ORAL TRADITIONS AS ALTERNATIVE LITERATURE: AN EXAMINATION OF TECHNIQUES AND NARRATIVE FEATURES IN TANGLE FOLKTALES

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Abstract
Each culture has its own forms, techniques and narrative style of folktale oral rendition. Folktales have been an important oral art form used in educating and entertaining the citizens of the concerned culture. It reflects the social and political milieu of particular times and place, and reflects the people’s culture and world view. In Tangle society, folktales constitute a form of entertainment, relaxation and education for the child. This art form is told by the fireside in the harmattan or dry season, between December and February, a time also when there is little farm work and hence no necessity for sleeping early. Folktales in Tangle tradition are in various forms. While there are dilemma tales others are etiological in nature. However, little systematic interest has been taken in the study of folktales in Africa and Tangle society in particular. Though isolated instances have been recorded, this has been carried out without any meaningful discussion of the techniques and narrative styles. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to understudy the techniques, content and narrative traditions of the Tangle folktales of the people of Billiri and Akko Local Government Areas of Gombe State, Nigeria. Most of the data used for this discourse are generated through a careful field work –where more than twenty (20) folktales were collected and later on few of tales were selected for this study. Tape recording and non-directive interview method were used to collect data. Besides that, library research and internet search were employed as latest source of information. Lastly, the paper finds out that modern education, which provides secular, pluralistic and egalitarian values is deficient in many ways; therefore there is urgent need to embrace oral tradition which fills this gap by inculcating universal, humanistic and Tangle values. The paper recommends that government should promote, document and disseminate the study of folktales through funding of research in this art form.

Keywords: Oral Traditions, Alternative literature, Techniques, Narrative features, Folktales

Introduction
In and outside Nigeria, the status of folk narratives has been deplored by almost everyone who has been concerned about it. For instance, folklorist like Darah, Okpewho, Bamgbose, Olatunji and the likes have described it as underrated, ignored and neglected. This study proposes to prove that whereas folktale traditions in Nigeria are relatively old, the present
The position of research on folktales is unsatisfactory. Hence, this study hopes to focus and provide a significant contribution to Orature study in Nigeria particularly as no systematic study of Tangle folktales (to the best knowledge of the researcher) has yet been done. There is, at the moment, a dearth of criticism of the Tangle folktales. The situation is fundamentally attributable to the non-recognition of the folktales as a form worthy of serious attention in our education system. Therefore, the significance of this paper lies in the exploration of the techniques and narrative features inherent in Tangle folktales; to give Tangle folktales a proper critical attention. The paper therefore attempts to address the following research questions: (a) Is the Tangle folktale tradition still observed and upheld by the people today? (b) What are the features and the techniques inherent in Tangle folktales? (c) What were the modes of performance of these tales? (d) What rich cultural values do the Tangle folktales offer?

Folktale is one of the forms of Nigerian folklore. Others include myth, legend, proverb, aphorism, reminiscence, anecdote and joke. In the main, folktales comprise various kinds of narrative prose literature found in oral traditions of the world. They are [told], heard, remembered and [as well as] subject[ed] to various alterations in the course of retelling (Kehinde 2010:1). Folktales have been given many definitions by many scholars of different orientations. Its definition depends on its functions in a society and the way the narrator and the audience think of it at the time of performance. For instance, according to F.B.O Akporobaro, folktale is:

an imaginative narrative (story) in prose form. The story that constitutes a folktale may have a basis in real life, but generally the story is an imaginative recreation of a memorable experience that is intended essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience. A folktale may be believed. Generally, however, they are considered to be untrue stories, and hence not object of serious belief (2001:4).

However, M.H Abrams provides a more concise and technical definition of folktale. According to him, “a folktale, strictly defined, is a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship, which has been transmitted orally” (5). This means that a folktale is imaginative: it is in prose form, its authorship is anonymous, and it is orally transmitted across ages. Edward Quinn defines folktales as:

A story handed down orally from generation to generation that becomes part of the tradition of a group of people. Oral transmission allows for continuing development and alteration of the story. Once a folktale assumes a written form, it remains a folktale, but its form becomes fixed. The folktale may include a wide range of types including the fable, fairy tale, legend and myth (2001:6).

