

Proverbial Dirges: The Urhobo Example

Felicia Ohwovoriole, University of Lagos

Abstract

The proverb is a literary expression of wisdom which offer the speaker a medium for the projection and fulfilment of a variety of socially desired goals. The proverb is an instrument of cultural transmission and its study can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values. Many proverbs abound in Urhobo funeral chants, songs and recitations and most of the proverbs have several meanings. One of Nwoga's important observations about the Igbo proverb which is true of Urhobo proverbs is that most proverbs have three meanings: the literal, the philosophical and the contextual. The paper focuses on proverbs embedded in Urhobo funeral poetry and their literary and contextual analysis. The data gathering methods adopted is participatory observation and interviews.

Introduction

Urhobo dirge proverbs are performed within the context of funeral ceremonies. In the dirges, the proverbs are used as part of the building blocks of songs, chants and recitations. The dirge also serves as an avenue for distinctive creativity, unchaining the people's poetic sensibilities in the process of the expression of grief and sorrow. As a unique literary type, the dirge takes various forms and tackles diverse subjects, especially those related to religio-philosophical matters. The paper regards the Urhobo as a culturally homogenous people in spite of the different dialects of Urhobo spoken in different clans of Urhobo land.

A Brief History and Characteristics of the Urhobo People

The Urhobo people are found mainly in the Delta State of Nigeria. They are spread over nine local government areas (LGAs) namely: Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli South, Ughelli North, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and part of Warri South. The Urhobo consist of over a million people judging by the National Census of Nigeria conducted in 1991 (Otite 1985). Their neighbors are the Isoko to the South East, the Itsekiri to the West, the Benin to the North, the Ijo to the South and Ukwani (Kwale-Aboh) to the North East. There are twenty-two polities and they have dirges that are essentially alike in themes, modes of presentation and performance. Their distinct culture that is manifest in literary, social, economic, religious and philosophical systems can be discerned in the people's funeral songs. The territory consists mainly of evergreen forests covered by a network of streams and rivers. The southern regions of Urhoboland are generally waterlogged especially during the rainy season from June to October. The northern areas are drier. The culture of the people has characteristics that have been greatly influenced by the physical environment which resonate their literary themes.

The water bodies and the tropical forests have informed the main occupations of the Urhobo people. Farming and fishing are the main occupations. Urhobo traditional

medicine is tied to plants in the forests. The advent of Western medicine has not diluted beliefs in Urhobo traditional medicine.

All the Urhobo socio-political units have proverbs that are essentially alike in themes and functions. Their distinct culture that is manifest in literary, social, economic, religious and philosophical systems can be discerned in the people's funeral songs or dirges. The Urhobo maintain that "amra sa gwu ra evwo kpe erivwin" The dead goes to the world beyond for lack of where to go. This saying underscores the belief that no one lives in this world forever. All human beings must eventually return to the land of the ancestors that is to their original home, which is erivwin.(land of the ancestors) Each person has just come to this earth as a sojourner.

Poetic Character of Proverbs and Socio-Functionalist Theory

Of the varied oral literary forms, the proverb is the form which, has proved to be of great continuing relevance to modern man and an examination of the proverbs of a people highlights their way of life and their social values. (Akorobaro and Emovon, 1991:1) On the subject of the proverb, J.H. Nketia(1958:51) makes an observation about Ghanaian proverbs which is also true about Urhobo proverbs:

The value of the proverb to us does not lie only in what it reveals of the thoughts of the past. For the poet today or indeed for the speaker who is some sort of an artist in the use of words, the proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language. In addition to drawing on it for its words of wisdom, therefore, he takes an interest in its verbal techniques-its selection of words, its use of comparison as a method of statement, and so on. Familiarity with its technique enables him to avoid hackneyed expressions and give a certain amount of freshness to his speech. This...approach to proverbs which is evident in the speech of people who are regarded as accomplished speakers or poets of a sort makes the proverbs not only a body of short statements built up over the years and which reflect the thought and insight of Ghanaians into problems of life, but also a technique of verbal expression, which is greatly appreciated by the Ghanaian. It is no wonder therefore that the use of proverbs has continued to be a living tradition in Ghana.

