

The language of libation rituals among the Efik

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Abstract

Libation rituals establish strong connections between the present (living beings) and the past (ancestors) as crucial components of African traditional culture and spirituality; they thus emphasise the belief in ancestors and man's dependence on supernatural forces for existence, growth, and wellbeing. This article examines the language of libation rituals in the context of Efik traditional marriage from literary, ethnographic, and linguistic perspectives. It describes the form and style of language use as well as the structure (morphology and syntax) of libation prayers, which are coded in specific cultural messages. The study reveals that the ritualised and symbolic language of Efik libation performances is generally solemn, poetic, less manipulative and not structurally open-ended, and that though they may employ commonplace everyday narratives, they have pragmatic connotations that can broadly be contextualised and understood in terms of the values and belief system of the Efik, given their culturally-shaped meanings and metaphysical presuppositions.

KEYWORDS: Libation rituals, morphosyntax, spirituality, ancestors, Efik, traditional marriage, ethnography, objects

Introduction

The Efik people are predominantly found in Southern Cross River State, in south-eastern Nigeria. They occupy five out of the eighteen local Government Areas of the state (Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, and Odukpani) as we can see in Figure 1. The population of Efik is 1.5 million first-language speakers and about 2.0 million second-language speakers (based on 2007 National Census demographic data), given that the language had served as the local lingua franca along the entire Cross River basin for over a century. The Efik are bounded on the north by the cluster of the Ejagham nations (Ekoi) and westward by the Ibibio neighbours. Its southern flank is the Atlantic Ocean.

The language of the Efik people is Efik. It has been classified as a member of the Lower-Cross sub-family of the Delta-Cross family in the enlarged Niger-Congo family of languages (Faraclas 1989, Williamson and Blench 2000). The Efik language is mutually intelligible with other Lower-Cross languages, such as Ibibio, Anaang, Oro, and Ekid, but the degree of intelligibility in the case of Oro and Ekid is unidirectional; in other words, speakers of these languages speak and understand Efik (and Ibibio) but not vice-versa.

The practice of libation rituals is a quintessential aspect of African culture and spirituality. It is a mark of piety and devotion to the gods and ancestors in an attempt to define a meaningful moment of communion, to honour the ancestors, and to chart a new form of consciousness as required by customs. Libation expresses the relationship between the Supreme Being and the ancestors on the one hand, and the ancestors and man on the other. According to Opukuwaa (2005), this evidence shows that libation as a form of ritual transcends both spiritual and material worlds. He further argues that the practice of libation has a significant impact on setting forth people's understanding of hospitality, tokens of fellowship, family living, death, continuity and contact. This position justifies Nehusi's (2013: 3) description of libation in Africa as 'a ritual of heritage.' Libation reflects the African experience of life across time and places and necessitates cultural transmission from one generation to another. Armah (2006) sees libation as a propitiatory custom found everywhere in the African continent, which involves the pouring of alcohol or other drinks as offerings to the ancestors or divinities. Nehusi (2013) maintains that the role of liquid is central in the ritual of libation, the ultimate significance is the restoration and maintenance of the cosmic order, given the assumption that 'for all Africans, libation is a path to the divine cosmic order, that is, the correct relations among people, other beings and things in the entire cosmos' (ibid.: 20).

Opukuwaa (2005) remarks that rituals keep the door open to the spirit world in order to receive clear guidance, direction, and messages that enable man to live a peaceful, prosperous and healthy life. He argues further that ritual helps to transform man's mind, body and spirit from certain negative beliefs and attitudes. According to Haviland and colleagues (2009), religious rituals enable individuals to relate to the sacred, reinforce a group's social bond as well as relief tension. It is also an important way in which events are celebrated, and crises such as death are made less socially disruptive and more tolerable for human consciousness. This means that libation can provide some psychological relief or emotional outlet that can reinforce social stability among community members. Kilson (1969) opines that libation is a sacrificial act that can elucidate certain ideas about the ordering of the universe and the meaning of sacrifice. Ritual is, in this sense, a medium for the expression of cultural ideals and models and, in turn, serves to orient other forms of behaviour (Edmund Leach in Bell 1999). Rituals enable people to modify their social order while simultaneously reinforcing certain categories of it.

According to Patton (2009: 31), 'the act of pouring or drinking a liquid is one of the oldest, most ubiquitous and least understood forms of religious actions in the world.' Language plays a crucial role in imparting information and representing shared beliefs in the art of ritual performances, but this role has been systematically downplayed or even ignored in the literature of ritual communication. Studies such as Carey (1992),

Rothenbuhler (1998), Foucault and Melican (2007), among others, have examined the dynamics of rituals and ceremonial engagements by local communities from a wide range of perspectives. Carey (1992: 18) posits two alternative conceptions of communication: transmission and ritual. He maintains that while the transmission view of communication involves sending, transmitting and giving information, the ritual view of communication is directed not towards the extension of messages in space but towards the maintenance of the society in time. He further argues that ‘ritual is communication without information’. In other words, ritual acts are sacred ceremonies that draw people together in fellowship and commonality without necessarily giving them new information.

