



THEMATIC AND STYLISTIC STUDY OF TIV DIRGES

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Abstract

This paper studies the thematic and stylistic features of selected Tiv dirges using theoretical insights from Structuralism and Functionalist stylistics. Both fieldwork and documented literary knowledge are used to collect, transcribe, translate and structure the selected dirges which are analysed in this paper. The paper finds that Tiv dirges contain instances of creative use of language which reflect the topic of discourse and the intentionality of the song performers. Some of the commonest themes in the dirges studied in this paper include the mortality man, the inevitability of death, the high death toll in the society, partying and carousing at funerals nowadays, loss and deprivation caused by death, connivance by evil individuals to kill innocent members of the community, among others, and the need to change the status quo. A study of the choice of language in the dirges selected for this study, therefore, affords a better appreciation of the dirges in terms of their thematic concerns and Tiv eschatological worldview.

Key Words: Tiv dirges, Structuralism, Functional stylistics, communal property, loss and deprivation

Sponsored by TETFund

Introduction

It is not an overstatement that a number of Tiv oral art forms have not received scholarly attention at all. This may be due to the biased attitude of Western scholars who doubted the status of verbal art forms as a form of literature or at best, associated them with primitive people. This mentality made many scholars to ignore oral art forms as not being well developed. Consequently, new contributions and reference materials in this area have remained scarce, hence, the art of the traditional folk as well as their intelligence and contributions to the world of literature remain largely unappreciated. This has been the fate of a number of African oral art forms over time, including Tiv dirges.

Tiv dirges are a body of songs rendered by an individual or a group of people to mourn the death of loved ones, friends or other members of the community. Dirges are sober songs expressing mourning or grief, especially during funerals. According to Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdul Na 'Alla (1994:67-90), dirges are funeral poetry. Gande Simon in his study refers to them as elegiac poetry (11-14). Unfortunately, it hardly occurs to the minds of many that, dirges have salient poetic qualities worthy of serious scholarly attention. This oversight amounts to injustice to the verbal art in particular and literature in general. The foregoing makes it pertinent to beam scholarly search light on Tiv dirges to better appreciate their potentials for social harmony and cultural preservation, while also highlighting their thematic pre-occupations and stylistic qualities, among other benefits. This effort may also inspire other researchers to go into other relatively virgin areas and endangered oral art forms such as lullabies, nuptial songs, occupational songs and war songs among others, to enrich the study of literature.

Literature Review

Many Tiv scholars have worked on other Tiv oral art forms. Prominent among such works include Toryima Jenkwe's *Yanmoel Yashi: A study of Tiv oral poetry*, Akosu Adeyongo's *Aspects of Tiv oral poetry*, Nyitse Mbaiver's *Form and content*

of Tiv songs, Nave Shirga's *The Lament Motif in Obadia Okor's songs*, among many others. However, other sub-genres of Tiv oral art forms remain unexplored and relatively virgin such as nuptial songs, work songs, lullabies and Tiv dirges, among others.

In their contribution on the study of dirges, some scholars often view them from different perspectives as funeral or elegiac poetry. For instance, Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdul Na 'Alla (1994:67-90) call them funeral poetry. This study does not disagree completely with the above scholars' submissions, though they are obviously deficient because dirges have salient qualities that negate strict categorisation. However, it needs to be noted that, placing dirges under the general term of funeral poetry is too broad and unsatisfactory. This study contends that dirges have peculiar features worthy of note as it can be seen in the analytical section.

Gande Simon also in his study, refers to dirges as elegiac poetry (11-14). This submission is also too narrow to be satisfactory. This is because dirges do have elegiac features but that is not their major preoccupation. Gande further posits that "Tiv elegiac poetry is a body of songs rendered by men or women-song makers, the latter mourn the death of ordinary people and children, the former mourn the death of their patrons (11)." However, this study contends that, the disparity Gande pointed out in his study is not prominent in the performance of dirges. Death in Tiv society is usually an instance that calls for solemnity. Once death occurs in Tiv society, mourners perform dirges, irrespective of the deceased' status, age or sex. Gande's position on the elegiac poetry creates the impression that, at the funeral of prominent personalities in Tiv land, it is only the renowned singers whom the deceased people patronised during their life time who perform to mourn them. This claim is not true of Tiv dirges. Mourners, mostly women equally perform dirges when prominent people pass on.

