

Kinyankore Folk Poetry: Structure and Context

Viola Karungi
University of Warwick, UK

Abstract

This paper is based on a research conducted to examine the structure of *Kinyankore* Folk Poetry and the contexts of its performance. The research was conducted in 2010 and 2011 among the Banyankore in Mbarara and Isingiro Districts in South-Western Uganda, particularly in the areas; Nyamitanga, Lugazi, Kyamugolanyi, and Masha and Rukuuba respectively. These areas were chosen purposively as they were identified as having a collection of *Kinyankore* folk poets whom I interviewed. Mbarara and Isingiro have both Bahima and Bairu with whom the poetry is directly associated. I also chose this geographical scope because I understand the local language of Runyankore, which is spoken by the Banyankore. The study concentrated on *Kinyankore* folk poetry as an object and a final product of performance with particular focus on praise poetry. Folk poetry was analysed according to its structure, context, and the individual performer's skill, creativity, and ability to memorize and perform the poetry. The research was limited to a period of 25 years from 1986 to 2011. This period can also be referred to as the National Resistance Movement (NRM) period. NRM has been the party in government since 1986 to date. This is why, for example, one poet hails President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as a hero, as he is believed to have liberated Uganda from the tyrannical rule of President Idi Amin Dada prior to 1986 as will be illustrated later.

Introduction

Kinyankore Folk Poetry known as *ebyevugo* (sing. *ekyevugo*) may be categorized into three classes; ancestral poetry, praise poetry and work poetry. This paper focuses on praise poetry. Praise poetry is recited to acknowledge a heroic deed, a noble character in the community, and to

express affection for a person or object by illuminating the noble/virtuous facts about that thing or person. Topical subjects include marriage, politics (leadership), employment, love, war and many more. This paper will focus on *ebyevugo* of politics and marriage. In essence, *abevugi* (*sing. omwevugi*) (folk poets) in Ankore (geographical area of Banyankore) should not only entertain, but also educate and inform the audience about past events, current affairs and even comment on the future. Generally, *ebyevugo* are packaged with *emicwe/ entwaza* (ethical lessons) for both young and old Banyankore. At okwanjura/ *okuhingira*, the traditional marriage ceremony in Ankore, a particular act known as *okwevugira omugamba* (to appreciate the 'yoke') perform, for the poetry is packed with pieces of advice for the bride and groom as they are being prepared to begin their own family. Poetry about politics reminds people about past events that are significant in history. *Ebyevugo* are a theatrical entertainment. Rubindi (1996) writes that 'Ankore nebaasa kwehimbisa ahabwe ebihimbo bingi, konka tihariho kihimbo nari kizaano kyona ekiri kukiza ekyevugo obukuru (Ankore may boast of several forms of traditional forms of folk lore but none of those forms supersedes the Kinyankore folk poetry)' (p. 6). Rubindi's argument elevates *ebyevugo* to a status that is above all the other Kinyankore forms of folk performance such as folk songs, folktales, folk dances, among others.

The Banyankore, (*sing.* Munyankore), indigenous people of Ankore, South-Western Uganda in the districts of Mbarara, Ntungamo, Bushenyi, Kiruhura, Rushere and in some parts of Rukungiri District, belong to the Bantu speaking group. Banyankore's ethnic language is Runyankore. Anything that belongs to Banyankore is known as Kinyankore. For instance, one can talk of Kinyankore Folk Poetry. Banyankore are divided into two sub-ethnicities, the Bahima (*sing.* Muhima), are cattle keepers and Bairu (*sing.* Mwairu), are known as crop farmers and hunters. *Ebyevugo* are mostly categorized in accordance with the two sub-ethnicities; poetry such as that concerning cattle herding is associated with Bahima, while poetry concerning crop farming and hunting is associated with Bairu. Therefore, *ebyevugo* can be categorized along these traditional occupations. Additionally, according to Fred Amutuhaire (50 years) 'Poetry of the Bahima is made of long stanzas while that of the Bairu is made of short stanzas' (Interview). Nevertheless, there are categories of poetry, particularly concerning (leadership) politics, which is composed and performed by poets from both groups.

