

CONVERGENCE OF TRADITIONALISM AND MODERNISM: THE ART OF IGBO ORAL POETRY, TRANSLATION AND PRINT RECORDING

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ABSTRACT

The traditional oral poet recounts works of art that predate the artist; nevertheless, he or she is capable of creating a new vision through the insightful use of language and plot to produce special effects, including the projection of new ways of life. Similarly, in recording and presenting works collected from the oral artist, the fieldworker is capable of recapturing the art of the oral poet, provided that greater rigour is infused into the print-recording process. The present paper demonstrates the following. First, the Igbo oral poet is both a cultural bearer and a pivot of modern, contemporary values. The collective body of verses that express the cultural realities of the people did not end with the introduction of Western-based education; hence, there is a need for closer attention to post-Western oral forms in order to encourage the creative spirit of the artist. Second, if we view the fieldworker or print recorder as a knowledge-seeker who depends on productions collected from the oral poet for the presentation and analysis of society from diverse perspectives, then the live recording sessions between the two also represent a convergence of traditionalism and modernism. Finally, faithful recording requires the ability of the recorder to render in print what is intelligible to the reading audience, paying special attention to nuances of pronunciation, grammar, local idioms, and meaning. These elements should accurately represent the language of the original performance and its communal authorship.

Key Words: Oral, poetry, bard, minstrel, communal, performance, griot, Igbo, bards, diviner.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ORAL POET AND RELATED TERMS

Oral poetry is part of a people's or communally owned and shared cultural heritage made up of several combinations of artistic language to produce music, dance, verse or chant. Several considerations including the occasion: temporal and locational, inform its performance. Indeed, every social performance of the traditional type is a contrived art form with strongly shared social implications. Every man and woman present in the oral poetry session form part of the performer: as she dances to the rhythm of the verses and chants, as he joins in the chorus, as both sob, or laugh over the emotions created by the lyrics of the poetry. In oral poetry, spectators are part and parcel of the success or failure of the whole session. There are people however, who by virtue of their training or talent, are more versed to lead in the oral poetry sessions. The implication of the above is that in oral performance there is communal participation and there is no single authorship or single performance.

Two of such groups of traditional poets in Africa are distinguished by Isidore Okpewho (1985). The first group consists of poets of the royal courts like the ones found in Mandika of Western Africa. This group consists of the **griot** and the **diviner**. The griot was traditionally a court poet attached to the king for the purpose of singing the king's glories and recording in his songs important historical events surrounding the ruling family. Ghanaian griot is called *Kwadwamfo*; in Rwanda *Umusizi* is ever handy, while in Zulu, the *Imbong* fulfils this role. Okpewho who describes the griots as a restricted category, elaborates that these poets "*attain their position after a rather long training*" (Okpewho, 1985: 5). Quoting Djibril Tamsir Niane (1960), Edrids Makward (1990) qualifies the griots as "*carriers of tradition*" (Markward, 1990: 23). Besides the griots, there is the second and more widely spread category of oral poets: the **freelance entertainer/poet** whose work is not tied down by the narrow situations as the occasions in the king's court or the diviner's consultations. This type of traditional performer relies on his personal skills or talents, some of which may be developed after a relatively brief period of apprenticeship.

Apart from the griots, diviners and freelance poets, writers also have another term: **minstrels** for a type of poet or musician that wanders about providing entertainment to people. The description of an Igbo oral performer by Helen Chukwuma (1994) could fall into the category of Beckson and Ganz's (1972) **minstrels** but not **bards**. As Chukwuma states, "In Igboland, the oral performer is a role certain individuals are ascribed to, and which they take on themselves because of their aptitude and ability" (Chukwuma, 1994, P.225).

Our examination of the different but related terminology lends credence to the fluidity in the meaning of these words and their usage. The conventional term for poetry in Igbo is *Abu*, whether written (*Abu Ederede*) or oral

(Abu Onu). Writers distinguish different forms of Igbo oral poetry namely: *ngugo/uri* (songs with choric refrains), *mbem* (oral performance of the non-choric type), *ugoli* (a song that demonstrates powerful feelings of joy; often characterized by self-praise). Other forms of Igbo oral poetry are *akwa ariri* (spontaneous or personalized grief), *mkpoku* (the invocation of a second person such as a supernatural or a distinguished personality hero. For the purposes of our work here however, we make little distinction between the three categories distinguished by Beckson and Ganz above namely, griots/freelance poets, bards, and minstrels, preferring rather to view them as synonyms for poets, especially oral poets in the Igbo cultural context.

