

Cultural Riddles and Performance in Modern African Societies

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| Akporherhe Friday¹ | Udi Peter Oghenerioborue² |

^{1,2} Department of Languages
(English), University of Delta,
Agbor, Delta State

ABSTRACT

Several forms of performance arts are underutilized for in the past few decades and the Urhobo riddles are not left out. This paper therefore examines various methods of preservation and transfer of riddles in traditional society. This study adopted the survey-descriptive approach as the data and information were collected from natural environment and analysed. It is underpinned by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory that focuses on the unconscious mind of people as the storehouse of latent materials which can be activated and brought to the conscious awareness. The information were collected with sound recordings which were afterward deciphered and deciphered from the Urhobo dialect into the English adaptation. In-depth interviews were also conducted to obtain first-hand information from respondents. The respondents were purposively selected and interviewed. The data collected in the field were qualitatively analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods. Findings reveal that riddles perform utilitarian functions like entertainment, education, knowledge transfer, coping and distractive strategies and so on. These linguistic resources should be preserved and documented due to their cultural values. Though there are problems hindering the growth of the riddles in contemporary societies, orators have devised the use of popular music as new way of preservation and transferring of oral traditions like the riddles from going into extinction.

KEYWORDS

folklore; traditional; riddles; health; verbal

INTRODUCTION

The human psyche is a reservoir of repressed experiences that can influence thoughts, emotions and behavioural patterns of people when brought to the consciousness layer. Sigmund Freud structured the mind into three layers: conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The conscious level implies the aspect of the mind that enables us remember things immediately while the preconscious refers to the layer that would make us recollect things after much time of racking the brain for stored information. This affirms the submission of Bressler (1999) that the oblivious intellect is the storage facility for covered up wants, feelings, desire, and fears" (cited in Al-Dmour, 2019:48). The third part of the mind is the unconscious which contains repressed thoughts, emotions or experiences from early stage in life. Oral resources such as the folksongs, proverbs, riddles, myths, folktales, legendary stories, and other verbal arts are therefore stored in the unconscious minds of people from childhood to adulthood. These linguistic products are activated and brought to the conscious level of the human mind during performance. The mind thus helps

significantly in the preservation and transmission of oral traditions to successive generations in traditional societies.

Whenever verbal arts such as the riddles are recollected from the unconscious and brought to public domain, people with such knowledge have their mental consciousness activated while those without the foreknowledge are subjected to critical thinking to decode the meanings embedded in such oral products. Familiar oral materials doubtlessly perform various utilitarian functions in traditional societies where they are valued by the people. Besides other functions, they are employed by performers unconsciously in addressing psychological problems of listening audience in socio-cultural settings. This paper therefore attempts to examine modern methods of preservation and transmission of African riddles in order to promote their cultural values in society. It will specifically examine African riddles as verbal arts; factors responsible for extinction of the verbal art of riddles; the utilitarian functions of African riddles; and popular music as modern means of preservation of riddles in contemporary African societies.

Riddles and Verbal Arts

Verbal arts are integral part of the oral traditions of people in traditional societies. According to Bula (2019), “verbal craftsmanship isn't the same as the typical or conventional discourse of human creatures. Verbal craftsmanship is purposely and skillfully embraced. The ‘verbal art’ of the verbal craftsman is continuously intentioned and artistically executed, not within the act of talking per se but in that of verbal execution”(109). The predominant verbal arts that exist in every African community are folksongs, folktales, proverbs and riddles. The concept of riddle cuts across all cultures even though this verbal art has not recorded a huge harvest of research works from scholars. The attention of scholars over decades has been on folktales, proverbs, songs, and other artistic products that people perceive as more fascinating.

