CHAPTER 3: The Interrelationship between Language, Music and Form in Hausa Oral Poetry

The fact that the Hausa language does not distinguish between song and poetry, calling both of them waka, is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also reflects a deeper and major principle, namely the close relationship in waka between language and music.[1] In oral poetry, this relationship is directly expressed in its external realization: Shata's poems are set to music and accompanied by instruments. Yet the correlation between language and music goes even further; it underlies the organization of a composition's linguistic and musical structure. Realizing the significance of the close music-text relationship--described by some as perhaps the most important characteristic of African song[2]--scholars have begun to call for a combined approach to oral traditions.

> The boundary between song and some forms of verse or declamation which are nowadays classified as "oral literature" is a blurred one and calls for co-operation between

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[1] Some scholars suggest the term wake for written poetry and waka for oral poetry but this has not been generally accepted. In any case, these two Hausa terms share the same roots unlike,for example, the English, French or German language.

[2] Francis Bebey, African Music: A People's Art (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1975).

> linguists and ethnomusicologists. Very little study has yet been made of musical characteristics found in the borderline art of praise-poetry or praise-singing which is practiced very widely throughout Africa.[3]

Musicological studies of oral poetry have mostly been focused on the way rhythm and melody are influenced by the dimensions of language. Languages in which tone has phonemic quality show a correlation between linguistic tone and musical tune. In languages with a quantitative syllabic structure the durational value of a tone is influenced by the structure of its concomitant syllable.

The importance of linguistic tone for song texts seems immediately evident for if a melody is altered, so is the meaning of a text. A singer will find it difficult to compose a rising melody when the words have a falling intonation. Scholars who feel that this influence is exceedingly strong have regarded language as a constraint to music, even calling it a "strait jacket".

> The words of each verse...need separate melodic treatment to make the tune agree with the rise and fall of the syllables. The result of all this is that African melody is in a strait jacket....there is no question that the

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[3] David Rycroft, "Zulu and Xhosa Praise-Poetry and Song," African Music 3.1 (1962): 79.

> restrictions of the system have a conservative and limiting effect on the free development of African melody.[4]

This rather extreme view however does not consider compromises that can easily be achieved. Even though melody must pay careful attention to phonemic tone and to speech melody in general, the understanding of a song text is also provided by its many repetitions and its general context.

Analyses of songs in different tone languages have shown that the correlation between tone and tune never occurs without alterations. This is true also for Hausa songs. Hausa is a tone language which distinguishes three basic tone types, a high tone, a low tone and a rarer high-low compound or falling tone. Hans-Heinrich Wängler writes,

> Es wurden überzeugende Abhängigkeiten zwischen beiden Arten der Tonhöhenverläufe, der musikalischen und der sprachlichen gefunden. Dennoch ist die Gesangsmelodie nicht sklavisch an die Tonstufen der Sprache gekettet....Manche Strophen zeigen eine nahezu vollkommene Übereinstimmung, in anderen ist das Verhältnis in dieser Hinsicht

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[4] A.M.Jones, "African Music in Northern Rhodesia and some other places," Livingstone: Occasional Papers of the Rhodes Museum 4 (1949): 11-12.

ungünstiger.[5]

Paul Richards confirms this observation in his analysis of the Hausa song Wakar Indefenda ('Song of Independence') by the oral poet Sarkin Taushi and his group. "The singers endeavour where possible to project the tonal pattern of the words. Nevertheless parallelism of the melody and text are by no means perfectly achieved."[6]

The Hausa scholar Dalhatu Muhammad refers to another important aspect of tone, the existence of tonal rhyme.

> The tendency for a poem to have a consistent tonal patterning at the ends of its lines and/or stanzas...reveals the presence in Hausa of tonal rhyme.[7]

Tonal rhyme is indigenous to Hausa poetry. It applies to both oral and written poetry and is thus probably more fundamental than syllabic rhyme which is associated only with written poetry and considered an adoption from Arabic poetry.

The next correlation of language and music in song is that between syllable structure and musical rhythm. In Hausa, the distinction of syllables is based on quantity. Two

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[5] Hans-Heinrich Wängler, "Singen und Sprechen in einer Tonsprache (Hausa)," Zeitschrift für Phonetik und Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft 11-12 (1958): 31-32.

[6] Paul Richards, "A Quantitative Analysis of the Relationship between Language Tone and Melody in Hausa Song," African Language Studies 13 (1972): 153.

[7] Dalhatu Muhammad, "The Two Facets of Rhyme in Hausa Poetry: Syllabic and Tonal," Harshe 1 (1978): 10.

types of syllables can be identified: long or heavy syllables (CVV or CVC) and short or light syllables (CV). In oral poetry, the relative duration of musical notes corresponds closely to the difference between short and long syllables. Equating '-' with long syllables and 'v' with short syllables, this correlation can be graphically demonstrated. A complete analogy between performed rhythm and linguistic rhythm exists in parts of Sarkin Taushin Katsina's song Wakar Indefenda:

performed rhythm: - - v - - v - - v -

linguistic rhythm: - - v - - v - - v -

bab-bar ka-sar Shee-hu dan Foo-di-yoo[8]

One of the lines in Shata's song Kyautar Chafe shows a deviation of performed rhythm from linguistic rhythm in the fourth, fifth and eight syllable.

performed rhythm: - - - - - - - - -

linguistic rhythm: - - - v v - - v -

Mam-man Kyau-ta da nin-yaa ta zoo[9]

In fact, clashes between syllable length and rhythmic length are rather common, as they are common between musical tune and phonemic tone. The meaning of the song however, is again easily conveyed through context and repetitions.

A complete unity between language and music is achieved

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[8] Example in: Russell Schuh, "Preamble to a Theory of Hausa Poetic Meter", unpublished paper, UC Los Angeles, 1986, 2.

[9] For complete rendition see Appendix A.

in African drum talk. As Walter Ong uses it to highlight the characteristics of orality in the human mind and language, it can be used to emphasise the interrelationship of African music and language. The tonal and quantitative features of a given language are imitated by drums and a communication through language is accomplished without the aid of the human voice. The drummed rhythms themselves form the specific text. The proper use of tonal and durational qualities reflects the concern for conversational and linguistic clarity required in much African music. For African drummers it is therefore important to have a highly developed sense of pitch in addition to rhythmic sensibility.

According to Hausa musicians, all instruments "talk", meaning that linguistic phrases are tied to all instrumentally produced sounds, either melodic or rhythmic.[10] In praise songs, praise epithets are not only expressed verbally but also instrumentally. The rendition of epithets through drum talk, called take is a common phenomena in all Hausa music, from court music to love songs, and even wrestling songs. In the latter, they often serve as "calls to battle" and each wrestler has one or more drum names which are repeated again and again to cheer the fighters.[11]

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[10] Fremont E.Besmer, "Hausa Court Music in Kano, Nigeria," diss., Columbia University, 1971, 69.

[11] Edward Powe, "Hausa Combat Literature: An Exposition, Analysis and Interpretation of its Form, Content and Effect," diss., UW Madison, 1984, 35.

