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**“Once upon a time in a country far, far away ...”**

*Ritualisation and Ritualised Communication in African Orature*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION OR TAKING YOU ONE STEP FURTHER TO EVERY LINGUIST'S DREAM**

Dear reader, please sit back, close your eyes, relax and imagine you are in the middle of West Africa, 4° north of the equator. It is warm (but not too hot because it is dark already) and the crickets are out singing. You are sitting in a village in the forest, around you there are lots of children sitting with their big brown eyes wide open, waiting excitedly. Now one of the old people raises his voice and you hear this .... Amazing, isn't it? Regrettably, much as we hate disrupting this wonderful picture, this paper will not let you in on a detailed account of the romantic sound of crickets. It could never replace the real thing. If, however, you are you are looking for a scientific approach towards African story telling, then look no further because this is the right place!

### ***1.1. Outline of the paper and the methods used***

The aim of this paper is to describe ritualised communication in African orature, in particular African story telling.

In order to lay the basis for this, a context in which to analyse a particular story has to be found. Accordingly, Chapter 2 discusses Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft's (1987) work on ritualised communication. Their ideas are based on Bühler's (1934) organon model of language and they suggest various levels of ritualised communication with various modes of expression. Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft's ideas are criticised and extended to adapt them to the context of African story telling.

Chapter 3 gives a review on literature on African orature and story telling. It explains the background, central concepts, the structures and important characteristics of African orature.

Based on these two chapters, an analysis grid for African story telling is developed. It summarises the most important points which have to be taken into account when an African story is being studied.

The following case study constitutes an explorative approach towards describing ritualisation and ritualised communication in an actual story. It uses the analysis grid as a guideline.

In order to reduce the risk of losing out on important information, the analysis has been designed in a two-way method consisting of a video annotation and a questionnaire.

The video annotation follows a top-down procedure and has been done by first taking the whole video and then picking aspects taken from the analysis grid, e.g. the structure of the session or verbal communication. Within these levels, specific instances have been isolated, segmented, and finally described.

The information gathered in the annotation subsequently led to the questions for the questionnaire. Additional questions resulted from the literature introduced in the chapters above. The questions span a number of linguistic levels starting from the word level and ending at the level of the spiritual background. Therefore, unlike the video annotation, the questionnaire has been set up in a bottom-up approach.

The summary of the features of ritualisation and ritualised communication occurring in this story also follows this model. The summary takes the concrete instances and answers and tries to generalise from these in order to apply the instances to the analysis grid.

## ***1.2. The object of the study – a story from the Ega people***

The Ega are a people living in the Côte d'Ivoire in the region of Divo in the Diés Canton. Together with *Egwa*, *Diés* is also one of the alternate names for the language Ega (SIL Ethnologue 2002). The word *Diés* itself however does not exist in the Ega language.

The Ega are a small enclave of Kwa people in an area of a Kru population. Their neighbours are made up of the Dida in the north, east and west and the Godie in the south. The majority of the Ega are bilinguals, usually with Dida as their second language. They keep good relations with the Dida as their neighbours. The total number of Ega people seems hard to estimate –figures shift between 67 and 15,000, according to Bole-Richard (1982, 359) the most reliable estimate, however, is around 5,000. The Ethnologue on the other hand estimates the population at 291-3,000. (SIL Ethnologue 2002)

The language belongs to the group of Niger-Congo languages but it has not yet been classified exactly within this group. So far it has been assigned to the Krou, Akan and Kwa groups by various researchers. The Kwa placement seems the most likely, however, because of structural characteristics of the language (e.g. noun class prefixes) which exist in other Kwa languages but not in any Krou language. Also, there is a

higher lexical similarity in basic vocabulary with Kwa languages than with Krou ones. (Bole-Richard 1982, 363)

As the number of speakers suggests, the language is endangered despite the fact that the ethnic group is growing. The reason for that is they are shifting to the Dida language because of intermarriage and other influences. (SIL Ethnologue 2002)

The story chosen for analysis in this paper is part of a corpus of stories collected in the Ega village Gniguedougou in March 2001. The stories were told by the village storyteller and recorded on digital video. This particular story is five minutes long and is the first one from the whole corpus.

## 2. RITUALISED COMMUNICATION

### 2.1. What is communication?

Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft start out with Bühler's (1934) model of language, who tried to represent the phenomenon of speech and the circumstances in which it usually occurs in a model. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 5)

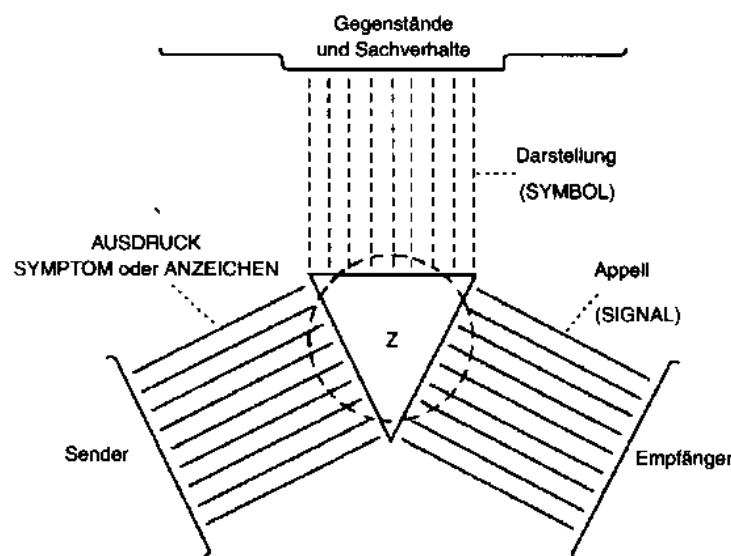


Figure 1: Karl Bühler's Organon model of language

The sign is situated at the centre of the model and it has three aspects. When it denotes objects and concepts it gets the function of representation and is considered symbol for what it represents. When it is an utterance that comes from the sender it has the function of expression and it is symptom of what is coming from the sender. When the sign is directed at the receiver it gets the function of a request or an order for the receiver who

