


---

## Analysing discourse of praise singing in African oral literature: The psychological implications

---

Carol Chukuyem Ohen<sup>1\*</sup> , Florence Etuwe Oghiator<sup>2</sup>, Dumkelechuku Christopher Obed-Ohen<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2&3</sup>Department of Languages, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria, [carol.ohen@unidel.edu.ng](mailto:carol.ohen@unidel.edu.ng)<sup>1</sup>, [florence.oghiator@unidel.edu.ng](mailto:florence.oghiator@unidel.edu.ng)<sup>2</sup>, [dumkele.obed-ohen@unidel.edu.ng](mailto:dumkele.obed-ohen@unidel.edu.ng)<sup>3</sup>

\*Corresponding author

Received: 25 October 2024 | Accepted: 15 November 2024 | Published: 31 December 2024

**Abstract:** This paper analyses praise singing in African oral literature, and its psychological implications. The psychological implication of analysing the discourse of praise singing in African oral literature is the application of ideas from the speech of the singer by bringing out the linguistic aspects of the speech and relating their psychological effects on society. Since society connects discourse analysis and psychology, discursive psychology has to do with the application of ideas from discourse analysis to issues in psychology. Discourse analysis studies speech, text, signs, and symbols, as well as their usage in performing actions. Praise singing in oral literature is an aspect of human behaviour and this informs the psychological implications. Since discourse analysis is a qualitative research investigating language use in a social context, this paper uses the speech act theory and critical discourse analysis approach as the theoretical framework. The study revealed that in modern-day technology, recorded audio praise songs are replacing face-to-face singing, and praise singing is implicated in the social connectedness and motivation of individuals. The findings also show that oral literature touches the body and feeds the soul, acting as a therapy which improves mental health. The paper concluded that praise singing in Africa adds aesthetics to oral literature as well as psychological satiety to individuals. Furthermore, the linguistic features in praise songs create awareness of the application of Discourse Analysis to African literature. Thus, praise singing nourishes the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of humans. Recorded audio and video praise songs were recommended for documentation.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Discourse analysis, Oral literature, Praise singing, Psychological implications, Speech act.

### Biographical notes:

Carol Chukuyem Ohen holds a PhD in African Literature in French. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Languages, Faculty of Arts, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria and is currently the Ag. Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Her research interest is in African Literature.

Florence Etuwe Oghiator holds a PhD in English Language. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Languages, Faculty of Arts, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. Her research interest is in Discourse Analysis.

Dumkelechuku Christopher Obed-Ohen holds a Master Degree in Clinical Psychology from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and is an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.

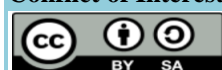
---

## 1. Introduction

In many African communities, praise singing is an important form of oral literature and it is one of the most commonly used poetic forms. Okpewho (1992) defines oral literature as literature that is delivered by word of mouth. This word of mouth, according to Okpewho, may be recited, spoken, or sung. Okafor (2004) sees oral literature as the verbal art of a non-literate community where such art is composed for a traditional audience for its entertainment and edification. Bessey (2016) describes oral literature simply as a spoken word transmitted from generation to generation. It forms part of

**Research Article:** This article is published by *Jozac Publishers* in the *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JLLS)*. This article is distributed under a Creative Commons [Attribution \(CC BY-SA 4.0\) International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

**Conflict of Interest:** The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



traditional literature and the rich cultures in Africa expressed in various ways like folktales, poems, songs, riddles, proverbs, myths, and legends. Historically, oral literature has functioned as an important medium of moral and civic education in non-literate societies. This is why modern African societies can adapt their oral traditions to present-day realities that can be used as tools for civic education. Thus, oral literature becomes an indispensable legacy for carrying out successful human interaction.

Long before the advent of written literary genres, oral songs had always existed in Delta State, in Nigeria, and in Africa. Oral traditions made it possible to pass knowledge to generations without writing. There are different types of songs such as the war song, the love song, the initiation song, the praise song, the work song, the circumcision song, the dirge, the lullaby, etc. In African communities, songs are used in almost all occasions of life. However, this paper focuses on selected praise songs from Ika and Ukwuani communities in the Delta State of Nigeria. Praise song applies to a series of praise epithets sung to men like kings, rulers, chiefs, warriors, and other important personalities like influential men or women or gods, animals, trees, and even towns. It can also be directed to one who performs a great feat. The encomiums involve the essence or the value of the object of praise.

