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THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF Fe'efe'e WOMEN'S SONG PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF KO CAK FHŪ NDAK Hā

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Abstract

This paper attempts to shed light on how women use figurative language through songs and dances in the Fe'efe'e traditional community to speak out their cries and yearnings. With the example of the ngwe song and dance named *Ko cak fhū ndak hā*, we demonstrate through ethnography of communication and speech act theories that since time immemorial, in Africa, in order to maintain social harmony and stability, women have been using strategies to express their thoughts in public in contrary to what views from outside and from the West have been stating. The ngwe is a perfect illustration of women's potency in the African society. This *ngwe* has been in Fe'efe'e women's hands a strong weapon to curse, praise and criticise the shortcomings of their society through the use of vivid and rhetorical or poetic language known as stylistic devices. The 'ngwe' song used for illustration expresses the pragmatic use of language as it is geared toward performative acts aiming at influencing the audience or the listeners.

***Keywords*:** Devices, discourse, language, linguistic, ngwe, performance, women.

1. Introduction

Modern discourses around the status of women in the African society have always portrayed them as oppressed beings and second sex, overshadowed by the image and presence of their male counterparts, their husbands, and therefore, a gender unable to make a decision. Yet, from a critical point of view, the truth is that with an insightful observation and analysis, in the African traditional society, they play their role, a role defined according to the societal norms and regulations. In fact, as the analysis will later demonstrate, in order to maintain and sustain stability and harmony in the traditional society, women are not supposed to undertake public speech. The reality is that they play the role of *shadow cabinet* to their males/husbands. The decisions men make in public or implement, are most of the time known as the result of what has been prescribed by their wives in private mostly at night. This has been completely ignored by the Westerner feminists who have usually misunderstood and misinterpreted facts because of their lack of subject's reference knowledge. Since women are not supposed in normal circumstances to undertake public speeches because of respect of traditional values, they have long made use of oral literature through songs and dances to voice out their feelings in public. These songs and dances are most of the time, painting the daily life of their community, advising, criticising its shortcomings and prescribing possible remedies to

address them. They are the expression of African oral literature, full of vivid, attractive and rhetorical devices. The use of these stylistic features confers to the whole performers the attributes of the master of the language. This paper intends in the first place to exhibit how women use oral literature and pragmatics through songs and dances such as *ngwe* in the Fe'efe'e Grassfields community of the Upper Nkam Division in the Western Region of Cameroon to voice out their worldview in public without violating the established societal norms. With focus on the *ngwe* song termed *Ko cak fhɨ̄ ndak,* we also demonstrate how women have recourse to figures of speech to spice the lyrics of their songs. The dynamism of the African oral literature as the expression of the innermost mind and soul of the African people and women in particular is expressed through this song. In order to capture this information and convey it to the reader, we organise the article into four sections. We begin by explaining the technique used for eliciting the data, then, we discuss the methodological framework adopted for the analysis. In the third section, with the illustration of the ngwe song termed *Ko cak fhɨ̄ ndak,* we show how women effectively make use of these songs and dances in public. In the last section, we explore the rhetorical devices used by the performers in the text to better convey their message, to vivify their language and attract their audience.

2. Data Elicitation Technique

The text used for illustration in this research is audio-recorded in the field, natural linguistic and cultural area of the language in which it is performed. The transcription method adopted is the orthography of the language, based on the commonly-known General Alphabet of Cameroonian Language (Tadadjeu & Sadembouo, 1984). The use of this transcription method is purposeful in that beyond a mere scientific description and scholarly analysis, the paper also intends in a perspective not too close to the objective of this paper, to popularise the writing system of the language as a contribution to the challenge of raising awareness on the use of African languages in the written form. The justification of this choice is simply for practical reasons: popularising or rather making know the writing system of the language to those who are not yet exposed to it. In addition, when scholars want to convey scientific information in European languages such as English, French, German or whatever other western language, they do not make use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). There is no reason why Africans should continue using absolutely the IPA where writing systems are available. The reason is therefore also ideological. The text could also be used in a formal classroom setting without any further required transcription.

