

THE LANGUAGE OF IGBO SATIRIC POETRY

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The poet, according to Plato, is a man of divine inspiration. He is naturally endowed with peculiar sensibilities that enable him to perceive what members of his society cannot perceive and to put his perceptions across to them in a way that should inspire them to take actions aimed at safeguarding their rights and interests. One of the literary arts employed by the Igbo poet in achieving this goal is satire, the literary art of exposing folly, vice and other social misdemeanors to ridicule. In this paper we examine the Igbo poet's use of language to achieve his satiric goals. The paper argues that the Igbo satiric poet achieves his literary goals by (i) exploiting the rhetoric devices already existing in the language, such as sarcasm, metaphor, metonymy, symbolism, personification, idioms, and rhetorical questions, among others; (ii) exploring his own creative imagination through the use of slang and puns; and (iii) harnessing some essential ingredients of satire such as invective, indignation, mockery, and humour.

Le poète, selon Plato, est un homme d'une inspiration divine. Il est naturellement doté des sensibilités particulières qui lui permettent de percevoir ce que les membres de sa société sont incapables de percevoir, et de leur communiquer ses perceptions de façon à leur inspirer la volonté de sauvegarder leurs droits et intérêts. L'une des stratégies artistiques employées par le poète igbo pour arriver à ce but est la satire, la stratégie littéraire qui dévoile la folie, les vices, et d'autres malversations sociales afin de les ridiculiser. Dans la présente étude, nous examinons l'usage de la langue par lequel le poète igbo vise à atteindre son but satirique. Nous proposons que le poète satirique igbo atteigne son but littéraire par: (i) l'exploitation des moyens rhétoriques qui existent déjà dans la langue, tels que le sarcasme, la métaphore, la métonymie, le symbolisme, la personification, les idiotismes, et les questions rhétoriques entre autres. (ii) l'exploration de son imagination créatrice par l'emploi des argots et des jeux de mots; et (iii) son génie de maîtriser les ingrédients essentiels de la satire, tels que les invectives, l'indignation, l'humour, etc.

0. INTRODUCTION

In his study of the language of Igbo poetry, Uzochukwu (2003) notes that the Igbo poet achieves his linguistic goals by making use of the established possibilities in the language and by going 'beyond those possibilities' through the creation of 'new communicative possibilities which are not already in the language.' The present study examines the language of Igbo satiric poetry in the light of the above. The paper argues that one of the ways the satiric poet makes use of 'the established possibilities in the language' is by exploring in his work the various rhetorical devices in the language, such as metaphor, metonymy, euphemism, symbolism, sarcasm, rhetorical questions and personification. He also makes use of the various elements of satire such as, invective, indignation, parody, humour and mockery, among others.

Satire, by definition, is the use of:

... invective, sarcasm, burlesque, irony, mockery, raillery, parody, exaggeration, understatement – wit in any of its forms – anything to make the object of attack abhorrent or ridiculous, ... (Coffey 1976:270),

to denounce the vices of either an individual or the society. Satire serves as ‘an artistic weapon (for) communicating ideas, thought and feelings about what is going on in the society’ (Olaoye 2004). The principal objective of satire is to diminish:

... a subject by making it ridiculous, and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn (Abrams 1988:167).

This objective is vigorously pursued by some Igbo poets in their attempts to reform the society through satire. This paper undertakes an examination of a selection of Igbo satiric poetry¹ with a view to demonstrating that Igbo satiric poets exploit all the communicative possibilities in the Igbo language in the discharge of their duties to the society.

1. THE IGBO POET AND HIS DUTIES

The Igbo poet is a man of many parts. He is a reformer, a political watchdog, a satirist, a praise singer, a chronicler of events, a teacher, and the people’s spokesman. As Plato put it, the poet is a man under divine inspiration who creates under the influence of forces beyond his control. The poet is by the nature of his calling, often considered eccentric, mainly because his own perception of reality is usually at variance with that of the other members of his society. He often sees what other members of the society cannot or are yet to, see and takes it upon himself to arouse their consciousness and to inspire them to action. He regards it as his duty to sensitize his people on happenings around them in the hope that they may see the need for social or political reformation. The poet may then be regarded as:

... a man on the watchtower who not only keeps eye on the society but also in the direction of the enemy to know when to warn his people (Ezejideaku 2005).

To be able to successfully discharge his duties to his society, the poet must be able to use language creatively. This he can do by adopting any of the various linguistic resources open to him. One of the ways he can exploit these linguistic resources is to satirize his subject through the use of appropriate imageries and linguistic devices (which are examined shortly). Another is to go beyond these by exploring his creative ingenuity through the use of puns and slang. The poet draws his inspiration from the happenings around him, and whenever he becomes inspired he finds it difficult to keep quiet. This is perhaps why Plato said the poet is under the influence of forces he cannot control.

