

# Surrogate Language in the African Novel: A Tool for Rural Development

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## Abstract

The portrayal of drum language as a surrogate language in the African novel recaptures this ancient instrument as still a viable means of communicating the people's thought and culture through spoken language by means other than speech. The African novel illustrates the developmental essence of the drum in traditional African societies especially in West Africa as portrayed in some authors' works like: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Camara Laye's *The African Child*, Etim Akaduh's *The Ancestor*, Ferdinand Oyono's *House Boy*, etc. The paper subdivides the drum into its symbolic uses at varying cultural occasions in Ibibio tradition in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, as follows: *obodom ubong*: or the royal drum, *obodom usuanetop*: for disseminating information and *obodom mbre*: for entertainment. The paper submits that language is not only an element of communication; but it is also a powerful means of enhancing grass-roots mobilization; a surrogate language which communicates actual speech by sounding out the stress and tone of syllables as well, has almost the same capability as language. The drum language therefore remains a viable means for: interpersonal and group communion, cultural transmission, and basically for information dissemination within the rural communities which characterize the folks' existence, organization and development. For any scientific change in the transmission of information to be effective within the rural areas, the planners, policy makers and administrators must take into cognizance the drum as a surrogate language for the dissemination of such information. Also since the drum language is a direct transfer of the stress and tonal features of most African vernaculars, the drum should be modernized and its language patterning encouraged as a field of study along with other contemporary scientific technologies for information propagation and for societal development.

**Keywords:** obodom ubong, obodom usuanetop, obodom mbre, tonal language, communication, call and answer device.

## 1.Introduction:

From antiquity, man has used all sorts of objects to convey meaning as a means of staying in social relations with other humans. These objects function as: surveillance of the environment, correlation of parts of the society in relation to the environment, transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next and as forms of entertainment. Among these means of conveying meaning is the drum which seems to speak a proxy language that is close to the verbal language. Language, among other definitions, is the code, the system of symbols, utilized in the communication of verbal messages. Joseph De Vito defines language "as a specialized productive system capable of displacement and composed of rapidly fading arbitrary, culturally transmitted symbols" (De Vito 1982). This is to say that, among others, inherent in language is specialization, productivity, displacement, rapid fading, arbitrariness, cultural transmission. Language therefore, is not merely and completely communication; it is a social institution, which exists because human beings interact in society. Language as a social institution is therefore, designed, modified, and extended or distorted to meet the ever-changing needs of culture or subculture. As such, language differs greatly from one culture to another. Again as a social institution, language both reflects and influences society of which it is part. Language is a bonding activity. It has been described as "the human essence and the quintessence of humanity" (Petters 1994), and the closest substitute language to man's spoken language remains the drum language.

A surrogate language on the other hand, is a method of communication through a spoken language but by means other than speaking. In contrast with speaking, which is the uttering of words or the articulation of sounds with the human voice, a surrogate language involves the uttering of words or the articulation of sounds through an alternative or surrogate voice. "Through the use of instruments, a surrogate language employs sounds that substitute for spoken words. In exceptional cases, a surrogate language may even substitute written text" (Nketia 1963). A surrogate language communicates actual speech by sounding out the stress and tones of syllables. "As technologies, they may be described as a cross between the telegraph and the radio. They transmit information by being beaten, blown, strummed, or tapped upon" (Ushe 2012). Surrogate languages emit words because they replicate the stress and tone of tonal languages.

"By 'tone' it is not meant 'a tone of voice,' but rather a phonemic tone, which is a key feature of many African languages. There is an observable change of meaning with a shift from

a high to a low tone a syllable of a word as in the case of drums” (Ayoo1991).

Other potent channels of communication include: idiophones: gongs, bells, rattles or Arephones: fresh unfolding palm fronts, decorated raffia and cryptic writing. It is widely recognized that Africa has a rich variety of instruments and in the case of drums, they come in various sizes and perform different functions: there is the goblet, conical, barrel, cylindrical, and frame (obviously they would be named within the certain dialect). In pre-literate Africa, the drum was the most popular instrument of communication among members of the same language community.