Definition of Kinyankore Folk Poetry

Ekyevugo is a Kinyankore performative oral art. It is a literal expression embedded with musical aspects (rhythm, intonation and pitch), which is composed and performed by Banyankore in Runyankore. *Ekyevugo's* strength lies in the meanings of the lyrics that form it, normally with a substantial component of figures of speech that include imagery, metaphors, sayings, proverbial phrases, and similes. *Ekyevugo* are categorized under the recited forms of customary folk lore, within the parasol of the sociological, situational, and occasional forms of folk lore.

Morris (1964) translates *ebyevugo* as 'recitations'. In another instance, while acknowledging that apart from Kirindi, no other writer has attempted to write the recitations as 'poems', he states, 'The praise poems are metric recitations' (1964:19). Nzaaro, on the other hand, translates *ekyevugo* as 'epic; recital of poetic amazing or heroic deeds' (2008: 181). The foregoing statements seem to underline the fact that both Morris and Nzaaro use the words 'poem' and 'recitation' while referring to *ekyevugo*. This implies that the concepts 'poem' and 'recitation' complement each other; scholars of *ebyevugo* use them interchangeably. In this paper, for purposes of differentiation and clarity, 'poem' will be used to refer to the composition/written *ekyevugo*, while 'recitation' will refer to the performance/performed *ekyevugo*. *Ekyevugo* remains a poem with only lyrics until it has been performed whereby it gains musicality, rhythm and movement to qualify as a recitation. Audiences can only experience the musicality of *ekyevugo* through performance. *Omwevugi* accompanies the recitation with movements and gestures. This is what transforms *ekyevugo* into a performance.

Origin of Kinyankore Folk Poetry

In their discussion, my informants expressed similar views concerning the origin of *ebyevugo*. Amutuhaire believes '[p]oetry was a result of Banyankore's regular habit to have communal gatherings in compounds for leisure activities' (Interview, *ibid*). Such activities include beer parties, storytelling, and family gatherings. Further, Amutuhaire stated that such gatherings created space for people to celebrate and share knowledge and experiences. The verb *okwembuga* is derived from the noun *embuga*, meaning a compound or courtyard. Amutuhaire's claim can be related to the notion that this poetry was inspired by the communal gatherings in compounds or Ankore chiefs' courtyards. His view is underlined by the fact that *ebyevugo* are a participatory communal oral art. As Bukonya writes,

Oral literature grows out of the good habit of people coming together, greeting and talking to one another. As people converge, they communicate. This is what makes them a community. They share what they have seen, heard and felt. They exchange experiences, observations, feelings and ideas. (1984:25)

Benjamin Bikwasizehi contended that '[p]oetry was as a result of one's desire to compose poems that are praise worthy of anything' (Interview, June 30, 2010). In this context, 'anything' includes people, domestic animals like goats or cows, land, crops, handcraft like baskets and handcrafted mats. This view explains why women recited poetry to praise their husbands, as men praised their wives, mothers, daughters and mother-in-laws. Morris states that the poems are essentially personal and topical; that an incident would provide a source of inspiration to a Muhima and he would compose a poem describing the exploits of himself and his companions and add it to his repertoire. The poetry would attain a peculiar popularity while the event was still fresh in people's minds although it would not survive its composer (Morris, 1964). Morris suggests that poets did not only think about a subject of composition but relied on events that happened and were probably known to other people other than the poet. This earned the poet more credibility for his creative skills if he was able to mesmerize the people about an event that they knew of. The notions about the origin of *ekyevugo* discussed here certainly have influence on how *ekyevugo* is composed.

Composing Ekyevugo

Similar to a folktale, *ekyevugo* should have a beginning, conflict and resolution. Informants argued that the order does not matter as it largely depends on each individual's creativity. O *muhimbi* (*sing.*) or *Abahimbi* – (composer) should introduce himself (name/symbolic name), clan, totem, home of residence or origin, and the topic of the story. Such introduction is significant because *ekyevugo* are associated with cultural identity and representation. It matters that the audience is able to identify with the performer. In many instances, *omwevugi* represents a clan/family, so it is important for the audience to know these facts. The conflict should elaborate a difficult/tricky/unpredictable/impossible situation, which the hero encountered, and how he managed to manoeuvre himself out of it. The resolution is the end result of the 'mission' and so, the moral of the story. The foregoing discussion contains basic information, which a composer should bear in mind before or while composing. While in most cases the composer performs his own poem, in some instances the performer is

different from the composer. In the latter case, the performer adjusts the introductory information to suit him. Either way, the process of composition remains the same. In the case of this paper, the informants that I will quote are each both a composer and performer. I categorize the process of composition into two phases.