2. RHETORICAL DEVICES

The Igbo satiric poet exploits the existing possibilities in the language by making use of some of the rhetoric devices found in the language. Among those used most often by the poets are rhetorical questions, sarcasm, metaphor, metonymy, symbolism, and irony. These are examined below.

¹ The poems examined in this study are selected from four different collections of Igbo poetry, namely: *Akpa Uche* (R.M. Ekechukwu), *Nka Okwu* (J.C. Maduekwe), *Omenka* (I. Ikwubuzo, C. Ogbulogo and L. Okoro) and *Utara Nti* (E.N. Emenanjo). Their readership cuts across all levels of secondary and tertiary education.

2.1 RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

A rhetorical question is:

A question asked, not to evoke an actual reply, but to achieve an emphasis stronger than a direct statement, by inviting the auditor to supply an answer which the speaker presumes to be the obvious one. (Abrams 1988:161)

This figure of rhetoric is mainly used for persuasion and to give speech or writing an oratorical tone. In his poem *Uko n'uju* (Scarcity in plenty) for instance, Emenajo uses rhetorical questions to set the tone of his 'attack' against the lies and hypocrisies of people in government who keep assuring the governed that there is enough wealth to go round and yet, the same people are passing through untold hardship:

- (1) **Kèduzi kà a gà-èsi nòdu n'anyị**
Wère aso na-àkwò aká?
Kèdu kwanu kà a gà-èsi n'ụ́ **n'íyí**
Kwere nchà Ọ́àa anyi n'anya? (*Utara Nti* pp.29-30)

How then can one be in the ocean
 and wash hands with spittle?
 How also would one be in a stream
 And allow soap into one's eyes?

Here the poet laments that in spite of being in the midst of plenty the masses are still dying of privation. His choice of rhetorical questions is evidently predicated on the poet's conviction that his observations are so obvious and the answers to his questions so clear that he does not have to supply them.

Obienyem adopts the same rhetoric device in his poem *Onye Nigeria* (The Nigerian) (*Utara Nti* pp 57-58) as he lampoons Nigerians for their wrong sense of values. For the poet, Nigerians do not attach much importance to true indicators of greatness such as honesty, hard work and discipline. Rather one's worth in society is measured by one's material possessions and position in society without regard to how such possessions were acquired. The poem is a ridicule on a country that has got its values completely turned upside-down, where the question is usually 'what do you have?' and not, 'how did you acquire what you have?'

- (2) **Motò òle kà I nwèrè?**
Ùdi leèsipòle kà I kwàrà?
Àkpa wònyòsi gī dīle?
Kèdu màkà èlèganzà gī?
Akpàtīle kà ha dī
Ì nà-àgba Benzi kà Ọ́Benlā (*Utara Nti*, pp.57-58)

How many cars have you?
 How many types of 'lace' have you got?
 How many are your portmanteaus?
 How about your 'eleganza'?
 How many boxes are they?
 Do you ride a 'Benz' or a 'Benly'?

literally means ‘King of heaven’ and the poet’s choice of it as the chieftaincy title of the butt of this poem is aimed at ridiculing the high-sounding and vain-glorious names often chosen by these ‘emergency’ chiefs. The poet is obviously worried that the once sacred chieftaincy institution among the Igbo is now up for grabs by the highest bidder. According to him, all it takes to become a chief in the contemporary Igbo society is to be just anybody!

- (5) **N’àlà onye Ọ̀lùlà nà-àbụ́ ezè nyị́rímányị**
In a land where everybody is the highest chief

Thus, he derides these so-called chiefs who go about showing off their emptiness, claiming to be the greatest chief in town (**eze nyirimanyi**).

In his poem *Afrika Enwerela Onwe Ya!* (Africa has become independent), Nnamdi Olebara also goes sarcastic in denouncing African countries that bask in the euphoria of being independent whereas they are still tied to the apron strings of their erstwhile colonial masters. In the first stanza of the poem, Olebara pretends to celebrate Africa independence:

- (6) **Ihe o ma, Afrika ènwerela ònwe yā!**
Site nà Verde ruo nà Horn
Site nà Gibraltar ruo nà Cape Good Hope
Ñǎa Afrika
Eē, añǎ màkà ndi isi ojī (*Akpa Uche*, p.66).

Great news, Africa is independent!
From the Verde to the Horn
From Gibraltar to the Cape of Good hope
Rejoice Africa
Yes, joy to the black race.

His real intention, however, comes out in the next stanza where he chides the so-called independent African countries for celebrating what is after all only a ruse.