## ***RITUALISED COMMUNICATION***

is then supposed to act upon this request. In that case the sign is understood as a signal for the receiver. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 6)

The sign can be spoken language but it does not necessarily have to be. What is more important is that the inventory of signs, be it language, street signs or gestures, is common to both the sender and the receiver. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 7)

On the basis of this model, Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987, 7) define communication as follows: communication is making oneself understood, informing and transmitting information about objects and concepts using sign systems – as for example speech signs (which function as symbols, symptoms and signals) – which come from a sender and are aimed at a receiver. Precondition for this – for “communication” – is a common basis between sender and receiver.

### **2.2. *What kinds of communication are there?***

Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987, pp. 8) distinguish between verbal and non-verbal communication. They then subdivide non-verbal communication into pheromonal, tactile and visual communication.

Pheromonal signals are considered very likely to play an important role in personal intimate relationships where they function as tonic long-term continuous signals.

Tactile communication functions through touch and body contact, e.g. shaking hands, kissing and so on.

Visual communication is expressed for example in clothes, jewellery and ornaments, through expressive movements, mimics, eye contact, gestures, body posture or direction and orientation of the body.

Gestures and body movements have been classified by Efron (as in Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, pp. 38) according to their function or meaning. EMBLEMS are symbolic representations where the sign has one particular meaning as for example telling somebody off with your index finger stretched out upright. ILLUSTRATORS are gestures that accompany speech and are closely linked to the content and the rhythm of the spoken words. They can for example segment and accentuate the words or they signal turn-taking rights. MANIPULATORS are gestures that do not have a particular meaning but take away excitement, tension or nervousness by simply “doing something”. This could for example be scratching your head or biting your lip or fingernail.

Whereas for example emblematic gestures have been found to be culturally specific, this is not the case for human mimic expression as it has been proven by Hjörtsjö, Ekman and Friesen. (as in Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 25) It is only rarely that you can

find culturally specific mimics like for example winking with one eye as a gesture for secret companionship. Generally speaking however, most gestures show principally the same pattern of behaviour and it is only the particular realisations that sometimes differ. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 33)

### **2.3. What is a ritual and what is ritualisation?**

Biological behavioural science defines ritualisation as a change of behavioural patterns in order to generate signals. Following from that, a ritual is defined as a pattern of behaviour which has been altered and thus ritualised into a signal that serves communication. The alterations can be simplification, exaggerated amplitude or extend of the movement, rhythmic repetition, changes in the threshold value that triggers the reception of the signal or the combination of a number of signals into one signal. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 59)

Among other functions, rituals play an important role guaranteeing and securing the bonds in and the inner cohesion of a group, e.g. rituals for calming down aggressions, for starting a friendship or for establishing and keeping friendly terms, good relationships and commitment towards somebody. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 75)

### **2.4. What is ritualised communication?**

Combining the concept of “communication” and “ritualisation”, Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987, 75) define ritualised communication as a form of strategic behaviour which

- increases the chance to predict behaviour
- serves to bind together and therefore also blocks aggression and
- can ward off the danger of possibly up-coming problems within the social group via communication by naming the danger and thus “putting it on the agenda”

in a word – ritualised communication is comprised of verbal and non-verbal utterances which have special signalling functions which originate from ritualisation.

Ritualised communication works as a safeguard mechanism in those areas of social interaction where trouble can be expected, e.g. when there is need for cooperation, when there are conflicts or when there is competition. It eases critical situations of the interaction and regulates disagreements because it intensifies the harmonising effects of talks and speeches, it establishes and stabilises social relations, it channels and keeps on a distance emotions, impulses and points of view. Consequently, it makes behaviour predictable and also makes room for trying out things without having to be worried about possible sanctions. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 76)



## **2.5. On which levels does ritual communication occur?**

Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft name three different levels of ritualised communication – the everyday ritual (“Das Alltägliche”), the special ritual (“Das Besondere”) and the extraordinary ritual (“Das Außergewöhnliche”). For every level they give examples of particular rituals and describe them in detail.

Everyday rituals (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, pp.77) are for example greeting rituals, which exist in the most diverse forms, then rituals for asking for, giving and taking things, or rituals summarised as “phatic communion”, a concept introduced by Malinowski. (Malinowski 1936, 314 as in Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 103) According to Malinowski, phatic communion is a form of communication that is characterised by an exchange of words that do not convey meaning or ideas but “merely” fulfil a social function by establishing bonds of personal union between people who have come together because they simply seek companionship. (Malinowski 1936, pp.314, as in Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 103)

Special rituals are for example public speeches for a larger audience, jokes, songs and verses that accompany games, ritual insulting, or magic and magical formulas. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, pp.104)

Examples which Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft use to illustrate the extraordinary ritual are a ritual of the Medlpa people where young men and women meet to get to know each other and maybe even find a partner to marry. Also, they describe the palm fruit celebration of the Yanomami and the mourning ceremonies of the Trobriand people. (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, pp.113) Of course, the carnival in Germany and other countries would also be an extraordinary ritual.