Concurring to Okpewho (2004:239), Enigma can be characterized as “a word amusement in which the components of mental work out and verbal expertise are combined to shifting degrees.” The researcher encourage uncovers that riddling execution continuously includes “two parties, with the one party proposing and the other reacting. (But) within the hone of song-riddles, the lead artist both proposes and answers enigmas generally made up by the singer.” Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2001:7) on his portion notes that enigmas are a voyage into the obscure. They are an welcome to set out on an experience that either brings enchant, entertainment and delight at finding the proper reply, or mortification and vexation at being driven off track. The think about by Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2001) uncovers that riddling may be a primordial verbal craftsmanship that has been exchanged to display era over each ethnic gather over the world. The researcher found that “Riddles are known to have existed since way back in time, for the primary reports date from thousands and hundreds of a long time back and such nations as India, Palestine, Mesopotamia and old Greece. Most dialects too have a word for conundrums since as sort conundrums have a place to all societies to the bygone stratum of folklore”(9). Gachanja and Kebaya (2013:293) acknowledged Okumba (2013) who sees the concept of riddles as word puzzles in which familiar objects or situations are referred to in figurative terms for us to decipher what is actually meant (135). Riddles like other verbal arts are facing extinction in African societies, specifically in Urhobo nation. Though scholars have investigated artistic products in the past, there are no significant studies carried out previously in the area of African riddles and their preservation in modern societies.

The study by Bula (2019:108) analyzes the African verbal craftsmanship craftsman among the TIVs in Nigeria, especially to the artist’s craftsmanship of verbal verse. The

researcher watches that “the sources where thoughts are gotten to create verbal verse are from individual and societal encounters; the beguilement given by the craftsman through craftsmanship includes a bit of value; and the utility of the craftsmanship of the verbal craftsman too offers diversionary.” Amali, Yusuf and Jekayinfa (2012) found that in Idoma society, enigmas are implied for children of essential school age. Since the innate Idoma teachers knew that the child was a item of his add up to environment, a wide extend of natural information was displayed to him as instrumental materials (346). The researchers contend assist that: the substance of Idoma graphic enigmas incorporate each circle of normal and human life of Idoma society. These incorporate different wonders such as the characteristic of people, places, plants, creatures and the other naturalia. Particularly it can cover zone like parts of the human body, agrarian crops or executes and actualizes of Idoma household life. It can too be drawn from the creature, vegetations and edit world. Advance, it can cover common wonders just like the moon, stars, rain, water, cloud, mountain, fire and stones, etc (347).

Within the conclusion of Amali (1980), conundrums are utilized to present the child to the fabric and non-matrial culture of the Idoma individuals. It is an instruction that's laid on the establishment of the child's social distinctive visual impression, especially those drawn from the characteristic world which regularly demonstrates near perceptions made on them by the innate Idoma teachers (cited in Amali, 2012:346). Moreover on the group of onlookers of conundrum exhibitions, Awedoba (2000) watches that; “Until as of late, it was the practice for children to engage themselves within the nighttimes with enigmas, folktales and children's recreations. There's be that as it may no session given only to telling enigmas or riddling, and at the same sitting children locked in in riddling, telling folktales and playing other games” (37).

So also, Gachanja and Kebaya (2013:293) recognized Dundes (1964) found that “riddles have long been marginalized due to different misinterpretations that they are childish in nature and when sanctioned, their essential part is to engage. Advance, this excitement is caught on to be that of inspiring giggling from the members as well as the gathering of people subsequently limiting them to the children province.” Dundes' contention is that individuals by and large have misjudged the execution of conundrums for children alone. He watches that “Children in numerous communities in Kenya and Africa as a entirety are considered to be the essential beneficiaries of conundrums since enigmas shape portion of the diversions that they play. The Abagusii community is no exemption as numerous of its individuals see enigmas as a source of beguilement for children.” Noyes (1995) states that “by the time a person has come to adulthood s/he would have experienced most of the curiously conundrums within the range. The ensuing need of grown-up intrigued harvest (cited in Awedoba, 2000).

The investigate carried out by Gachanja and Kebaya (2013:298) certified that “riddles are basically pivotal in honing the intellect and the thought forms of the members. It is clear that through enigmas individuals learn imperative truths around life in spite of the fact that disguised as a diversion. Partaking within the riddling prepare makes a difference one to memorize more around life and the social encompassing and in this way, one is able to create a sense of mental satisfaction”. The previous hence suggests that enigmas offer assistance the youthful to memorize around the presence of social values and prepares him with measuring sticks to degree them (Gelfand, 1979:85). On the viewpoint of sources of enigma in society, Awedoba (2000) found that:

Enigmas, it'll be figured it out, are based on basic perception of the environment in which the society finds itself. This incorporates the physical environment, human society, its organization and how that society works, how creatures and other

living life forms carry on, the relationship of holiness to man and the physical environment, etc. this kind of information can be obtained from either the conundrum point of reference or the sequent (42).