From ancient times, praise singers or griots were usually found in kings' palaces and in the houses of influential people in society. As such, they could be professional bards serving as court historians of their tribe with the ability to relate genealogies and to sing the praises of their kings or masters. Generally, praise singers are skilled in verbal arts and their sung poems usually serve as social commentary since they also deal with social and political matters. The major function of the praise poet is, therefore, to conserve social consciousness, transmit it, and, at the same time, entertain.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study include the following:

- a. to demonstrate discourse analysis of... praise singing in African oral literature;
- b. to explore the psychological implications of praise-singing.
- c. to acknowledge the value of oral literature

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1. Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory (SAT) originated from John Austin, a linguist. The theory attempts to solve some of the devices in languages (Obodeh, 2018). The theory states that to speak is to do something. Searle in Akinwotu (2020) posits that speaking a language is performing speech acts, which include making statements, giving commands, and others. Therefore, praise singing or citation is a speech act, as words are used in performing the act. The thrust of speech act theory is that utterances do not only express a state of being, they also perform an action (Akinwotu, 2020). This means that we do not just say something with words, but we do something with them. Actions mean the interpersonal uses of language in everyday context which involve the exchange of information that has been acquired (Oghiator, 2007).

### **2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) deals with social change, gender and power (Obodeh, 2018). It is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (Obodeh, 2018; Van Dijk, 1997). CDA is an approach that indicates other modes of meaning making; including gestures, intonation, image and gaze (Dauran, 2022). The foregoing can be seen in praise songs (poems) or citations in Africa.

Consequently, CDA is one of the prominent advanced approaches that is employed in analysing language as social practice (Meyer, 2004; Dauran, 2022). To support this assertion, praise singing is one of the social practices in African oral literature. Critical discourse analysis is different from other forms of discourse analysis, as the critical is not negative, instead, it shows connections and causes that are overt (Aworo-Okoroh, 2022).

## **3. Delimitation of study**

Millions of praise songs exist in various African communities, but this study is based on selected praise songs from Ika and Ukwuani communities in Delta State of Nigeria. The nature of the paper will require the translations and discourse analyses of the sample praise songs. The study will discuss some benefits of praise singing, focusing on the psychological implications.

## **4. Samples of Praise Songs from Ika and Ukwuani lands.**

### **Example 1: Ika Praise Song/Poem for the King (A merger)**

Obi agu (3x)  
Ni to n'enyi fe  
I ri gu nwai eri  
Eze a gu  
Eze a a gu ukpo  
Ogi azun gbondon ohinmi  
Obi tutu

Tutu tantan  
Eworo uku  
Nwadan nwai nwai  
Nwa ogun le ekirikan  
Eze nwen ali  
Ni to n'enyi fe  
Oken oshishi hun memem egboko  
Oken mgburu hun jun ekpeti  
Oken oshishi hun jun ugbole  
Oken oshishi hun egbondon ofia  
Iyare, iyare.  
Enyi ki iwu.  
Ihien enyi zoma oku, e e lihi  
owi ikpoho le/mgba ikpoho le  
Eze itebite  
Iyare, iyare.

**English Translation:**

- 1 All hail the lion king (3x)
- 2 May you live long to be served (by us)
- 3 After you, your son will reign
- 4 Long live the king
- 5 A king does not stop reigning.
- 6 The one who uses his back to raise a standard against the sea.
- 7 The formidable king that cannot be dared.
- 8 The indomitable one.
- 9 A great and mighty lion
- 10 The one whose appearance is scintillating
- 11 The one who cannot be daunted.
- 12 The king owns the land
- 13 May you live long to be served (by us)
- 14 The mighty tree that makes a forest
- 15 The big wrapper that fills a box
- 16 The mighty tree that fills (covers) the entire farm
- 17 The mighty tree that raises a standard against the bush
- 18 We welcome you.
- 19 An elephant you are.
- 20 Whatever the elephant steps on cannot rise.
- 21 A friend to all women (in the kingdom)
- 22 The king who is everlasting.
- 23 We welcome you.

The above praise song is usually recited or sung to herald the arrival of an Ika king as he steps out to sit on the throne to receive visitors or to judge cases. Names of animals like lion and elephant that depict great strength and size are carefully selected to designate the king. The king is addressed as a lion. The lion, often regarded in folklore as the king of the jungle, cannot be conquered or overcome. A mighty tree and a big wrapper also denote the king's nature to shield, defend and protect the subjects, even with his back. Furthermore, adjectives like undaunted, indomitable, everlasting, mighty, scintillating show a king who is fearless, whose royalty is twinkling and whose authority cannot be challenged. Some kings of Ika land have unique greetings, hence, the introductory greeting 'Obi agu' can be substituted with a peculiar greeting like 'Doo, Dein' for the Dein of Agbor kingdom. The praise can also be punctuated with unique titles like 'Agadagidi' for the Obi of Umunede kingdom.

"Whatever the elephant steps on cannot rise" (line 20) refers to the fact that the king's decision is final; it cannot be altered. Again, it can be observed that whereas some lines in the song address the king in a direct speech (lines 2, 3, 13, 19 and 23), all other lines refer to him as a third person in an indirect speech.

**Example 2: Praise Greetings to Okpalauku**

Onye nweosa!  
Okpalauku bu odu  
O gbuefi!  
O gbuefi!  
O ka mmọ  
O ye iwu  
Shi u ukubaga  
Dike dini obodo!