## **2.6. Criticism and extension**

Unfortunately, although this is very interesting, Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987) only describe particular events to illustrate their levels of ritualised communication. What they do not do is to give information about the characteristics of the individual levels they propose. This makes it difficult to assign one’s own “candidates” to a particular group. Intuitively, this would not be too hard, scientific research however demands more than points of view, it wants hard-boiled proof to turn opinions into facts. Therefore we suggest the following classification system, which has been set up on the basis of the examples Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987) give:

## *RITUALISED COMMUNICATION*

**Table 1: Features of levels of ritualised communication<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>The Everyday</b>	<b>The Special</b>	<b>The Extraordinary</b>
Occurrence time-wise	very frequently	less frequently	much more rarely
Occurrence framework-wise	part of everyday routine, no special framework	often in a particular framework (e.g. introductory phrase before telling a joke, summoning people for a public speech), sometimes even institutionalised (public speeches)	very institutionalised
People involved	small number (two to a few)	higher number or only particular “initiated” people (see magic)	high number of people sometimes from a number of communities
“Effort”, preparation needed	little effort, no conceivable preparation	little to quite some preparation, conceivably more effort than everyday	huge effort and lots of preparation
Meaning attached to it	increasing from everyday via special to extraordinary		

Another point that possibly deserves consideration is Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987) choice of communication model as basis for their analysis. The Bühler model which they use includes the constituents of the sign, the sender, the receiver, objects and facts and the functions of expression, appeal and representation. This describes the forms of communication but is it enough to describe all the aspects that contribute to the ritualisation of the communication? What about the situational context, the particular people involved in the events, the internal structure of an event, the respective syntactic, acoustic, motional, lexical, ... structures that play a role and are certainly being used to construct the ritualisation? Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987, pp. 113-125) mention these in their descriptions. They say that the events have certain functions (finding a partner to marry, making friends and keeping a friendship with a neighbouring village, ...) that they take place at certain times (when parents invite potential partners, when the palm

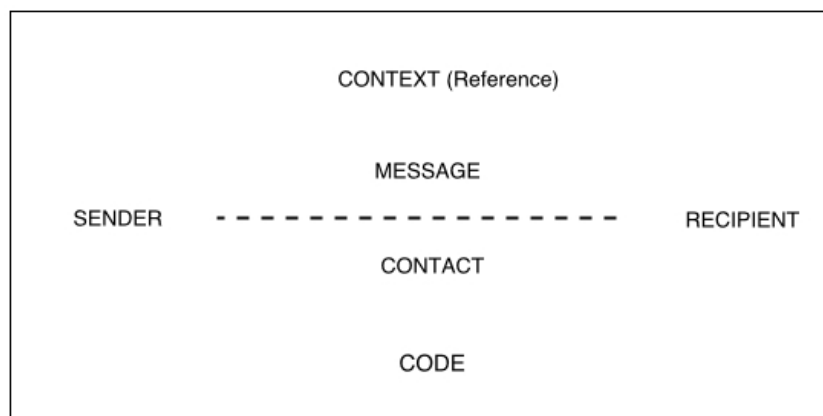
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<sup>1</sup> This table is the table originally given in the term paper. However, after writing another paper on a similar topic, this table was reorganised. The new version is included in the appendix.

## ***RITUALISED COMMUNICATION***

fruits are ripe), ...) at certain places (the parents' houses). A ritualised event can also involve taking drugs, communication via giving objects or food as signs of for example the plan to marry a certain girl, or it involves rules of discourse that regulate who is allowed to talk or who is allowed to join in and how. All these factors contribute to the ritualisation format and without taking them into account ritualised communication would not have the same effect. Singing songs and dancing to impress a woman might be considered rude and totally inappropriate in a context other than the ritual, especially when the community has high and strict decency standards as Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft mention. Therefore, it does not seem justified to leave out these factors.

As the Bühler model cannot account for these components of communication, another model has to be found. The Jakobson model of the constitutive factors of communication can be interpreted in a way that it covers all the factors mentioned. Jakobson originally intended it to describe verbal communication but soon his model was also used for many non-verbal processes of communication. (Nöth 2000, 105)



**Figure 2: The Jakobson model of communication**

Jakobson extended Bühler's expressive aspect of the sign, which denotes objects and concepts, to make it an aspect which has a referential function and refers to the context of the message. He does not limit this context to objects and concepts but instead defines it as follows:

Um wirksam sein zu können, benötigt die Botschaft einen Kontext, auf den sie sich bezieht (Referent in einer anderen, etwas ambigen Terminologie). Dieser Kontext muß dem Empfänger verständlich sein und entweder verbaler Art oder verbalisierbar sein. (Nöth 2000, 105)

[i.e. in English: In order to have an effect, the message requires a context to which it refers (a reference in a different, rather vague terminology). This context has to be comprehensible for the recipient and it has to be a verbal context or must be expressible verbally.]

## ***RITUALISED COMMUNICATION***

If the message is “This is a table.” the context is relatively straightforward. It takes some sort of a table or an image of a table that a person can refer to and that is it. But let us consider ritualised communication as a rather large and very complex sign just like for example for text linguists a text is a complex unit of a sign. This very complex sign is situated in a particular context. As the sign is complex, the context it refers to is more complex too and, for ritualised communication, can include situational factors, the people involved and so on. This complex context is understood by the recipient, in this case the participants in the ritualised communication. Furthermore, although the context is not always verbal it can be put into words by saying for example “The palm fruit celebration takes places only at the time when the palm fruits are ripe.”