Historically, drums are presumed to have originated as early as in 6000 BC. Mesopotamian excavations discovered small cylindrical drums dated 3000 BC. Inside caves in Peru several wall markings were found which show the use of drums in various aspects of communal life. The American Indians used gourd and wooden constructed drums for their rituals and ceremonies, especially it is most revered among the people of Africa, where it comes in various forms and fulfills various functions. (Wikipedia:86). Indeed, Africa may be called the 'Drum Continent' because nowhere else in the world has a greater range or number of drums. Africa is the continent which saw the emergence of man and probably the beginning of music itself." (Wikipedia:44). The drum speaks the drummed language. Kofi Yankson acknowledges that: “The drum signal was a direct transfer of the tonal features of the African vernacular into musical medium. But a mere knowledge of one’s vernacular did not guarantee an understanding of drum language; it also had to be learnt” (Yankson 1990). The drum therefore, requires some form of skill to utilize it as a medium of communication and even as a musical instrument.

Sam Akpobot in Des Wilson describes the wooden drum as: “a hollowed-out tree trunk made to produce two tones. It comes in different sizes and it is played with two beaters made out of bamboo ... It can be played as a solo instrument by a specialist musician to transmit messages from the chief of the village, in groups of two or three in an orchestra” (Willson 1998). The drum is therefore, as a multipurpose instrument capable of giving a clear-cut message without ambiguity to the trained ears. Akpobot also identifies three major kinds of drums according to their functions among the Ibibios of South Eastern Nigeria namely:

*Obodom ubong* (royal drum), *obodom usuanetop* or *obodom ikot* (drum for message dissemination) \ and *obodom mbre* (common drums used by masquerade and other cultural groups). The language of the *obodum* which is based on the tonal patterns of the local language is understood by those who have been brought up under the traditional system. As it is usually played by specialist drummers (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1998).

Like Yankson, Akpobot emphasizes that the language of the drum though based on the tonal patterns of the local language, its language is not readily accessible to most members of the younger generation. To make this possible, the present generation has to be taught its system just as they learn the letters of the alphabet because it is a specialized form of language. "African languages operate on two levels: rhythmic speech and tonal inflexion. Combined, these may be interpreted by differently pitched drums or single log drums capable of producing more than one pitch, any ambiguities becoming clear by intelligent appreciation of the context." African-djembe (2014). Therefore, drums are traditionally incorporated into African culture as means of communication. So effective is this means of communication that it can actually substitute for spoken language due to the ability of drummers to estimate human speech patterns to near perfection. For instance, the African talking drum is so named because it can fairly accurately very closely represent the rhythm and pitch of human speech expressions, and a major tool for rural development.

Des Wilson incorporates the drum under idiophonic communication instruments “capable of producing their own messages as well as producing signals which serve as attention-directing devices prior to the delivery of the actual communication message” (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1998). The African rhythm is actually a metrical call and answer device that serves to create a pattern that should be viewed as a response. This further underlines the importance of understanding African rhythms as an expression of communication and even as a language device. For instance, the fact that communication can be done over great distances set the drum aside as a surrogate language. It is also believed that the language of the drums is spiritual. In Chinue Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the author writes: “there were seven drums and they were arranged according to their sizes in a long wooden basket. Three men beat them with sticks, working feverishly from one drum to another. They were possessed by the spirit of the drums” (Achebe 1958). Still in the above mentioned novel, the author notes: “The drums were still beating, persistent and unchanging. Their sound was no longer a separate thing from the living village. It was like the pulsation of its heart. It throbbed in the air, in the sunshine, and even in the trees and filled the village with excitement” (Achebe 1958). The drum is a fundamental nature of the people and therefore, a viable

device for rural development. The rural dwellers who utilize the drum as a most effective traditional communication method should mark up to about 75-80% of African population. Drumming is considered a nighttime activity but may be heard in times of daylight only on days of rest, or periods of mourning which may last up to three months. The African drum is in effect an essence of the African people wherever they may be found all over the world

Africans in the Americas had come from a diverse arrays, locations and backgrounds through the whole of the continent of Africa. The drum therefore, served as an extremely powerful substitute for language. It made communication across the plantations in the New World, otherwise forbidden, possible. As a result, it provided African slaves with an instrument to try to integrate themselves into a new identity – that of African American. The drum language was also used by African slaves to organize riots and rebellions, despite the great ethnic and linguistic differences that existed among them (Yankah1997). In the time of slave trade in Africa, Africans likewise, used the talking drum as a strategic method to warn against the arrival of slave catchers during this period too. Once their use became known to non-users and as a mark of their effectiveness, slave masters in the Americas (Yankah:7), and colonial governors in Africa (Carrington 2014), outlawed their use. Despite this, black Africans ingeniously incorporate these same unique rhythms and beats that have heavily influenced Western Rock and Roll music.

