Cinematographic Presentation of Digitized Audio-Visual Folkloric Performance Features: A Case Study of Tinga Tinga Tales

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Abstract

This study analysed how the film director has used cinematographic techniques such as mise-en-scene, montage, camera shots, camera movements and camera angles to establish performance features in Tinga Tinga Tales. To achieve the set objectives, the study was anchored on an interplay of Rhetorical theory of performance and cinematography theory. Rhetorical theory argues that performance is constructed within a structured context which incorporates the relationship between the performer and audience within the frame of time, place and occasion. Cinematography theory focuses on how the cinematographer employ cinematic techniques in developing performance features such as performer, setting/ context and the audience. This study found out that the film director has employed various cinematographic techniques in presenting folkloric performance features. The findings reveals that the use of cinematography has shifted the natural settings and contexts of folkloric narratives such as time, location of performance, occasion of performance among others by simulating artificial audio-visual settings and contexts.

Keywords: *Audio-visual, cinematography, performance, rhetorical, tinga tinga tales*

1.0 Introduction

In folktales, performance is one of the fundamental dimensions of culture as well as the production of knowledge about traditions and beliefs of the people. Performance is the backbone of storytelling since it embodies the whole process of communication. According to Bauman (1984) performance is an action, event or process that is fully realized through being performed and it is done in accordance with the cultural rules and regulations. The concept of performance should be argued using cultural understanding of history, literature and society as a whole since it is rooted in a people's way of life. According to Ganyi (2012), performance context is an oral discourse that fosters interaction between the narrator and audience in the onerous task of raising societal consciousness to the power of culture in the development of an indigenous personality profile for African societies.

According to Finnegan (1972) the significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition: for the nature of performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the literary form from being exhibited. For Finnegan, full actualization of performance involves actual delivery and not just use of mere words. The success of any narrative or a performance depends on the presence of a narrator /performer, the audience, setting/occasion, use of verbal and paralinguistic features of language, use of mnemonics and accoutrements(Chinyowa, 2011; Lusweti, 2014).

African scholars have credited the narrator as an epicenter of an oral performance. They opine that a performance only comes into existence when performed but it does not begin until the performer comes unto the scene (Muleka, 2014; Finnegan, 1970). The presence of the traditional artist as the custodian of the communal and cultural values, traditions and customs foregrounds him/her as the mediator during the transmission of an oral performance (Muleka, 2014). The performer decides the content and the method of delivery in consideration of the occasion. For instance, the nature of the story may require a narrator to perform in the dark of the night or in the light of the fire. The performer decides what to perform at what stage of the function and what appeal to make to the audience. The context responds to when/where/why of a performance; the composition,(the what), the audience, (for whom) and transmission, (the how) (Muleka, 2014). The occasion can directly affect the detailed content and form of the piece being performed. There is an established tripartite relationship between the performer, the audience and the tale.

Folktales are among the oral forms that have undergone evolution due to the advent of technology through the use of stable and portable media. Studies have noted that since the inception of technology, the ways and modes of storytelling have changed. Muchiri (2017) argues that even though technology has nearly killed the traditional format of storytelling, it can also be used to give a new lease of life. Advancement in technology is, for him, a memory of keeping the art form alive.

The shift in technology has led to rising of consciousness about the elements, nature and performance of the traditional stories irrespective of its advantages of greater interconnectedness of advancing cultural exchange among nations of the world. Although these changes can be identified, many scholars tend to focus on the collection and analysis of oral tales in their written forms and rarely give them a performance approach (Propps, 1968; Dundes, 1971). Bogdavona and Noev (2010) suggest that an interactive digital platform may be suitable for bringing oral tradition and technology together thus suggesting that a blend of technology and oral tradition would present a new way of storytelling in an interesting manner.

This advanced evolution of technology has brought a golden era in animation storytelling. Animation in African countries has greatly been influenced by the western animation techniques and innovations with varying and distinct national styles. This study focused on *Tinga Tinga Tales* which is among the new forms of digital audio-visual folkloric media. *Tinga Tinga* is a British–American and Kenyans' children television series airing African tales. This programme named after Tinga Tinga art from Tanzania is produced in Nairobi, Kenya, by Homeboyz animation–a studio of approximately 50 people. The series was first conceived by Claudia Lloyd, the head of animation at the London–based Tiger aspect and comprises of 52 episodes.

2.0 Literature Review

A number of studies have been done on cinematography and visual storytelling but less focus has been given on the use of cinematographic techniques in establishing performance features in Audio-Visual medium. Hodaie(2017) analyses five productions using cinematographic techniques and elaborates how cinematography is executed. The videos include *Retrospect (2014)*, *Whistle (2014), Death Posture (2015), The Greater Albany School District (2017) and Demogorgon (2013)* which are not folkloric in nature. This study is concerned with performance features in videos that are folkloric.

