's family members to the venue of the engagement ceremony. The presence of the groom's family members at the venue is usually announced with singing, drumming and dancing. The *Alága idúró* sings various songs to announce their presence. Song texts are indicators of culture. Songs rendered during engagement ceremonies showcase the Yorùbá marriage culture. Songs at the entrance of the venue of engagements are usually songs of celebrations and joy. Masters of ceremonies engage in musical dialogues at the entrance of the venue of the engagement ceremonies. The musical dialogue by *Alága idúró* and *Alága ijókòó* at the entrance is the first musical display. *Alága ijókòó* welcomes the members of the groom's family; she sings various songs to welcome them. The researcher observed that *Alága idúró*, apart from singing songs of greetings to show their presence, also sings other praise and worship songs. Two examples of songs sung by an *Alága idúró* to communicate their presence at the entrance of engagement venue are as follows:

**MEDLEY**  
(Wedding Songs)

### Example 1

#### Song Texts:

Àwa ló de o  
 Àjòjì ò lè wòdílú  
 Kónílé má mòò

#### Translation

We have arrived.  
 It is important to inform you  
 of our arrival.

The arrival of the groom's family is heralded by various songs led by the *alaga iduro*, who is the spokes person of the groom's family. The Alaga Iduro sings songs to reveal the presence of the groom and his family members to the venue of the traditional wedding ceremony. In the contemporary society, this is usually the first stage of the ceremony. They are welcome by the *alaga ijokoo*, who engage them by telling them to entertain her in dancing and singing of several songs. It is the intensity of their dancing and singing that show their love and the level of their care for the prospective bride. The Alaga ijokoo will not allow them into the venue of the engagement until she is fully entertained.

### Songs to Demand for Money at the Entrance of the Engagement Venue

The *Alága ijókòó* puts three bowls at the entrance of the engagement venue for the groom's family members to drop money. She sings various songs to demand money from the groom's family members before they are allowed into the venue of the engagement ceremony. Masters of ceremonies have several songs they use in requesting for money and bargaining; the following is an example of such:

#### OWO OMO ALAFIA

E ki mi si mu a bo o Me - c - se - e - ti ni - ta - ri - pe  
 O - wo o - mo a - la - fi - a o - wo o - mo c - mi gi - gan o - wo o - mo a - la - fi  
 a re - to - ta ku si woo wa ni mu e - bi

#### OWO MI SO NIRAN TAWA (Ijebu Dialect)

O - wo mi so ri ran ta wa O - wo mi so ri ran ta wa  
 E mi o so ni man re ko ja - de si bi E ni o so ni man re ko ja de si ta a o  
 O - wo mi so ri - ran ta wa

**Example 2****Song Texts:**

*E kí mi sínú abòd mèòtèdèdèta*  
*Nítorípé Owó, Omo,*  
*Àláfíà*  
*Nitoripe Owó, Omo, Èmígígùn*  
*mèòtèdèdèta kòní wòn wa*  
*Léóbí àwa*

**Translation**

Greet me by putting money into the three  
 bowls because, money, children and  
 Peace of mind.  
 money, children and long life.  
 We will not lack the three of them  
 in our family.

Apart from being entertained through songs, the *alaga ijokoo* representing the bride's family also demands for money from the grooms family members. The three bowls she places at the entrance of the venue of the ceremony represent money, children and long life; they are her wishes for the prospective couple. She does not allow the *alaga iduro* and grooms family members into the venue of the ceremony until they have dropped money into these bowls. The money collected belongs to the *alaga ijokoo*. The significance of this activity is to reveal the Yoruba belief that, before a man can venture into marriage, he must be responsible and must be able to carry out his financial responsibility toward his wife and the members of her family.

**Songs of Greetings by Groom's Family Members**

The groom's family members are led into the engagement venue by the *Alága idúró*. When they get in, they greet the bride's family members; women kneel down, while men prostrate to greet the bride's family members. To show courtesy, the groom's family members must sing and greet their in-laws very well. An example of a song of greeting recorded and notated is as follows:

**À-ná ké-ré À-ná tò-bi**

À-ná ké-ré      À-ná tò-bi      Ì-dò bá lẹ      I'a fí k'á na

**Example 3****Song Texts:**

*Àná kéré Àná tòbi*  
*Ìdòbálẹ̀o la fí nkána*

**Translation**

In-laws, whether small or great  
 you prostrate to greet them (Oladipo,  
 2015)

During Yoruba traditional wedding ceremonies, the Yoruba various cultural beliefs are revealed. In Yoruba land in-laws are usually held

in high esteem. The above song reveals that whether small or great, whether grown-up or not, you kneel or prostrate to greet your in-law. In-law must not be disrespected. A man's in-law are his wife's parents, elder or younger sisters and brothers. By kneeling and prostrating, the *Alága idúró* and the groom's family members greet the bride's parents and relatives in bride's native dialect and English language. If their musical performances are acceptable, they will be well received and permitted to sit. The bride's and the groom's family members sit facing one another and the *Alága ijókòó* and *Alága idúró* stay at the centre to conduct engagement ceremonies.