As by now the constituent “message” is not limited to verbal communication anymore, it can also include the communication through objects (cf. Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 116 – giving food to parents to show one’s intention to marry their daughter) or through motion in for example dances – something that Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987) do not have categories of communication for.

Finally, the respective syntactic, acoustic, motional, lexical structures contributing to the ritualisation can be summarised in the category of “code” because they are extra features of the message reflected in the code.

In conclusion, when ritualised communication is analysed the following points have to be taken into consideration:

- the various modes of communication given by Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987), i.e. tactile, visual, and verbal
- possible other modes of communication, e.g. through objects, through motion
- the features of the code that conveys the message, e.g. for verbal communication syntactic, lexical, intonational or possibly others
- the situational context
- the people involved
- the placement in one of the three levels of ritualised communication proposed by Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987)

### **3. AFRICAN ORATURE**

One context in which ritualised communication occurs in African communities is ORAL LITERATURE or more precisely “ORATURE”. Finding a precise definition for this term

proved to be rather difficult, none of the major encyclopaedias or lexica have an entry for it. Therefore, the basis of the term as it is used here is a characterisation of oral literature given by Ahoua (Ahoua 2001). He states that oral literature is the basic form of all literature and functions as a multimodal and multifunctional system. Oral literature consists of systematic conventional, socially fixed text components whose structures and functions are organised in an open, linear and hierarchical system. The system is considered open because structural and functional variations are possible as long as they occur within the framework of the macro structure. Because of the time-wise organisation of the piece of literature it is seen as linear.

The following sections will give some central background information on African orature, explain the major concepts, the dynamics behind and the central motifs in African story telling. Finally, it summarises the ritualistic features of African orature.

### **3.1. Background information**

First of all, in order not to misinterpret or to wrongly judge orature (esp. in its opposition to Western literature) it is important to drop eurocentric points of view on African oratures. Instead, orature must be analysed within the parameters of African cultural ideas (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 488), within its own framework (Mutere n.d., [1]). African orature is by no means inferior to European literary traditions. Quite on the contrary, it has to be treated as classical, as Knowles-Borishade shows with the following list of its classical features:

1. African orature has a history which goes back to the Egyptian antiquity in terms of oratorical format, styles and dynamics.
2. Its tradition “conforms to particular African cultural expectations” and is considered standard and authoritative. (Albarry 1990, as in Knowles-Borishade 1990, 448)
3. Its analysis is possible “in accordance with an approved and recognized set of traditional standards” (Budge 1973, as in Knowles-Borishade 1990, 448)
4. African orature is codified “in a relevant, articulated system that is congruent with the actual phenomena”

(Knowles-Borishade 1990, 488)

Now why do stories get told in the first place? Orature fulfils a much wider function than just keeping people happy. Of course it entertains, but it also informs and instructs. (Agatucci n.d.) It sets models for human and cultural behaviour (Scheub 1985, 2) and establishes and reinforces social and political order within African communities.

## *AFRICAN ORATURE*

(Mutere n.d., [2]) Thus it constitutes a medium for organizing, examining and interpreting an audience's experience in the present. (Scheub 1985, 2) In a word, orature is meant to solve conflicts by negotiation and by setting moral guidelines.

Agatucci adds to this that the tale as a central form of orature serves important social and ethical purposes and expresses the structures of meaning, feeling, thought and expression of oral peoples. (Agatucci n.d.) She quotes Obiechina, who put it like this:

The story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a mode of conveying culture, experience and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings and attitudes in oral societies.

(Obiechina 1993, as in Agatucci n.d.)

To be "entitled" to fulfil all these functions, storytellers can rely on the authority of the past and the ancestors because this is where stories are believed to come from. Therefore, oral art is considered to contain a residue of past and cultural life and wisdom. (Scheub 1985, 2)

However, this is not supposed to mean that orature is static and cannot change. Stories are modified and adapted to suit changing values and social conditions. Depending on time, culture, place, regional style, performer and audience, the same story may sound very different, something that differs substantially from Western literal traditions. (Agatucci n.d.)

African orature can be divided into three major genres:

1. the riddle and the lyric poem
2. the proverb
3. the tale, heroic poetry and the epic

(Scheub 1985, 2)

The genres are characterised formally, functionally and on the performance level by the following points:

Formally, all three genres have in common a metaphorical structure. Within this structure, they make use of images which reflect aspects of the tradition of the respective culture. The images are mythic and sometimes also fantastic. Understanding and organising these images correctly is not easy, especially when there is many of them and when they are complex. That is why children learn to organise simpler images in for example tales so that they can set up a conceptual model and acquire a way of thinking that helps them to comprehend more complex stories later on. In addition, the metaphorical structure also helps the audience to keep track of the story line as it

controls this patterning of images and provides a “unifying, steadying matrix”. (Scheub 1985, pp.2)

As orature sets models for human and cultural behaviour, it follows that it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Accordingly, history, which appears in a fragmentary form in heroic poetry and epic, is more like a comment than a record. (Scheub 1985, 2)

On the performance level, orature consists of three inseparable elements – (spoken) word, music and dance. All elements are dependent on each other and contribute towards each other. This interdependence becomes clear in the African conceptualisation of the relations between spoken word, music and dance. This concept sees all three elements as different expressions of the same idea, which will be explained in more detail in the next section.

### **3.2. Nommo**

The central concept in African orature is NOMMO, the Word.