The foregoing implies that every riddle must reflect the immediate environment of the performer, hence, riddles contain images found in African societies particularly the Urhobo land. However, riddles can perform foreign verbal arts if they are imported from other societies and cultures.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted the survey-descriptive approach as the data and information were collected from natural environment and analysed. The information were primarily collected from sound recordings which were afterward interpreted and interpreted by the analysts. In-depth interviews were also conducted to obtain first-hand information from respondents. The respondents were purposively selected and interviewed at informal settings and public functions. A total of fifty (50) Urhobo riddles were collected based on their thematic relevance from various sources and qualitatively analyzed by the researchers using descriptive and analytical methods. The oral data were transcribed and translated from the Urhobo language into the English version for the benefit of non-native audience.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory that explores the underlying factors responsible for reactions, emotions and thoughts of individuals in society. National Open University of Nigeria (2014) reveals that "psychoanalytic feedback accepts that writing gives a productive and complex source for the investigation of the human intellect. It makes a difference to uncover to us things almost the connection between the cognizant and the oblivious intellect, dialect and reality. A psychoanalytic translation of a work can offer assistance to fathom the puzzles included in complex and typical topics" (254). It focuses on the view that the human mind contains (cultural) materials that were collected from childhood to present but pushed into the unconscious. Psychoanalytic theory is rooted in psychoanalysis which according to Al-Dmour (2019:48), "in literature builds on Freud theories of psychology, which helps readers simply interpret literary texts". In this study, the repressed contents are the folkloric resources that can be activated and brought to consciousness of people. Ritamani (2014) states that:

Therapy could be a instrument by which we will decipher the meaning of the distinctive fables things. Old stories- the information and learning of people is inadequate without the help of therapy. By analyzing the lore within the light of therapy, we may get it the society- the individuals. It is vital to get it the society- their trusts, wants, needs and clashes which is conceivable through psychoanalytic ponder and other strategies (14).

Since oral traditions are produced by rural people (the folk), there is therefore the need to investigate how they reflect the cultural life of both the performers and the listening audience in traditional settings. Ritamani (2014) found that the application of the psychoanalytic "theory is valuable since it makes a difference us to get it the nature of human intellect. Once more, it makes a difference us to decipher the typical implications found completely different fables things" (13). The utilitarian functions of verbal arts particularly the African riddles and how they shape the lifestyle of individuals and the general wellbeing of society will form part of our discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Utilitarian Functions of Urhobo Cultural Riddles

The Urhobo society is characterized with various forms of folklores or oral traditions such as proverbs, folktales, myths, legends, folksongs, riddles, tongue twisting, oral poetry and non-verbal dramatic performances like sacred rituals, masquerade dances, and traditional festivals, among others. In his paper, our focus shall be on some of the utilitarian functions of the cultural riddles as follows.

Critical Thinking

The performance of riddles among children and adults subjects them to high level of imagination and critical thinking as they make frantic effort to proffer solutions to the problems contained in the oral performance. In the view of Ennis (1985), “critical thinking is a reflection of thought.” He explain also that “when one ones his considering capacity, it'll include a solid examination and a sharp not of what is before them and their minds” (cited in Marni, *et al.* 2020:660). Riddles are intellectual task that require cognitive ability to unravel the meanings embedded in them. They also activate the consciousness of audience about the mysteries phenomena in societies.

Examples:

- (1) Ido : *Die je awo evwo, oje abo evwo; ye ove ame phiye oche ro ye?*
Riddle : What has no legs and hands but it fetches water and fills its own pot?
Answer: *Ukokodia* (Coconut)
- (2) Ido : *Mi mue uwevwi me vwo yan; Die ye me phan?*
Riddle : I walk around with my house what am I; what am I?
Answer: *Usekpe* (A snail)
- (3) Ido : *Die oye Oghene mare ye avwo teye ubi-in?*
Riddle : What did God create that we cannot use it to break kernel?
Answer: *Ukoho* (An egg)
- (4) Ido : *Die ye vre anurhoro we omi ju we yere?*
Riddle : What passes at your door post without greetings?
Answer: *Osio* (Rain)
- (5) Ido : *Die yi vwe awo ye osa ya-an?*
Riddle : What has legs but does not walk?
Answer: *Imeje* (A table)
- (6) Ido : *Die yi vwe ako buebu ye osa dovwe ohwo-o?*
Riddle : What has many teeth but cannot bite?
Answer: *Ofeto* (A comb)
- (7) Ido : *Eravwe vo oye nya ve awo ene urhioke, awo ive ogheruwo gbe awo erha ovwovwo?*
Riddle : Which animal walks on all fours in the morning, two in the afternoon and three in the evening?
Answer: Oshare; (A man, since he crawls as a child, then walks and uses a cane when he gets older).
- (8) Ido : *Phughu phughu si potor.*
Answer: *Odja rue ihori-in;* (Soap does not get produce worm).
- (9) Ido : *Teye agogo, kpere alleluyah;*
Riddle : Hit the gong, shout alleluyah.
Answer: *Orieda ka re ishoshi-in;* (A witch must never cease to be in the church)

