African oral genres (tales, proverbs, riddles, and lullabies) as a sociolinguistics topic: some methodological directions

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Abstract

Tales, chantefables (i.e., tales interspersed with songs), lullabies, riddles, and proverbs are pervasive in almost every African culture. Because they are believed to crystallize the life philosophy of their native speakers considered as discrete ethnic communities, they have often been collected and listed in books. Yet, as we currently have them, they are virtually unusable by the modern generations. This paper seeks to develop a methodology that would help achieve the following: (a) explain cultural elements in these African oral genres (i.e., human characters, animal characters, specific plants or fruits) and show how they could be related to modernity, (b) renovate these oral genres by keeping the format but changing the messages so as to adapt them to modern realities, (c) sensitize the societies against the evils that may be perpetuated by our leaders by denouncing them indirectly through the use of the characters found in these traditional oral genres, (d) create new oral genres following the format of these traditional oral genres to educate the youth how to protect themselves against what they perceive as evils connected to their traditional cultures (e.g., witchcraft practices, dealing with the world of spirits still active in their ethnic communities) and introduce new positive values as can be inspired from foreign cultures (that may be of African origin, or western, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) that they may admire, (e) devise ways to use them through media and the gadgets of new technology of information and communication so as to render them appealing to the modern youths. The rationale for developing this innovative methodology for dealing with African oral genres is explained through bits of life events as lived in Cameroon and the DRC. Instances of tasks that could be developed from such a methodology to serve in literacy for the communities are proposed in the paper as well.

Introduction

One of the features that probably characterize African cultural lore is the richness of oral genres variously known as oral literature or orature. In an attempt to preserve this oral literature, several individual authors have collected tales, proverbs, riddles and published them in books. Yet, despite the existence of these books on oral literature, the young generation in Africa that has grown under the western school system somehow feels estranged with respect to this oral literature. One thing is sure: we certainly admire those of us who master these oral genres. Better still, it is when we go to our native villages that we appreciate their handling in various social contexts of use. Because their performance is part of the way native speakers use their language, it can be legitimately discussed as a sociolinguistics topic. I wish to point out that works on oral literature within sociolinguistics are rather rare and I suspect, one reason may be that we still lack the appropriate methodology to deal with them. This is precisely what I would like to propose in this paper. However, before proposing such a methodology, I wish to elaborate on the rationale that may push sociolinguistics researchers to get interested in oral genres and why they would treat it as a sociolinguistics topic. This paper will therefore consist of three parts. Part 1 deals with the rationale to treat oral genres as a sociolinguistics topic. In this part, I lay out a number of sub-topics African oral genres are supposed to cover and which kind of population

they address. I illustrate these sub-topics with allusions found in oral genres as reflected in real life events drawn from Cameroon and my own native ethnic community of the Nande in the DRC. Part 2 is a proposal of a methodology to deal with oral genres as a sociolinguistics topic likely to reflect the life events of African societies, including the need for their renovation to be able to deal with the present problems African communities face. Part 3 is an outline of a research proposal on "chantefables, riddles and lullabies in the Nande area" as an example of work in which the methodology proposed for dealing with oral genres as a sociolinguistic topic could help solve a cultural problem an ethnic community may actually face. It also delineates the kinds of work that could be developed from the study of oral genres in the school system so as to be truly useful to an ethnic community in the domain of literacy and cultural revitalization.

I.   Why treat African oral genres as a sociolinguistics topic

Because this paper will not be necessarily read by people of African origin only, I wish to first make explicit what, as Africans living in the modern world influenced by the western civilization, each one of us, I believe, knows that part of one's inner being is related to one's ethnic community culture. My use of the terms "ethnic community culture" specifically refers to our cultural traditions that include oral genres like chantefables (i.e., tales interspersed with songs), lullabies, riddles, and proverbs. In the minds of most Africans living in urban milieus, these traditional cultures are mostly found in villages where homogeneous communities of a specific culture can be found. When I decided to work on this topic on oral genres, my intention was really to resuscitate the love I had for chantefables when I was still a child. I remember that they were so captivating as we would listen to tales, in the early hours of the night, say between 8pm and 10 pm, around the fire, and the tale teller would intersperse songs in her tale. For regular tales without any song component, we would still be mesmerized by the various characters, animals, monsters, spirits, in brief, by a fairy world that would frighten us. At the end of the tale, we would all wait to hear the moral lesson the tale teller would deliver as a conclusion to her tale. At other times, as young children, we would sit in two groups in the evening and start "launching" riddles. We would usually start them with these ones:

A group:	B group
Kati tsị́bị	Erị̩tondị́ ry' omo buhyâ
It-says tsíbi	drop-of-water of in pit
	the drop of water as it falls in the pit
Kati gɔbɔgɔbɔ	ɔlúsúlê
It says gobogobo	A type of creeper (a plant species)

Then, one person from group A would give a more difficult one. For example:

Ngwítɛ́ ɛ́mbɛnɛ yagɛ́, ɔ́buli mụgendị́ akálị̩sayàyɔ̂

I have a goat, each passerby feeds it (by moving it)

If Group B does not find the answer, Group A gives it. In this case, it is the leaves along a path. All passers-by touch them and they move. Now comes the turn of Group B to "launch" its riddles and Group B answers until it is also blocked on a given answer. This is an exercise that may continue for an hour or more until people are tired and they want to go back home to sleep.

As for lullabies, I know only one but I imagine there must be more. Even if they are scarce in my ethnic community, I am pretty sure that other communities could have more. I was particularly envious of an African couple I met in a hospital in Bukavu who could sing beautiful lullabies to their child in French. I realized that lullabies are a precious feature in each community in that they tell us how caregivers would deal with small children when they cry or when they need to sleep.

As I talked to my sociolinguistics students at the University of Yaounde 1, I realized that they harbor the same feelings of happiness as they think about such performances when they participate to them in their villages. Such scenes are virtually nonexistent in urban milieus partly because their inhabitants very often belong to various ethnic communities and would not perform them as a way of perpetuating their own ethnic cultures, and also because western civilization has brought new kinds of entertainment such as movies, soap operas that they view on TV or music that they listen to through their ICT (Information and Communication Technology) gadgets such as smartphones and ipods.