Lotman, (2016) explores the ways in which cinematography affects viewers' perceived empathy towards onscreen characters. He looks at how depth which is one of the tools of cinematography plays a role in the audience's perceived empathy towards onscreen characters. The study focuses only on depth which is one of the conceptual tools of cinematography. This study departs by employing other elements of cinematography such as mise-en-scene, camera movement, and montage among others.

Tahor (2016) examines cinematography and visual style: Understanding the collaborative role of the cinematographer in the development and production of South African fictional feature films. The aim is to establish the role of cinematography in fiction feature film. This study departs by focusing on assessing performance features in animated films.

Joyce (2010) analyses how mobile phones and digital texts such as e-mail are efficient in facilitating folk process hence excluding other digital technologies such as television and cinema. This paper departs by assessing the presentation of performance features. Gachanja and Kebaya (2012) examine how film and television fairytales are built and how traditional pedagogical values of these narratives are negotiated as the tales conform to modern technology. They emphasize on how traditional pedagogical values of fairytales are negotiated through the realm of visual media. Although, the study focuses on aired *Know Zone fairytales (2009),* they exclude other aired folktales like *Tinga Tinga Tales.* This study departs by paying attention on performance features.

Izang (2012) focuses on the structure of Africa's contemporary digital content development industry with a view of evaluating its potential as a medium for promoting the African Renaissance Agent. This study focuses on six affirmation projects: *Kabongo(1998), Tinga Tinga Tales(2011), Zambezia(2008), Lion of Judah(2010), Magic cellar(2006), Interactive Child learning Aid project (I-CLAP) model(2002).* While Izang is interested on the new forms that have resulted from technology and how technology is a medium of promoting African heritage, this study analyses performance features. Kiagho (2010) examines the authenticity of today's *Tinga Tinga* art where he focuses on style and the factors that influence the stylistic evolution of the first and second generations of film art. This study deviates from Kiagho's study since it is concerned with performance features.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design since it involves a detailed and systematic examination of content of *Tinga Tinga Tales* for the purpose of identifying performance features. A case study method of descriptive design was employed in collecting data and an in-depth analysis of the tales was done. This study employed purposive sampling technique in establishing the target population. Out of the five local television channels; KTN, Citizen, NTV, K24 and KBC, which air animated cartoons, Citizen TV was purposively sampled. The animated cartoons were folkloric in nature. Crossman (2018) posits that sample selection is based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Accessible population for the study was video films of *Tinga Tinga Tales* aired in Citizen TV. A survey on Tinga Tinga was conducted on You Tube videos which were available since 2010 to 2019 and out of the 55 videos available, 33 were selected as units of analysis. The researcher employed convenience sampling to select the 33 episodes since these episodes fulfilled certain features that aided in discussing the set objectives of the study. The downloaded tales were watched and a record of the tales used in analysing performance features was made. Transcription of data and various codes were used to identify the elements and data was analysed qualitatively. This study used textual, content and visual analysis of

the selected Tinga Tinga tales to examine how the film director has presented the tales to bring out performance features.

4.0 Results and discussions

In this section, the study presents cinematographic elements around which the folkloric performance features were analysed. It explores how cinematographic techniques such as mise-en-scene, montage, camera shots and camera movements are used in developing performance features such performer, setting and the narrator.

5.0 The Use of Mise-En-Scene as Elements of Narration

Mise- en -scene is a French term which means, place on stage, and refers to all visual elements of a film production within the space provided by the stage itself. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2003), mise-en-scene encompasses the most recognizable attributes of a film such as the setting and the characters; it includes costumes and make-ups, props, and all other natural and artificial details that characterize the spaces that are filmed. Barsam and Monahan (2010) explain that these elements help in creating mood and meaning to the shots. This study focused on how the elements of mise-en-scene have been achieved within the film, and how performance features such narrator, actors, setting, use of props and costumes, language use among others have been presented in the tales.

6.0 The Role of setting in a Film Narrative

Setting or context is among the features that characterize a performance. It refers to the circumstances under which a performance takes place. In African traditional storytelling, performances were dictated by the context/ settings which depended on the moment of the day, the nature of the space, who is present what they were doing before and what they are going to do next, why they are gathered and what is the nature of their social interaction. The occasion can directly affect the detailed content and form of the piece being performed. Basing these arguments, this study looked at how the film director has used setting in *Tinga Tinga Tales* to enhance the narration of the tales. Setting in the tales has been used to show the vital role it plays in the narration of film stories. As an element of performance, it serves to indicate the place where an action is taking place and time of the day. For instance, Tinga Tinga has been used as the place or context where narration of the stories takes place although different geographical set- ups are used. The place is referred to as a land of wise animals. For instance, there are places like a dry land, a desert, a water source, hills/mountains, and a forest, among others which have been used by the film director. Figure 1.1 below shows the setting of Tinga Tinga, which is the home of all animals in different locations.

