

Original Article

Artistic Creativity in Sagalo's Traditional Oral Praise Song "Kadade"

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Abstract: Oral praise song is a widely spread form of oral poetry in African traditional societies. It is classified among the heroic or epic songs composed to excite and provoke emotional feeling in the person to whom it is addressed. Also, a praise song is artistically conceived to stimulate and encourage combatants on the ground fights and battles. This paper attempts the analysis of the artistic creativity of Sagalo in his masterpiece praise song entitled "Kadade". The study draws its underpinning from the sociolinguistic approach. The work has revealed, on one hand, a predominant style characterized by the use of literary devices such as proverbs, metaphors, imageries and hyperboles, and on the other hand, it has shown the major literary interest of Sagalo's traditional oral praise. The study has particularly highlighted the figurative language use by Sagalo in his song, "Kadade" and his capacity to excite the internal and external feeling of the audience.

Keywords: Oral Literature, Praise Song, Artistic Creativity, Sagalo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional oral songs occupy a prominent place in African people's life. This is due to the important role songs play in African societies. The primary motive of songs is to educate, sensitize, and entertain the audience. That is to say, oral songs constitute an essential pillar in the construction of society for they shape an important part of people's life and thinking. Social activities and practices (marriage, funeral, rituals, farming, and festivals) are mostly accompanied by song and dance in Africa. Bichi corroborates this fact in these terms "oral praise-singing is an institutionalized phenomenon among many sub-Saharan African groups." (87) Songs play important roles in all aspects of African life, and there is hardly an occasion or occupation that does not involve singing. It is in this respect that Chamo (2014: 200) observes different types of songs such as: work song, marriage songs, praise songs, love songs, nursing songs, spirit songs, etc.

Bichi defines oral praise songs as "these very important components of the folklore of many sub-Saharan African groups. They occur in various forms. These songs are basically epithets called out in reference to an object (a person, an animal, a town, etc.) in celebration of outstanding qualities and achievements." (86) Furthermore, Dandatti maintains that "a praise-line is a concise, often metaphoric come-line statement accentuating the positive qualities of persons, social roles, events in which people participate, or objectives found to be beautiful in the surrounding environment, a praise is a compendium of praise lines." (105) The definition above also, highlights the function of praise poetry in the society corroborated by Ojaide when he mentions that "praise poetry promotes courage, hospitality, generosity, sensitivity, and other virtues that are held as models to which all humans should aspire for meaningful lives and peaceful coexistence." (53)

Dandatti adds that "an oral singer educates, entertains, informs and sensitizes the public about current events as well as the ancient historical accounts. He can also praise, warn, condemn, or advise, depending on the situation and circumstance". (37) Thiam argues that "Public praise is a double-edged sword because it not only inflates the individuals with a sense of pride, but also it obliges them to live up to those who preceded them, even better than them, in order to leave their mark for future generations." (15) Thus, we will examine Sagalo's praise song to analyse his artistic creativity while conveying the message to his audience.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This work is an interdisciplinary study. The data collected for this paper are mainly Sagalo's masterpiece oral praise song entitled "Kadade" which is an MP3 recorded song of about seven minutes. Other related library data are also examined to achieve the objective of this study. Both primary and secondary sources are objectively analysed using the sociolinguistic approach which focuses on the study of the impact of social context and language use to provoke connectivity. This approach allows to show how creative and talented Sagalo is in his efforts of using language to convey his message.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Who is Sagalo?

Mahaman Sagalo, known for being the famous national traditional wrestling singer, has undeniably marked the



history of wrestling in Niger. He is native of Dan Toudou, Dogaraoua district, in the region of Tahoua, Niger Republic. While his paternal lineage is a koranic scholar family, his maternal one is a griot family. He chooses to follow the latter, maternal lineage, and starts singing with the assistance of Dan Sama who had initiated him into singing. Sagalo was first, the Dogaraoua court singer, then, he further becomes a wrestling singer.

As a wrestling singer, Sagalo was primarily known in his natal area where he accompanies wrestlers from one village to another. Thus, he became a local popular traditional wrestling singer. With the evolution of wrestling in Tahoua region, competitions were organized at central cities like in Tahoua and Konni. There, Sagalo discovered famous wrestlers like unbeatable Kadade who became Sagalo's best wrestler. Then with the initiative of the national championship by the late President of Niger, General Seyni Kounthé, Sagalo becomes a national wrestling singer. He sings, praises, entertains and excites for more than forty years in the different arenas of the eight regions of Niger. After his death, the journalist Bako pays tribute to Sagalo in the column of *Le Sahel*, he (2012) writes:

Mahaman Sagalo, singer at the court of Doguerawa, especially known for being the undeniable master of the arena, will no longer be at the rendezvous of the national wrestling championships. Indeed, the man who reigned for more than forty years on our arenas with his tambourines and his powerful voice on the occasion of the editions of the traditional wrestling championships, died on January 18, 2011 in Galmi.