This paper seeks to establish the effectiveness of the drum as a surrogate language and a toll to enhance grassroots mobilization for society's development: its various uses in rural African communities, as seen in some select African novels, with particular reference to West African works namely: Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1953) Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1974), Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1981), Etim Akaduh's *The Ancesto* (1983), Ferdinand Oyono's *House Boy* (1960), among others. The paper also foregrounds the essence of drum language as a tool that should be encouraged for rural mass mobilization. In addition, the paper also envisages its future expansion to accommodate contemporary forms of communication for greater development. The paper will interrogate this topic by grouping the drums according to their uses and functions in accordance with the culture of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State, South Eastern Nigeria distinctively: *Obodom ubong* (royal drum), *obodom usuanetop*, (drum for message dissemination), and *obodom mbre* (common drums which consist of *obodom idion* (*idion* cult drum), *obodom ekponyoho* (*ekpe* masquerade drum), *obodom ekong* (*ekong* society drum), and others named after the cultural groups which make use of them.

## **2.Obodom Ubong as Surrogate Language: a Tool for Rural Development:**

This drum is sacred and has direct bearing with royalty. Sam Akpabot in Des Wilson describes this royal drum as seen among the Ibibios as: “a two-piece medium for disseminating information and has a direct link with royalty. One of the drums is smaller than the other. It is known to be used on three specific occasions: at the installation of kings, during a royal celebration and at the death of kings. The language of the drum which is based on the tonal patterns of the local language is understood by those who have been brought up under the traditional system” (Wilson 1998), African rhythm is not merely meant to be taken as a musical accompaniment; it is literally a symbol of communicating. In the words of Burgoon and Ruffner (1994): “Communication is a process that involves a shared code or codes of verbal and nonverbal symbols. The meanings of the symbols are in the people who use them, not in the symbols themselves; meanings are in people”, communication therefore, is a shared code or codes of symbols with which a body of people understand each other, and some standardized usages do exit and through it we affect people and control our environment.

For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), when at the first cock crow “people of Umuofia heard the sound Go-di-di-go-go-di-go. Di-go-go-di-go. It was the *ekwe* talking to the clan. One of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed-out instrument ... When the *ekwe* began to talk, ... men stirred on their bamboo beds and listened anxiously. Somebody was dead”. Through the “esoteric language of the *ekwe*. ... The ancient drums of death beat” (Achebe 1958), Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel immediately recognizes that an important person must have died. Drumming and rhythm are essentially means of communication and if Africans can be said without question to perceive anything about rhythm, is that they can perceive how communication proceeds. African drummers can strike a rhythm that replicates not only speech rhythm, but also speech pitch and the meaning is very specific.

The language of the drum is clear during sacred rituals like the titled men and king's funerals. They listened to the esoteric language of the *ekwe* and deciphered that a great man has died. “The drums and the dancing began and reached fever-beat” (Achebe 1958), as the time for the burial drew near. The “funeral drums” (Achebe 1958) beat violently and men leaped up and down in frenzy. It is the *ekwe* which at dawn announced to all the nine villages the death of one of the great men of Umuoffia, Ezendu, the man who on his last visit to Okonkwo, warned him that: “That boy calls you father. Bear no hand in his death” (Achebe 1958). But at the death of Ogbuefi Ndulue - another great man in Umuofia - the drums did beat “to tell Umuofia of his

death” though he is a titled man, this is because a strange thing happened. As Ozoemena, Ndulue’s first wife is told of her husband’s death, she hobbled out of her hut to the threshold of her husband’s hut and calls his name “ ‘Ogbuefi Ndulue’ three times without any answer, she shuffled back and laid on her mat and died” (Achebe 1958). It is said “that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind”. Ozoemena, therefore, will be buried first before the drums could announce the death of Ogbuefi Ndulue to Umuofia.

The drum will not beat for title men who commit very serious offences against the gods of the land. In this instance, the drum does not beat at the death of a great man like Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, because Okonkwo, “one of the greatest men in Umuofia” (Achebe 1958), commits suicide. Among the Igbos and among most cultural groups in Africa, suicide cases are never buried by their people and therefore, they are never celebrated, instead: “sacrifices are made to cleanse the desecrated land” (Achebe 1958), caused by their death; strangers are normally paid to bury such suicide cases. Since this drum is usually played by specialist drummers, its language is not readily accessible to most members of the younger generation. The inherent act of specialization in the handling and understanding of the language of this instrument enhances rural development.

