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Transformations of the African Folktale: Towards a Poetics for Authentic Adaptation*

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Abstract

There are two broad kinds of transformation of the traditional content and performance of the African folktale in postcolonial Africa: auto-transformation and adaptation. The first is transformation from within the cultures that own the tales; the second is transformation from the standpoint of the outsider. This paper examines auto-transformation from the perspectives of language, subject matter and form and adaptation from the sensitive and insensitive adapter perspectives. The adaptations are then assessed against the traditional conventions of folktale composition, which Alex Olrik has crystallized into "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative", and the traditional conventions of folktale performance, which Sam Ukala has crystallized into "Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response". From these sets of laws emerges, perhaps, a poetics for reliable and authentic adaptation of the content and form of the African folktale.

Introduction

Transformation – the act of changing or being changed – is a common feature of the African folktale and its performance. The same stories are "told in a community with an infinite number of variations, and both the retailers and consumers may never tire of [it and this] goes side by side with the construction of relatively fresh tales" (Okpewho, 1983: 157); in performance, different types of the folktale blend into each other with "amazing facility" (Thompson, 1977: 24). No wonder Degh (1972: 59-60) describes all oral narratives as having "no final form" and Dorson (1972: 30) adds that "oral folklore simply moves into new forms...". Transformation occurs, not only in the form of the folktale, but also in its content

(Amuta, 1989: 70). The rationale for this lies in the fact that African oral cultures do not operate by written constitutions, but by codes of living transmitted and popularised mainly in the themes or moral lessons of their folktales; consequently, "dimmed memory of a people's traditional artistic performances is tantamount to dimmed memory of [their] identity, philosophy, and moral and ethical codes" (Ukala, 2004b: 265).

In this paper, I will examine the two broad kinds of transformation of the traditional content and form of the African folktale, namely, auto-transformation and adaptation. The first is transformation from within the cultures that own the tales; the second is transformation from the standpoint of the outsider. Under auto-transformation, language, subject matter and form are focused on; under adaptation, sensitive and insensitive adaptations are discussed. All transformations are assessed against the traditional conventions for the composition and performance of the folktale as crystallised, respectively, by Olrik (1965) and Ukala (1986), and my deduction is that a creative rather than a mechanical or perfunctory observance of the laws may yield a poetics for a reliable and authentic adaptation of the traditional content and form of the African folktale.

What are traditional content and form?

Content here refers to language and subject matter while *form* refers to mode of transmission. Though plot and conflict are also parts of content, in African folktale aesthetics, they are less susceptible to transformation than language and subject matter, since there are conventional ways of plotting and conflict development that are evident in most tales.[1]

Language

As any African folktale collector would find, the language of the folktale is not the workaday language of the folk among whom the folktale is found. Rather, it is artistic language, which has a lot in common with the typical language of modern literary drama: it is orally, auditorily and psychically effective. Orally effective language is described as one that

> an actor can speak easily and can manipulate to maximum dramatic effect.... For example, emotion is expressed in speech mainly by the way in which a speaker utters vowel sounds. (Albright *et al*, 1968: 41)

To be orally effective, therefore, the language must have familiar diction; its sentences must be short and, where they are long, they must be balanced and have natural pauses for breathing. An example of oral

effectiveness could be taken from "Ejimuchemebi", an Ika folktale[2] performed by 55-year old Pastor James Emefiele:

Ika	**English**
O nwe owu ebo,	There were two friends,
ikenye ikenye we wu,	males they were,
ikorobia ndi nwe ndun.	young men with energy.
Ohu wu Ejimuchemebi;	One was Ejimuchemebi;
hunobo wu Ejimucheosaebi	the other was Ejimucheosaebi.
Ejimuchemebi wu hun	Ejimuchemebi was one who
ghaleni anu odun.	did not heed advice.
Ihien ile O jekole j'eme,	Everything he wanted to do,
a'ju ihian.	he won't consult anyone.
O duale a obi	Once it struck his mind
ni o jeko eme e,	that he was going to do it,
o me ihien.	he did it himself.
O juko nnedi;	He won't consult father;
o juko nne;	he won't consult mother;
o juke nwenne;	he won't consult relatives;
o juko ndi idumu.	He won't consult neighbours.