Dike ghali obodo!  
Obodo alusu  
Ye ebi ndu ogonogo.

**English Translation**

- 1 The owner of everyone (in the land)
- 2 'Okpalauku' is an elephant tusk.
- 3 The slaughterer of cow!
- 4 The slaughterer of cow!
- 5 The announcer of festival!
- 6 The one that enacts laws.
- 7 That there shall be no movement (curfew).
- 8 The great one in the land!
- 9 When the great one leaves the land,
- 10 The land is defiled.
- 11 You will live long.

The above poem is a praise to the Okpalauku in Ukwuani land. The Okpalauku is usually the eldest male in the community, who is crowned the king of the people. He is regarded as the owner of everyone in the land. He authorises the annual celebration of festivals from his palace called 'Obi'. The poem is written in eleven lines. All the initial letters in the first words in the lines begin with upper cases. This suggests the dignity upheld on the Okpalauku by his subjects. He is the slaughterer of cows. In time past, 'efi' (cow) was used for any ceremony and the head must be given to the Okpalauku. There are repetitions in the poem, 'efi', in lines four and five; 'dike' lines eight and nine, 'obodo' lines eight, nine and ten. The repetitions show the continuity of Okpalauku in the land.

There is a metaphor in line two 'Okpalauku bu odu' (Okpalauku is as an elephant tusk). Okpalauku is being compared to an elephant tusk. Elephant tusk is highly cherished and revered in Africa, most especially in Ukwuani land where the elephant tusk is a priceless ornament.

The punctuation marks are carefully selected. There are four exclamation marks, five full stops and one comma. The exclamation marks are very normal in praise singing to express emotions and blessings from the Okpalauku. The praise concludes with a prayer that the king will live long.

**Example 3: Praise Singing at the Funeral of a Great Ukwuani Man.**

Agu, Agu!  
Oke Agu.  
O nweni kobo.  
O gbu efi!  
O gbu efi!  
O shini ye ọsa li!  
Oke onyke!  
Onyeke njeonu!  
O me yiyi ,f  
O me ọgo  
Dike Esa!  
Dike Esa!  
O je atọ ọko.  
Oyi nde ogbei.  
Ogẹlẹnya gbo,  
Ezhi ọgẹlẹnya.  
Na ni udo

**English Translation**

- 1 Lion, lion!
- 2 The great Lion.
- 3 He who had money (kobo)
- 4 The slaughterer of cow!
- 5 The slaughterer of cow!
- 6 The one who fed everyone!
- 7 A great man!
- 8 An expensive man!
- 9 The one who gave generously.
- 10 A free giver/A giver.
- 11 A great man, without limitations
- 13 A great man, without limitations.

- 14 A beau!  
15 A friend of the poor  
16 The rich of the old.  
17 The real wealthy!  
18 Go peacefully.

The poem is a dirge to a great man in Ukwuani community. Usually in Ukwuani, when great persons die, their praises are sung. It is a joyful occasion to sing one's praises at death in Ukwuani culture. For this cause, the question is always asked to a wrong or evil doer. "When you die, what would people talk about you?"

The dirge is a long poem of one stanza with seventeen lines. The lines begin the first letters with an upper case, even when the last word in the preceding line ends with a comma. This is a kind of foregrounding, as all first letters in the lines are capitalised. There is also an aberration in the use of capitals. This is seen in lines one and two (Agu); lines eleven and twelve (Esa). "Agu" means lion in Ukwuani, and when a person is referred to as a lion, that person is great, strong and brave. "Esa", literally means seven in number. When a man is referred to as "onyeka esa", it means that man is great; seven is a very significant number in Ukwuani tradition.

The poem has well selected punctuation marks that are carefully placed to suit the praises. There are seventeen punctuation marks, eight exclamations, seven full stops and two commas. The preponderance of the exclamation marks portrays the excitement of the praise singer. The frequent occurrence of the full stop also makes the speaker/reader to observe a longer pause before the next line in the poem. All these depict the great value accorded to the dead man.

The syntactic structure of the poem consists of high-sounding words, groups, clauses and sentences. The high-sounding words are 'Agu', 'Osa', ogelenya, while the groups include 'oke agu', oke onyeka', 'Dike Esa', 'Ogelenga gbo, Ezhi ogelenya. The clauses also include "O gbu efi", "na ni udo", "je atụ ụko", 'shini ye osa', (gave generously). The clauses run into sentences.

The semantic implications are some figures of speech in the poem. The figures of speech observed include metaphor, euphemism, personification, and hyperbole. The metaphors are 'Agu', (lion), "oke agu" (great lion). The euphemism is "na ni udo" (go in peace). The statement is also a personification as the dead man is addressed as a living being. In fact, the words in the poem are greatly personified by the poet, the praise singer. The hyperboles are "oshini ye osa li". (The one who fed everyone) "Dike esa" (great man) éśá, means seven. This implies that he was as great as seven great men.