From the above verbal arts, the answers provided for the riddles such as the ‘ukokodia’ (1), ‘usekpe’ (2), ‘ukoho’ (3), ‘osio’ (4), ‘imeje’ (5), and ‘ofeto’ (6) must be convincing after careful reflection on the expressions with the images they convey to the audience. For instance, it is mysterious for coconut to bear fruits with water in each nut. The shell of a snail is likened to a house that it carries about. Also, eggs are round but not as solid as rocks or stones that can be used to crack palm kernels.

Educative

From time immemorial, riddles have been regarded as informal means of educating children and adult listeners in traditional settings. They are tools for moral instructions, social construct, social cohesion and validation of cultural beliefs and practices. According to Anene and Njoku (2018), “As the most seasoned industry, it is the most instrument utilized by society to protect, keep up and update its social harmony. A society’s future depends to a great extent on the quality of its citizen’s instruction. In all human social orders, instruction is implied to pass on to the unused eras the existing information of their physical environment, to present people to the organization of society” (72). In corroborating the forgoing, Eguavoen (2016:91) states that “the riddle serves to educate both the young and old about the ideals and values of the people and to maintain the status quo.” The view of this scholar is affirmed by Anene and Njoku (2018:72) who acknowledged Esuand Junaid (2014) that “instruction may be a handle by which the society helps the more youthful era to get it the heritage of their past, take part beneficially within the society of the show as well as contribute to long-standing time.” Some illuminating examples of such riddles are given below:

- (10) Ido : *Me vwe urhe, kemu kemu mi vwori evwo rue emu; Die ye me phan?*
Riddle : I am a tree; every part of me is useful. What am I?
Answer : *Orie* (Palm tree)
- (11) Ido : *Die oyi se yere enu ye ovwe abo-or?*
Riddle : Tell me what climbs up without hands
Answer : *Orodeko* (A Snake)
- (12) Ido : *Die oye muegbe ke ophovwi ye okpe ophovwi-in?*
Riddle : What prepares for war but does not go for it?
Answer : *Ovwen* (Palm fronds)
- (13) Ido : *Vue vwe ihwo ive re anye da nyan vwe osio, ame te ovo yen ote ovo-on.*
Riddle : Tell me two people that when walking under the rain, water beats one and does not beat the other.
Answer : *Aye ve evu* (Pregnant woman)
- (14) Ido : *Die ye sa che akpo ve erhuvwu omi bi rhe rhioma ve umiovwo?*
Riddle : Tell me who comes to the world beautiful and goes back ugly.
Answer : *Owhorapkor* (Human being)
- (15) Ido : *Die oye eravwe re orehe evu re unu ye a rio-or?*
Riddle : What is the meat in the mouth but is not eaten?
Answer : *Erevwe* (Tongue)
- (16) Ido : *Vue vwe omo re obaphiyor kpe aghwa, ode rhivwi rhe ve iwu.*
Riddle : Tell me the child that went to the farm naked and came back with clothes.
Answer : *Oka* (maize)
- (17) Ido : *Vue vwe orinvwin re onyovo she omaroye.*

Riddle : Tell me the corpse that buried itself.
Answer: Oworhe (Cough)