- (7) **Mà Afrika, òlèē añǎ gī?**
Òlèē isi inwērela onwe gī?
Ebe o tu u m’Afrikà b’ò n’àlà ha
Ebe a chū p’ò m’ò n’è gi n’àlà ña hā
Chu ga hā ebe àlà kp’ò ku?
Afrika, ñ n’àlà ya

But Africa, where is your joy?
What is the meaning of your independence?
When many Africans are strangers in their own land
When your brothers are driven from their beautiful land
Into the dry places of the desert?
Africa, stranger in his own land

The allusion here is to the situation in the apartheid south Africa where, until just over a decade ago the blacks were denied even the most basic necessities of life. The poet opines that the so called independent countries of Africa were mistaken in their unwarranted celebrations of independence whereas some other African countries were still under the burden of colonialism, apartheid and bad leadership. Rather than celebrate, the poet says Africans should actually be ashamed of themselves:

- (8) **Gèe ntà South Afrikà, Zimbabwe nà Mozambique**
NŌlu u mŌnē
Kà iherē ōnwe gī mee gī
TŌ! Afrika, ŋo.

Listen in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique
 Hear the voice of your brothers
 And be ashamed of yourself
 Shame! Africa, what a pity.

Like all sarcastic writings, this poem is a call on Africa for self-examination and self-correction.

2.3 METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Metaphor and metonymy are closely related inasmuch as they both have to do with substitution. Metaphor is a figure of substitution based on similarity while metonymy substitutes an attribute for the thing itself. It substitutes cause for effect or part for whole or vice versa (Ezejideaku 2004:51). Lodge (1981:11) argues that metaphor and metonymy are in fact rhetorical applications of the two fundamental processes involved in any utterance: selection and combination ... metaphor juggles with selection and substitution; metonymy juggles with combination and context.

Metaphor is based on similarity between things that are otherwise dissimilar while metonymy tends to represent, as faithfully as possible, the actual relations of things to each other in space and time.

In a poem entitled *Akwukwo Oru Ego*²

- (9) **Ihe nā-alànye mmādŏ'i kwū ŏŏ**
Ihe nwaànyi sòrò ju dī ya
Wèrè gbasòwe di amōosu
Ihe lāgara onye Ìsraēl ŋwu rō ohī
ŋū ghi ya mètèrè ndi Ñdŏ jì èrè u mŏa?
Oŏwa ya butere ugu na mgbà niile di n' uwa taa?
Oŏwa ya kwànyèrè u kŏchukwu na bŏrŏ (Akpa Uche, p.42)

That which makes people commit suicide
 That which makes a woman abandon her husband
 And follow a wizard husband

² This poem was written in the early 1970s; when Nigeria used the pound as her legal tender. The one pound note: Obienyem uses a series of metaphors to describe the pound and its attributes:

What lured the blind and the lame into stealing?
 Is it not what makes the Indians sell their children?
 Is it not the cause of all the troubles in the world today?
 Is it not what sent a pastor to prison?

In this poem, Obienyem does not mention his subject (One pound note) by name; rather he describes it with a number of metaphors, each of them an apt description of one of the ugly attributes of money. It is only in the last line of the poem that he offers a physical (yet metaphorical) description of the pound as:

(10) **Nwa mpempe akwu kwēfū!**
 A worthless piece of paper!

This single line, while still not making a direct reference to the pound note, perfectly encapsulates the poet's contempt and indignation for this piece of paper that is 'the root of all evil'.

A cursory reading of the poem reveals that all the 'qualities' attributed to the 'One pound note' by the poet applies to money generally, so much so that the title of the poem could have been simply **Ego** 'money'. Thus it is obvious that the poet here uses the pound note as a metonymy for money. Hence, the evils attributed to the pound in this poem are actually not the evils of the pound but the evils of money.

2.4 SYMBOLISM

A symbol, in the broadest sense, is synonymous with a sign and refers to anything which stands for (or signifies) something else. In a more restricted sense, however, especially with respect to language, a symbol is applied to 'a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself' (Abrams 1988:184).

In the poems under study, symbols are used mainly to avoid making references to different (but related) objects at the same time. Hence one symbol is used to represent two or more objects or ideas. In the following example for instance, Emenanjo (in *Uko n'uju*) uses **ego** 'money' to signify natural resources, wealth and money proper:

(11) **Ego à**
A sDà ànyị nwèrè n'Ìjèlì Ìjèlì
BŌ'Ōkù kà ọ dD
Ego à
A sDà Ōughī ya bŌkwu
BŌaāni n'akwukwọ kà ọ dD (Utara Nti, pp.29-30)

This money (wealth, resources)
 We are told that we have in billions (abundance)
 Is only in the air
 This money
 We are told is not the problem
 Is on paper only

Ego ‘money’ is used here as a (metonymic) symbol of wealth or resources which Nigeria is said to have in abundance and yet has nothing to show for it, as the citizens continue to wallow in poverty.