This style is replicated in Ruth Finnegan's translation of a Limba (Sierra Leone) folktale, "Adamu and Ifu":

> He came and showed them the trees in fruit. He showed them every tree in fruit for them to eat. 'This is your food'. He showed them one – 'Don't eat this one oh! This is a prohibited one. You are not to eat it.'
> (Finnegan, 1970: 323)

Auditorily effective language, according to Albright, *et al* (1968: 42), is "composed in such a way that its meaning is readily grasped by the hearer at the same time that his ear is pleased by the sound". This definition is not completely acceptable because the grasping of meaning is essentially a function of the mind, not the ear. Therefore, I would rather define auditorily effective language as one that pleases the ear through different kinds of repetition. In African folktales, these include anaphora – the repetition of a word or group of words at the start of a sequence of lines; repetition of a line or phrase or word at short intervals; consecutive repetition of a phrase or clause twice or more times in a line; "chain repetition" - one in which the end of a line forms the beginning of the next line (Ukala, 1986: 184); alliteration; assonance; and rhyme.

For lack of space, I will give three examples of repetition. First is anaphora, which is apparent in the last four lines of the quotation from "Ejimuchemebi" above. Second, the repetition of a line or phrase or word at short intervals, is evident in the tale, "Tortoise and Beetle", performed by Mrs. Rosa Maghori:

Ika	**English**
Ya o [Mbekwu] no fain Ada ihien.	(Then he [Tortoise] struck Beetle.
Ada no dan;	Then Beetle fell;
Ada no ki ukwua ch'ime; Ada no nyuma enya;	Beetle withdrew his legs; Beetle closed his eyes;
ya Ada no nwuhun-o.	then Beetle died-o.
"Erhn?" Mbekwu e le e; o kpa eka.	"Erhn?" Tortoise examined him; he touched him.
"Ada, lihi n'igwaru rhi nni rhi anu."	"Beetle, get up and eat food and eat meat."
Ada no nwuhun.	Beetle died.
"Ada, lihi nu. Onwu ogbahu ro de ra nke ero?"	"Beetle, get up now. Is this true death or feigned death?"
Ada no nwuhun.	Beetle died.
"Rhi nni n'iricharin anu!"	"Eat food and eat all the meat!"
Ada no nwuhun.	Beetle died.

The third example of repetition, drawn on Susie McDermid's translation, *Tales from the Basotho,* is of consecutive repetition of a clause: "She walked, she walked, she walked through the bushes" (McDermid, 1974: 5). Alliteration and assonance are also evident in the above examples.

Psychically effective language communicates graphically and emotively to the mind through such devices as slurred vowels, onomatopoeia, ideophone and imagery. In the following extract from "Tortoise and Beetle", slurred vowel occurred in the delivery of the last line:

Ika	**English**
Ya ke Mbekwu no gbama, o gbama, o gbama. ... Mbekwu no gba te-e-ee.	So Tortoise began to run, he ran, he ran. ... Tortoise ran fa-a-aar.

The slurring of "e" communicates, not only that Tortoise has run a very long distance, but also that he may never know his way back from that deep jungle.

Onomatopoeia occurs in the Ika folktale when common or formal adverbial phrases or clauses are replaced by sounds that suggest their own meanings, for example, the fire in "The Mischievous Little Boy" burns "*gidigidi*"; and the entrapped dove in "Dove and Melon Seeds" flutters his wings "*pipipi*". Since it replaces a phrase or clause, the onomatopoeia in the Ika folktale is a word-saver. It also communicates meaning more vividly than the phrase or clause that it replaces.