Phase 1: Conceiving the Idea and Generating Words

This is the first step in the composition process. Three approaches stood out from the interviews with the informants; 1) Event-based poems 2) Character-based poems and 3) Theme-based poems. Whatever the approach, all *ebyevugo* have a basic structure as described above, and as will be elaborated subsequently. For all categories, *omuhimbi* must select words that can tell a heroic story in an extra-ordinary manner. Words are normally taken out of unusual Runyankore vocabulary and must take care for the elements that I have discussed in the definition above. Unusual words are used because the performer is deemed to have extraordinary intellect and artistic ability; they also emphasize the 'heroicness' of such a character. While selecting words, the aspect or rhyme is emphasized to enable the musicality of the piece, much as it is also a means by which the poet proves his acquaintance with the Runyankore diction more than other Banyankore.

Normally, the poem is composed from a first person's point of view. Therefore, the performer in most cases 'emerges as the hero'. Nevertheless, the story should indirectly make clear the actual hero to the audience. Alternatively, the poem can be composed from a third person's point of view. In this case, the composer directly refers to the heroic character. In both contexts, the performer normally makes his own introductions himself to the audience. In the past, most poets told actual stories about their real escapades, but today, while the idea of the hero is still central to *ekyevugo*, many of these poems are fictive stories. Some of the poets I talked to about how they conceive ideas and compose the lyrics responded in the following ways. Byomuhangi Rwabyoma, a forty-five year old poet stated:

There is not a single formula for composing. And it also depends on the theme of your composition and the length of the poem (Interview, June 30, 2010).

While Rwabyoma acknowledges that conceiving an idea has no prescribed formula another, seventy-four year old poet, Benjamin Bikwasizehi, comments:

I sit alone and think without talking. Then nice thoughts come to my mind and I begin expanding the ideas by adding flesh to them (Interview, June 30, 2010).

The informants generally agreed that composing *ebyevugo* gets easier as the composer gains more experience. This suggests that a poet would comfortably compose a credible *ekyevugo* using various approaches. Amutuhair, the founder and director of Rwankunionio Cultural Performers, a troupe that specializes in performing Kinyankore folklore including *ebyevugo*, testified to this claim when he said that, with more than twenty years of experience, he is capable of composing a poem on the spot even if it were for an impromptu performance away from Anko-re.

Phase 2: Learning, Memorizing and Creating Musicality for Ekyevugo

Learning and memorizing *ekyevugo* involves making a critical appreciation of it; revising the words and editing them where necessary, learning their pronunciation and contextual meanings and intonations. The poet then incorporates musicality in the text. Musicality is achieved by creating crescendos and diminuendos in the voice and improvising movements for the piece. Most of the informants recounted that although *ekyevugo* is an oral art, which implies that they would rely on their memories to remember the compositions, today they have an option of writing them down. This simplifies the process of learning and memorizing since there is a point of reference. Nevertheless, Bikwasizehi argued that he still relies on his memory and does not need to write down his poems. At the age of seventy-four, Bikwasizehi could be one of the surviving poets who joined the profession before Uganda's independence in 1962. He did not attain formal education; hence, Western education has not influenced his art. At 23 years and less than two years' experience in reciting *ebyevugo*, Rogers Byaruhanga exclaimed:

Can you fail to learn and memorize your own composition? (Interview: July 7, 2010)

Would Byaruhanga make the same exclamation about memorizing a poem that he has not composed? Probably not. It is not necessarily true that a good composer is a good performer and vice versa. But it is probable that memorizing one's composition is easier, because that person knows the background of the story and so they can easily learn it off head. Since there is a possibility that one may tailor it to suit one's

capability, a performer is free to select words that are easy to pronounce and remember depending on their exposure and experience. Nonetheless, as she notes, but the other point to note is that, occasions where *omwevugi* performs another person's composition is a recent development.