A similar symbolic reference is made to **ji** ‘yam’ and **ego** ‘money’ in the poem *Dibia Adugburuja* (The fake physician) by Iwu Ikwubuzo (*Omenka*, p.18). As in example (10), **ji** ‘yam’ and **ego** ‘money’ are used to symbolize wealth.

- (12) **Dibi** $\square$ **ā** **mbụ** **anyī** $\square$ **kp** $\square$ **ó** **orụ**
Ùwe **agbada** **kà** **o** **yìrì** **bi** $\square$ **a**
Agbada **onū** $\square$ **ya** **mìrì** **è** **mì**
Fọjuchaa **ji** **ānyī** $\square$ **n’imē** **ya**
Fọjuchaa **ego** **ānyī** **n’imē** **ya**.

The first physician we engaged
 He came clothed in *agbada*³
Agbada with deep pockets
 He filled them with our yams
 Filled them with our money.

In this poem that highlights the misrule and mismanagement of Nigeria’s abundant resources by both her civilian and military rulers, the poet castigates these rulers who usually come in the guise of ‘saviour’ but turn out to be ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing.’ His reference to **Uwe agbada** (3 piece clothes) is also symbolic. In Nigeria, **agbada** is a typical dressing code of the rich and affluent. Among the Igbo, civilian government is referred to as **Chi** $\square$ **chi** $\square$ **Agbada** (**Agbada** ‘government’) because of the penchant of the politicians to dress in **agbada**. Thus, Ikwubuzo’s reference to **agbada** here is a reference to civilian rulers, as opposed to their military counterparts who are referred to as **ndi uwe Kaaki** ‘Khaki wearers’. Ikwubuzo underscores this in another stanza of the poem:

- (13) **Dibi** $\square$ **ā** **ūwe** **kààki** $\square$
Bùrù **ogw** $\square$ **à** **p** $\square$ **ò** **ia**
Isāp $\square$ **ānyī** $\square$ **unyi** **ūko**
Dibiā **agbada** **tèrè** **ānyī** $\square$

The khaki clothed physician
 Came with ‘SAP’⁴ concoction
 To ‘sap’ away the privation dirt
 Inflicted on us by the *agbada* physician

Like in example (11) where **agbada** symbolizes civilian government, Khaki here symbolizes military government. In yet another stanza of the poem, he makes another symbolic reference to the military uniform:

³ Agbada is a three piece flowing Nigerian attire for men. Because it is a favourite dressing for politicians and the affluent in society, it has become a symbol of both democracy and affluence.

⁴ We return to this later.

- (14) Ûwe hā bù àkpà àkpà n'àhụ
 Kari□a ùwe agbada anyi□ hēēē
 Mgbe a fòjùrù akpà e bù bia
 Ihe e kwùrù n'òbibia
 Abūghikwa ihe e kwùrù n'ùla ...

Their dresses were full of pockets
 More pockets than the civilians' before them
 When they filled their pockets
 What they said at their coming
 Is no longer what they say about going...

The poet's reference to dresses full of pockets is both literal and symbolic. Military uniforms are usually full of pockets. It is this fact that the poet exploits to symbolically refer to the pockets as the hiding places of stolen national wealth, here symbolized by yams and money.

2.5 IRONY

This is another linguistic device exploited by Igbo satiric poets. By definition, an irony is the 'dissembling or hiding what is actually the case ... in order to ... achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects' (Abrams 1988:91). An irony may also, refer to a situation in which an existing situation is different from, or the opposite of, what should be expected. This is the sense in which Emenanjo uses irony in his poem, *Uko n'uju* (Scarcity in plenty) where he laments:

- (15) Ñkenū bi n'àlà nà-apē mmānụ
 kari□a ò□sa bitū'elū (Utara Nti, pp.29-30)

The ground-dwelling wren gets more oil
 Than the tree-dwelling squirrel!

In these two lines Emenanjo encapsulates the embarrassing and ironical situation in which people living in less-endowed countries enjoy better standards of living than Nigerians, in spite of the enormous wealth available in the country. The contrast between **nkenu**, a very small bird that is not known for flying high up in the sky, and **osa**, the squirrel, is striking because the latter virtually lives on palm trees and should have abundance of palm oil. Ironically, however, the wren, despite being virtually ground-dwelling, enjoys greater access to 'oil'. This is no doubt an allusion to the Nigerian situation where countries that import petroleum products from the country seem to have better access to the products than Nigerians. **Nkenu** and **Osa** are thus metaphors referring to foreigners and Nigerians, respectively.