3. Methodology

The concern of social scientist is that he tries to capture the causes of human behaviour from within. In fact, as Nolen Turner (2011, p. 204) notes, the 'subject's frame of reference', mostly in African contexts, in order to be well understood and grasped, must be interpreted with an insider's view. This is because, the understanding of facts and messages conveyed in such situations require more than just the linguistic knowledge of the language. It necessitates the pragmatic comprehension of the environment in which the facts and

phenomena are happening as well as their context of production. It is this blended approach, which can enable the understanding of the message behind the words.

The song used for illustration in this article was recorded from two elderly informants living in the natural milieu of the language, the Fe'efe'e natural language and cultural community, and who were former performers of *ngwe*. Furthermore, the song was performed and used during one of our lectures in Cameroonian languages and cultures. We also made use of our insider's view to carry out the research. Our native speaker's knowledge of the language and the culture, our lifetime in the community during our childhood are also an added value to our capacity of deciphering such songs. Furthermore, we used to see school girls performing the *ngwe* during breaks when we were a schoolboy. In the Fe'efe'e linguistic and cultural area, until today, during the first two years of high school, the observation is that during breaks or in the absence of a teacher, some female students move away from the school premises, away from the administrators' curiosity in order to avoid disturbing the institution tranquillity to perform the *ngwe*. However, it must be pointed out that *ngwe* is critically endangered as the original songs and dances are fading away together with their performers.

We analyse the example of *ko cak fhɨ̄ ndak* to unveil why, how and when females perform the ngwe. During the performance of ngwe, the songs used by the actors could have some lexical variations from one group to another. This has not to be regarded as an alteration of its initial version. It is rather the expression of the dynamism and creativity of African oral literature. Finnegan (1990, p. 130-149) concurs with this view when he points out that oral texts are at the same time product and process. In other words, an oral text shall never be perceived as a finalized form because each time it will be recorded, or performed from one group to another within the same community, some changes or rather variations will always be noted. The changes might also be observed in the way performers act, i.e., their body movements, and their dancing steps also vary.

In order to capture the innermost of the text, we made use of an eclectic approach in our analysis, description and deciphering of facts. We will make use of what we call a conversational-pragmatic approach, which will borrow at the same time from Gumperz (1982a&b) interactional sociolinguistics and Dell Hymes' (1976) ethnography of communication.

Through what we called a conversational-pragmatic approach, which combines the use of language or oral text in context and situation, we demonstrate that the use of the kind of language found in women's songs and dances are not just the result of a spontaneous act, yet a medium of social construction of identities and their relationship with their environment, the expression of their mastery of the language. Therefore, only those speakers or listeners, who are well-acquainted with the language, would be able to capture the conveyed message. Consequently, the so-called ribald lexical items found in such discourses can only be understood by adult listeners, an audience made up of adult speakers who master the linguistic *dressings* of the language. Doing so, women do not violate the social norms

regulating the use of 'polite' language in their society. They rather strengthen their point, spice their words and embellish their expressions. This is also part of the use of language for expressiveness as can be observed from the presence of the figures of speech, which give the songs and dances a poetic and aesthetic dimension.

In the analysis, we resent the data in three levels. The first level displays the original data in Fe'efe'e, language of the song; the second provides the word for word translation of the text while the third indicates the attempted dynamic translation or literary translation of the text in English.

The pragmatic expression of woman's feelings through the expressive use of signs or bodily movements during their songs and dances contribute to the conveyance of their main message and influence their environment. Therefore, gestures play an important role in the process. These bodily expressions, together with the whole song, as mentioned by Habermas (1987), are part of the communication process, as communicating does not only mean conveying a message, but far better more, constructing, altering, influencing and modifying social relationships, taking and defending a position in a given social context.