Figure1.1: A setting of Tinga Tinga

In African traditional societies, storytelling sessions used to take place inside small huts where people could gather around a fire place. In *Tinga Tinga Tales*, the film director has expounded on the setting in that, both open and closed places have been used. The film director has used the forest to show an enclosed area. There is fire that is lit, animals are asleep and the presence of the moon showing that it is indeed at night. This can reflect an African traditional set up. Figure 1.2 below shows use of fire as a source of lighting during storytelling.

Figure 1.2: The presence of fire shows night

Setting also gives characters an avenue to meet and dialogue depicting both time and place where events of the story takes place. For a narration to take place, a particular location is set where characters meet for dialogue. This helps to create realistic flavour in enhancing a conversation between characters in the film. This is evident in all the stories. A stage is set where the main characters and the other characters are introduced through dialogue. The figure 1.3 below shows different animals in a stage set-up.

Figure 1.3:An illustration of a stage–set up for a storytelling event-Vulture, parrot and Tinga birds in a conversation

7.0 The Symbolic Use and Contribution of Props

When African traditional storytellers told their tales, they did not simply recite them to the audience, but rather used dramatic techniques to bring them to life before their audience. One way they did so was through the use of elaborate props. The use of props had a sacred purpose. This study analysed how the film director has used these props in establishing performance.

The presence of props as elements of mise-en-scene reveals what happens on stage. The way a story is presented to an audience can illicit different emotions and feelings depending on how visual stimuli are used. The cinematographer is an artist and also a storyteller who designs the images to supply the necessary components for storytelling. Different types of props are used in different stories. The various props used include; a nest, a twig, an anthill and a web which help the audience in connecting with what happens in the story.
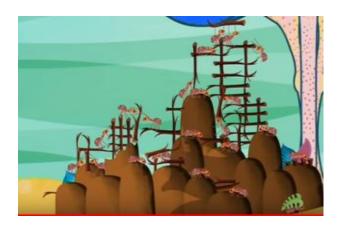

Figure 1.4: Showing an anthill to illustrate the use of props

8.0 The Role of Costumes

As props were traditionally used so were costumes. Costumes are also used as items of art that are meant to bring out dramatic effect in a performance. They refer to the clothes and accessories that a character in film wears. Costume in film narrative does a number of functions such as signifying the characters and making clear distinctions between various characters. Further, costumes are the easily noticeable aspect of mise-en-scene which include either make-up or wardrobe choices used to convey a character's personality or status and to signify the differences between characters. According to Bruzzi (1997), the use of costumes is also important not just in defining characters but also as indispensible elements in the narratives.

The film director has used various costumes to define characters in the film. The opening scenes in each story introduce characters in different attires. For instance, Elephant, Hyena, Monkeys, Lion, Crocodiles are identified through the difference of the costumes they wear. Any garment worn in a film is considered as a costume. The major characters such as Lion, Monkey, Elephant and Hippo have been made to stand out from minor ones through the manipulation of the designs of their costumes. Figure 1.1 shows Tinga Tinga animals in different costumes.

Costumes can be used in setting up the mood and atmosphere. Animals change their attires depending on the kind of atmosphere. For instance, in the story "Why Crocodile has a bumpy back," the film director has used different costumes depending on the kind of the environment various characters interact with environments communicate to the audience.

Figure 1.5: Use of costumes in defining environment; Crocodile under a tree

9.0 The Symbolic Use Lighting and Colour

Brown (1992) credits lighting as an inherent element in film as music is to opera. Lighting is one of the greatest elements used to evoke emotions of the audience. Film directors use various types of light to ensure that their audience is at the right place. According to Brown, in visual storytelling, few elements are as effective and as

powerful as light and colour. They have the ability to reach viewers at a purely emotional gut level (Brown, 2012 p.8). Brown argues that the main qualities of light the viewer notices in a picture are; colour, brightness, softness, throw pattern and angle. In film, different lighting techniques are used to differentiate various types of stories, provoke audience's emotional response and assist in narrative interpretation. The focus of analysing lighting is to establish the kind of effects it has on audience's emotions and perceptions of the narrative. In these tales, the film director has used brilliant and highly saturated colours which depict Africa's art styles in terms of theme, colours and symbols.