#### **3.2.1. Origin of Nommo**

Nommo is a term that comes from the African mythology. Nommo is a deity “from the Malian Dogon cosmology who was created by their Supreme deity, Amma, and possesses the power to create by the spoken word” (Mutere n.d., [8]). This spoken word used by the deity has been regarded by African traditions as a two-fold concept similar to the Chinese Ying-Yang concept. On the one hand it is a masculine force of life, on the other it requires a fertile matriarchal environment for its power of conception so that the matriarchal environment can receive, actively nurture and give ultimate passage to the life generated by the Word. (Mutere n.d., [1])

#### **3.2.2. Philosophical concept of Nommo**

As a philosophical (and linguistic) term generally used to describe African orature, Nommo refers to the generative or procreative power of the spoken word. However, the concept behind the term does not stop at that creative implication but goes beyond that. It adds an aesthetic element by reasoning that, firstly, whatever is able to create is good and, secondly, what is good is beautiful, too. According to Mutere separating these two senses of the concept of Nommo would mean negating the traditional understanding of the concept.

Like its mythological counterpart, the linguistic term of Nommo unites in itself both masculine and feminine forces in order to create and thus do good, as Mutere explains in the following paragraph:

Nommo [...] brings otherwise dormant forces to life by an oral creative principle that is similar to the one which governs the masculine seed and its generative power in the biological realm. And it is the feminine creative forces and matriarchal environment that brings the Word to fruition. Both masculine and feminine represent an opposite and complementary creational force that explains and necessitates the other and collectively informs the structure and harmonious functioning of the universe. (Mutere n.d., [1])

This ties in with Knowles-Borishade, who also sees one characteristic of Nommo in that it unifies and “gives birth to unifying images that bind people together in an atmosphere of harmony and power”. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, p.495)

As the idea of unifying already suggest, there are always more people than only one involved in the sending out of Nommo. The voice that utters the Word must never be on its own, the presence and accompaniment of others is obligatory. This symbolises the concept of the “ultimacy of the collective” and is deeply rooted in the African culture, which also for example makes decisions only by agreement of the community rather than by one person. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 494)

Nommo is a very potent force, but its power can still be enhanced, for example:

- by the improved character of the caller (morality, commitment, vision, skill)
- by the use of certain vocal techniques of the caller (use of the spiritual moan, halts, pauses, non-verbal utterances)
- when used in a ritualistic format

(Knowles-Borishade 1991, pp. 493)

### **3.2.3. Influences on Nommo**

Nommo effects African orature on various levels and is reflected there, too.

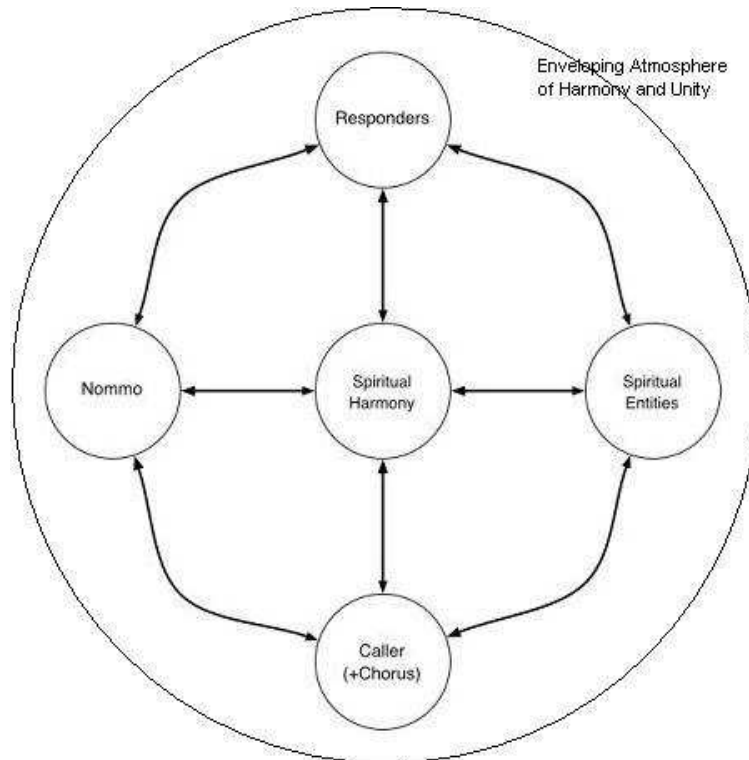
- *functionally* in the roles the various participants play in a story telling event
- *formally* in the various motifs and stylistic elements used in orature
- *modally* in the manners Nommo is expressed
- *medially* in the “transmitters” that express Nommo

#### **3.2.3.1. *Functionally – a constituent paradigm for African orature***

Proper story telling involves five constituents: the caller plus chorus, spiritual entities, Nommo, responders and spiritual harmony. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 490) The



constellations of and the relations between the individual elements are given in the following model (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 492):



**Figure 3: Paradigm of constituents in African Orature**

Unfortunately, Knowles-Borishade does not make it explicit whether this model applies to all genres of orature. For us “naïve” Middle-Europeans it seems a lot of effort for something as “little” as a riddle. Also, in the recordings we have of riddle telling no invoking of spirits and establishing of a ritual format could be seen.

The CALLER is the “primary creative element” as “s/he initiates the speech ritual” and it is primarily him or her that sends out Nommo. As a further function, it is him or her that eventually presents solutions for the social and political problems addressed in the story. Still, the caller is not only performing as a poet sending out words but is also activating spiritual and psychic powers in order to gain a higher level of consciousness and then establishes the ritualistic format (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 491).