From a pure speech act perspective, these songs and dances aim at influencing their target as it shall be viewed as an illocutionary act (Austin, 1975). Lakoff (1975) shows that women's linguistic role as perceived in public, with no correlation to their professional status or their job, gets it inspiration from the collective responsibility of support and search for maintaining harmony in the family. This might even be one of the explanations justifying the use of figurative language in public songs and dances, to extend this idea of family preservation of harmony to the public sphere. Notwithstanding, from a sociolinguistic point of view, the use of figurative language can be construed by the pure cultural values characterised in Africa by the categorical imperative use of a 'polite' language by women as pointed out by Yaguello (2002). Furthermore, it portrays the kind of language used by adults to convey a specific message in Africa in specific contexts. Such a language, as we will notice from the text, is full of devices whose usage falls within the saying of Achebe (1995) according to whom, in the Igbo land, '*proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten'*. These devices are therefore, the spices with which texts are spread onto their receptors. This simply unveils the imagery nature of the speech of those who *master the language* in Africa and betrays the eloquence and cultural binding of discourse partners.

4. The Importance of Fe'efe'e Songs and Dances

In the Fe'efe'e traditional society, women are not expected to speak in public spheres where men are present if they want to express their cries and yearnings and to criticise. This is only possible, when they are among women, discussing women matters.

From a critical perspective, this is not because they are oppressed in the society; it is simply due to the fact that each traditional society has its values its norms and regulations. In order to comply with these norms and regulations and preserve social cohesion and stability, each gender category, male or female, has to strictly abide by the rules. However, it should be

pointed out that scholarly works have demonstrated the power of women in private in the traditional African society. The example of marriage decisions in African communities is a sound illustration. In fact, most of the time, before the ceremony to receive the dowry takes place, ceremony chaired and managed by men in the Fe'efe'e community; women are known to play an upstream role. The decision they take in isolation with their husband or imposed on them is adopted during the ceremony -who will be given what and in what quantity-. Furthermore, it is well-known that women highly positively or negatively impact their daughters' choice for their potential husband in the African traditional society. However, it should be noted that nowadays, this tendency is slowly fading out because of the huge influence of the western culture. Yet, some consequences are also observed from such tendencies as marriages are no more as stable as in the traditional society, or do not last as longer as they were in the past because of the so-called freedom of girls to stand by their own in the choice of their partners, disrupting by this fact gender relations which play an important role in the stability of the society. In this vein, Mhlambi (2012, p. 18) states that 'Growing feminist consciousness in African societies seems to have ruffled up the dominance of a patriarchal setup and to a large extent, disrupted presumed harmony that characterised gender relations in African societies'.

Based on the foregoing, women play a decisive role in the community, but their decisions are not to be taken or made in public so as to allow men to always state 'I have said so!', while in reality, what they say, or the decision they take is what has been imposed on them by their wives out of public places. It is no secret in the Bamileke land in the West Region of Cameroon in general, some women, like the mother of the *Fʉ 'traditional ruler'* are the '*ladder in the palace'*. In fact, if you want the chief to solve an urgent matter for you the only way you can rapidly reach him is either through his mother or his first wife. In most Fe'efe'e villages, there are some women who are empowered by the chief, based on their mystical powers, to watch over the village, and report to the palace any possible mystic evil act in preparation or perpetrated in the village: they play a protective role. This role played by these women has already been reported in other traditional African communities. In Kane (1961, p. 49-58) *La Grande Royale,* portrayed as a woman who influences the daily life of the Diallobe people is a perfect illustration. It is then obvious that African women, according to the organisation of the African Society are strong and active participants to the societal development. Unlike what has been reported and wrongly interpreted by outsiders so far in terms of '*Woman's rights'*, African women play a vital and influential role in the transformation of their immediate environment. This has never been ignored by men. A further illustration of this point is the case of the Ibgo woman power which has been reportedly used to fight against the British colonial regime in Nigeria in the 20th century. As noted by Azuonye (1992, p. 14), 'In 1929, Igbo women organized and successfully carried through a revolt against the British colonial government which led to the commissioning, by that regime'. Outsiders have always been unable to capture this other side of gender relationship in the African society because of their incapacity to penetrate it, to perceive and analyse issues from below, and consequently, have always looked at things from outside. In

this respect, Azuonye (1992, p. 14) talking about the case in the Igbo traditional society, writes:

> From a more superficial observation, it is quite easy to see the exact opposite [talking about the power of women in Africa]: an overriding male-chauvinist and patriarchal society in which women appear to be dominated by their menfolk and confined to subservient roles as part of a cartel of "slave wives" in a predominantly polygamous environment. The paradox is indeed striking, and nowhere else, in Igbo traditional arts, is it more eloquently portrayed than in Igbo oral narratives.