Appraising the importance of minstrels or the bards Chinwendu A. Nwizu (2017) posits,

The bards are rewarded by their lords especially those that are attached to the courts of kings. These rewards could come in the form of cash or money, or it can come in the form of material gifts. Generosity from the lords praised and others whom praises are showered upon is a good motivation for the bards. Freelance bards also receive rewards from those they sing their praise. Usually these bards compose, sing, perform at diverse occasions and also preserve the songs for proper transmission to the newer generations. The bards invent images and symbols that suit the context of their performances: they also invent images that portray the character that they have in mind. (Nwizu, 2017, P.53-54).

2. THE ORAL POET, INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

The oral poet can and does evolve a new social order by the ability to create, recreate, and imagine. In these instances, she is not just a vehicle for transporting the ideals of the culture of the people: through the lenses of poets, members of a society can see other points of view that may be different from the widely held cultural norms. The poet thus acts both as the traditionalist and modernist, forging for the people new realities that would engender new insights, thoughts, and actions. We have used the terms: traditionalism and modernism in several senses here. First, an oral poet is a cultural bearer as well as a pivot of contemporary values. This means that the oral performer is both a traditionalist and a modernist, by her/his ability to combine the new and the old in order to project conflated ideals upon the society. Second, if we view the fieldworker/ print recorder as a knowledge-seeker that depends on the productions collected from the oral poet, for the presentation and analysis from diverse perspectives, of a particular society, then the live recording sessions between the two is also a convergence of traditionalism and modernism. There is a tendency for fieldworkers/print recorders to focus attention only on the literary products of peoples with little influences of industrialization, new language, formal education, etc., believing that such peoples are a repertoire of the most authentic experiences of cultural artifacts in the tradition. Except for an extinct society, there is continual flow of literary productions, in so far as there is a living language that constitutes a people's shared reality and identity. Much of our examples shall be taken from Igbo, a name that defines a people and their language in the southeastern area of Nigeria.

Oral poetry is intricately bound with culture hence oral poets are regarded as the bearers of their people's culture. It includes the artistic rendition of a people's shared, consensual beliefs, experiences, the evocation of the indigenous flora and fauna to communicate the literary traditions of the people. The artist is hereby seen as the vehicle that helps represent the people's psychosocial, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms. A well-rendered oral poetry positions the material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects of a people's culture against the background of their modes of organization, their belief system, their morality, their strengths, and yes their foibles, to mention a few. The oral poet is an artist, and as Ben Ochigbo (2001) rightly points out below, "It is therefore, the artist's duty to crystallize the realities of a culture through a sensitive distillation of the total experience and through that, evolve a concrete reality in the environmental setting which as a feedback moulds the people's thought psychologically to appreciate their bearing and anticipate in a more meaningful way the shape of the present" (Ochigbo 2001: P.61).

No doubt, a people can stand out as a distinct group by the artist's crystallization of such a people's uniqueness and essences, through the highlights of their cultural realities. The essence of good poetry is that it touches us in a certain way; it lifts us up; it evokes an emotion within us. Thus we feel pain, pleasure, anger, or all of these at once. As rightly stated by Okpewho that "*the African oral poet is just as capable as his modern counterpart of painting powerful mental pictures by his use of words*" (Okpewho, 1985, P.11).

According to F.U. Okoh, (2017:)

Okpewho's concern is with making the distinction between folklore and literature. He argues that oral literature is just the verbal aspect of folklore, adding that folklore comprises traditional methods of cooking, architecture, medicine, and dressmaking as well as religion or ritual, art, instrumental music, and dance. He ends by stating that "The total body of information which a community possesses about all these things is its folklore (Okoh, 2017, P.37)

Alo, L.K. (2006:12) asserts that,

The African tradition of oral literature is as rich in content and variety as that of any other major cultural areas, folk or civilized, past or present. Proverbs, riddles, song and drama text, poetry, praise names are significant parts of African Oral Literature. The various categories of African oral literature have a rich content and are of various forms. These are also important and culturally informative and full of the corpus of knowledge of the folk. Folklore, folk literature or oral literature can be brought squarely under the purview of folklorists. (Alo, 2006. P.12)

In recognition of the place of the audience in African oral literature Emezue G.I.N. (2017:) is of the view that “The audience is a very important aspect of oral performance. Most of the time, the audience cease to be spectators and become active participants. This is essentially true in such instances in the course of narrative folk tales and singing dirges when the audience/participants take in the songs or other forms of antiphonal acts.” (Emezue, 2017, P.418).