The ideophone in the African folktale appears similar to the onomatopoeia, but there is a marked difference between the two: while onomatopoeia is a word-saving device, the ideophone is a dispensable addition to an otherwise complete sentence. The following extracts from the Ijo "Ozidi Saga", recorded by Clark, which describes the sound of marching, thunder and lightning, and from McDermid's *Tales from the Lesotho* illustrate this phenomenon:

> ... amene numo mo sarai bo mene
> Eriti, ti, ti, ti, ti
> Erien kene kpi-kpi-kpi, kpi-kpi-kpi, kpi-kpi-kpi...
> Agono bi yu timi gbara-ra-ra-ra-ra.
> (Clark, 1977: 328)

"The melon came rolling toward her, *pi-ti-ki, pi-ti-ki,* it knocked her down *pi-ti-ki, pi-ti-ki,* then rolled away, *pi-ti-ki, pi-ti-ki*." (McDermid, 1974: 34-35)

The ideophone either creates a mental picture of an action or shape or arouses the sensation of smell, colour or sound of what has been described or alluded to in a particular statement. In that regard, it may be seen as a form of imagery contrived by use of sound rather than by simile, metaphor and personification, by which the conventional imagery is contrived. Yet conventional imagery is also evident in the African folktale, for example, in the song in "Onunu", another folktale of that title, in which Onunu, the wonder child, calls himself "eater-of-barrenness".

Subject Matter

Everything that has affected and/or still affects the African folk from the beginning of time to date constitutes the subject matter of the African folktale, and subject matter is transformed by recreation or substitution in response to new experiences. I will return to this under auto-transformation of subject matter.

Form

In the traditional African setting, folktales are transmitted by oral performance. Ben-Amos (1971: 10) observes that "the telling is the tale":

> Two stylistic aspects of story-telling characterize narrative performance in many African societies: active audience participation, and dramatization. The telling of a story is often a dialogue between the narrator and his listeners, the former unfolds the events and the latter respond vocally in affirmation. Such an exchange may be solely verbal, melodic or both. (Ben-Amos, 1975: 179)

Graham-White makes a similar observation, but adds:

> In the Congo, the Bologa perform an epic in which a singer's narration is acted out by mimes [...] while in the Ngom-Ngom dance of the Fang the acting-out of the story, sung by the Chorus, is done by a masquerade and puppets. (Graham-White, 1974: 27)

The key elements in the above descriptions are the performer's leading role, active audience participation, narration, dramatisation, dialogue, impersonation, song, mime, dance, masquerade, puppetry, movement and role-play, all of which are elements of drama and theatre.

Transformations

Auto-Transformation

As earlier stated, auto-transformation of the tale and/or its performance is carried out by members of a particular culture, working from the insider's viewpoint. They transform the content and form of their own intellectual property "in accordance with the changing realities of life and the dynamics of the struggle for subsistence" (Amuta 1989: 70). By so doing, they refresh or adjust old thematic or aesthetic values or introduce new ones, which are considered desirable.

Auto-transformation of Language

The agents of auto-transformation of language are mainly younger members of the culture, who have acquired some Western education or have been exposed to other cultures through travelling. They transform or fracture language by occasionally injecting English words into the indig-

enous language or by composing songs entirely in the English language, especially in new tales. For example, in "The Placenta Soup", performed by Miss Morka, then a student at the College of Education, Igueben, Nigeria, the following English expressions or their corruption were injected into Ika language: "So", "replesi" (replace), laiki (like), "witoutu" (without), "No smoke without fire", "... daytime for notin. Sometin is driving it", "so says our forefadas", "bad example", "a bad leader brings about di bad subjects, okay?" Similarly, in performing the "Ozidi Saga", Okabou, who lived in the city of Ibadan, frequently infused English words into Ijo, for example, "tain" (time) and "keloke" (o'clock or clock), etc. (See Clark, 1977). Also the song in "Bini", an Ika folktale performed by 14-year old Clement Dibie, is entirely in Pidgin English:

The papa, the mama, Bini don die
The papa, the mama, Bini don die
If you look under pillow
You'll see Bini head
If you look under pillow
You'll see Bini head
The papa, the mama, Bini don die.

Auto-transformation of Subject Matter

By transforming old subject matters or substituting them with new ones, the traditional folktale performer removes the anachronism of old subject matters in a new social order, keeps up with topicality, enhances the contemporary relevance of his/her work, and affirms the relevance of the folktale as a powerful means of communicating new ideas, fancies and values to the contemporary indigenous community. It is through the transformation of subject matter that fracturing of the folktale easily occurs.