The above riddles can educate audience in socio-cultural settings where the listeners understand the messages being conveyed through them. For instance, the *orie* (palm tree) or *irie* (plural form) are used in various ways in traditional communities where they are usually planted. Some of the uses include soap making, local food, foot match, thatch roof, brooms, palmwine, kernel oil, nuts, antidote, and so on. The answer of snakes above is also educative as audience will become aware of the fact that snakes climb trees especially palm or raffia palm trees and dwell at the uppermost part. Palmwine tappers or palm fruits harvesters could attest to this because some of them recount their personal experiences with snakes especially the black spitting cobra. For the riddle of palm fronds, audience will realize that warriors in traditional communities use the fresh, tender yellowish palm fronds as costumes and in some cases, diviners employ them to ward off evil spirits and for cleansing of people. Riddle 13 reveals the fact that a pregnant woman only gets drenched while walking in the rain but not the fetus in her womb. Also, the riddle (17) above implies that individuals can suffer from *Oworhe* (cough) suddenly as sickness and also they become healed as though the ailment was buried in the human body. It is therefore worthy of note that riddles as oral performance are an aspect of language that encourages learning, through interaction with grown-ups and collaboration with mates; children learn things they might not fulfill on their possess, particularly in a dialect (Abari, Ayodeji & Okunuga, 2013:9).

Entertainment

Riddle performances are primarily meant for pleasure among children especially after the day's work. In traditional societies, riddles are performed during relaxation while the moon shines or native lamp positioned at the centre of the arena. The forms of riddles that are structured into questions and answers are performed by individuals, in pairs or groups depending on the pattern of riddling with a view to diverting attention of audience to pleasant moments. Again, the riddle (13) of pregnant woman requires critical reasoning for meaning to be unfolded. Actually, the foetus inside a woman's womb is another human being which is not physically seen by people. The riddle implies that the foetus never get drenched by rainfall. Also, the birth of a baby is usually mood enhancing but death activates sad, worrisome and depressive moods. Food is among the basic necessities needed by man in every society. However, poverty and famine should make one eats his own tongue. This riddle (15) correlates with the Urhobo proverb that, "*Owevwe hwe ohwo ade rie erevwere-en*"; (Hunger does not make one eats his own tongue).

- (18) Ido : Die oye kporho siere odeya?
Riddle : What gets wetter as it dries?
Answer : *Omokpa* (Towel)
- (19) Ido : die oyi vwe inu buebu ye onyore ame?
Riddle : What is full of holes but still holds water?
Answer : *Ahwerhe* (A sponge)
- (20) Ido : Me se ko yen mi vwe iwu-un. Die onyen mephan?
Riddle : I am always spinning but I don't have any clothes. Who am I?
Answer : (A spider).
- (21) Ido : Die onyi se she ye ovwirhe-en; ose vwirhe ye ose she-en?
Riddle : What falls but does not break; and what breaks but does not fall?
Answer : Night falls and day breaks.

- (22) Ido : me sa die asa re urhukpe ephan, ye mi ghwe urhukpe de lo muvwe. Die ye me phan?
Riddle : I can only live where there is light, but I die if the light shines on me. What am I?
Answer : *Uphophoro* (Shadow).

Distractive Strategies

Riddles serve as a means of diverting the attention of listening audience from their unpleasant memories, feelings and dysfunctional thoughts to something interesting and humorous. Some riddles invoke laughter when heard and so listeners are bound to be distracted from their emotionally disturbed condition to ideas and thoughts that will stimulate their happy mood. Riddles usually contain images and themes that can stimulate happy and sad mood of people during and after performances; hence, they function as co-activators. The sound produced during the performance of the riddles are usually humorous and exciting to hear and this can alleviate pent-up emotions of unhappy people in a socio-cultural setting.

Examples:

- (23) Statement: *Ekaka kokoro*;
Meaning : *Erawewwi ve ughweri-in* (Rats do not crack potassium chloride).
- (24) Statement: *Rigida vo*;
Meaning : *Eravwe ve idjo rue unu-un* (An animal with horns does not enter a hole).
- (25) Statement: *Kaka mi djo ko*;
Meaning : *Oho vwe uvuowo-or* (A fowl does not have a calf).
- (26) Statement: *Phu phu ko-in*;
Meaning : *A phra dan vwe uyovwi dje urhe-e* (A bird does not fly and bash its head against a tree).
- (27) Statement: *Tughor, tughor*;
Meaning : *Emue ubi kpahen ole teya-an* (One cannot place a palm nut on a tuber of yam to crack).
- (28) Statement: *Phia cho ne*;
Meaning : *Egbede she vwirhe-en* (A needle does not fall and break).
- (29) Statement: *Sukurubi*;
Meaning : *Eherobo dje eto-on* (Human palm does not grow hair).