Another contribution on the subject matter of dirges is from Tsenongu Moses. While shedding light on the differences between dirges and elegies, Tsenongu states that dirges are shorter

than elegies. Again, the subject matter of dirges is usually diversified. The emphasis here is to philosophise over death, thereby reflecting on various issues such as attacks by death, its inevitability, the helpless nature of man in the hands of death, among other issues. On the other hand, the latter (elegies) mainly eulogise the dead man's virtues. Also, dirges are only performed at wake keep nights and during the laying in state of the deceased whereas elegies are performed even after burial. Lastly, dirges have no known composers while elegies have identifiable authors (P.1-3). This study aligns with Tsenongu's position highlighted above. However, Tsenongu's position that dirges are only performed by women (2001:2) is unsatisfactory. The fact that women are predominant performers of dirges does not restrain men from participating in their rendition. Men also join the women to sing dirges at funerals and at times act as the lead singers.

Dirges and Elegies

Scholars often use dirges and elegies interchangeably in error. This study contends that the two terms mean different things in the context of oral poetry. The differences are noticeably in the areas of length, subject matter, occasion and authorship. According to Tsenongu, dirges are shorter than elegies. Again, the subject matter of dirges is usually diversified. The emphasis here is to philosophise over death. Dirges reflect various issues such as attacks by death, its inevitability, the helpless nature of man in the hands of death, among other issues. On the other hand, the latter (elegies) mainly eulogise the dead man's virtues. Also, dirges are only performed at wake keep nights and during the laying in state of the deceased whereas elegies are performed even after burials. Lastly, dirges have no known composers while elegies have identifiable authors (P.1-3).

The above views are shared in this paper as one hardly finds a Tiv poet who does not have one or two elegies among his compositions. For example, the late Oliver Aye, one of the renowned oral poets in Tiv land who hailed from Ukum Local Government of Benue state, Nigeria,

composed some elegies to mourn his friend Saakuma. Iyoughur Ute Nyaguma from Vandeikya Local Government also composed elegies to mourn late J.S Tarkaa and Faasema Zungwe, among others. Late Obadiah Kehemen Orkor also composed many elegies to mourn and lament the death of his late sister, Yavihi. Dirges and elegies are, therefore, not the same thing and must not be treated as such.

This study, therefore, analyses dirges to add to the existing literature on verbal art of the Tiv thereby bringing into limelight their salient features for better literary appreciation and by extension, Tiv oral literature generally. This effort may also stimulate other researchers to study other Tiv oral art forms that have remained unappreciated over time.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on dual theoretical insights. On the one hand is the theory of Structuralism. This theory is associated with Ferdinand de Saussure as its founder and was later developed by a French anthropologist, Claude Levi Strauss in his study of myths. This theory holds that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. In this light therefore, no work of art operates in isolation, the culture of the artist or author determines in most cases what is in the text; when the text is broken down into units, meaning is arrived at.

The relevance of this theory to this study is that, it offers insights into a people's way and perception of life and can be applied the study of the thematic and stylistic qualities of the songs in question.

On the other hand, another theory adapted for this study is Functional stylistics which is an offshoot of Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday's Functional Linguistics. The theory posits that, language choices are informed by the pragmatic intent of the language user. In other words, the language choices the language user exercises are goal oriented, reflecting the ideational, the textual and the interpersonal functions known as the metafunctions of

language. According to Patricia Canning, Functional Stylistics emphasises the pragmatic import of the formal properties of language alongside the context of a speech event, as well as the situational knowledge shared by both the speaker or the writer and the listener or the reader. She reveals further that, language is not used in a vacuum, as it does not do or mean everything in and for itself (46). Based on the foregoing insights, this study examines the choice of language in selected Tiv dirges which are performed to mourn the deceased while also philosophising over the inevitability of death, among others.

Methodology

This study uses fieldwork and library research methods. The twelve dirges studied in this paper are obtained from live performances with the aid of recording technology before being transcribed and translated in English using free translation to capture the meaning as expressed in the source language as much as possible. The choice of the songs is informed by their thematic content and stylistic features. This number of Tiv dirges is adjudged to offer sufficient textual evidence about the thematic concerns and choice of language in Tiv dirges generally.

Tiv songs hardly have titles, therefore, the first lines of each song are used as its title for ease of reference. Lineation is done based on perceived sense blocks in the songs. Also, the lines of the songs are numbered for ease of analytical

reference. Documented literary knowledge covering figures of speech, their artistic effects and other rudiments of grammar is used for analyses of the stylistic features and thematic content of the songs.