Although the context of proverbs use are quite diverse such that proverbs in novels, newspapers, magazines and the like, proverbs are an integral part of the interpersonal communication of everyday life. By employing a proverb, a speaker may be able to express his or her view regarding a certain situation while protecting the interpersonal relationship between himself or herself and the hearer.

Because of the poetic character of proverbs, they are used as part of the building blocks of some traditional poetry. This is depicted in many Urhobo dirges which is a subject of this paper. Some of the dirges have proverbs embedded in them. The poetic

texture of the proverbial dirges derive from the figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, hyperboles and so on.

The theoretical framework of this paper hinges on the sociology of art forms as developed by Malinowski who articulates a socio-functional view of oral literary forms. He stresses that literary creations are not entirely for pure aesthetic entertainment; rather they have a great role in the social organization and life style of the people. This theory concentrates on the things that a community does and their various functions. Sociologically inclined scholars of African oral literature have identified various societal functions for oral literature (the proverb) Writing about the complex function of myth Malinowski (1926) asserts

A myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function, it expresses, enhances and codifies belief, it codifies and enforces morality, it vouches for the efficacy of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of men. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization. It is not an idle tale but a hard worked active force, it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but a pragmatic wisdom. The function of myth briefly is to strengthen tradition and endow it with greater force

D.I. Nwoga (1975) in his study of the Igbo proverb identifies three meanings of proverb: the literal, the philosophical and the contextual. He refers to these levels as “what is said, how it is said, and when.” Nwachukwu-Agbada (2002:20) opines that a contextual meaning of a proverb is derivable from an understanding of the metaphorical essence of proverb terms, for without this knowledge communication stands to be impaired.

In his study of the poetry of divination (ifa) among the Yoruba, Bascom (1954) emphasizes the usefulness of these chants as an encyclopaedia of the people’s wisdom. Proverbs have been studied among various African societies for the several ways they help to establish the authority of a statement.

Post Malinowskian functionalists like Edmund Leach, Raymond Firth, Emile Durkheim and Radcliffe Brown agree that facts contained in a tale (or a proverb) provide pictures of the societies that produce the work. The Urhobo funeral proverbs, therefore, perform essential functions that emanate from structurally thematic reflections of the worldview of the people.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1982) assert that ‘literature occurs only in a social context as part of culture in a milieu’. In other words, the proverb is culturally bound. Abdulkadir (1981) shares this point of view especially when he says: “The folklorist is not only interested in the song text and its structure, but in investigating the place of the song in the life of the community and the relation of traditional songs to their social environment .

An understanding of the social experiences that exist in a particular society aids the appreciation of works that emanate from such a society. Ngugi Wa thiong’o (1982) also describes the functions of literature:

...the product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions and conflicts at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes of a community's wrestling with the total environment to produce the basic means of life: food, clothing, shelter and recreating itself in history

The dirge as a literary activity serves several purposes. It disseminates social norms and ideas relevant to the continued survival of the community. A proper understanding of the dirge in Urhobo can hardly be done without knowledge of the society from which the dirge emanates. According to Wilbur Scott(1972), "Art is not created in a vacuum. It is a work of art of an author of a particular background fixed in time and space and answering to a community of which he is an important and articulate part

The proverb, as an art, in effect not only portrays social reality but also attempts to persuade the recipient to adopt a certain attitude towards that reality. A funeral occasion has the predominance of the emotion of sorrow but many of the dirges are not limited to sorrowful utterances but rather there is a mixture of sorrow, reflection and even an existentialist view of human existence. Thus other than lamenting the dead, mourners (dirge performers) engage in moral education, social criticism, and philosophical reflection on life. Furthermore, the dirge is primarily an art, which makes use of imagery (metaphors, similes, analogies, anecdotes, parables, repetition and wit). These artistic elements are realized by means of intellect and the exercise of imagination.