The CHORUS validates and bears witness to the Word sent out by the caller by calling out short phrases such as “teach” or “that’s right”. This is one of the places where the concept of “ultimacy of the collective” is reflected because the voice that sent out the Word is not a solitary one anymore. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 494)

The SPIRITUAL ENTITIES, who are made up of God, lesser deities, Holy Spirit, ancestors, the spirits of the dead and the spirits of the unborn (Mbiti 1989, as in Knowles-

Borishade 1991, 495), also witness the rhetorical event. Furthermore, they are seen as judges and enablers of the process. (Knowles-Borishade, 495)

NOMMO contains the message delivered in the event, it has already been explained above in detail.

The RESPONDERS, the “community who come to participate in the speech event” (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 497) are seen as “secondary creators”. They judge the callers utterances and then either accept or reject the message depending on the “perceived morality and vision of the caller and the relevance of his or her message”.

This interaction is a very complex system of verbal checks and balances where both caller/chorus and responders are critical to what they are saying but contribute towards each other and try to find a solution that satisfies all. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 498) Agatucci adds to this that participating in and judging accomplished oral story telling performances is regulated by sets of high aesthetic and ethical standards developed by the traditional African societies. The audience feels free to interrupt performers (both less-talented and respected ones) in order to “suggest improvements” or to criticize. (Agatucci n.d.) It seems very likely that these intrinsic rules are part of a ritualistic format.

SPIRITUAL HARMONY is the supraordinate objective of the event. It is the basis for moving or acting on solutions that are presented by the caller, validated by the chorus and sanctioned by the responders. The solutions themselves are secondary, what is primary is harmony as it is the prerequisite for any kind of movement towards solutions. (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 498)

It might look as though the fact that spiritual harmony is considered the supraordinate objective is contradictive to the claim that the central concept in African orature is Nommo, the Word. Remembering the characteristics of Nommo given by Knowles-Borishade and Mutere, however, it becomes clear that Nommo is reflected here as well as it works towards a “harmonious functioning of the universe” (Mutere n.d., [1]) or an “atmosphere of harmony and power” (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 494).

In a word, as

- the caller sends out
- the chorus validates and witnesses
- the spiritual entities witness, judge and enable
- Nommo contains
- the responders judge and accept or reject and

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- spiritual harmony is achieved through the spoken word, Nommo is reflected in all the constituents and can be seen as the binding element, the “super-glue” of African orature that holds together the people, the poetry, and the passageways of African orature.

### *3.2.3.2. Formally – the motifs used in orature*

According to Mutere there are various stylistic motifs used in African orature, which do not occur coincidentally but reflect the conceptual background and the understanding of the world of the African people.

Mutere lists the following motifs:

- Call and response
- Kimoyo
- Masquerade
- The “Talking Drum”
- Kinetic Orality
- Jazz

Unfortunately, like Knowles-Borishade Mutere does not explain exactly in which genres of orature she has found these motifs. She does, however, say that they are parts of the “oral-aesthetic” which she defines as

a term introduced by the author to distinguish in holistic terms the aesthetic motifs, creative processes and cultural forms that derive from the African oral life-world cosmology (Mutere n.d., [8])

This and the examples she gives in her article suggest events on a somewhat larger scale than riddles, proverbs or even stories – she for instance refers to mourning ceremonies and funerals. Furthermore, the events she mentions often relate to African American communities, e.g. African American church sermons, musical performances by James Brown, Aretha Franklin or even Michael Jackson.

Still, all the motifs Mutere introduces will be explained. Whether all of them appear in the actual story telling must be left open for now.

The CALL-AND-RESPONSE principle is seen as a reflection of the fundamental principle of the creation of the world, which, as we have seen above, came into existence through the spoken word. Just like Nommo, the spoken word, the call-and-response principle is understood as two-part system characterised by different poles which are united and depend on each other. Call-and-response is therefore not only a literary characteristic. It has a strong spiritual basis and, moreover, serves a social function. In the African

communities it establishes and reinforces social and political order and it passes this way of “remaining order” through discourse on to the next generation. Young people learn the conscious interaction between the two sides of the call-and-response motif, which thus plays a crucial role in education and socialisation. (Mutere n.d., [2])

KIMOYO, a Bantu term meaning “[language] of the spirit”, is a motif that functions as a kind of bridge-builder which brings together creator and creation, spirit and flesh, the spiritual world and the “real” world, and the past and the present. Kimoyo does so by integrating speech, the Word and rhythm, which are all realisations of Nommo, into the oral-aesthetic order. Simultaneously, it gives primacy to the spirit, which is seen as the generator of these audio and video representations of Nommo. (Mutere n.d., [3])

MASKS are a powerful force in the performance of African orature. They have a metaphorical character and visually represent what is otherwise invisible, e.g. a deity, the spirit of an ancestor, a concept like death or a trait of character like strength. A mask expresses Nommo through the dancer who wears it and who does not speak himself but utters words and conveys messages from the supernatural being or the concept represented by the mask. (Mutere n.d., [4])

Like a mask, the TALKING DRUM motif is also seen as a channel for Nommo (coming from ancestral voices). The instrument can “talk” because in the oral-aesthetic event the spirits of the ancestors find a residence place in the drum. This allows the ancestors’ voices to be expressed via the drum rhythms. Still, it is not exclusively drums that can become a temporary residence for a spirit. Musical instruments and even the body of a dancer can take in a spirit and thus express Nommo through music and dance. This motif shows very clearly how spirit, word, rhythm, music and dance are connected to each other in the African understanding.