As we think about tale-telling, riddle performance, or even the use of proverbs that are usually interspersed in the speech of wise elderly people of our ethnic communities, the questions that come into our minds are: why are we still captivated by these oral genres? What led our ancestors to conceive such tales, riddles, and proverbs? For the youths living outside their ethnic communities, is there a way that they could still benefit from the knowledge from these oral genres as a way to affirm their belonging to the culture of their ethnic communities? Why do animal characters, monsters, spirits regularly feature in the tales?

One thing that we have to bear in mind is that our world is not necessarily drastically different from the world of our ancestors. They had the same mountains, the same rivers, the same plants, the same animals. To express their feelings, their joy, pain, or fears, they did it through our native languages. The tales, proverbs, riddles, lullabies we encounter in our villages are a reflection of their interpretation of life events. Of course, there are elements in our modern life that are different, notably because of the contact with foreign civilizations and imported religions such as Christianity and Islam. When we say that we belong to a given ethnic community, we mean that we share a number of cultural features with other members of that community. As the traditional lore of our ethnic communities still appeals to us, it behooves upon us to attempt to know better our background through scrutinizing what the hidden messages behind the oral genres may be.

As I talked to my sociolinguistics students, I realized that there is a whole hidden world that is part of us and that may explain some of our behaviors towards people we encounter. My students specifically insisted that the world is not only inhabited by human beings as we know them. There are other spiritual beings that live in this world, mostly in waters, trees, specific places in the forest, etc. The elders of our ethnic communities, particularly the initiated ones, are aware of the presence of those beings and that is why there are certain prohibitions that are to be respected in order to preserve harmony with the spiritual world. Because the initiates are sworn to secrecy to never reveal the knowledge they were taught during their initiation into their secret societies, the knowledge they are allowed to impart to the non initiated members of the communities, mostly women and children, is imparted through such oral genres as tales, proverbs, and riddles. As two of my students, (from Chad and the Central African Republic) who happen to have been initiated during their adolescence specifically told me, the initiated people have a different interpretation of the common tales because they contain truthful elements they abide by and that they are not allowed to reveal to the uninitiated members of their communities.

Since this paper is meant to target sociolinguistics researchers likely to get interested in the African oral genres and that they need to first be convinced of the necessity of viewing the oral genres through a new perspective, not the perspective that has been mediated by our western colleagues who, as they discovered the richness of the use of proverbs, riddles, tales in African daily interactions, simply identified them as "oral literature," I will sketch out a more complete picture of what these oral genres mean to the African native communities on the basis of events they presently experience in real life and which might have led our African ancestors to devise these oral African genres to educate their people and ensure the intergenerational transmission of this knowledge.

To set the scene for the proposals I wish to make in this paper, let me start with an excerpt from my jury report of the comments Professor Charles Binam Bikoi of the University of Yaounde 1 gave to my student while defending his PhD thesis on " Tales among the Kotoko of Makari" in our department of African languages and linguistics. Because I consider these excerpts crucial for the proposals I will make in this paper, I maintain the French rendition and give its translation in English. He said:

> Quand bien même votre travail est une contribution sur la civilisation Kotoko, on aura besoin de découvrir le trésor caché. Car, en effet, le conte n'est pas fait pour lui-même. Derrière les mots, derrière les formes, les personnages, les références, il y a un placement sociologique, une simulation ou une dissimulation. C'est un espace de mise en scène où le non-dit n'est pas toujours présent. Ceci est valable dans toutes les cultures du monde. Pour vous, c'est quoi la littérature orale ? Croyez-vous à la littérature orale au-delà de ce que vous avez lu dans les travaux des spécialistes de cette littérature comme Calame-Griaule, Roulon-Doko ?

> [Even though your work is a valid contribution on the knowledge of the Kotoko culture, there is a need to discover the hidden treasure. A tale is not woven for its own sake. Behind the words, the forms, the characters and the references, there is this sociological contextualization, a simulation or a dissimulation. It is a dramatic space where the words that are not specifically uttered are always present. This is true for every culture around the world. For you, what is oral literature? Do you believe in that oral literature

beyond what you have read in the works of the so-called specialists of this literature like Calame-Griaule, Roulon-Douko?]

Le professeur Charles Binam Bikoi a ensuite insisté qu'il nous faut sortir du piège épistémologique. Tant que nous interprétons cette littérature orale comme une orature, ou une oraliture en restant figés à ce que les chercheurs dont vous faites allusion ont affirmé, nous n'aurons pas évolué. Peut-on continuer d'utiliser le terme « littérature orale » ? Elle ne saurait s'enfermer dans l'oralité. Il y a aussi la vitalité, l'être en situation des locuteurs, du récepteur, de l'interaction entre les conteurs et les participants. Le texte ainsi conté est finalement un tissu organisé.

[Professor Charles Binam Bikoi has then insisted on the necessity of escaping the epistemological trap. As long as we interpret this oral literature as an orature or an oraliture by remaining crystallized to what the researchers you refer to in your work have declared, we will not have evolved. Should we continue to use the term "oral literature?" It cannot be limited to orality. There is also the vitality, the characters in their contextual situation as speakers, addressees, the interaction among the tale tellers and the participants. The text that is thus orally told is ultimately an organized network.]

Concernant la relation entre oralité et textualité, il faudra réconcilier les écoles. On n'est pas scientifique en se référant à une école donnée mais on l'est aussi par rapport au dévoilement de ce que l'on sait.

[Regarding the relationship between orality and textuality, there is a need to reconcile the schools of thought. To be scientific does not mean that you have to abide by a given school of thought. You are also scientific when you succeed to systematically unveil your knowledge of a given phenomenon.]