### **Modern praise singing**

For centuries, oral traditions existed without modern technologies like writing and printing. Nevertheless, oral traditions are adapting to changing times and have been intermingled with technologies and circulated through recordings. As a result, a modern praise may be a master of ceremony or an entertainer hired to laud rich and prominent people in some important events. Achor (2020) sees praise singing in modern times as a socio-cultural phenomenon which characterises the present-day political scene in Nigeria. He defines political praise singing as the use of statements loaded with encomiums to promote a politician or a government programme in order to get support from stakeholders. According to Achor, before 1999, political praise singing in Nigeria was usually modest, but since then, it has been much dependent on unhealthy political rivalry due to the inordinate ambitions of some politicians to win opponents at all costs. This implies that modern praise singing can be performed for both positive and negative reasons. In this regard, Obiezu (2019) posits that since politicians have the habit of employing the services of praise singers before elections, such praise songs can serve as an ode to a particular politician while at the same time run down the opponents. Mohammad (2022) avers that negative praise singers are enemies of good governance who are comparable to drivers who drive drunk; who either get killed or kill others. Negative praise singing is therefore destructive and deceptive, having the same outcome as harmful propaganda. Since socio-cultural norms encourage praise singing in Nigeria, the authors agree with this view that a negative praise song is detrimental to good governance.

On the other hand, the praise singers of today, according to Obiezu (op cit.), use this as a means of making money for themselves. This way, praise singing has become an economically viable and lucrative job whose forte is the elections. In the absence of elections, some praise singers get invitations to sing at social events. Thus, from being entertainers, they become entrepreneurs. Furthermore, some stand-up comedians have gradually turned into praise singers who record their praises in audio and video clips to market them.

### **Celebration of Life**

The examples in this section would be praise songs or poems for women, especially the elderly, at funerals. In Ika and Ukwuani communities, like in most ethnic groups in Nigeria, people are praised more when they die than when they are alive. According to Klaudi (2022), a funeral is the biggest social event in Nigeria. As a result, most people hire performers for entertainment at funerals. Funeral performances are a symbol of status and are based on traditional or religious customs or a combination of both. People sing songs or recite poems to pay tribute to the deceased. Funerals have become so important that people prefer spending more money for a loved one's funeral to paying medical bills to take care of the person while alive. This is evidenced the report by Noret (2023), of an old dying woman who was abandoned by her children and close relatives, only for the latter to start planning a 'befitting' burial as soon as she passed on. At funerals, the living organise elaborate parties for the dead. Deltans, and indeed Nigerians, believe that the type of burial given to the dead reflects the type of life the person lived or the family financial status. This is why people "celebrate life" when

a person dies in order to give the person a “befitting burial”. In the same vein, people praise their dead loved ones with songs and dances more than they praise the living. People believe that such songs are not only a tribute to the dead, but also a reflection of the personality of the deceased; hence it is usually seen as a celebration of life.

Africans generally see death as a transition from the present life to another life; from the physical world to the spiritual world. Consequently, praise songs are a tribute to the dead (Onu, 2018) as they begin their new life as an ancestor, except the person died young or by accident, in which case, a dirge is taken to express grief.

#### **Example 4 (Ika Praise Song/Poem at the Funeral of a Matriarch)**

##### **Odede ala Ohinmi d’Awu o**

Odede ala ohinmi d’awu o  
O la rerere  
Odede ala d’ezu iken  
Odede arun gwou  
Odede ebi gwou  
Onye bigu o la ohinmi d’awu.  
Odede ala ayeri d’ebiri  
Odede a la ohinmi d’awu  
O hen elu ozo, nene  
O hen elu ozo  
Elu rimma y’ abia

#### **English Translation**

##### **A Matriarch Goes Home to Bathe in The Sea**

- 1 A matriarch has gone to bathe in the sea
- 2 She is going smoothly and peacefully
- 3 A matriarch has gone to rest
- 4 A matriarch has finished her course
- 5 After life, one retires to bathe in the sea.
- 6 A matriarch has transited to the great beyond.
- 7 A matriarch has gone to bathe in the sea.
- 8 See you in your next life, Mama.
- 9 See you in your next life.
- 10 You will come back to a good life.

This a praise poem of ten lines. The first seven lines are indirect speeches spoken in the third person singular, while the last three lines are direct speeches addressing the late matriarch. The seven lines inform the audience that a great mother has gone home and gives reasons for her departure. Culturally, Ika people, and indeed Africans, talk to their departed ones; praise them, send them messages and pray to them. This is why the last three lines speak to the dead. Here, the traditional belief of the people comes into play where it is believed that humans can bathe in rivers, but it will only take a spirit being to bathe in the sea or ocean. Africans also believe in reincarnation hence the matriarch is bidden farewell till she returns to the next life. The idea of a good life in the last line actually refers to a better life. The living wishes the departed matriarch reincarnation to a better life.