Both, the sixteen and twenty-one year old *abevugi*, Ambrose Tumuramyé and Mackinnon Keinerugaba, respectively, noted the problems encountered in the process of learning their first poems. (Interview, July 7, 2010) Amutuhaire concurred with the above informants. He said that learning the first poem requires patience; however, as the poet gains more experience the poems become easier to learn. Tumuramyé, Keinerugaba and Amutuhaire attribute this difficulty to the fact that, as noted earlier, *ebyevugo* are normally composed using unusual Runyankore words and expressions. Therefore, a poet has a double task of mastering the words/phrases as well as the art of recitation. It is harder to learn *okwevuga* in the twenty-first century because today, the Banyankore are less exposed to *okwevuga* as an art whereas in traditional Kinyankore society, it was a norm for people to engage in its performance. Children were introduced to it at a tender age, and it was easier for them to compose, learn and memorize poems.

Structure of Kinyankore Folk Poetry

Ekyevugo consists of *enkome* (stanza/verse) and a response/refrain 'Eeeh!' (Yes!). 'Eeeh' is an affirmative response by the audience. The performer normally recites stanzas, while the audience intones the refrain. The audience's response is the same in all poetry except, it may vary in intonation. Poets always assume that the audience knows this response at all occasions, and so audiences are expected to respond whenever a poet calls. *Enkome* are written in verse form as opposed to prose. Stanzas for a single poem range from one to infinity depending on the creative ability of the composer, the demands of the occasion and sometimes the theme. Among the Bairu, the performer begins and ends by calling for the audience's response as demonstrated by Rwabyoma Byomuhangi, a Mwairu *mwevugi*, in the recitation below. The refrain in most cases punctuates the end of each stanza.

Omuzaahi

(The Refugee)

Omwevugi: *Mwena ngu eeh!* (x2)

Audience: Eeh (x2)

Omwevugi: *Akaba ari omushambo*

Omuhingi murungi rwata

*Akaba agamba nahebera nka Nyamashozi
Nkamuzahura omuzaha
Azahiire Buganda*

Omwevugi: *Mwena ngu eeeh! (x2)*

Audience: *Eeeh (x2)*

Omwevugi: *All say yes!*

Audience: *Yes*

He was a Mushambo
A good farmer
He used to stammer like Nyamashozi
I saved him, the refugee
He had taken refuge in Buganda
He was a Mushambo

Omwevugi: *All say yes!*

Audience: *Yes.*

(Interview, 30 June 2010 in Masha –Rukuuba, Isingiro District)

Abevugi generally like to attract and given attention and so would not go off-stage unnoticed. Thus, he may make several calls in order to attract the attention and full participation of the audience before ending the poem. The poem of the Bairu is relatively shorter as compared to that of the Bahima who generally recite longer poems.

The Bahima *bevugi*, however, normally begin their poems with a full stanza after which the audience responds with 'Eeeh!' as in the foregoing poem. As with Abairu, the response punctuates the end of each stanza. Alice Kyiritama (53 years old) of Rushere, a Muhima female poet, performed the *ekyevugo* below. Since she is a Muhima, her *kyevugo* is about cattle.

Ihimba ry'ente

(Praise for Cattle)

Omwevugi: *Nimpurira ente neijuga eseri*

Nimpurira abariisa nibatera emikuri

Nibashumya Siina na Gaaju

Kuzeshera

Eshi ihimba ry'ente ni rirungi!

Kandi eigamba ryazo riboneire!

Audience: *Eeeh!*

[Mwevugi: I hear the cattle mooing across from the hill across the valley

I hear the herdsmen playing flutes

While descending with Siina and Gaaju

To quench their thirst

Oh! How nice it is to sing of cattle!

And how beautiful it is to talk of them!

Audience: *Eeeh!* (x2)]

(Interview, 2 January 2011)

After the last line, the audience responds with '*Eeeh!*' before the poet proceeds to recite the next stanza. While the poem should normally end with a stanza other than the response, sometimes the audience gets excited and sends off the poet with an emphatic '*Eeeh!*' as *omwevugi* leaves the stage.