Why are these excerpts important? Note that most knowledge we acquire in schools is usually mediated through a western perspective. When the western researchers discovered our oral genres, that is, tales, proverbs, riddles, lullabies, legends, and epics, they called them " oral literature" as they found that they were the equivalent of their literature transmitted in the form of novels, poetry, and drama. From an African perspective, we cannot continue to consider these oral genres as merely oral literature. Like Prof. Binam Bikoi said, there is more to it, notably what he calls " simulations," that is, what the characters try to imitate in all walks of life in their society, and the "dissimulations," that is, what they hide and yet want to convey indirectly presumably because, in order to keep harmony in the society among its different members, there are certain ideas that are not to be expressed explicitly. When one considers the context of use of oral literature, one realizes that the way they have been recorded in books cannot be the end of the story. Tales may not be a mere fantasy world that the tale teller weaves to amuse children. When an elderly person uses a proverb, there must be a reason why he does so. There must be reasons why one would not expect a proverb from young people when addressing the elderly. Tales, proverbs, riddles, and other elements of oral genres contain and hide realities that the community members experience in their daily interactions. Because of this, they are a full-fledged issue of sociolinguistics research in that they fit the domain of ethnography understood as "a description of peoples or cultures" (Denscombe 2007:61) and ethnomethodology in that ethnomethodologists "focus on phenomena of everyday existence, actually on various bits and pieces of it, in an attempt to show how those who must deal with such bits and pieces go about doing so" (Wardhaugh 1992 :250).

Before making some methodological proposals on the way researchers in sociolinguistics could explore topics related to oral genres, let me illustrate with some life events I have mostly learned here in Cameroon and that could be made part of the "simulations" and "dissimulations" that the treatment of oral genres as a sociolinguistics investigation domain could help accomplish.

a. Explanatory component of the cultural elements found in oral genres.

As is often the case, participants in an oral genre (tale, proverb, riddle, chantefable) are not only human beings. Animals and deities (i.e., spirits) and sometimes trees feature among the active participants in a tale. If we want oral genres to be a window to the hidden world in which a society lives, it might be worthwhile to enquire whether animals, trees, and spirits are ever active in real life in that society. From the stories I have learned here in Cameroon, I now know that, in the Yambassa community, animals and even the bark of a tree can communicate with a human being as reported in the article entitled " How animals and things can speak and communicate in the Yambassa culture" by Manbossia Eric Paulin (Mutaka 2011: 280-282.) Excerpts from this article will best illustrate this communication.

> The Otongtong (i.e, villager holders) are used to communicating with animals and trees. They have those animals in the chief's compound. They are a cat, a dog, a hen, and a duck; all of them are very old and each of them has a specific role. The old dog must give a report of the witchcraft activities every morning. If there is a bad spirit that has flown over the village in the night, he tells it to a village holder in the morning. So does the cat which also gives information about thieves. If a man has gone to another man's plantation to steal his plantains or his cocoa or if a woman has gone to another woman's farm to dig up his cocoyam, the cat will give a report in the morning about it. [....] But when there is a serious problem in the village that needs the help or the advice of ancestors in addition to going to their tombs to communicate with them, the oldest patriarch of the chiefdom goes to the bush. There is a place there where there is a sacred tree called " nwang." That tree is an intermediary between the people and their ancestors. […] They (i.e., wizards or village destroyers) communicate with dangerous animals such as snakes and ravens. When one of them wants to kill somebody, he consults his wicked snake or sends it to kill the victim. If you go to his house late in the night, you can meet him conversing lively with his snake. His raven goes or flies from farm to farm in the village to locate where there are good crops. Then it comes and tells the "boss" who can then send his wicked rat to go and steal or he does it himself.

I have also heard several stories from my Bamileke students that some powerful members of their communities, mostly the notables, usually have animal proxies called "totem" to protect them. About the spirits, the two students from Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) adamantly tried to convince me that the world of spirits is real. One of them has actually even seen them twice. As he explained, spirits are actually demons God created as former angels and that were chased away from heaven with their leader Lucifer to live among human beings on earth. They sometimes take human bodies. This was the case of a white man who manifested himself in a "marigot" (marsh) because the student and his companions had trespassed in his territory. He also told the class of a chicken that was mysterious. Although it was once locked inside a house, it was seen regularly in the field along a woman peasant who was weeding the plants in her garden. When they decided to chase and kill it with spears, it mystically

disappeared. He has also told of a taxi driver with feet in the forms of tree sticks. His colleague from the CAR made me listen to a testimony given by a Christian convert who explicitly declared that, in the mystical world, he could change into 14 different people. He recounted that he was a "Brigadier généreux" of the 4th rank and that he could induce people to make accidents within a distance of 500m over the earth surface. He recounted how he was further trained in South Africa and that he was sent to Duala to kill a woman intercessor who, for six months, had prevented the demons from causing accidents in the city of Duala because of her prayers. Because the student from Chad knew about him, he confirmed that he revealed that he was the cause of a car accident that killed 300 people in Djamena in order to be upgraded in his satanic society. The way he was initiated, he was invited to a room that only his initiator could enter. He was seated in a chair and, for three weeks, he simply disappeared. When he came back, people thought he was a phantom. But he convinced them that he was not a phantom as he came with a suitcase full of money and shared some with them to distract them from harboring bad feelings about him. As I listened to all such details, I could not keep from thinking of the mysterious trips participants in African tales usually do in the spiritual world.

Thus, when spirits or animals appear in an African oral genre, this could be a clue for the researcher to investigate whether some of the members of that community actually deal with such characters in real life. As one of my students told me, a child will never discover if his father who may belong to a secret society is capable of performing mystical acts such as planting a banana tree that will grow and ripen within 30 minutes as part of the mystical dance of Koogang, a Bamileke mystical dance non initiated people are forbidden to watch. Even when the dancers dance in public, they wear masks from head to feet. A child may know that his father belonged to that secret society when he dies because, it is then that the Koogang dancers will come and retrieve his body from his house.

b. Need to renovate oral genres by keeping their format and by changing the contents so as to make them fit modern realities

One implicit aim in performing riddles or using proverbs and telling tales is for the hearer, mostly children, to be able to recount them as well. It would be a lure to believe that the oral tales in a given society remain unchanged. Because society changes, it is normal that elements of change must be introduced in such oral literature genres. If it is true that children learn through hearing tales of horror to inculcate into their minds the need to never misbehave, they could also be encouraged to recount such horror tales by twisting them slightly and they would thus integrate in their new versions of the tales the illusions to the modern ills that are pervasive in their society.

