

## AN APPRAISAL OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND THE CRUSADE OF MORALITY IN HAMZA'S EWOGBOKA

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### Abstract

The sustenance of moral values in every society across the globe, is fundamentally achieved not only through the dictate of the religious practised in such society, but also through the efforts and reinforcement offered by singers through their songs composed in indigenous languages. It is noted that Songs in indigenous African languages are reflections of African traditional society where cultural and moral values define its uprightness. In Nupe society, singers through their songs often render checks on social vices, with specific thematic preoccupation, composed in Nupe language. The reinforcement of the issues of morality is cogently achieved by the manipulation of language in such songs. In our society today, people are departing from the cultural and moral values which are significant reflection of subconscious adoption of western heritage. It is on this premise that this paper seeks to examine how language is used in addressing issues of morality in the song “*Ewobgoka*” by Hamza, using Modified Divine Command as theoretical framework. The paper discusses the pattern of language used employing primary data drawn from the song. The data used by this paper are obtained through the interview and excerpts retrieved from the singer’s archive. The analysis reveals that the thematic preoccupation and content of some of these songs are better understood through the medium of indigenous languages. Thus, the paper concludes that singers in our society are not just entertainers but also social crusaders.

Keywords: indigenous African language, Nupe society, Egwobgoka, Modified Divine Command, social command

### Introduction

Songs in Nupe language provide both excitement and entertainment borne out of appreciation and happiness during naming and marriage ceremonies, turbaning ceremonies, cultural festivals or certain important events. The word “*entertainment*” is often used to define the benefits of either the song or music. However, the benefit of the former goes beyond providing entertainment as it can have more serious thematic preoccupation than the latter whose objective can be for listening pleasure. Songs are cogent avenues through which singers utilize to expose government policy or that of a traditional ruler especially if such policy goes against the interest of the people. Alhaji Hamza uses the song *Ewobgoka* to reinforce our understanding of who Nupes really are. *Ewobgoka*, like other Nupesongs, is a discernible reminder of a trendy phenomenon that seeks to sensitize the mindset of the generality of the people

in contemporary times. The song is composed to admonish and inculcate the moral values which define African traditional society. Hamza uses the song to rekindle the lost experiences of moral values in African traditional society with particular emphasis on the Nupe's society. *Ewogboka*, which literally means, "money is powerful", signals the drift that seems to swallow the moral values of our society through the dispensable vanity. Social vices that pervade our society today is a direct result of morality that has become a scarce commodity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Different theories create different interpretations in understanding the concept and the extent of effects of certain phenomena. There are several theories of morality such as Euthyphro dilemma by Plato that tries to give better interpretations in comprehending the concept of morality as the seedbed of every society. Distinguishing between what is right and wrong is the key element which determines the peaceful coexistence in every society across the globe and this is not only contained in the cultural norms of a particular society but also in the tenet of the religion practiced in such society which in turn, may be product of God's commands. Nupe society to some extent, is an Islamic-oriented and several moral principles of this society emanate from two major sources: the Hadith (the saying of Prophet Muhammad) and the Holy Quran (the Holy Book of Allah). Therefore, the theoretical Framework of this study is derived from Adam's (2002) Modified Divine Command Theory which postulates that "Any action is ethically wrong if and only, it is contrary to the commands of a loving God". This however, suggests that in actual world, being contrary to the commands of a loving God is what constitutes ethical wrongness. This theory further holds that morality is not based on the mere commands of God, but it is rooted in the unchanging omnibenevolent nature of God. According to Adam, morality is grounded in the perfect nature of God. Thus, what informs the choice of this model, is the gradual departure from the moral values that define our society today which is acknowledged and addressed in the contents of the song "*Ewogboka*".

### **Defining Morality**

Morality is simply the degree to which something is right or wrong. Morality is a noticeable difference of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are marked as proper and those that are improper (Sedley, 1987). Sedley's observation however, suggests that all these features mentioned can be right or wrong and that morality is responsible for their distinction. According to Stephen (2005), morality can be seen in the perspective of descriptive and normative definition. From the descriptive point of view, Stephen (2005) defines morality as the most vital code of conduct put forward by a society and accepted by the members of such society. Thus

this implies that the activities of the members of such society would be governed by the code of conduct stipulated by the society. Though Jonathan (2006), stresses that the notion of accepting the code is a first-personal matter. Normative definition of morality on the other hand, Stephen (2005), sees it as a code of conduct that, given the specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons. In the normative sense, morality refers to a code of conduct that would be accepted by anyone who meets certain intellectual and volitional conditions which includes the conditional of being rational (Stephen, 2005). Sam (2010) argues that any definition of morality in the descriptive sense will need to specify which of the codes put forward by the society as moral. This argument therefore, stresses that the distinctions should be made between morality, laws, etiquette and religions so that morality can be taken to refer to every code of conduct put forward by a society. Alan (2009) observes that not all codes that are put forward by societies are moral codes in the descriptive sense of morality and also not all codes that would be accepted by all moral agents are moral codes in the normative sense. Therefore in simpler sense, morality could be referred to as goodness or rightness.