On a similar note, John Hagan provides a comprehensive and critical list of the technical features of folktales:

It has a literary convention expressed in the scheme of formal features: the introductory statements; the body of the tale interspersed with songs; the moral or etiological conclusion; the narrator–audience interaction; the use of language characterized chiefly by repetition and resort to ideophones; the role of songs to punctuate sections of the story and to advance the plot in some cases.
This form of story-telling takes place in the evening, the bedtime and the twilight. Actually, it is a taboo in many societies to spin folktales in day time: “the mother of the story teller will turn into a hen if she/he performs during the day”. For the Tangle people, to the best of my knowledge; folktales are also forbidden during the day time possibly because if folktales were told in the day time most children will not be there to carry out their daily house chores. Therefore, “a bird could perch on the person’s head involved in the narration” if done during the daytime. However, this is just a fictive belief which is uttered as form of deterrence or to scare the children, or an attempt to compel them to respect the tradition.

It is convenient, therefore, to state that folktales generally are replete with inherited wisdoms, social, personal and moral values. According to Sony Camara’s *Manding Informants* (1978:6) “African stories are neither a record of reality nor pure fantasy. Although they are stories that happened at the beginning of time, “they describe things as they happen today”.

Folktales also interpret the experiences of the ordinary person from birth to death and beyond. For example, the grizzly story of hornbill dwells on the stress laid on custom among Nigerians. This story delves into what happens when a community member loses sight of how traditions tie its members together. Once the hornbill lived in a village, but it would not conform to the customs of his people, most especially his refusal to attend burial rites. Hence, the story’s pedagogical importance includes the shared concerns of community cooperation of energy needed in forging community (Kehinde, 2010).

However, not all stories are utilized in teaching virtues, as there are some that are ambiguous or contain vices rather than virtues. Plato and Socrates observed that stories to be used in teaching should be selected with utmost care.

Then should we be so careless to allow children to hear just any story made up by anyone who comes along, taking ideas into their minds that are the exact opposite of the ones they should have when they grow up?(10).

It is paramount, that stories for the children should be selected and be screened. This is done with a view to avoid those stories that may impact negatively on the morals of the youths. It is an obvious fact that some stories are better left out because they contain a lot of vices, and some teach ills. Patrick Ebewo in Kehinde (2010:11) commented on this:

_The emphasis on the telling, teaching (especially at the primary school level), and the enjoyment of tales involving tricksters, and their nefarious activities might be a contributory factor to the present corruption and indiscipline in our society because of the psychic effect those stories may have on the young individuals._

Thus, some folktales have the potential of breeding indiscipline and immorality in society. If not carefully illustrated, some folktales may mould children’s characters to become bullies, aggressors, con artists and selfish individuals. However, if well and carefully employed, folktales stand as useful tools of socialization and celebration of communal ethos and pantheons (Kehinde 2010:4) Kaschula adds that, “Oral literature exists only insofar as society allows it to exist” (12). Ebewo(2005:13) also concurs with Kaschula’s view:

_Fascinating stories with unambiguous moral lessons for the good health of society should continue to flourish in African communities and schools because folktales are important arms of African culture, and we cannot afford to dismiss them with a wave of the hand._
Methodology

The data for this study was drawn with the combination of a number of both the primary methods and secondary methods of data collection, namely: the researchers own knowledge as members of Tangle community. Being members of the Tangle community gave the researchers an intuitive grasp of the Tangle culture that could be utilised to gain useful information from informants. The researcher did not rely only on the assistance and insights of other community members but also embarked on a field study—where twenty (20) folktales narrative sessions were witnessed and collected from various regions within the Tangle community. Tapes recording and non-directive interview method was used to collect data. Secondary sources which have used by the researcher are library research and internet search where latest information was supplied. Others secondary sources are books, articles from journals and dissertations.