The irony is carried further by the poet's rhetorical question:

- (16) **Kŋrŋ m ihe kpātara nà**
Mmadùŋ gā-ènwe mgbuli,
Mà mgbuli àna-àgụ ya? (*Utara Nti*, pp.29-30)

Explain to me why
 One would have game
 But be in want of (game) meat.

A similar use of irony may be seen in Ikwubuzo's poem *Ehihiediegwu* (Day time-marauders) where he laments the activities of the 'advance fee fraudsters' popularly known as 4-1-9 reference to the section that deals with such crimes in the Nigerian criminal code. He registers the ironic situation in the following words:

- (17) **Ènwè n'àka aja āja**
àdakā n'òŋ nụ mmanu mmānu
Uŋkpālā buchaa afoime
Idiidio taghiri erie aku nwa
Aka kpāra àkù
À buŋruŋ ihe a nààra chie n'àlà. (*Omenka*, p.27)

The monkey with the soiled hands
 The baboon with the oily mouth
 The grasshopper carries the pregnancy
 But *idiidiotaghiri*⁵ enjoys the benefit
 The wealth gatherer
 Becomes disinherited

In this piece, **aka aja aja** 'soiled hands' and **onu mmanu mmanu** 'oily mouth' are idiomatic expressions referring to labour and reward respectively. Ironically, however, the labourer in this case is different from the recipient of the reward. It is the proverbial case of 'monkey-de-work-baboon-de-chop' (the monkey works while the baboon reaps the benefit) except that in this case, it goes beyond mere exploitation and suppression. Like **idiidiotaghiri**, these daytime marauders not only build their wealth on the sweat of others but kill their victims in the process if they posed any threat, and celebrate their dirty exploits in the full glare of all and sundry. Unfortunately, the society, ironically does not bother to find out how these vulgar spenders acquired their wealth as the poet alludes in the second stanza of the poem:

- (18) **Ajūkwana m ahia ha nà -àzuŋ**
Ajūkwana m ebe ha nà-àruŋ

Do not ask me their trade
 Do not ask me their profession

⁵ **idiidiotaghiri** is a type of ant that builds its nest with mud but seals the nest with a grasshopper which it kills.

2.6 PERSONIFICATION

Personification is a rhetoric device in which ‘either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings’ (Abrahms 1988:67).

A very good example of personification in Igbo satiric poetry can be seen in Maduekwe’s poem, *Ego na-Ekwu* (Money talks) where he personifies ‘money’ as the de facto ‘king’ of the society who prescribes the code of behaviour for its ‘subjects’:

- (19) **ÀgboghŃruchaala n’ihŃgŃ si rŃa, chŃm!**
ŃkŃ-egŃ kpŃnapŃ ndikŃŃ ezi ndŃ
Ego à gwàrà onye nwèrè ya, Gàa gbàjie oberè aka!
EgŃ nà-èkwu, Ń kwàdòrò oke ƣchichŃ na ajŃ òmùme
Bia nye iwu si: Chufuonù èzùmike, chufuonŃzi ndŃ (Nka okwu, pp.30-31)

Ladies have been defiled because money said to them, ‘seek me!’
 The call of money has denied men honest living
 This money told the rich: Go and strangulate the poor!
 Money talks, it supports greed and immorality,
 And has decreed: *away with rest, away with honest living!*

The poem is an indictment of a society that has got its priorities completely misplaced. As a result of the importance attached to the acquisition of money, people are ready and willing to do anything to acquire it, and this has wrecked morals and healthy living in the society.

The Igbo satiric poet also exploits his own creative imaginations through the use of puns, and slang. These are examined below.

2.7 PUN

This is a deliberate play upon words, either because they are homonyms (identical in sound) or they are very similar in sound. Ikwubuzo, for example, plays upon the English word *sap* in his denunciation of the military adventurers in Nigerian politics, who came with promises they had no intention of keeping:

- (20) **Dibia uwe kààkŃ**
Buru ƣgwŃ saàpŃja
IsàpŃnyŃ unyi ũko
Dibia agbada tèrè ànyi (Omenka, p.18)

The Khaki clothed physician
 Came with ‘SAP’ concoction
 To ‘sap’ away the privation dirt
 Inflicted on us by the agbada physician

Here the poet plays on the word *SAP*, acronym for the infamous Structural Adjustment Programme, introduced by the military dictators. He manipulates the English acronym ‘SAP’ to derive the Igbo word **isàpu** ‘to wash away’.

Apparently, the soldiers came to wash away corruption from the country but ended up ‘washing away’ the treasury in much the same way as erosion washes away the surface of the earth.

In the poem *Onye Nigeria* (The Nigerian), Obienyem plays upon the words ‘benz’ and ‘benly’ because of their similarity in sound;

(21) **Ì nà-àgba beḂ kà ỌḂenlì?** (*Utara Nti*, pp.57-58)

Do you ride a ‘Benz’ or a ‘Benly’?