To avoid excessive bulk of text, only relevant song extracts are cited in text. The ultimate goal of analysis is to enhance a better appreciation of the literary and functional import of Tiv dirges to the society.

Thematic Appreciation of Selected Tiv Dirges

It is worthy of note that, Tiv dirges generally revolve around the people’s worldview and their social life. The Tiv worldview religiously rests on the potency of “Tsav” (witchcraft) and Mbatsav’s (witches and wizards) overwhelming power. The elders are considered wise both in natural and supernatural ways. This explains why every death is laid on their doorstep. It is for the same reason that the dirges have themes such as the universal nature of death, the helplessness of man in the hands of death, among other, which are analysed in the subheadings below.

The Universal Nature of Death

One of the themes that is conspicuous in Tiv dirges is that, death is universal and inevitable. In one of the dirges titled “Aondo noo ku gbe kuan bee...” (rain of death is flowing), death is likened to a deluge as it is captured in the following extract:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Aondo noo ku gbe kuan...	Solo: The rain of death has fallen and is flowing
Mrumun: Bee	Chorus: Bee...(Torrentially!)
Mnder: Wura noo ku gbe kuan	Solo: The rain of death has fallen and is flowing
Mrumun: Bee...	Chorus: Bee...!
Or a za ikaa Mbakine wanngom	Someone should inform Mbakine my kinsman
ior ne ar ve	This people have come
Ngom, Aondo va wura noo	My mother rain has fallen and is flowing
ngu gbe kuan bee...	bee...!

The idea of the universality of death is metaphorically captured in the above song. The high scourge of death is likened to a torrential

rainfall that causes flooding which consequently brings destruction to the whole environment. The effect of this song on the bereaved person(s) is

that, they are made to understand that death spares no one; everyone must bow to it when it comes calling, hence, their case is not a peculiar one.

Similarly, the idea of the universality of

death is also captured in a song extract titled “Cheke ken iyoun yough” (Examine your mind) as follows:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Me gba yemen ku wam Ior mbalamen mba lamem Mbadun zenden ikyu yum Azenden ikyu yum Yo sule ngu ken tiev Myila or wan ga mngu a yila or kwase ga...	Solo: As I attend funerals Gossipers keep gossiping me Mbadum keeps attending funerals She keeps attending funerals Farm work is unattended to I haven't invited anybody's child I haven't invited anybody's wife
Mrumun: Cheke ken iyoun oo... Cheke ken iyoun youghoo Ia dio yo u lam Ia dio ga oo We kpa cheken shin shima	Chorus: Examine your conscience ooo! Examine your conscience ooo! If you are free you can talk If you are not free ooo! Keep examining your conscience Let me just go ooo!
Mnder: Me gba yemen tso ooo! Man Adule zende yo sule ngu ken ityev Kpa ngu a yila or wan ga Ngu a yila or kwase ga	Adule keeps moving about leaving the farmwork unattended to But he has not invited anybody's child He has not invited somebody's wife
Mrumun: Cheke ken iyoun oo... Cheke ken iyoun youghoo Ia dio yo u lam Ia dio ga oo We kpa cheken shin shima	Chorus: Examine your conscience ooo! Examine your conscience ooo! If you are free you can talk If you are not free ooo! Have a second thought

In the above song extract, performers lament their ordeals as burial ceremonies take all their time even at the expense of their farm work due to the high incidents of deaths in the society. Consequently, they have become the subject of ridicule to gossipers. It is in response to this situation that the performers warn that all are affected by the scourge of death; no one should laugh at another person. Examining one's

conscience as captured in the response draws attention to the universality of death, hence, the bereaved person(s) should take solace in the fact that death spares no one.

In another dirge titled “Chigh ki ga’ (No medication), performers also decry the inevitable nature of death. The following extract illustrates this:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Ka han shi me za?	Solo: Where else shall I go?
Mrumun: Chigh ki ga	Chorus: No medication!
Mnder: Kyemisi je kpa mza	Solo: I have been to the chemist
Mrumun: Chigh ki ga Mbatyev wamaa..	Chorus: No medication my dear Mbatyav!
Mnder: Makurdi kpa mza	Solo: I have been to Makurdi
Mrumun: Chigh ki ga	Chorus: No medication!