### **3.Obodom usanetop as Surrogate Language: a Tool for Rural Development:**

By its very name *obodom usanetop*, it is meant for disseminating information. This drum is used to send messages over great distances, as long as several miles on some occasions. Drum messages can be addressed to specific individuals by calling their names or the whole community may be so informed through this medium if the message is meant for the public consumption, Akpabot agrees that: “this is a very vital function by the *obodom usanetop*. Commenting on this category of drums, Des Wilson says: “... because this type of *obodom* is very large its message could cover distances of over twenty kilometers. ... When played at night, its message could be received in very distant places. In some cases ... the messages can only be understood by the elders and chiefs for whom the message is usually meant ...” (Wilson1998). The efficacy of the drum is illustrated during Ezeudu’s death; while the wailing of the women could not be heard beyond the village, but the *ekwe* (drum) carried the news to all the nine villages and even beyond (Achebe 1958). In that way, rhythm serves to act as a contingency. It is most assuredly easier for messages to be sent via drumbeat than by foot messenger. Also commenting on this type of drum, Emmanuel Akpan states: “if placed on the roof or tree top is a rare instrument, the sound of which can announce a state of emergency in the community” (Emmanuel 1994). Drum language as a surrogate language expresses rhetorical communication that contains three elements: the speaker, the message, and the audience. Drums and rhythms are also important in establishing social bonding.

In Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, the *Ikolo* drum is also used to summon emergency meetings. The author tells us that “the *Ikolo* was not beaten out of season except in great emergency” (Achebe 1974). For instance when Captain Winterbottom summoned Ezeulu to Okperi, the Chief Priest “sent word to the old man who beat the giant *Ikolo* to summon the elders and *ndichie* to an urgent meeting at sunset” (Achebe 1974). In this instance, the elders immediately understand the essence of the drum language and will hurry for the meeting summoned and at the appropriate time.

The drum can be used for regulating a gathering of the people. Still in the above mentioned work, after every citizen has assembled at the market place, the *Ikolo* calls the meeting to order: “Soon after the great *Ikolo* sounded it called the six villages of Umuaro one by one in their ancient order ... It went on numbering again by this time starting from the youngest ... the *Ikolo*, the king of drums, which presides over and regulates the meeting and with special drum signals” (Achebe 1974). As the villages are called in their ancient order, their leaders indicate their presence and co-operation in matters that are of concern to the whole clan. The *Ikolo* now beat unceasingly; “sometimes it calls names of important people of Umuaro ... But most of the time it calls the villages and their deities. As the *Ikolo* takes attendance of those present through the prehistoric register, it also salutes and encourages great achievers for their achievements and ever ready co-operation. Finally it settles down to saluting Ulu, the deity of all Umuaro” (Achebe 1974). The drum acknowledges the spiritual help for the various deities and pay particular homage to their great deity Ulu forever backing them up in transcendental matters.

Similarly, at the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves; a ceremony of purification before the beginning of the planting season, in response to the *Ikolo*’s call for order: the Chief Priest emerges from his shrine, runs to the market place then faces the *Ikolo* and addresses it “speak on, Ezeulu hears what you say ... The *Ikolo* drum worked itself into a frenzy during the Chief Priest flight especially its final stages when he, having completed the full circle of the market place, ran on with increasing speed into the sanctuary of his shrine, his messengers at his heels. As soon as they disappeared the *Ikolo* broke off its beating abruptly with one last KOME (Achebe 1974). The people understand that the last beat of the *Ikolo*’s KOME signals the women to join the Chief Priest, now in his shrine in burying the individual and communal sins. So it is the *Ikolo* that regulates the meeting.

The drum signals the beginning of harvest. In Camara Laye’s *The African Child*, before the rice harvest begins, the head of each family rises at dawn and goes to cut the first swathe in his fields. “As soon as this first sheaf had been cut, the *tom-tom* would sound signals on the beginning of the harvest” (Laye1981). It is



only then that the reapers march to the rhythm of the tom-tom for the harvesting of the rice. The tom-tom is a type of drum for disseminating information at the harvesting of rice and also used in appeasing “the spirits of the soil,” whose influence could not be ignored for a favourable “sunny weather and protection for the harvesters against the danger of snake-bites” (45), the drum signals soothe both man and spirits. Imelda Udo (2014) (in an unpublished paper describes the drum language as a type of language: “in which the vocabulary is understood in the context of a combination of the prosody and the syllables/phrases of the language through notes from the drum beats”.

