TOWARDS PRESERVING IGALA FOLKTALES

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Abstract
In more recent times, Igala culture just like any other culture is being influenced by modern games, cultures and practices which mostly are alien to Igala traditional norms. These games capture the interest and psyche of many Igala youth at the detriment of their inherited cultural values. Consequently, some Igala rich-cultural values are gradually disappearing, and the popularity of Igala folktales in particular is on the verge of extinction. This study advocates the need for documentation of Igala folktales through the use of technology as a way to preserve their values among the future generation. The work argues that since Igala folktales have an important place in the social life of the Igala, its disappearance foreshadows a danger to the harmonious and progressive development of Igala kingdom.
Keywords: Igala folktales, documentation, preservation and Igala cultural values.

1. Introduction

Igala traditional values and experiences are principally expressed and transmitted by means of oral traditions such as folktales, myths, rituals, proverbs, folksongs, dances, social institutions and works of art. Igala folktales are traditional stories usually based on human or animal experiences, set on natural or supernatural environment. These stories are predominantly adventures and incidents usually masterminded and championed by trickster characters or quest heroes. Generally, Igala folktales is didactic and informative in nature, with animal tale characters believed to have the power of speech, and ability to conduct themselves informs of representative of humans. It is characteristically unique and original in nature, and the setting is in the ordinary, original, village, pre-historic, pre-industrial or pre-modern societies. It arises from the self-created and autonomous (Egbunu, 93). In early Igala traditional society, Igala children and adult youth participated actively during traditional performances, especially in folktale presentations and discussions. In Igala traditional ambience, there exists a long standing system of bringing up the younger ones, and Igala oral literature, particularly folktales played a significant role in the training and upbringing of Igala children. Igala folktales served as veritable means through which Igala as a nation transmitted her culture, literature, beliefs, values and philosophies to the young ones in the society. Modern technology and games are attractive to Igala youth just like other adolescents in other tribes. These threaten the survival of long-inherited folktales in Igala; and the ailing status of Igala

traditional folktales is largely blamed on negative influences of modern games, negative attitudes towards the Igala language, and social vices in Igala kingdom in general. According to Akijobi, there is a serious need to encourage the young ones to develop the interest of free-form life histories, known as ethno-historical tradition or oral history via the documentation of life and times of our people in different areas. Above all, they should be introduced to the African traditional values early in life, folktales in particular should be used in telling stories at home because it is an abridgement of the African wisdom (172). All this calls for a strong need to diverse means to document Igala folktales with a view to sustaining and preserving them for generational use.

2. Methodology

Participant observation and interviews were the major data gathering techniques for this research. The researchers are both indigenes of Ogugu community, one of several that make up the Igala kingdom. The two researchers have good firsthand knowledge of Igala oral traditions, particularly folktales, having previously served as cup-bearers to traditional elders in their respective communities. Ogugu community as a study area cherishes the use of folktales in the building and development of their children as they believe that the only way to sustain the cultural values shared in the community is to teach the children those values. The researcher thus selected sample data, their extinction levels and made suggestions on how Igala folktales can be documented for the future generation.

3. Oral Storytelling in Nigeria: An Overview

Nigeria is a country blessed with a rich cultural heritage, a myriad of indigenous languages and ethnicities that provide the fulcrum of its cultural identity. Storytelling is one of its cultural identities, which according to Edosomwan (1), is a powerful process in adult education as a useful instructional approach in facilitating adult instruction and learning, especially during the preliterate period. In the words of renowned writers, if indigenously, records of ancient written traditions did not exist in Nigeria, what understanding we do have of traditions, cultural codes, value systems and tenets for preserving balance of social order in the Nigerian context are passed from generation to generation in oral form? (Achebe, 58; Chinyowa, 10; Vambe, 24). According to the named authors, there was no written language, yet stories of great historical exploits and mythical creations were kept alive for generational use.

Storytelling in Nigeria is considered as an instructional approach with a broad applicability in human learning for both adults and children. According to Edosomwan, storytelling is universal and is popular in many cultures in Nigeria and is the medium used to preserve beliefs, social values, and cultural experiences as well as to transfer them from one generation to another. Through history, adult educators like Plato and Aristotle have used stories to connect, demonstrate, illustrate and communicate with learners (1). Verbina and Domodaran (13), confirm this when they state that storytelling was used as a medium to educate, preserve in pre-literate Nigeria societies, oral history, and convey cultural norms to the indigenous people. Nigerian society used storytelling as oral discourse, since writing was unknown to the most of the populace (Achebe, 223). It was obvious then that storytelling occurred in both formal and informal settings. Some storytellers were considered oral artists or court historians, developing special talents in storytelling including the memory and endurance to tell lengthy histories.