Mnder: Sha Donga kpa mza

Solo: I have been to Donga

Mrumun: Chigh ki ga Mbatyev wamaa

Chorus: No medication my dear Mbatyav!

In the above song, the inevitable nature of death is highlighted in the poet persona who rhetorically asks where there is cure for death? The chorus answers the question posed by the poet persona through inference that there is no medicine for death. The fact that death has no medicine is, as such, stressed. No matter the number of places one goes looking for medication, death is inevitable as seen in the call where mention is made of the several places being visited in search of medication to no avail. The above dirge is a

short song comprising only eight (8) lines but it has a slow and steady rhythm which makes it easy for the audience and even the bereaved persons to memorise. This goes a long way in consoling them that death is an inevitable end for everyone. This, Chirzendan attests to when he says “you only treat sickness and not death” (39).

Another dirge which bemoans the onslaught of death is a song titled “Ku Mir Msorum” (death has thrown a festivity).

Tiv

Mnder: Ku mir msorum m ngu lohon (2X)

English

Solo: Death has thrown a party (2x)

Mrumun: Hanma or a kende yongu sha

Chorus: All should raise their cups

Mder: I too popo

Solo: Fill the cups to the brim

Mrumun: I na mba ken uya kpa ve ma.

Chorus: Give even the unborn to take

Ahee!

Ahee! (A distress call)

Ityo yam Mbakine,

My kinsmen of Mbakine

Ka anti u tseghe?

Who does it spare?

U loho caca o

It has invited all

Hanma or a ma keng keng.

All must drink

In the above song, the universal and the inevitable nature of death is metaphorically likened to a drinking festivity hosted by death. Invitation to this festivity cuts across all manner of people irrespective of their ages. That is why the response asserts that, even the unborn children are to partake in the drinking spree.

death to humans as it spares no one. Everyone must partake of this “drink” and feast. The motif of the inevitability and universality of death runs through all the songs as it affects everybody irrespective of one’s age, sex or status.

It is interesting to note here that, Tiv dirges are inundated with powerful use of personifications which gives life to this art form. For instance, in the expression “death has thrown a festivity,” death” is given the human ability to throw a festivity where attendance is by compulsion; all humans must attend, eat and drink. The choruses assert the inevitability of

The supremacy of God

The Tiv people believe in and revere God as the most powerful being who is the creator of heaven and earth. Similarly, death is considered second only to God. In other words, apart from God, death is the greatest. The above is the subject matter in the following song extract titled ‘Aondohemba’ (God is supreme):

Tiv

Mnder: Oo a o a yoo

English

Solo: Oo a oo ayooo!

Or hembe ku yo ngu hana?

Who is above death?

Aondo hembra inja, cir oo

God is the greatest, followed by the soil

Mnder: Oo a o a yoo

Solo: Oo a oo ayooo!

Or hembe ku yo ngu hana?

Who is immortal?

Aondo hembra inja, cir oo	God is supreme, followed by the ground
Mnder: Va nan azenga a kuugh	Solo: Give me the straws of death
Aondo sen kende se jinga I	God has given us the straw of death
kuugh ve!	
Mrumun: Ayo oo... ku yo u hembra	Chorus: Ayoo! death is mighty
Aondo hembra sha won ve!	But God is the almighty
E ku u wua Mbadim	Death has taken Mbadim
Wan Kera ngu zeoo...	The daughter is no more
Aondo hembra nya icir oo...	God is supreme, followed by the ground

In the song above, God is believed to be supreme. It is God who created death, that all men must die. The Tiv people’s philosophy about death is seen as a relay race where the first athlete passes the baton to the next person at a point and the person given continues till all the athletes participate in the race with each person taking his or her turn. It is against this background that the call in lines 7 and 8 metaphorically refers to the incidents of death as the “straw of death.” When death, like the Supreme God, is personified as taking Mbadim’s child, the bereaved person(s) can only ask in the rhetoric “what can one do?” which by implication is an acknowledgement of the supremacy of God.