Proverbial Dirges

Urhobo proverbial dirges can come in straightforward statements and also form part of laments, eulogy and other funeral recitations. The proverbs may also be garnered from folktales, songs composed annually for festivals, personal names indicating beliefs and values of the people. The poetic texture, form and quality of the Nigerian proverb, derive from the insistent vividness of the tropes, similes, hyperboles and metaphors, which act as the communicative vehicle of the proverb (Akpobaro and Emovon 1994:8). Some of the dirges in Urhobo are composed through the assemblage of proverbs. The following dirges depict a lot of proverbs:

Ovụe r' Akpolo
Inyeren inyeren e

1. *Bori kpe kale avwan toboyen*
2. *Avwan ra vu 'Akpolo*
3. *Osiobe r'okeko obi ji ghwu re*
4. *Onyemera avu' Urhobo*
5. *No re vwa ro t'inyo*
6. *Emu ro osewen ode jovwo*
7. *Kamono be ghwa yo*

8. Isini re osherhe k'obuko Osiobe
9. Erere omo oranda cha
10. Eee aro d'onimo
11. Erivwin hwora ro vwe
12. Kidie emu abi vveri o
13. Uhanghwa uwevwin ju udu ju

Message to Akpole

Refrain: News! News! Oh!

1. **Those who are going to Ikale**
2. Go and tell Akpolo
3. The only surviving scribe has passed away
4. Soon a directive was sent to Urhobo
5. That she should come and care for mother
6. What were left behind by grandfather
7. Who will now possess them
8. **Isini in vogue is now performed in the absence of Osiobe**
9. The gain of a child coming from overseas
10. Oh mother what a pity!
11. Death has taken me aback
12. How do I lament?
13. The muse of music in my old will not make lack

In line 1 the proverb is an allusion made to “Ikale”, the area in the southern part of Ondo State in which many of Urhobo people have a settlement. The phrase “bori kp'ikale” is loosely applied to those who have migrated from home for economic reasons. Such migrants rarely visit home hence we a message is sent to Akpolo asking him to return as an important relation has passed away. In line 8 the proverb is an allusion made to “isini” a popular Urhobo dance by women in the 60s. This dance is featured in the absence of Osiobe who is among the Ikale immigrants.

Once funeral rites are completed the descendants would be very happy expressing this mood in dirges such as this:

1. *Omo re orivwin ne adjare re vw'oma*
2. The mourner proclaims I am rid of insults

In the above proverb the mourners are in effect expressing their happiness that having done everything about the parent's burial rites, they are now free from the troubles of constant afflictions from the departed, and the mockery of the society. After the burial it is also the duty of the in-laws to smoothen the room in which a deceased has been buried. This is usually the day they come in a dancing procession with guns or cannons to render their last services for that particular august in-law. This involves much expense for both the members of the family and the sons-in-law. In Urhobo tradition it is on this day that the family is recognized by the society whether its members have produced well-behaved daughters who have been happily married and

have thus brought honour to the family or not. In most cases if a son-in-law fails to fulfil this obligation, it would result to shame for such a daughter and her marriage may be dissolved. The reason usually advanced for such dissolution is that the son-in-law has treated their daughter with contempt and as a harlot. In traditional Urhobo society harlotry is shameful profession, and the families whose daughters go into such trade are ridiculed hence the performance of these songs:

1. *Amre egoo*
2. *Vwo she orivwin ke igberadjaa*
3. *Amre egoo*
4. *Vwo she orivwin ke igberadjaa*

1. **There are no In-laws**
2. **To perform the burial rites of a harlot's parents**
3. There are no In-laws
4. To perform the burial rites of a harlot's parents

In the funeral rituals one could see the importance of procreation

1. Apoi orare otọ udo
2. Ibaba kpore
3. Gba mọ re hwosa re udo

1. Apoi that usually licks father's broth
2. Now father is deceased
3. Come and perform your obligations

Apoi is an endearing name for a last or favoured child. Such a person is noted for eating the remnants of a father's meals. If he was a gluttonous type, he is satirised during the funeral ceremony of his father. He is urged in the above dirge to perform his responsibility towards his father since he benefited immensely from him. In a similar vein children of a deceased are called upon during a wake to repay any debt owed their father. In performance mourners can go on for a long time recounting various food items and ways the deceased was of benefit to his relations and dependents.