I also imagine that if chantefables, that is, tales with songs, that usually draw the children's attention are used, they could be inserted in a made up tale as a leitmotiv to depict the predicament that a given community undergoes. This would be a way to encourage various members of the society engaged in telling tales to think about the ills of the society and propose

solutions. Similarly, proverbs could be found and made to illustrate the situation so as to encourage the youths to better behave by respecting the norms of their society.

Speaking about sensitization about the evils in the society, it is well known that, in most African cultures, it is virtually forbidden to criticize the authorities. My students have for example told me that, there are times the chief of the Mundang community in Chad may decide to defraud people of their cattle because he may want to give them to a political authority of his choice. He decides for example that he needs 200 cows, 200 goats, and 100 sheep. His police force will simply go and catch those cattle without asking any permission from their owners. If you complain, you will simply be banished from the Mundang kingdom. Another decision he took in his local village in Chad is that he is the only one to have a house built in hard materials. Even if you are rich, you are not allowed to build a modern house. Another type of evil that is usually enforced by the gatekeepers of our African cultures concerns widowhood. In many parts of rural Cameroon, when the husband dies, the woman is subjected to a number of atrocities some of which are clearly against her human rights. She may be forced for example, among other things, to marry the brother of her deceased husband, give up her property even if she purchased it with him (see this report and other extensive descriptions of evils against women in the name of tradition in Mutaka and Bolima 2011: 99-119).

Because characters in tales, riddles, and proverbs are not necessarily human, people could be encouraged to devise tales in which they denounce these atrocities. Following a comment that Charles Binam Bikoi, the Executive Secretary of CERDOTOLA, once told us in the defense jury of Adam Mahamat's PhD thesis at the University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon, the use of animals and their behavior in the tales is probably a way for people to express dissenting ideas on what happens in their society. As they cannot tell their chiefs that things go wrong, they express this feeling through such tales. Although the gatekeepers may not immediately take new decisions to reform the rules that oppress their people, as they hear the complaints mediated through the tales, some of them will be led to make the appropriate reforms as they also need to protect themselves from a more powerful authority, the one of the central government which will have probably signed such documents like the universal declaration of human rights, the African charter for human and people's rights, the convention against torture and other cruel inhuman degrading treatments, the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women as mentioned in Mutaka and Bolima (2011:116-117).

Assuming that the recounting of these tales, proverbs, and riddles will be addressed to people belonging to different African communities, this should be an opportunity for their devisers to introduce what they consider as positive elements from other cultures in a bid to educate their own people, and other people as well. It is for example observed in many African communities, once a person has been elected chief, he wants to cling to power. It is as if power is personalized into a single individual. From my own point of view, this does not only concern African heads of states. It also concerns local authorities at various levels, be they heads of political parties. Yet,

when one observes elected authorities in such countries as Japan, China, the US, or France, when their time is over, they simply leave. Better still, if an authority feels he is no longer the best person to exercise his power, as was the case of Pope Benedict XVI, he takes the decision of getting someone more competent to replace him. I imagine that, through the tales, proverbs and riddles that our young people could be encouraged to devise, they could try to attribute what they consider as positive values in the heroes in their tales as a way to educate their people to progressively acquire those values.

A personal wish I believe the devising of innovative oral genres could help accomplish is to tell people how to protect themselves from witchcraft and spiritual attacks. As I write these sentences, I am not sure my non African readers will understand why I even include this in this present paper. Very often, my students accuse me of behaving as a non African because I am not a firm believer in the world of spirits, let alone, the Satanic feats as either recounted in the Bible or told as testimonies. I recognize that, as an African, I cannot deny that these mystical feats exist, for example, people changing themselves into animals. However, in my experience, I have never known such cases. Also, as I usually tell my students, I come from an area in the DRC where we had a native Catholic bishop who firmly encouraged people to renounce the so-called satanic practices. I have thus lived in a world where I do not personally know these satanic practices. But I know that they still exist in my area. I have heard of people whose genital organs have been removed and hanged on a tree because they did not pay a woman they had sex with. I have also heard of the sister of a friend of mine who was attacked by spirits and was found on the top of a tree with wounds. Here in Cameroon, I hear more horrible stories and most of my students tell me that they are afraid to go to their villages because of witchcraft. If they go there, they usually take a fruit called "jujube" that allegedly protects them against the attacks of wizards and witches. The terms they use: "on doit se blinder," that is, one must have a protective shield around his body. I have also learned that there is a fruit called "agawake" that tends to nullify the power of the witches, and also that, when you tickle a witch with taro leaves, she reveals her witchcraft practices. In their attempt to convince me that witchcraft practices really exist or that the world of spirits is real, they told me of an event that took place in Duala in 2008. More than 20 people who went to the seaside were swept into the sea during a tide. Yet, it was not a strong tide because the water barely reached their knees. All the people died. To get their corpses, the traditional authorities had to plead with the inhabitants of the water to bring them the corpses since they knew how to communicate with them. As a result of their negotiation, the more than 20 corpses were found at the foot of the bridge between the City of Duala and Bonaberi. My students have also told me of testimonies by children who declare that they are witches and that, in their supernatural life, they travel in sardines boxes that they use as airplanes. There are people who also report that they have heard the noise emitted in some places, usually at night, and near bridges or roundabouts. Muslim students seem to also have a firm belief in the existence of genies that they depict as spiritual beings living among us and who can provoke havoc if they are angered. They usually speak of the use of a " talisman" that is an

object that has supernatural powers and by means of which the forces of the genies may be nullified.

Notice that similar characters with supernatural powers are often depicted mostly in tales. This is a motivation, in my view, to probe their existence and impact on the ethnic community members whose tales may contain them. Even for those communities who are believed not to have active monsters and spirits, their being mentioned in the oral genres may serve as an indication that they once existed in that community. This in turn would indicate that such communities are not that different from those where monsters and animal characters still materialize in real life in the forms of totems as is the case in certain communities here in Cameroon. Because of all such stories that are part o the daily life of many Africans and that our non-African partners are probably unaware of, my wish is that the researchers in sociolinguistics who are willing to make oral genres the topic of their investigation find out from the ethnic communities in which they conduct their research what elements can protect people against witchcraft effects. My hope is that they will introduce those protective elements in their tales, proverbs, and riddles in a bid to educate their people. I also hear that certain ethnic communities are protected by deities such as Mwankum for the Bakossi and Mbo of Cameroon. I imagine children would then learn about such mystical protecting deities through oral genres as they could feature as characters in the tales for example.