With advancement in lighting technology, film has experienced a new taste by using different styles of lighting. For instance, notable lighting and lighting styles are used in different types of stories. Lights can either be logical or pictorial. When light appears to be caused by actual light source, it is termed as logical. The use of lit fire in the story shows an actual source of light. In the story, "Why Hippo has no hair," fire is lit in an enclosed place, in a forest and it is symbolic. The use of fire in an enclosed area at night symbolises what takes place in a storytelling session. Figure 1.2 illustrates the use of fire as a source of light.

10. Use of Camera Shots

This study revealed that various camera shots have been used to serve various purposes in the tales. For instance, the camera shots are used to introduce the setting, themes, and characters of a story. A number of camera shots have been used such as an establishing shot/extreme long shot, long shot, medium shot, close up shot, extreme close up shot. These camera shots help in serving various purposes in the stories. For instance, an establishing shot has been used at that beginning of the scene to situate where, and sometimes when, actions that are to follow take place. It is a shot used near the beginning of a scene to establish the interrelationship of the details to be shown subsequently in nearer shots (Reisz and Milla, 1968 p.399).   Figure1.1 gives an illustration of an establishing shot. A long shot has also been used in the stories. This shot that shows a scene from a distance where the viewer can have a better look of what is going on but not close enough to be emotionally involved in the scene. Through, a wide shot, the audience is able to grasp the whole information presented in a scene once. It gives extra information on what is going on and this enables the audience to be part of the story in order to understand what is going on. The cinematographer has also used other shots such as an extreme long shot, medium, close- up and extreme close up shots to capture the characters and their performance. These shot frames less of the background and more of the face of the character. The shots has a direct impact on how the audience interprets a scene in the story. Figure 1.4 gives an illustration of the shots.

11. The Use of Camera Angles

In the tales, the film director has used camera angles to reveal the position through which a mise-en-scene of a shot is captured. The use of different directions and heights of angles connote different meaning in a film. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2008), a camera angle is distinguished into three different categories that is high angle, straight-on-angle and low angle. High or low camera angles are used to show how people respond and show different opinions in regard to a certain object. A high-angle shot is a technique where the camera looks down on the character or subject from an elevated perspective. A high angle shot does a number of functions in a narrative. For instance, it has been used to convey narrative information in the tales. On the other hand low-angle shot is taken from below the eye level. An object that is taken from a low angle indicates that the viewer seems to be looking up at it thus the object is judged more positively (e.g. larger, stronger, bolder) than when the object was photographed from a high camera angle.

12. Use of Montage

Montage is a cinematic technique which helps in denoting the creative manipulation of a film to achieve pre-meditated meaning through truncation and the outlay of shots in a sequence (Bordwell, 2005). Montage helps the film director in structuring time and space thus creating a dramatic structure and emotionally engaging the audience. It is an editing technique in which shots are juxtaposed into one sequence often set to music. Montage sequences imply the passage of time and it is a way of at once providing the audience with a lot of information. In the tales, the film director has used montage on several occasions to create visual and emotional effects. Montage is used to create tension and slow time and as a foreshadowing device. In the story, "Why Whale sprouts," the director utilizes montage to enhance the dramatic effect of the story.

13. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to analyse how folkloric performance features are established in Tinga Tinga tales through the use of cinematographic techniques. From the foregoing, it is evident that there is use of cinematographic techniques in establishing performance features such as the performer, setting and characters. The researcher identified various cinematographic elements such as mise-en-scene, montage, camera shots, camera angles, lighting and colour and camera movement. The use of these techniques plays different roles in the film. For instance, the use of mise-en-scene, purposively establishes the setting, costumes and props in the film. The film director employed various settings that were corresponding with what was going on in the stories. The researcher found out that setting plays a number of roles in the narrative such as it provides an avenue for characters to move; interact and trade their secrets, establish various environments that situate each character and also define the

time of the day. Through, the interplay of cinematographic elements such as camera shots and movements, the role of setting was achieved. Various camera shots such as establishing shot, mid-shot, extreme mid shot and a close -up shot were analysed in this study. The study found out that these camera shots were used in establishing the setting, themes and the characters of the story. For instance, through an establishing shot, various settings were identified in Tinga Tinga. Camera movement, montage, editing and camera angles were also used in analysing the features of mise-en-scene in the film. These features helped in establishing performance features in the film narrative. This study concluded that the use of cinematography has shifted the natural settings and contexts of folkloric narratives such as time, location of performance, occasion of performance among others by simulating artificial audio-visual settings and contexts.

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