Traditional Segregation: Encoded Language as Powerful Tool. Insights from Okati Ùmụakpo-Lejja Ọmaba chant

Uchechukwu E. Madu
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Nigeria
uchs221@gmail.com

Abstract
Language becomes a tool for power and segregation when it functions as a social divider among individuals. Language creates a division between the educated and uneducated, an indigene and non-indigene of a place; an initiate and uninitiated member of a sect. Focusing on the opposition between expressions and their meanings, this study examines Ùmụakpo-Lejja Okati Ọmaba chant, which is a heroic and masculine performance that takes place in the Okati (masking enclosure of the deity) of Umuakpo village square in Lejja town of Enugu State, Nigeria. The mystified language promotes discrimination among initiates, non-initiates and women. Ọmaba is a popular fertility Deity among the Nsukka-Igbo extraction and Egara Ọmaba (Ọmaba chant) generally applies to the various chants performed to honour the deity during its periodical stay on earth. Using Schleiermacher’s Literary Hermeneutics Approach of methodical practice of interpretation, the metaphorical language of the performance is interpreted to reveal the thoughts and the ideology behind the performance in totality. Among the Findings is that the textual language of Ùmụakpo-Lejja Okati Ọmaba chant is almost impossible without authorial and member’s interpretation and therefore, they are capable of initiating discriminatory perception of a non-initiate as a weakling or a woman.

Keywords: Ọmaba chant, Ùmụakpo-Lejja, language, power, hermeneutics

Introduction
Beyond the primary function of language, which is expression and communication of one’s ideas, language is also a tool for power, segregation and division in a society. According to Sourgo (2013), Sik Hung Ng and Fei Deng (2017, p. 1), “language creates influence through words, oratories, conversations and narratives in political campaigns, emergence of leaders, terrorist narratives, and so forth.” Sourgo emphasises that some categories of individuals and groups “use language as their main tool for maintaining status and power.” Also, Fairclough (1989) posits that “Power is not only built and sustained via coercive means (by force), but also via indirect ways (use of language). Succinctly, Fowler (1971, p. 61) argues that “language is delineated as “social practice” by which power relations
are established and sustained.” The domineering effect of a language cannot be over emphasised as it brings about a “feeling of superiority” and it also becomes “an important instrument of oppression” (Naudorf, 2001). This study investigates the language of Ụmụakpo-Lejja Okati Omaba chant and the use of obscure language for indirect communication among the initiates, which is geared towards gaining influence, protection of the sacredness of the Omaba Deity and its participation rituals. Using Schleiermacher’s Literary Hermeneutics Approach of methodical practice of interpretation, the metaphorical language of the performance is interpreted to reveal the thoughts and the ideology behind the performance in totality. The findings revalidate the influential role of language in the segregation of the language users from the initiates, non-members and the womenfolk.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a critical theory, which although originated from Plato and Aristotle, became more prominent in the 17th century. It began with Maurincio Beauchot and was basically concerned with the art of interpreting, discovering the truth and values of biblical exegeists. In other words, its concern was how to ascertain meaning with regard to; ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘how,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ ‘by which means’ of a text. However, the major bone of contention among the early scholars of hermeneutics was whether the bible should be given literal, moral, allegorical or analogical interpretations. And the major controversy among the pioneers; St Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, John Colet, Martin Luther and John Calvon was the approach that best portrayed the truth of a text.

Modern Hermeneutics began with Dannhauer in 1974 and he was significant for introducing the general application of hermeneutics to all texts other than the bible. His remarkable contribution was a systematic textbook (Hermeneutica Sacre sive Methodus Exponendum Sacrum Utteranum) in general application of hermeneutics which helped to distinguish between the true and false meaning of any text. This contribution of his was as a result of a proliferation of texts in that century.

The principle of authorial intention was another major input made in hermeneutics studies by Clauberg in 1654 and it was further popularised by Schleiermacher and Whitley in the 19th century. The authorial intention principle however generated so much controversy that it was accused of authorial and intentional fallacy. Among the scholars that fiercely criticised the principle were Derrida, Heidegger Gadamer. These critics felt that authorial intention limits viable textual interpretations and most of them opted for neutral close-engagement-interpretation because the authorial history makes interpretation subjective. Although Gadamer rejects the authorial intention interpretation principle, he, however, maintains that the historical traditions of a text are indispensable in unravelling textual meanings. For him, no one can enter a dialogue neutrally or
without a point of view. He therefore proposes the dialogical interpretation model, which emphasises engaging dialogue with persons and subject matters. Despite the criticisms against the authorial intention model, this study finds Schleiermacher’s model indispensable in the analysis of Okwụ Umuakpo-Lejja Omaba Chant because that is the only approach that can ascertain the real meaning of the chant.

**Omaba chant**

This refers to the half-sung-half-spoken utterances that contain elements of praise for not only Omaba and his qualities but also for his participants. These various renditions, which are often ritualistic and sacred, are only heard when maa nó n’ala (Omaba is on earth) in all the Igbo Omaba cultural areas. The Okwụ (the Deity’s village square enclosure) variety which is performed by an individual or the deity and ụma maa (the deity’s children) for the community, feature most prominently on the eve of the fall/return (Odida maa) and the departure (Ula maa) of the deity. While the tones are elated and happy in the former, they are, however, sorrowful and moody in the latter (locally described as ikwa emeri) and such expressions as these are usually portrayed; Orie egwa egwa! Anyi amiri---emi hororo! (The Orie market day should approach fast! We have escaped---emi hororo) The Orie market day which is the Omaba’s favourite day is as well chosen for its departure day and that is why the utterer pleads for the swift approach of the day. They, according to him, henceforth would be exonerated from any evil misfortune that would befall either the village or the indigenes of that community.