Storytelling in Nigeria according to Gardner is and was used by professional narrators, educators, and parents to teach respect, moral instruction, norms, societal values, and by extension preservation of the historical, cultural customs (29). What this means is that storytelling was also used to promote listening skills among young Nigerians and to preserve the identity of the people. Oduolowo in his work (2014) states that, in the traditional African environment, specifically Nigeria, young children were told stories in the form of oral narratives by parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. This way, the younger generation was able to learn how to obey instructions from elders by practising listening skills and learning about their heritage. For adult learners, stories were used to depict the wisdom, knowledge, and power of elders. These stories according to Edosomwan (2), sometimes incorporated proverbs which are short, memorable sayings that express a belief or piece of advice. Amali affirms this when he states that proverbs can be used for admonition, to warn of impending danger, or for counseling and encouragement depending on the context. Folktales also have value to society in Nigeria (14). Therefore, the transmission of folktales is something very natural and cultural in the Nigerian environment. For example, in those days in Nigeria societies, particularly in the rural communities, people would congregate after the day's work around the village square every evening, a prototype of the modern day community center to listen to music, watch dances and special narratives that took on different characters.

4. The Significance of Igala Folktales: didactive Features

Generally, Igala folktales are very rich and didactive, usually told during moonlight period. *Ahaka*, as it is called in Igala language is a science in itself, which means history or events of the past that are usually related to the young ones as part of entertainments for both elders and children every evening. Igala folktales contain imaginary stories of the ancients that are uniquely educative, didactive and informative. It consists of long and short interesting stories that are usually related to the children by elders in the society. According to Egbunu (40), Igala folktales contain oral history and oral chronicles of Igala society that is a kind of historical narrative that teaches the youth values and customs of the Igala society. Each of these literary forms or linguistic characteristics forms a significant aspect of the Igala people and Igala culture.

Ahaka (folktales) is synonymous with *Alọ*; the Igala axis that shares boundaries with Enugu state uses *Alọ* to mean folktales, while other parts of Igala kingdom use the term *Ahaka* to mean folktales. Both *Ahaka* and *Alọ* mean the same in Igala kingdom. Both items are used at night to teach children certain histories in the form of long and short stories. However, the *Ahaka* or *Alọ* has this introduction and forms the basis of a popular idiomatic expression (below). Every Igala folktale always begins this way: *Ahaka/Alọ mi kwo kwa-kwa-kwa, I lia an'oji añẹjẹ* with the meaning, my tale rests on Tortoise. Igala folktales, like other cultural folktales, are synonymous with history in all its ramifications: it has to do with stories that are concerned and connected with people, situations or things that existed in the past. Meanwhile, *Ahaka/Alọ* literary means history. It means the reporting of events that are particularly connected to the past. In essence, *Alọ* is a very old traditional story of Igala people that is usually passed unto the youths in a spoken form. It can equally mean one's biography, the history of animals or interesting events in the life of man. One distinctive and didactive feature of *Alọ* is that its stories are not imaginary rather, they are honest and accurate or precise accounts of the past events. It is common that at the end of the stories there are moral lessons for the youth to put into use.

In Igala culture, some or most of the folktales have more than one moral lessons to be learnt by the growing youth. While some have similar meanings, each of them has a shade of meaning peculiar or unique to itself. Some of the didactive features of Igala folktales include the fact that they liberate, teach, correct and shape the youth to live a healthy life that is beneficial to themselves and the society they find themselves. In addition, these folktales address the domestic, social and political life of the people particularly the youth, so long as the stories are not imaginative but

accurate accounts of ancient happenings. There are also Igala folktales that talk about moral values e.g. patriotism, love, unity, fairness, hard work, patience, justice, truthfulness, loyalty and contentment.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The fascinating aspect of Igala folktales is that they are down to earth and practical. However, this does not mean that they are every easy to interpret. In fact, because folktales are to true to life, it is possible to find contradictions. A tabular procedural format of data presentation was adopted for this study.

Table 1: Sample of Igala folktale among the Old

Igala Folktales	English Interpretations	Learning Point
Ahaka mi kwo kwa-kwa-kwa ilia noji apiẹpiẹ. Apiẹpiẹ kwane ika kini ialo t'u ulẹ ta kidabi wa. Oñw ilia m'u ifinw kokọ li ojọdọ. Ama ta'ki dabi wa, ọnyi m'u kojẹ. Oñw alu kimu dabi wa, iñọ li ifinw gẹn. Taki chanẹ e'kwa kakini ñie pie piẹ piẹ ẹñwu lẹ itẹ aka teñini.	My tale rests on a bird called (Allied horn bill) who once decided to travel to an unknown place. While it was going, it hung his intestine on the wall. Before it came back, what it hung was eaten off by warms. It came back, looked for it and could not find it and it started shouting pie pie pie pie. The same things it says till today.	This teaches the Igala children not to be: - Careless about their tomorrow. - Foolish in taking some decision. - Reserved over some critical decision. - Disposed to the elders.