The ancestors who are venerated in every ritual act serve as the link between the Supreme Being and the people, thereby connecting a spiritual flow that restores balance not just to the people but also to their community as well. Ruthenbuhler (1998) maintains that rites and ceremonies mark socially significant occasions, defining beginnings and endings and aiding social transitions and libation ritual can be perceived as a way of repairing the African spirit (Kofi 2010). Kofi (2010) further argues that ancestors who are in the ancestral realm are divinely entrusted with man’s spiritual development, and have divine directives to guide and protect man. He likens the act of pouring libation to making a mobile phone call. The way the phone alerts its owner with a ringing tone is synonymous to awakening the ancestors when libation is poured. The language of rituals is stylised and highly formalised, which demonstrates the “poverty” of expression in ritual: what can be said is greatly restricted by the way it must be said in order to be recognised as an authoritative and legitimate ritual (Bloch 1974). This is one of the ways rituals exercise considerable social control by creating situations that compel the acceptance of traditional forms of authority (Bell 1999).

On the research

Data for this ethnographic and qualitative research were recorded in the Calabar South Local Government Area as a part of a larger project on documenting libation rituals in Kiong, (a nearby community to Efik) funded by the Endangered Language Documentation Programme (ELDP), University of London, United Kingdom. We carried out audio and video recordings of two traditional marriages with particular emphasis on libation rituals (*úduok m̀m̀in*). The digital data were annotated, transcribed and translated into English-based textual materials. Ten traditional chiefs and five other members of the Efik traditional community were observed and interviewed to elicit information on the significance of libation rituals, the culturally-shaped meanings of ritualised language and objects as well as some of the myths surrounding ritual performances. We also employed participant observation as a key approach in the data collection process. The language of libation rituals has been categorised into its form, style, and structure and accordingly analysed. We adopted an approach to the study of pragmatics known as ethno-pragmatics as the main theoretical plank for the analysis of ethnographic data on libation rituals. Ethno-pragmatics or anthropological pragmatics, according to Goddard (2006), is concerned with explaining the speech practice, which begins with culture-internal ideas, that is

shared values, norms, priorities, and assumption of speakers, rather than any presumed universals of pragmatics. Staal (1968) maintains that like rocks and trees, ritual acts and sounds may be provided with meaning, but they do not require meanings and do not exist for meaning's sake. In this article, however, we argue that the language of libation rituals among the Efik can only be broadly understood and contextualised in terms of the locally specified meanings assigned by the belief system of the Efik. In other words, the performer creates the effect of generating cultural meanings, which are hidden in the face of natural discourse.

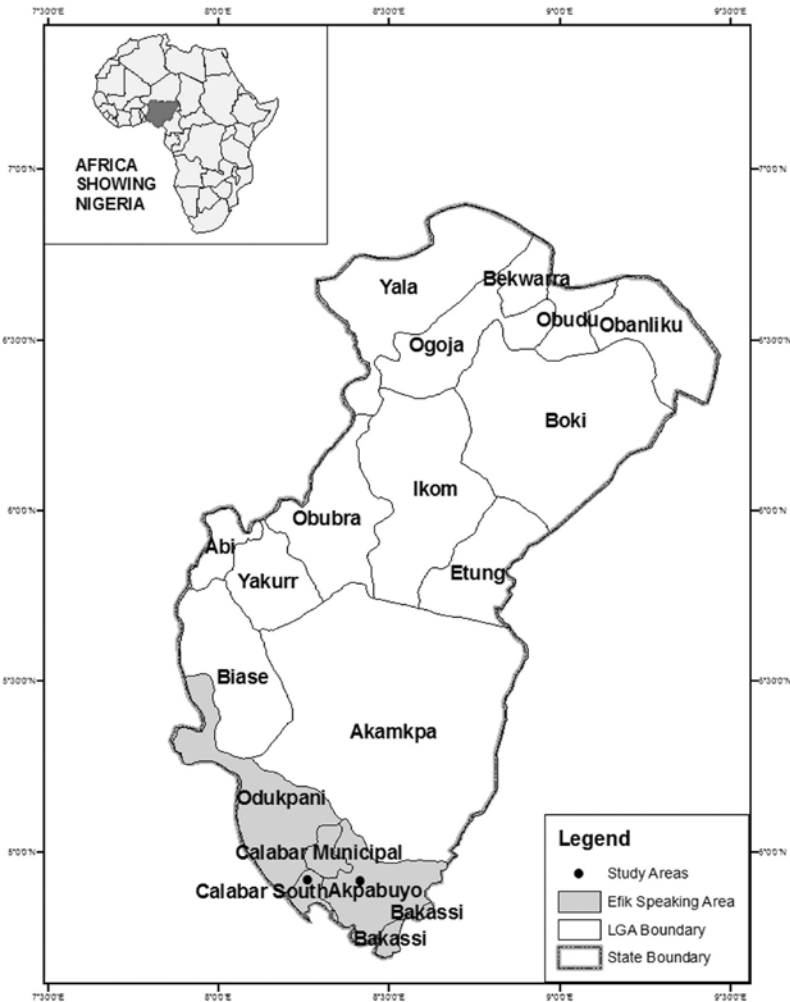


Figure 1: A map of the study area
(Source: Geography and Environmental Science Dept, UNICAL).

Language and culture of the Efik

The relationship between language and culture is a symbiotic one. Language is the vehicle for the expression of cultural values, beliefs, mores, and worldview, while culture provides the mirror through which speakers make sense of their language. Every language has its unique system of rules (grammar) that guides its speakers to speak and understand their language fluently. Beyond these generally established principles which guide speakers' cognitive abilities (competence) or knowledge of their language, there are socially set parameters and norms that guide language use. These norms are regulated by the socio-cultural environment. In this regard, while language is patterned by the culture of the people, culture is transmitted through language. Language is the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated and through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world (Barker 2012). This justifies the claim by Hall (1997:2) that the idea of culture refers to shared meaning. According to him:

To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same way and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus, culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and making sense of the world in broadly similar ways.