The chant performed by the deity and its children is highly ritualistic, sacred and believed to be sung by the maa (deity). As a result, in some areas like Umunengwa in Nru - Nsukka, the chant is neither played openly nor danced to by the women and the uninitiated ones. Participation is therefore, highly restricted to the initiated members and the young initiates. But in some areas like Lejja, the women are given the liberty of listening and dancing to the melodious performance. The chant was formally performed on every Orie day but now as a result of the changed era of white-collar jobs and academic commitments, it is performed occasionally by a representative of a community who doubles as the deity and the deity’s children. This representative’s selection is neither by social class nor age. It is rather by a sonorous voice and, compulsorily, a well-versed knowledge of on-the-spot figurative composition as each performance is a totally new event. In the world of the Omaba chant, knowledge of figurative expressions is the beginning of wisdom as the chants are rendered in highly figurative languages that will be very difficult to unravel by the non-initiates and women. The representative must be able to keep the rules of not revealing the instruments and the cast of the performance to non-members, essentially, protecting the sacrosanct nature of the institution. Obiechina (1978: 384) succeeds in capturing the euphoria
that surrounds the Omaba chant and its recitation: „As the day for the festival comes closer, the general preparation and anticipation reach fever pitch, people begin to exchange visits and to become more generous with their drinks, foods and Kola nut. Ballads and minstrels rove around entertaining small audiences with songs, poetry and music... announcing the expected arrival of the spirits and setting the scene for the paltic effusion which is to characterize the entire Omabe festival“ (emphasis mine).

Just as he has argued, Omaba chants have that great quality of highlighting the unique music of the Nsukka people, whereby the maraca, Uhwie, metal gong and other instruments combine to produce sounds that are peculiar and uniquely Nsukka. In other words, once the sounds are heard, they are quickly connected with the Nsukka cultural group.

Omaba chants also are relevant to society in the sense that they are raconteurs of a town’s history. This idea is made manifest when the chant documents the genealogy of the participants’ history. Mrs Regina Ude, one of the interviewees and a one-time Oyima (a revered title taken by elderly women of substance in the Omaba culture) from Obukpa in Nsukka, recounts how the chant traces the history of a participant who comes in as the chant is being performed. It goes thus: “Okoro the son of Ude I greet you, Ude, the son of Ogbonna” - a man who performed majestic tasks.

In the traditional setting where there are no academic institutions that stand as standards of measuring an individual’s intelligence, the chants are the distinctive yardstick for measuring the creative and intelligent ones. This is because the chants make room for personal expression, the application of intelligence and creative imagination which are displayed in the on-the-spot fabrication of idioms, symbols and imagery used. This, of course, easily makes an individual stand out from the crowd. Also, the ability of a performer to compel response from the audience through the gestures he makes which are both dramatic and entertaining add to the unique creative prowess of an Omaba chant performer.

Omaba chant, no doubt, is a uniting factor among the members in the sense that it allows both the royal and the poverty-stricken members of society to participate in it. Since the major requirement of the Omaba chant performance is creativeness in figurative language to qualify as a performer, all the other societal distinguishing qualities like age, royalty and wealth are relegated to the background and there is room for all classes of men to participate in it. As a result of this classlessness there is free mingling among all the members.

**Contexts for Ụmụakọ Okọ Ọmaba chant performance**

There are three major occasions for the Okọ performance rendered during Omaba’s stay on earth. The first performance of this chant takes place three
months after Omaba’s return and the particular date is fixed by a group known as the ogba maa (the deity’s age grade). Ogba maa is made up of selected young men born within the period of Omaba’s last departure and the year of its next return that is, two consecutive years. Traditionally, the year for the deity’s return is known as ahwa maa (the deity’s year) and those born within that period are known as the umu maa (the deity’s children), who consequently form the ogba maa with the age grade that precedes them. The reason for the initial outing is mainly to commemorate Omaba’s peaceful entrance into the community. After the first and the general performance set by the ogba maa, the Omaba leaders from Ebara and Ugbele quarters of Lejja fix theirs to observe the Obuegba (the official announcement of the date for the deity’s departure from Earth). A month after the Obuegba, the deputy leaders of the deity (Dunoka) agree on a date to fix their own performance which is later followed by that of Amankwo. After these latter performances, then, the Omaba deity prepares for its departure from earth which comes up within two months’ (traditional) time.

Language interpretation and analysis of ŭmụakọ Okẹti Omaba chant performance

In all the performances, the audience is made up of the Ogba maa (Deity age-grade) and some other participants who support the rendition in the form of making responses and chanting of refrains to the recital. The crux of the rendition is a greeting to every male member of the community, both the Omaba devotees and Christians alike; and anyone who hears his name proceeds to present his gifts to the performer who represents the deity in this rendition. The gifts usually presented could be snuff, kola nut or drinks of any type. Whether one has any gift to offer or not, the deity summons everyone to come forward and collect his own gift which is a piece of kola nut. The performer mentions titles and epithets that could easily be played out musically. Also, an individual is identified by mentioning both the paternal and maternal pedigrees, or by mentioning either of them.