II.   A methodological proposal to deal with oral genres as a sociolinguistics topic

So far, oral genres have generally been considered as belonging to a culture of the past and that the same stories in these genres are recounted to the young people as a way to simply perpetuate them. Although they feature widely in African oral narratives, they have not drawn extensive research presumably because they do not constitute a canon developed by western researchers from whom we have inherited the school system. The few works on oral genres have sought to basically explain them by categorizing them in various semantic domains which do not have a direct link with present day life events (see for example Bauman 2006). Yet, in the light of the real life stories presented in the first section, we know that they have always been closely associated with the life of the different ethnic communities but their message has always been a "simulation and/or a dissimulation" of life events that are not always accessible to the common people in the society. One way to explore their ramifications in the life of the present day ethnic communities is to adopt a new perspective on their interpretation. Because they are part of our African traditions, we need to devise a methodology that lets our young generation embrace them, revitalize them, renovate them in a bid to render them useful in the modern world in which they live.

Presumably, the different elements of the acronym SPEAKING in the ethnography of communication of Hymes (1974) can serve as the best guidelines for research on oral genres. Because of the aim for using the oral genres to educate the youth and also to learn more about

our own cultures, I will specify in my comments on this acronym where the emphasis can be laid.

Setting and Scene: Specify the setting and scene as found in the tale. This will probably refer to areas that are known. However, some of the scenes may be supernatural. This should already serve as a cue to find out whether the ethnic community has secret societies, or a group of elders who know how to deal with the spiritual world.

Participants: Make an inventory of the participants. These may be humans, spirits, animals, or even plants with the human ability to communicate. If there are animal characters, find out whether the community has totems, that is, animals that are proxies for certain members of the society whose role is to mystically protect them. You may discover, as my students have told me that, when a person with a totem leaves his seat, it may be forbidden to sit on it because it is mystically guarded by an invisible being. If you sit on it, you may experience body itching and ultimately become sick.

Ends: A tale usually ends with a purpose, namely why a given behavior has been adopted or a taboo is enforced. However, during the analysis of a given tale, the researcher should go beyond the purpose that has been given by examining the hidden purpose of a tale. The characters in the tale may in fact refer to actual human beings of the society, and the tale is recounted in order to denounce for example their behavior or as a warning to people who may trespass certain prohibitions imposed by the elders in that society. I have been told, for example that, in certain ethnic communities here in Cameroon, if you go to the field during the period of mourning, you may encounter ferocious animals or some strange beings because it is usually forbidden to go to a field at such a period of time.

Key: Since this concerns the tone, manner, or spirit related to the interaction, it might be interesting to know who tells the story and to whom. If it is an elder telling a story to children, there might be a hidden message. However, if the tales or the riddles are merely a game among young people, there might not be any message that is hidden behind such a game. When examining the key for telling a narrative, it would be also worthwhile to find out whether the community holds in high esteem good speakers. Or is it the case that people who speak too much are not trusted? Could there be a difference between the characteristic of being talkative for a man that would be different for a woman? Does the society expect women to speak more than men? Which could be the keys related to a tale that would be admired in the community? Are there any cues that would tell the listeners whether a given oral genre is a myth, a legend, a simple tale, an epic if these exist in the community? Does a specific oral genre use ideophones to achieve certain emotional effects during tale-telling as proposed for example in Mphande (1992)?

Instrumentalities: that is, the oral channel and mostly the actual forms of speech employed. Do some characters speak in a special dialect? Do the words used in the riddles or in the proverbs

belong to special registers? The researcher should make sure to note whether a given tale contains songs. What could be the purpose of such songs? Is it merely to render the tale more attractive or does the song contain a hidden message that needs to be heeded?

Norms of interaction and interpretation: It would be interesting here to note how the elders interact with the children while telling the story. How is knowledge acquired? Is it the case that the elder tries to emphasize the learning of a whole group rather than certain individuals in the group? Presumably, the norms of interpretation of a tale will be different from those of proverbs. Is the hidden message ever hinted at directly or is it always conveyed indirectly? Why this indirectness in the way messages are conveyed? Does this indirectness apply also to women and children? If the community has secret societies, how are the messages interpreted by its members? Are there any specific criteria people have to fulfill to qualify as members of the community likely to listen to the tales or perform riddles?

Genres: Since tales, proverbs, riddles, lullabies are easily recognizable by their users, it might be interesting for the researcher to define the frame of each individual genre. He should also try to determine whether there are subtypes for a given genre as is the case for tales. As an example from Mahamat's thesis on the tales of the Kotoko of Makari, he identifies the following: the fairy tales, the animal tales, and the humoristic tales. Better still, the researcher should work out the categorization of these genres from the names used by the native speakers as these would reflect more faithfully what they really mean by these genres (Wierzbicka 1985)

If an inventory of tales, proverbs, and riddles already exists, the researchers should sort them out to see which ones pertain to a given issue they want to investigate. Even if new messages related to current problems in the society are made to fit in these oral genres, it is important that the traditional frame of a given genre be maintained so as to make it recognizable as being closely related to the genres of the past as transmitted from generation to generation. A recent adapted tale would still be recognized through its chronotope as used by Bakhtin (1986:42), that is, the configuration and interrelationships of time space that distinguishes and that may ultimately define genres. As Bauman (2006)further suggests, genres, then, by means of their chronotopic orientations, become mechanisms for perceiving, conceiving, communicating about, and interpreting particular aspects of the world. In the following section, I propose more guidelines for treating oral genres on a topic that researchers may investigate when they concentrate on a problem that a particular ethnic community faces.

III. Oral genres as an innovative culture revitalization tool among the Nande of the DRC

Because this section is mostly addressed to young researchers willing to work on oral genres as a sociolinguistics topic, I delineate a number of guidelines that could help them produce work that I hope would be useful to their communities. Let me reiterate the words in Charles Binam Bikoi's remarks I mentioned earlier as they should motivate subsequent work on oral tales as different from what has been done so far:

There is a need to discover the hidden treasure in the oral genres. A tale is not woven for its own sake. Behind the words, the forms, the characters and the references, there is this sociological contextualization, a simulation or a dissimulation. It is a dramatic space where the words that are not specifically uttered are always present […]There is also the vitality, the characters in their contextual situation as speakers, addressees, the interaction among the tale tellers and the participants. The text that is thus orally told is ultimately an organized network.