The general assumption here is that language is a tool for the perception of thought. This position is in agreement with Sapir and Whorf hypothesis which assumes that one's pattern of thought and perception of reality (which are cultural indicators) are determined by his or her language. In other words, Sapir argues that we seem to understand nature and the world around us along lines laid down by our language (Carroll 1956). This is the idea behind the concept popularly referred to as linguistic determinism. There have been opposing claims that cultural requirements do not determine the structure of a language. This is because culture finds reflection in the language the people employ. The people value certain things and do them in certain ways; hence, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and do (Wardhaugh 2000). Sapir (1929: 207) argues that, '...language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine the texture of our lives.'

Similarly, Salzmann (1988) maintains that language is the key to the cultural past of the society and a guide to its social reality. It has also been argued that languages are associated historically with particular cultures given that languages provide the key to the associated culture and its literature. In this way, a language is fully understood in the culture in which it is embedded (Mehadi & Jafari 2012). From the preceding, the connection between language and culture is inextricably interwoven. Among the Efik people, language is the strongest driver of their cultural heritage. The artefacts, values, philosophy, oral and written literature of the Efik people can only find expression in the Efik language. The cultural history of the people such as in the era of slave trade given the coastal location of Calabar, the Efik capital as a slave emporium in the pre-colonial period, can clearly be understood and appreciated through written evidence. Efikland is richly endowed with natural sites for eco-tourism promotion. These include the Mary Slessor Cenotaph, Botanical Garden, Marina Resort, Tinapa Resort,

and The National Park. These tourist attraction sites have been packaged and promoted as national and international destinations through the medium of language. In addition to this, the Efik people are famous for their cuisine culture, which has dominated the food scene in Nigeria. They have traditional rich and hearty “soul foods”, which are passed down from one generation to another. Food can be a signifier of symbolic meaning, and cultural conventions tell us what constitute food and what does not, the circumstances of their eating and the meanings attached to them (Barker 2012). The food pattern has become part of the Efik social structure and material culture and has been packaged to promote tourism in every part of Nigeria and beyond. This has largely been achieved through the instrument of language. Language, therefore, is the very essence of the Efik culture.

Forms of language use

The study identifies the predominant use of proverbs and idioms as important components of the language of libation rituals among the Efik people. Based on our field data, we identify these proverbs and idioms and offer ethno-pragmatic interpretations, bringing out their culturally shaped meanings in the context of libation rituals involving traditional marriage as a cultural event.

The use of proverbs and idioms

The performer who invokes the ancestors during libation rituals is one who exhibits great oratorical skills, cultural competence, and historical knowledge. He possesses the spiritual force to open the way to spiritual communication (Olokun 2005). He chooses fine diction, intonations, and modulations to drive home his prayer points. From our findings, the more florid his speech, the more accolades he receives from the audience. Mensah (2013) maintains that proverbs are deeply rooted in the people’s cultural traditions and reflect their ways of life. They are dynamic and innovative, displaying diverse degrees of semanticity and traditionality, and contain enormous ethnographic information which draws upon age and currency (ibid.). Yankah (2012) views proverbs as a verbal genre that embodies the high point of rhetoric in traditional and contemporary African society. Proverbs constitute the essential ingredients of the structure of libation communication among the Efik. They are used in condensing the wisdom of experience, exhibiting profound thinking and expressing time-honoured truths gained through generations. They are symbolic of the rich cultural histories of the Efik people and are also employed to advise, admonish, caution and talk back to the ancestors. Generally, proverbs function as social control mechanisms as they are used to protect the marriage institution, sanction ethically upright behaviour, and encourage the cultivation of societal values and virtues such as patience, circumspection, tolerance, hard work among others (Mensah 2013). From our data, we identified some proverbs and their ethno-pragmatic interpretations. Some proverbs are used to appeal to the ancestors directly:

- 1(a) *Ídìm í-sí-kùrè-ké ntán* (A stream does not consume all the sand/Stream 3SG-ASP-finish-NEG sand).
- (b) *Édìm ó-tò-tót isòñ òdién é-dèp* (The rain usually informs the earth before it pours/Rain 3SG-EMP-inform earth before 3SG-pours).

The proverbs in 1 are a product of long-term historical and social interactions which draw upon the collective human experience and traditional wisdom. The performer who uses them has knowledge of the culture in which the proverbs are grounded as essential code to communicating some morals to the audience and advising the bride. The proverb in 1(a) implies that despite the stream or river having the largest amount of sand, sand can still be found elsewhere. Literarily, sand cannot be exhausted. The performer uses this proverb to imply that the list of ancestors is endless. It was at the point of naming the ancestors one after the other that he used this proverb. The proverb acknowledges the fact that several other ancestors do exist, but not all of them can be mentioned by the performer as at the point in time. He, therefore, implies that if an ancestor is not named or mentioned, it should not be interpreted as he or she was not welcomed to participate in the marriage ceremony. The unnamed ancestors are appealed to directly through this proverb and their presence quite acknowledged. The proverb in 1(b) recognises the supernatural powers and influence of the ancestors. It says that the rain gives prior notice to the earth before it pours. In the same vein, the Efik people inform their ancestors and seek blessing and protection before any social, cultural, spiritual or public event could be celebrated. With this proverb, the performer rightly shows reverence and intimates the ancestors, soliciting for approval to carry on in the said marriage ceremony. Other proverbs and figurative language are used to foreground continuity and fertility which the marriage institution enacts:

- 2(a) *Étó á-kpá, á-yàk órũñ, órũñ é-dí úkó étò* (When a tree dies, its root remains. The root is the strength of a tree/Tree 3SG-die 3SG-remain root, root 3SG-be strength tree).
- (b) *(Ñnyin) ì-dì úkòm, ònyin í-dí-hé úkòt* (We are plantain tubers; we are not raffia/3PL 3PL-be plantain, 3PL 3PI-be NEG raffia).