In another proverb 'The poor that is fatuous prays for death'

1. Wọ davw' oma
2. Wọ davwẹn omawẹn ne
3. Oşẹ r' avwaren ro'ghwuru
4. Koyẹn avwaren şe ẹ o
5. Ovwiogberhe r'ogheghen
6. Anọ yen ji ghwu
7. Ko no shi we ?

1. You are appraising yourself
2. You are comparing yourself with others
3. It is our father who is late
4. Whom we are performing obsequies for
5. The poor that is fatuous
6. She too wants to die
7. Who will give you a befitting burial?

It is observed that a great deal of critical spirit is embodied in Urhobo dirges. This is all the spirit that the children of a deceased or those whose parents are still alive must be guided by certain standards of conduct. In some dirges children of a deceased are urged to place themselves in a position in the society where they can be in position to give their deceased parents befitting burial:

Oya fa nure

1. *Oya fa nure*
2. *Oya fanu, ye gbiku re oya (proverb)*
3. *Okẹ r'inene vwo h'akpọ*
4. *Emọ ronye sere gbe mu hu*
5. *Oya fanu, ye gbiku re oya*
6. *We ne nuvwwe vie*

The curtain falls

1. The performance act is over
2. The performance is over, yet you give a belated act
3. When mother was alive
4. The children did not appreciate her worth
5. The performance is over, yet you give a belated act
6. Come and mourn with me

Obukohwo (proverb)

1. *Obuk' ohwo*
2. *Obuk' ohwo r'ata na*
3. *Ọna djẹ rhe , oyen djẹ rhe*
4. *Ọna cha vw'uko*
5. *Obuko ohwo r'ata n*

Family Back Up

1. Family backing
2. The family backing that is cherished
3. One comes, another hastens to me
4. And yet another brings me help
5. To be shored up by the family solidarity is what we cherish

The bereaved is not alone in her moment of grief. She has the support of family members who will assist in bearing the cost of funeral expenses. This show of solidarity is the mark of communalism. It should be noted that death is the subject of most of the proverbs. In another proverbial dirge death is compared with the metamorphosis of a Queen termite that makes maturity the termination of life. The poetic effect of comparisons lies in the art of yoking together two ordinary unlike subjects, and thus providing a basis for the audience to engage in quick imaginative thought. Such comparisons also crowd a number of ideas into a single expression, adding great wit to the poetry as in:

Ovie r,erheren

1. *Ovie r,avie vweki*
2. *Omuwwe dje, muwwe dje*
3. *Agwolo ogba na abe mree*
4. *Agwolo oloko royen abe mree*
5. **Ovie r,erheren tanure (proverb)**
6. Okpore

The Queen of the Anthill

1. The wailings in a market place
2. Have rendered me motionless, frozen
3. We searched for the strong man to no avail
4. We sought for his rapier, but in vain
5. The queen of the anthill has completed its task
6. It has taken its exit

In the above dirge, the mourner uses the symbol of a lost staff ‘oloko’ to convey the idea of a great loss when death takes its toll. The image of a queen termite, which dies upon reaching the adult stage, is spelt out. It brings to mind the metamorphosis of an insect from egg stage to the adult stage after which it dies. In like manner the natural human development moves from childhood to maturity before demise. The analogy of the queen termite is very appropriate as it is usually the most important insect in an anthill. Its death usually brings disarray to a colony of ants the way the death of the owner of an oloko would bring confusion to a family circle.

In addition we are given a picture of death as a chain that constrains:

Ogba ru' igoni

1. *Ehehe ogba ru' igoni*
2. *Kono ? (proverb)*
3. *Ehehe ose r'avware ghwu gbere otọ*
4. *Ohwahwa rode muwwe okioghwe*
5. *Ogba ru' igoni*
6. *Kono o o ?*
7. *Baba, opha udje okpo re*
8. *Eeeeeeeeeee*

Death has chained the giant

1. Death has imprisoned the strong
2. Who else can escape ?
3. Death has imprisoned our father
4. A big harmattan has gripped me in the rainy season
5. The metal chain has constrained the great
6. How much less the weak?
7. Father, the pride of udje dance has gone home
8. Eeeeeeeee