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3. THE POET’S SUBJECT POSITION: PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

The language of poetry, written or oral, is poignant, evoking strong emotions, conveying a people’s cherished ideals, combining the new and the old, and helps emerge a new social order by its imaginative capabilities beyond the here and now. Emenanjo’s statement comes to mind in this instance, “every living culture and people, has chameleonic tendencies. It changes its colours, shapes, forms and spots wherever it comes in contact with alien people and cultures” (Emenanjo: 2000, P.12).

The ability to thread upon a familiar landscape and courage to venture into the unfamiliar; to work with widely accepted visions as well as infuse visions not so widely accepted- all are part and parcel of the poet’s subject position in adopting consensus as well as traversing the unpopular areas of the periphery. Collectively they combine into the chameleonic tendencies which Emenanjo (2000) refers to in the above statement.

These chameleonic tendencies are aptly represented in many versions of Igbo poetry where themes may change, paying special attention to some areas than others. For a limited assessment, we have included four Igbo oral poems in the appendix. For instance, a theme that previously focused essentially on character may be manipulated in such a way that emphasis is shifted to situation, action or setting. The language may be observed to be different, representing the occasion and age in which the artwork originated. Plots may also change to give credence to some episodes as well as add new ones. These strategies rather than robbing the artist of credibility could help engender among the audience, greater respect and confidence on the artist. They see from the artist’s perspective as well as participate in the communal effect of the atmosphere generated by a gifted artist. Two contrasting examples in the first two poems (Examples 1 and 2; see appendix) demonstrate the age and time in which each of the poems has existed.

3.1: EXAMPLES 1 & 2

Excerpts from the two poems show obvious admiration of the qualities of each of the women; the first poem praises Ezelagbo while the second poem greets Chinyere who gave birth to Ngozi who gave birth to Nkiru, the latter whose birth has occasioned the ceremonial visit of the Abigbo dance group to Enugu, an Igbo city. In the first poem, little use is made of western, contemporary issues, unlike the second poem that mentions the then civilian administrator of the Eastern region of Nigeria (Asika) as well as the District Officer (D. O). These salient points give an idea about the age of each poem.

3.2: EXAMPLE 3

One of the post-western Igbo oral poets par excellence, who has made remarkable input in the development of new diction and themes that go beyond the conservative views of traditional poetry, is Okonkwo Asaa (a.k.a.

Seven Seven). Unlike poets like Kaalu Igirigiri (see Azuonye, 1990: 42-75), Loolo Chinyereude (see Uzochukwu, 1985), and Jeveizu Okaavo (see Azuonye, 1984), Okonkwo Asaa is an artist who situates contemporary issues against the background of the Igbo socio-cultural conditions that generate them. In an excerpt below, the artist shows deep insight into the socialist-materialist conditions surrounding an emerging cosmopolitan lifestyle, which have resulted in a reversal of privileges between men and women, the type never envisaged in a much earlier Igbo culture.

Analysts, fieldworkers and print recorders have often recognized certain distinctive features of oral poetry. Besides being recognized as authentic to the people's values, norms and belief system, it is an orally-composed and performed art form with different oral formulaic conventions and artistic use of language that serve as mnemonic devices, helping to aid memory. The aids to memory in the poem by Okonkwo Asaa include the following:

3.2.1: IDEOPHONES: Some significant ideophones are [*ghalakata na ghalakata*: an idea of disarray and confusion. Again, the words *gologolo*, *gelegele* yields an idea of shimmering, dark and translucent smoothness; Blackie's complexion. The formulaic, ideophonic phrase: *mpiti kweli*, covers several superlative exclamations that state the following conditions:

1. As the two new lovers enter Blackie's house (this phrase is translated as "amazing indeed")
2. The Joseph's state of drunkenness from Blackie's offer of Gordon Gin ("drowned himself in liquor")
3. As the two lovers enter Joseph's house (the phrase is translated in this particular line as "terrible/terrible indeed").

3.2.2: BORROWING: Similarly, there are several borrowings from the most widely used language of contact: English. This helps to situate the poem within a more contemporary framework than the first poem in this write-up (we have written in the italic all the borrowings from English).

3.2.3: NEW CULTURE: The content of Okonkwo Asaa's poem also shows a remarkable departure from the traditionalist and conservative view of what is often conceived of as a people's consensual value system. In the emerging Igbo urban culture exemplified in his poem, Blackie: a beautiful, unmarried, socio-economically independent woman lives alone in the city. Joseph, an unmarried man who works in the Colliery also lives alone. But in contrast to Blackie, Joseph is shown to live in abject poverty, is always shabbily dressed, in constant debt, and suffers from severe inferiority complex in the presence of Blackie because of the privileged status of the latter. In the latter part of the poem (not documented in this short write up for lack of space), Blackie reassures Joseph that his poverty would not be a hindrance to the possibility of their getting married, since she is in a position to take care of his needs. In a nutshell, single women are rarely given a positive representation in a typical Igbo oral literature; thus Okonkwo Asaa's version of romance in the love poem above is quite new in Igbo oral literature, especially the poetry.