Apart from the distractions which riddling bring about, some riddles provide effective strategies to cope with difficult conditions of life if their central themes and the images they conveyed are critically examined. They reveal how to manage certain health and psychological problems in social cultural settings. Some of such riddles are as follows:

- (30) Ido : *Vue vwe ohwo re akpor neje dje oshoroye, te oniomo, oseomo, odufe, ogbere, ovie, ovien; osa rho vwe ohwo siere ovwerhe de vwerhe ohwo.*
Riddle : Tell me who the whole world fears, who can't tell mother from father, who can't tell rich from poor who can't tell servant from king, who wakes you up when your sleep is sweetest.
Answer : *Ughwu* (Death)
- (31) Statement: *Phughu phughu sipotor*;
Meaning : *Onieda kare ishoshi-in* (A witch/wizard cannot cease to be in the church).
- (32) Statement: *Zigbo zighigbo*;

Meaning : *Uvo mue osho te aso-on* (Day does not appear so frightening as night).

(33) Statement: *Karoha gbonuze*;

Meaning : *Esie ora re epharo ne-en* (No one can hide facial wound).

This utilitarian function is closely related to that of distractive strategies discussed above. There are some riddles that enhance the mood of people whenever they are performed while there are also a couple of them that trigger psychic and emotional pains when their central themes are heard.

Knowledge Transfer

Folkloric forms contain the indigenous knowledge of the people where they are produced and such knowledge must be transferred from one generation to another. For instance, some riddles convey cultural beliefs, sacred rituals, philosophies, folk medicine, human foibles, and so on, which must be transfer to audience in traditional settings. In affirming the foregoing, World Affairs Council of Houston (2019) states that “Verbal conventions allow a society to convey information from time to time without writing. They offer help to individuals to make sense of the world and are used to educate children and adults about important perspectives of their culture”(1). In contemporary society, verbal folklores are not only transmitted orally, they are transferred to audience through the new technologies and digital devices. The Urhobo riddles are also part of the oral traditions that are transmitted to successive generations through the dual modes explained above. Most of the riddles convey themes and images that will be memorable in the minds of audience. Some examples are given below:

(34) Statement: *Kodo ni kere*.

Meaning : *Udo re aware* (An ancient mortar).

(35) Statement: *Ocha, kpror; ora, kpror*.

Meaning : *Oche* (Earthen pot for holding water)

(36) Ido : *Edo vo oyen ese ru vwe orore, emi bi nyo vwe orere ofa?*

Riddle : What is the sound you make in a town and it is heard in the neighbouring community?

Answer: *Owurhu* (Canon)

(37) Ido : *Mi nene owe oke neje, mi rue obo wo rue ye wo se dje obo te vwe-e, wo se muvwe-e; die ye me phan?*

Riddle : I follow you all the time and copy every move you make but you cannot touch nor catch me. What am I?

Answer: *Uphophoro* (Shadow)

The research done by World Affairs Council of Houston (2019:1) reveals that “in spite of the fact that composed history existed for centuries in West Africa, most composing was in Arabic, and the larger part of individuals did not perused or compose in Arabic. So the transmission of information, history and involvement in West Africa was basically through the verbal convention and execution instead of on composed writings.” Several words and expressions help to broaden the knowledge and communication skills of audience in socio-cultural settings. During verbal art performance, for instance, children pay keen interest to the words of the speaker and narrator, reflect on them and provide the meanings embedded in such expressions. In the course of riddling, new words are used and their meanings are disclose to listeners thereby increasing their vocabulary for public communication.

Examples of riddles of such nature are provided below.