Death is for everybody, both the strong and weak. When death occurs people in the society usually console the bereaved by supporting them in any capacity. The “igoni” in line one is an allusion to colonial prisons. The outward and visible sign of British colonial rule in Urhobo land were the native courts and prisons that were established at various centres. A feature of the system was the office of the court clerk—the man who had the responsibility for summoning the court members to attend court, administering summonses to witnesses, keeping the records and ensuring that offenders meant for prisons were kept there. In many ways the court clerk was regarded as a strong man “ogba”. In spite of his powers he could not overcome death. The soloist may also comment on the issues handled in the songs as she performs. She may also give opinions, lend advice and pass judgement:

Ogbo oo (proverb)

1. Orivwi gbo-o
2. Orivwi gbo-

Always fresh

1. The deceased does not get rotten (proverb)
2. The deceased does not get rotten

The “ogbo o” conceptually connotes that any time a bereaved is financially strong enough to perform his parent’s obsequies; both the dead and the living would gladly welcome him. Death is likened to a crab, which is not easy to wrap with leaves:

Eghwro

1. *Ehe! Ehe! ehe!.*
2. *Ono pha r’uko r’egwhro?*
3. *Ober’iko*

The Crab

1. Alas! Alas! Alas!
2. Who can wrap a crab with leaves? (proverb)
3. The one that tears parcels

Proverbial dirges are more philosophical than laments which are predominantly poems that express grief. These proverbs are forms of poetic communication because of their exploitation of the resources of metaphor, hyperboles, simile and allusions used in expressing Urhobo religious worldview.

For example:

Urhoro

1. *E igo, igo obuole ro vi' oma*
2. *Ovu' ebe r' daron*
3. *K' obo evu oria*
4. *Ughwu r' ohwe imiragwen*
5. *Urhobo ona k' eghughu*
6. *Amono vughe ete ame. wan ru' ukokoria*
7. *Ruevun yaran Oghene ruro*
8. *Urhoro ede rhie.*
9. *Obo afa vwie oko oye bie*
10. *Edjo gan vre edje, edjo ko kwa*
11. *Ughere erivwin ye ato uchi ba*
12. *Asa re atu ushi ba oy'erivwin*

Urhoro

1. Oh! (shouts, shouts, a lead singer's lamentation)
2. Every person has his pains
3. These are concealed inside a sufferer
4. Death that killed an important person
5. Urhobo what mighty things are these
6. Who knows where water entered the coconut
7. God made it possible for water to get inside
8. Urhoro, every person has a date
9. As you load your boat of life, so shall it
10. A stronger divinity drives the weaker one away
11. The grave is never dug beyond the gate to the land of the dead
12. The bottom of the grave is the land of the dead

In the above incantatory dirge, the reciter highlights how erhi operates and directs man in accordance with its own declaration. It never deviates from its former declaration. Urhobo believe a person carries along all what he has loaded into his boat of life. He carries all, both good and evil ones. He never drops any of them. This notion does not recognize that it is possible to change an ill destiny; man should thus resign himself to fate. Man's life is only marginally in his hands. If one has good head he will experience good living, but if he has an ill head he will not enjoy all the good things of life. Another aspect of men's performance consists of an act between a challenger and an accompanist. This act was observed in Oviri-Olomu funerals. The challenger is usually the leader while anybody from the audience can act the role of the accompanist who corroborates the statements of the performer as in this example

recorded during the funeral of late Chief Jomoni Okpakovwokon of Oviri-Olomu in Delta State of Nigeria:

1. *Otota: Ovwata rioja k' ekper'onieda*
2. *Ekpaho: Kono ekperi onieda da rioja?*
3. *O: Eravwen eje v'ehwen*
4. *E: Orhere oyi tue*
5. *O: Ore odame tol'ako*
6. *E: Kidie ogbore oriemu r'orivwin ru?*
7. *O: Ohovwon r'Oguname johwo r'evue ele*
8. *E: Oji muoga kono ji kpu ji?*
9. *O: Igberadja fe omote oyoyovwin*
10. *E: Amono rovwe vwi'igberadja?*
11. *O: Akpo ni' esee*
12. *E: Oho kpevw' erhuru*
13. *O: Eba sioma n'unuu*
14. *E: Ofe sioma n'unu*
15. *O: Oghoro be yoroon*
16. *E: Ke yorhe orhiri*
17. *O: Mavo eha ru t'ariri?*
18. *E: Mavo iso ru te'to egba?*
19. *O: Erhinyodavwe mu' ifi obe 'sivwo*
20. *E: Erhinyodavwe ke igbeyan erhuru*
21. *O: Emougho ke Uloho*
22. *E: Ewerin muogho ke ulohoo*