In Achene’s *Things Fall Apart*, “Okonkwo has just blown out the palm-oil lamp and stretched himself on his bamboo bed when he heard the *ogene* of the town-crier piercing the still night air: “Gome, gome, gome, gome, boomed the hallow metal” (Achebe 1958). From the language of the drums Okonkwo discerns a clear overtone of tragedy and figures out the nature of emergency to be war with a neighbouring clan. In *Arrow of God*, the author declares that when the drum “is beaten for war it was decorated with skulls won in past wars” (Achebe 1974). The skulls show the gallantry of the people and signal the tribe’s preparedness to go to war. The town criers with their drums are used to summon elders or age groups in society to assemble at the village square for some social or political activities (Finnegan 1997), to give and receive information.

In Ferdinand Oyono’s *House Boy* (1960) Anton, a black Frenchman, who understands the drum language recognizes the distant sound of the drum to come from M’foula and that the drum “says a Frenchman is very ill”, and therefore needs help. Anton’s skilled acquisition of the message of the drum language sets him with some others off immediately to reach the black French man. According to Leswell in Michael Burgoon and Michael Rufiner (1974): “communication has three functions: surveillance of the environment, correlation of different social groups, and transmission of the social heritage”. Leswell further describes communication with the following questions: “Who/says, What/in, Which channel/to whom/with what effect” (Burgoon&Rufiner 1974). The construction of the message and the character of the drummer, play important parts in persuading the audience.

In Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1953) since she is socialized in the language of drums she understands that: “vast pervading doom ... a drum of calamity each beat echoing the mighty impotence of our human endeavour”, again she recognizes the language of “the funeral drum”, and through this familiarity she becomes responsive to the expectations of others and accepts the ideals of her traditions.

It is not uncommon at all for a drumbeat to communicate with the people through playing a hymn to a tribal deity or chief. As the drum does this, it incorporates a certain element of the contention that abstraction and cognitive abilities come into play. This is especially true in less sacred ceremonies. Again in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, “A big *ogene* sounded three times from *Ulu*’s shrine. The *Ikolo* took it up and sustained an endless follow of praises to the deity” (Achebe 1974). “The *ogene* sounded again. The *Ikolo* began to salute the Chief Priest”. The drum will not acknowledge a usurper; the drum reaffirms the legitimacy of the Chief Priest and his priesthood as the physical embodiment of the spiritual representative.

Okon Essien acknowledges language as “one of the most important attributes of mankind” and sees the drum as: “the creative use of language in which sound is structured for meaning with the drum: set the drum apart as a surrogate language, perhaps as the oldest substitute means of communication in the world, with every society employing it in varying degrees” (Petters 1994). A surrogate language like the drum language always plays roles that delve into the social fabric of the people of various cultural groups especially in Africa. It serves also as a store house that promotes the peoples’ cultural heritage; it acts as credible show of affinity among participants in the African cultural environment. Just as people of a certain culture know what certain words mean when given a certain kind of inflection, so too will most Africans instantly recognize the patterns of drumbeats. This certainly supports the idea of assigning a value beyond cognitive understanding to African rhythm. African drums and drumbeats have great utilitarian values that may be said to be indispensable to the people.

#### **4. Obodom mbre as Surrogate Language: a Tool for Rural Development:**

The *Obodom mbre* consists of *obodom idion* (*idion* cult drum), *obodom ekpo nyoho* (*ekpo* masquerade drum), *obodom ekong* (*ekong* society drum), and others named after the cultural groups which make use of them. “These drums are also carved out of logs of wood” (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1998). Though used as instruments of entertainment, they serve also as communication devices because they are also used to extend information to participating members. Describing *obodom mbre*, Omibiyi in Des Wilson states: “These are hollowed out and slit open at the top to create a pair of lips which are struck with beaters. The two lips give contrasting tones. ... They are used to accompany various music and for verbal communication” (Ansu-Kyeremeh:1998). The drum is a traditional media of communication which has credibility and reliability. Thus apart from being used as musical instrument, the drum as used in rural areas provides a common front that helps the people operate and interact freely. Communication through the drum is two way. The audience responds to its messages; the response, which may come from an individual or a group in the community, is always simultaneous and

spontaneous.