Furthermore, the praise for a dead matriarch can take the form of solo and chorus where the soloist recites a line and the audience responds: a sample of such a performance follows.

#### **Example 5: Ika Praise Song/Recitation for a Dead Matriarch**

##### **Oganranya Nne M**

Solo:	Oganranya nne m ooo
Audience:	Ookwa!
Solo :	Omu nwa nne m ooo
Audience :	Ookwa !
Solo :	Oshinni nne m ooo
Audience :	Ookwa !
Solo :	Owu ehu nne m ooo
Audience :	Ookwa !
Solo :	Odaze nne m ooo
Audience :	Ookwa !
Solo :	Nne m, o gi oru mgbadan mehunme ofe

Audience :                   Ookwa !  
Solo :                           Okpoho kari ibe nne m ooo  
Audience :                   Ookwa !  
Solo :                           Okpa egbo nne m ooo  
Audience :                   Ookwa!  
Solo :                           O hen elu ozọ o, nene  
Audience:                   Isese

**English Translation**  
**My Wealthy Mother**

Solo:                           Hail my wealthy mother  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           Hail my fruitful mother (in child bearing)  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           Hail my mother, the great culinarian  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           Hail my elegant mother  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           Hail my neat and decent mother  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           My mother who uses the antelope's thigh (as a soup spoon) to stir  
the soup  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           A woman above her equals  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           My mother, the wealth maker  
Audience:                   We concur!  
Solo:                           Till we meet again in the next world, Mama.  
Audience:                   Amen.

The common feature here is the solo and response form, in no logical sequence. The song reveals people's emotions and showcases praise for the dead matriarch, regarding her life and achievements. The praise song for the dead in Ika and Ukwuani communities is flexible in the sense that the singer is free to incorporate the personal qualities, character traits, attributes and the achievements of the deceased in a rather spontaneous manner. This also reveals the creativity of the lead singer. Most of the singers in this case are soloists who express their feelings about the departed person. In some cases, it is the children of the deceased, not necessarily professional praise singers, who voice out such spontaneous praises at funerals.

Repetition is mostly used to add aesthetics to the oral expression. It is also a way of carrying the audience along, making them to participate in the oral performance. It is noteworthy to say that if there is a lacuna, a shortcoming in the life of the departed person (childlessness, unaccomplished dreams/projects, etc.), the praise song or poem translates into a prayer expressing the wishes to be achieved in the next life. Here, the traditional belief in reincarnation is also revealed. This informs the example below.

**Example 6 Ika Poem Expressing Wishes for a Dead Matriarch**

**Elu ozọ**

Nne m onye oma  
Elu rimma y'abizi o, nene  
I gha akpa egbo, y'a mu nwa  
I jenko d' awuru onye we marin amarin  
I biazu elu, y'eweri ukeke, y'eweri pensoro  
I k'awuru igwe hun efe elu ke ugboelu

## English Translation

### Your next life

- 1 My good mother
- 2 Your next life will (still) be glorious, Mama.
- 3 You will make wealth and at the same time make babies.
- 4 You will be a woman of renown and influence.
- 5 When you come to life again, you will take up your pen and pencil
- 6 You will be an iron that flies high like the aeroplane.

The above poem is a prayer for the dead woman. The praise poet expresses good wishes for her in the next life. She will not have money at the expense of having children and vice versa. Whatever she missed in the present life will not elude her in the next one. For example, if she did not go to school, the next life will be an opportunity to have formal education. It is true that traditional praise songs are handed over from generation to generation, but modern praise singers have the poetic license to coin new words and add them to an already existing poetic song. For instance, they can compare the object of praise to a modern technological gadget like the aeroplane or the train. Consequently, the content of praise songs still depicts the history of ethnic groups, but it is becoming more reflective of urbanisation and modernity.

## 5. The implications of the study

Since praise singing in oral literature is one of many ways in which individuals engage in social interaction (Goodman, 2017; Potter, 1996), there are tendencies that it will have psychological implications both for the singer and the hearer. By psychological implication, we refer to how praise singing influences an individual's cognition, emotion and body movement (psychomotor activities).

It is understood that praise singing evokes words that have meaning to the hearer and the singer, which implies that there are levels of communication which can influence the cognition of individuals, especially as the auditory signals reach the brain for interpretation of the words sung. This evokes powerful thoughts in the individual as the information processing areas of the brain are activated (Avery, 2021). As a work of art, a song enhances creativity, especially when the words are carefully selected by the artist.

A study on the *Feedback Loop Model* suggests that environmental influences in the form of praise singing trigger the mental stimulation of the hearer, which may serve as a motivation for greater reflection about life (Walter, 2021; Walter & Altorfer, 2022). This, according to Rodriguez (2019), metamorphoses into the psychological benefit of the appreciation of art and beauty that emanates from listening to the praise. Rodriguez also states that the hippocampus area of the brain charged with the activation of memories is stimulated during praise singing. Brain centre studies show that this therapy has been employed among stroke patients in an attempt to restore their speech ability (Rodriguez, op cit.). In this regard, Wilson (2020) states that researchers found out that singing improves mental health and mood. After some singing workshops held for people with mental health conditions, participants recorded improvements in their mental health and mood.