Sagalo incarnates the symbol of traditional singer in Niger, but little has been written on his creative works. With regard to that, we will depict his skilful creativity through the use of style in his masterpiece song, "Kadade".

B. Style in Sagalo's songs "Kadade"

Oral songs, like any other form of literary genres, are works of art performed in various style. Abrams defines style as:

The manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse – it is how a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says... it may be analysed in terms of diction, or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language; the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds, and other formal features; and its rhetorical aims and devices. (190-191)

Style determines therefore the degree of creativity of an artist. And it usually varies from one artist to another. It is in this vein, Muktar (2004: 3) mentions that a style can distinguish a work of art from another by the same artist or from another artist. With reference to the above quote, style reflects the artist's will and talent of creativity through his or her work.

Therefore, style is an important component of verbal art especially in praise songs. It is in this respect, Thiam states that "griot has a great freedom of speech, he handles both flattery and stifling." (15) Thiam shows that traditional praise griots or singers like Sagalo are very creative and use their languages to create an attractive and powerful style in their songs. Thus, one may find various literary devices such as proverb, metaphor, imagery, and hyperbole, etc. in the content of their message.

C. Use of Proverbs in "Kadade"

Mieder defines proverb "as a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation." (3) Similarly, the above definition shows that a proverb is a traditional verbal artistic channel of conveying moral and societal values. The quote also, advocates the appropriateness of using proverbs in society. that is why Abba mentions that "proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective in oral or written communication". (117) Furthermore, Sarvi notes that "proverbs beautify the use of language and it is one of the yard sticks of language proficiency and makes expressed ideas more convincing." (138) All the aforementioned scholars depict the functions of proverbs whether in society or in artistic works.

With regard to the meaning and the role played by proverbs in the verbal art in general and in the praise song in particular, Sagalo is a reference. He uses highly uses literary and linguistic device (proverbs) in his songs. Moreover, Praise songs as performed by Sagalo are inseparable from the use of proverbs. This explains the multitude of proverbs found in most of his songs and particularly in "Kadade". He then uses various forms of proverbs to warn his famous wrestler's opponents, Kadade, nay he guides wrestlers to accept their destiny. Below are some illustrations:

"Maye maci abokin wassa" (the witch who kills his friends):

This Hausa proverb conveys the meaning of unfamiliarity, that of being dangerous or having no complaisance in one's acts. Sagalo uses this proverb not only to depict the character of his favourite wrestler, Kadade, but also to warn

Kadade's opponents. The use of this contradictory proverb shows the degree of Sagalo's creativity not only to provoke fear and doubt in the mind of any wrestler who will face Kadade in the arena, but also to show his seriousness during the combat.

"Alheri ya gayda wanda kayi nai" (may good doer find good):

In Hausa society, moral values are part of the educational system and code of conduct that is why people currently use proverbs to encourage good manners and practices in their daily exchanges. "Alheri ya gayda wanda kayi nai" conveys the meaning of hope and wish to the person it is addressed to; it is one of the mostly used proverbs to motivate altruism and solidarity among people. Sagalo uses the proverb "alheri ya gayda wanda kayi nai" to encourage not only wrestlers to incarnate good qualities, but also to be useful to their surroundings.

"Wurin da na saba yafi inda bin saba ba" (home is better than abroad):

This proverb means to feel more comfortable and secured with the persons you know than with those you ignore. Hausa people use this proverb to encourage two important values in social life, namely: satisfaction and contentment in any situation and place a person finds him/herself. Sagalo uses this proverb to explain the solid relationship which exists between him and Kadade. It is also a way for him to invite his audience to be proud of their country whatever the situation they are living in.

"kowane lokaci da nashi mutane" / "wata rana wanda su ba mune ba" (each period has its pole star)

These two synonymous proverbs explain a natural phenomenon or law whereby the different successive generations always mark their time and pass. Sagalo uses them not only to encourage wrestlers to make effort in order to mark their era, but also, to draw the attention of his audience on the fact that things change and people pass away, ancient generations give way to the new ones and nothing resists to this natural law.