One can think that women do not make use of songs and dances in public because they are oppressed. It is however because of their due respect to the norms regulating their society. The use of the *ngwe* song and dance for illustrative purposes shall be our focus in the subsequent section.

An ngwe situation involves participants who are at the same time singers and dancers. At the same time they emit the song, they also refrain it all together. They create a communication situation where they all are at the same time speakers and hearers and those around them mere spectators.

5. The Use of *Ngwe* to Portray the Fe'efe'e Society

Ngwe is a form of play or game where women combine songs and dances. During its performance, participants make a half-circle, then each of them one after another has to move out of the half-circle, goes one to two metres from others, runs, jumps slightly and throws herself with her back so that others can hold her, then lift her lightly. Before throwing oneself, one has to make sure that one does not have an enemy in the middle of the half-circle. The *ngwe* is performed by the group by singing a special song or special songs, struck up by one of the participants. At times, the song of *ngwe* is organised in, a) verses, struck up by one of the performers and, b) chorus, repeated by the rest of the group. The chorus is always one of the verses.

A single *ngwe* song can convey messages articulated around many themes. Generally, the different thematic issues addressed in the *ngwe* song express women's worldview. It is in fact, one of the activities women used to carry out in the past during their leisure time or during specific social events to trim their encounters. Nowadays, although the practice is slowly vanishing because of rural exodus, some women who moved and settled in towns still practice the *ngwe* during instances such as visit to new-born babies.

Far back in the past, women used the *ngwe* during certain public ceremonies either to praise, or to express their cries and yearnings, to criticise the evils of their society or the shortcomings of the rulers. In fact, the *ngwe* was used to express faith, joy, and desire or to criticise the society. With the gradual loss of our traditional African heritage, it is becoming more and more unpopular as it is very irregularly practised. Yet, as mentioned above, some women still practice it in a few occasions. Furthermore, school girls do also practice it as their

main game during break periods or playtime in schools. Therefore, it is observable that *ngwe* is a woman reserved practice. Any boy/man who gets involved in at school is considered by his peers as effeminate. In fact, from a societal point of view, a man or boy can only stand aside and admire the rhyme and rhythms of the play.

5.1. The example of ko cak fhū ndak

Ko cak fhū ndak is one of the many songs used by the performers of the *ngwe*. In this song, as aforementioned, more than one themes are addressed to them; the most prominent are sexuality, infidelity, forced-marriages, and anti-colonialism.

The song is organised in verses with a lyrical repetition of syntactic constructions and the repetition of the vowel '*e*' throughout. As for the rhythm, there is no regular pattern to be pointed out. Therefore, there is no special observation with regard to the regular metrical shape. Yet, it should be noted that the bodily rhythmic movement such as hand-clapping, buttock shaking, which comes up to coordinate the dance steps of the performers has not to be considered as a separate constituent, but as an added element, which is part of the performance. In fact, this bodily expression and rhythmic patterns are used at times by the participants to upgrade the event and raise more concern and reactions among the spectators. This view is corroborated by Finnegan (1978, p. 265) who argues that:

> The very common songs to strict time, however, have a beat that is articulated with dancing, rhythmic movement, percussion by instruments, or hand-clapping, all of which contribute to the form and attractiveness of the song. These rhythms are worked out in many different ways in various types of song, but one commonly recurring musical feature seems to be the simultaneous use of more than one metre at a time, as a way of heightening the rhythmic tension. (p. 265)

This rhythm is accompanied in this specific song by a sarcastic tone, marked by the deliberate criticism and mockery behind the words.