In Shata's orchestra the talking drum is an essential instrument. Four or more drummers participate in the performance of whom at least two play a talking drum.[12] Shata often refers to the kalangu (generic term for a group of 'talking drums') in his lyrics and his drummers use it to emphasise his words through instrumental repetition. After Shata sings "kuma ka ji kalanguna na fadi" ('listen to what the drums are saying') in his song Kyautar Chafe, the vocal part is interrupted for almost one measure to give voice to the talking drum alone. The epithet "Inna Kyauta" is repeated several times in drum language. Drummers can also assist the singer when he is at a loss for words suggesting a text played in drum language.[13] Indeed, "an African rhythmic pattern is more properly considered as a phrase than as a series of notes."[14]

Rhythm and rhythmic complexity has been described as the heart of African music and has probably been more widely commented on by Western observers than any other single aspect of African aesthetic expression. This can be ascribed to the fact that the percussiveness of African music differs considerably from Western music. It is important to note that

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[12] personal communication with Shehu Karaye, Jan. 1987.

[13] David Ames, Edgar A.Gregersen, and Thomas Neugebauer, "Taaken Samaari: A Drum Language of Hausa Youth," Africa 41 (1971): 12-31.

[14] John Miller Chernoff, African Rhythm and African Sensibility (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1979) 80.

percussiveness is not limited to percussion instruments alone. Jones writes,

> Rhythm is to the African what harmony is to Europeans and it is in the complex interweaving of contrasting rhythmic patterns that he finds his greatest aesthetic satisfaction. ...whatever be the devices used to produce them, in African music there is practically always a clash of rhythms; this is a cardinal principle.[15]

The "clash of rhythms" is achieved through an overlapping of a number of different beats. This results in conflicting rhythmic patterns which are called "cross rhythms".[16] Each of the rhythms is relatively simple in itself, yet in combination intricate and changing relationships are established between them. This is what has intrigued the Western ear as sounding so 'complicated' or 'fascinating'. ("African music...is syncopated past comprehension."[17]) Often the different rhythms are played in different meters creating a multiple- or polymetric effect. "It sounds as if different rhythms were competing for our attention" Chernoff writes. Each drummer contributes his own

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[15] A.M.Jones, "African Rhythm", Africa 24 (1954): 26-27.

[16] Chernoff 46.

[17] This is a quote from a music professor in Berlin, rendered in Jones article "African Rhythm", p.26.

part to the total crossrhythmic and polymetric fabric. "There are never two or more playing the same thing unless their specific drums are the same."[18]

The rhythmic patterns of the drummers are rhythmic formulas and the structure of the music is based on their continuing repetition. It is on this level that the relationship of language and music reaches a new intimacy. In song the musical composition technique closely resembles the traditional oral technique of verbal composition. They are both formulaic in Parry's sense of 'recurring units regularly employed under the same metrical conditions'. The meters of the different formulas may vary, but each drum keeps it's own meter constant. And as in the oral traditions, the effect of the formulas relies on their repetitiveness and metric consistency.

Alteration and improvisation in the repetition of the formulas is allowed but has to follow certain rules. As the verbal artist is constrained by the metrical conditions of his formulas so is the musician. The duration of notes can be changed or certain rhythmic figures can be substituted by others, but the overall form generally remains the same. During the performance, improvisation is mostly limited to the master drummer. The rest of the drum ensemble repeats their rhythms in unchanged form. This is paralleled by the verbal composition. Shata as the master singer is relatively

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[18] Chernoff 46-47.

free to improvise whereas the chorus repeats verbatim ("formula proper") the theme and main formula of the song. The master singer plays verbally the part that the master drummer plays musically. Often the master drummer emphatically repeats the master singer's phrase in drum talk. The dynamic interaction between solo and chorus, solo and instrumental reply and master drummer and drum orchestra results in an arrangement known as call-and-response scheme. This is a major characteristic of African music finding its counterpart in the verbal compositions.

As in the oral traditions, the emphasis of improvisation is not on the introduction of new themes or formulas but rather on showing creativity with the already established ones. Improvisation itself becomes formulaic. As repetition is the key aesthetic device, repeating something old in new ways is more appreciated than countless new inventions. A good drummer distinguishes himself through the mastering of a traditional repertoire more than through many varied and complicated rhythms. He will engage mainly in playful variation of already existing rhythms.

> Improvisation for the master drummer... lies not so much in the genesis of new rhythms as in the organization and form given to the already existing rhythms.[19]

Chernoff confirms for music what Parry and Lord described for

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[19] Chernoff 82.

oral traditions.

The rhythmic formulas are not the product of a single drummer but have been generated in a communal process over a long period of time. The most successful rhythms are singled out and passed on. For a specific performance the drummers can thus choose from a traditional stock of communally selected and accepted rhythms.

> "In traditional African music, compositions have been developed and refined over the years, and superfluous beating has been eliminated so that the rhythms do not encroach on each other."[20]

The rhythmic formulas share this generating process with their verbal counterparts. Both are the "gradual work of a generation of countless poets" and drummers. The older a poet or a musician the better often is his work. In Africa age has never been considered an obstacle in the career of a performer--in sharp contrast to Western societies. Shata himself is approximately in his eighties now and his latest record (1985) has been praised as one of his best.[21]

Learning is a communal effort. Drummers learn their rhythms not individually but together with the whole ensemble. The music can only live through the relationship

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[20] Chernoff 60.

[21] Personal communication with staff from the Hausa Program at "Voice of America" broadcasting service, Washington D.C., Jan.1987.

and interplay of whole sets of rhythms and not through individual parts. This is why African drummers, unlike Western drummers, do not depend on stress and counting for musical precision and why it becomes extremely difficult for a drummer to play his part unless the whole ensemble is playing.[22] The rhythms themselves are also learned as an entity rather than split into separate, counted out parts. In oral societies, only comprehension and learning by unit can secure storing and retrieving of knowledge. For the drummer, not the individual notes but the rhythmic formula is the smallest separable unit in a piece of music--as is for the poet the verbal formula in a poetic line. "The basic conception is an entity, a single unit made up of several parts which are envisaged as a totality."[23]

Music and songs are often familiar to the community. The audience can follow with informed interest the efforts of singers and drummers to add additional dimensions of depth and excitement to a performance. The musicians continuously revitalize traditional forms, thus producing the curious effect so typical for oral traditions and traditional music; their style is both traditional and improvised. No performance is ever the same. A story has as many versions as it is retold, and so has a piece of music. Even two

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[22] Chernoff 53-54.

[23] Alan P. Merrian, African Music in Perspective (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982) 459.

consecutive performances of a given song are not identical in a literary sense. "Two performances of a given piece, even if they are said to be identical by its users, differ, and very often, quite widely. There is a 'text', but never a final, unequivocal one; such notions are unknown."[24]

A piece of music that has become very popular can be 'borrowed' by other poets. When the famous Hausa poet Narambada composed his song Bakandamiya it became so popular that it soon spread around in the countless versions of other poets, each adding his own flavor to it. "Bakandamiya" has now turned into a generic word for a poetic masterpiece.[25] As the concept of plagiarism does not exist in oral societies the question of artistic origin is relatively irrelevant because each performance is regarded as a new, fundamental setting of artistic creativity.