### Songs to Herald the Groom to the Venue of the Engagement Ceremony

The following are examples of songs to announce the presence of the groom at the venue of engagement ceremonies:

#### Ọ-kọ ì-yà-wó tẹ lẹ ò mò ré



#### Example 4

##### Song Texts:

*Ọkọ iyàwó tẹ lẹ ò mò ré o  
mòò ré o*

##### Translation

This is the bridegroom you  
have not known (Oladipo, 2015)

#### MA JO SI BI TO WU E



#### Example 5

##### Song texts

*Màa jó síbí tó wù ẹ  
ìgbà tí o ò yáwó lówó bàbá ẹnìkàn*

##### Translation

dance the way you like  
you did not go into borrowing

*Mà jó sí ibi tó wù ẹ*

dance the way you like

The groom is led into the engagement venue by the *Alága idúró* and is usually followed by friends. The *Alága ijókoo* stays at the entrance of engagement venue to collect money from the groom. When the groom finally enters, he and his friends prostrate two times to greet the bride's parents and family members and the third time, the groom prostrates alone. A song that shows that the groom prostrates goes thus:

### E F'ADURA GBE DI DE

E fa - du - ra gbe di de o - ko i - ya - wo

do ba le e fa du ra gbe di de

#### Example 6

##### Song texts

*Ẹ f'ádúrà gbe dide*  
*ọkọiyàwó dóbálẹ*  
*ẹ fàdurà gbe dide*

##### Translation

Raise him with prayers.  
 The bridegroom prostrates.  
 Raise him with prayers.  
 (Oladipo, 2015)

The above song reveals the Yoruba belief in respect for the elderly, most especially ones parents, it also expose their belief in parental prayers, through this, they help in the continuity of Yorùbá old epithelium beliefs.. The groom prostrates to be prayed for. The *Alága ijókòó* asks him if he is prostrating to the brides' parents to marry their daughter or not. The *Alága ijókòó* sings the following song. The song is interpreted as "it is of your free will that you have come to ask for our daughter's hand in marriage. Do not come back to tell us that you do not want her again.

#### Songs to Reveal the Arrival of the Bride

An example of a song that shows the presence of bride goes thus:

##### Song texts

*Oyege Adeola Oyege*  
*Oyege Adeola Oyege*

##### Translation

You have done well Adeola.  
 You have done well Adeola.

*Tunde rí ô lòmò oge*  
*Ó sì gbé o ní'yáwó ò*  
*Adeola oyege*

*Tunde sees you as a virtuous lady,*  
*and has married you.*  
*You have done well Adeola.*

Songs at this point announce the presence of the bride at the engagement venue. The groom's family members must show enthusiasm, dance with the bride and spray her money.

Songs of masters of ceremonies reveal the different stages of engagement contracts. Engagement items are very important ingredients of Yorùbá wedding ceremonies. The groom's family members take engagement items to the bride's parents. The *Alága ijókòó* and *Alága idúró* sing songs when engagement items are brought in. The song below reveals the bringing in of engagement items. Engagement items consist of the bride price, tubers of yam, a bag of salt, honey, umbrella, clothes in a leather box, fruits and other items (Oyeladun, 2012). The following song reveals the presentation of engagement items.

**E WA WO**

E wa wo t'òko 'ya wo gbe wa E wa wo t'òko 'ya wo gbe wa O  
fo wo re ra O hun to da ra o gbe lo si le a no re

### Example 7

#### Song texts

*E wá wò t'ò-kò'yà wó gbé wà*

*E wá wò t'ò-kò 'yà wó gbé wá*

*Ó kó wó rê rá ohun tó dára*

*ó gbe lo sí 'le àno rê*

#### Translation

Come and see what the bridegroom has brought.

Come and see what the bridegroom has brought.

He has used his money to buy beautiful things,

and brought them to his in-laws. (Oladipo 2015).