The proverb in 2(a) emphasises identity and continuity as part of the social bond between the dead and the living. The ancestors represent the dead tree whose roots are still alive and sustain the social, cultural and spiritual wellbeing of the living. The proverb is a form of ancestor veneration. It is a way of praise-singing the heroic exploits of the ancestors and making them appear sacrosanct in the traditional scheme of things. According to a respondent, this proverb is usually used at the initial stage of the libation performance to reawaken and remind the ancestors of their responsibilities to the living. The idiom in 2(b) entails that the Efik people are like the plantain tuber and not the raffia tree. This expression emphasises productivity or fertility in marriage. A bride is likened to the plantain tuber that produces many suckers around itself, in contrast to the raffia tree that stands alone and dies in the fullness of time without any offspring. The performer uses this idiom to petition the ancestors to make the bride to be fruitful and bring forth children in their numbers.

Other proverbs are used to advise the bride to be prudent and circumspect in managing her potentially lean resources:

- 3(a) *Ò-fõn átá, ó-fõn èkpàt, ó-fõn èkpàt, èkpàt á-nwáñádé inúá* (If it's good for the bet, it is good for the pocket, if it is good for the pocket, it opens its mouth wide/ 3SG-good bet, 3SG-good pocket. 3SG-good pocket, pocket 3SG-open mouth).

- (b) Éyén úbuènè ò-tòñò ndíén ké ékwòñ (A poor person begins his nutritional life with snails/Child poor 3SG-begin nutrient with snail).

The proverb in 3(a) emphasises the fact that if the bride is successful and wealthy in her matrimonial home, her family and community will in turn benefit enormously from her potential goodwill in the future. In other words, if the new home is good for the bride, it will also be good for her family, friends, acquaintances and community through a multiplier effect of her expected magnanimity. The proverb in 3(b) is a direct advice to the bride to desist from flamboyant lifestyles and always ‘cut her coat according to her cloth’. She is enjoined to live within the limits of her husband’s resources since she is expected to have a humble beginning. According to our findings, it is believed that as her new family grows, the greater things of life will come her way gradually. The last set of proverbs is used to address members of the audience who are not positively disposed towards the marriage ceremony. It is naturally believed by the Efik that some people may not be happy to share in the joy of others. Such people do not only disapprove of such occasions but also initiate diabolic means to breach the peace of such occasions. The proverbs in the fourth set are usually directed to such people:

- 4(a) Ó-duók òtòñ ké òtòñ é-tiènè (He who pours dust is followed by dust/ 3SG-pour dust PREP dust 3SG-follow).
- (b) É-kébé úkébé ò-tòrò úkébé ésié (What one takes as an enema is what he/she excretes/ 3SG-take in enema 3SG-excrete DEM).

The proverb in 4(a) is a direct warning to people who are regarded as enemies of progress. The ancestors are requested to visit such wicked people with the effect of their evil wishes or manipulations against the celebrant. Similarly, the proverb in 4(b) seems to convey the same message. Since the ancestors are believed to have supernatural powers, to bless or to curse, they can always give retributive justice to wicked people. The performer takes into account the context of these proverbs and the mutual cognitive environment between him and the audience. He has communicated through these proverbs relying on the audience to fill the details that he did not explicitly communicate, in other words, to have an interpretation of the proverbs within the defined context.

The literary significance of the language of libation rituals

Based on our field data, we noted the use of literary devices particularly metaphor and personification in the discourse of libation rituals among the Efik. Metaphors are used to process and understand experiences of one kind in terms of another. This is the cognitive view of metaphor, which argues that ordinary conceptual systems based on linguistic evidence are metaphorical in nature, and structure how we perceive, how we think or what we do (Lakoff & Turner 1989). Metaphors, therefore, map one domain of experience unto another leading us to understand one concept or sense in the context of another. Duranti (1997) argues that figurative language reveals how the specific form and content of our speech can be seen as a guide to our experience of the world. In this study, we have determined that certain primary component of libation ritualised language can only be

interpreted and understood based on folk cultural-linguistic experience. Metaphors have been employed as essential component of libation prayer where the bride, ancestors, and other parties have been succinctly addressed:

5. Ñ-dòhò nwán ndó á-ká-ká dó, ñdìtò ké úbók ké úbók (I am saying as the bride goes forth, let her multiply exceedingly/1SG-say bride 3SG-EMP-go, children PREP hand PREP hand).