Contents of Tangle Folktales

Tangle folktales contain animals, plants, fairies and fictitious characters having human attributes such as the ability to think, and talk as humans, and sometimes work and walk on two legs. “The many feats and antics credited to them tend to provide fun for the children especially as most of such characters are known to them in appearance and habits” (Oriloye and Ojo 2010:173). However, the amount of amusement a child can derive from a folktale would largely depend on the narrative capabilities of the narrator. There are short stories in which all actions and whatever conflicts generated in the story is resolved in a single plot. In Tangle folktales, there are stories that may or may not be accompanied by a song. Stories that are not accompanied by any song however, tend to be dry and uninteresting to the audience whereas those told with song accompaniments allow the audience to participate and reduce boredom. There are however stories with songs that are designed to lead into such stories by containing germs and specs of the story proper. There are tricksters stories in which a relatively smaller animal tricks and renders a much bigger and stronger one stupid. In such stories, the trickster performs his antics on the larger animal as a form of entertainment in the traditional society. The trickster is therefore considered the most paradoxical of all characters: the creator and destroyer, prosecutor and judge, giver and negator. He always dupes and he too is sometimes duped or fooled. There are stories that have more than one or two plots. The narrator is also challenged to knit all the different plots into an organic one that is sequential. There are folktales which are designed to provide explanations for why certain things are the way they are. This category of tales is known as etiological tales. Though the explanations they contain may lack scientific proof, they succeed at satisfying the curiosity of the child about the why’s and whereabouts of certain things.

Tangle folktales are told strictly according to local conventions in respect of narration, audience and the time and context of performance. Among the Tangle, story-telling is practiced as a form of entertainment. Sometimes the audience clap to the rhythms of the accompanying songs. However, a narrator may draw on her/his own experience to add some detail and vividness to demonstrate her/his literary astuteness. This could make it dramatic.

The language of Tangle folktales is very simple and straight forward unlike the complexities found in adult discourse. This relative simplicity could be explained in terms of the limited vocabulary of the child, his incomplete usage and his limited experience of life. Since the art of story-telling is designed for the child-audience, it is only logical that its vocabulary should be couched in simple, straight forward language so that he/she can easily understand both the contents and the instruction it is meant to convey to him/her. However, this does not mean
that the language must always remain monotonously plaintive. Linguistic devices and other narrative techniques are employed to make the narrative less prosaic and memorable to the child. Such device includes the use of songs, ideophones, onomatopoeia, allusions, metaphors, obscure terms as well as dramatic dialogue.

An accomplished narrator might employ impressive passes in which he/she could describe and paint characters and objects by his/her emotions and tones thereby using his/her narrative skills present vivid and imaginative pictures that induce different shades of meaning in the audience. Therefore, the audience could “see” quite familiar pictures of the characters as they go through the actions being described is being watched on stage live or on the screen. However, since not all narrators possess the same narrative skill, the achievement of a successful narration would vary from one narrator to the other.

**Opening Formula**

Oriloye and Ojo (2010) state that: “the frequent use of formulas is designed to enhance the literary effects of the performances. It also helps to set both the narrator and audience in the proper frame of mind for the story telling exercise (174). This means that the opening formula is meant to excite the audience. However, there are various choices of the plethora of the formula accorded to different folktales in different communities of different countries. For instance, the Wolof folktales commence with an opening formula, where the story teller increases the volume and raises the pitch of his/her voice and intones by saying: there was a story. The audience respond with normal voice and pitch: ‘Our legs are crossed’, or ‘we are sitting down and ready’, then the story teller say: it happened here. The audience replies: it was so.

Among the Siwindhe when the grandmother is satisfied that everyone has arrived, she calls the house to silence by saying:

“Let the house go grazing. Let the house go to the end. Let the house come to the centre. Let the house be dead silent’.