The play on the words becomes more effective in view of the contrast between the two words. At the time this poem was written (early 1980s) Mercedes Benz was the most expensive car in Nigeria while Honda Benly was among the cheapest motorcycles and usually associated with teachers whom the society perceived as belonging to the lower rung of the economic ladder. Thus, **beḂ** becomes a metaphor for wealth while **benlì** signifies poverty.

2.8 SLANG

Slang is an informal expression peculiar to a particular group of people. In most cases it is difficult for a non-member of the group to understand a given slang word. The use of slang is one of the ways Igbo satiric poets make their satiric attack more poignant. In the poem *Onye Nigeria* (the Nigerian) (*Utara Nti*, pp.57-58), Obienyem outlining the priorities of a typical Nigerian, asks:

(22) **Àkpà woònyòsi gī dī òle?**

How many are your portmanteaus?

Woonyosi is clearly a slang word which the poet uses in place of **potomanto**, the more familiar ‘igbonization’ of portmanteau. This serves to attract more attention to the word, and by implication, the poem. Similarly, in the poem *Ehiehiediegwu* (Daytime marauders) (*Omenka*, p.22), Ikwubuzo writes about the advance fee fraudsters:

(23) **Ego ‘ozu’ ha gbùrù**

Kà ha jì àkwa ònwe hā na ndÖ

Money from the ‘corpses’ they ‘killed’

They use to ‘mourn’ themselves alive

The booty of their exploits is devoted to wanton carousing.

Igbu ozu ‘killing a corpse’ is slang popular among the advance fee fraudsters and refers to the successful duping of a foreigner.

In the poem *Dì anyi i burula Eze?* (Pal, are you now a chief?) Obienyem refers to money as **pa** instead of the normal **egō** in order to emphasize the vulgar display of wealth by the Igbo nouveau riche:

- (24) **Ebe m nèwrè òkpu mmee mmee**
Jide Ìjà nà Èù akpukpo,
Ezè Ọ́ọ́he Ọ́ (*Utara Nti*, pp.63-64)

Since I have a reddish cap
 Money and leather fan
 What else is there to being a chief?

3. SATIRIC DEVICES

We noted earlier that one of the ways the Igbo satiric poet achieves his satiric goals is by exploring the essential ingredients of satire. Some of these ingredients include: invective, mockery, indignation and humour. We examine below the application of these satiric devices in Igbo poetry.

3.1 INVECTIVE

This is a direct denunciation of a character (or the butt of a satiric comment) by the use of derogatory attributes. Its aim is to make the subject ridiculous and odious. In the poem *Di anyi i burula eze?* (Pal, are you now a chief?), Obienyem refers to his subject as:

- (25) ... **Ezè Igwē nwa jī egō àchụ egō**
 ... **eze nwe ezè nīle** (*Utara Nti*, pp.63-64).

Eze Igwe 'high chief', the business tycoon
 The chief of all chiefs.

Ordinarily, this would pass for praise and admiration of the subject under reference. But the poet reveals his real intention in the next lines of the poem:

- (26) **N'ala onye Ọ́ọ́ nà-àbụ ezè nyìrìmanyì**
Ezè Ìgbò dīe,
Ò nweghi ọmà
Ajụ e jì èbu ezè dọ nà Ọ́wùrù nīlè

In a land where everybody is the highest chief
 Igbo chieftaincy is simple
 It has no complications
 The pad for carrying chieftaincy is in every compound.

By implication, if the subject is the 'highest chief' in a community where every person is a 'highest chief' the quality of his chieftaincy is better left to the imagination. In another poem, *Akwukwo oru ego* (The one pound note) (*Akpa Uche*, p.42), Obienyem turns his invective, not on any human being but on 'money' which he describes in the following terms:

- (27) **M jide ihe à n'aka**
Ọ na-àkụ pèkèpèkè
Ọ na-àghokwu Ìfufè

Nwa mpempe akwukwọ efù!

When I hold this thing in my hand
 It is extremely weightless
 It is pursuing the wind
 A worthless scrap of paper!

The poet's anger seems to stem from the various atrocities committed by this weightless piece of paper (see comments to example 9). To him, the real value of 'this thing' is far less than the evil associated with it, hence the denunciation.

A similar case of angry denunciation is found in Maduekwe's poem *Nne Anyi Afrika* (Our mother, Africa) where he castigates the European colonizers of Africa as:

- (28) ... **ndị ọcha chāra tóó** (*Nka okwu*, pp.5-6)
 ...over-ripe whitemen

He plays upon the similarity in sound between **chara** 'to ripen' and **ocha** 'white' to achieve his satiric goal of making the Europeans look like over-ripe fruit because of the 'colonial evil' which they visited on Africa.