- (38) Ido : *Orhe we yen ihwo efa vwo rue emu vre we. Onye idie?*
Riddle : It belongs to you, but other people use it more than you do. What is it?
Answer : *Ode* (Your name)
- (39) Ido : *Wo rue uvu re ugbula, urhukpe re uke, icandoro kugbe enyerhare ephan. Die onye wo ke vwo rhu taye?*
Riddle : You walk into a room that contains a match, a kerosene lamp, a candle and a fireplace. What would you light first?
Answer : *Ugbula* (The matches)
- (40) Ido : *Die oyen osa te ota-an ye osa kpahen ko we sie re wo de te ota vwo ke?*
Riddle : What cannot talk but will always reply you when spoken to?
Answer : *Egho* (Echo)
- (41) Ido : *Die onyi vwe ubiero ovo nye more ore-en?*
Riddle : What has one eye but cannot see?
Answer : *Egbede* (Needle)
- (42) Ido : *Die onyi vwe orhen re obrabra siere odedie akpor, nye ogbon vwevwerhe siere ode ghwu?*
Riddle : What smells bad when living but smells good when dead?
Answer : *Esi* (Bacon)
- (43) Ido : *Ghere ovwe ke me die akpor, nye ke vwe ame ke mi ghwu? Die onye me phan?*
Riddle : Feed me and I will live, but give me a drink and I will die. What am I?
Answer : *Erhare* (Fire)
- (44) Ido : *Oro vwe ikpe buebue re nye ovre emeravwe ovo-on.*
Riddle : It has been existence for years but it is never more than a month old. What am I?
Answer : *Emeravwe* (The moon)
- (45) Ido : *Die ye dje gharie uwewwi ye ovwe awo ro vwo ya-an?*
Riddle : What runs all around a backyard, yet has no legs to move?
Answer : *Ogba* (A fence)
- (46) Ido : *Die ye sa whra ye wo de hw eke, ome je hwe ko we?*
Riddle : If you drop me, I will crack; smile to me and I will smile back. What am I?
Answer : *Ughegbe* (A mirror).
- (47) Ido : *Ose re Omotekoro vwe emete ri yoyovwi ene: Erhuvwuna, Omotikoko and Ometejohwo. Ono ye omote re ene?*
Riddle : Omotekoro's father has four beautiful daughters: Erhuvwuna, Omotikoko and Ometejohwo. What is the name of the fourth daughter?
Answer : *Omotekoro*
- (48) Ido : *Vue vwe obo re onya ra ome ke uko, onya cha ome ke uko;*
Riddle : Tell me what stays back when coming and stays back when going.
Answer : *Ikawo* (The heels)
- (49) Ido : *Die oye wo hwe wo ki vwo rue emu?*
Riddle : What has to be broken before you can use it?
Answer : *Ukoho/Ukokodia* (An egg or a coconut)
- (50) Ido : *Die oye wo se vwirhi siere wo be toro-or eyen, wo dje obo te-en?*
Riddle : What can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?

Answer : *Ive* (A promise)

The indigenous knowledge contained in the above riddles can only be transferred to audience who understand the language both in written and spoken forms. Language is an integral part of oral traditions and it is the vehicle for communicating ideas, beliefs, feelings and norms. This view is affirmed by Abari, Oyetola and Okunuga (2013:9) who state that dialect remains the as it were implies by which instruction is actualized and traditions and convention transmitted from one era to another. In this study, audience will not only acquire information that would enhance their cognitive and communicative skills but also obtain profound knowledge of their cultural heritage for transmission to successive generations.

African Riddles in Contemporary Societies

Riddles in contemporary African societies are facing the problem of extinction like other verbal arts such as folktales, myths and legends, and the reasons for this are not farfetched.

Religious Factor

The focus of most children in modern times have been captured by religious programmes and activities at their various worship centres. They engage in quizzes, Bible or Koranic studies, picnics, camps, prayer meetings and so on. While the faith of children are being built by religious groups, the oral traditions are neglected. Some religious leaders even discourage their members from participating in cultural practices and events, regarding them as fetish, barbaric and unholy. Sometimes, sanctions are placed on religious faithful who disobeyed their clergymen. However, this depends on the magnitude of the offence committed by the members. All these have far-reaching implications on the survival of verbal arts particularly the riddles.

Education Curriculum

In the past, children were given opportunities to develop their skills of listening and speaking through storytelling but today, our school system has changed. There are no more provisions for singing, cultural dances and storytelling in our education curriculum. There is no doubt that children in most cities and towns have no indigenous knowledge of folklores and even those that do, are not given the opportunity to display their narrative skills for their classmates or peers. The human mind usually contains repressed materials that collected and stored from childhood to adulthood. So, oral traditions that are transmitted to children both at informal and formal settings have a long way to shaping the lifestyle of individuals in society.

Insecurity

The issue of insecurity is another problem that hinders the transmission of riddles and other linguistic products in most societies today. In the past, parents and children used to gather at moonlight to share stories learnt. The narrators were usually elders who have narrative skills and experience about life which they intended to transfer to younger generations. Insecurity then was at its barest minimal as everyone knew the members of every family in the community. Nowadays, parents do not allow their children or wards to keep late night because of fear of the unknown. There are increasing rates of kidnapping, robbery, rape, jealousy and so on, which prevent children from staying outdoors let alone telling stories in the neighbourhood.