In traditional Efik society, children are regarded as the source of strength and stability not just to the particular family they belong but to the community as a whole. Children sustain family lineages and are the potential source of economic empowerment and the greatest assets of the family. This is exemplified in the Efik proverb *Ó-dò ánwàn ó-yòm éyén* (He who gets married is in need of children/ 3SG-marry woman 3SG-want child). A childless marriage has no place in the Efik traditional society, as it is highly stigmatised. Procreation and wellbeing of children are therefore the basic norms of the marital relationship. The use of the metaphor *ké úbók ké úbók* (lit. on hand, on hand ‘multiply exceedingly’) is a direct charge to the bride to be fruitful and be blessed with many children through the intercession of the ancestors. A metaphor has also been used to recognise royalty:

6. Ésien Ékpè Ókù ñnyín ké únèn á-bàk ékóm (It is our Esien Ekpe Oku (king) that the rooster greeted first/ Esien Ekpe Oku DEM CLFT rooster 3SG-early greeting).

The idea of a rooster greeting a king first implies that the bride’s father who is the chief host of this traditional event has the benefit of royalty that is, having a king as one of his ancestors. One way of showing reverence to such an ancestor is to recognise and appreciate him early enough before any mention of ‘external’ ancestors. Among the Efik, the crow of the rooster has many cultural interpretations. It may be used to indicate the time of day, or announce the demise of a prominent member of the community. Another use of metaphor is found towards the end of the libation prayer when the performer needed to inform the ancestors about the desire of the living to reciprocate their goodwill and blessings:

7. Kórò ènò é-dì ébúót (Because giving is lending/CONJ gift 3-SG-be lending).

This metaphor is used to demonstrate, first, that all the requests made to the ancestors by the performer have been granted, and the audience has a duty to appreciate and reciprocate the gestures of the ancestors. One way of doing this is to maintain a continuous spiritual flow of prayer and thanksgiving through the further pouring of libations as the study discovers. A metaphor is also used to inform the ancestors about the purity of the offer given to them:

8. Ò-nò ówò údiá ó-siò-siò ífòt (He who gives another food is expected to remove witchcraft/3SG-give person food 3SG-EMP-remove witchcraft).

Witchcraft here is a metaphor for poison. The belief in witchcraft is predominant among the Efik. It is said that membership in such a cult can easily be transmitted unknowingly to unsuspecting persons through food and drinks. It is, therefore, incumbent on a host as a cultural requirement to always taste his foods and/or drinks before the guest is served. The performer, therefore, uses this metaphor to reassure the ancestors that what he had given to them was without flaw. He further demonstrated this conviction by consuming the remaining part of the drink.

Apart from metaphors, we also identified the use of personification as a literary device in the libation ritual text:

9. Édim ó-tó-tót ísòñ ñkó ñdién é-dèp (The rain usually notifies the earth before it pours/Rain 3SG-EMP-inform earth CONJ before 3SG-pours).

Edim (rain) is given a human attribute of taking a communication verb *tót* (notify) to drive home the point that the presence of the ancestors is indispensable in the traditional gathering of the living. The rain represents the living beings who need to consult the earth (ancestors) to obtain permission for the occasion. This expression foregrounds the importance of the ancestors in every cultural event in the Efik traditional society. Eyo-Ita (2014) maintains that ancestors are not just invited to partake in cultural events, their past heroic deeds and achievements are usually remembered and recited as they are being recognised. Another use of personification is noted when the performer attempts to encourage the bride to be prudent in the management of her lean resources as we noted earlier:

10. Ó-fón èkpàt, èkpàt á-nwáñádé ínùá (If it is good for the pocket, it opens its mouth wide/ 3SG-good pocket. pocket 3SG-open mouth).

The message here is for the bride to understand that though her marriage may be a humble beginning, it has great promise for the future. If she could develop her marriage together with her husband, they should be able to grow and touch the lives of people around them. The idea of a pocket opening its mouth wide is to demonstrate the benefits the marriage could have on her siblings, relations, parents and community members. The performer also uses personification to inform the bride that her getting married has been a great relief to her parents and nothing should cause her to mismanage it so as to have reasons for returning to her parent's house:

11. Ókúbe ó-kó-bõñ àkàm ètè í-bòhó áfíá (The chameleon prays to escape from the (hunter's) trap/Chameleon 3SG-ASP-pray prayer COMP 3SG-escape trap).

The message here is a subtle warning to the bride that her getting married is the greatest delight of her parents who no longer shoulder her responsibilities as their daughter. She has to be physically and emotionally detached from them and ensures that she nurtures and endures her marriage to the end. She does not have a room in her father's house anymore, and there should be no ground for divorce. She is, therefore, challenged to face her marriage squarely and work for its benefits.

A structural analysis of the language of libation rituals

Libation rituals make use of language that is part of the grammatical structure of the Efik. They constitute parts of the everyday narratives in addition to containing certain metaphysical presuppositions. In this section, we undertake an analysis of the structure of the language of libation rituals taking into cognizance its morphology and syntax.

Morphologically, the structure of words in libation rituals ranges from simple lexical items to complex inflectional words. At the level of the lexicon, some of the words are primarily common nouns or proper names:

12	Noun (names)	Gloss
	Ínsà	(from Anansa) deity
	Èfiòm	(from ofiom) crocodile
	Ékpó	spirit
	Émà	goddess
	Átài	goddess
	Úkpòñ	soul

These are the names of the ancestors. Despite the fact that these names contain semantic properties in themselves and contribute enormous semantic sense into their structure, the meanings of these names do not rely on interpretations that are extremely literal or semantic in content. They embody cultural idiosyncrasies that need to be properly understood from both ethnolinguistic and ethno-pragmatic perspectives (Mensah & Offong 2013). For instance, *Èfiòm* represents outstanding strength, *Ékpó* stands for the invincible powers of the ancestors and so on. This is why ancestral names are not just ordinary labels or markers of identity but are of immense supernatural relevance, influencing among other things the notion of personhood, ethnocentrism and celestial events (Mensah 2015: 115).