A good example is the subject matter of "Bini", which is cannibalism as the evil of modernity. A house wife, who loves eating meat, is so angry about the meagre monthly allowances she receives from her husband for the family's up-keep. So she decides to slaughter and eat her husband's favourite son. Giving wives monthly feeding allowances was a new phenomenon in Ika in 1982, when the tale was collected; it was practised only in households where husbands earned monthly salaries. Therefore, as a caution to greedy, inconsiderate modern wives, the wife in the tale is executed. Traditionally, and in earlier folktales, women cooked with meat provided by their hunting husbands. The substitution of that practice

with cannibalism in the present tale was to heighten the audience's revulsion against unpredictable modern ways.

The subject matter of another tale, "No Smelling", is the importance of knowledge. In the narrative, there are many brands of rice that smell bad, but a particular brand has a sweet aroma and is very tasty. The wife challenges the husband, who loves rice, to go to the market and identify the sweet-smelling, tasty brand that she will cook for him. It is not until he finds it that he can have a decent rice meal, which was uncommon in Ika at the time the folktale was collected. The moral of the tale is that the rewards of knowledge far outweigh the pains of acquiring it. There is also a feminist undertone: men should experience the never-ending agony and hardship of housework in order to understand what their wives go through! In this lies a fracturing of traditional gender roles.

Auto-transformation of Form

From time immemorial, African communities have engaged in several kinds of competition – wrestling, dancing, masquerading, poetry and folktale performance, etc. This inspired the people to strive for excellence and resulted, among other things, in the development of new techniques, which made folktale performance comparable with, and as satisfying as, the Western theatre performances, which were beginning to take root. For example, in her description of *Anansesem*, the story-telling art of the Akan of Ghana, Sutherland suggests that story-telling has developed from a show of dramatics to a professional theatre: "there are in existence some specialist groups who have given it a full theatrical expression with established conventions" of characterization, language, structure, inter-change between narrator and audience, music, opening and closing (Sutherland, 1975: p. v).

Similar auto-fracturing of form has occurred in many other African cultures. For instance, among the Tiv of Nigeria, the original largely verbal narrator-audience form of folktale performance was transformed into a quasi-professional theatre, popularly known as "the Kwagh-hir theatre" (Gbilekaa, 1980: 6-7). Judging by its performances since the nineteen-seventies, which feature narration, music, dance, and dramatisation of the narrated story, it provides an example of well-rehearsed, indigenous repertoire of folktale performances in Nigeria.

Also by the early 1990's, Lele Gbomba of Sierra Leone had become a popular professional performer of the folktale, making "adroit use of costume"; narrating while sitting on a mat at the centre of the arena or ranging "freely over the whole arena when playing the role of a character in the drama"; at random, engaging members of the audience to play

roles while the audience accompanies the performance with songs and instrumental music (Spencer, 1990: 351-52, 356). Similar development toward professionalism in folktale performance is reported by Graham-White (1974) in his study of the Nkudo villagers in the Republic of the Congo, for whose performances realistic sets are sometimes constructed.

Adaptation

In our context, adaptation is the transformation of the content and/or form of the folktale by translators and creative writers, working from the outside. Its main purpose is to repackage the tale for a wider audience, using a form that they are familiar with. Depending on how much of the original thematic and linguistic content it retains, it might serve, even in its new form, as a means of preserving and propagating the tale, its aesthetic and thematic values. This has resulted in the uniqueness of modern African literature: the "folk tradition in [it] has [...] become part of the essential qualities of its literary expression" and the root of much of its appeal (Nnolim: 1992: 16). African writers also use collected folk texts "as a basis for writing original works that reflect, from a more or less modern perspective, some of the major concerns of today so as to demonstrate that [oral literature is] relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals" (Okpewho, 1992: 293).