Violence

Our field research has revealed that at traditional events such as festivals, song performances, dances, ritual of circumcisions and marriage ceremonies, the verbal arts of proverbs, riddles, storytelling, and so on, are predominantly deployed by elders. These folkloric forms are usually performed in the evenings after major events have been completed by celebrants and well-wishers. Today, cultural events are characterized with violence perpetuated by secret cult groups, robbers and ritualists, to mention a few. Sometimes, people see such moments as the time for revenge, leading to loss of lives and valuable property.

Death of Custodians

This is another factor that has contributed to the gradual eroding of oral traditions particularly the riddles in our modern societies. The death of custodians of folklores (verbal and non-verbal) marks the end of oral traditions in some communities especially where such people were the only ones committed to the transferring oral works to the successive generation. For instance, the death of Chief Akpomedaye Ofua who was a specialized in the performance of verbal arts like proverbs, tongue twisting and riddles is a threat to the survival of oral traditions in Urhobo society.

Complimentary Verbal Art

Riddles often serve as adjunct verbal art in traditional societies because they cannot be performed all day. For instance, children can begin moonlight plays with songs, dances, clapping, and oscillatory running within the arena before settling down to listen to myths, folktales and legendary stories. According to Awedoba (2000), “they may start with enigmas, at that point move over to stationary recreations and maybe conclusion with narrating. The time committed to enigmas is frequently brief by comparison with the telling of folktales, folktales are ordinarily respected as more curiously and energizing” (37). Riddles may be introduced into the entertainment session after the interests of the audience have been stimulated and sustained for performance.

New Media

The advent of the new media/technologies have promoted the collection and documentation of oral traditions in recent times. They have bridged the gap between the distant cities and the rural areas where oral traditions take place. People now prefer watching or listening to verbal and non-verbal folklores on television and radio instead of appearing physically at the scenes of such performances. Besides, the availability of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Internet, and so on, has shifted the attention of audience away from experiencing oral traditions in socio-cultural settings. On the contrary, the new technologies like digital video disk (DVD), MP3, Ipod, Compact Disc (CD), E-mail, and so on, have helped in the documentation and transfer of oral resources to people across the world. Even researchers can now share ideas, download oral materials and seek information through digital devices.

Popular Music and Documentation of Riddles

Cultural values and indigenous knowledge of a group of people could be documented in several ways and these include cloth design, folksongs, riddles, proverbs, dances, dramatic performances, folktales, oratory, sacred rituals, ceremonies, prayers and herbal practices, to mention a few. Apart from the documentation of riddles through the common technology of print-writing, investigation has shown that such verbal art can also be preserved through folkmusic performed by traditional musicians in contemporary societies. Among the Urhobo

of Nigeria, for instance, riddles are performed not only for documentation but for entertainment and education of listening audience in traditional societies.

Findings therefore show that since oral traditions are facing extinction in African societies particularly Urhobo land, song performers and orators are now documenting these artistic resources on their own volition. Often times, they weave some myths, folktales, proverbs and riddles into their song renditions for entertainment, education and documentation as well. The likes of Akpomedaye Ofua, Raphael Okejepha (Achonacho) and other orators have documented several oral works through song performance in audio recordings and these have been made available for people who have passion for Urhobo oral literature. The emergence of the new technologies of print-writing, audio and audio-visual media, the internet, and recently the social media platforms should not be considered as impedance to oral performances but as new development that would strengthen oral literature in general and riddle performance in particular. It is against this background that this study attempts to examine the utilitarian values of traditional riddles among the Urhobo of Nigeria with a view to promoting psychological wellbeing of individuals for the growth and development of society.

CONCLUSION

Riddles have no authorship in traditional societies as they are property of the communities where they are produced except those collected and documented or published by individuals. They are cultural materials that are shared or transmitted orally and stored in the memories for future utilization. Though the technology of print has helped in preservation and documentation of verbal arts especially the riddles, they appear to be fast eroding away from most communities owing to factors such as religion, education, insecurity, violence, new media, death of custodians, and so on. Orators have therefore deployed modern means of preservation and documentation of riddles through popular music or song performances in Urhobo society as could be experienced elsewhere.

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