Another morphological property of the language of libation ritual is the constant use of agglutinating morphemes or what Spencer (1991:224) calls ‘long polymorphic words in which each morpheme corresponds to a lexical meaning or grammatical function’:

- 13a. Ídimí-sí kúré – ké ñtán (The stream does not consume all the sand/Stream 3SG-ASP-finish-NEG sand).
- b. Éké m-mí-kémé-ké ó-kpòñ ((He) that cannot accomplish (a feat) should leave/Det 3SG-PRES-can-NEG 3SGleave).

The agglutinating structure in 13(a) consists of the third person singular *l-*, an aspectual marker *si-*, the root verb *kure* (finish) and the negation marker *-ke* while the agglutinating expression in 13(b) contains the root verb which is an auxiliary *keme* (can) in addition to third person singular morpheme *m-*, the present tense marker *mme-* occur prefixally while the negation marker *-ke* functions as a suffix. This is why Katamba (1993) maintains that an agglutinating language tends to display a more or less one-to-

one matching of morphemes with morphs. Generally, this kind of fusion enables different morphemes to exhibit various functions in a string in such a way that a single word can encode a meaning which would require a relatively elaborate sentence (Spencer 1991). This is an important inflectional characteristics of the Efik language.

The study also discovers the dominant use of paragoge in the language of libation ritual among the Efik people. Paragoge is the insertion of a morpheme at the end of a word. This is mostly found at the end of emphatic statements. In other words, certain aspects of the sentence are emphasised depending on its final tone. Instances of paragoge are as follows:

- 14(a) *M̀bùfò é-dí émì – ó* (You are the ones here /You (pl) are here – ó).
(b) *Dìbó dó nwọñ – ó* ((You) come, take it and drink/Come collect (it) there and drink – ó).

The use of the final emphatic morpheme -o performs two functions in the discourse of libation rituals. First, it expresses emphasis and establishes the notion of background knowledge. Pragmatically, it is assumed that the performer already has background information about the ancestors he is addressing. He knows the ancestors (that is why he called them by their names) and the ancestors know him; therefore, it is a mark of familiarity. It also introduces a personal, friendly and affectionate touch into the discourse.

The study also discovers the use of reduplication as another morphological feature of the language of libation communication among the Efik. Reduplication is an affixation process in which some part of a base is repeated either to the left or to the right or occasionally in the middle (Spencer 1991) instances of reduplication includes the following:

- 15(a) *M̀búkọ́! M̀búkọ́!!* ((Our) Ancestors! (Our) Ancestors! /Ancestors, Ancestors).
(b) *Óyé! Óyé!! Óyé!!! Báb Èfik Èbòr̀t̀t̀* (closing chant).

Here, the process of reduplication involves entire constituent copying or what is commonly referred to as total reduplication. While the reduplicative effect in 14(a) is used to signal an increase in frequency, given the need to reawaken the ancestors to their responsibilities the one in 14(b) is used to signal an increase in intensity as a way of informing the ancestors and the audience that the prayer has ended.

From the standpoint of syntax, the study reveals that the language of libation rituals forms an essential structure of basic Efik sentence types but only differ in style. It shares primary sentential features with everyday language, taking into account both simplex and complex clause types. In the following analysis, we examine the basic sentence structure and functions found in the language of libation communication among the Efik people.

Simple sentences have both subjects and predicates. They are generally independent and have constituents such as objects, complements, adjuncts, etc., and have the simple S-V-O structure. Semantically, this type of expressions are said to be propositionally complete given the presence of a truth-conditional. They are usually in the present tense.

- 16(a) *Órùn édí úkó ètò* (The root is the strength of a tree/root 3SG- is strength tree).
(b) *M̀búkọ́ é-dí-nọ́ ònyìn ibèr̀d̀d̀m* (Ancestors, come and support us/Ancestors 3-PL-ASP-give us support).

In 16(a), the copular verb *é-dí* (is) relates the noun phrase complement with the subject while in (b) the root verbs occur in relation to the subject concord and the aspectual marker. The object NP complements the verb *nó* (inform). It is interesting to note that instances of interrogative sentences were not found in the data analysed in this study. This is not, however, to say that questions do not form part of the libation prayer.

Another peculiar syntactic feature of the language of libation rituals among the Efik is the predominant use of imperative constructions in making appeals or requests from the ancestors. Instances of imperative sentences are found in 17:

- 17(a) *É-bó mímín dó* (Take this wine/3PL-take wine there).
 (b) *É-búána ké ndó émi* (Participate in this marriage/3PL-participate PREP marriage DEM).
 (c) *É-tó ísó é-tó èdèm e-di* (Come from far and wide/3PL-come front 3PL- behind 3PL-come).

The imperative sentences in 17 that are traditionally used to issue commands or directive force have been reduced to an abstract category here since they evoke non-directive meaning. They are used as forms of exhortation and permission given the degree of familiarity between the performer and the addressees (ancestors) who are only present in the performer's consciousness. According to Takahashi (2009), this kind of imperative suggests a shared action by both speaker and addressee, but it does not involve a verbal response indicative of agreement or refusal since they are performative utterances. The constructions may be interpreted as a proposal for an action by the speaker that contains a non-directive force in which no response is involved. In Efik, there are no specific morphological markers for imperative constructions. They are represented by the bare stem of the verb, and since the language is not a null-subject one, the base form of the verb is made to associate with the non-emphasised subject, though the emphasised subject is seemingly missing.