Communication is not a personal but a symbolic process requiring a shared code or codes of abstractions. To announce the presence of the big masquerade *egwugwu*, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the drums sound in reference to the spirits of the ancestors which emerge from the earth, and greet the people in their esoteric language. Achebe remarks: "the drums sounded again and the flute blew. The *egwugwu* house was now a pandemonium of quavering voices: *Aru Oyim de dedededeil* filled the air" (Achebe 1958). Still in *Things Fall Apart*, after the judicial council of the *egwugwu* had retired to discuss verdict in their house: "They were silent for a long time. Then the metal gong sounded and flute was blown, the *egwugwu* had emerged once again from their underground home, the metal gong and the flute, in dialogue, together announce the reappearance of the *egwugwu*" (Achebe 1958). The drum used by different masquerade groups produce esoteric messages whose speech formula applied to deliver the message is meant for the trained ears of members. For example, only members of the *Ekpo nyoho* society understand the speech formula used to deliver special messages to its members. The playing of the drum to produce messages is an intricate affair which demands a high level of professionalism and expertise and such can only be found among those who have acquired the skill. No outsider or someone without prior training is allowed to do so, otherwise, dissonant information will be sent out and the offender would not go without some grievous penalties including death penalty to the culprit for desecrating the *Ekpo nyoho* drums. Though these drums come under *obodom mbre*, they are sacred and revered by the different cultural groups who will not compromise any abuse.

On various social occasions one hears drum beats and rhythms: during festivities that carry less weight, such as at a traditional dance: "a group of elders could hear, from a distance, the faint beating of the *ekwe*, at an *ozo* dance, a peaceful dance from a distant clan" (Achebe 1958). The drum is also heard when "Okonkwo is about to kill. Ikemefuna, just then distant beating of drum began to reach them" (Achebe 1958), as a form of warning not to commit the hideous crime of killing his 'son'. Drum beats are also heard during sporting events; for instance as Okonkwo and Amalinze the cat are engaged in a wrestling match "the drums beat ... and the spectators held their breath" (Achebe 1958). Interestingly, these particular rhythms and tones can communicate much like a sportscaster making comments upon the action of the match.

Still in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in another wrestling competition between Maduke's team and their opponents; through the general knowledge of the language of the drums, the people now know that the two teams are about to dance "into the circle and the crowd roared and clapped; the drums rose to a frenzy. ... The old men nodded to the beats of the drums and remembered the days when they wrestled to its intoxicating rhythm" (Achebe 1958). Again the author says: "... the drum beat the unmistakable wrestling dance-quick, light and gay ... Okonkwo cleared his throat and moved his feet to the beat of the drums. It filled him with fire as it has always done from his youth. He trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue. It was like the desire for a woman" (30). As the other teams continue in the wrestling competition: "the drummers took up their sticks again and the air shivered and grew tense like a tightened bow" (Achebe 1958). Communication is a dynamic process, and the process is a transaction that affects both the sender and the receiver, therefore, the playing of the drum to produce messages is an intricate affair, which demands a high level of expertise.

The drum can function: solo, act as a chorus, play in unison, or enter into dialogue, with other musical instruments. In *Arrow of God*, when Nwaka one of the chiefs, is boasting of his achievements "the flute called him *Ogalanya Ajo Mmo*, and the big drum replied, in a sort of dialogue" (Achebe 1974). After uttering a few more boastful words: "the flute and the drum spoke again" (Achebe 1974). Then both the flute and drum, in unison, endorse Nwaka's boastful claims. At the end of his final monologue, he addresses the crowd: "Tell me folk assembled, a man who did this is his arm strong or not?" The crowd replied "His arm is indeed strong" (Achebe 1974). Acknowledging some of the distinguishing characteristics of the drums Ayoo Fabola (1991). includes: "ability of the audience to talk back almost immediately and simultaneously". Another example of the drum in dialogue is at the Festival of the *Pumpkin Leaves* in Achebe's *Arrow of God*: "A big *Ogene* sounded three times from *Ulu's* shrine" and "the *Ikolo* took it up and sustained an endless flow of praises to the deity (Achebe 1974). Once more after the messengers of the Chief Priest had cleared a place for him: "the *ogene* sounded again" and the *Ikolo* (also) began to salute the Chief Priest (Achebe 1974). Yet again at the wrestling competition between Okonkwo and Amalinze the cat: "the drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath" (Achebe 1958). On the above occasions, the instruments can be said to be engaged in dialogues with other instruments or with humans. The people quickly interact easily with the drums because they are a submerged in those mores.