Themes in Kinyankore Folk Poetry

Ebyevugo rotate around the social, economic and political issues of Banyankore, and today these issues could be national or even universal. A poet normally focuses on one theme at a time. Such themes include love, leadership, marriage, children, women, men, poverty, beauty and any other topical issue of interest. Several *ebyevugo* regarding *okwanjura/okuhingira* in Ankore were performed during interviews. For this paper, I have chosen one poem performed by Tanazio Baitwababo (58 years old) in Nyamitanga during the interview on 4 January 2011.

Ruhendeka

(One Who Never Tires)

Mwevugi: *Mwena ngu eeeh!* (x2)

Audience: *Eeeh!* (x2)

Mwevugi: *Rutamwebwa rutamutekateka amaraka ga abigarire. Nkaribata aka-bango katengatenga, abaishikiyi bankubya ruhendeka.*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Rukyindo nkagirukangitsya etuutu yobutsigazi, Mugogo za Nyakataraka za gyira nimbacumita akarutakondoka zizagyiire omu nte.*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Manya owahingiza omugamba aba atahingiza mugamba, aba yahingiza ente. Nyamurungi nk'ogu tagyendera eryo. Omu harimu Kagondo na Rugondo, omu harimu Kasina na Rusina, omu harimu Kagaju na Rugaju, omu harimu Kasa na Rwasa.*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Nyamurungi kwaza kushwerwa tashwerwa mushaija ashwerwa eka*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Aba bayoroba, aba omukazi, aba nkabigumira, azara nayorora*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Ab' omusingyi gw'eka, ayombek'eka, atatsya abagyenyi aba omunyabuzaare .*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Aba rushoborora. kwarebya iba, aba yarebya eka*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Rutamwebwa rutamutekateka amaraka ga abigarire. Omukatongore bakantongoza kvevugira amamanzi nka aga. Rutamwebwa rutamutekateka amaraka ga abigarire, omukatongore bakantongoza, omukabungo bambungabunga, reero nkevugira amamanzi nka aga.*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Manya bayakyira akatwakira, bafungura yatufungurira, bariisa yaturiisa twaruga aha kyamushana. Reero batuyweisa akatunyweisa, batinda aketinda ekyetindo ky'abakundeine. Ekyetindo ky'abakundaine kimanywa ekyesiigo kyabo.*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Nimunzaare ba Taata!*

Audience: *Eeeh!*

Mwevugi: *Mwena ngu eeh!*

Audience: *Eeeh! (x2)*

Omwevugi: *I who never forgets, who is never swayed by the beautiful voices of Queens. I stepped on a Hunchback and he trembled; then the girls nicknamed me the 'one who never tires'.*

Audience: *Yes!*

Omwevugi: *I run through the swamp with youthful sweat and climbed the mountain of Nyakataraka. The herdsman threatened to stab those (cattle) which can't bend chewing cud cattle cud in the afternoon rest.*

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: *One who gives a daughter into marriage with a yoke has actually given her away with cattle. A beautiful girl like this one does not just go away with empty hands. In this gourd, there is Kigondo and Rugondo, in the next, there is Kasina and Rusina. In the other, there is Kagaju and Rugaju and in this one, there is Kasa and Rwasu.*

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: *When a beautiful one goes into marriage, she is not married to her husband alone but to his family.*

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: *She becomes a listener, a responsive wife who perseveres, and bears children, mothers them.*

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: She becomes the foundation of the home. She builds the home, becomes hospitable to visitors, and becomes a family member.

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: She has answers to all questions. When she betrays her husband, she betrays the entire family.

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: I who never forgets, who is never swayed by the beautiful voices of Queens. In Katongore I was commissioned to perform recitations to these heroes. In Katongore I was commissioned; in Kabungo they treated my fractures. Then I performed recitations to the heroes like these.

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: (When we arrived today) The one who welcomes welcomed us, the one who cooks porridge cooked for us, the one who feeds fed us until we returned from lunch. Then the one who serves porridge served us the one who prepares the bed adorned herself with the clothes of those who are in love. The clothes of those who are in love only know those who wrap themselves with the cloth.

Audience: *Yes!*

Mwevugi: I beg to be born in this home, elders!