The song talks about the bride price taken by the groom to the bride's parents. Some of the materials taken to the bride's parents by the groom's family are symbols for prayer for the couple. List of things that are usually taken to the bride's parents in the contemporary Yorùbá society are the Holy Bible for the bride for Christian traditional engagements or Quran for Muslims, an engagement ring, a bag of salt, tubers of yam, honey, baskets of fruits such as; oranges,



pineapples, bananas, a set of dish bowls, a box containing shoes, bags and clothing for the bride, an umbrella for the bride, crates of minerals and maltina drink and sugar. (Oyeladun, 2012)

There is an exchange of the letter of proposal and letter of acceptance between the groom's and the bride's mother. At times, the *Alága Ìdúró* collects the proposal from the groom's parents to deliver it to the bride's parents and collect the letter of acceptance from them to be delivered to the groom's parents. The exchange is determined by the *Alága Ìjókòó*. The groom's mother and bride's mother may be asked to stand up, face each other to exchange the proposal and the acceptance letter. The groom's mother gives the bride's mother the marriage proposal and collects the acceptance letter from her. At times the *Alága Ìdúró* presents the marriage proposal to the *Alága Ìjókòó*, who then presents the acceptance letter from the bride's parents to the *Alága Ìdúró*. This exchange of the marriage proposal and acceptance letter is a nuptial performance. Songs sang in the context of these actions are:

### Mo ti gba lẹ̀ tà a yọ̀

Mo ti gba lẹ̀ tà a yọ̀ Mo ti gba lẹ̀ - tà a - yo

Mo ti gba lẹ̀ - tà a yọ̀ è mi ò tún se rù a - yémọ̀

#### Example 8

##### Song texts

*Mo ti gba lẹ̀tà ayọ̀*  
*Mo ti gba lẹ̀tà ayọ̀*  
*Mo ti gba lẹ̀tà ayọ̀*  
*mi ò tún se rù aayé mó*

##### Translation

I have collected a letter of good news  
 I have collected a letter of good news  
 I have collected a letter of good news  
 I will no longer be a slave

The above song was sung by an *Alága Ìjókòó* to reveal that the marriage proposal has been presented to her and hands it over to the bride's parents.

**Àbò ré o dádì**

À - bọ ré o dá - ò ò - bọ ré o mọ -  
mì a jí sẹ tẹ rán wa à - bọ ré o dá - ò

**Example 9****Song texts**

*À-bọ ré o dá-dì*  
*à-bọ ré o mọ-mì*  
*a jí yè tẹ rán wa*  
*à-bọ ré o dá-dì*

**Translation**

This is the reply, daddy  
 This is the reply, mummy  
 we have delivered your message  
 This is the reply, daddy

**Songs as Instruments of Entertainment**

Songs are also used to entertain participants at engagement ceremonies. *Alága ijókòò* and the *Alága idúró* sing various songs to entertain guests and at the same time negotiate with one another. The following popular songs are sung by masters of ceremonies. The *Alága* sang, danced, gesticulated and demonstrated as they sang the song.

**ORI IYA MI O**

Ó...ya mí o mí o mí o wón fẹ kó bó lá mí o mí o mí o ma je  
 kó kó bó lá mí o mí o mí o ma kó kó ma ra kó ma kó wó ma mí ma kó  
 ma kó gùn o ma kó... gùn o ta wa sa a gò kó dè For ta

**Example 10****Song Text**

*Orí iyá mí ò*  
*Wón fẹ kó bó lá mí o*  
*Mà jé kán kó bó lá mí*  
*Mà kólé, mà ra 'lè*  
*Mà lówó mà ní mótò*

**Translation**

Oh my mother's creator.  
 They want to destroy my wealth.  
 Do not allow them to destroy my wealth.  
 I will build houses, and buy lands.  
 I will have money and cars

*Mà ségun osó mà ségun òtá* I will overcome wizards and my enemies  
*Wón à sagolo de Portá* They will pick bottles till they get to  
 Porthacourt

### Songs as Means of Symbolic Representation

Songs are also used as means of symbolic representation. The following is an example of a song used as a medium of symbolic representation:

**Bíbèlì mi ni unó ma gbé ò**

98 Bífè-lì mi ni unó ma gbé ò à-jé ò l'ágbára ló-rí rẹ o-só kò l'ágbára

103 ló rí rẹ Bífè-lì mi \_\_\_\_\_ o o Bífè-lì mi ni unó ma gbé

#### Example 11

##### Song texts

*Bí-bé-lì mi ni n ó máa gbé ò*  
*-à-jé ò l'á-gbá-ra ló-rí rẹ*  
*o-só kò l'á-gbá-ra ló rí rẹ*  
*Bí-bé-lì mi e e*  
*Bí-bé-lì mi ni n ó máa gbé*

##### Translation

I will always consult my Bible.  
 witches cannot overcome it.  
 wizards cannot overcome it.  
 I will always consult my Bible.  
 I will always consult my Bible.