3.2 MOCKERY

With respect to poetry, mockery refers to a poem whose intension is to make the object of satire ridiculous or unseemly. It is usually the poet's hope that his mockery of the target would either lead to self-correction or serve as a deterrent to others. In the poem *Di anyi I burula eze?* (Pal, are you now a chief?) Obienyem mocks the nouveau riche Igbo whose craze for chieftaincy titles has indeed reached a ridiculous level. To achieve his aim, Obienyem 'derogates' the hitherto sacred instruments of chieftaincy among the Igbo:

- (29) **Ajụ e jì èbu ezè dǎà ǽwùrù nīle**
Dị n'ime olu nà Ìgbò,
Ebe m nwèrè òkpụ mmee mmee
Jide Ìjà nà Ẹ̀u akpukpo,
Ezè Ọ́kúhe Ọ́? (*Utara Nti*, pp.63-64).

The pad for carrying chieftaincy is in every compound
 In both riversides and heartland Igbo
 Since I have a reddish cap,
 Raw cash, and leather fan,
 What else is there to being a chief?

It is worthy of note that Obienyem deliberately refers to the symbols of chieftaincy in very derogatory terms. Ordinarily, red cap, money and leather fan symbolize royalty, wealth and authority, respectively, but in the poem they signify vulgar display of wealth.

Okpu mmee mmee (reddish cap) refers only to the colour of the cap as opposed to **Okpu mmee** 'red cap' which signifies time royalty. **ija** 'raw cash' on the other hand signifies a vulgar display of wealth, here used instead of the normal **ego** 'money' or **aku** 'wealth'. Similarly, **Nku akpukpo** 'leather fan' makes reference to the common (raw)

leather fan. The leather fan normally used by (real) chiefs is known as **agu** or **akupe**. To refer to it as **nku akpukpo**, is to make it as ridiculous as possible.

It is significant to note that character is not mentioned among the requirements for chieftaincy. This underlines Obienyem's rhetorical question: **Eze o foro ihe Ozo?** 'What else is there to being a chief?', after naming what these chieftaincy-crazy society considers the essentials of chieftaincy. The craze for chieftaincy titles has reached the stage where people engage in all sorts of fraud, bribery and murder to get enough money to buy as many titles as possible. To the poet, the situation is as ridiculous as it is disgusting. His contempt for these titles and their holders is hardly concealed:

- (30) **Mà ezē nàirà à Ọzè gịnị**
Ezè ụra atụ nà ezè nkwòrò
E gbue ebì abụọ è zoo otù
Okwu sie ikē ndi ūwe ojī ... erie egō (*Utara Nti*, pp.63-64)

But this naira chieftaincy, what sort is it?
 Chieftaincy of sleeplessness and envy
 Of hanky-panky and fraud
 If the going gets tough the police are bribed

The poem ends with an ominous rhetorical question:

- (31) **Bikonu, eze naira a o bu eze gini?**
 Pray, what is this naira chieftaincy?

3.3 INDIGNATION

Indignation here may be described as the demonstration in a poem of anger and disgust at what the poet feels is unjust, unreasonable or unacceptable. The choice of words in this type of poem is such that the poet's anger virtually drips through the poem. This is the type of situation we find in Obienyem's poem *Aga m egbu Ọchụ* (I shall commit murder) (*Utara Nti*, p.61):

- (32) **Nye m mma ka m gbue Ian Smith**
O meela ụmỌfrikà ihu fere azụ
Nye m egbè kà m gbagbuo Jon Voster
Ọ mǎgoola ịnyoỌfrikà n'ihu dī ha;
Nye m ọgỌà m līe Idi Amin;
Ezè ike bụ n'ụlỌ
Hapū□nỌn kà m sèrè òbèjirì wakpò ụmỌnmō□ọ jua:
Gịnị mèrè Afrikà jì bụrụ òbòdo nā-eri sỌa nrịọta?

Give me a machete to kill Ian smith
 He has defaced the children of Africa
 Give me a gun to shoot (and kill) John Vorster
 He has mounted African women in the presence of their husbands;
 Give me a hoe to bury Idi Amin
 The local tyrant;

Leave me let me confront the spirits with a sword, and ask:
Why is Africa a land that eats only from begging?

The poem was obviously written in the 1970s when Ian Smith, John Vorster and Idi Amin ruled Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), South Africa and Uganda, respectively. The poet is furious with them for their tyrannical dehumanization of Africans in their own land. As far as he is concerned, they deserved to die for their crimes against Africa and the poet is, as it were, ready to execute the punishment himself. It is significant to note that the poet evokes the traditional instruments of war and burial – machete, gun, sword and hoe—against these enemies of Africa. This suggests that the poet is actually calling for war against them. In other words, Africans should rise, fight, kill and bury them in retaliation for their evils against the land. His anger is however, not restricted to these enemies of the land but also to the ancestors who have joined hands to make Africa a beggar continent.