Audience: *Yes! (x2)*

At a traditional Kinyankore wedding, the poet must talk about cattle and the beautiful bride. The poet is always part of the groom's entourage. Banyankore believe that a girl cannot/should not be married if cattle, has not been paid for her bride price. This is why the poet says that 'A beautiful girl like this one does not just go away with empty hands.' Names of cattle are mentioned in pairs because each bull/cow is significant. Pairing symbolizes that the groom and bride will be able to bear children since they are also a pair. For instance, *kigondo* is the bull (male), while *rugondo* is the cow (female), *sina* is the bull, while *rusina* is the cow, *gaju* is the bull while *rugaju* is the cow, etc. Sometimes names of cattle are mentioned depending on the clan of the bride or suitor since clans are associated with cattle. Other times, names are mentioned depending on the bride's favourite cow/bull, or the favourite of her parents. It may also depend on the cow/bull which the suitors consider as the best among the herd which they would have paid for bride price. The dynamics vary greatly. For example, the performer may refer to the bride as 'Kagaju' if it is a special gift to her from her parents on her wedding day. The other significance of paying paired cattle as dowry is to imply that the cattle will be able to reproduce easily since the owner of the cattle will not need to search for

mates of the opposite sex elsewhere. This particular *ekyevugo*, recited on the day of *okuhingira*, dramatises the rituals and activities of the Kinyankore bridal dowry and wedding ceremonies. *Omwevugi* acknowledges the hospitality of the hosts and praises them for performing key roles at the wedding ceremony. For example, the individual who welcomes *abashwezi* (husbands/suitors), the caterers and other people waiting on the guests. After mentioning names of the cattle that were paid for dowry, he then requests the groom's father-in-law(s) to accept him to marry the girl.

O *kuhingira*, literally translated as 'Give -Away' the bride into marriage, must be accompanied by *ekyevugo*. An individual male or female who is normally selected in advance, and is part of the groom's entourage, performs it. He performs this poem on behalf of the suitor. The performer addresses the bride's parents directly as if he were the one going to marry the girl. Many of such poets today are hired to do this job since there are fewer poets compared to pre-colonial times. As noted in the introduction, this act is known as '*okwevugira omugamba*' (appreciating of the yoke). A yoke is a symbolic long stick used to carry a collection of gifts including a collection of gourds of milk and *ecuba* or traditional container which herdsmen use to carry water for their cattle. The bride's family prepares *omugamba* and gives it to her as a special present to mark her wedding. Therefore, *abashwezi* (suitor's entourage) must perform *ekyevugo* in appreciation of the present; otherwise, they will be considered as ungrateful. The bride's family is at liberty to reject *ekyevugo* if it has not been performed to their satisfaction; for instance, if they do not appreciate the lyrics or performance. A fascinating scenario develops when the bride's family presents *omwevugi* to challenge the *abashwezi*'s apparently unsatisfactory show. That would mean that the *abashwezi* are defeated and so cannot take the bride with them. This may go on for a while until the bridal group is either satisfied by *omwevugi*'s skills or the in-laws produce a more accomplished performance. At the end of the recitation by the groom's *mwevugi*, he says, 'I beg to be born in this home elders!'. At this point, if the bride's family has appreciated the *ekyevugo*, her father hands her over to the suitor and gives her blessings as she begins her marriage. The suitors, now qualified as 'husbands', receive and go back to their home with her. Hence, *Ruhendeka*, the title of the recitation, comes true as the man (the one who worked hard and got tired but did not give up) is seen as having worked tirelessly in order to win the woman of his dreams.

Politics is a central theme of some *ebyevugo*. Several informants recited *ebyevugo* whose subject was about the success of the NRM. Many praised Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the Ugandan President, for his successful political reign. An example is the following *ekyevugo*, *Obusingye*,

which is performed by both, Bahima and Bairu. It was performed by 55 year old Constance Sabiti.

Obusingye

(Peace)

Omwevugi: Mwena ngu eeh.