3.3: EXAMPLE 4

In a unique love poem in our fourth and last poem (see appendix: example 4), several westernized imageries are employed to highlight the new lifestyles believed to be typical of the single, urbanized Igbo man and woman.

This no doubt is a poem that is constructed after the arrival of Christianity and western culture, as seen in the poem's reference to wedding ring, night crawling – perhaps to clubs, and free rides or hitchhiking (an action popularly called *lift*). The poet however maintains a typical traditional stance by its support of the culture of bride price in Igbo. We must comment that apart from this latter instance, and probably few other traditionalist standpoints, the poem is generally radical, as demonstrated in the poet's readiness to marry any woman, including a woman that goes contrary to Igbo culture by showing her interest in a man she fancies ("one that comes to you by herself"). However, such consideration would be determined by the extent of wealth that such a woman possesses (*she should be well fed*).

Similarly, a word or phrase that is believed to be heavily biased has been substituted for a less biased one. According to the oral poet who delivered this poem to me in 1992, the phrase *mara ihe*: "to be intelligent" has been used to replace an earlier biased form: *hxjuo anya*: "to experience excruciating pain and suffering". As the poet explains, the phrase *experience excruciating suffering* sounded too strong and presented a marital union in a deplorable light namely: as tortuous and dreadful tasks for the bride.

What constitutes a people's tradition is a synthesis of ideas, values and practices over several generations of a family, group or society. According to Afam Ebeogu (2001), the hallmark of what distinguishes a people for what they are is their cultural tradition, which also is a function of the degree at which that tradition comes to terms with the fluxes of the moment within a continuum. Ebeogu (2001) submits as follows, "Tradition is thus predisposed to dynamism; as its antiquarian quotient tends to associate it with conservatism, the needs of survival under contemporary experience ultimately reshape it in readiness for the magnetism of change" (Ebeogu, 2001:141).

4. THE QUESTION OF DOCUMENTATION

One of the most vexing issues of our times is the implication of studying a work of art as a literature even if such a work of art is written in another language besides the indigenous language of the society which it claims to

represent. Elechi Amadi's (1993) statement below has far-reaching implications for the study and development of indigenous African languages in particular and oral literature in general: "I define African literature as a literature written about Africans by Africans for African. To qualify as African literature therefore, a work of art must satisfy the three criteria implied in this definition" (Amadi, 1993, P.103).

The problems with the above statement include the question of medium (should it be *written* only?), and the above writer's silence on the language (should it be in an African language or any language other than African?). By implication, works of art written in English, French, German, etc. by an Igbo writer qualifies as Igbo literature, in so far as it contains Igbo themes. But the use of the word, *for Africans* (in this case, for Igbo people), falls short of explanation, for, how do we determine an Igbo person? Is it by cultural attire, skin colour, language or by other widely held views about what the typical Igbo person should be?

Important to any consideration of an answer is the fact that the word "Igbo" qualifies a people, their culture, their geographic location, and their language. thus, to be an Igbo person should no doubt include the ability to read and write in this significant language, among others, that gives a person an identity as "Igbo". To support the Igbo cause should also include the ability to create and sustain literature for an Igbo-speaking audience. And, since no language can be sustained without the growth and development of its literature, then we can surmise that, "African" literature written in English language, falls short of providing strategies of regeneration for a language as endangered as Igbo. Again, if we view the fieldworker/print recorder as a knowledge-seeker that depends on the productions collected from the oral poet, for the presentation and analysis from diverse perspectives, of the society being studied, then the live recording sessions between the two is also a convergence of traditionalism and modernism.

5. FAITHFUL DOCUMENTATION AS ART

A faithful recording/documentation is one that attempts to bring the charged atmosphere of the live sessions into the print. Unfortunately, writers pay little attention to the grammatical forms of Igbo writing by arguing that it is impossible to pay attention to the nuances of grammar while transcribing an oral data. Linguists know that this is only a feeble argument, since even dialectal forms adhere to grammatical rules and can be transcribed with great precision. Indigenous poetry collection can be beneficial both for its indigenous audience as well as the non-indigenous, by a faithful print recording of the original, in a source language (Igbo in this case), and a corresponding translation in a target language (English, French, or any other language, as the case may be). The importance of language as a vehicle of culture is so aptly recognized by Emenanjo (2000) that he calls for a thorough-going language and linguistic revolution that would follow the paths already marked out by several committed linguists and folklorists. As observed by Ebeogu (2001), "the ultimate understanding of what written African literature means is linked in many ways with our understanding of the nature, character and scope of African folklore" (Ebeogu, 2011, P.153).