In another sense, by identifying an individual through the lineage, it could be said that the performance is an enactment of a communal gathering that is presided over by the deity itself. This action could signify a ritualized conferment of respect to the individuals’ family lineages. Significantly in the chant, each person’s family is traced and paid tribute to as seen in the citation (lines 66-67), where the first line refers to the paternal lineage while the second refers to the maternal origin:

Ịmanụọ Nwolu nwa Ugo nwa Ugodi O
(twice)

Emmanuel Nwolu, the son of Ugo, son of Ugodi O!
(twice)

Ewọra nwa-Ugwele-Echara

Ewọra, the son of Ugwele-Echara)
On the other hand, the performance which takes place inside the Okǝti is structurally divided into four sections or divisions that glide into one another during the rendition. The first and the second sections refer and give honour to the spiritual and ancestral heads of the clan, the supernatural beings and the long dead ancestors, while the last two segments pertain to the living since they refer to those who are still alive and their accomplishments. Symbolically, there is a depiction of a convergence between the living and the dead for a ritual communion where the first three sections, on a general note, deal with the recognition and payment of tributes while the last is the entertaining part that conjures everyone to laugh, participate actively and enjoy the musical ecstasy of being part of the performance. This final stage is the story telling session where short symbolic stories are told for the relaxation of all and it goes on till the end of the performance. The end of every movement is significantly marked by a change in the beating of the musical instruments.

In the first section, while paying tribute, the chanter, first of all, recognizes the hierarchical leadership of the town, starting from the highest (supernatural beings) to the lowest (all the men of that community). The onyishi, who is the eldest man in the community, is recognised after the supernaturals and the kola nut implicitly comes from him as a mark of respect. The kola nut being a unifying symbol as well as a ritualistic food that reinforces interactions in both the physical and metaphysical worlds is used by the performer to symbolically bind the community in one whole piece. The unification is reinforced further by the tribute paid to all the living and supernatural beings of the community that is, the deities, the ancestral heads and every adult male in the clan. Every adult male who is a member of that community is specifically identified in order to make the membership bond stronger; as it is always believed among the Igbo that, ‘Ụmụnnabyike’ (there is strength in brotherhood).

Also, the performance portrays a profuse embellishment of its characters with hyperbolic pseudonyms, sobriquets, and every other epithet of praise conceivable at the moment of rendition. The dialect of the recital is quite distinct from the standard Igbo used as a formal language and this goes on to the extent that an outsider, a non-member as well as women find it difficult to understand the language of the performance.

The first section of the performance is a litany of the ancestral spirits and fathers in their order of hierarchy. This is symbolically and structurally portrayed in their invitation to collect the Odo’s kola nut by the reciter. The chant, on the overall, is a symbolic recognition of pedigrees of a particular clan as each clan’s spiritual deity and the ancestral fathers are invoked and paid tribute to. These greetings and paying of tributes are explicated in the excerpt below, (lines 1-57).
In line 1, the chanter first of all recognizes the founder of his community, / Dimogwuma- alaibenechi / the land of kin and the deity, with the clan’s ancestral name. It is a land of peace where the community members co-exist peacefully and live a life of brotherhood. The land is also complimented because it is respected as the people’s ancestral burial place. The land’s boundary is clearly marked by a native tree known as ojirooshi (traditional boundary-demarcation tree) which connotes that the land is spiritually guarded by Ndə ushi / (the founding fathers). These spiritual guards are then acknowledged in line 5. The next tribute goes to, Idenyi Òhom, who is the (spiritual deity of the community). The / Umu ada Oha, were oji Odo-0! / (female ancestors of the community) are greeted in line 4, in order to acknowledge the gender completeness of the community. Likewise, / Dimoká onye nwe ala/, (the overall ancestral head of the ushi people) is acclaimed in line 5. Line 6 invites the whole of the community members to join in the spiritual communion. The deity and the overall head of the spiritual messengers are heralded in line 8. It is also noteworthy that the use of ‘it is kolanut / nọba oji / means an invitation for a spiritual unification which is symbolised in the sharing and eating of the kolanut. However, since the ancestral and spiritual beings own the people and all they have, the chanter just emphasizes what is being presented to them, which is kolanut.

In the second section, the ancestral deities and heads of all the communities that make up the ’Okékgwuma’ quarters of Lejja are greeted. ‘Dúlugwunye’ (line 11), the spiritual deity of the ’Uwala clan, is mentioned in line 10 while ‘Ézèlekwu Òmeji’ (line 12) is the ancestral head of the Amube village. ‘Ezelamenyi’ (line 13), is Amube’s spiritual deity and ‘Ézikè- Nwèzè,’ (in line 16) is the ancestral head of the ‘Ishiemelu’ village in Lejja. While ‘Ézikè Nneva da Ìgà’ in (line 17), the oldest community in Lejja town, is hailed too. ‘Omekọ-Ugwunye’, (in line 18) begets Umuefi village while ‘Ézikè-Tím’ (line 20), heads the Nwiyi clan of Lejja. ‘Èzèlekwu Ézè-Ohe,’ (line 21), gave birth to Amankwo village and ‘Urókọ-Nkwo’ (line 23), fathers the Amegu clan. In like manner, ‘Amábynekwà’ (in line 24), traditionally heads the Mbiamonyme village. ‘Ézikènèbo’, (Amebo village - line 25), Ezebanúgwú (Ameze-28-29), ‘Ndà Ushiokpara,’ (Mbiamonyme village-line 30), ‘Ézikè-{ligwè (Amogbu)}, Ézèugwocha-Ezikèbikò (Umuorugbogu - line 35), ‘Ézikènèmọké,’ (Ugo), Òvàr (Owere ala-line 38), Ézikè Obiameji (Ejarija), Òlùbé (Úgbèlè, line 42) Ézikè Dúlugwú, Ézikèahum (Upatá, line 44) Áyogolò (Umú Òbeke, line 46), Dímshinne, (Úmunwugweja) Úgwoke ne Ugwunye, (the ancestral parents of Omba deity, (line
50), Úgwú Éshà də Úgbèlè Ùwaala, (the ancestral abode of Omaba deity) are all listed for recognition and paying of tributes in the first section of the chant.