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Obusingye omu Uganda, obusingye Isingiro. Nkarubata akabare katengatenga abahingi n'abariisa bayeterana abany'itima bagwa kihumura.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Uganda bakagitera akashana yatagata owekitinisa Purezidenti Yoweri Museveni yaba omuhumuriza. Ebi byona nimbigamba ahabwa Ruhanga n'Ihanga Ryaitu.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Kambanze nsiime owekitinisa Purezidenti Yoweri Museveni owazahwiire Uganda akakwata embundu nabaserukare be bakaza omukishaka bakarwana Uganda ekatunga obusingye.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Ngaruka nsima owekitinisa Purezidenti Yoweri Museveni owatambaire itwe abakyara obutwabaire twaguma enyima nkembiriro. Konka obwa hati naitwe twaine omugisha nitushutamu omu ofisi tukwata akacumu katongana nempapura. Tubingire obworo nobutamanya.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Ngarukye nsiime owekitinisa Purezidenti Yoweri Museveni ahabwa abaana baitu aba purimare na sekendure abariyo nibashoma obucweka ihembe boona bashome.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Imwe bantumwe murekye tubingye obworo nobutamanya. Mwikirize turwanise omuzigu sirimu. Tukyebaze akakooko ka sirimu tumanye amagara gaitu okugemereire.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *Nambwenu itwe aba Isingiro tushaziremu kwohereza ba MP bagyende omu Palamenti bakwatinitse n' owekitinisa Purezidenti Yoweri Museveni bamwongyere engaro, obusingye tuburye nk'abakama.*

Audience: Eeh!

Omwevugi: *N'akahangaare emanzi ya Muvumenti!*

Omwevugi: All you say yes

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: Peace be upon Uganda, peace be upon Isingiro. I stepped on a stone and shook it as farmers and cattle keepers gathered around while the envious people were filled with envy.

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: The brave warriors brought a ray of hope as His Excellency Yoweri Museveni became our comforter. I say this for God and our Country.

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: Let me first thank His Excellency Yoweri Museveni who liberated Uganda from the past dictators alongside his armed soldiers who, went to the bush and fought until Uganda got peace.

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: I again thank His Excellency Yoweri Museveni who raised us women from the inferior position. Now we are also lucky to sit in offices, hold a pen and paper and fight Poverty and ignorance

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: I praise His Excellency Yoweri Museveni for enabling our children in primary and secondary schools to study under the system of free education for all.

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: I call upon everyone; let's fight poverty and ignorance. And let us agree to fight the deadly disease AIDS. Each one of us should test for HIV/AIDS to know our health status

Audience: Yes!

Omwevugi: In fact, we people from Isingiro decided to delegate MPs [Members of Parliament] so that they corporate with His Excellency Yoweri Museveni to keep peace. Long live He, the hero of National Resistance Movement!

Audience: Yes!

(Interview, January 6, 2011)

Omwevugi praises Museveni elevating him to the status of a hero since, in her view he has performed brave acts - leading a grass-roots guerrilla war that restored peace in Uganda. Such a poem may be recited when Museveni visits *omwevugi's* home village, Masha. It also serves as an appreciation and encouragement for the heroic character to proceed with such good deeds. *Omwevugi* assumes that she is the mouthpiece of other people who may not have the chance to tell praise the heroic character. In the concluding lines, *omwevugi* calls the President 'emanz'i', which means "a hero whose deeds, should be acknowledged by the rest of society".

Costumes and Props

In performing *ebyevugo*, male poets may wear *ekanju* (white tunic) and *akakohe* (a free cloth). In addition, props such as *enkoni* (herding stick) or *EICUMU* (hunting spear) are used. These costumes and props have a cultural significance in performing Kinyankore poetry. According to 21 year-old Marcus Steven Tumuhaise from Nyamitanga, a poet should wear *enkofira y'akaranga nte* (a round shaped hat), *ekanju* and *rugabire* (rubber shoes) traditionally worn by Banyankore cattle herders in Uganda. Tumuhaise explained that the round-shaped hat, also known as 'an announcer of cattle' was initially worn by Bahima cattle keepers while *ekanju*, has been worn by the Banyankore since the 1940s. (Interview, January 6, 2011) However, sometimes, as an additional piece of costume, *omwevugi* may wear a string of beads across the chest. The *omwendal/akakohe/omunagi* that the *mwevugi* ties around the chest or his loins was originally used by the Bahima to protect themselves from the cold while grazing cattle. It is believed that that cloth replaced bark-cloth, a type of material made from the bark of the *mutuba*, tree, following the coming of the Arab (slave) traders, colonisation and the introduction of cotton in Uganda in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, the Bahima, practising barter trade, may have exchanged cattle or milk for cloth.