In the affective domain, praise singing has the capacity to conjure powerful feelings or emotions (Omigie, 2015). The emotive aspect may be more basic than the cognitive aspect because emotions demonstrate the capacity to experience meaning (Johnson, 2007). In praise singing, one expresses delight, feelings of triumph, self-effacement, cries or indignity (Johnson, 2007). Praise song tends to evoke emotions as people participate in listening. Praise singing activates brain regions associated with emotion (Limbic system), and has the capacity to release pleasure hormones such as endorphins and dopamine, which serve as a sort of pain killer as well as a motivator, making praise singing powerful (Menon & Levitin, 2005). It can also have a therapeutic effect, particularly when the song or poem may elicit stories of past events which may have been catastrophic. It provides an avenue for the expression of hitherto suppressed emotions which then creates emotional relief (Smyth, 2002). Thus, it adds to memories, entertains and strengthens people when they are depressed. On this, Wilson (2020) opines that singing is good for the body and mind, and so, can be used as a therapy. When people sing in a group, they feel bonded, and according to Wilson, one of the neurochemicals released when people feel bonded together is oxytocin, the love hormone. As a form of social interaction, Basu (2005) agrees that praise concretises the emotional bond among singers in a group and between singers and their king/master whose praise they sing. Rodriguez (2019) also agrees that praise singing can ameliorate feelings of isolation and loneliness.

According to Smith (2023), from the clinical point of view of neurologists, music and singing have the profound ability of lifting out of depression. Praise singing can excite, tease and even flatter the person being praised. Here, Smith finds a connectedness in the findings of musicological, psychological and neurological studies that singing brings out the emotional aspect of the human nature. As part of traditional literature, songs teach moral lessons and societal values, eliciting a more acceptable behaviour from people.

Independently, the singing voice can be a transmitter of emotion as well as a direct means of communication that is separate from and independent of the words that may accompany it (Rodriguez, 2019). Studies showed that various emotions can be discerned specifically with respect to the singer's intent without the engagement of any accompanying words (Baltes, 2011; Holmes, 2013). It could be seen through tone, gesticulations and facial expression. This may imply that the ability to communicate emotion is a psychological benefit of praise singing that should not be undervalued (Rodriguez, 2019). Avery (2021), showed that individuals who engage in praise singing reported being happier with their overall emotional well-being. This may be through the improvement of mood, increased concentration and counteraction of anxiety and stress, especially when controlled deep breathing is employed. This stemmed from a range

of neurobiological studies that showed that emotional responses to praise singing have a direct effect on hormone levels. therefore, praise singing has the capacity to increase the levels of melatonin (which can help to induce sleep) and likewise decrease levels of cortisol, the hormone associated with stress (Smith, 2023). On the part of the singer who praises the dead, praise singing also becomes therapeutic since it helps the singer express his feelings and emotions regarding the loss. Again, while listening to these praises, members of the family of the deceased are emotionally consoled that their departed loved one lived well and was indeed relevant in life. The praises will at the same time challenge listeners in the audience to live good lives in order to also get good reports at the end of their own lives.

The psychomotor implication is in terms of motor function which, according to Avery (2021), is related to voice production and control, learning and memorising melodies and lyrics. Studies show that there is an increase in muscular activities in the legs and forehead when responding to praise singing especially as the vocals increase in intensity (Harrer & Harrer, 1977; Swallow, 2002). Philips (2021) avers that, sometimes, the motivation evoked from praise singing could be so obvious that they may make the listener more generous with the release of financial resources, at least, for a while. This agrees with Oladunke (2024) who confirms that panegyrics move the person being praised as well as other listeners to part with monetary and material gifts to the singer.

## **6. Research findings**

This study carried out an analysis of praise singing within the context of African oral literature, the Ika and Ukwuani communities of Delta State as case study. Through the application of Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the following are the significant findings of the study:

- a. **Psychological Implications of Praise Singing:** The study pointed out how praise singing has significant psychological effects. It has been noted that praise songs are an effective means of expressing and influencing emotions, while giving the objects of praise a sense of accomplishment, inspiration, and self-value. The therapeutic benefits of these songs were underscored as well, since they provide the objects of praise with stress relief and emotional satiety.
- b. **Linguistic Features in Ika and Ukwuani Praise Songs:** An examination of the linguistic features in Ika and Ukwuani praise songs uncovered a diverse range of stylistic and semantic strategies to improve the aesthetic, artistic and communicative characteristics of the songs. These not only enhanced the oral tradition, but also elucidated the potential to advance the understanding of African linguistics.
- c. **Multifaceted Functions of Praise Songs:** Praise songs were discovered to have a variety of purposes, ranging from positive to negative. Examples of positive effects of praise singing include excitement, reinforcement as well as comic relief for the listeners. The negative purposes of praise singing range from flattery to deception which are instruments of social-economic downturn and bad governance.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the cultural, psychological, and linguistic richness of praise singing as an essential component of African oral literature. This study not only validates the importance of oral traditions, but it also advocates for more scholarly engagement with its discourse aspects in order to improve understanding and preservation of Africa's cultural and literary history.