### **Morality in African Society**

The diffusion of questionable activities in African society today, raises the question of what kind of morality is guiding the people. The pervasion of moral decadence in several societies in contemporary times is an expression of absolute detachment from the societal norms. Miller (2001) sees morality of a society as a gestalt of all the moral beliefs held by its individuals, but those moral beliefs are themselves beliefs about societal norms. According to Christopher (2004), morality describes the principles that govern our behaviour and that without these principles in place, societies cannot survive for long. Christopher's view suggests that without these guiding principles, the survival of the society is at stake as disintegration and break down of law and order would define the existence of the society. Patricia (2011) notes that a society is just the name for all the people we interact with, it is a useful name to give to a particular group of people. According to her, a society is the situation of being in the company of other people. Thus this brings to the understanding that one being in the company of others is expected to be guided by certain moral principles. Sam (2010) argues that a society develops particular features in which some are clearly recognized, and some are not. Social taboos for instance are moral features of a society, and public nudity for example, is a social taboo of western culture (Sam, 2010). Sam (2010) adds that people have adopted the belief that this is morally wrong from their society. Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion or culture (Sedley, 1987). Sedley's view is not at variance at what it obtains in African traditional society whose code of conduct is mostly derived from either

religion or culture. And if at any point in time, the society notices any threat to this code of conduct, certain avenues are expended to rekindle peoples' awareness about the issues of morality.

In today's world, morality is often thought of as belonging to a particular religious point of view (Christopher, 2004). This does not mean that mere being religious point of view will preclude its application provided the point clearly identifies what is good and what is bad. It should be noted however, that morality impacts our everyday decisions and is indispensable to society as it holds the key to its existence.

### **Indigenous Language and the Question of Moral Standards**

The survival of cultural integrity in several societies today, are due to the certain functional indigenous languages spoken in such societies. It is noted that indigenous languages offer multiple benefits not only in terms of maintain cultural norms of a society, but also in recognizing them as a medium of instruction at all level of education. According to Spolsky (2002), language spoken uniquely by an indigenous community or with origins in a given community or country. Spolsky's view implies that an indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. However, a language that is native to a region is also tied to the culture of that region, and the survival of cultural norms of that region is also tied to the functional indigenous languages spoken by the native people of that region. Cultural heritage and knowledge are passed throughout each generation by language (Kilgour, 1999).

The significance of indigenous languages is mostly noticeable through the roles of oral poets, soloists and singers who are the agents of cultural heritage in African traditional society. In addition, the awareness of the consequences of moral decadence and other vices that threaten the cultural and moral values in our society is being brought to the limelight by the singers in their different songs composed in indigenous languages. Another area in which indigenous languages seem to be beneficial is in education. Although, it is widely believed that the difficulty many students face in acquiring education particularly in sub-Saharan Africa is a direct result of English that is used as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Using non-indigenous languages have certain disadvantages, because non-native languages do not provide equal access to education for Nigerians (Fafuwa, 2016). Similarly, Muazu (2016) stresses that using English has serious impact of western cultural domination and degrades Nigeria's national culture. However, Muazu's view implies that the outright downgrade of Nigerian cultural integrity is a reflection of western cultural dominance which is a product of non-native language used by Nigerians. According to Fafuwa (2016), one of the most significant advantages of using indigenous languages in Nigerian education involves the impact on Nigeria's

national culture. It is worth to mention, however, that the development of education and the sustenance of Nigerian cultural integrity hinge on the emphasis placed on the use of indigenous languages.