According to Sabiti, from Nyarubungo Masha, a male *omwevugi* should hold either *EICUMU* (spear) or *enkoni* (herding stick). Sabiti elucidated that because men are hunters, they carry spears. However, since men and women herd cattle, they are all likely to carry sticks with them. Hunters normally carried spears as fighting weapons against wild animals and enemies. Sabiti's view, however, is dismissive of the historical fact that men looked after cattle while women did the household chores. In addition to the foregoing views, Fred Amutuhaire argued that '[b]ecause of security reasons, these days the law only allows us (*abevugi*) to hold herding sticks but not spears'. Generally, there is fear of the *mwevugi*, in a moment of excitement, inadvertently stabbing someone in the audience. That said, given the modernization of stage performances, today *omwevugi* may drop the stick in order to hold a microphone.

Amutuhaire stated that sometimes poets wear either *oruhu* (an animal skin) of *emmondo* (a serval cat) or *engwe* (a leopard). 'When you wear an animal skin' he explained, 'the audience regards you as a hero or heroine and brave. They admire you. They may think that you are the one who killed a fierce animal such as the serval cat or the leopard'. Amutuhaire, however, acknowledged that it is not easy to obtain such an animal skin today since Banyankore no longer hunt. He also expressed a fear that

because the places where these animals are found have been designated as national parks and game reserves, *abevugi* are afraid to use the skins for fear of being prosecuted. (Interview, *ibid*)

Finally, Dora Banguba (53 years of age) informed the author that on top of other costumes and props, Bahima women a *bevugi* should adorn themselves with *enkwanzi* (traditional beads) on their arms, neck and forehead because '[a] woman should always look beautiful especially before men'. (Interview, January 2, 2011) Banguba's argument relates to that perception by Banyankore that a woman should never go plain without any adornment. Bahima girls also wear similar beads as a symbol of beauty at their *okwanjura/okuhingira*.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a basic surface process for performing *ekyevugo*. This criterion applies to all forms of *ebyevugo*, for all occasions by both Abahima and Abairu. It applies to poets of all experiences, no matter their ages. Even though the poets here have been shown to be men, and even though the art was originally male-dominated, like many other professions/occupations in African societies, there are female composers and reciters. *Ebyevugo* are a participatory oral art between the performer and audience. This requires the audience to have basic knowledge of the art in order to respond with enthusiasm to the performer vigilantly. This enthusiasm powers the performer to make a 'heroic performance.' A single performer cannot alone perform *ekyevugo*. Ideally, for this participatory element to be achieved, *ebyevugo* are performed in the round as is the case for other forms of African folk lore such as storytelling. But because of modernization in the theatre realm, performers often have to use the stage which isolates them from the audience as co-performers. Being an oral art, many *abevugi* are still reluctant to preserve the poetry by writing it down for purposes of documentation. Those who write it down only keep the written version up to the phase of learning and memorizing the poems.

References

- Bukenya, A.S, and M. Gachanga. *Oral Literatutre: A Junior Course*, Nairobi: Longhorn Kenya Ltd., 1996.
- Morris, H.F. *Heroic Recitations of Bahima of Ankole*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Kinyankore Folk Poetry: Structure and Context

Kangire, S. Rubaraza. *Nuwa Mbaguta and the Establishment of British Rule in Ankole*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973.

Nzaaro, Esau. *Orunyankore omu Rungyereza. Runyankore – English Dictionary*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2008.

Rubindi, G.N.P. *Ebyevugo nébyeshongoro bya Nkore*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996

Interviews

Amutuhaire, Fred. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 13 July, 2010

Baitwababo, Tanazio. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 4 January 2011

Banguba, Dora. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, January 2, 2011

Bikwasizehi, Benjamin. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 30 June, 2010

Byaruhanga, Rogers. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 7 July, 2010

Byomuhangi, Rwabyoma. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 30 June 2010

Kyiritama, Alice. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 2 January 2011

Sabiti, Constance. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, January 6, 2011

Tumuhaise, Marcus Steven. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, January 6, 2011

Tumuramyé, Ambrose. Interviewed by Viola Karungi, 7 July, 2010