Table 2: Sample of Igala folktale among the Middle-Aged

Igala Folktale	English Interpretations	Learning Point
Ahaka mi kwo kwa- kwa-kwa ilia n'oji añẹjẹ, I kw'oji añẹjẹ ilia n'oji Aibọ kpai Abiọmẹ. Añẹjẹ kwa ne ile nwa fọkọ mẹ, ilaneke ran. Ẹgbadu kabiọmẹ lia, ili añẹjẹ ñw. Ama ẹgbadu kiwa, iali ọya ñw (Aibọ) kia a nẹñw oji okuta ọjọduu. Oñw ọjọ k'idẹ lia, abiọmẹ wẹ dọ imọ kuta Aibọ du, imuda ma kia kakini Añẹjẹ dọ mọn. Imokwuta lẹ du rọtinyọ, ila maka ka Añẹjẹ idu rọtinyọn. Aluki n'ọjọ jẹ pẹẹ abiọmẹ lẹ lia kigba ọkọ ñw, ta ki fa Añẹjẹ li unyi, oñwu i kia ñw ki ọkọ ñw	My tale rests on Tortoise, from there to Aibo and the creditor. One day Tortoise went and got some money from his friend and promised to pay back. But whenever the creditor visited he was always not meeting Tortoise at home and his wife always told him, her husband was not around, but always busy grinding on a local stone. Several attempts were made by the creditor to get his money but all to no avail. This very day he got fed up and took the grinding stone of the Tortoise's wife and threw it away not knowing that what he threw away was his debtor. One day, he came back and met Tortoise at home, asked him to pay him else something will happen and Tortoise told him that before he could pay him he should go and bring back his wife's	- Do not be lazy and useless among your contemporaries. - Do not live a life of deceit. - Do not act when you are angry.

dunw oñw Añẹjẹ ka ñw ka kakini imachẹgba kimo uk'uta akọkọ ọya ñw du du dakubi wañw, inẹgbadu k'ia dọ kọ ñw ñwu. Taka abiọmẹ le, ila dọmọ atane okuta lẹ tenyini.	stone. The man is still there looking for the grinding stone he threw away up till now and because of that he could not could back for his money.	

Table 3: Sample of Folktale among Children

Igala Folktales	**English Interpretations**	**Learning Point**
Ahaka mi k'wo kwa-kwa-kwa ilia an'oji Añẹjẹ, I kwọmọ ilia an'oji Otinalọ. Añẹjẹ le ilia fẹñwu bibi che kpai Otinalo onw m'afumu. Maka nw ka kakini manyadu kpa, onw ifologwu che buma ku ma kpa nw oji kpakpa lan ama, kuma kpa nw efẹ piọ. Onwu m'a mo logwun gba onw madu lo tefẹpiọ. Oñwu ma ma Añẹjẹ du rọ tefẹpiọ, oñwu Añẹjẹ chanẹ erule ki lo, oñwu magwonyu ẹrẹ nw. Taki momu da onw ikañw ma kakini, "echẹ ẹrẹ mi mẹgwonyu no chai ikpoli". Onwu ma tọnọ ta ka Añẹjẹ rale.	My tale rests on Tortoise and Otinalọ. Tortoise committed adultery with Otinalọ and he was caught. He was told that he was going to be killed but he pleaded that he should not be killed on a dry land but in the water. His plea was accepted and he was brought to the river bank to be killed. He was thrown into the river. As was about to swim away, they held his leg, but Tortoise shouted and said thank God you are not holding my leg but a stick and they left it and he swan fast away.	- Run away from whatever the society condemns. - Do not sleep with someone's wife. - Do not trick people.

The folktale (Table 1) is not within the reach of many Igala children in many Igala communities neither is it documented anywhere for easy reference for the unborn generations. It is clear that this tale is almost at the verge of extinction.

A careful look at the folktales (Table 2 and Table 3) shows that some images are created because they would always come with lessons to be learnt by children while the stories go on. In Igala traditional setting, every old man or woman is a teacher as they would always gather the children and tell new exciting folktales which is always referred to as juicy moonlight tales. In the past, youth played active roles in the performance and transmission of oral literature in a typical community setting but today, the story has completely changed.