During a performance, the interaction between artists and audience is as important for the musicians as it is for the poet. The message of the song is not merely expressed through the words alone but also through the way they are carried out in the music. The musicians have to be as sensitive to the reactions of their audience as the poet and be as quick to react to moods and requests. The participatory

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[24] Simha Arom, "New Perspectives for the Description of Orally Transmitted Music," The World of Music 2 (1981): 48.

[25] Dalhatu Muhammad, "Bakandamiya: Towards a Characterization of the Poetic Masterpiece in Hausa," Oral Poetry in Nigeria, eds. U.N.Abalogu, G.Ashiwuju, and R.Amadi-Tawil (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981) 57-70.

character of African music has often been pointed out as one of its main features; it is what Ong called "two-way-street" phenomenon. The audience is directly involved and serves as an immediate and lively critic. Their reactions and comments are a sign of concern for their art which is often connected to the quality of their lives. Each performance is integrated into its specific social situation. Art articulates philosophical and moral concerns, which are often reflected in the music-making situation itself. This is most directly expressed in dance, the physical expression of consciousness. Movement becomes art. In dance the audience itself is transformed into some kind of performer. The gestures, facial expressions and body movements of the poet which are so essential to the oral performance are a rudimentary expression of the same vital connection.

In oral poetry, oral traditions and traditional music come together in a unified form as both manifest the principles of orality and the techniques of oral composition. The notion of 'traditional' is inseparable from orality. 'Traditional' does not refer to the often derogatory connotations of Western usage where it conjures up visions of 'primitive' or oldfashioned societies hopelessly clinging to ways of the past.'Traditional' does not mean static. It simply "describes the handing down of knowledge, belief, and custom from generation to generation, and is usually thought

of as being accomplished by word of mouth", i.e. orally.[26] In this sense, societies all over the world are traditional to a certain extent.

Simha Arom introduces the term "oral music" without defining exactly what he means.[27] As 'oral' implies some kind of verbal expression, something uttered by the mouth, 'oral music' would narrow down music to song. Yet when talking specifically about song, the term oral music seems to be tautological or even misleading. To include all genres of music that are composed, memorized and transmitted orally, i.e. without writing, the use of 'traditional' in the above defined sense, appears more appropriate.

The problems in the Western perception of African music are curiously related to the concept of literacy, however, in a roundabout way. In his article "Rhythm and the Concepts of Time-Reckoning", Alan Merriam describes the Western notion of time and how it has been applied to the analysis of African music by most Western and African scholars.[28] It is the old conflict between an emic or etic approach in intercultural analyses. One of Merriam's points is, however, that the Western notion of time is so internalized and regarded as universal that it has not been acknowledged in musicological descriptions. As African music is largely determined by its

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[26] Merriam 136.

[27] Arom, 48.

[28] Merriam

rhythms and as rhythms only live through their relationship in time, the problematic of time perception is rather acute.

Rhythm has been defined as "music divided into standard units of time."[29] This definition is based on the concept of time as a linear structure consisting of an infinite series of equally spaced pulses. Merriam lists four basic Western assumptions of African music based on this premise. The first assumption is the existence of an "equal pulse beat" derived from equally spaced pulses. The second is the assumption of an implied steady beat throughout the music providing the framework upon which rhythm is built. The structuring of music in meters, measures, bar lines, accents etc. is derived from this. The complexity of African rhythms leads to the third assumption of a basic organizing principle which coordinates the different rhythms and centralizes them into a single regularly pulsating unit. The fourth assumption is that in music a specific starting point for rhythmic groupings is set, a 'beat one'.

Contemporary theories of African music fit the facts as they are conceived from the premise of the linearity of time and its measurement in small, regular units. Within the Western model the organization of African rhythms can be accounted for and explained. However, "the scanty knowledge we have of African time reckoning seems to point to the exact opposite, i.e. a non-linear concept and no measurement of

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[29] Chernoff 41.

time in small units."[30]

Merriam tries to describe non-linear models of time reckoning, such as spiral or circular systems. Here rhythmic patterns are perceived as small distinct entities which are repeated again and again in a circular motion. Drummers can join in with different rhythms at any time in the same circular motion. Ethnomusicologists are therefore increasingly refraining from transcribing music in the linear Western notation form where these circles would be pressed into complicated polymetric systems. This representation would be correct in the sense that it would capture the exact durational values of the notes but incorrect in that it would not reflect the perception of the people who play the music.

Merriam does not address one of the key factors in the time perception of people: whether they live in an oral or literate society. Members of predominantly oral societies are bound to perceive time differently than people in highly literate societies. Oral societies neither have the technology, nor the interest to define time in the exact way literate societies do. Units of time measurement tend to be much larger and recur in circular units. Ong points out that one of the main reasons for the development of writing was the making of lists. Perhaps the most influential of these lists was the numeric calendar culminating in the electromagnetic exactness of contemporary time determination.

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[30] Merriam, 444.

Literates are fascinated with numbers, dates and their precision. Calenders and watches function linearly; it is not merely something new that begins but the next; the next day, the next month, the next year, the next century. All of them occur in regular, exactly measurable units of time; a week has seven days which are 24 hours long which have 60 minutes each which are 60 seconds long and so on. Within these premises time can be perfectly accounted for.

As literacy has affected nearly all societies so has the measurable linearity of time perception. However, this is only one way of conceptualizing reality and as such as relative and arbitrary as any other. The present analysis of Shata's songs follows an etic approach using the linear conventions of meters, measures, bar lines and the rest. It was the only approach of which a grasp of the material seemed possible.

Just as a preconceived notion of time does not capture the complexity of reality so an analysis based on the premises of literacy can fail to recognize a differently structured concept. In the majority of studies on Hausa oral poetry its irregularity in form and structure is pointed out. This is largely due to the fact that Hausa written poetry generally serves as the model of analysis and what is found differing from its form is considered irregular.

> Most Hausa oral praise songs are not governed by a regular line pattern, i.e. the end of the

> lines do not necessarily have to rhyme and do not have regular length; and even along the lines there is no established order or regularity in the meter."[31]

The formal hallmarks of written poetry are stanzas of regular length, most commonly two or five lines, and lines of regular length. Lines are divided into feet with regular syllabic patterns. Two rhyme schemes are employed, syllabic and tonal rhyme. There is external syllabic rhyme in which the final lines of stanzas end in the same syllable. In internal syllabic rhyme the non-final lines of a stanza are rhymed.[32] In tonal rhyme the last two syllables of lines and/or stanzas are usually marked by a consistent tone patterning.[33]

The analysis of a written poem can be done on the basis of a written text. Applying the same method to oral poetry is an immediately evident failure; oral poetry does not have a written text, it does not have one single, stable text at all. Therefore a linguistic transcription of a song is not enough for a formal analysis. Only in combination with its music can an oral poem be understood. It is the musical

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[31] Malam Idi Zurmi, "Form and Style in Hausa Oral Praise Songs," Oral Poetry in Nigeria, eds. U.N.Abalogu, G.Ashiwuju, and R.Amadi-Tawil (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981) 96.

[32] Muhammad, "The Two Facets of Rhyme" 6-18.

[33] Dalhatu Muhammad, "Tonal Rhyme-A Preliminary Study of the Role of Linguistic Tone in Hausa Verse," African Language Studies 17 (1980): 89-98.

accompaniment that reveals the structure of oral poetry.