If you truly ponder the quintessence of these remarks, you will realize that the recounting of tales, the performance of riddles, the singing of lullabies, and the use of proverbs in their context of use is something worth the attention of ethnomethodologists in their quest to understand why people act as they do. When a researcher decides to investigate the oral genres in a given language, presumably he tries to understand why the community uses these oral genres. That is why, this will be made clear in the introduction of his work, and he will presumably tell the readers what his research purports to achieve. In the following, I use a proposal I once wrote for my ethnic community. I reproduce it here as I hope it will clarify my idea of using oral genres to solve an actual community problem and how they could be innovated so as to be used as teaching material in our school system and also serve in literacy endeavors.

a. As ideas one would specify in the introduction, one should give an overview of the research, that is the summary and the specific goals of the research project. I wrote the following for the project of collecting chantefables, lullabies and riddles among the Nande of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This project seeks to (1) use them in order to rebuild and reinforce cultural values of peace among the youth who has been widely disoriented by the ill consequences of a war, such as subverting the moral values, that is, by compensating rebels who took arms and who are the present authorities of the country, (2) record traditional songs found in tales (i.e., Chantefables) and lullabies which constitute a highly endangered feature of the Kinande traditional lore, (3) show how they can be used as literacy materials for various categories of the Nande population (parents, diaspora Nande children, Nande living in urban milieus and in need to remain connected to their traditional culture), (4) develop a methodology and the implementation of a study on oral literature containing songs that is suitable for being archived on a website (such as ALORA of CERDOTOLA) so as to allow wider access to the material by the local communities.

As also part of the introduction, the researcher should say why he chose the specific topic for his investigation. In the case of this project and what problems it is expected to solve, I wrote the following:

Background on the Nande social context to justify this topic
As an aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the power conquest of the rebels to oust President Mobutu in the DRC, a number of militias were formed in eastern DRC. In the Nande area these local militias were called "Mai-Mai." Their official aim was to defend their country against invaders that came from East (Rwandans, and mostly the

Katangese rebels who perpetuated atrocities among the Nande), the MLC rebels led by Bemba and whose motto was " effacer le tableau," to mean, exterminate all the forces that would attempt to oppose them in their conquest of the Nande area. Before that war, the Nande were known as a peaceful people. Owning an arm was virtually a crime unless one was a soldier or belonged to the police force. What is also significant is that, not many Nande were in the army, which means that people in the national army who were supposed to defend the national territory were not from the Nande area. They simply did not defend the area because, in their Congolese mentality, they presumably thought: why die for other people when they cannot defend themselves? What is really strange, and I would like to emphatically stress this, parents, school and religious authorities were totally at a loss when they saw some of their youth join the Mai-Mai rebels in the bush. Curiously enough, some intellectuals also did this. I personally know a schoolmate in the university who had been the head of the English department at ISP Gombe who also joined these Mai-Mai rebels. Although religious authorities continued to advise parents not to let their children join the Mai-Mai and preserve the traditional values of peace among the neighbours, what finally happened, with the victory of Laurent Desire Kabila who thus ousted Mobutu and his subsequent replacement by Joseph Kabila as the new president after the assassination of his father, the regime was organized in such a way that it is the former rebels of various denominations who shared power in the DRC. Joseph Kabila was designated President and there were four deputy presidents from other rebel groups. As a matter of fact, my former school mate who was head of the English department at ISP Gombe thus became a minister. The moral lesson that the youth derived from this political turmoil was that, to succeed in life, you simply have to take arms and be ready to live by extorting the population from their goods for your own survival. A second important lesson for the youth was the absolute necessity of knowing how to speak one's native language and be accepted by one's ethnic community as its loyal member. The origin for this was that, during the rebellion, many people got killed when they could not speak Kinande properly as this was a way for the rebels to test people's cultural identity and get rid of the possible spies who were not Nande. This is why, nowadays, Nande people who live in large cities in the DRC or abroad have become highly motivated to learn Kinande and feel integrated in a Nande cultural community.

Why is this related to the topic? Now that peace is progressively coming back in the country, it is crucial to inculcate in the children, mostly, the very young people the values of peace. Traditionally, as in most African countries, what is known as oral literature, i.e., tales, legends, myths, riddles, contributed to explain what led the local people to adopt their specific lifestyle. One type of tales that mostly captivated children's attention is the one that contained songs. I call them chantefables for lack of a proper word in either French or English. Characters in those songs did not have to be necessarily animals as in the French chantefables. Although tales have been collected, so far, it was difficult to

properly record such songs in a way they could be preserved. Today, the new technology of information and communication enables us to make such recording of this feature of our traditional culture. Because tale telling is no longer a feature of modern life, songs contained in tales face extinction. That is why they need to be recorded for their preservation as an intangible cultural heritage for the Nande and the scientific community. This project will thus help us achieve two goals. First, we will be able to record tales with traditional songs and preserve them. Secondly, through tales with songs, we will be able to encourage the production of material, i.e., tales that teach children the proper Nande values related to peace maintenance. The songs in the chantefables could easily be used to intersperse the innovative tales people could be adapting from earlier tales to teach these values of peace. The use of such chantefables in literacy materials will be an excellent way to start healing, from infancy, the social tissue of the Nande that has been severely disrupted by war. Children will again grow, with the proper peace values they are supposed to mostly learn from their parents and their siblings. As will be argued later, we will avail ourselves of the use of ICT facilities to disseminate this literacy material, as it will be digitalized.

b. Lack of a proper methodology to deal with tales to ensure their archiving and use
One problem that has always beset both students and teachers of sociolinguistics courses is how to deal with tales, proverbs, and riddles from an academic point of view. Many communities already have a collection of tales, and sometimes riddles, and proverbs. But we all know that their being consigned in a book does not enable people to properly use them. The problem is that we lack a methodology to propose to students how they could write a thesis dealing with this important feature of African traditional lore. Most importantly, since we know that tales, proverbs, and riddles make sense to their users only when they are used in their proper context and by the right participants in an interaction, how could the existing material be exploited so that it can really become useful to the local communities to cultivate the positive values of peace mediated through this traditional cultural lore?
As one of the sociolinguistics teachers highly concerned with this issue, I wish to delineate, through this project, what I believe to be the proper methodology for dealing with cultural material on chantefables, riddles, and lullabies, and produce three types of work as components of the project: (a) a paper that shows how the material can be exploited for academic purposes, (b) the format of the material to be archived and ultimately posted on a website to enable the local communities to access it, (c) types of innovative work that could be elaborated from such material as literacy tools that would enable the youth to use it to promote messages of peace as well as cultural positive values that fit their life in modernity.