"Bin hana yaro ba, sai wuya ta hana shi" / "koway sha bakar wuya wa aikar." (let everyone assume his/her choice)

Here are two other synonymous proverbs, they convey the same meaning. They both transmit the meaning of assuming one's choice. Sagalo uses these proverbs in his song to praise the power and supremacy of his favourite wrestler, Kadade. It is also, to discourage Kadade's opponents during the combats in the arena. The two proverbs can be used to express the issue of responsibility and assuming it in the society. In addition, the use of these synonymous proverbs is an exhortation to be surrounded by good advisors. For traditionally, a person who is looking for advice rarely fails in his or her decisions.

« Sai da magani, sai da magani, in babu maganin ba'a fara kama micjiya » (There must be something, there must be something, if there is nothing it will be impossible to catch a snake)

This proverb shows that certain risks cannot be taken without any preparation. It is used to warn or to draw the attention on dangerous acts or adventures. Sagalo mentions this proverb to draw the attention of wrestlers who confront opponents like Kadade. It is also a way for him to show the unbeatability of his favourite wrestler. Though wrestlers know that confronting any opponent can be a risk, but the case of Kadade is highly risky. This proverb serves also as a guide for people's interactions in the society.

"Girman gona, gomma" (the crops determine the surface of a farm)

Hausa people use this proverb to show that a person's success is gauged by the result he obtains after accomplishing a deed. Sagalo uses this proverb to praise on one hand, the fame of Kadade, and on the other hand, to incite him to persevere in the course of wrestling carrier. He not only encourages him to win the sword which symbolizes being the national champion of the traditional wrestling in Niger, but also, he teaches wrestlers commitment in life, particularly Kadade, his close friend and beloved wrestler.

The current use of proverbs in "Kadade" exhibits the notable talent of Sagalo whereby he conquers the attention of his audience and arouses the emotion of wrestlers in the arenas; that is why Zakari Sidi calls him "le maître des arènes" (the master of arenas).

D. Use of Metaphor

A Metaphor is a figure of speech that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated, but which share some common characteristics. In other words, a resemblance of two contradictory or different objects is made based on a single or some common characteristics. (literarydevices.net, 24-10-2019).

Verbal artists, especially praise singers, mostly use metaphor to give important attributes to the person they praise. Thus, Sagalo uses metaphor in his song "Kadade" to create a special style to excite the wrestlers. One of Sagalo's particularities is the mastery of Hausa language use; that is why he employs diverse literary devices like metaphor in his

songs. Thus, it worth mentioning some of the metaphors used by Sagalo while he sings the praise of Kadade.

“Kadade dangalin samarin Tahoua” (Kadade, the wall of Tahoua’s youth)

Through the use of this metaphor, Sagalo conveys on one hand, an important message to Kadade; that of motivating him to persevere in his struggle to win the sword, and the message of recalling him his responsibility regarding Tahoua people who impatiently wait his victory for the national sword in their region. Also, the metaphor expresses the richness of Sagalo’s praise song in its diction to transmit his message.

“ba a gama kulbi da rijiya; ba a gama shege da mai uba” (the river and the well are incomparable; illegitimate and legitimate sons are incomparable)

Sagalo uses a compound (double) figurative language through the above-mentioned sentence. The metaphor is composed by two types of contrast comparison: the first, gulbi and rijiya, two sources of water (a large one and a small one) and the second, shege and mai uba, two sons but different in their status (illegitimate and legitimate). This higher style used by Sagalo shows his mastery of Hausa language in creating prominent artistic features. Through the double metaphor, Sagalo tells his audience that Kadade is unique; no wrestler can be compared to him. That is why Sagalo mentions two different incomparable elements in his metaphor.

Other metaphoric praises addressed to the favourite wrestler of Sagalo, Kadade, are: itatuwa (the woods), kunama (the scorpion), kogo (the hole of a tree). Sagalo intensifies his figurative language through the metaphors mentioned above. To exalt his hero, Sagalo refers to things: the wood for its resistance and the hole for its dangers and fearsome darkness; and he refers to animals, the scorpion for its dangerous venom. The Reference to these particular things and dangerous animals shows the skilful abilities of Sagalo to manipulate Hausa language and create an extraordinary style to praise the outstanding qualities and achievements of Kadade.