### **The Nupe People and Their Language**

Nupe is predominantly spoken by Nupe people in Niger, Kogi, Kwara and the FCT Abuja. Ismaila (2002) notes that Nupe is a word used in describing people living in the confluence of Niger and Kaduna rivers. According to Ndagi (2000) Nupe language belongs to the language family of “Niger-Congo *Kwa*”. Stewart (1971) however, states “*Kwa*” language family subsumes seven major languages namely: *Ewe-tchi*, Lagoon languages, *Kru*, Yoruba, Nupe, Ibo and Edo. In line with Stewart’s observation, Welmers (1971) stresses that there are basically only four dialects in Nupe language namely: Basa-Nge, Dibo, Ebe and Kupa. In contrast Nadel (1942) argues that there are five dialects in Nupe language namely Nupe proper (Bini), Ebe, Zhitako, Basa and Kupa. It is imperative to note that the classifications made by both Stewart (1971) and Nadel (1942) are on the basis of dialects in which such dialects of Nupe language exist. ( Nadel (1942) states that there are twelve different Nupe groups viz:Ebe, Gbedegi, Kusopa, Benu, Bini, Dibo, Kyadya, Ebangi, Batachi, Kupa, Chekpa and Gwaba).

Adamu (2016) argues that like other languages who evolved through some other languages, Nupe, as a medium of communication did not evolve from any Nigerian language. He further maintains that Nupe is Nupe and one of the *Kwa* languages whose root lies in the Niger-Congo phyla. This however, suggests that Nupe like other languages has not been penetrated by emigration from any land. Although this does not rule out that there may not be possible influences from other languages such as Hausa, Igala, Kanuri and Yoruba on the Nupe culture. As regards matter of authority, aristocracy is the system of governance in Nupe land which was planted by *Tsoede*: an Igala prince of Nupe mother (Adamu, 2016).

Nupe people are highly enterprising which is rooted in agriculture, fishing, smiting and woodcarving. According to Adamu (2016), the religions practiced by Nupe people before the advent of Islam and Christianity were the worship of the deities in the traditional fashion: *Kuti* with *Sogba* as the intermediaries was approach for personal or family spiritual needs.

### **The Data**

The following are the data collected through interview and the CD obtained from the singer. However, the song verse is written in the original form (Nupe) in italicized form and numbered for easy reference in discussion. LSA style sheet is used in analyzing each verse.

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1. *Ewogboka*  
Money is powerful  
Money is powerful
2. *Wanchigbeyizhejin*  
It cure worldproblem  
It solves the problem of the world
3. *Ewo a yawojin*  
Money marriage conduct  
Money conducts the marriage
4. *Ewo a sunanjin*  
Money naming ceremony conduct  
Money conducts naming ceremony
5. *Ewo a ekokan*  
Money fight settle  
Money settles the fight
6. *Ewo a gyarajin*  
Money dispute settle  
Money settles the dispute
7. *Ewo e lizatakaichi*  
Money one's solve problem  
Money solves one's problem
17. *Etun lo gayikpayende o*  
Hard workis key to success  
Hard work is the key to success
18. *Etungawa a dalo*  
Work mustyou do  
You just have to go and work
19. *Wachi de ewoebofo*  
For youhavemoneyin case  
For you to have the money in case
20. *Etu lo gayikpayende o*  
Work is key to success  
Hard work is the key to success
21. *Wachi de ewoebofo*  
For youhavemoneyin case  
For you to have the money in case
119. *Egigagindatokomai*  
Child don't father abuse  
Child! don't abuse your father
120. *Egigaginnatokomai*

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Child don't mother abuse  
Child! don't abuse your mother  
121. *Yimigagibatokomai*  
Wife don't husband abuse  
Wife! Don't abuse your husband  
122. *Gwazuma to nuguchi*  
Younger brother and elder brother  
Younger and elder brother!  
123. *Gwazumagaginuguchitokomai*  
Younger brother don't elder brother abuse  
Younger brother! don't abuse your elder brother  
124. *Egika'atungagbamanmi we ye*  
Student don't underrate teacher your  
Student! don't underrate your teacher  
125. *Kawakpe'adada gbingan*  
If you don't know better ask  
If you don't know, you should better ask  
126. *Egitsu'anda*  
Child be careful father  
Child! Be considerate to your father  
127. *Egitsu'anna*  
Child be careful mother  
Child! Be considerate to your mother  
128. *Gwazuma u tsu'anuguchi*  
Younger brother be careful elder brother  
Younger brother be considerate to your elder  
129. *Egitsu'anda*  
Child be careful father  
Child! be considerate to your father  
130. *Egitsu'anna*  
Child be careful mother  
Child! be considerate to your mother  
131. *Egika'atuntsu'a man yankatun*  
Student be careful teacher  
Student! Be considerate to your teacher  
132. *Kawakpe'a dada gbingan*  
If you don't know better ask  
If you don't know, you should better ask  
133. *Ka mi wunchigawa de yegboro lo*  
That is when you can progress