Let me elaborate further on these three components as they are meant to serve as guidelines for our sociolinguistics students intending to work on tales, and possibly proverbs.

Concerning the research venues a paper on tales and possibly proverbs should address,

- Make an inventory of the participants in the tale (chantefable), specify their contributions in the development of the paper.
- Make also an inventory of the main events in the tale, including the use of possible items such as specific plants, fruits, seeds, minerals that participants might use to communicate with the fairy world of the tales.
- During the analysis, see how the role of the participants can be related to the functioning of the society. This would be in response to the idea that, often times, participants in a tale often address the real problems a given society faces and which are considered taboo in real life. One case in point is criticizing leaders. In many African societies, leaders are not criticized openly. Yet, a way to address criticisms can be done through tales as this is an indirect way of telling people what misfortunes a society is likely to undergo if its leaders take wrong decisions.
- The researcher should try to obtain further information from the community members to know why certain items are used. The idea behind this is that, often times, crucial decisions are taken by members of secret societies and their hallmark is never to reveal their dealings in those secret societies. Yet, through an indirect way, it could be possible to discover why certain decisions have been taken through tales. To illustrate this, we know that, in real life, human beings cannot talk to trees or to animals. Yet, it seems that certain members of the society who have established a pact with the powers of the invisible world are able to do so. Although this might not be evident in the ethnic community of one's investigation, as seems to be the case in the Nande community to which the present author belongs, I wish to reveal in this paper that several manifestations of members of secret societies in Cameroon dealing with the invisible world are often reported (see Mutaka and Iyari 2015, Mutaka 2011, etc). Since such strange communications appear in tales, this seems to indicate the possibility that there may be members of secret societies, who are able to do so among the Nande as well.
- Relying on what has been reported on the mystical communication of human beings with the invisible world, namely that they use certain items like special plants, fruits, seeds, researchers on tales should also try to find out what the role of these items might be in a given ethnic community. Take the example of the wild onion. It is alleged that it has mystical powers that sorcerers use in witchcraft. This is true among the Nande as also among several other ethnic communities in Cameroon for example. The idea of investigating their use through tales could give a clue to the scientific community to start looking for the origins of this mystical power, assuming that it is not mystical and that it is the result of certain molecules in these plants or fruits that may be sensitive to certain vibrations normal human beings are insensitive to.
- The researcher should also be sensitive to certain items in the tales or proverbs that might have a specific cultural value for the society. This would be a way for the researcher to reveal the richness of a given culture, thus contributing to its revitalization among its members, and eventually, initiating further positive changes that might be inspired by the existence of similar cultural features in other parts of African societies, even of western and Asian societies, as long as

the researcher believes this might be beneficial to his or her ethnic community.

Regarding the format of the material, it is advisable that, while collecting the data, the researchers avail themselves of the opportunities that the ICT offers for archiving the data. Thus, for this project, the following will be done:
- record songs with a Sony digital recorder so as to transfer them into a computer. This digital recorder is an ICD-UX71. We will be using the standard mode, that is, the high-quality stereo recording mode (44.1khz/192kbps). Note that, if the country was totally peaceful and if the means of transportation were easier in the secluded places where the recordings will be done, an alternative means of recording such songs would be the use of more sophisticated digital recorders usually recommended in training courses on archiving material on endangered languages.
- Take pictures of items in the tales that might have a significant cultural value. This also includes the picture of the area and the specific place where the tale is given as well as the tale teller and the audience present. A HMX-W300 Samsung video camera will be used for that purpose.
- The researcher should also collect metadata about the tales and riddles, that would allow users to be informed on the names, the context of the tale, the types of instruments used for the collection of the data, etc.
- The researcher will also translate the tales, following the practice in sociolinguistics where he gives a word to word translation followed by a literal translation. Following such a translation, a literary translation of the text is then presented. This will be done in English (and French for our Nande local communities who are mostly Francophones)
- The collected material and the literacy materials that will be elaborated from the chantefables, lullabies and riddles will be computerized in such a way that they may be downloaded and be played on ICT tools like smartphones, Ipads, ipods, CDs, and DVDs.

Regarding the exploitation of the material, there are a number of innovative tasks that will be elaborated. They include

a)   Encouraging the culture learners to re-adapt the material to suit peacekeeping objectives. To do this, they may keep the songs, but change the contents of the tales to help correct what they perceive as dysfunctions in their societies. They may also make changes in a tale, with a specific objective such as addressing a particular ill in the society, and using the song from the chantefables to further capture the attention of the audience.

b)   Preparing riddles in groups, focusing them on certain areas (e.g., fighting AIDS, avoiding promiscuity, respecting elders, respecting marriage vows, etc.). This would be an innovation in that the youths do not have to only know the traditional riddles but they should be encouraged to create new ones that might contribute to peace and development in the Nande society. Once they are ready with their riddles, they can then play them publicly in two teams, following the rules of the performance of the traditional riddles. This means that one member of group A says a riddle and a member of group B gives the

answer until Group B fails to respond. Once he fails, group A gives the answer and lets the opposing group start giving its riddles and they provide answers until they fail as well. The winner is the team that will have given two riddles without receiving the correct answer.