The third section of the chant deals with the identification and greeting of all the men of that particular village. The Deity, who doubles as the chanter, announces his arrival and asks those whose names he has mentioned and the rest of the participants how they are; ‘/ Omaba abja—O ‘Unu emee agaa-O? (Omaba has come—O, How are you), line 59-61. Then, in lines 62-64, the chanter refers to Dımogwuma as / Dımogwuma anagọ egbọ agọ / Mẹ agọ koyịra baanyi nẹ nkpọ eja O! (Dımogwuma who does not kill a lion / yet a lion hangs on the wall pins in our houses) /.

The metaphor of ‘killing of a lion’ is recognised as ‘bravery’ and the inability to do so conversely depicts ‘weakness.’ The chanter creatively employs what Claude Levi-Strauss terms ‘theory of binary opposition’ when he uses ‘the killing of a lion’ to represent bravery and the inability to kill one to denote weakness. On the overall, the chanter ingeniously makes reference to the clan’s brave, strong, and intimidating fighters, designated in the chant as ‘the lion that hangs on the walls of their different houses.’ The fighters ensure that none of the community-members’ rights are carelessly trampled upon. The Ezenwagǝgǝdẹ lineage in Ùmụakpọ village, for example, ensures that every stolen item by a member of another community is returned to the owner within hours of such a report to them. The chanter, in essence, boasts of the endowment of these strong men (who fight for their weak community members) for he sees such as an awesome blessing from the deity. He connects this amazing providence from the deity with line 112 where he refers to the oyimas (female initiates) who bring food to him as / Ùmụ Chi n’edokwueze / (offspring of God-crowned lineage). For the performer, obviously, without the supernatural aid, such a gift would not come.

Then, he further calls on Nkwoda Ugwuoke Obọtẹ (lines 65-67) whom he refers to as, / Èzè-anagọ-egbọ-agbọ n’ọha (the king that does not kill a lion in the public) and commends him for / filling his mouth with àjààrị /.

Àjààrị is the fibrous remains of the bread fruit after the seeds have been separated from the head and that is the deity’s mysterious representation of meat. It is also used to feed the cows during the dry season when fresh grasses are difficult to come by. The reciter only links àjààrị with meat because of the similar quality of ‘dryness’ at the moment of consumption. Since the villagers do not have the modern means of preserving meat like the refrigerator and the freezer, they usually put the meat in ngǝga (traditional iron baskets) and hang it over the fire or above the cooking pot so that as the meals are prepared, the meat is smoked and preserved. The meat, after series of smoking becomes very dry and is called anọ kpor nkọ n’ẹju ọnu (the dry meat that fills the mouth). It is these metaphors of ‘dryness and over-filling-of-the mouth’ that the chanter echoes in the rendition. The image portrayed is such that Nkwoda, the son of Okwume, has presented him a gift of a mouthful of meat and he is overwhelmed with such gesture of generosity. The same effect is
encountered in lines 79 and 109 where the performer declares that “he feels dizzy,” even when he has not tasted “the drinks.”

In lines 74, the Deity introduces himself as: /Ọbənya ụdara nwa Òbòdòike Èzè/ (It is me, Ụdara, the son of Obodoike Eze) / . Ụdara is biologically known as Chrysophyllum Albidum fruit and to some people, it is the peach fruit or the star apple fruit. Ụdara among the natives stands for ‘fertility’ and ‘sweetness’ not only among the Ụmụàkpo community of Lejja, but also in many other Igbo communities. It is also in the same sense that he transfers the connotations to himself as both the giver of many children and a melodious performer.

Furthermore, in line 75, the chanter mentions the setting of his performance by designating the place with the two most outstanding trees found there. He says: /A nọm nẹ be egbə na be ụvərə (I am in the house of egbə and ụvərə)/. This reminds us of the following observation of Mead (1969, pp. 383) that: “Symbols and images in Maori chants are not just creations which they have imagined for purely aesthetic reasons but... are rather symbols which underlie some cultural value. For example, the ‘mountain’ symbol represents a group as well as its geographical domain. In other words, the symbols can serve the purpose of identity in the chants as rivers, lakes, and a well-known ancestral figure can establish the name of a tribe without its name being mentioned”.

In the same manner, egbə (a medicinal plant traditionally used to cure malaria) and ụvərə (Spondias Mombin) are symbolically used by the chanter to designate the particular setting of his performance. Egbə, biologically known as Alstonia Boonei, Ahun in Yoruba and Ụvərə (Putaa in Hausa, and Sapo in Yoruba) are the two ancient trees that stand out in the Ụmụakpo village square that houses the okati, which is the chanting abode of the performer. These two trees in the chant represent the village, Ụmụakpo, which the performer skillfully employs to make his language difficult to understand by the majority of his audience.

In lines 76-78, the chanter identifies /Ịmanuel Madu/ (Emmanuel Madu) by both his paternal / Nwolu, nwa Ugo Nwugodi/ Nwolu, the son of Ugo, the son of Ugodi) and maternal /Ewərala nwa Ugwuele Echara/ Ewərala, the son of Ugwuele Echara / pedigrees. Emmanuel is further hailed as /Ọchịrə agbə wera nwa ọbęlè/ (one who has just collected the agbə and nwa obele). Agbə means the natively woven rope which wine tappers use to climb palm trees while nwa ọbęlè is a small native wine gourd. The chanter presents an image of a man going off to his work which completely deviates from the real meaning of the expression which is that Emmanuel has presented a gift of wine to him. This action of Emmanuel’s immediately attracts the chanter’s response; /manyə evəgədem eju/ (wine makes me feel dizzy) from the performer.