In his study of poetic meter, Russell Schuh makes an important contribution to the understanding of Hausa poetry as he emphasizes the significance of performance for written poetry and of instrumental accompaniment for oral poetry.[34] In written poetry the Hausa meters are largely modelled on the meters of classical Arabic poetry. However, only 10 of the 16 Arabic meters can be identified in Hausa and within these nine, a certain number of irregularities occur. Hausa literate poets also frequently use meters which have no counterparts in the Arabic system. Most of them write their poetry with the intention that it be recited in an oral performance. According to Schuh the performance aspect of written poetry offers the key to an explanation of some of the common metric irregularities and deviations from Arabic poetry. In performance silence by a poet often has metrical value. He can deliberately insert pauses of fixed values to fill out feet which lack the textual weight of other feet. He can also change the value of already existing syllables by lengthening or shortening them. These alterations are not predictable from the written text alone.

For the scanning of Hausa poetry Schuh suggests a replacement of the terms 'foot' and 'syllable' by the terms 'measure' and 'beat'. Beat corresponds closely with syllable; a long syllable is equated with one beat (-), and a short

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[34] Schuh 1-26.

syllable is equated with one half-beat (v). Both terms have musical connotations. In music the number of beats per measure is kept constant, i.e. a four-beat measure always extends over a period of four beats regardless of their realization. Thus whether they are played as 8 half-beats or 2 two-beats does not matter. The meter of a piece of music is defined by the kind of measure it employs. Applied in this sense, the concept of measure differs significantly from the concept of foot. In the Arabic system, a particular meter consists of a constant number of foot types and their sequence per poetic line. The internal structure of a foot can vary as the syllabic length can be altered or syllables can be deleted. These variations permit a total syllabic weight change so that the syllabic weight can alter from one foot to the next. In other words, a foot is not confined to a constant number of beats. In the Arabic meter tawil, for example, the first and third foot differ in weight from the second and fourth foot by one long syllable or two beats.

Tawil: v - - / v - - - / v - - / v - - -

Aliyu Na Mangi has composed Hausa poetry in the Arabic meter ramal:[35]

- v - - / - v - -

nai nu-fin waa- kaa ja-dii-dii (I intend to write a new song)

In Arabic poetry, a common modification of the foot type

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[35] Example in Schuh 7.

/-v--/ would be /-v-v/, which reduces the total syllabic weight from 7 to 6 half-beats. Aliyu Na Mangi never does this. He instead frequently uses two short syllables in place of one long syllable at the end of the first foot.

\- v - v v / - v - -

rab-ba-naa yi da- din a-min-cii (our Lord, create more love)

This is a variation not provided for in the Arabic system. In Hausa oral poetry and in much written poetry however, feet with irregular numbers of beats do not occur - as they would not occur in music. Therefore the use of the term measure is more accurate. The variation chosen by Na Mangi allows him to retain the length per measure on a constant 7 half-beat duration.

As in the performance of written poetry, silence also has metrical value in oral poetry. The linguistic pauses, however, are here filled in by the instrumental accompaniment. Schuh calls this a "linear" style of performance as opposed to a "vertical" style, meaning that in a linear style the music flows continuously from beginning to end of the song, whereas in a vertical style each line begins with the rhythm anew and pauses at the end of lines or stanzas have no fixed rhythmic values.[36] Vertical style only occurs in written poetry. In the song Kyautar Chafe, the continuous instrumental accompaniment fills in the linguistic

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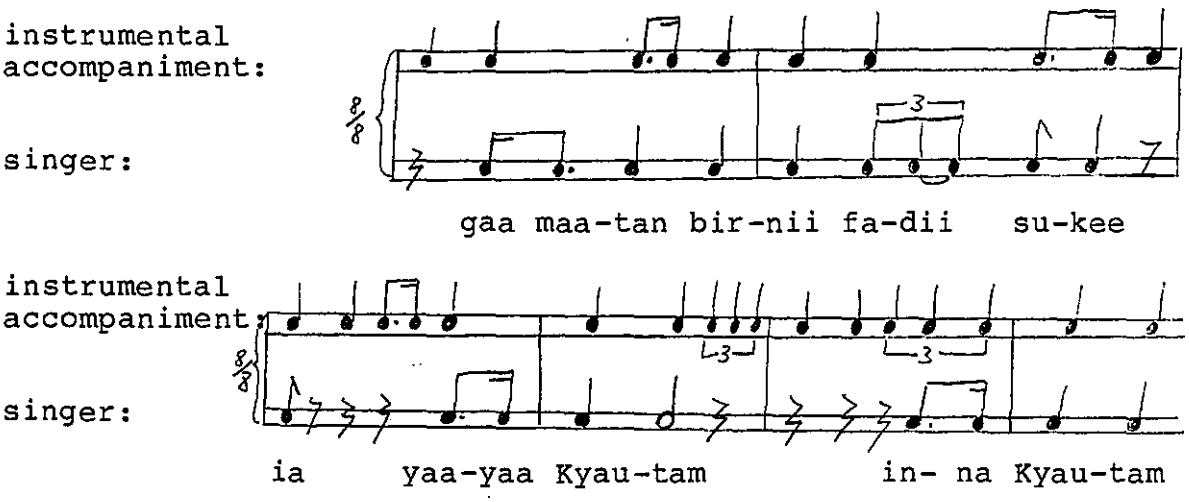
[36] Schuh 19.

'gaps' consciously created by the poet.

(mm 11-15)[37]



In oral poetry the examination of the linguistic text alone does not reveal a regular metric pattern. Only in its musical realization does a metric organization become evident. The musical realization comprises both the vocal and instrumental parts of the song. Its meter is organized in measures containing fixed numbers of beats. Schuh's statement that "the key to scanning oral poetry is in its instrumental accompaniment, for this always follows regular patterns"[38] is thus extended to include the vocal accompaniment (singer and chorus) in addition to the instrumental one. From Schuh's statement it could be inferred that the singer can freely improvise or experiment with the text as he is always backed up by his orchestra for metric precision. However, the oral

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[37] For complete rendition see Appendix A.

[38] Schuh 1.

poet's improvisational freedom is limited by two facts. First, his text is largely based on formulas which are generated under the same metrical conditions and thus ensure metric consistency, thus his improvisations are formulaic. Second, in his rhythmic variations the singer stays within the boundaries of measures, and measures, as was shown, consist of a fixed number of beats which define the meter. In Shata's songs the meter of the vocal part remains consistent throughout the song.[39] It can thus be inferred that the singer also has an important function in the metric organization and consistency of the songs.

In addition to the solo singer, the vocal parts of the chorus also play an important role in the songs. They are not only metrically consistent but also melodically and textually so. The choral refrains (amshi) are the structural and thematic reference points of each song. They build a syntactic, rhythmic and melodic unit which determines the character and overall form of the composition. Meter, rhythm, length of line, division of the stanzas, melody, tonal rhyme, and main theme are all established through the amshi. Its constant repetition serves as an affirmation of its

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[39] Jim McKee who is currently writing his Master's thesis on wakokin yam'mata (Hausa girls' songs) at UW Madison, told me that a change of meter in the vocal parts of the girls' songs does indeed occur. However, I could not verify this in the Shata songs I have analyzed. I think the reason for this is that text is more important in Shata's songs and the (oral) composition of text, as I have just shown, is confined to certain metric consistencies.

individual functions and its overall importance.