c)   For the diaspora youth, listen to a chantefable, answer specific questions concerning the contents of the chantefable, be encouraged to retell the chantefable in one's own words, preferably in Kinande. If they cannot do it in Kinande, they should be allowed to retell it in a language they fluently speak (Swahili, English, or French) and be also encouraged to formulate questions about the interpretation of events in the chantefable. This should be an opportunity for parents to teach their children more about the Nande culture. In literacy classes, children could also be encouraged to look for similar chantefables in other cultures and retell them as Nande tales, making sure that they use names of places that are part of the Nande area. They would be also encouraged to sing the songs they have learned from the chantefables by introducing them in the tales they will have adapted from foreign sources, that is, from tales from other parts of African and, eventually, from other continents. Here, I think of stories that might belong to cultures they may admire like the Chinese or the Japanese cultures. It would be a way of introducing the positive values of other cultures into their own ethnic community culture.

d)   Because lullabies are rather rare among the Nande (I know only one),during exercises of tale telling these could be included in the tales for soothing the children who cry because either their parents went to fight in a war or the mother has gone somewhere to look for food because her husband is absent fighting in a war.

e)   When used in schools as part of the school curriculum, as a home assignment, pupils will be encouraged to communicate more with their parents, grandparents, and people from their traditional communities not only to increase their awareness about their cultures but also to seek insights that are likely to help them get rid of the negative impact of their cultures and innovate what is likely to help them become better individuals in their societies. They will then be asked to make up their own tales from the insights they will have gained from their parents and intersperse such tales with songs from the chantefables. Eventually, they may be asked to turn their new tales into sketches for role-playing. This is a task they may do in groups. They could also be encouraged to elaborate on a story that one of the groups will have made up and that clearly aims at fighting the dysfunctions in the society, and then role-play that story as a game in their schools or in their local communities. We strongly appeal to the cultural leaders of local communities to encourage the theatrical performance of such stories made up by their youths. One practical way to promote such revitalization features of traditional cultures is the promotion of yearly or biannual cultural fairs during which the important cultural features of local communities are displayed and that innovations are progressively introduced for the betterment and the adaptation of traditional culture to modernity.

In support of these various tasks, we should bear in mind that culture is not static. As societies evolve, they face new challenges that call for the development of material that is more suitable to respond to them. For example, to the challenge of insecurity in the area, there is a need to find ways to fight that insecurity by inculcating the right ideas in children. If there are wrong examples that have been given by the elders, the society should find a way to say it through tales and riddles as an acceptable indirect way of pointing out the dysfunctions of the society to its present leaders.

Conclusion

By way of concluding this paper, let me say a word on the intellectual merit of treating oral genres as a sociolinguistic topic and its broader impact on research scholarship.

First, about the intellectual merit of this topic, I wish to point out that the need to work out a methodology for dealing with oral genres (chantefables, tales, riddles, lullabies) arose from opinions that jury members have often expressed during PhD theses defenses of works on oral literature (e.g., Mahamat: 2013 , a PhD thesis on tales of the Kotoko of Cameroon) and also in plenary sessions in international conferences of the WALC (see for example Ekkhehard Wolff 2011) and recently in one that was held at Abraka in Nigeria where I was the keynote speaker (cf. Mutaka 2015a). Because this oral literature genre is typically African, western sources willing to deal with it from an African perspective are virtually nonexistent. As Africans, we wish for example a thesis to contain the proper presentation of data and their analysis, but also, we always express the wish that the contents be useful to the local communities for the revitalization of their languages and cultures. Hopefully, a paper that would be written from the material that will be collected and the various tasks on the exploitation of the material that will be proposed as a literacy tool offer clear guidelines on the kinds of questions to investigate for the write-up of a sociolinguistics thesis on tales (and possibly on proverbs and riddles) and also on the types of work that should be included in the appendix as literacy material for the local community.

I also wish to let the potential users of this methodology to know that, in our collaboration with foreign universities in the American continent, it is our common concern that we also produce work that is useful for the local communities and that we start building a database that we could share to promote works related to the revitalization of languages and cultures (see for example the project on data integration and tool development as well as a database creation and maintenance that would contain archival and ethnographic collections for the purposes of knowledge recovery and implementation in language and knowledge revitalization efforts, as specifically proposed by Gabriela Pérez Báez (Curator of Linguistics, Department of Anthropology, MRC 112, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution) for their initiative of language and culture revitalization, personal communication; see also Mutaka 2015b and the whole volume of this book project on community-based linguistics edited by Shannon Bischoff and Carmen Jany (forthcoming).

Secondly, as for the broader impact of work on oral genres that would implement this methodology, CERDOTOLA would be a preferred publishing outlet : work that would result from the implementation of this methodology would encapsulate the kinds of work it wishes to

be publishing for the revitalization of oral traditions and African languages. As for archiving, the material would be posted on the CERDOTOLA website, alora.cerdotola.com to enable not only the Nande community for this project on chantefables, riddles and lullabies in the Nande community, but also researchers around the world interested in the promotion of African languages and cultures to easily access it.

Note also that the need to produce documents for literacy out of this project is likely to bear a broader impact in the African continent (and possibly in Latin America) as many youths born in urban areas no longer practice their languages and cultures and are thus in need of using this material, hopefully on their ICT gadgets such as smartphones, Ipads, and Ipods to either practice their African language or learn more about their traditional culture. These youths will probably be encouraged by their parents who, unfortunately, because of their living conditions in urban milieus no longer offer an ideal context for their children to learn their languages and cultures. They will find in this literacy material what they used to admire in tale telling when they were children and that they yearn to transmit to their kin and kith.

       In the appendices of work on oral genres, I would specifically encourage the researchers to include the following:

- Tales, lullabies, and riddles with translations in both English and French;
- metadata on the tales, lullabies, and riddles, including pictures of the areas and the status of the informants;
- Format of a talk show that could be aired on a community radio. A text by a professional tale teller that ends with a moral lesson to educate the community could be broadcast as a regular feature of a radio program. Alternatively, researchers could prepare a video version of such talk shows in collaboration with the community and offer it to the community as a way to encourage it to revitalize its own language and culture.
- Sample of a literacy lesson plan to explain the procedure to exploit this material on chantefables, riddles, and lullabies as a way to combat insecurity in the Nande region for example. Here, literacy coordinators will be encouraged to use the two volumes of tales by Kavutirwaki that are being digitized by CERDOTOLA in order to render them accessible at the ALORA website.

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