After this, everyone is aware that the narrative session has begun. It is usually the grandmother who tells the first story or asks for a volunteer (Mota 2009:38). Miruka notes that once the audience assents the narrator sets off on a quest to transport everyone into the world of make-believe, the world of suspense, of eliciting sorrow and joy, the world of satire and allegory, and the world of long and short adventures. In the course of the narration, the audience pays close attention and instinctively reinforces the process by giggling at a funny point, exclaiming in surprise, clicking in disgust, lamenting at the suffering of the hero/heroine, or doing whatever relates to the changing mood of the story, so long as it accords the flow of the narrative and leaves the narrative tension intact. For the people of Ekiti, the opening formula however varies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator: Mo waa ro o</th>
<th>Audience: Tereja</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator: Mo waa ro, waa ro, waa ro Mo de le Ijapa Tiroko Oko Yannibo</td>
<td>Narrator: I searched for a tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience: Tereja</td>
<td>Audience: Teraja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator: I searched, searched and searched for a tale (until) I got to the house of Ijapa Tiroko Husband of Yannibo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The narrator is at liberty to repeat the first line while the audience continues to answer until she/he is satisfied that she/he has secured the attention of the children. Yet another version of the above formula is as follows:
Narrator: Alo ooo
Audience: Aa looo
Narrator: Aloi da “Paa” Oro “Tijo oo” O so “gudugudu” meje Oku agho “gbit” ale Anse won-won-won s’ndi upon

Narrator: I have a story
Audience: A folktale
Narrator: My tale breaks “paa”
It hangs “tijo oo” it breaks
Seven big fruits each of which falls “ebii” to the ground. My tale breaks on Anasin Oyere the one with beaded ladle.

The Tangle opening formula for Sindi (folktale) is rendered thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator: Dig ma?</th>
<th>Audience: Diggo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator: Ma ipp sum orop gu ka wanagu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum orop gon nang?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum mejin nang?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience: Sum orop non...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sum menon...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When this is done, everyone is certain that the narrative session has begun and the tale was about to start.

Closing Formula
The closing formula is used to round off a narrative. For instance; the Tangle closing formula for folktales is uttered by the narrator as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator: Sindi ka likidik, or</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator: Sindi ka manji mene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator: Are you seated?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience: we are seated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator: what is your spouse’s name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the name of your wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the name of your husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My wife’s name is...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband name is...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Songs
The frequent occurrence of songs in folktales is confirmed by Finnegan (1970:374) remarks that, “songs are characteristics of African tales all over the continent”. Therefore, most stories are accompanied by songs which constitute a part of the narrative core or are sometimes used just to ensure audience participation thereby eliminating boredom.

The audience constitutes the chorus. The accompanying songs could be in the form of lead-chorus, call-response or dialogue. Themearne (1913) in Oriloye and Ojo (2010:176) informs us that: “speeches by animal characters are often sung; sometimes in falsetto and always with a nasal twong”. Again, Doke (1934) in Oriloye and Ojo(2010:176) emphasizes that: “They (songs) do not occur in every story and in some cases; there are local distinction between prose and choric series”.

Stories without songs usually sound dry and bare as they might not be easily distinguished from the ordinary everyday speech or conversation. In some stories, the songs constitute the main elements of the story (176). Generally, in folktales songs are said to perform entertainment functions by guaranteeing audience participation in the process of storytelling. Thus, rather than being passive the audience becomes participatory. However, sometimes the singing aspect does not involve the use of any musical instrument beside

Hand clapping. Also no dancing to the rhythm of the songs is allowed for instance in Ekiti culture.
A large corpus of Tangle folktales/stories is punctuated with songs. The Tangle tales songs (to the best of my knowledge) are usually sung by the narrator alone rather than being shared between a narrator and the audience. This assertion is based on my field experience and over twenty storytelling sessions I have witnessed. The songs are designed to ensure a rapport between the storyteller and his audience, and this is maintained from the beginning of the tale with its formulaic introduction. Below are instances of Tangle folktale songs:

**Text (1)**

**Narrator:** Laliwin, Laliwin ma dottu Palsheje ka wattu kabno nu shinugo  
Laliwin, laliwin ma dottu Palsheje ka wattu durno nu nigo ba  
Laliwin, laliwin ma dottu Palsheje ka wattu tikttuo nu duluko  
Laliwin, la liwin ku tikttu lo no ku addu kwino ku kwattun laliwin nu yakong nang?

**Translation:**

Children, children go and call Palsheje to come slaughter me to rest  
Children, children go and call Palsheje to come put me down I am cooked  
Children, children go and call Palsheje to come and share for I have cooled down  
Children, children you shared my meat, you ate my head and deny the children what have I done?