is seen as an omen. This notion is known as “bi” (omen or premonition). An omen is a sign that evil is about to happen to a person or family members. This happens through various means like the hooting of the owl at night, mysterious loose of money, nocturnal animals or creatures seen at odd times and a host of other things. These mystical creatures can be animals like the chameleon crossing one’s path, a toad crossing one’s path in the day time, a squirrel crossing one’s path as well as a crab crossing one’s path at day time. East reports of the Tiv that “the thing they fear most is the chameleon, anyone who finds one of these in his path will certainly turn back” (136). It is against this background that the song titled “Avungu Hine Shin Akongo” (hooting owls at the backyard) takes its source from. It is captured thus:

Premonition

The Tiv people’s belief in ‘tsav’ affects their psyche to the extent that sight of strange animals

Tiv	English
Mnder: Avungu hine shin akongo	Solo: The awls hoot at the backyard
Mrumun: Ikpu kpu kpu eee	Chorus: Ikpu-kpu -kpu eee
Mnder: Avungu hine shin akongo	Solo: The awls hoot at the backyard
Mrumun: Ikpu kpu kpu eee	Chorus: Ikpu-kpu -kpu eee
Nga a eren nahan yo	When they behave lie this
Onov Mbakine songo or kende	Mbakine kinsmen have slaughtered somebody
Ka u nana mough ga ooo	That person will not survive ooo
Yange la yo or a kpe keng keng	That day somebody must die

The Tiv believe that nocturnal animals/birds such as the owl have mystical links with witches/wizards. As such, when an owl is heard hooting at one’s backyard, it assumes a serious meaning that death is imminent, hence,

fear grips people once the hooting sounds are heard.

The same message is found in another song titled “**Mza Lobi**” (I went to Lobi). It is captured below:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Mza Lobi mgbe hidyen oo(4x)	Solo: On my way back from Lobi (4x)

M ungwa kwagh uva tseghe tseghe tseghe	I heard something moving tseghe! tseghe! tseghe!
Tso m tile dong Mtamber too yo	As I stood still I waited for a while
M ungwa Mela tehe hough gbuku!	I heard Mela coughing “gbuku!”
Ggbuku la injia na yo kpolum kyua A kporun yo a wua or tsembelee ...	“Gbuku” means draw nearer As I drew nearer he has killed somebody
Mrumun: Mza Lobi mgbe hidyen oo(4x)	Chorus: On my way back from Lobi (4x)
M ungwa kwagh uva tseghe tseghe tseghe	I heard something moving tseghe! tseghe! tseghe!
Tso m tile dong Mtamber too yo	As I stood still I waited for a while
M ungwa Mela tehe hough gbuku!	I heard Mela coughing “gbuku!”
Gbuku la injia na yo kpolum kyua A kporun yo a wua or tsembelee ...	“Gbuku” means draw nearer As I drew nearer he has killed somebody

Here again, the belief that witches/wizards lay in wait for their target victim is made known. In this song the mourners through the use of the idiophone “Tseghe” “Tseghe” and “gbuku gbuku” which are onomatopoeic in nature capture the movement of the wizard as well as his coughing as he steps on dry leaves, supposedly in a forested area while on an eerie mission. The poet persona tells us that she was coming back from Lobi market when she discovered that, Mela, (a supposed wizard and elder in the family) had laid in wait for an intended victim. She heard the noise and stood still for a while and the cough indicated that someone should come closer. Before then, he (Mela) had already killed somebody. This, to

them shows that anytime they hear such a cough or noise, it is a premonition of death.

Human vices: Mbatsav’s motivational cause for killing

The Tiv people believe also that, in human existence, people are believed to harbour within them vices such as envy, covetousness, hatred, jealousy and mischief among other vices. It is believed that when “ormbatsv” harbours these vices against an individual, such an individual becomes a target to be killed. The song below titled “**Ior mban mba zanden Imongo**” (These people walk together) illustrates this as it can be seen in the extract below:

Tiv:
Mnder: Ior mban zua mba zanden
imongo
Mrumun: Ior ne zua mba zanden aguve aguve
Mnder: Ior mban zua mba zanden
imongo
Mrumun: Ior ne zua mba zanden aguve aguve
Mnder: Ior mban zua mba zanden imongo
Mrumun: Ihom zanden vea ifer man anger

English
Solo: These persons are friends (2x)
Chorus: These friends move about like Eagles
Solo: These persons are friends (2x)
Chorus: These friends move about like
eagles
Solo: These people are friends
Chorus: Enmity is friends with wickedness
gossips

Man iyuhwe Kua mzaiyol mba zenden
imongo (2x)
Ior mban zua mba zenden aguve aguve

Jealousy and mischief are friends

This people move together like
eagles

In the above song extract, mourners decry the collaborative manner with which people who harbor these vices can attack their victims. These vices are further personified as they walk together (as friends would), committing atrocities together as it is captured in these words “enmity walks with mischief slander and envy including troubles” the idea being emphasized here is that, the thought of killing another person can only come to fruition if

and when the collaborators are mischievous, slanderous and envious. When the target victim is killed, the perpetrators now walk about boastfully that they have “done it”.