Complex clauses in the language of libation rituals include cleft-constructions which are bi-clausal expressions in which the higher or matrix clauses are the focused part of the clefting, and the subordinate clause is relativised. Examples of clefting in our data include:

- 18(a) *Ísòñ óró ké édim ó-tòt émi* (It is the earth that the rain is informing here/Earth Det CLEFT rain 3SG inform Det).
 (b) *Òkùkìm Ókùkìm á-dá ònùk ké úsányà -ó* (It is only the male sheep that gets its horns from being oppressive/Male sheep male sheep 3SG- get horn CLEFT -o).

In the data in 18(a), clefting is indicated by the cleft marker *ke* (that), which is ecliptised. The function of this clause depends on the governing predicate of the nominal clause. In 18(b), clefting is signalled by reduplication and it functions as the subject of the matrix clause. The evidence in 18 reveals that clefting in Efik could either be a property of a subordinate clause as in (a) or that of the main clause as in (b).

The study has also discovered instances of conditional clauses in the language of libation rituals among the Efik people. These clauses indicate that the action of the

main verb can take place if certain conditions are fulfilled (Mensah 2013). Examples of conditional clauses include:

- 19(a) Ò-kòúfòk, ényé é-yìp ínó (If he exploits the family home, he becomes a thief/3SG-exploit house -3SG- steal thief).
(b) Ówó à-kàn ñkpó á-nám (If one can perform a task, he does it/Person 3SG- can something 3SG- do).

These examples of conditions describe hypothetical events that are premised on other future events. They represent potential state of reality that may not be fulfilled.

Beyond syntax, the study also noted the frequent use of politeness strategy in the conversational schema between the performer and the ancestors. This is a cultural stereotype that recognises the need for the ancestors to be highly revered. Such politeness markers are found in the following expressions:

- 20(a) M̀bòk, m̀bùkpó Íkòt Ñkónóné ófùrí ófùrí (The entire ancestors of Ikot Nkonone, please.../Please ancestors Ikot Nkonone full full).
(b) M̀bòk, m̀bùkpó é-dá-há é-dá (Ancestors, please arise/Please ancestors 3PL-stand-3PL-stand).

The use of the politeness marker, *mbok* (please) conveys the impression of a subject addressing its superiors. It also reflects the level of intimacy between the performer and the addressees as well as the seriousness of the situation. These are components of positive politeness, which builds and maintains social relationships and self-esteem. According to Brown (1998:85), positive politeness strategies include compliments, seeking agreement, joking, claiming reflexivity of goals, claiming reciprocity and expression of sympathy, understanding, and cooperation. These approach-based strategies, according to Hobbs (2003), treat the addressee as someone who is liked and esteemed. In this way, power and social distance are the critical parameters that the performer accesses in defining the notion of politeness in his interaction with the ancestors. Brown and Levinson (1987) anchored the question of verbal politeness to the addressee's feelings and showing respect to his or her face, however, in the context of Efik libation rituals where the interaction is not face-to-face with the addressees (ancestors) and no instant feedback is required, the addressees only exist in the conscious mind of the performer. Therefore, the need to support each other's face (though salient) is intuitively recognised.

Another important pragmatic connotation found in the language of libation ritual is in the response of the audience at the end of the libation prayer. Everyone welcomes the performer as if he had just returned from a very far and tedious journey with the expression *Été ó-mó-yóñ-ó* (Elder, you are welcome). The assumption here is that having the privilege of interacting with the ancestors on behalf of the people is quite a critical assignment and having successfully completed the task is likened to returning from a long journey. This concern gives credence to the cognitive view of libation rituals, in which the ancestors do not just exist in the consciousness of the performer and audience but are seen to be spiritually present.

Material symbolism in libation rituals

A fascinating aspect of libation communication among the Efik is that ancestors may be addressed verbally or non-verbally in the course of the libation prayer. In the analysis above, we have analysed the verbal components of this performance and in the discussion that follows, we examine the various sacred material objects that are used and their significance in the context of Efik traditional marriage as the study reveals. This is in consonance with Turner's (2008) position that in a ritual context, almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time by convention stands for something other than itself (a symbol).

After the initial pouring of libation with liquor (alcohol), which is mainly used to awaken the ancestors, the use of water is introduced by the performer as a continuation of the ritualised performance. Based on our findings, water represents peace and purity. The Efik people regard water as a primary source of their life. Apart from its domestic uses, water is a source of transport, occupation (fishing), and rituals. It is believed to have some healing powers. The Efik believe that no one wages war against water because water has no enemy. It is, therefore, pure, neutral and peaceful. Two reasons have been advanced for the use of water as a component of libation rituals among the Efik. First, it is aimed to cleanse the couple physically and spiritually to present them worthy to come before the ancestors. Secondly, and importantly, it is meant to enable the ancestors to grant the couple a peaceful marriage devoid of any rancour that could eventually lead to divorce in the future.

Immediately after the use of water, a native egg (one laid by a home-grown hen) is put in a white saucer and given to the bride to hold with her two hands. The egg is a symbol of life and prosperity, and it is believed that it brings forth life when it is hatched. Wigington (2010) argues that the egg is a perfect symbol of life and fertility, it is representative of new life and is, in fact, the life cycle personified. According to our respondents, the egg is a source of blessing and fertility to the bride. As the eggs hatch and bring forth life in their numbers so shall the bride conceive and bring forth children to prosper her family.