As a consequence, no language can be sustained without the rich growth and development that literature, in oral as well as written form, provides. Thus, so-called African literature written in another language falls short of providing strategies of regeneration for languages as endangered as many African languages including Igbo. Chombow (1990) clearly states that "The relationship between language and national development should be obvious from the fact that since education is crucial in the training of manpower for national development and the language-medium is crucial in the education process, it follows that language is important and in fact vital to national development as well" (Chumbow, 1990, P.63).

A faithful recording involves the ability of a recorder to put down in print, what should be intelligible to the reading audience who has not been fortunate enough to witness a live performance, unless of course one is lucky to have met the print recorder. Many writers including Azuonye and Udechukwu (1984) and Okpewho (1990) have tried in their different capacities to establish a peculiar poetics of the oral literary genre by stressing important features that make it unique and different from the written genre. Nevertheless, important to sustaining a truly African vision of literature is the language of presentation.

An oft cited limitation of presenting oral poetry in its original language is the perceived underdevelopment of the indigenous language from where the field collector has picked the raw data. Save for a few writers, many collectors of Igbo oral literature have shunned the idea of transcribing the original work in print: writers thus produce final, published oral data in English. The problem of publishing an oral art form only in a foreign language, yet labeling it African art is a general trend among earlier writers, but this problem persists even in the 21st Century. However defensive people may be of such an act, it is important to note that the language of presentation is very significant in giving a work of art its identity, and for the endangered African languages, this fact can hardly be overstressed. Similarly, some writers publish their works in the original language but pay little attention to the lexico-grammatical forms of the language. It is often claimed that the processes of reading and comprehension, already belaboured by the oral, dialectal forms – are complicated further when details presented

as recorded in the field. As experienced linguists observe, translators and transcribers alike posit this puerile argument in their vain attempt to conceal their haste and inexperience with the diction and grammar of the indigenous language they claim to be promoting. Only in an African language such as Igbo may a writer pay little regard to grammatical and lexical accuracy and yet earn the reputation of an educated scholar in Igbo studies. Yet in writing English and other foreign languages, the same African writer displays a remarkable sense of fluency and carefulness in order to gain the respect of the owners of the language. Unfortunately, few Igbo field collectors and recorders are prepared to attempt effective ways of writing the language appropriately, yet all lay claim to bilingual proficiency and feel quite confident to write and publish however inaccurately their grammar and spellings may be.

6. TWO TECHNIQUES OF FAITHFUL DOCUMENTATION, ONE GRAMMAR OF DOCUMENTATION

The major techniques of documentation observed to be prevalent among print recorders of Igbo oral poetry are monolingual presentation and bilingual writing. However, whichever technique a print recorder chooses must be undergirded by a singular grammar of documentation. We discuss these below.

6.1: MONOLINGUAL PRESENTATION

This could either be in English or Igbo. For now, presenting their data in English is the most favoured on among Eurocentric scholars who avoid the encumbrances of grammar and diction. Unfortunately, literature becomes a self-indulgent art form that satisfies only the needs of the western educated people; even the field work resource person can hardly recognize it as her/his contribution to Igbo literature. An alternative technique of monolingual presentation is the method of printing data in Igbo only. As stated earlier, few Igbo people could read Igbo as accurately as they can read English. And, since most of the oral data is in dialectal forms, the ability to read depends on a person's command of Igbo language. Uzochnikwu's (1985) work on Igbo funeral dirges is a very good example of monolingual presentation in Igbo.

6.2: BILINGUAL WRITING

The raw Igbo data is first transcribed in Igbo and then translated into English and both are published. This technique provides several opportunities for bilingual readers, scholars in translation and comparative studies, as well as readers who can read one out of the two languages only. Three techniques of bilingual writing are employed by writers in this group. The first style is to present the lines of the two poems in an alternate form. This style helps to make each verse readily available for comparison at first glance. This method has been adopted in Emeka's (2000) data examined above. The second strategy is to fully present one poem, first, in the original language, after which the translation follows in another language. This is the second strategy adopted in Songs 1, 2 and 3 above. The advantage of this method is that the poetic lines of the work are well maintained, without the discontinuous, unattractive form that would tend to discredit the first strategy. Finally, the third technique is to place each English verse in a position adjacent to the original work/phrase/sentence that it translates. This is the technique adopted by Okot P'Bitek in much of his oral poetic writings (see for instance P'Bitek, 1972) and by Azuonye and Udechukwu (1984) as well as by Regina Obakhena (2001). Although the presentation of the poem is not as attractive as the first in the list, this is an effective way of comparing the data from both the original and translated versions.