Okpewho (1983: 216-17) examines adaptation in four categories: tradition preserved, tradition observed, tradition refined, and tradition revised. Tradition is *preserved* in an adaptation when there is a "near total submission to the oral tradition" with regards to content or form, even though the adapter makes use of "contemporary idioms" or stylistic devices, for example, Clark's (1966) *Ozidi.* Tradition is *observed* when the adaptation shows a "greater degree of creative licence" in "broadening the ideological scope of local traditions by marrying them with concepts and motifs" taken from other traditions. Tradition is *refined* when the author "take[s] leave of the tales in their old forms" because he "is solidly attached to the more contemporary modes of creative writing": only the "figures" of the tales are "adopted for the essences or values that they embody"; [...] New tales are told [...] though the old messages endure". Finally, tradition is *revised* when the writer creates his own "myth of a society with an undifferentiated ethnicity... takes leave of the old tales and the prejudices they embody" (Okpewho, 1983: 218-19). Okpewho's four categories reveal two broad types of adaptation: sensitive and insensitive.

Sensitive Adaptation

Sensitive adaptation may be found in two forms. In the first, there is a recognizable long-existing folktale which is translated or adapted; in the second, there is a new tale that has been created. Yet both are written in a way that captures the thought and speech patterns of the folk of the relevant culture as well as their compositional and performance conventions.

To produce a sensitive adaptation, the translator or adapter transforms mainly language, subject matter and/or form. He may transform the language by giving the tale a foreign language and, conversely, giving the foreign language the ring and flavour of the tale's original language, thereby creating "indigenized English" (Ukala, 1996: 281), if the translation/adaptation is into the English language. He may transform subject matter by grafting new experiences onto an old tale, thus enhancing its contemporary relevance, or by creating a new tale with a theme that is relevant to the people and reflects their present condition, values and aspirations. Finally, he may transform the traditional form by reformatting it for the literary theatre without bleaching out its essential conventions. Sensitive adaptation adopts the format of drama, even in a translation, because, as has been demonstrated above, the traditional African folktale exists only in performance.

In this regard, Clark's *The Ozidi Saga* is, perhaps, one of the most authentic representations of the form of the African folktale in a translation. It is a bilingual text with two columns: Ijo on the left and the English translation on the right. Both columns are presented in the manner of a play-text with the name/title of each speaking performer to the left margin, followed by a colon and then the performer's speech:

> Yabuku:Agadakpen yenyen (Praise name)
> Okabou:Never pick at fire!
> Although he roused himself, his belly would not respond.
> 'Oh', he said, 'help, then – O Orea my mother, my mother,
> my mother! ..."
> Caller:O STORY!
> GROUP:YES!
> (Clark, 1977: 133-134)

Okabou is the lead performer and plays the major roles. Yabuku, Caller, Group or Audience or Spectators, Solo, Chorus, Prompter, and Master-drum are the collaborators or co-performers, who play all the subsidiary roles. The translation has the equivalent of stage-directions

that are italicised and placed in parentheses. The difference between them and the stage-directions of literary drama is that they describe past actions while the stage-directions of literary drama texts are blueprints for future actions.

The patent flaw in Clark's translation is its failure to reflect the peculiarities of the language of the original; for example, in the translation of the Ijo description, which I quoted earlier:

... amene numo mo sarai bo mene	... marching in with his song.
Eriti, ti, ti, ti, ti	You should hear the noise of it.
Erien kene kpi-kpi-kpi, kpi-kpi-kpi,	The sky trembled with every
kpi-kpi-kpi...	motion
Agono bi yu timi gbara-ra-ra-ra-ra.	And the thunder of it tore the sky

(Clark, 1977: 328)

Clark (1977: 156) admits that his renditions of ideophones are "poor approximations to the sense and sound of the original".

Thus sensitive adaptations of the content and form of the African folktale may be evaluated by how much they entrench indigenous compositional and performance conventions, which have been respectively crystallized into "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" by Alex Olrik (1965) and "Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response" by Sam Ukala (1986). Perhaps, I should now briefly describe the two sets of laws.