**Text (2)**

**Narrator: Tangle**

Fultufulta naman geil  
Fultufulta naman geil  
Fultufulta naman geil

**Translation**

Fultufulta geil’s meat  
Fultufulta geil’s meat  
Fultufulta geil’s meat

**Text (3)**

**Narrator: Tangle**

Ma montun be liwin  
Tette anang orop tu tul kama  
Kwi ka tede  
Kwi yugdu yugdu  
Ka atu wi nu ga sheb ka  
Ka attu wi sheb ka  
Nu waduk ku seebu na attu  
Wainu po idno tungyo-tung  
Na wan ma Alika ka lekkutan kwin  
La mwidir mwdir  
Ippu latabak kwannin

**Translation**

Just leave me children  
The man has brought a woman from far away land,  
Her head with tede  
Her head heavy, He said that fire be brought, I asked whether he demanded for an axe.  
He said that fire be brought, I headed for the axe and he hit me at face tungyo tung  
Am going to Alika’s house to sew my head neatly like a fulani woven tray.
Song in folktale enables the narrator achieve a great deal of rapport, especially in the middle of the tales. In fact it creates a psychological atmosphere which enables the audience to participate in the action of the story both mentally and emotionally and, in the process, move the audience to the world of fantasy.

**Theatricality in Tangle Folktales**

A story telling session is an oral dramatic performance. This is one of the fundamental features of the Tangle story-telling tradition. The sitting arrangement of the children is usually in a thrust like stage where the narrator sits at the middle. This in a way provides an opportunity for the narrator to see and interact with his audience. For the costume, each child retains his or her normal house wear that has been put on since morning. Buttressing the theatricality of the African story-telling exercises, Smith and Dale (1920) in Oriloye and Ojo (2010:177) averse that:

> It would need a combination of photograph and kinematograph to reproduce a tale as it is told.... Here was a hip mumbling but every muscle of the face and the body spoke, each in its tone.

When narrating a folktale, the narrator assumes the personalities of the various characters involved, acting out their dialogue, their facial expressions and so on. Therefore, through oral dramatization, the narrator saves a lot of words. Oriloye and Ojo (2010) remark that “... [the narrator] exploits to the fullest all the narrative freedom granted [to him or her] by tradition to enhance the vividness of her story while the audience to make verbal contributions in the form of spontaneous exclamation, remarks, comments or questions” (177).

However in Tangle animal folktales, the following animals frequently feature. These animals include the following: Hare (Nethe) is a trickster and a cheat.

Lion (Ampara) is traditionally the king or chief of the animals. He is courageous and as king he is expected to be wise. However, both his course and wisdom are put to the test when is he fooled by the little hare. Hyena (Turum) is the symbol of greed and destructiveness. He only thinks about satisfying his prodigious appetite. Monkey (Pidok) is adroit and clever; he uses his wit to save himself from trouble rather than to make others suffer. Birds are friends of human, especially in time of trouble they act as guardian spirits and often carry messages to help save human characters from precarious situations.
Conclusion
From the foregoing discussion, it has been established that story telling is an important aspect of socializing the young ones in traditional society. They are vignettes on the vicissitudes of social life which comment on human nature and its effect on interpersonal relationships and social cohesion. As a form of entertainment, the tales are also powerful vehicles of social cohesion, through which people are educated that human beings are self-seeking and that we learn from our customs and traditions.

This paper has discussed the various narrative techniques, theatrical elements and as well as the mode of Tangle folktales. Therefore, the individuals are challenged to take interest in to the various aspects of oral performances especially folktales. Research into African culture should be intensified because modernity and urbanism are wearing away the young generation from their cultures at very early stages. Technology has today reduced the world to a village setting, and keeps bombarding the populace, especially the children with lots of foreign cultures. Therefore, it is important that governments should as a matter of concern fund research into collection, transcription, translation and the preservation of Nigerian cultural materials for posterity. Results indicates that modern education, which mostly provides secular, pluralistic, egalitarian and market values necessary for running economic, political and legal institutions and machineries of modern nation-state is deficient in many ways; and it is the oral tradition which fills this gap by inculcating universal humanistic values and Tangle values. There is need for school administrators to include folktales in the curriculum because is an important process of cultural orientation of children as they grow and learn away from homes. This helps in reinforcing whatever they learn orally from parents from homes.

Works Cited