1. Challenger: If an innocent person is suffering witches are accused.
2. Response: Who will then be accused if a witch is suffering?
- 3.C: Every animal has a heart
- 4.R: That of the cricket is branded as the one that biales
- 5.C: The one who drank water is picking his teeth
6. R: What will Ogbore who ate all the funeral food do?
- 7.C: When a man was sick in Oguname he sent someone to reap yam from his farm.
- 8.R: If the thief falls sick, whom will he send to steal for him?
- 9.C: A harlot is usually very good and attractive
- 10.R: Who sanctions his daughter being a harlot?
- 11.C: The world is full of ungrateful people
12. R: The fowl is constantly grateful to the rubbish heap
13. C: The eba does not hide in a hole
14. R: Small tilapia does hide in a hole
- 15.C: Every little fish can be handled
16. R: Try the electric fish for a start
17. C: How did the fishing net become a toy?
18. R: Ask me how the faeces got to the beard
19. C: In vain Erhinyodavwe was treated of yaws

20. R: You mean she was thrown into a refuse heap

21. C: The iroko tree is respected

22. R: The monkey is no respecter of trees

The remarks of the accompanist expand the scope of the main performance and also demonstrate wisdom by giving the right response. During this act no musical instruments are played, the challenger and responder depend entirely on the skill with which they can match the wisdom stored in their memories. Immediately after their act music is now introduced to usher in another variety of performance full of histrionics while philosophical dirges are rendered as in “Ogba ofovwin scheri” :