6.3: THE GRAMMAR OF DOCUMENTATION

It must be admitted that documentation is not necessarily an easy task for the fieldworker and print recorder. However, a faithful production of the oral art form is an intellectual activity that requires a good knowledge of the language, a commitment to its cause and a remarkable clarity in delivery of the words in print. In all, the essence of every translation is to capture as closely as possible the flavour and aesthetics of the original text. Quoting Horst Frenz (1971), Okpewho (1990) submits as follows:

A translator must bring sympathy and understanding to the work he is to translate. He must be the original author's most intimate, most exact, in short, his best reader. But he must do more than read. He must attempt to see what the author saw, to hear what he heard, to dig into his own life in order to experience anew what the author experienced... the translator must be creative (Frenz, 1971, in Okpewho, 1990, P.114-5).

The license of translator, also called the **technique of paraphrasing** refers to what scholars recognize as the translator's right to defer organically or be independent, but nevertheless to pursue that independence "*for the sake of the original in order to reproduce it as a living work*" (Bassnett-Mcguire, 1980: 82).

The method of producing a bowdlerized version of an oral text with inordinately presented diction and grammar as well as haphazard translation, defeat the aim of the entire literary exercise. Consequently, the documentation of oral literary forms is a combination of skill, art and language experience that produces a credible text, which not only pleases but also helps foster the growth and development of a people's language and culture.

6. CONCLUSION

Artists, both oral and written, are not merely vehicles for transmitting the ideals of a people's culture; they are also lenses through which reality can be perceived anew. By positioning the material, institutional, philosophical, and creative aspects of a people's culture against the background of their modes of organization, belief systems, morality, strengths, and foibles, well-rendered poetry evokes strong emotions, conveys cherished ideals, blends the old with the new, and facilitates the emergence of a new social order.

Since few languages can sustain growth and dynamism without the regenerative capacity provided by literature written in those languages, the development of African literary aesthetics is a *sine qua non* for indigenous language development. In this regard, African literature written in the English language falls short of providing regenerative strategies for languages that are as endangered as many African languages, including Igbo.

Consequently, a well-articulated print recording of oral poetry is one that observes poetic licence within the constraints of grammaticality, fidelity to meaning, and bilingual translation, among other considerations.

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APPENDIX

Example 1.

The world, hear
Uwa nulu
Hear about Ezelagbo
Nulu maka Ezelagbo
...
A thing of beauty
Ive mali mma
Has a covenant with the eye
Na-anya goli ogo
The eagle feather with which our chi
Ugbene ugo chi anyi
Bedecked our heads
Tuveli anyi n'isi
The mother that hears and rears
Nne mulu zua
The mother that gives when hunger comes
Nne na enye gbe oji agwu
The ogoli of her husband's home
Ogoli uno di e
...
Ezelagbo closed the door
Ezelagbo mechili uzo
So that the jaguar may not carry off the goat
Si ka agwa d'ebuna ewu
But the jaguar spent no thought
Ma agwu echeru eche
Carried off the goat
Bulu ewu naa
And we wonder
O di egwu
Ezelagbo wakes up in the morning
Ezelagbo putali ututu
Prays her chi
Si chie
That troubles does not come to her
Okwu na uka abianali ya
...
That day that God moulded Ezelagbo
Mbosi nii Chukwu kpulu Ezelagbo
God did not go to work
Chukwu ejero olu
Do you know that Chukwu
Unu amago na Chukwu
Answered no call at all
Azaro oku ma cha cha
(Emeka, 2000: 54-5)

Example 2.

Chinyere Asika i nodinma
Anyi nyere gi ekele
Ebe I jiri obi nwayoo muo Ngozi
Onye riwere ihe ka nwa
Ya enyene m, ya enyene m
Nkiru Asika kpotara umu Abigbo l'Enugu
...

Ekelelem D. O nwa Onunkwo
Ya na Kenneth Isiguzo
Ndi na-eji achi ala ya adi mma
Ebe ejiri ha obi nwayo biri n'Abo
Nkiru Asika nodi mma
Gi na nne na nna muru gi
Alawala m
nkiru le, a lawala m...