The first complete singing of the amshi seals the choice of a particular meter. For the determination of oral meters, Schuh suggests taking the eighth note as the basic unit of measurement.[40] A meter is then analyzed in terms of the number of eighth notes per measure. One can speak of a "4 meter" with four notes per measure, a "6 meter", a "8 meter" etc.[41] The number of oral meters used by Shata is surprisingly small, containing only an "8 meter" and a "12 meter". They are within the ranks of the most common Hausa oral meters as described by Schuh[42] and typical of African music in general. "In spite of what we think, most African music is in some common variety of duple or triple time (like 4/4 [8/8] or 12/8) and not in the 7/4 or 5/4 that many Westerners have thought they might have heard."[43] Meter in oral poetry can be defined as organized pulsation functioning as a background for the rhythmic design of a poetic line. The variety of rhythms that the poet and his group achieve by the way they group beats within a given metric framework is virtually unlimited. In none of the seventeen songs analysed in this paper, was the rhythm ever the same for two songs

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[40] Prof. Schuh told me that he adopted this system of analysis from Prof. Anthony V.King.

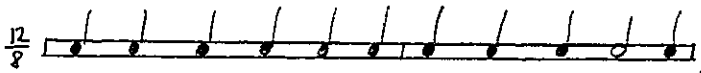
[41] Schuh 2.

[42] Schuh 3.

[43] Chernoff 47.

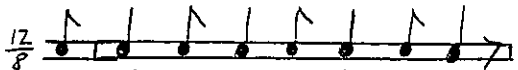
even though only two different meters were available. This is not to say that rhythmic identity could never happen yet it would appear to be an exception rather than a common occurrence. Exactly which rhythm and which meter is chosen as characteristic for a particular song is prescribed by the amshi.

The choice of a rhythm is influenced by the correlation between language and music. The text of the choral refrain thus plays an important role in determining the rhythmic pattern. Not only the length of each syllable but also the number of syllables and the way they are arranged is significant. In the song Abubakar Tafawa, the refrain has eleven syllables which are distributed on eleven beats in the measure.



Al-lah ji kan A-bu-ba-kar Ta-fa-wa[44]

In shorter refrains the poet may split a, usually long, syllable into two and thus prolong the refrain. In Ladin Oga, the two syllabic word 'Ladin' is split into three syllables, La-a-din. The tones of the doubled syllable are often, though not always, identical.



A gai da La-a-din O-ga

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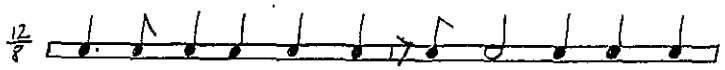
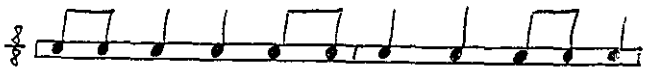
[44] The final syllable in a line of Hausa poetry, written or oral, can almost always be scanned as long.

Sometimes an extra syllable can be added as in Hamza Dan Labaran, where the three syllabic word 'alhaji' is turned into the four syllabic 'al-a-ha-ji'.



Ya al-a-ha-ji Ham-za dan La-ba-ran

In Habu Yan Mama, the refrain has eight syllables and is composed in an '8 meter'. However, instead of an exact correlation between beat and meter Shata decides to insert one syllable and duplicate two other syllables to achieve a rhythmically more interesting version.



A-la-ha-ji Ga-ar-ba yan ma-a-ma

In oral poetry, writes Harold Scheub, "it is not the number of syllables that distinguishes the poem's metrical character, but their organization."[45] The various arrangements of syllables only expand the rhythmic pattern, they do not alter the meter.

As was mentioned earlier, the relationship between linguistic length of syllables and the performed rhythm is also characterized by both exact correlation as well as absence of correlation. An exact correlation is particularly common in the amshi of a song.

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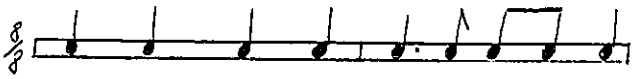
[45] Harold Scheub, "Oral Poetry and History", New Literary History, Spring 1987 (forthcoming): 3.

Dadin Kudi:

performed rhythm: v - v v - v v - - - -
linguistic length: v - v v - v v - - - -
ku-dii a ka-shee su ta han-yaa mai kyau

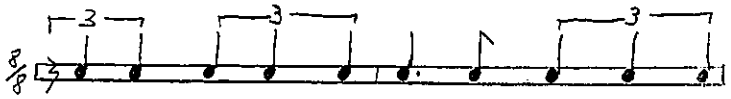
Sharu Uwawu:



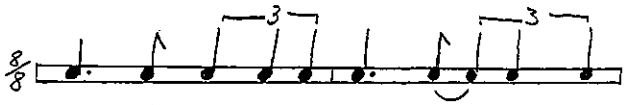
performed rhythm: - - - - - v v v -
linguistic length: - - - - - v v v -
kuu-soo-shin bir-nii U-wa-a-wuu

In the individual stanzas of a song an absence of correlation occurs more frequently.

Kyautar Chafe:



performed rhythm: - - - - - - v - - -
linguistic length: - v - v v - - - v v
Shaa-ta yaa ta-fi nee-man Kyau-ta. Na



performed rhythm: - v - - - - - - -
linguistic length: - - v v v - - - -
jee Cha-fe a-ka cee baa taa nan.[46]

The alternating violation and confirmation of these correlation 'rules' results in special kinds of tension. If the correlation between lexical length and performed rhythm is very low, tension between the linguistic and performance level is created, a process which can be referred to as

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[46] See Appendix A, mm.38-41.

tension building. If the correlation between the two levels is very high, it leads to a tension release or zero tension. A constant alternation between tension building and tension release enlivens the performance and contributes to the aesthetic quality of the overall composition.

The basic unit of verse is a line. Muhammad defines a poetic line in written poetry as "the complete metrical unit made up of feet whose relevant prosodic base in Hausa is quantity." For oral poetry he says, "as with most African oral poetic systems where music is involved, the problem of delineation, of clearly demarcating the poetic line, is a troublesome exercise."[47] However, if Schuh's suggestion is followed and the concept of 'feet' is replaced with that of 'measures', Muhammad's definition of poetic line can also be applied to oral poetry and delineation of oral verse becomes less 'troublesome'. A line generally forms a melodic, rhythmic, and syntactic unit. Exceptions are possible in lines that run into each other in the same stanza without a grammatical break. This is commonly referred to as line run-on. The accompanying music can help to mark the boundaries of a line. The exact value of pauses in the vocal parts is easier to determine because the instruments continue to accompany the song non-stop and can thus serve as measuring aids. Often the beginning of a new line is also marked by a

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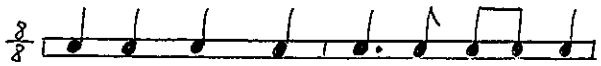
[47] Dalhatu Muhammad, "Structural Tension in Poetry: Case Notes on Enjambment and Run-On in Hausa," Harsunan Nijeriya 7 (1977) 79 and 84.