John Nweze’s father, Agəgəde, as a title-holder bears the name /Èzè-O-gbəe-ıshi-O-yara-àgbáányá O! / ‘The king that kills a head and leaves the jaw behind’ / (line 81). This is a title he bears as a result of his magical powers. By killing
someone and leaving the jaw out, the king succeeds in hiding the identity of the deceased. In other words, he is brave and courageous enough to withstand any circumstance or strong individual from the neighbouring villages. This attribute earns him respect and admiration from the clan members.

Afterwards, attention shifts to / Donatus Ozo, the son of Ézè-Ọká /, (lines 82-85). The referent’s father used to be the clan’s spokesman at oha (village elders) meetings in the past and that is why the deity recognises Donatus by his father’s profession which is / ‘É-rikẽtẽ-okwu-Ézè-Ọká / [voracious eating (not eater) of words]. The father who served the function of ita okwu (pronouncing the verdict of any ruled case), did such with so much expertise and rhetorical prowess that he was known far and wide. Ita ókwú among the Lejja people could be likened to the role of ‘Evil Forest,’ a member of the Egwugwu, in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, when it addresses both parties (Uzowulu and his in-laws) involved in the marriage dispute with a view to resolving the row between them:

“We have heard both sides of the case,” said Evil Forest. “Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute…” To Uzowulu he says, “Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman. Then Evil Forest turns to Odunukwe, the eldest among the in-laws and says: “...If your in-law brings wine to you, let your sister go with him. I salute you” (p. 82).

Again, anyone who had not ‘killed a horse’ would not enter his Obọ / Onye ọgbọ anyinya epiọga n’ọba be Dugwu Ọgọ / (Someone who has not killed a horse cannot enter Dugwu Ọgọ’s Obọ), line 85. The killing of a horse used to be the highest form of funeral respect conferred on the dead by the relatives and it is performed only by the wealthy. The chanter therefore captures the practice where those who killed horses for their departed parents hung the skulls of those horses in the Obọ (the meeting place of a clan) as a way of installing the departed there in the Obọ. Indeed, the ritual installation of the dead in the Obọ is apparently the last in a series of funeral rites accorded the dead. It is an invitation into the community of spirits that inhabit each obọ. As such, it is a ritual of incorporation and in the past, people could point to the skulls of horses or cows killed for specific individuals. By mentioning this experience, the chanter is recalling the past, the historical memory of the people. The statement, therefore, highlights that Donatus’s father, whose house is given the attribute of Oбу is a place where only those who were able to kill horses or cows are welcomed. However, Dugwu Ọgọ’s wealth is over-stated when the chanter makes reference to the man’s social class by saying that the poor cannot enter his palace. Obviously, the obọ cannot be completely shut out to the poor. The hyperbolic expression was made to emphasize the man’s social status as a rich man.
Obviously, for the performer, some community members who have not contributed significantly to the community’s development which could be in the form of provision of infrastructure, offering of employment and active participation in the community’s activities deserve no praises and that is why there are no eulogies attached to their names when mentioned. Their identification simply ends with the naming of their ancestral fathers.

Demianụ Ọzọ earns himself the hyperbolic sobriquet, ‘one who satisfies both the elephant and the people of Edem /Ọ ranyima ényí Ọ ranyima Èdèm / in lines 88-90. ‘An Elephant’ being a huge animal obviously must have enormous appetite and it has to take a lot of strength and hard work to have it satisfied. The title is therefore used for someone whose yams are inexhaustible. In the same vein, it is always a great achievement for one to continuously satisfy one’s in-laws with food during any occasion and that explains why Damian is exceptional in his farm work. That also elucidates the structuring of his in-laws’ place of origin, Èdèm, into the creation by the chanter. Also, the action of the birds to acknowledge his hard work and ‘give him a name’ (onye enaka turè eha n’ega) is a skilful infusion of personification into the art because the birds are given a human attribute which is speech. This is seen in line 90 where a non-human object is given human qualities. Damian Ọzọ (88) is such a hard worker in his farm site that the birds too have recognized it and chant his sobriquet. The birds, by giving him a title, have performed the human activity of presenting an award to a meritorious candidate who has distinguished himself from the rest.

In lines 91-94, Ugwokeja, the son of Okpe is designated as, /Ọ màkpo’ agbagba ndiom anyị / (the breaker of our women’s gourds) in line 94. Ugwokeja, as a result of his energetic play of the maraca, keeps breaking the gourds that the women specially provide for the making of the musical instrument. This statement is also ironic because of the discrepancy between the intention of the performer and what he says. Therefore as a result of this discrepancy, the comprehension of the expression may constitute a little puzzle for an audience.

Again, in line 96, by referring to Ugwutikiri nwa Okpe (95) as /Agà na-awa èdù/ (a leopard that roams the wild), the performer likens the man’s strength and bravery to that of a leopard. Obviously, the reference is in recognition of the man’s occupation as a hunter and the risks involved in the profession. This remark does not only highlight the physical prowess of Ugwutikiri nwa Okpe but also his courage and fearlessness in fighting for the community’s interest. Although there could be a negative connotation of the leopard as a hunter/predator that hunts other animals, Charles Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest or eat or be eaten’ philosophy of the jungle justifies the lion’s actions and that is why this animal is always given a positive attribute with regard to its power to conquer. Also, /Ugwuntikiri, the son of Okpe, is acclaimed for his expertise in horn blowing. He is called the /Emerà ntàm Odugwu Ịkàwó / the passionate horn blower of Ịkàwó/-
the Ọmaba deity (line 98). For the chanter, therefore, /Ugwutịkịrị nwa Okpe/ Ugwutịkịrị the son of Okpe/ represents “the lion” in every ramification.