E. Use of Imagery

According to Abrams “imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature...imagery signifies figurative language.” (78-79) In a similar vein, Amali asserts that “imagery is the description of people or things and the pictures created in our minds”. (105) Therefore, the use of imagery in a work of art reveals the artist’s level of language manipulation to convey his message by creating images which will be engraved in the mind of his audience. That is why Sekoni affirms that:

Manipulation of audience feeling or sensation is manifested in narrative performance through the pottering of narrative images or episodes. For audience emotion to successfully manipulated, the performer must arrange his images in such a way that subsequent images vary audience emotion. The elimination of boredom is thus a crucial factor in the performer’s effort at varying audience sensation. (142)

Consequently, the use of imagery in oral praise songs proves to be necessary not only, to better catch the attention of listeners, but also to excite them in order to change their mood and feeling. Sagalo does not make an exception to this artistic power. He uses imagery in his song to create an emotional and exciting feeling in his favourite wrestler, Kadade. He for instance, repeats the following imagery: “*ɗan bagobri mai tsago*” (son of bagobri with scars). Through this image, Sagalo describes Kadade and creates his image in the mind of his audience; he also uses it to manipulate the feeling of Kadade and to excite him to react.

“raba gardama” (the one who puts an end to arguments) is another imagery used the song “Kadade” to better describe Kadade. This description created by Sagalo gives an extraordinary image of Kadade in the mind of his opponents and the audience in general. Furthermore, the examples mentioned above are a perfect illustration of Sagalo’s high talents of artistic creativity in his songs. The quote also, reveals the power of Sagalo’s message while praising wrestlers in the arena. And the use of imagery is one of the most significant aspects which explain the particularity and supremacy of Sagalo as traditional wrestling singer in Niger

F. Use of Hyperbole

According to Abrams “hyperbole is bold overstatement, or extravagant exaggeration of fact, used either for serious or comic effect.” (77) Hyperbole is another figurative use of language by artists to catch the attention of their audience. It is in this respect that Amali quotes Paul who asserts that “the use of exaggeration is to produce vivid effects and also catch the interest of the audience”. (109)

Sagalo currently uses hyperbole in his praise song in general, and in “Kadade”, in particular. He intensifies hyperbolic compliments to Kadade while praising his fame and his bravery. Sagalo uses a cluster of overstatements to strengthen his praise. He sings:

*Kasar Arawa ba samu dā kamar Kadade ba
Maba rugga ba a hayfi dā kamar Kadade ba
Abzinawa basu samu dā kamar Kadade ba*

*Arawa do not have a son like Kadade
Maba ruga do not have a son like Kadade
Abzinawa do not have a son like Kadade*

Through these lines, Sagalo exaggerates by showing Kadade as an extraordinary son and that is not given to any family or community to give birth to. The lines also, convey the feeling of close relationship which exists between Sagalo and Kadade.

Other hyperbolic terms used in the praise song “Kadade” of Sagalo are « Mai doguwa dari da talatin » (The one who has one hundred and thirty doguwa). Through this sentence Sagalo praises the supernatural and mystic power of Kadade. Yet, wrestlers are inseparable from fetish and marabout with whom they sign agreement of victory and in return the wrestler should make sacrifice and rituals. The use of this hyperbolic sentence not only catches the attention of Kadade’s opponents, but also it creates a feeling of fear in them.

Moreover, Sagalo continues his praise by using hyperbole, he says: “Na karuwa mai jan idon da yara kazoro” (Man of Karuwa who has red eyes that fear children). This hyperbolic compliment by Sagalo conveys an exaggerative physical description of Kadade through which he shows how redoubtable Kadade is in the arena by his opponents. Besides, Sagalo uses another overstatement while praising Kadade’s superiority. He sings: “dubu uwar dāri” (Thousand mother of hundred) and “kura uwar kare” (hyena mother of dog). These hyperboles are all in all overstatement because they imply the highest exaggeration in the praise of Kadade. “Dubu uwar dāri” and “kura uwar kare” show that even among the best wrestlers, Kadade is the best.

To sum up, hyperbole has significantly contributed to the attractiveness and the exciting message of Sagalo. It also, shows his advanced level of manipulating Hausa language; it is in this respect he succeeds praising wrestlers at the different traditional wrestling arenas.

V. CONCLUSION

Talented creativity has largely characterized Sagalo’s oral praise in “Kadade”. The analysis has focused on some major literary aspects of the song. Proverbs, metaphors, imageries and hyperboles have been the main devices used by Sagalo while praising his favourite wrestler, Kadade. The diction and the figurative language used highlights the outstanding artistic value of Sagalo’s work. His skilful usage of language explains the power and the attractiveness of his message. The study also, shows that praise songs like that of Sagalo are highly dominated by interesting poetic components which make it particular among the various types of poetry.

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