Olrik's (1965: 132-36) laws are seven in number: 1. The Law of Opening and Closing; 2. The Law of Repetition; 3. The Law of Three; 4. The Law of Two to a Scene; 5. The Law of Contrast; 6. The Law of Twins; and 7. The Law of the Importance of Initial and Final Position. I do not wish to describe these laws further because they are subsumed in Ukala's laws, to be described shortly, which are crystallised from performance conventions, while Olrik's derive from texts. For the African performer does not "memorize and deliver already written lines" (Ukala, 2000: 77) but spontaneously composes and delivers texts in the process of performance. Consequently, the Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response provide a more comprehensive set of parameters for the evaluation of adaptations. Suffice it to acknowledge that Olrik's laws are largely observed in African folktales. For example, Laws 2, 4 and 5 are evident in "Tortoise and Beetle" and "Ejimuchemebi", both of which I discussed above.

Here are Ukala's Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response:

1. The Law of Opening

A performance of the folktale is opened by an opening formula, which

may be rendered in full or shortened. It arouses the audience with a verbal formula and/or a song, offers it an opportunity to encourage or stop a prospective performer, depending on the audience's rating of his/her abilities. It also allows for the introduction of major characters and/or the setting of the tale. This is different from Olrik's first law, which captures the movement of the *sage*, from calm to excitement at the beginning and then from excitement to calm at the end (Olrik: 1965: 132.)

2. The Law of Joint Performance

Having approved of a performer, the audience takes upon itself the obligation to be a collaborator or co-performer by singing, asking questions to remove doubt, making comments to enhance vividness and, sometimes, taking over the tale from a failing performer.

3. The Law of Creativity, Free Enactment, and Responsibility

Creativity: The performer fleshes out the memorized bone-structure of the tale that he has chosen to perform in words that are pleasing to speak, to hear, and easy to understand. He adapts new experiences to the tale to replace inappropriate parts or increase contemporary relevance. He may create a new tale which may later be absorbed into the traditional repertoire, if it meets the rules of folktale composition. Free Enactment: At his discretion, the performer simply narrates or gesticulates and simulates any character's actions and/or speech. Responsibility: He may take the creative liberty to fracture content and/or form, but he takes responsibility for the way his story turns out. He is, therefore, discreet in his response to questions and comments from the audience. (Ukala, 1986: 265-267)

4. The Law of the Urge to Judge
5. The Law of Protest against Suspense
6. The Law of the Expression of the Emotions
7. The Law of Ego Projection:

These derive from the audience's responses as spectators and critics when they are not co-performing. They evaluate the narrator's abilities and the characters' conducts (Law 4); ask questions and make comments which could defuse suspense if not discreetly handled by the narrator (Law 5); freely express emotions of grief, pleasure, scorn, fear and sympathy (Law 6); and make idiosyncratic interjections aimed at attracting attention to themselves as potential narrators (Law 7).

(Ukala, 2001: 38)

8. The Law of Closing

> This is manifested in the closing remarks of the performer; the closing formula, by which the performer signs off and the audience passes its final judgement on him/her; and, sometimes, a closing song (Ukala, 1986: 269).

Using the above laws, I will now evaluate Clark's (1966) *Ozidi,* an example of sensitive adaptation of content and form. It is an adaptation of the Ijo "Ozidi Saga" for the literary theatre. The Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response are patent in Clark's (1977) translation of the saga, entitled *The Ozidi Saga*. In *Ozidi,* the play, Clark entrenches Laws I, 2 (partially), 3, and 8. Under Law 2, the Law of Joint Performance, he involves the seven virgins, selected from the audience, in the sacrifice scene (though they remain mute all through), and the "spectators" in the final processional dance, yet he neglects to reflect Laws 4 to 7 and, consequently, loses a great deal of the "audience's collaborative-cum-critical input" (Ogude, 1999: 3). Clark also fails, as in his translation, to reflect the thought and speech patterns of the Ijo in the language of the play. Despite these shortcomings, there is sufficient evidence of the playwright's sensitivity to the content and form of the epic that he adapted.

Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1982), *Another Raft* (1988) and *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1991), and Sam Ukala's *Akpakaland* (1990), *Break a Boil* (2004a) and *The Placenta of Death* (2007) are also commonly cited by critics as more or less sensitive adaptations of African folktale conventions. This, according to Anigala (2007: 7), enhances the mass appeal, communicability and contemporary social relevance of the plays, since they use the traditionally popular "folk tale device as a dramatic periscope to scrutinize contemporary socio-political concerns". Ogude (1999: 4) expresses similar views, but posits that what "distinguishes [Ukala] from other users of the myths and legends of our past is his application of the traditional performance idiom and structure in the re-enactment of tales and parables". Hence, perhaps, Asagba (2008: 82) opines that "after Clark and Sutherland, no other African playwright has been so overtly and passionately involved in the exploration and utilization of the traditional African past as Sam Ukala has done." Writing about *Akpakaland* (1990), he states:

> From the standpoint of subject matter, thematic content, form, language, décor, use of space, music, dance and audience participation, the play

> like most of Ukala's drama draws inspiration from the repertoire of folk narrative performances and techniques. (Asagba, 2008: 85)

Also Inyang (2008: 187) describes Ukala's transformation of the same play into a video film in 2006 as "a cultural preservation technique", due to its reflection of indigenous idioms and performance strategies even on the screen.

Insensitive Adaptation

Insensitive translations show no sensitivity to the linguistic peculiarities and compositional and performance conventions of their sources. Tales collected are

> freely translated: the parts which are not understood are omitted or re-worked, the contradictions are settled, and the whole is retold in a style acceptable to a wider Western public […]. The foregoing may show how risky it is to work on most published collections of oral literature texts from unfamiliar cultures, especially if one's main concern is the wording of the folktale. (Jason, 1977: 269)

They are risky to work on because they are "fake-lore", according to Dorson (1950: 335): they do not represent the content and form of the original and, therefore, cannot be identified with by their owners.

Examples of insensitive translations abound, but it may suffice to cite Francis Omili's *Folk Stories from Ukwuani* (2006) and *The Missing Prince and Other Tales from Ukwuani* (2008). None of the twenty-eight tales in the two collections reflects the compositional and performance conventions of the Ukwuani, even though Omili shows awareness of the conventions in his textbook for the teaching of Ukwuani language, *Imu Asusu Ukwuani* (2010: 135-36). Rather than apply the indigenous opening formula, for example, he opens most of the tales with the colonial stock phrase, "Once upon a time"!

Insensitive dramatic adaptation comes in the form of plays with narrators or narrator-figures, which are based on indigenous sources but show inadequate sensitivity to indigenous compositional and performance conventions, for example, Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1970) and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* (1984). In such plays, narrators or narrator figures are used in ways that are largely alien to the folk of their cultural settings. Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* exemplifies this point. It has a narrator and narrator-figures; begins with an arouser, "Wake Up Mother Africa", and ends with a song; contains "a traditional gun-boat

dance" (160); has song all over; contains a heavy sprinkling of the vernacular, several instances of role-play and narration followed by dramatization. Nevertheless, the director of the play says it is "most reminiscent of early Brechtian theatre" and that Brecht's *Measures Taken,* which the playwright saw in the Edinburgh festival of drama and theatre, "was an important influence in [the play's] construction" (Steadman, 1984: 147, 151).

Conclusion

I have attempted to demonstrate that transformation is a common feature of the African folktale. In particular, I examined transformations of language, subject matter and form and found that they are effected, first, by members of the cultures which own the tales, working from the insider's standpoint, and then by adapters, working from the outsider's standpoint to repackage the tales for the consumption of a wider audience. Writers have produced sensitive or insensitive adaptations, depending on how much they reflected the traditional compositional and performance aesthetics of the African folktale as crystallized in Ukala's "Eight Laws of Aesthetic Response". Yet, because of the dynamism of African folktale aesthetics, a reliable poetics for the authentic adaptation of the African folktale may derive from a creative rather than a mechanical or perfunctory observance of the laws.

Notes

* "Programme Note", *Nigeria*, 1977

1. See, for example, Ukala's (1992) "Plot and Conflict in the African Folktale", *African Literature Today,* 18, pp. 62-72.

2. I will give a number of examples on language mainly from Ika folktales for two reasons: I collected and studied sixty of them, including "Ejimuchemebi" (besides forty-two others which are variants); I am Ika and literate in the language.

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