## **7. Contributions to knowledge**

This study makes significant contributions to the field of African oral literature, linguistics, and discourse analysis in the following ways:

- a. **Improvement in Discourse Analysis and Literary Studies:** The study is an important resource for linguists, particularly those who specialise in Discourse Analysis. It bridges the gap between oral traditions and contemporary linguistic methodology by employing theoretical frameworks such as Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, while demonstrating how these approaches can be applied to the analysis of African oral literature.
- b. **Elucidation of Linguistic Features in African Oral Literature:** By delving into the stylistic and semantic features of Ika and Ukwuani praise songs, the study highlights the distinct linguistic structures and devices found in praise songs. This contribution magnifies the status of oral literature as a repository of linguistic originality, thus providing fresh possibilities for further studies.
- c. **Psychological Dimensions of Oral Literature:** The study emphasises the psychological consequences praise songs/poems, as a means of emotional expression and gratification. It demonstrates the power of praise singing to increase self-esteem, motivate people, and provide emotional support. This understanding broadens the scope of oral literary research to encompass psychological and sociological aspects.
- d. **The Role and Motivations of Modern Praise Singers:** The study equally sheds light on the techniques and motivations of modern of praise singers. It also provides a comprehensive understanding of both the positive and negative impacts of their performances. This role not only expands our understanding of modern versions of praise singing, but also serves as a resource for analysing the changing cultural significance and ethical implications.

In summary, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of African oral literature and emphasises its linguistic, psychological, and cultural relevance. It equally provides a foundation for further research in related fields, and promotes the preservation and scholarly exploration of Africa's rich oral traditions.

## 8. Recommendations and suggestions

This study recommends that praise songs should be documented in audio, video and written forms so that they can be better preserved and passed on from one generation to another, thereby preserving vocabulary, expressions and poetic devices that can easily be lost otherwise. Thus, for praise songs or poems to be durable in a world that has become a global village, there should be other media of transmission apart from the mouth. The ones written as examples in this paper have been presented in such a way that in-coming generations will know them and probably improve upon them. More praise songs and citations should be exposed to youths in Ika and Ukwuani communities in Delta State in particular, and in Nigeria in general for prosperity.

## 9. Conclusion

In this paper, the authors analysed the discourse of some selected praise songs from Ika and Ukwuani communities of Delta State, Nigeria. The study shows that from being historians of ethnic groups, praise singers have gradually transformed into social and political performers, even entrepreneurs in modern times. Consequently, there is a shift in the function of praise singing. Apart from what is sung in the king's palace that eulogises the traditional ruler, teach genealogies, preserves language registers and history, most modern praise songs have become a money-making venture where people engage in praise for financial benefits. This has brought about positive and negative praise singing.

Positive praise singing based on truth with the aim of honest governance which tends to build the nation should be encouraged, while negative praise singing should be discouraged since it is insincere and tends to cover bad leadership that is insensitive to the plight of citizens. Positive praise singing should therefore be bestowed on remarkable achievers alone and not on idlers or non-performers. In addition, people should learn to celebrate the living instead of waiting to celebrate their 'lives' when they die. It is better to mark birthdays and important anniversaries, praise loved ones at such events, making their impact felt and allowing them realise with joy that their work is well appreciated than wait to praise them at their funerals.

It is generally said that a song touches the body and feeds the soul. Since praise singing can excite, tease and flatter the object of praise, it has been shown to be therapeutic, improving mental health and reducing stress. In fact, praise singing nourishes the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of humans.

## ORCID

Carol Chukuyem Ohen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5462-4079>