Ogba ofovwin scheri

1. *Kpregede uvo*

2. *Ke nye igo*

3. *Ki ti vo igo ne cha?*

4. *Eya ri kpe' raka ghwovue re*

5. *Okobaro ofovwin cheri*

6. *Ogba ofovwin cheri*

7. *Me guon' Ijomoni me mreree*

8. *Otiti kuenu ovie*

9. *Jomoni ghwuru v'oma kpokpo*

10. *Onana egha.*

11. *Out inughe juvwevwo*

12. *Omo r'obo de ghwu*

13. *Tefia Tuyota oye gbe*

14. *Oro obo se si nuchi*

15. *Koyeb ebo serhe*

16. *Ohovwon de ghwu abo r'obo*

17. *Obo vwe kiddie soro buebu*

18. *Ebo kparo mre umiovwon*

19. *Me mre ughwu ocho je me taa*

20. *Ohovwon chere fuomaa.*

22. *Ke me niere no?*

23. *Oye die obuko r'ota*

24. *Ee kiddie hwe Jomoni?*

25. *Ono rien obo re rhirin*

26. *Ejo gan vre edjo, edjo ko kwa.*

27. *Ame hwe ohw' Ovwere k'Urhobo*

28. *Eravwen r'oto phe kue oro eyovwin*

29. *Ughere r'erivwin yen atuchi ba.*

30. *Asa r'at'uchi ba ouyen erivwin*

31. *Oviri ozighe obo.*

32. *Kono vue vwe obo ri hwe re.*

33. *Ughwu br'iroro akpo dje.*

34. *Ughwu zigh'Oviri.*

35. *Ee Onime , Onime.*

The Fallen Champion

- 1.All of a sudden at noon
- 2.An alarm was heard
- 3.Where is the alarm coming from?
- 4.The women who went to reap cassava brought the news
- 5.The captain has fallen
- 6.The champion is dead
- 7.When I searched for Jomoni I did not find him
- 8.Otiti raised an alarm weeping
- 9.Jomoni died without being sick
- 10.This is an abomination
- 11.You on lookers leave me alone
- 12.When the child of a doctor dies
13. Many false and true statements are made
- 14.Anyone he is able to bring to life
- 15.It is there the medicines of the doctor are proved to be potent
- 16.But if any person dies in his hands
- 17.Then doctor has many reasons to give in order to explain the death away
- 18.The charms foresaw the doom
19. I saw death but I was afraid to reveal
- 20.The patient slept on one side and did not feel comfortable
- 21.Things got worse when he turned to the other side
- 22.Had I known
- 23.Is usually an after-thought
- 24.Oh what can be responsible for Jomoni's death?
25. Who knows exactly how he has predestined himself?
- 26.A stronger divinity drives the weaker one away
- 27.An Ijaw dies in water, not to talk of an Urhobo
- 28.The animal that is under a tree cannot urinate on the one that is on top of the tree
29. The grave is never dug beyond the gate to the land of the dead
- 30.The bottom of the grave is the land of the dead.
- 31.People of Oviri there is confusion
- 32.Can someone tell me what is responsible for his death?
- 33.Death has cut short all plans
34. Death has brought confusion to Oviri
- 35.Oh my mother, my mother.

In this lyric performance we are shown the belief of the people. Witches are in most cases accused of being responsible for most of the evil in the society. Practical wisdom is displayed in the dirges. Most of the words are metaphorical. Writing on the working of the metaphor, Petrie(1979:460) in his study of the metaphor writes:

Metaphor in education has traditionally been viewed as occasionally heuristically useful but essentially ornamental, and sometimes as downright pernicious. I have argued that metaphors are essential for learning in a number of ways.

They may provide the most memorable ways of learning and thus be our most efficient and effective tools. But further, they are epistemologically necessary in that they seem to provide a basic way of passing from the well known to the unknown. However, such a formulation is somewhat misleading, for the crucial use of metaphor is in moving from one conceptual scheme with its associated way of knowing to another conceptual scheme with its associated way of knowing.

From all indication the proverbs in the dirges come from the womb of Urhobo tradition. The proverbial dirges apart from serving the function of utterances performed within the context of a funeral, they provide forum for poetic and dramatic expression of the power of the intellect. In this paper we have been able to establish that proverbs are part and parcel of Urhobo funeral dirges. These proverbial dirges also entertain, enlighten and educate the mourners. They serve as warning, rebuke, praises, suggestions, advice and present the cosmological views of the performers.

Note: The dirges used in this paper were collected during a research on Urhobo dirges and they are part of a thesis 'Urhobo Dirges: Poetic Forms and Social Functions' by F. Ohwovoriole

References:

- Akporobaro, F.B.O. and J.A. Emovon (1994) *Nigeria Proverbs: Meaning and Relevance Today*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine Publication.
- Bascom, William R. (1954) 'Four Functions of Folklore.' *Journal of American Folklore* 67
- Ifa Divination (1959)Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Egudu, Romanus N. (1972) 'Proverb and the Riddle in Igbo Traditional Verse' *Ikenga* 1.
- Egudu, R. and Donatus Nwoga eds.(1971) *Poetic Heritage: Igbo Traditional Verse* Enugu: Nwankwo-Ifejika.
- Finnegan, Ruth.(1970) *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Ekeh, Peter. Ed. (2005) *Studies in Urhobo Culture* Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw.(1926) *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. New York: W.W. Norton Co,
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1982) *Writers in Politics* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd
- Nketia, J.H.(1958) *Folklore in Ghana The Ghanaians* 1,
- .(1955)*Funeral Dirges of the Akan People*. Achimota: University of the Gold Coast.
- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J.O.J.(2002) *The Igbo Proverb: A Study of its Context Performance and Functions*. Enugu: John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.
- Nwoga, Donatus Ibe.(1975) 'Appraisal of Igbo Proverbs and Idioms.' *Igbo Language and Culture*. Vol. 1 Ed. F. Chidozie Ogbalu and E. Nolie Emenanjo. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Onigu, Otite ed.(1980) *The Urhobo People*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Petrie, H.(1979) 'Metaphor and Learning' in *Metaphor and Thought* ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Radcliffe Brown, A.R.(1935) 'On the Concept of Function in the Social Sciences' *American Anthropologist* 37
- Wellek Rene and Austin Warren (1982) *Theory of Literature*. London: Pelican Book.