Also in Etim Akaduh's *The Ancestor* 1983, at the reception ceremony to celebrate Tison, we find the drum in concert with other instruments: "Again the wooden gong cried from the shed: Koi! Koi! Koi! Koi! This was followed by the long drum, humming continuously Ton-ton-kim; ton-kim: and later the Ekpe bell chimed: Taam! Taam! Taam! Taam!"

The drum can also be spoken to. At this great festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, Ezeulu faces the drum and talks to it: "Speak on" he says to it: "Ezeulu hears what you say" (Achebe 1974). The drum is thus, the

official signaling instrument of Umuaro village with its official player, the old man, Obiozo Ezikolo, any ambiguities become clear by intelligent appreciation of the context. The response to communication through the drum with an individual or with a group in the community is always simultaneous and spontaneous.

The drum communicates and imparts messages that would persuade, entertain, inform, or do a variety of other things. These are achieved through shared meaning. In Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1981) as Laye hears the *tom-tom* begin to beat from the remote part of the compound, he describes the effects of the drum beat in him. He says: "the notes had roused me at once, had struck my breast, had struck right at my heart", the effect of the tom-tom beats on him is predicated on the fact that he knows instinctively, that his time has come for him to join the band of boys due for initiation into manhood.

The drums are employed to sing in praise of a deity, "A big *ogene* sounded three times from *Ulu's* shrine. The *Ikolo* took it up and sustained an endless flow of praises to the deity" (Achebe 1974). The *Ikolo* now beat unceasingly; "sometime it calls names of important people of Umuaro ... But most of the time it calls the villages and their deities. Finally it settles down to saluting *Ulu*, the deity of all Umuaro" (Achebe 1974). The communicative ability with the drums reaffirms the drum as a surrogate language that is cultural and ordered and a viable tool for rural development.

The drum is utilized to eulogize a village or a whole clan: "the great *Ikolo* sounded. It called the six villages of Umuaro one by one in their ancient order ... It went on numbering again by this time starting from the youngest ..." (Achebe 1974). As the villages are called in their ancient order their leaders indicate their presence and co-operation in matters that are of concern to the whole clan. Again in announcing the death of Ezeudo, to the nine villages in the clan, the *ekwe* begins by naming the clan:

Umofia *obodo dike*, 'the land of the brave'  
... It said this over and over again, and as it  
dwelt on it, anxiety mounted in every heart  
that heaved on a bamboo bed that night. Then  
it went nearer and named the village:  
*Iguedo* of the yellow grinding-stone!  
It was Okonkwo's village. Again and again  
*Iguedo* the drum calls and men waited  
breathlessly in all the nine villages. At last  
the man was named and the people sighed  
'E-u-u, Ezeudu is dead (Achebe 1958).

The drums are engaged in many other ways for instance to sing the honorary designations of eminent men. In *Arrow of God*, as Nwaka is boasting of his achievements "the flute called him *Ogalanya Ajo Mmo*, and the big drum replied, in a sort of dialogue" (Achebe 1958). When the ancient drums of death beat in praise of the dead the great warrior Ezeudu, the language is clearly understood by other warriors; the effect of the drum language sets the other warriors - now glad in their paraphernalia of raffia with their bodies painted with chalk and charcoal - in frenzy: "cutting down every tree or animal they saw, jumping over walls and dancing on the roof" (Achebe 1958). The drum language also causes the ancestral spirits to emerge from the underworld: "some of the spirits like *egwugwu* appear from the underworld, speaking in a tremulous unearthly voice and completely covered with raffia, some of them very violent, some very dreaded - with only one hand and with it carried a basket full of water, and some quite harmless; old and infirm leaning heavily on a stick" (Achebe 1958).

Collectively, drum language fosters social relations as it leads to affiliation, affection and affinity among people of the same cultural group. Individually, it fosters self-concept, confirmation of self, reduction of uncertainty and what Burgoon and Ruffner in *Human Communication* (1974) call "impression management or creating proper image of ourselves". In spite of their great legacy, use of surrogate languages has decreased (Finnegan 1997). Modern technological advances in communication have overshadowed their traditional importance. Subsequently, the new generation is less interested in their appeal, although some contemporary musicians and Pentecostal Churches still make use of drums.

Drum language like all surrogate languages, is not however, a perfect substitute for spoken language. Speech is slightly modified by its use. The use of stereotyped phrases greatly lengthens the message and the time necessary for its relay. An Akan drum can only produce approximately 500 words, excluding proper names and titles (Nketia 1963). As such, some topics are difficult to communicate. The drum has a limited capacity to conquer time because it can only be heard up to about twenty miles away. If the destination of a message is greater than twenty miles (or, in some cases of dense forest, only seven miles), the message must be relayed from one drummer to another (Ushe 2007), as a result, instantaneous communication across a greater distance is not possible.