On the other hand, the song demonstrates that the idea of family planning has not to be perceived in Africa as originated from the Global North civilisation. African women knew exactly how and when to avoid early-birth or to avoid conceiving when their children are still babies. This explains why, without the use of all the contraceptive methods, unlike today, they were able to spend at will four to five years before giving birth to another child. In this song, there is a criticism of why men are not capable of allowing their wives to respect this planning, because of their envy to satisfy their sexual desire. This message is clearly conveyed in the following verses of the song:

(1) Ko cak fhū ndāk hɑ̄ lɑ̄ e

Take pot come down give lɑ̄ e

'Take this food and give to my husband when you will reach down there'

(2) Kō cāk fhū ndák há, n sí' ghēn ndāk bɑ̄ tia fhū ndak ntām ā

Take pot come down give I no go down no stick come down knock me

‘ Take this food and give to my husband when you will reach down there, may a stick come and prick me if I do not go down there.’

(3) N dɑ yá’ ghěn ndak lɑ̄ ē e

I had already go down lɑ̄ ē e

‘I had already gone down there.’

(4) N dɑ yá’ ghěn ndak lɑ̄ nə kwēn ndak ndēn mɑ́ mén a cwī

I had already go down then animal arrive down say that son my grow up

‘I had already gone down there and the idiot said that my son is already a grown up’.

From the data in 1, 2, 3 and 4, there is evidence that the performers are voicing out their disappointment. They are hammering at the reason why they should not go to their husband’s house. In fact, according to the tradition, women are not supposed to live in the same house with their husbands. In most polygamous marriages, the husband’s house is thrown off centre, in such a way as to enable him control the activities and movements of his wives.

Forced marriages were in the past known as traditional practices against which women had no weapon. The *ngwe* was one of the channels through which those who went through such experiences could express their bitterness. When most of the young girls were forced to get marry to very old men of about eighty years old, one of the consequences of these forced marriages was infidelity. Infidelity is perceived in the African tradition as an abomination, a curse and consequently, is harshly criticised indirectly in this song in the following terms:

(5) Ngɑ̌ tɑ̄ɑ̄ cǎk mɑ̄ghɑɑ ǎ mōh

I put pot lover on fire

‘I am cooking my lover’s food.’

(6) Ngɑ̌ tɑ́ɑ́ cǎk mɑ̄ghɑɑ ǎ mōh, nə mɑ̄ ndak ncēh ā mɑ́ n sɑ’ ngɑ́ kɑ?

I put pot lover on fire animal be down call me that I come do what

‘ What for is the idiot calling me when I am cooking my lover’s food ?’

Not only the verses in 5 and 6 criticise infidelity, in the context of the song, they are also a mockery at those old men who, in spite of their age, marry young girls and are thereafter unable to accomplish their marital duty. Consequently, the wife ends up in the hands of a lover. Therefore, the question indirectly asked by these performers is: Why on earth should an old man marry a young girl when he knows very well that he will not be able to perform his marital duty?

Although there is a popular belief from the western world that women were prevented from expressing their point of view about sexuality in Africa, in listening to a song like *ko cak fhɑ̄ ndak*, one comes up with a different apprehension of the reality. In fact, in the following

verses, the speaker is castigating forced marriages showing how it leads to infidelity because of the incapacity of the old man to be up to the conjugal task. At the same time, it serves as a channel to express hot and vivid insults to all men who fall within this category.

(7) Pō lēn mā̄ m bā̄ nzhwīē mven wen

They say that I be wife old person

'They forced me to marry an old man.'

(8) Pó lén má m bá nzhwīē mven wen ā mā̄ mbhi ntūā̄ ŋǔ' m bā̄ njam nsāngālā

They say that I be wife old person he be front post shakingly I be behind enjoy

'They forced me to marry an old man; when he walks staggeringly bent on his stick I am behind him enjoying with my lover.'

(9) Pɑ̌h mven wěn ghěn ntē Kɑsʉɑ (twice), a mā̄ mbhi ntūā̄ ŋǔ' n mbā̄ njam nsāngālā

We old person go market Kɑsʉɑ he be front post skakingly I be behing enjoy

'I and the old man went to the market in Kɑsʉɑ and when he was in front walking staggeringly, I was behind him enjoying with my lover.'

Evidence from these verses shows that the performers are criticising forced marriage. By so doing, they are pointing out the consequences of such marriages as they often lead to infidelity. The case presented in this song is that of a young girl who is forced to marry a very old man.