The chanter commends his humble alliances and their contributions towards the success of the performance as he says to him: /‘Ọnụ na-ahwia gọ mẹ úkwụ na-ejianye/ (Your mouth develops blisters while my waist hurts), (line 76) appreciating their devotion, resilient spirit and the undying love in their performance of this role. The ironical expressions actually mean that the fellow performer’s mouth will never develop blisters and the reciter’s waist will never hurt.

In other words, /Ọmakpọ agba ọdị ndom anyi/ The breaker of the women’s gourds (line 98), /Emer ntam Odugwu Ikawo (Passionate horn blower of Ikawo) (lines 79/109), and /“Ejụ n’evam (I feel dizzy) are all hyperbolic because they overstate the actions of the bearers and express the contented feelings of the chanter. /Ejụ na-ẹvam (I feel dizzy)/ (line 109) could also be a signal to other spectators or listeners that are out of sight to bring much bigger gifts and goodies.

Ekwuelechi, the son of Alaya Oghonne Nshi Ogori, the son of /Ugwọ’narọyi/ (lines 100-104) is greeted and, in order to be particular to whom he addresses, the chanter also greets the family with their maternal designation from Ozara town,’Ọ naga egwu uri m’abaga n’aga.’ (Who does not apply the cam wood until he has transformed into a leopard). The reciter historically draws his idea from the family progenitors who were known for turning into leopards. And for such a family, any native body design with uri is prohibited when they are in their human forms because Uri is regarded as being similar to the leopard’s dark designs and avoided once the family members are in their human forms as a mark of total change in body form and respect for their source of origin. Evidently, this is the artiste’s native employment of intertextuality to his art, for he draws information outside his performance to substantiate his information. It is also a figuration which means that some situations challenge individuals to actualize their essential selves.

The intelligence of Madu Nweze is compared to that of a man who has mastered the art of deception to the extent that he knows who the thief is yet he goes about with a metal gong in search of the thief (lines 107-108). Literally, this expression would have been derogatory because it depicts dubiousness and untrustworthiness, but the deity uses it positively to applaud Madu Nweze’s cleverness thereby making the language strange and difficult to understand. The fact that he hides his knowledge of the criminal effectively is ironically attributed to smartness rather than evil as it ought to have been. Literally, the listener would think the chanter rebukes the man’s behaviour of pretence of not knowing the thief. But on the contrary, the man is being praised for being very clever. Further figurative usage is portrayed as the performer exclaims at this point that ‘/Ejụ n’evam/I feel dizzy.’/ This is an expression the performer uses to show his
gratitude to the gift of wine. The statement, obviously, contradicts the literal meaning that he is tired out by the lengthy rendition.

Furthermore, the women who bring food are greeted by the performer and advised thus /Unu para ànyàkà E zele oshi/ (carry anyaka and desist from stealing) (lines 110-111). Anyaka is the traditional type of rope woven from ribs of palm fronds. It is locally used by women pot traders to bind the pots together for easy carrying on their heads while going to the market. ‘Anyaka,’ is used to represent trade. The performer, after thanking the Ojíma for their gift of food, advises the women to start trading instead of soiling their hands with any corrupt practice to get money. ‘To carry Anyaka,’ also suggests labouring for livelihood.

The audience and readers are in essence compelled to work harder at making meaning out of the text by being totally captivated by it. In the same vein, the Omaba chanter applies the figurative language to his art for the effect of concealing the masking activities from the non-initiates and women. The same, we may recall, is depicted in Achebe’s (1958, 78-79) Things Fall Apart, where the Egwugwu (the masking institution of òmụọfia) is invited to resolve the marital case among Uzowulu, his wife and in-laws. Uzowulu’s in-laws accuse him of beating his wife but he claims that his in-laws took his wife, Mgbafo, from his house and therefore, they should return her bride price to him. The Egwugwu salutes Uzowulu as ‘Uzowulu’s body’ instead of his name ‘Uzowulu’ for the same purpose of mystifying the ‘spirit’s language.’

Conclusion
Invariably, Umuakpo - Lejja Okọti Omaba chant, as it has been elaborated above, employs obscure and local figurative expressions extensively. These infusions, which covertly emphasise the ritual behind the Deity’s reverence and the amiable (heroic) deeds of the chant’s male characters, protect the sacredness of the masking institution. The interpreted language of òmuakpo-Lejja Okọti Omaba chant clarifies its almost impossible coherence without authorial and member’s interpretation. The language is, therefore, discriminatory to non-initiates, and women, who in order “to belong” are unconsciously influenced into the membership.

References


**Contact**

Uchechukwu E. MADU, PhD.
Department of English and Literary Studies
Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu Alike Ikwo
Ebonyi State, Nigeria
uch3221@gmail.com

**Appendix:**

*An Ọmaba chant performed by the ‘deity’ and his ‘children’ in the Ụmuakpo Okati, Ụmuakpo village square of Lejja town on Orie night, July the 17th, 2019.* (The dialect is different from the pedagogical Igbo version and that necessitated the use of the symbol ‘ǝ’ for clearer presentation of words in Lejja dialect. The text is also numbered for easy references).