The bride is instructed to pick one of the engagement items and while the above song is being sung, the bride picks the Bible. Brides that are Christians pick the Bible, Muslims pick the Quran and if she is a traditional worshiper and she picks the cutlass. The significance of this song is to bring to bear that religion is part and parcel of the social life of the Yoruba. The bride must hold on in tenacity unto her belief in God, because it is the only guarantee of a successful marriage.

### Songs as Instruments of Emotional Expression

To set the mood for engagement ceremonies, masters of ceremonies engage various songs and gesticulations in nuptial performances. An example of a song that served the purpose of emotional expression was a song sung by an *Alága ijókòó* to reveal that a bride's mother was crying when she was told to pray for her daughter (the bride). At one of the engagement ceremonies attended,

the bride's mother could not hide her emotion; she wept aloud that everyone could hear her sobbing. The *Alága ijókòó* conducting the engagement ceremony sang the following song lyrics of emotional expression: "*Ìyá 'n gbàdùrà fẹmọ ó n ké, ekún ayọ ni mama n sun*" meaning 'mother is praying for her daughter and she is shedding tears of joy'.

**Song texts as Instruments for Validation of Social Institutions**  
Marriage is a very important institution among the Yorùbá and child bearing is paramount in a marriage. The crowns of marriage are the children. The following song shows the importance of children in a marriage union.

### IJO OLOMO LAN JO

45  
I jo o mo la n jo i jo o lo mo la n jo

49  
Ko si i jo e Ko si jo e le ya le se wa I jo o lo mo la n jo

#### Example 13

##### Song texts

*Ijó ọmọ l'ànjó*

*Kò síjọ ẹlẹyà lésè wa*

*Ijó ọmọ l'ànjó*

##### Translation

We are dancing because of our children.

It is not because we do not have something important to do

We are dancing because of our children

The above song by *Alága idúró* shows the importance of children. The *Alága idúró* reveals that they value the bride, she is worth celebrating and she is the reason why every member of the groom's family has come and is celebrating.

#### Song Texts as Instrument for Enforcing Conformity to Social Norms

Songs used by masters of ceremonies expose the Yorùbá culture and norms and have helped in conforming to societal beliefs. The

following song exposes the Yorùbá belief regarding the respect for in-laws.

### À-ná ké-ré À-ná tò-bi



#### Example 14

##### Song texts

Àná kéré Àná tòbi  
Ìdòbálẹ̀ l'a fí k'ána

##### Translation

Whether an in-law small or great.  
You prostrate to great your in-laws.

#### Song Texts as Initiators for Physical Response

The message music carries are culturally defined and are capable of producing a reaction from the listeners (Nketia, 1970). Research findings have shown that the lyrics of songs by masters of ceremonies have contributed to specific physical reactions by the guests at engagement ceremonies.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, through the lyrics of songs of masters of ceremonies, the importance of marriage, institutions, child bearing and other cultures of the Yoruba are revealed. The choices of songs to be performed during engagements are usually dictated by the linguistic background of the bride, the bridegroom and participants at engagement ceremonies and the dexterity of the masters of ceremonies. Song texts are very powerful instruments of communication of the *Alága* during engagement ceremonies. Song texts are used to interact, communicate and pass messages between masters of ceremonies and couples, masters of ceremonies (*Alágas*) and participants at engagement ceremonies.

---

### References

- Nketia, JHK (1970). *Ethnomusicology in Ghana*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Nketia, JHK, (1982). Perspectives on African musicology. In *African and the West: The Legacies of Empire*. I. J. Mowoe and R. Bjornson. Eds. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Oladipo, O.T. (2015). Yorùbá traditional marriage masters of ceremonies as agents of continuity and change in Yorùbá nuptial performance. *Journal of the Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria*, 8(1), 233-252.
- Oyeledun, O. (2012). Preserving the Yorùbá cultural heritage. Retrieved 8 Nov 2012, from [www.Yorùbá\\_bridal\\_engagement.com](http://www.Yorùbá_bridal_engagement.com).