3.4 HUMOUR

Humour and wit often go hand in hand. The difference, however, is that while wit is intended by the writer or speaker to be comic, humour may come from what the writer or speaker intended to be serious but ends up making the auditor laugh. Thus, a humorous poem may be humorous only to the reader and not to the poet. The effectiveness of humour in satire derives from the fact that when we are made to laugh at a person or subject we do so not just because they are ridiculous but also because they are being ridiculed. Thus, ‘the laughter is derisive, with some element of contempt or malice, and serves as a weapon against its ridiculous subject’ (Abrams 1988:198). In *Ule Akwukwo Naijiria* (Examination in Nigeria), Obienyem focuses on the very serious subject of examination malpractices in Nigeria but succeeds in making the reader laugh at the perpetrators and their desperate moves to circumvent due process in the conduct and writing of examinations:

(33) Onye dākwarā akwūkwo Ọ nà Nàìjirìà
 nèwrè ụkwụ nsụ nsụ
 Ọ nweghị ụkwụ ogologo Ẹ ọ nà-ènwe
 àkpā aworowo
 Agboghobìā dakwara akwūkwo Ọ nà Nàìjirìà
 Ọnara nà
 Ọ maghị ẹgwè ukwù n’elu àkwà ndi nkuzi
 Ọdrà ọhụ
 Mà Ọbà nne yā abughị ezè nàirà n’ònwe yā;
 Ma ọ bụ nà nnà ya b’adi achich Ọ n’è
 Àchich Ọn’ọnụ;
 Ọkoro nà àgboghọ dākwarā akwūkwo nà
 Nàìjirìà Ọ I mara nà
 Ndi mụrụ ha nà-àkụchara ọkpà àga n’ụlọ ụkà
 Ẹkwe nà eligwè gà-àkwụ ụgwọ (Utara Nti, pp 61-62)

Whoever fails examinations again in Nigeria
 has dwarfish legs
 He has neither long legs nor amorphous bags

Any lady that fails examinations again in Nigeria
 It would mean that she does not know how to gyrate her waist
 on the modern-day teachers' bed
 Or that her mother is not the real cash-madam
 Or that her father is among those who scratch from the plate,
 and scratch into the mouth
 Any youth who fails examinations again in Nigeria
 it means that their parents march to the church
 To sing that heaven is the rewarder.

Obienyem carefully chooses his words in a way that he makes his point humourously. Such expressions as **Ukwu nsu nsu** 'dwarfish legs', **akpa aworowo** 'amorphous bags' **achichita ... achichia n'onu** 'scratch and scratch into the mouth', **akuchara okpa** 'to hit the leg noisily on the ground' are ideophones deliberately employed to create homourous images of those who run around with 'bags' of naira to bribe their ways through what Obienyem calls 'WAYEKI', his *igbonisation* of 'WAEC', the English acronym for West African Examinations Council, the organizers of High School examinations in the English-speaking West Africa. He avoids making direct reference to the sexual act between the modern-day teachers and the examination candidate, but succeeds in painting a graphic picture of the act while at the same time being euphemistic.

If satire is 'the expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement or disgust excited by the ridiculous or unseemly' (Coffey 1976:9) and if its main purpose is to 'expose an offender to shame or disgrace with a view to making him behave better' (Egudu 1972) then we can say that the Igbo satiric poets whose works we have examined in this paper have adequately used this instrument in their attempt to reform the society.

4. CONCLUSION

Our concern in this paper has been to examine the use of language in Igbo satiric poetry. Satire among the Igbo performs, among others, the functions of censoring and correcting the society by exposing social offenders to ridicule. The Igbo satiric poet achieves this goal by exploiting in his poem the elements of satire available in the language. Some of the most frequently used, as our study shows, include indignation, mockery, invective and humour. The poet also harnesses the various rhetorical devices in the language but goes beyond these to also explore his own creative imagination through the use of slang and puns, among others. All these linguistic devices are used in such a way that vice is condemned and an earnest call is made for change.

Igbo satiric poetry has its roots in Igbo oral poetry where satire played a more vibrant role in the maintenance of social harmony. Thus, the rhetoric and satiric devices examined in this study were actually 'inherited' from the Igbo oral tradition. It must be said, however, that the modern satiric poets by exploiting their own creative abilities and having benefited from contact with other languages through (formal) education, have been substantially original in their chosen task of charting with words, a new course for the Igbo and Nigerian society.

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