On the whole the talking drum principle can be understood as a communication technique because musical instruments become co-creators and conveyors of Nommo. (Mutere n.d., [5])

The motif of KINETIC ORALITY designates one surface form of Nommo and means that Nommo as the generative power that constitutes life is expressed in some form of physical movement. As a consequence, kinetic orality is closely related to rhythm, another surface form of the Word.

Kinetic orality exists in a continuum of the visual kinetic, the oral kinetic and the spiritual kinetic. Participants in the oral-aesthetic event make use of visual kinetics, such as dress, facial expression and body movements including dance, in order to

magnify the oral kinetic (of the word). The magnified word in return optimises the “passage of the spiritual kinetics” (explained above as kimoyo) and sets up a good relationships and good understanding with the community. This idea matches with Knowles-Borishade’s paradigm and the supraordinate objective of establishing spiritual harmony.

Kinetic orality is not a one-way process coming from the callers/leaders only though. The audience contributes to it as well and provides “responsorial accompaniment” by calling out encouraging phrases like “tell the truth” or by rhythmically clapping their hands for example, which corresponds to the functions the chorus takes over in Knowles-Borishade’s paradigm. (Mutere n.d., [6])

The last motif Mutere mentions is JAZZ, which she understands as a “mode of discourse and mission that is subsequently achieved in musical performance”. Mutere claims that even in the musical sense of the word

jazz remains consistent with the oral concept of Nommo as a masculine principle of conception and creation in the traditional African sense as previously mentioned. (Mutere n.d., [7])

What is missing in her argumentation, however, is where the feminine principle in the jazz motif is. As Mutere herself explains, Nommo consists of two parts that cannot be separated and not having a second part seems incongruent with what she said above.

Another aspect of the jazz motif is explained more understandably though. According to Mutere, the motif of jazz is characterised by the call-and-response mechanism. The caller does not have to stick to a given text, s/he improvises and conceptually mediates the present. The caller is supported by the chorus’s responses, which draw from the past, the ancestral memory, the familiar. The responses thus set up a matrix which steadies the whole process. Just like with Nommo, this pattern consists of two parts, one without the other could not exist. (Mutere n.d., [7])

### *3.2.3.3. Modally and medially - the ways and “transmitters” of Nommo*

Nommo is expressed in various ways or modes. Modality is defined by Gibbon et al. as

the way a communicating agent conveys information to a communication partner (human or machine). e.g. intonation, gaze, hand gesture, body gestures, facial expressions. (Gibbon et al. 2000, 438)

It is difficult to separate the mode from the medium that transmits it because the one more or less determines the other. A medium is defined by Gibbon et al. as

a physical device to capture input from or present feedback to a human communication partner. e.g. a microphone, keyboard, mouse, camera, text/image/video display, loudspeaker. (Gibbon et al. 2000, 436)

This is a very technical and “up-to-date” point of view. Put like this, it would imply that mediality only existed in technical and electrical systems. However, as a superordinate term for medium Gibbon et al. give “physical device”. So, if the term “medium” is extended to also cover “non-electronical” instruments of conveying input or presenting feedback, it then can also take into account drums, instruments or even the human body as physical devices in a wider sense.

As a consequence, this part will look at both the modal realisations of Nommo and their respective transmitters. Of course, in the chapters above the modes and media used to convey Nommo have already been mentioned, this part therefore is supposed to summarise them.

In African oral performances Nommo is represented

- verbally
- visually
- motionally
- acoustically

**Table 2: Modalities and media in African orature**

<b>Mode</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Place in orature</b>
Verbal	human voice	spoken word sent out by the caller reply phrases from the chorus comments from the responders lyrics of the songs words uttered by wearers of the mask
Visual	masks dress human face human body	from the spectators' perspective: facial expressions gestures and other body movements dance
Motional	human body	from the actors' perspective: gestures and other body movements dance responsorial accompaniment of the responders, e.g. rocking rhythmically along with the tune, stomping their feet, ...
Acoustic	musical instruments drums	music drum rhythms tunes of the songs

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<b>Mode</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Place in orature</b>
	human voice human body	responsorial accompaniment of the responders, e.g. clapping their hands or stomping their feet

---

### **3.3. Ritualisation in African orature**

In the last sections, the concept of ritualised communication and the traditions of African orature have been introduced in detail. This part will now link the two sections and summarise where ritualised communication can be expected in African orature and, consequently, which points an analysis will have to take into consideration.

According to Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987), there are three different levels of ritualised communication – the everyday, the special and the extraordinary level. Any given piece of African orature that constitutes ritualised communication should fit into one of these categories judging on the basis of the characteristics of the individual levels given in the introduction to ritualised communication.

Once the piece of orature to be looked at has been assigned to a certain level, it can be analysed into further detail to see where exactly the ritualisation is located. For this analysis we suggest the categories SPIRITUAL LEVEL, FUNCTIONAL LEVEL and PERFORMANCE LEVEL.

As ritualisation has been defined as “change of behavioural pattern in order to generate signals” (Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft 1987, 59), then strictly speaking the spiritual background cannot be seen as ritualised because it is neither a behavioural pattern nor does it generate signals. Despite of that, it is a fixed and given basis for any African orature and it sets the conceptual, philosophical and spiritual background for it. Without this basis, African orature would not have a source or origin. Therefore, the SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND is included as one characteristic in this grid for the actual analysis following later on.