In other instances, dirges express the hardheartedness of the “Mbatsav” who kill and still have the courage to boast of their wicked exploits. The following extract from the song titled “**Ingin Kule ve**” (This is over) reveals this:

Tiv

Mnder: Asema oooo
Ingin kure ve
Ior mba asema a yen ve la
Wan nyor ver ian ve

Mrumun: Asema oooo
Ingin kure ve
Ior mba asema a yen ve la
Wan nyor ver ian ve
Or a yam mato ga yô
Mase shin ican inan

English

Solo: Asema ooo!
This is over
To those ill-wishers
He has gone given room for you

Solo: Asema ooo!
This is over
To those ill-wishers
He has gone given room for you
If one can't buy a car
It is one's share ineptitude

Here again, people who have evil minds, that is, those that harbour vices such as anxiety, envy, jealousy and hatred among other vices to the extent of killing others believe that, once their target victim is no more, they would be at rest. The lead singer informs the collaborators (the witches and wizards) who have killed the deceased that, those of them whose hearts are full of envy and covetousness, the deceased is no more but it is only a matter of time; they will also follow suit. In

other words, this is to tell them that even though they have succeeded in killing the deceased, death is no respecter of persons, one day they too will enter the grave. The response agrees that, this has come to an end, the perpetrators who, out of jealousy, envy or covetousness as a result of the deceased's progress/should have a rest of mind now; if they are not able to acquire much now that he is no more, then shame on them.

Tiv

Mnder: Ate u vingir oo
Me vaa (2xs)
Mbayuhwev se ge ge oo
Mrumun: Ate u vingir orti va wura ga
tso a noo
Ayough gba mbakwav ve
Onov mba yuhwev tema
mbera sen la oo (2x)

English

Solo: For a reception hut oo!
I cry (2x)
The jealous people are joyful
Chorus: The reception hut, no signs of rain but
it has fallen
The houses of the age mates have
collapsed
The children of the jealous are there
laughing (2x)

From the above, one can deduce that it's the same motivational reason for killing someone that is captured here as well.

Death as a merry making event in Tiv society

One of the impacts of western civilization on Tiv culture is that, burial ceremonies have now become occasions for merry-making. Gone are the days when the death loved ones were periods

of mourning, abstinence and starvation. Currently, the occurrence of death usually calls for celebration where people go, not to mourn with the bereaved but to eat and drink. Other people even before they pass on, instruct their children to give people a lot of food to eat. This theme is common in a number of dirges. One of the dirges titled 'Ayange me kpe' (when I die) is an instance:

Tiv :

Mnder: Ayange me kpe

Mrumun: Ior I saa ica

Mnder: Me ayange me kpe

Mrumun: Or a de ve ga

Mngu a kwagh u yan ga

Mder Ka or a kpe yoo

Mrumun: Ior I zaan ayemee...

Mba a za songo ivo

Or u nan woo ivo ga

Ku unan u gba kwagh ga!

English:

Solo: When I die!

Chorus: People should stay away

Solo: I said when I die

Chorus: Nobody should come

I have no food (2x)

Solo: When someone dies...

Chorus: People rush there

To go and slaughter goats

He who did not slaughter a goat

Holds a miserable burial ceremony

Here, the poet persona through sarcasm says that when she dies, people should stay away because she has no food to give them. The implication of this is that once death occurs, people are more concerned with the food and meat that will be served particularly if the deceased person has people who will provide this, but not really to commiserate with the bereaved persons. On the contrary, any deceased person whose relations lack the means to provide food at his persons funeral, people will not attend such funerals in

numbers. It is on this note that the women singers through the use of sarcasm lampoon the Tiv society of today for this act. The aim for all this is to make people see reason and bring back that communal living of yesteryears where people truly shared in one another's grief.