## References

- Achor, P. (2020). *Many Trumpeters, Same Chorus: A Review of Praise Singing in Nigeria's Political Scene*. Retrieved from [www.spokespersonsdigest.com](http://www.spokespersonsdigest.com)
- Akinwotu, S. (2020). Speech Act Theory. *Theory and Practice of Pragmatics Series, 1*. Pragmatics Association of Nigeria.
- Avery, D. (2021). The power of music: Singing in a choir can boost cognitive function in the elderly because it combines different brain processes, study reveals. *Daily Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authnamef=Dan+Avery+For+Dailymail.com>
- Aworo-Okoroh, J. (2022). Critical Discourse Analysis, *Topics in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*. Pragmatic Association of Nigeria.
- Baltes, F. R., Avram, J., Midea, M., & Mill, A. C. (2011). Emotions induced by operatic music: psychophysiological effects of music, plot and acting: A scientist's tribute to Maria Callas. *Brain and Cognition*, 76(1), 146-157.
- Bessey, B. (2016). *The Importance of Song in Africa Oral Literature*. Retrieved from <https://auccom.wordpress.com>
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis Cambridge: UP*
- Daukan, N. (2022). An Application of Critical Discourse Analysis in Public Speeches. *Topics in Pragmatic and Discourse of Pragmatic Series, 3*, Pragmatics Association of Nigeria, Haykee Press.
- Goodman, S. (2017). How to conduct a psychological discourse analysis. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 9 (2), 142-153.
- Harrer, G., & Harrer, H. (1970). Music, emotion and autonomic function. In M. Critchley & R. Hewson (eds.). *Music and the brain*. Heinemann.
- Holmes, S. O., (2013). The effects of emotion on acoustic characteristics of vocal vibrato in trained singers. (A Masters Thesis, Brigham Young University) *Brigham Young University Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 3616. Retrieved from <https://scholarsarchives.byu.edu/etd/3616>
- Johnson, M. (2007). *The Meaning of the Body: The Aesthetics of Human Understanding* U of Chicago Press.
- Klaudi, K. (2022). *Nigerian Funerals: Customs, Ceremony and what to Expect*. Retrieved from <https://www.JoinCake.Com>blog?Funeral+Etiquette>
- Meyer, M. (2004). *Methods of Critical Discourse*. London: Thousand Oaks.
- Menon, & Levitin, D. (2005). The Rewards of Music Listening: Response and Physiological Connectivity of the Mesolimbic System. *NeuroImage* 28, 175-184.
- Muhammad, S. (2022). Praise Singers as Enemies of Good Governance. *The News Chronicle*. Retrieved from <https://thenewschronicle.com>
- Mullet, D. R. (2018). A General Critical Discourse Analysis. Framework for Educational Research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*. 29.

- Noret, J. (2023). "Burying at all Costs: Investing in Funerals in Southern Benin". *Africa*, 93, 293-209. DOI:10.1017/S000972023000256.
- Obiezu, T. (2019). Local Praise Singers in Nigeria Serve as a Tool for Politicians. *VOA*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com>
- Obodeh, F. E. (2018). *The Language of Religion: A discourse Analysis of Three Typologies in Nigeria*. (Ph.D Thesis), Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.
- Oghiator, F. E. (2007). Semantics and Pragmatics. *Journal of Teacher Perspective*. Association of Nigerian Teachers. *Benue State University, Markurdi*. 1(3).
- Oghiator, F. E. (2022). Discourse Analysis of Some Linguistic Features and Cohesive Devices in Surah 94: A Religious Discourse. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 19(5).
- Okafor, C. A. (2004). Oral Tradition and Civic Education in Africa. *International Education Journal*. 5(3), 410-416.
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African Oral Literature: Background Characters and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Oladunke A. A. (2024). Yoruba Chanters' Performance Strategies, *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JLLLS)*, 4(2), <https://doi.org/10.57040/7jvsz553>
- Omie, D. (2015). Music literature: Are there shared empathy and predictive mechanisms underlying their affective impact? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1250. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01250
- Onu, J. (2018). Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria. *International Digital Organization for Scientific Research (IDOSR) Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 72-88.
- Phillips, E. (2021). Worship and Emotion: Introduction. *Liturgy*, 36 (1), 1-3
- Potter, J. (1996). Discourse analysis and the constructionist approaches. Theoretical background. In J. E. Richardson (ed.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences*. BPS Books.
- Rodriguez, T. (2019, July 12). The Psychological Benefits of Singing. *CS Music*. <https://www.csmusic.net/content/articles/the-psychological-benefits-of-singing-2/>
- Smith, R. (2023). Music, Singing, and Emotions: Exploring the Connections. *Themelios*, 37 (3). <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/music-singing-and-emotions-exploring-the-connections/>
- Smyth, M. (2002). Culture and society: the role of creativity in healing and recovering one's power after victimization. In J. P. Sutton (ed.). *Music, Music Therapy and Trauma: International Perspectives*. Jessica kingsley Publishers.
- Uhunmwangho, A., & Oghiator, F. (2022). The Language of Religion as Discourse: Analysis of the Syntactic Structures in Proverbs Chapter nine. *International Journal of Culture and Religious Studies*. 3(1), 31-47.
- Van Dike, T. (ed.) (1997) *Discourse Studies Vol. 2* London: Sage
- Walter Y. (2021). Towards a qualitative model of religious worship experiences: Perceived encounters with the divine in the ritual context of musical devotion practices. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 5(1), 94-141.
- Walter, Y., & Altorfer, A. (2022). The psychological role of music and attentional control for religious experiences in worship. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 75 (12). <https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218221075330>
- Wilson, D. (2020). 10 Ways That Singing Benefits Your Health. *Healthline*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com>