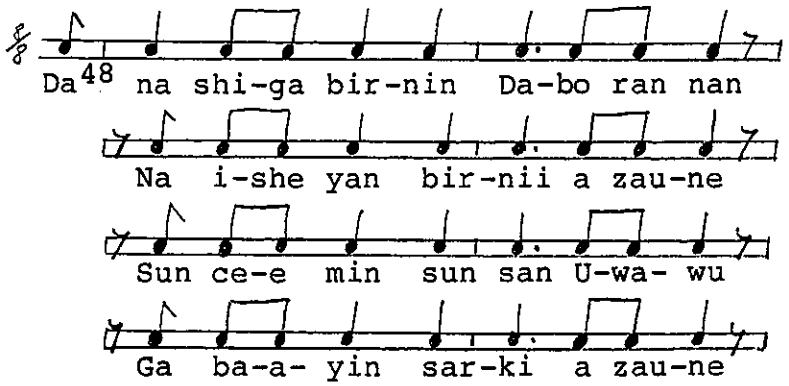
musical accent.

The first line of the choral refrain serves as the model for the remaining lines in the poem. If the refrain line is two measures long, the other lines in the poem are two measures long. In this sense, a poem with regular line length is one in which the lines of the stanzas conform to the line of the refrain in terms of the same number of measures employed under the same meter. Most of Shata's poems reveal regular line length. Of the seventeen songs in the corpus, thirteen employ regular lines. The remaining four show some variation but in none of them was delineation ever completely irregular or arbitrary. The song Sharu Uwawu which is composed in regular lines. Its choral refrain is one line long consisting of two measures in an '8 meter'.

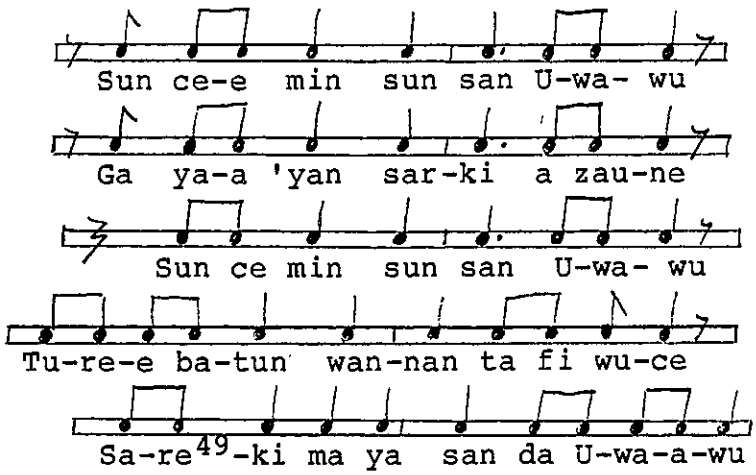
amshi:



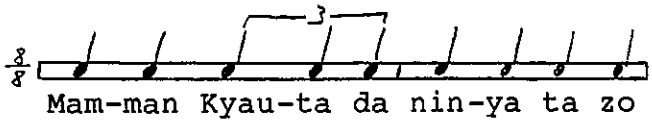
stanza:



[48] The first syllable of the stanza overlaps with the last beat of the preceeding amshi.



An example for irregular line length is Kyautar Chafe. The song is composed in an '8 meter'. It has a two-line refrain both lines being two measures long. Most of the stanza lines conform to this model; however, at two points in the song irregularity occurs. Each time Shata sings the series of praise epithets for Kyauta, the lines flow into each other and the two measure line separation is invalidated. In the first stanza, the first two lines are regularly spread on two measures per line, whereas the last part of the stanza is irregularly spread on altogether seven measures (mm.)

amshi (first line): 

First stanza:[50]

A'a 'yammatan birni fadi suke (2 mm.)
Ga matan birni fadi suke:(2 mm.)
Yaya Kyautam (2 mm.) Inna Kyauta, Gwaggo (2 mm.)
Kyautam. Sannu da rana yaya U-(2 mm.)-war Gajeje (1 mm.)

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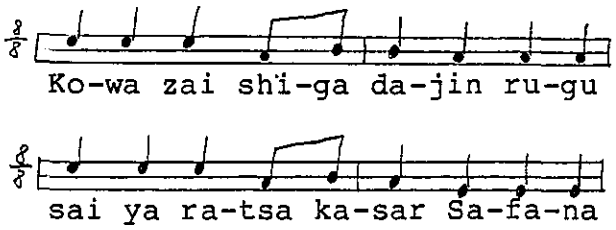
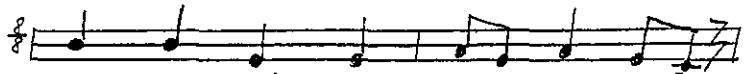
[49] The 'e' in sarki is inserted to create an extra syllable.

[50] See mm. 9-19 in Appendix A

The majority of the choral refrains in Shata's songs are one line long. This line is repeated without alteration throughout the song. In refrains which have two lines both lines are constructed very similarly yet differ in text and sometimes also slightly in melody or rhythm. The second line of an amshi often ends on a lower tone sequence than the first line thus imitating the downdrift pattern of the language at the end of a phrase. The lines of the refrain in Dajin Rugu are rhythmically identical yet melodically different due to the lower tones in the second line. (Lower tones here refer only to the performed melody and not to linguistic tones.)

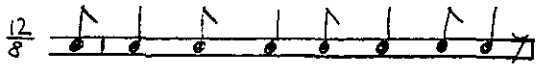


In Widi Dan Tijjani, the choral refrain adds a rhythmic variation to the melodic variation in the second line. The rhythmic variation becomes necessary as the first measure in the second line has two syllables less than the equivalent measure of the first line. Shata balances it out through notes of long musical value. The two final measures of each line are rhythmically identical again yet end on different tones.



The choral refrain is usually repeated verbatim throughout the song. Textual variations may occur to bring the meaning of the refrain closer to the meaning of the preceding stanza but they are rare and always employed with the same rhythmic pattern. This is the case, for example, in the songs Ladin Oga and Abba Siri Siri.

Ladin Oga:



A gai da La-a-din O-ga
Gi-dan su La-a-din O-ga
Mi-yar-ki La-a-din O-ga
Ga-rin su La-a-din O-ga
Tu-won-ki La-a-din O-ga

Abba Siri Siri:

yaa Al-ha-ji yaa Ab-ba Si-ri Si-ri
dan Al-ha-ji yaa Ab-ba Si-ri Si-ri
do-min da-ra-jar Ab-ba Si-ri Si-ri

A further technique to vary the choral refrain is what King calls "karbi".[51] In this technique the chorus joins with

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[51] Dr.A.King, "Form and Functions in Hausa Professional Song," Oral Poetry in Nigeria, eds. U.N.Abalogu, G.Ashiwaju, and R.Amadi-Tshiwala (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981) 135.

the singer in a unison continuation of the stanza he has initiated, or the chorus takes over the stanza from him. In both cases, the chorus normally proceeds, with or without interruption, to its completion and the singing of the amshi. In the song Sha Ruwa, the chorus joins with the solo singer in the last three beats of the stanza's final line.