- That is when you will achieve success  
 134. *Be yandondoyizhena we wanau*  
 In everything planet you desire  
 In everything you desire to achieve on this planet  
 135. *Be yandondoyizhena we wanau*  
 In everything planet you desire  
 In everything you desire to achieve on this planet  
 136. *Egigagbandawo ye ma re*  
 Child don't father underrate  
 Child! don't underrate your father  
 137. *To'ozanagikinikebabawanan*  
 Andthatperson look like your father  
 And even he who looks like your father  
 138. *Jin kokarigagbayemaa*  
 Try effort don't underrate him  
 Try don't underrate him  
 139. *Gagbayezu u nna we yemaa*  
 Don't underrate age mateyourmotther  
 Don't underrate who is of the same age  
 140. *Gagbayezuyayawayema*  
 Don't underrate age mate your elder brother  
 Don't underrate he who is like your elder brother  
 141. *Kanga wa de yegboro lo*  
 That is when you progress  
 That is when you will achieve success  
 142. *Be yandondoyizhenawawana'e*  
 In everything planet you desire  
 In everything you desire to achieve on this planet  
 143. *Be yandondoyizhenawawana'e*  
 In everything planet you desire  
 In everything you desire to achieve on this planet  
 144. *Beyandondoyizhenawawana'e*  
 In everything planet you desire  
 In everything you desire to achieve on this Planet  
 145. *Ga yin yanmanchiwazhiyangba ma*  
 Don't your parents provoke  
 Do not provoke your parents  
 146. *Ga yin baba we yangban ma*  
 Don't father your provoke  
 Do not provoke your father



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147. *Ga yin nna we yangban ma*

Don't mother your provoke

Do not provoke your mother

148. *Kanga wa de yegboro lo*

That is when you progress

That is when you will achieve success

149. *Be yan don doyizhenawawana'e*

In everything planet you desire

In everything you desire to achieve on this Planet

150. *Be yandondoyizhenawawana'e*

In everything planet you desire

In everything you desire to achieve on this Planet

151. *Be yandondoyizhenawawana'e*

In everything planet you desire

In everything you desire to achieve on this Planet

### Data Analysis

From the data, it is apparent that language is central in conveying the intended message to the target audience. It is pertinent to note that songs are sung for a particular purpose to either entertain or get important message across to the people that can only be carried out through the appropriate use of the language. This however, entails careful and prudent choice of the title, pattern and lexicons in coherent manner in order to convey the intended message. For any song that has the objective of addressing a particular issue in the society, a key source of attraction to such a song, a captivating and descriptive thematic preoccupation which is a characteristic of the song under review "*Ewogboka*". The lead vocal uses metaphorical language in opening the first verse of the song "*Ewogboka*" (Money is powerful). This word is metaphoric in the sense that it has a lot of meanings. However, these meanings are evident in the verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 below.

1. *Wan chigbeyizhejin*

It cure world problem

It solves the problem of the world

3. *Ewo a yawojin*

Money marriage conduct

Money conducts the marriage

4. *Ewo a sunanjin*

Money naming ceremony conduct

Money conducts naming ceremony

5. *Ewo a ekokan*

Money fight settle

- Money settles the fight
6. *Ewo a gyarajin*  
Money dispute settle  
Money settles the dispute
  7. *Ewo e lizatakaichi*  
Money one's solve problem
  8. *Egiwaewoebofo*  
Child! look money in case  
Child! Look for money in case
  9. *Kawakpe'a dada gbingan*  
If you don't know better ask  
If you don't know, you should better ask
  10. *Egiwaewoebofo*  
Child look money in case  
Child! Look for money in case
  11. *Ewo a chigbeyizhejinwakpe'a*  
Money cure world you don't know  
Money solves the problem of the world you don't know
  12. *Kawala'akpe'a dada gbingan*  
If you haven't known better ask  
If you haven't known, you should better ask
  13. *Kawakpe'a dada gbingan*  
If you don't know you better ask  
If you don't know, you should better ask
  14. *Egiwaewoebofo*  
Child! look money in case  
Child! Look for money in case
  15. *Egiwaewoebofo*  
Child look money in case  
Child! Look for money in case
  16. *Miganganwa da yiaewo*  
I am not asking you to steal money  
I am not asking you to go and steal money
  17. *Etun lo gayikpayende o*  
Hard work is key to success  
Hard work is the key to success
  18. *Etungawa a dalo*  
Work must you do  
You just have to go and work

19. *Wachi de ewoebofo*  
 For you have money in case  
 For you to have the money in case
20. *Etu lo gayikpayende o*  
 Work do is key to success  
 Hard work is the key to success
21. *Wachi de ewoebofo*  
 For you have money in case  
 For you to have the money in case

The emphasis attached to these meanings is that in our society today, people especially youths, do not want to work and often want live a luxury life which is a noticeable source of deviation from the moral values. In verse 8, he reiterates the importance of money in which he advises the youth to seek, but warns in verse 16 that a child should not indulge in stealing. Lead vocal's suggestion as to how to make the money without resorting to stealing is noted in verses 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 respectively.