Chinyere Asika, greetings
We send our greetings
For in humility you gave birth to Ngozi
Whosoever enjoys anything else other than (the gift of) procreation
Should not give me, should not give me
Nkiru Asika brought the Abigbo group to Enugu
...
I greet D. O. the son of Onunkwo
Also Kenneth Isiguzo
People that take proper care of the affairs of the land
For in humility they live in Abo
Nkiru Asika farewell
I go back henceforth
Nkiru behold, I go back henceforth
(Abigbo Obeama Mbaise, in Achebe, 1971: 15-20). My translation.

Example 3:

Josefu na Bulaki

I fugwo ka Bulaki na Josfu si je nu di na nwunye?
*Josefu m na-ekwu ifenwa, di ayi, na-alu olu na **Konari***
Unu ma na ndi konari na-elu ajo atiti
O na-abu fa je ije olu fa ekolu ighalakata na ighalakata

...
***Once upon a time** Josefu jechaa olu nataba olu ya*
*Josefu naputa ebe oyibo na-akponu ni **pompu***
*Josefu nepu anya anya na **pompu**, ka I fulu!*
Ife na-eji ya gologolo, ife na-egbu ya gelegele
Si nwoke nya ni ya yi anata olu na anya afua ya ife
Gini na-eji m gologolo, o gini na-egbu m gelegele
O si ya anana nti, oo nya ka a na-akpo Bulaki

...
Josefu wee welu nwayo kpo nya Bulaki
*Bulaki, **my dear**, na Josefu ya anuebe gi*
Bulaki welu nwayo je kpo Josef

...
***Fostofol** na mu na gi naabo je-eludugwo be mu*
*Ka mu nye gi ife a na-akpo **ntatenmenti** n'onu oyibo*
Fa naabo we bata be Bulaki na mpiti kweli
*O bulu na Bulaki a na-ekwu ifenwa, enweka nu **puropati***
*Bulaki ewelu **carpet** na **chair kovachaa** bi ye*
*Welu nke a na-akpo **white cloth** we nyua fa anya*
*Fa naabo wee bata Josefu kwulu **tension***
*Bulaki si Josefu di m, **go havu seati***
Josefu wee welu nwayo je kpoo ya Bulaki
*I ma na anyi bu **konari** na-elu ajo atiti*
*M noba ani n'ochi I debelu o ga-eme ochi gi **doti***
Bulaki welu nwayo je kpoo Josefu
Okwo agwago m gi na okwelu onye ga-ekwelu e n'isi
Nodu ani n'ochi mu echi niine ka mu suba akwa
Josefu bulu ike managa n'ochi e debelu odenegie

...

Bulaki tinye aka na **kaboodu** weta botulu godin jiini
Kua nya na **tebulu**, Josefu kponyebe nkwo n'afu
Josefu lachaa mmanya na mpiti kweli
Bulaki welu nwayo je kpoo Josefu
Alrighti, wellu, nje k'ayi lue be nna mu
Josefu wee welu nwayo kpoo nya Bulaki
Ekwego m na ayi ga-elu na be nna gi
Fostofol na mu na gi ga-eludugwo be m
Ka nwoke wee di ka mmadu wee solu gi na be nna gi
Fa naabo jee be Josefu na mpiti kweli
Hey! Ubiam na-akoosu **turobulu**

...
Fa naabo bata be Josefu na mpiti kweli
O bulu na Josef mu na-ekwu enwero **puropati**
Fa naabo bata Bulaki wee kwulunuu **tenshionu**

...
Josefu wee jebe na **backi yardi** oo
Kwudo nwaanyi fa ncha bi na the same **yardi** oo
Kwudo nwaanyi fa ncha bi na the same **yardi** oo
Halo Misiisi, bunye m some woman **benchi** oo
Pia m woman **benchi** oo, na enwelu m **sitirenja** oo
Nwata nwaanyi we jete kpoo Josefu oo
O tegwo anyi ji bili na the same **yardi**
I ya-ete ofe, I nalu m ngwugwu ogili
I ya-eli ji, I nalu m ngwugwu ukpaka
I nweefu **sitirenja** I naa mu woman **benchi** oo
I pughi ebe a m welu akaodo we je kulua gi aru!
Ubiam na-akoosu **turobulu**

Joseph and Blackie

Have you witnessed how Blackie and Joseph became husband and wife?
The Joseph that I am referring to, our guy, works in the Colliery
You know that Colliers are always covered with ugly dirt
Often times, as they prepare for work, they put on shambled attires, *ighalakata* and *ighalakata*