In another dirge titled "Na iwer" (Bring food), performers of dirges ridicule the people who attend burials only to pester the bereaved to offer them food, as it can be seen in the following extract:

Tiv:

Mnder: ka or a kpe i yila nan oo (2x)

Mrumun: Via wam na iwer

Mder: Ne tim ior ne bee ve!

Mrumun: na iwer

Mnder: ne tim ior ne bee ve

Mrumun: Na iwer

Or kpen due gema na iwer

Songo iyongo kua igo I tamen

Kongoso ityo na na bua

English:

Solo: When someone dies he is called upon(2x)

Chorus: Via bring food!

Solo: You have finished destroying all the people

Chorus: Bring food!

Solo: You have finished destroying all the people

Chorus: Bring food!

The deceased has brought food

The fat sheep and pig have been slaughtered

The kinsmen are offered a cow

The above song extract lampoons the Tiv society of today which is so gluttonous that when someone dies, they still call on such a person to

give food. The song continues that a dead man gives food, slaughters a sheep, a pig and finally gives his kinsmen a cow. The essence of the song

is to ridicule the Tiv society against their overdependence on celebration at burials and calls for a change of attitude.

Stylistic Features of Some Tiv Dirges

Tiv dirges have salient stylistic features.

Tiv

Mnder: Aondo noo ku gbe kuan...

Mrumun: Bee

Mnder: Wura noo ku gbe kuan

Mrumun: Bee...

English

Solo: The rain of death has fallen and is flowing

Chorus: Bee...(Torrentially!)

Solo: The rain of death has fallen and is
flowing

Chorus: Bee...!

In the above extract, death which is an abstract noun is personified as having the ability to flow like water. This, coupled with the ideophonic expression “bee” (torrentially) creates a virtual picture of a deluge or flood which is unstoppable and spears nothing in its way. This choice of language effectively paints the picture of the inevitability of death, no matter one’s status.

Additionally, the belief in the inevitability of death is emphasised and re-emphasised through repetition. The solo lines “Aondo noo.../ Wura noo” are both structurally similar and semantically synonymous and declarative of a

In one of the songs titled “Aondo noo ku gbe kuan bee...” (The rain of death is flowing), the sense of a deluge is created in the choice of language used as it can be seen in the following extract:

universal truth. The repetition of the open-mouthed expression “Bee” as the choral lines, apart from emphasising the inevitability of death, additionally establishes the communal nature of dirges by encouraging communal participation through its simplicity and ease of performance. The metrical effect of the choral expression further heightens the musicality the song. This much is the artistic value of the choice of language in the song in question.

In another song titled “Na Iwer” (Bring Food), the choice of language used is also worthy of note as it can be seen in the following extract:

Tiv:

Mnder: ka or a kpe i yila nan oo (2x)

Mrumun: Via wam na iwer

Mder: Ne tim ior ne bee ve!

Mrumun: na iwer

English:

Solo: When someone dies he is called upon(2x)

Chorus: Via bring food!

Solo: You have finished destroying all the people

Chorus: Bring food!

In the above extract, as the song performers ridicule the situation where funeral ceremonies have become avenues of festivity, the choice of language consciously reflects this. The first solo line:” ka or a kpe i yila nan oo / When someone dies he is called upon” is a passivised expression indicative of a widespread disposition in the society which cannot be tied to a particular person, group or even an institution. In other words, the choice of this depersonalised expression implies that everybody is culpable. This is deliberately repeated for emphasis to call attention to a vice that needs to be condemned. The choral lines in the above extract are also

structurally similar and semantically synonymous. In the first instance, a null subject “via” is used. The choice of this contemplative term in the subject’s position stylistically suggests open-endedness and can refer to anybody accordingly. This is similarly conveyed in the subjectless second choral line where any proper name can fit in. The overall stylistic effect of this choice of language is to expose for satiric purpose the social anomaly in the society with a view to reverting to the good old days when death of a loved one or neighbour called for deep mourning and empathy with the bereaved.