*Dịmọgwụma, ala ihe n'chi, oji Odo---0! Dịmọgwụma- land of kin and god, Odo’s kola nut Oh!*

*Dịmọgwụma, ala ihe n'chi, werọ oji Odo---0! Dịmọgwụma- land of kin and god, collect Odo’s kola nut 0!*)
Idenyi Òhóm, were oji Odo---O!(2X) Idenyi Òhóm, Come and collect Odo’s kola nut O! (twice)

Ưму ada Òha, were oji Odo---O!(2X) Ưму ada Òha, Come and collect Odo’s kola nut Oh! (twice)

5 Ndọ Ushi anyị, bia were oji Odomagala--- O! ((2X)) Our Ushi members, Come and Collect Odo’s kola nut Oh! (twice)

Ndọ Ụmuakpo, were oji Odo---O (2X) (The people of Umuakpo, Come and collect Odo’s Kola nut O)!(twice)

Dimöká onyé nwe ala, oji Odo--O(2X) Dimöká, the owner of the land

Adaada Òha, bia were oji Odo---O!((2X)) Adaada, Come and collect Odo’s Kola nut O! (twice)

Ndọ Ụwa ala, bia were oji, The people of Uwalu (downhill), Come and collect Odo’s Kola nut O! (twice)

10 Ama Ụwa ala, bia were oji Odo---O! Ama Uwalu, Come and collect Odo’s kola nut (twice)

Dulugwunye, bia were oji O! Dulugwunye, come and collect Odo’s Kola nut O!

Ézèlekwu Òmeji, oji Odo---O!(2X) Ézèlekwu Òmeji, Odo’s Kola nut-O! (twice)

Ézèlimenyi, were oji Odomagala---O!(2X) Ezelimenyi, collect Odomagala O!(twice)

Lejja, were oji Odomagala---O! ((2X)) Lejja, collect Odomagala O! (twice)

15 Dimo-Ugwunye, were oji Odomagala---O! Dimo-Ugwunye, collect Odomagala O!(twice)

Ézhiké- Nwèèzè, oji Odomagala---O! (2X) Ezikeye Nweze, Odomagala’s kola nut O!(twice)

Ézhiké Nnevè da Ìgà, oji Odomagala---O(2X) Ézìkè Nnevè a Ìgà, oji Odomagala--O Omekey-Ugwunye, oji Odomagala!(2X) Omekey-Ugwunye, Odomagala’s Kola nut! (twice)

Ézè nwa ọchima, oji Odomagala--O! (2X)) Ezenwọchima, Odomagala’s Kola nut O!(twice)

20 Ézikè-Tim, oji Odomagala ((2X)) Ézikè-Tim, Odomagala’s kola nut

Ézèlekù Ézè-Ohe – oji Odomagala—O! (2X)) Ezelekwi-Eze-ohe’ Odomagala’s kola nut (twice)

Èva da Ìgà- oji Odomagala! Èva of Uga Odomagala’s Kola nut (twice)

Urókó-Nkù- oji Odomagala! (2X)) Urókó-Nkù- Odomagala’s Kola nut

‘Amábunèkwà – Mbiamonye- Odomagala! ‘Amábunèkwà – Mbiamonye (twice)

25 Ézikènèbò- Odomagala! (2X) Ézikènèbò - Odomagala! (twice)

Ézikè-Tím- oji Odomagala ((2X)) Ézikè-Tím- Odomagala’s Kola nut! (twice)

Ézikè-Nwèèzè- oji Odomagala((2X)) Ézikè-Nwèèzè-Odomagala’s Kola nut! (twice)

Ezebànúgwú

Ezebànúgwú ma na Amo-eze((2X)) Ezebànúgwú -who gave birth to Nweze)

30 Ndọ Ìshi okpàra oji Odomagala! ((2X)) The Ushi okpàra people- Odomagala’s Kola nut! (twice)

Éžènèbò, Odomagala O! Ezenebò, Odomagala’s Kola nut!
A play of the musical instruments. Yet a lion hangs at a post in our houses.

Mkpmé Owelega-Okekwuma, Nógbú ojí- O! Mkpmé Owelega-Okekwuma, it is Kola nut--O!

Mbiamongye!
Adaada da Ógbéle nọgbú ojí-O!(2X)Adaada of Ógbèlè it is Kola nut-0!(2X)

Ọmaba! - - - - - - - - -

Mbiamonye!
Adaada da Ógbéle nọgbú ojí-0-0!(2X)Adaada of Ógbèlè it is Kola nut-0-0!(2X)

(Another bridge is observed and the tempo of the musical instruments slows down)