...
Once upon a time, Joseph was coming back from work
Joseph arrived at a place the whites call the (water) pump
Joseph looked beyond the pump, behold!
Something darkly dazzling him *gologolo*, something brightly glittering *gelelele* on him
He told his mate with whom he was returning from work, that his eyes have beheld something
What is darkly dazzling me *gologolo*, what is it that is brightly glittering *gelelele* upon me?
He told him, relax, she is the one called Blackie

...
Joseph calmly called her, Blackie
Blackie, my dear, Joseph will marry you
Blackie calmly called Joseph ...
First of all, you and I will get to my house
So that I will offer you something called entertainment in the white people's language
The two of them then entered Blackie's house, amazing indeed
It turned out that this Blackie had a lot of house furniture (property)
Blackie covered her place with carpet and chairs
Used the one called "white cloth" to bedazzle them all
They entered and Joseph stood at attention
Bulaki said, Joseph my husband, go and have a seat
Joseph then calmly called her Blackie
You know that those of us that work in the Colliery are usually covered in serious dirt
If I begin to seat down on the chair you have provided, it will dirty your chair
Blackie calmly called Joseph
Remember that I have told you that whosoever accepts one, should accept everything about the person
Do sit down on my chair, tomorrow I shall do the laundry

Joseph landed his buttocks on the cushion chair
...
Blackie reached her hands inside the cupboard and brought a bottle of Gordon Gin
Landed it on the table, and Joseph started pouring liquor inside the stomach
Joseph drowned himself in liquor
Blackie calmly called Joseph
Alright, well, let's get to my father's place
Joseph then calmly called her, Blackie
I have agreed that we shall get to your father's place
First of all, you and I shall get to my place
So that a man should look proper before going with you to your father's place
Both of them went to Joseph's house, shameful!
Terrible! Poverty is the root cause of trouble...
The two of them entered Joseph's house, shameful indeed
It turned out that the Joseph I am talking about has no property
They entered and Blackie stood at attention...
Joseph then started going to the back of the compound
Accosted a woman who is a tenant living in the same compound with him
Hallo! Misiisis, give me a kitchen stool (woman bench)
Quickly give me a kitchen stool, for I have a visitor (*stranger*)
The woman then approached and called Joseph by name
For a long time, we have been living in the same compound
When you wanted to cook soup, you would collect a wrap of *ogili* (an ingredient)
When you wanted to eat yam, you would collect a wrap of *ukpaka* (an ingredient)
You now have a visitor (*stranger*); you ask me for a kitchen stool
If you do not leave my presence, I will break your body with the wooden pestle
Poverty is the root cause of trouble
(Okonkwo Asaa, electronically recorded; My translation).

Example 4:

O narana m ola m gba n'aka

O narana m ola m gba n'aka
Ee o o nwaokorobia be onye ozo
Aga m alu ya alu
O nyenanu m ola m gba n'aka
Ee o o nwaagboghobia be onye ozo
Aga m alu ya alu

Nwaanyi daa ohu ise ----- Aga m alu ya alu
Nwaanye daa ohu iri -----Aga m alu ya alu
I ga-alukwa nke jiri okpa biakwute gi
Aga m alu ya alu
O ga-erijuo afo
Mara ihe
Taa ahuhu diiri nwaanyi na be di ya ---- egwu oma
O ga-erijuo afo
Mara ihe rikwee uru diiri nwanyi na be di ya --- egwu oma okorobia
Rege rege ----- O biala m n'obi

Okorobia ka mu na-akpo oku
Okorobia nwanne, ije abali ga-ala ala
N'ime onwa a ee
Ee ee, ee, ije abali ga-ala ala
N'ime onwa a
Agboghobia ka mu na-akpo oku
Agboghobia nwanne, ije liifutu alaala
N'ime onwa a ee
Ee, ee, ee, ije liifutu alaala
N'ime onwa a

She has accepted my ring

She has accepted my ring
Yes, this is a male youth of another family
I will indeed marry him
He has given me the ring
Yes, this is a female youth from another family
I will indeed marry her
If a woman costs two hundred ---- I will surely marry her
If a woman costs four hundred ---- I will surely marry her
Will you really marry the one that comes to you by herself?
I will surely marry her
She should be well fed
Should be intelligent
To face the heavy task that awaits a woman in her husband's home --- good dance
She should be well fed
Should be intelligent
To reap the gains of a woman in her husband's home --- good dance
Rege rege ----- it has touched my heart
....
Young man, I call upon him
Young man my brother, night crawling will surely end
Within this month
Yes yes yes, night journeys will surely end
Within this month
Young woman, I call upon her
Young woman my sister, free rides will surely end
Within this month
Yes, yes, yes, free rides will surely end
Within this month

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