A similar situation can be seen in the

following extract from a song titled “Or hembe ku yo ngu hana” (Who is greater than death?):

Tiv	English
Mnder: Oo a o a yoo Or hembe ku yo ngu hana? Aondo hembra inja, cir oo	Solo: Oo a oo ayooo! Who is immortal? God is the greatest, followed by the ground
Mnder: Oo a o a yoo Or hembe ku yo ngu hana? Aondo hembra inya, cir oo	Solo: Oo a oo ayooo! Who is immortal? God is supreme, followed by the ground

The first solo line in the above extract is a guttural expression which is usually used to express despondency and helplessness when death takes a toll. The second line in the solo rhetorically calls attention to the inevitability of death. “Death” in line 2 and “the ground” in line 3 are synonyms which are second only to God. The effect of this choice of language is that, death is inevitable as everybody will eventually die and be buried in the

ground which never gets filled up as long as death is never tired of taking people. The same choice of words is repeated in the chorus for emphasis. Repetition in this context also makes the song easy enough for general participation.

In another dirge titled “Iorban Zua Mbazenden Imongu” (These Persons are Friends), the choice of language is equally worthy of note as the following extract reveals:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Ior mban zua mba zenden imongo Mrumun: Ihom zanden vea ifer man anger gossips Man iyuhwe Kua mzaiyol mba zenden imongo (2x) Ior mban zua mba zenden aguve aguve eagles	Solo: These people are friends Chorus: Enmity is friends with wickedness Jealousy and mischief are friends This people move together like

In the above extract, the dominant literary technique is the use of personification. Human vices such as enmity “ihom,” wickedness “ifer” and angee “backbiting” are addressed as “ior” (persons) who are mutual friends in a triadic relationship. This presupposes that, the presence of one implies the presence of others as they are mutually interdependent. Similarly, the duo of envy “iyuhe” and problems “mzeiyol” are also mutually interdependent. This choice of language has a virtual appeal on the listeners and makes the

message a graphic reality. Their movement is later described using the ideophonic coinage “aguve-aguve” which is suggestive of swiftness and lack of restraint in the manner the eagle soars in the sky. This choice of language enables the audience to perceive these personalities moving together in connivance to take a soul as a concrete reality.

Furthermore, in another song titled “Avungu Hine Shin Akongu” (The owls Hoot at the Backyard), the choice of language used is quite distinctive as the above extract illustrates:

Tiv	English
Mnder: Avungu hine shin akongo Mrumun: Ikpu kpu kpu eee	Solo: The awls hoot at the backyard Chorus: Ikpu-kpu -kpu eee
Mnder: Avungu hine shin akongo Mrumun: Ikpu kpu kpu eee	Solo: The awls hoot at the backyard Chorus: Ikpu-kpu -kpu eee
Nga a eren nahan yo Onov Mbakine songo or kende	When they behave lie this Mbakine kinsmen have slaughtered somebody

Ka u nana mough ga ooo

That person will not survive ooo

“Ikpu kpu kpu eee” found in the choral lines in the above extract are onomatopoeic expressions which are suggestive of the sounds the owls make. This sound is frightening as it is believed to be the premonition of evil. Those meaning suggestive expressions are repeated to emphasise the presence of the sinister forces of darkness with the sole aim of destroying human lives. The performers see through all this which eventually culminates in slaughtering a neighbour. This choice of language has a strong appeal on the human sense of hearing as well as sight, the effect of which is to satirise the people of Mbakine for taking sides with witches and wizards to kill people in the community. The motive behind this choice of language is, therefore, to sue for change.

Findings of the Study

A study of the thematic concerns and stylistic features of the dirges studied in this paper reveals that, dirges have functional import to the society and this is achieved through the choice of language used. This suggests that, the choice of language is not incidental but reflects the thematic concerns and the oral performers intentionality. Satiric choice of language is used to call attention to the prevalence of partying and carousing at burial ceremonies, the general decline in the spirit of communal ethos and the unguarded activities of witches and wizards. Also, bereavement and loss of the sense of empathy, among others, are equally reflected in the choice of language thereby revealing the functional nature of the dirges for condolence and social commentary.

Additionally, this study reveals that dirges are usually crafted in simple language that is suitable for communal participation. The antiphonal structure of the dirges further suggests that they are communal property and the inevitable medium through which the people express their beliefs and eschatological worldview.

Conclusion

Tiv dirges contain instances of creative use of language. The linguistic choices often reflect the

topic of discourse and the intentionality of the song performers. Some of the commonest themes in the dirges studied in this paper include the mortality man, the inevitability of death, the high death toll in the society, partying and carousing at funerals nowadays, loss and deprivation caused by death, connivance by evil individuals to kill innocent members of the community, among others. A study of the choice of language in the dirges selected for this study, therefore, affords a better appreciation of the dirges in terms of their thematic and stylistic potentials.

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