Analyzing the content of the folktales (Tables 1, 2 and 3 above), Igala folktales are assertive, corrective and directional, this is because, they are expressions of facts which contain above all

wisdom, expression of universal truth about life, evergreen and timeless and highly philosophical. They also fit into universal issues of human beings as a whole, rather than an individual.

4.2 The Present State of Igala folktales

African folktales are rich and very embracing, and have been in existence long before the advent of the Europeans. Akijobi in his work, observes that although African folktales and storytelling pattern were very active in many African rural and urban areas, they are now almost on the verge of extinction (174). This observation is true where the Igala people are concerned; particularly the young, political and traditional leaders of tomorrow no longer see the need to be told such stories. Igala folktales are now regarded as stories that lack sense, and devoid of truth. The Igala appear to have abandoned their once valued and cherished folktales, forsaking the once popular, prominent medium through which cultures, values, morals and ethics were communicated and inculcated into the young. In their place today are modern games, interference from foreign languages and cultures, but most especially the negative impact of the social media, are all contributing factors.

It is obvious from the present status of Igala folktales that many Igala youth are now more at home with modern games, stories, cartoons and home movies, etc., than with the traditional Igala folktales. The current situation portrays the constraints to the growth and transmission of Igala storytelling habits, moonlight activities in Igala communities, thereby upsetting the natural cultural scheme of development of the Igala youth. Regrettably, Igala folktales such as, *Añeje kpai Aibo, Adagba oko, Apiepie ucha ubi, iya icha (*Tortoise and his wife *Aibo,* Bush elephant, Allied horn bill, Moon light play*)* etc., now appear very strange to many Igala children, who have become more comfortable at home with modern games than the cherished values of the Igala community.

The situation of Igala folktales can be related to the fate of traditional oral literature in Nigeria, which, according to Ikwubuzo, has been affected by a number of factors. There is the influence of literacy and urbanization which encourage rural-urban drift, and consequently abandonment of cultural traditions, the loss of oral mode of literacy and literary tradition (39).

Epuchie and Ameachi (154) also observe that the pastime of folktale telling is fast disappearing because of the advancement of more recent technological innovations such as the social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, facebook, whatsApp, instagram, etc.

5. Conclusion: Preserving Igala Folktales

Igala folktales, like other forms of popular folktales, is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium for commenting on contemporary social and cultural issues. It can also be a significant agent of change capable of storing the people's historical experiences for a generational use. This is how folktales emerged. Folktales are animal stories. They are stories about selected animals personified to carry certain human attributes in order to play out and needed role for moral lessons. One interesting thing about the folktale is the manipulation of animals as humans playing out their political, sociological and cultural roles in a fictional community (Idoko, 4). With the advent of modern technology and its attractiveness for young people. There is a real need for effective documentation of Igala folktales as a way to maintain and preserver its longevity.

Documentation in general terms, has been defined as a set of documents provided on paper, or online, or on digital or analog media, such as audio tape or CDS (Cropper, 2). This exercise is very important in preserving Igala folktales. Usman in Nnyigide and Okoye says that up to 1870, neither France nor Italy possessed folktales (12). Yet, within 15 years from that date, over 1,000 folktales have been collected in each country. This was possible through documentation. In today's increasingly homogenized world, we are losing the many voices of the earth; mostly, the voices of indigenous peoples and local communities. Thousands of diverse human cultures and languages, and the oral traditions that they have nurtured, are being overpowered by just a few dominant voices that have spread their reach across the globe. Some Igala scholars like Egbunu, Idachaba, Abutu, Usman, etc., who are very concerned about Igala core cultural values have contributed in this direction of documenting Igala folktales (Egbunu, 42). However, most Igala folktales are yet to be fully documented even though Igala communities are very fertile for gathering information on folktales as affirmed by Usman qtd. in Nnyigide and Okoye (17). For example, in Biu community with a population of 452,304, according to the National Population Commission (NPC 2006), over 1,000 folktales were documented within two years (6). To support this, Helser qtd. in Nnyigide and Okoye asserts that he collected over 800 tales in the same community in the 1920s (94). The analyses also reveal that most Igala folktales are not computerized, and few are documented on paper, while some are completely still oral based in this century.

Finally, this paper advocates for proper documentation of Igala folktales for effective preservation of Igala culture and tradition. The Igala as a matter of urgency must begin to consider in addition to converting oral literature into written or book form, also encourage the use of current

technological innovations and advancements in the society. More so as young people today are very conversant with information technology and the use of social media for interactions. Therefore, computer animation for creating of animal characters in Igala folktales should be encouraged, which can also be developed into cartoon feature films. There is the need for parents to also introduce these cartoon/animated feature films depicting Igala oral traditions in their homes by watching them with their children. The death of any nation's cultural values is also the death of that nation.

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