After the prayer with the egg, a piece of clay is put into the same small plate held by the bride. The clay is said to symbolise beauty. Clay has enormous industrial and aesthetic values to the Efik. It is fired to produce bricks for local buildings and constructions; it provides traditional ceramic materials for pottery and a source of local cosmetics particularly used by maidens. With this clay, the beauty of the bride cannot be diminished. Beauty in this context is not just defined in terms of physical appearance or outlook but that which is essentially referred to as 'the beauty of the inner being.' It is this latter category of beauty that enables the bride to live a God-fearing life worthy of emulation, and to show love and tolerance to everyone around her. It is believed among the Efik that a woman does not marry her husband only but the husband's entire family and possibly his extended families. Therefore, the beauty of the clay endows the bride with a large heart to love and accommodate everybody in her new home.

An old coin, usually a British penny (given that this was a legal tender during the era of the British colonisation of Nigeria. We have also noted that the Efik still collect their dowries and bride price in Great Britain Pounds) is also introduced into the same plate held by the bride. The coin is a symbol of wealth or materialism. The couple must not experience poverty in any way. With the coin, the groom is empowered to cater for the

well-being of his family. The ancestors are requested to multiply the coin endlessly in the lives of the couple so that they can always live in abundance and riches.

A fresh palm frond is also put into the plate as a symbol of protection. The palm tree is regarded by the Efik as a magic plant as a result of its enormous domestic, economic and spiritual significance. This is why Gruca and colleagues (2014) argue that because palms are part of the everyday life of nearly all rural people in Africa, it may be expected that they are also significant in the spiritual framework of rural life in Africa. The ancestors are requested to use this object to place an injunction against prospective predicaments such as accident, untimely death, ill-health, or attack by forces of darkness. This is why Gruca and colleagues (*ibid.*) contend that palms are believed to have protective power and/or ability to counteract or influence the actions of malevolent forces. It is believed that no physical or spiritual manipulation can have any effect on the couple after the invocation of this palm frond prayer.

The use of alligator pepper also forms an important non-verbal mode in the communication with ancestors. The performer puts seven seeds of the pepper in his mouth and chews, makes some incantations and spits them away almost immediately. The significance of the alligator pepper is to add spice to the marriage and guarantee its general success. Finally, two small white stones are also put in the same plate still held by the bride. From our findings, the stones represent the power of the earth and ancestors. The couple is reminded not to forget their roots (progenitors) both dead and alive. They have to pay their dues and recognise the stream from which their spiritual and physical lives flow. The performer also uses the left hand to pour the libation to wave away evil spirits and curse other spirit and ancestors who are not in agreement with what is being celebrated. The use of material objects in libation rituals, therefore, reveals that these performances are not just cosmological discourses but forms of symbolic communication that strengthens community membership.

Conclusion

This article interrogates the form, style and structure of the language of libation rituals among the Efik in south-eastern Nigeria with particular reference to traditional marriage events. The performer's creative language use is based on his knowledge of the history and tradition of his people in addition to his personal commitment to the discourse. We examined the expressive and symbolic functions of ritual elements and analysed the culturally-explicit language of libation rituals, which involves the use devices such as proverbs, idioms and metaphors in addition to material symbolisms and which is generally characterized by irregular syntax. The language of libation rituals is a symbolic representation that expresses and transmits ideas, values, emotions and attitudes that can lead to an understanding of the Efik cultural system. It increases cultural identity and creates a sense of closeness to the sacred powerful forces. The syntactic structure of the language of libation rituals is not open-ended but constrained by a limited set of constructions. The ancestors can only be addressed by using non-directive imperative constructions. In totality, we submit that libation performances are significant resonances of African cultural, social and spiritual realities that provide the bridge and continuity that reconnect the past with the present. The language of libation rituals, therefore, is less stylized, highly fixed and deeply symbolic with enormous socio-cognitive and ethnopragmatic reading and which has helped to sustain the socio-religious order among the Efik.

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Povzetek

Ritali darovanja pijače vzpostavljajo močne povezave med sedanostjo (živimi) in preteklostjo (predniki), ki sta ključna elementa afriške tradicionalne kulture in duhovnosti; na ta način poudarjajo verovanje v prednike in odvisnost obstoja, razvoja in blagostanja človeka od nadnaravnih sil. Članek preučuje jezik ritualov darovanja pijače v kontekstu tradicionalne poroke Efikov z literarne, etnografske in jezikovne perspektive. Opisuje obliko in stil uporabe jezika kot tudi strukturo (morfologijo in sintakso) molitev pri darovanju pijače, ki so kodirane v specifičnih kulturnih sporočilih. Študija kaže, da je ritualni in simbolni jezik predstav darovanja pijače pri Efikih splošno slovesen, poetičen, manj manipulativen in ni strukturno odprt. Kljub temu, da te predstave uporabljajo vsakdanje pripovedi, imajo pragmatično konotacijo, ki jo je mogoče splošno kontekstualizirati in razumeti z vidika sistema vrednot in prepričanj Efikov v skladu s kulturno oblikovanimi pomeni in metafizičnimi predpostavkami.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: rituali darovanja pijače, morfosintaksa, duhovnost, predniki, Efik, tradicionalna poroka, etnografija, predmeti

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