S:Kai, laa ilanhaa i lalla (S+Ch:) duniya
Ch:Shaa ruwaa baa laaifii baa nee

S:Ai kun ga Alhaji Shata (S+Ch:) sha ya ke
Ch:Shaa ruwaa baa laaifii baa nee

S:Suna da wauta ba su da (S+Ch:) hankula
Ch:Sha ruwa ba laifi ba ne

In Habu Yan Mama, the chorus takes over a line in the middle of a word from the singer. The chorus finishes the line and the singer comes in again to terminate the stanza. As it is always the same line that the chorus completes, it becomes almost a second amshi.

S: Na Malum-
Ch:-fashi, Habu yan Mama

or:

S: Garba na Malum-
Ch:-fashi, Habu yan Mama

The singer sometimes begins a new stanza while the chorus is still singing the refrain. This leads to an overlapping of the end of the refrain and the beginning of the first line in a new stanza. The singer resorts to this variation when the first line is particularly long and he would otherwise have difficulties fitting all the words into

it, as is the case in Kyautar Chafe:

Ch: Kullum Kyauta da saa'a ta zo
S: san nan na...
...je Kaura mai neman Kyauta
An ce man Kyauta ba ta nan.

Ch: Kullum Kyauta da saa'a ta zo
S: sai na dubi...
...girman Katsina birnin Dikko
Mai nemanki Uwar Gajeje.

The stanzas in an oral poem are semantic and syntactic units. An overflowing of one stanza into the next without grammatical break--a common device in written poetry, called 'enjambment'--is virtually non-existent in oral poetry.[52] It is prevented by the choral refrain, one of whose functions it is to mark off the different stanzas and enable them to be grammatically independent. Stanzas, however, vary greatly in length. They can have from one to as many as ten or more lines. Regular verse form would impose too great a restriction on the oral poet who, after all, composes his song 'on the spot'. If he is at a loss for words, he can signal the chorus to join in and help him out. Or if he has a good idea that he wants to develop at some length, he needs more space. The stanzas are the domain for creative and artistic brilliance of the singer. They supply a dramatic contrast to the repetitiveness of the choral refrains.

Singer and chorus establish their own communication system for the joining-in of the chorus. As the songs are improvised and recreated differently each time, clear and

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[52] Muhammad, "Structural Tension" 80.

unambiguous signals between poet and group are crucial for a smooth performance. Many of the chorus members are apprentices of Shata and have worked with him for a long time. Chorus and singer are thus very familiar with each other and can rely on their long teamwork experience. Certain body movements and gestures can serve as external signals for the chorus. In an interview with the Nigerian scholar Dandatti Abdulakadir, a member of Shata's chorus describes one of the signals Shata uses during performances. It is the "mouth technique" in which Shata turns to the chorus right before the beginning of a song, points to his mouth and says "bakina" (lit. 'my mouth'); the chorus then knows exactly when to join in and what to sing. The informant also confirms that the songs are not practiced or rehearsed before a performance.[53]

In addition to external gestures there is a whole set of internal signals worked into the body of the song itself. These signals are certain rhythmic, melodic, or textual figures or a combination of the three and generally occur at the end of the last line in a stanza. They can be rather simple, as in Widi Dan Tijjani, where each time the singer has completed a stanza he adds a series of exclamations, "ta!", as an indication for the chorus to join in. The number of "tas" per final line depends on the length and

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[53] Dandatti Abdulkadir, "The Role of an Oral Singer in Hausa/Fulani Society: A Case Study of Mamman Shata," diss., Indiana University, 1975, 169.

rhythmic pattern of the line as they fill out the remaining beats of the last measure.

17. Wancan dan Tijjani Widi - ta!
Alo, alo, mai ganga ya gode...

41. Wancan mutumin Shata - ta,ta,ta,ta,ta!
Alo, alo, mai ganga ya gode...

Signals which are not set apart from the line text are more subtle and complicated. Fremont Besmer describes what he calls "concluding motive" in a song by the oral poet Sarkin Taushin Sarkin Katsina.[54] It is a specific melodic phrase employed with different texts throughout the song at the end of each stanza. Besmer interprets it as a structurally important device whose function it is to unify the song. It seems very likely, however, that the singer also uses it to signal to his chorus that he has finished the stanza and wishes them to join in.

Shata frequently uses this technique. In his song Mammanda Katsina, the concluding motive of each stanza consists of three syllables. Rhythm and melody are the same, the text varies. Mostly the key word of the song, "Mammanda", is repeated but other words also occur. The melodic phrase consists of two short, high tones and one long, low, concluding tone.

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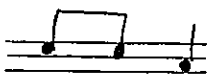
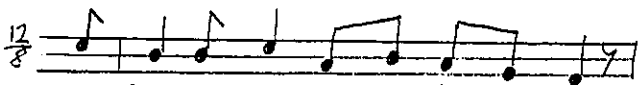
[54] Fremont Besmer, "A Hausa Song from Katsina," Ethnomusicology 7.3 (1970): 426.

signal: 

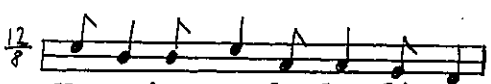
Mam-man-da
yi mai ba
Al- lah ne
zan sa- du
yan ya- ra

In Kumbo Apolo XI the signal for the chorus corresponds to the melody and rhythm of the refrain. The text can change although it also frequently employs the song's key word, "(Kumbo) Apolo XI". The melody has a falling sequence and thus imitates the Hausa. The concluding tone is long and low.

signal: 

Kum-bo A- po-lo e- i- le-ven
wan-nan A-po-lo e- i- le-ven
a-kwai A-po-lo e- i- le-ven
In ga i-rin ji-ri-gin wa-ta
har mu kai shi wu-ri-in wa-ta

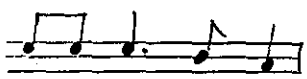
A slight rhythmic and melodic change occurs when the stanza final line ends on "lafiya" as in stanzas 3 to 6, and 19. The third-last syllable is left complete and on one long tone, instead of doubled and distributed on two falling tones, as in "eleven". Yet this change is so subtle that the basic character of the join-in signal remains the same.



Ya-a ko-mo da la-fi-ya

In most of the songs the concluding motive or join-in signal corresponds to the last half of the choral refrain in melody, rhythm, and text. Each time the motive occurs, the

chorus must join in. The singer may at various points in the song repeat parts of the signal yet the chorus only reacts if it is rendered in its complete form. In Alhaji Isuman Bichi, for example, the join-in signal is set to the words "Isuman Bichi", derived from the refrain "Wo tabako Isuman Bichi" ('Heigh-ho tobacco, Isuman Bichi!'). As they are central to the text, Shata often repeats them at the end of beginning or middle lines in the stanzas but never in combination with the signal's melody and rhythm unless it is the stanza's last line. The motive reveals again a melodic downdrift sequence and ends on a final long and low tone.

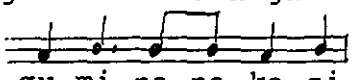


I-su-man Bi-chi

stanza 7. Mai alheri Isuman Bichi
Kuma ga hakuri Isuman Bichi
Ga addini Isuman Bichi
Wo tabako Isuman Bichi

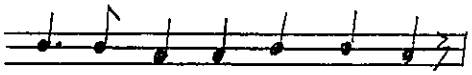
stanza 15. Ga addini Isuman Bichi
Ga alheri Isuman Bichi
Ga son jamma'a Isuman Bichi
Sada zumunci Isuman Bichi
Kuman ga baiwa Isuman Bichi
Wo tabako Isuman Bichi

The choral refrain of the song Gumina Na Ke Ci is "kai yan yara gumina ya ke ci" ('I'm fed by my sweat!') The join-in signal adopts melody, rhythm, and text of the last part, "gumina na ke ci". The last melodic tone here is high and is as such analogous to the high linguistic tone of "ci".