Criticism of the imposition of the learning and speaking of foreign languages in Africa by Africans is a secular concern. There is a popular belief that all the Africans embraced the imposition of western languages on them during the colonial era. Yet, a critical look at this song shows that it clearly castigates this practice in the verses presented below and that the practice was wrongly criticised:

(10) Pō zăp Māyá'nkām

they whip Māyá'nkām

'They whipped Māyá'nkām.'

(11) Pō zăp Māyá'nkām, mbūā̄' nkhu mbūā̄' mbō má a kɑ' yū' ndāk

They whip Māyá'nkām break feet break hands that she no hear white

'They whipped Māyá'nkām until breaking feet and arms because she is unable to understand English.'

(12) Mɑ mʉ ā kɑ̌' Māyá'nkām,

If I be Past Māyá'nkām

'If I were Māyá'nkām (ironically)'.

(13) Mɑ mɯ ā kɑ̌ Mɑ̄yá'nkām, mɑ ngɑ̌ njū' si' ndāk tɑ njū' mfə̀laŋsī(ironically).

If I be Past Mɑ̄yá'nkām then I hear until white until hear French

'If I were Mɑ̄yá'nkām, I would be able to understand English and French.'

The idea which arises from these verses is that of the harsh criticism of a system in which people are abused because of their inability to understand/speak a foreign and colonial language. These verses prove that African women, in spite of their level of Western education-to be understood in the Western way- of the time, were able to utter a vivid diatribe against the colonial imposition of foreign languages on them through their songs and dances in public in order to raise awareness in their community about the issue. In raising awareness, their intention was also to pave the way to rejecting such practices. They were therefore aware that languages were to colonial masters what a rifle is in the hands of a hunter.

During performances, the bodily movements which accompany the songs are an addendum to draw the attention of the audience and to beautify the scene and the performing act. This bodily movement ends up provoking burst of laughter in the audience and excitement from the youth present on the scene. Consequently, some of the most comic of these youths repeat the song each time they see any of the performers or each time they meet together to imitate the performers, most of the time, in a *slow motion style*.

In order to make this *ngwe* attractive to the spectators and to convey their mastery of the language, the performers make use of figurative language in their songs. The song *ko cak mfhɯ̄ ndak* used for illustrative purposes is no exception.

5.2. Deciphering some Stylistic Devices in ko cak fhɯ̄ ndak

Also called figures of speech, stylistic devices are part of the spices of African oral literature. The accurate choice and understanding of words, do not only depend on the linguistic knowledge of the language, but to all the cultural and imagery connotations that come together to allow the speaker convey a message only receivable to knowledgeable persons. Although most of the words used in the song are straightforward, i.e., common words known by everybody, the choice of their combination and their context of usage confer to them a different semantic connotation whose understanding requires at the same time linguistic and cultural knowledge or ethnographic communication capabilities. Their use aims at making the game or the play attractive and instructive through embellished language features. In addition, they intentionally want to avoid young people to be exposed to the obscenity of the language that the songs often contain.

The main devices used in the song are figures such as metonymy, assonance, figures of repetition in general, irony and onomatopoeia. In the following, we unveil these figures as they appear in the song.

The word *cak* in the analysed text is used to refer to food. This metonymy presents the container to express the contents. The container is the pot itself *cak* while the contents is food which has been referred to as *pot*.

The most prominent category of stylistic devices used in the text is repetition which comes up in a melodic pattern used to draw the attention of the listener through the implicit creation of a *receptive enjoyment*. In order to achieve this seductive goal, sentences, phrases, words, and sounds are repeated constantly in the text.

Also known in general as syntactic stylistic devices, repetitions are used by the performers to create a kind of musicality in the text. Furthermore, the effect of this musicality as already mentioned, is to captivate the attention of the audience and retain their interest to the song so that they can perceive the message conveyed. A look at the entire song (see appendix) shows that the first verse of each couple of verses is repeated. The very first six verses of the song illustrate this observation. In fact, the first verse serves as the starting point to the second verse which makes a couple as illustrated below.

(14) Ko cak mfhū ndak nhɑ̄ lɑ́ e!

Ko cak mfhū ndak hɑ̄, n sí' ghěn ndak bɑ̄ tia fhū ndak ntām ā.