Perhaps, the most fascinating element of African rhythms and the one that separates it from western counterparts is that it is used for the purpose of narrative. African history has a long oral tradition and within that tradition the rhythm of the drum plays an important role. Not only are storyteller's sessions often

accompanied by drumbeats, but on some occasions, epic-sized narratives are expressed almost entirely through drumbeats. The rhythm varies and the call and response speaks to the skilled listener. Obviously, then, perception is not an issue. It is merely a historic and cultural assumption.

Communication is a pervasive activity that serves many important functions in society and in our personal lives. The process of communication enables people to exert controls over their environment (Burgoon&Rufiner 1974). It is one of the basic means upon which folks interact meaningfully among themselves. It is used as a means of notification, alertness and entertainment, communicating messages across distances and villages, bringing people together, It helps settle disputes among members of a village and serve as memory device to assist people remember important events that took place in African society (Nketia1963). It is used to praise gods and people in society, invoke the spirits of ancestors and deities, correct the errors of societies, generate conversational proverbs in order to allow people to communicate with their elders and it is still part of royal ceremonies or recitals or ancestry (Ushe 2007). The social, political and economic value of the drum language in the development of African rural areas are innumerable - they can be used to - report, remark on contemporary affairs, propaganda, mirror or mould attitude, convey warning messages and mobilize the people.

### 5.Conclusion

Throughout the paper, the emphasis has been on drum as a surrogate language: a tool for rural development in Africa as envisaged in select African Novels. In almost all parts of rural Africa, one common ground for empathy and grass-root mobilization for society's development is the time in which the drum is played because of the apparent integrity of source. African languages operate on two levels: rhythmic speech and tonal inflexion, combined, these may be interpreted by differently-pitched drums or single log drums capable of producing more than one pitch, as exemplified by the surrogate language spoken by *obodom ubong*, *obodom usanetop* and *obodom mbre*. Unlike the radio, however, only those who can recognize the use of tones on the drum are actually aware that messages are even being transmitted.

Drum language encloses a womb of space in which silence and identity emerge; as an implement of communication, it serves many important functions in the collective and in the personal lives of the people, it speaks a language that is widely understood and appreciated by the cultural groups where it is employed, it recognizes the existence of traditional structures. The vicious sounds that produce language of many drums pounding together are necessary implements to stir up emotions in: battles or wars, sporting events, inspire excitement and passion. It transmits special messages and allows for "secret" communication to occur publicly, as they transmit information "secretly" through segmented public space. As a result, African cultural groups have used the drum and other surrogate language instruments to convey warning messages and mobilize their people. On certain public occasions, personal names, genealogies and unique characteristics of people are expressed in drum language. Many a drum beat will move some Africans to do unusual things: calms them if they are overwrought with grief, and stirs them to dance if they are apathetic. On a spiritual level the drum language is vital to everyday life and provokes a need to take part and listen. Drum as a surrogate language creates a fertile ground for the emergence of good, and people oriented development. It makes known the intentions and directions of society programmes and concerns, it promotes cultural heritage of the people and society pride, solidarity and unity. It promotes the language of the people because the drum language is a derivative of the language of the people, thereby, enhancing the unity and peaceful co-existence among people in African society and as such, a viable tool for rural development.

Consequently, for any scientific change in the transmission of communication to be effective in African rural areas, the planners, policy makers and administrators must take into cognizance the drum as a surrogate language for dissemination of such information. The invasion of scientific and modern technology in information dissemination will not obliterate this established cultural interactive and mobilization process; since the drum language as a surrogate language is one of the basis upon which rural communities give and receive information which characterize their existence, organization and development.

### 6.Recommendations:

There is need to refined and modify the drum language for more effective communication in order to enhance more developments in society. Since the drum language imitates African tonal language, more scientific investigations should be carried out to improve on more varied tones for more effective communication.

Modern means of communication such as microphones, radio, television, internet, newspapers and others should be introduced to the rural areas to enhance the drum; therefore, viewing centres should be set up at strategic places in the rural areas for the people.

Drum as a surrogate language should be undertaken as a discourse in the rural schools to keep up the awareness among the young ones before they move to the urban areas; for that reason teachers and drummers



should be encouraged and other drummers trained as part of an added skill for the continued development of this art and the environment.

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