Eze- anag-agbá-agbá-n’ọha - The king that does not kill a lion in the public (twice)
Nkwoda nwa Ọkwume be anyị Nkwoda, the son of Okwume
O ọrụ ọghụrụ sojue nyọọ 0 - He has filled my mouth with ajari
Ọnyịshi anyị e-e-e (twice) (Our clan head e-e-e-!) (twice)
Ọnyịshi umụ ọkê nwa O(2X)
(2X)
70 Śonyịshi anyị ruru eru! (The clan head is duely yours!)
Śonyịshi weterem ụbụ oji ne nwọkwụtị! (Our clan head bring to me one
cotyledon of kola nut and a snuff box)
Ọnyịshi anyị weterem ụbụ oji ị jirerem ahụ (Our clan head bring to me the
kola with which you bought the land)
Ọnyịshi anyị rurịrụ ọgwụ ịbé nwọkwụtị! (Our clan head bring to me the
cotyledon of kola nut and a snuff box)
(2X)
75 Anọ m n'ọrụ ọghụrụ ụbụ Ọvụrụ (I am in the house of egba and
uvụrụ)
Imanuel Nwolu nwa Ugo nwa Ugodi O (twice)
(Emmanuel Nwolu, the
son of Ugo, son of Ugodi
O(twice)
Evurala-nwa-Ugwele-Echara -
(Evural, the son of Ugwele-
Echara)
Ọ chịrụ ọgba wera nwa ọbụlẹ - O - He has collected ọgba (a
climbing rope that protects the
wine tappers from falling off the
tree) and a small gourd
Manya evugade m eju O -
Wine makes me dizzy O
80 Ọbụjụ Nweeze nwa Agagadę O (twice)
(John, the son of Eze, the
son of Agagadę O(twice)
Eze-O-gbacular O-yea-ata ọgbụ nyọ O!-
The king that kills a head and
leaves its jaw behind
Donatus nwa Ozo (twice) -
Donatus, the son of Ozo
E-rikeje-okwu-Ezê-Okâ -
Voracious eating of words Eze
oka
Ala ne ga ọzọ Ọkọrọ Ozara Ugwoji -
Your motherland is Okoro Ozara
Ugwuoji
85 Onye ọgbagọ anyị n'ị na epiogọ n'ọbụ be Dugwu ọgo-
Someone who has not killed a
horse cannot enter Dugwu ọgo's
Obi
Charles Nweeze (twice)
Nwa Ugwuezugwu Ụkwụna -
The son of Ugwuezeugwu Ụkwụna.
Demianu Ozo (twice)
Damian Ozo
O-రʉnyïa-ẹnyi-ٳ-రʉnyïa-Edem -
Satisfier-of-both the-elephant-
and-the-Edem-people-with-
farmwork
Onye-ənənə-turu-əha-negə -
Someone whom birds have given
Ugwokeja nwa Okpe O (twice) - Ugwokeja, the son of Okpe O!
Ugwoke Ekwueme Ugwu
Ekwueme Nwa Úgwú nwa Ereje - Ekwueme, the son of Ugwu, the son of Ereje
O mákpo’ agbọgba ndiom anyị - The breaker of our women’s gourds!

95 Ugwutikọrị nwa Okpe-O (twice) - Ugwutikori, the son of Okpe O!
Agọ na-áwá èdù - The lion that forages in the forest
Nwaba-emè Ázọ nwa Améèyà - Son of Uzu, who does what he says, the son of Améèyà
Emerọ ntìm Odugwu Íkàwó - Passionate horn expert of Ikawo
Ọnụ na-ahwia gọ mé úkwụ na-eji nye-O - Your mouth develops blisters while my waist hurts

100 Ekwuelechi O (twice) - - Ekwuelechi O (twice)
Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori - - Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori
Ugwu Alaya da Ngwoke - - Ugwu Alaya of Ngwoke O!
Ugwọ’narụọyi - - Alaya-Ogbonne-Nshì-Ogori
Ọ nọọ egwu ụrị m’abọghọ n’ọgọ - He does not apply ụrị unless he is in the forest!

105 Madu Ezea O (twice) - - (The man’s name)
Madu Nwezeji Amoke - - Madu, the son of Ezeji Amoke
Madu Nweezé, Ọ maar onye ọbọ ọshi - Madu the son of Eze who knows the thief
O ụmọ gụọgụ ga na-achọ onye ọrụ ọshi e - Yet goes around with a metal gong in search of the thief
Èjụ na-evi m, Onye nke anyị abịa - I’m feeling dizzy, our own has come!

110 Oyima ikparọkwu - - - The people’s Oyima!
Ndị ọma para anyaka ọzọ ọshi - My good people Carry anyaka and do not steal
O—O Ụmụ Chinaedokwueze - - the offsprings of God-crowned lineage

(The Beating Changes Again- Story Telling Session)

Nẹ nya jekọ nye ije nye O! - - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(I am going on my own journey Oh!) - - Jereke—Jeke-O
Nwaanyi shi n’aga uzo fata! - - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(A woman came out from the corner of the road) - - - Jereke—Jeke-O

115 Nẹ nya zọfọta nne nye nya dara nye O! - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(If I rescue her mother that I should take her O) - - Jereke—Jeke-O
Nẹ nya zọfọta nna nye nya dara nye O - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(If I rescue her father that I should take her O) - - Jereke—Jeke-O
Nẹ nya azofọta nne nye bịa je dara e Ọjụ - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(I rescued the mother and came to take her and she refused)
Nẹ nya azofọta nna nye bịa je dara e Ọjụ - - Jereke—Jeke-O
(I rescued the father and came to take her and she refused) - Jereke—Jeke-O

Jereke---Jeke O Jereke--Jeke O - - Jereke—Jeke-O

120  Nọ nna nya eze agbaa nya ọba - - Ngba  eba-Ngba-

huyereke

(My father, the king, has conferred on me the royal rites)  
Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

Nọ oheyi ọkụ anara nga ọba - - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

(The hot ogbono soup has taken my rites from me)  
Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

Nọ utara ọkụ anara nga ọba - - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

(The hot foo foo has taken my rites from me) - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

Ụwa ndiom ụwa ngata - - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

(The world of women, the world of dogs) - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

Eba nwa nwa Ogiri Iyoke - - - Eba- a- nya

(My oath the son of Ogiri Iyoke) - - Eba- a- nya

125  Nọ nwa rigwo nke onyeke - - - Eba- a- nya

(If I did eat that of a man) - - - Eba- a- nya

Nọ nwa rigwo nke onyenye - - - Eba- a- nya

(If I did eat that of a woman)

127  Eba nwa gi tigbugwo nye - - - Eba- a- nya

(My oath beat me to death) - - - Eba- a- nya

Tugworiegwodo! (May it be done unto me according to the wishes of the gods!)

(Further stories go on till dawn)