N dɑ yā' ghěn ndak lɑ̄ hē e!

N dɑ yá' ghěn ndak lɑ́, nə kwēn ndak ndēn mɑ́ mēn ă cwī.

Pó lēn mɑ̂ ngɑ̌ tiē mōō lɑ́ e!

Pó lén mɑ̂ ngɑ̌ tiē mōō, a mɑ̄ mēn wen kɑ́ lɑ́ ŋūhuhū.

Ngɑ̌ tūɑ̄ cak māghɑɑ ă mōh

Ngɑ̌ túɑ́ cak māghɑɑ ă mōh, nə mɑ̄ ndak ncēh ā mɑ́ n sɑ' ngú kɑ?

Take this food and give down there

Take this food and give down there; should a stick come and hit me if I do not go down there.

I went down there once and the idiot told me that my child is already a grown up

They say that I have given birth to a baby when his elder is still a baby

They say that I have given birth to a baby when his elder is still a baby; but is it somebody's child ŋū, hu, hū!

I am cooking my lover's food

I am cooking my lover's food; and why is the idiot calling me down there.

The repetition of the whole syntactic structure is also sustained by the repetition of vowels also called assonance. Assonance is a figure of sound based on the repetition of the same vocalic sound in a word, phrase or sentence.

In order to make the performance scene live and the song more seductive, the singers also have recourse to onomatopoeia, using sounds as words or, using words describing sounds which sound like the sounds they describe as in *'ŋū hu hū !, hē he hē hē he hē !'*.

These repetitions do not in any way create monotony in the song. As Nketia (1955, p.104) points out, 'they may have a musical mode of meaning or they may be a means of emphasizing points that [performers] might wish to make'. Okpewho (1992, p. 71) cited by Mutia (2003, p.4) emphasises that:

> It is necessary to grasp first the aesthetic value of repetition in a piece of oral performance. In a fundamental way, the repetition of a phrase, a line, or passage does have a certain sing-song quality to it; if the repetition occurs between intervals in, say, a song or a tale, the audience is often delighted to identify with it and to accompany the performer in going over a passage that has now become familiar. (p.4)

The repetitions create or better still, betray a certain familiarity between the performers and the public.

Rhetorical devices are then used to vivify the scene and give animation to the language. As evidenced by the song, the context of the performance requires a responsive audience. As commonly known in oral literature, the audience shares the same cultural universe with the performers; they have the same '*collective memories and culture*' (Turner, 2011, p. 203). This explains the recurrent repetition which is also a strategy of inviting the audience to repeat or mime the verses.

The irony which transpires in lines 7 and 8 is the illustration of the mockery men usually suffer from their wives in their daily relationship. All together, these figures betray or expose the aesthetic of the Fe'efe'e language and contribution to the convergence of the main message.

6. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in this analysis, it has always been a mistake for outsiders to argue that African women are not allowed to voice out their feelings, their cries and yearnings. Instead, they are the corner stone of their society, playing the role of 'shadow cabinets'. Yet, oral songs and dances have been proven to be their major means to channel their voice to the public in the traditional Fe'efe'e society. This has not to be confused with the emerging modern world view by some African women who transcend the traditional norms and consequently, brake societal balance through violation of its norms. With the ringing bell of the so-called *human rights* or better put woman rights from the West, African women are on the move and they are breaking African traditional values, and this is leading to the destabilisation of the African society. A blind copy-and-paste version of the values propagated from the West by African women might be one of the consequences of the derailment of the relationship among different gender groups on the continent today. The song used for illustration in this paper demonstrates the richness of African oral literature and the women's linguistic capacities to manipulate language in their public performances and to use this language through songs at will to foster change. The pragmatic dimension of the language used, accompanied by gestures through prolific songs and dances are strategies to convey to community members their social philosophy and to distract people during performances on

ceremonial grounds and social events as well. In seducing the audience, the beauty or aesthetics of the language, assists in the conveyance of the core messages to the target listeners through a "game language".