Furthermore, another salient issue of morality that is reinforced through the content of the song "*Ewogboka*" is the significance of outright respect for one's parents, teacher, brother (elder) and those who are of the same age with your parents. It is noteworthy that in African traditional society, absolute respect to this category of people determines one's success. For, it is part of moral values upon which the society is built. Thus, this is what obtains in Nupe society, upholding the moral values gives people not only respect among the people, but also determines their success as individuals. Meanwhile, in the event where these moral values are diminishing, one of the ways in which they are addressed is through the songs composed in indigenous languages where the subject matter would be understood by the native speakers. In the song "*Ewogboka*", the lead vocal takes into cognizance, the noticeable erosion of these moral principles and reiterates their significance to our peaceful coexistence. This is noted in verses 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127 and 128. In these verses, he uses the simple language in strengthening the significance of respect for the category of people mentioned earlier. It is noted in verses 133 and 134, that the deviation from these principles will definitely lead one to failure in all aspects of life. While verses 136, 137, 138, 139 and 140 portray a replica of Nupe society, verses 141, 142, 143, 145, 146 and 147 further explain the wisdom behind respecting one's parents. Although, the conveyance and understanding of these messages are as a result of not only indigenous language that is used, but also the pattern of how language is used which enables the target audience to comprehend both the thematic preoccupation and the contents of the song "*Ewogboka*".

### The Pattern of Language in *Ewogboka*

Understanding the contents of any form of expression be it written or spoken hinges on the pattern of the language used. It might help to know that the interpretation of the subject matter or thematic preoccupation of any form of expression is better understood if the pattern of the language used in such expression is prudently and cogently chosen. However, in the present study, we review the pattern of the language used in relation to both thematic preoccupation and the general contents of the song “*Ewogboka*”.

- a. **Repetition:** This is one of the notable patterns of language used in the song. Several repetitions of certain verses are made in order to emphasize how vital morality is to both our society and existence the world over. For example, verses 96, 97, 100, and 105 are repeated to emphasize how important being successful is as an individual. Also, verses 128, 129, 130, and 131 are equally repeated to signal the danger of being disrespectful is to one’s parents. Thus, repetition makes the whole contents of the song understandable. Repetition also enhances the symphony of sounds in the song.
- b. **Metaphor:** Oral artists often incorporate metaphorical language in their expression in order to enhance the aesthetic value of the song as well as aiding the understanding of the songs by the target audience. The artist may consciously feature this in order to make the audience ponder more on the purpose of expression. This however, is evident in the title of the song “*Ewogboka*” which literally means “Money is powerful”. Other instances are noted in verses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively. Though, the metaphoric sense of the title makes the song a celebrated one among Nupe speakers as it reflects the present socio-economic challenges among the Nupe’s society and most African societies in general.
- c. **Proverb:** This is one of the profound features of expression in African traditional society. Proverb expresses an idea that most people believe is true. In songs, this feature is invariably employed in order to make the purpose of the song more explicit. Meanwhile, the presence of this feature is noted in verses 22, 26, 27, and 28. The lead vocal uses them to strengthen the crusade of morality in the song “*Ewogboka*”. African proverbs are always laden with imagery, which enhances the aesthetic values of the song.

### Conclusion

From our discussion so far, we have been able to show the position of indigenous languages in African traditional society and how songs are composed in these languages to address certain issues of morality. We realized that songs, if given due attention, are not just sung to provide entertainment only, but are also instruments

which guides the activities of the society. This study notes that the ability to recognize the social position of certain singers and the impact of their songs in the society is often impaired because of the faulty medium of expression. Thus, the thematic preoccupation and the contents of the songs composed in indigenous languages are always better understood by the target audience. Meanwhile, this study does not in any way intend to suggest that the songs composed in foreign languages are incapable of passing the intended message to the audience. However, it is the belief of this study that the intended messages conveyed through the medium of indigenous languages are more beneficial to the generality of the people speaking such languages than those of foreign languages in which not everybody is its speaker. The study also examines the devices that add glamour and meaning to the songs such as repetition, metaphors and proverbs. Finally, the study concludes that singers in our society are not just entertainers but also social crusaders.

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