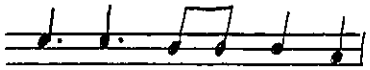
gu-mi-na na ke ci

In Annabi Muhammadu, the join-in signal is "Annabi Muhammadu" taken from the last half of the refrain's "na tsaya ga Annabi Muhammadu" ('I rely on the Prophet Muhammad').



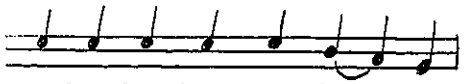
An-na-bi Mu-ham-ma-du

In Gargadi Mugunta, the amshi is "Mu gargadi mai gina ramin mugunta" ('Let's warn the digger of an evil hole')and the join-in signal is "ramin mugunta". Downdrift pattern and low, long final tone are prevalent again.



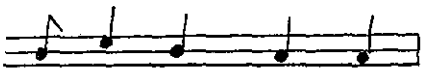
ra-min mu-u-gun-ta

The choral refrain in Abubakar Tafawa is "Allah ji kan Abubakar tafawa" ('God have mercy on Abubakar Tafawa') and the join-in signal is "Abubakar Tafawa".



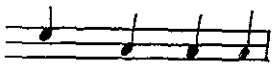
A-bu-ba-kar Ta-fa-a-wa

In Dadin Kudi, the refrain is "Kudi a kashe su ta hanya mai kyau" ('Money, spend it wisely!'). Although this refrain is often repeated verbatim or almost verbatim in the stanza final line, again only the last part of the refrain, "ta hanya mai kyau", serves as the join-in signal. In five of the twenty-two stanzas in the song textual variations occur. Rhythm and the downdrifted melody remain unaltered.



ta han-ya mai kyau
-ci Mam-man Sha-ta
-ki-di sha- sha-ta
mu-na go- de mai
-ga sha-shan-ci ba

In songs with a two-line refrain it is the last part of the second line that serves as the model for the join-in signal. This is due to the fact that the second choral line mostly ends on the downdrift pattern so typical for join-in signals and Hausa language in general. In Dajin Rugu, the join-in signal is melodically derived from line two of the amshi, yet its text alters between the two amshi lines. Rhythmically both lines are identical. The refrain is "Kowa zai shiga dajin Rugu / Sai ya ratsa kasar Safana" ('If you enter Rugu forest / You have to pass through Safana'). The join-in signal is either "dajin Rugu" or "(ka-)sar Safana".



da- jin Ru-gu
or: -sar Sa-fa-na

In all these examples the final line of a stanza plays the crucial role in signalling the choral participation. The join-in signal thereby corresponds closely to patterns that were established in the choral refrain. They sometimes overlap textually, they often overlap rhythmically, and they always overlap melodically. This demonstrates the importance of tone for the structure of Hausa oral poetry. The tonal

identity in the concluding syllables of a stanza final line establishes a consistent tonal rhyme scheme. It is external tonal rhyme, as it concerns only the last line of the stanzas. The rhyme patterns of a given song are determined by the amshi which is an extension of the amshi's influence on the general form of the poem to the domain of tone. Muhammad makes a similar observation:

> It is significant here to observe that the amshi which is generally the thematic and structural reference point of oral poems, tends to determine the tonal rhyme pattern of the lines of the poem as a whole, thus assigning a dynamic role for tone.[55]

In oral poetry tonal rhyme has a double function . It is a prosodic device contributing to the aesthetic appreciation of the poem, thus demonstrating the artistic skills of the poet. At the same time it is important for the discourse between singer and chorus during the performance as it is the decisive signal for the chorus on when to join in the song and conclude the stanza.

This observation could help to explain a phenomenon that has been noticed by different scholars of Hausa poetry. It is the evenness and constancy of final line parts in contrast to the often blurred line beginnings. Schuh writes:

> Another feature of Hausa poetry which I have

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[55] Dalhatu Muhammad, "The Two Facets of Rhyme" 14.

> observed, and which both Joseph Greenburg and Neil Skinner have independently pointed out in personal communication, is the fact that line ends in Hausa poems tend to be almost entirely regular, whereas line beginnings frequently are not.[56]

Tonal rhyme is always employed at the end of a line and thus provides regular line endings. Due to the aesthetic and functional importance of tonal rhyme, regular line endings occur frequently. In African music these regular endings are a common phenomenon. Chernoff points out that the characteristic features of a piece of music are employed at the end of a musical phrase and not in the beginning. A poetic line is a unified musical phrase. Its distinctive tonal pattern is therefore established at its end. The same is true for a distinctive rhythmic pattern. Many times Shata's poems show a regular rhythmic figure in the last part of the lines. One could speak of 'rhythmic rhyme'. When the poet has to squeeze a high number of syllables into a line he does so in the beginning rather than at the end of the line. This creates a greater rhythmic inconsistency at the line beginning whereas the rhythmic final patterns can remain stable. The stability of line endings through the repetition of certain tonal or rhythmic figures is a highly effective musical foregrounding technique. It is extended also to the

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[56] Schuh 17.

text, as the key word of a song is placed at the line ending rather than at its beginning. Finally, the choral refrain which is the characteristic line of the whole poem, is always placed at the end of a stanza. Thus the foregrounding of the central phrase is achieved and the stanza, the next bigger unit after a line, is effectively rounded off.

> In Western music, the lead singer or instrumentalist starts on the main beat; in African music the situation is reversed: the musician unifies his time with the last beat he plays rather than the first one. In African music, then, the main beat coincides with the entrance of the chorus and not the soloist, and...the main beat comes at the end of a dynamic phrase and not at the beginning.[57] [my emphasis]

This characteristic is also reflected in the nature of a songs's opening. The musicians never start out together. Each song is begun by Shata alone. In about the middle of his first line--the first line being rhythmically and tonally rather indistinct-- he is joined by his drummers. After they finish the line together the chorus joins in with the amshi. It is only at this point that the song reaches its full rhythmic, melodic and thematic dynamics. The first few notes of the song signal the drummers which rhythm to use. The

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[57] Chernoff 56.

singer's text and melody together with the drummers' rhythms provide the model for the choral refrain.[58] The use of these kind of 'staggered', independent entrances into a musical piece is "an important characteristic of African music" called "apart-playing".[59]

Thus the principles of music influence the overall form of a poem as much as they influence its individual parts. From the frame of a performance and its embodiment in music to the very stanzas, lines, and even syllables a correlation between the structure of language and the structure of music exists. In this sense, language and music achieve a complete unity in Hausa song. Mamman Shata is as much a poet as he is a musician. Only the mastering of both disciplines and their unifying into one could make him to what he is: a true and great oral poet.

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[58] This description of a song's gradual set-up stems from personal communication with Shehu Karaye, Washington D.C., January 1987.

[59] Chernoff 47. The term "apart-playing" was first applied by Richard Farris Thompson in his article "An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance," African Forum 2.2 (1966): 93-94.