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Appendix

Ko cak mfhū ndak nhā lά e! Take pot arrive down give then e!	Take this food and give to my husband when you reach down there

Ko cak mfhū ndak nhā̄, n sí' ghěn ndak bā̄ cia Take pot arrive down give I no go down no stick fhū ndak ntām ā come down hit me	Take this food and give to my husband when you reach down there. May a stick comes and hit me if I do not go down there.
N dɑ yā' ghěn ndak lā̄ hē e! I past-already go down there e!	I had already gone down there
N dɑ yá' ghěn ndak lá, nə kwēn ndak ndēn má I past-already go down there animal arrive down say that mēn ă cwī child my big	I had already gone down there and the idiot said my son is big enough
Pó lēn mɑ̂ ngɑ̌ tiē mōō lá e! They say that I sow child then e!	They said that I have given birth to a child while feeding another
Pó lén mɑ̂ ngɑ̌ tiē mōō, a mā̄ mēn wen ká lá they say that I sow child he be child person Q-then ŋūhuhū! ŋūhuhū!	They said that I have given birth to a child while feeding another. Is it someone else child ŋūhuhū!
Ngɑ̌ tūā̄ cak mā̄ghɑɑ ă mōh I put pot lover my fire	I am cooking my lover's food
Ngɑ̌ túá cak mā̄ghɑɑ ă mōh, nə mā̄ ndak ncēh ā I put pot lover my fire animal be down call me má n sɑ' ngú kɑ? That I come do what?	I am cooking my lover's food, and why is the idiot calling me down there?
Nkinken Mōōnkakntē Idiot Mōōnkakntē	Mōōnkakntē, the idiot
Nkinken Mōōnkakntē, mɑ ă njīī tɑ' mfəlāŋ má ā idiot Mōōnkakntē that he see one franc that he kɑ̌shūā̄ wūā̄ pass death	Mōōnkakntē, the idiot, when he sees a coin he thinks he has challenged death.
Mɑ mu ā kɑ̌' Mōōnkakntē That me if past Mōōnkakntē	But if I were Mōōnkakntē
Mɑ mu ā kɑ̌' Mōōnkakntē, mɑ ngɑ̌ njīī tɑ' pōk má If me I be Mōōnkakntē therefore I see one coin that n kɑ' ghú wū. I not have thing	But if I were Mōōnkakntē I would argue that I have nothing but a coin.
Pō zăp Mā̄yá'nkām They beat Mā̄yá'nkām	They whipped Mā̄yá'nkām

Pō zăp Māyá'nkām, mbūā' nkhu mbūā' mbō má a They beat Māyá'nkām break feet break hands that she kα' yū' ndāk no hear white	They whipped Māyá'nkām, breaking his feet and arms because she was unable to understand English.
Mα mʉ ā kα̌' Māyá'nkām If I me be Māyá'nkām	But if I were Māyá'nkām
Mα mʉ ā kα̌' Māyá'nkām, mα ngα̌ njū' si' ndāk tα If I me be Māyá'nkām therefore I hear white until njū' mfəlaŋsī hear French	But if were Māyá'nkām, I would be able to understand English and French.
Pō lēn mbā nzhwīē mven wen They say be wife old person	They forced me to marry an old man
Pó lén mbā nzhwīē mven wen, ā mā mbhi ntūā ŋǔ' They say be wife old person he be front post shaking n mā njam nsāngālā I be behind enjoy	They forced me to marry an old man and when we are walking together, he is in front of me moving staggeringly while I am behind him enjoying with my lover.
Pα̌h mven wēn ghěn ntē Kαsʉα We old person go market Kαsʉα	I and the old man went to the market in Kαsʉα
Pα̌h mven wěn ghěn ntē Kαsʉα, a mā mbhi ntūā ŋǔ' We old person go market Kαsʉα he be front post shake n mbā njam nsāngālā I be behind shake-joy	I and the old man went to the market in Kαsʉα and when he was in front of me moving staggeringly, I was behind him enjoying with my lover.
Nu mó' lαghú ā lā ē he! problem other arrived me then ē he!	I had a problem ē he!
Nu mó' lαghú ā lā ē, hē he hē hē he hē! Problem other arrived me then ē, hē he hē hē he hē!	I had a problem ē, hē he hē hē he hē!