Functionally, all orature has the same GOAL: besides entertaining it is meant to educate its audience in various realms of life in the community. Whereas the content of the actual lesson being taught depends on the riddle, proverb or story, the fact that it teaches can be considered ritualised. The behavioural pattern of telling a story generates the signal of a lesson to be learnt.

Ritualisation on the performance level is the most intriguing part of African orature.

First of all, the SITUATIONAL CONTEXT of a story telling performance can be a fixed one.

As proposed in the essay by Knowles-Borishade, it is important to see who takes part in  
*Wayne Rafferty and Sophie Salffner (2002)*

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the event and which functions the people fulfil. The location in which the story telling takes place, the time when it happens, the order in which the people sit – all this can be regulated by ritualisation.

Secondly, as the art of story telling is often professionalised (Agatucci n.d.), there are restrictions on the PEOPLE INVOLVED as performers. In some communities, only the oldest member or the chief priest can tell a myth as it is a “solemn story” that deals with the supernatural or deified human beings. (Finnigan 1976, as in Onuekwusi 1997, 337) To be able to handle the forces coming from the supernatural expressed in the word, story tellers, who are sometimes called griots or bards, go through years of special training and have to accomplish complex verbal, musical and memory skills. (Agatucci n.d.)

In the actual story telling situation, it could be the STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION that could have a ritualised format. It has to be investigated whether there is a certain order of events that every story telling session follows and what the individual elements in that order are.

Typical VERBAL techniques of COMMUNICATION given by the various authors mentioned before are

- the short phrases called out by the chorus which validate the callers words, e.g. “teach”, “that’s right” (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 494)
- the use of pauses by the caller (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 493)
- the vocal techniques of the caller to enhance the power of the word (Knowles-Borishade 1991, 497)
- the discourse rules for participation and judgement of accomplished oral story telling performances (Agatucci n.d.)

Additionally, the verbal message can contain syntactic, lexical, intonational, or other structures that become part of the ritualistic character. And last but not least, the lyrics of the songs can be summarised in this category of verbal ritualised communication.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION is expressed via the ritualistic use of masks as well as through the visual kinetics dress, facial expressions and body movements including dance. The latter also constitutes ritualised MOTIONAL COMMUNICATION when they are analysed from the performer’s point of view.

ACOUSTIC ritual COMMUNICATION occurs as music, both sung tunes and played music, in rhythmic sounds and drum rhythms and in the “responsorial accompaniment” of an



audience, e.g. when the audience is clapping their hands or stomping their feet. (Mutere n.d., [7])

Other contributions by the responders are less fixed by the authors in terms of a certain way of communicating, they could be anything visual, verbal, acoustic or motional.

What is very important to bear in mind with this working grid is that the ritualisation is not necessarily in particular gestures, mimics, vocal techniques, setting, etc. Rather, it is the existence and the actual use of it that turns an ordinary remark into ritualised communication.

#### **4. ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO**

The video that is used here was recorded in March 2001 in Gniguedougou, a village in the Divo region of the Côte d'Ivoire. It was filmed on mini-DV cassette by Dafydd Gibbon as part of the recordings made for the DOBES Project funded by VW-Foundation. It shows a story from a story telling session in the village (Corpus Ega Contes 2001), the people who are taking part are village's storyteller Gnaore Grogba Marc and other people from the village, among others there were Paul, Etienne and Jeanette.

The video recording of the story telling has been annotated by taking into account the following points:

- phonological transcription
- French glossary
- structure of the session
- verbal elements
- visual/motional elements
- acoustic elements
- description of situational context (who, participants' sitting order, where, when)

As there are no native speakers of the language (and the culture) at hand, the annotation has to be done on the basis of "educated guesses". Judging from what has been said in the quoted literature, from what has been written in the theoretical part above and from intuition, everything that seemed significant, striking or unusual has been marked. Some of the labelled parts will be taken up again in the questionnaire following below and it remains to be seen there whether they actually constitute elements of ritualisation or not.

## ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO

The video has been labelled using the TASX-Annotator developed by Milde (Milde 2002). This tool requires a video file, preferably in avi-format, and/or an audio file, preferably in wav-format. The annotation itself then is in XML. The result looks like this:

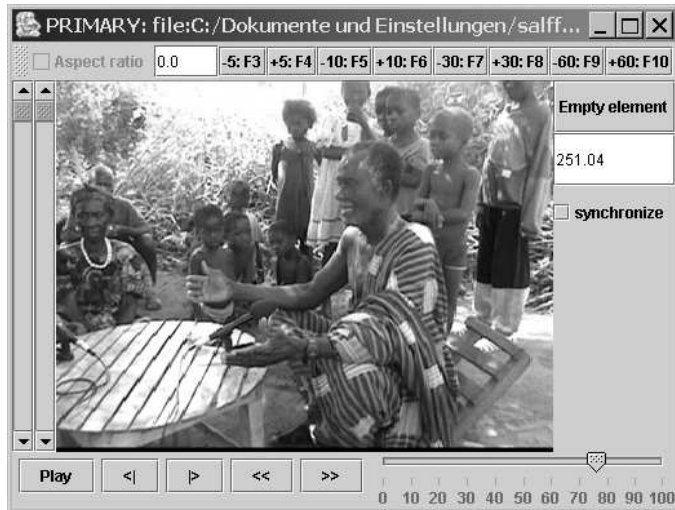


Figure 4: The video window of the TASX annotator

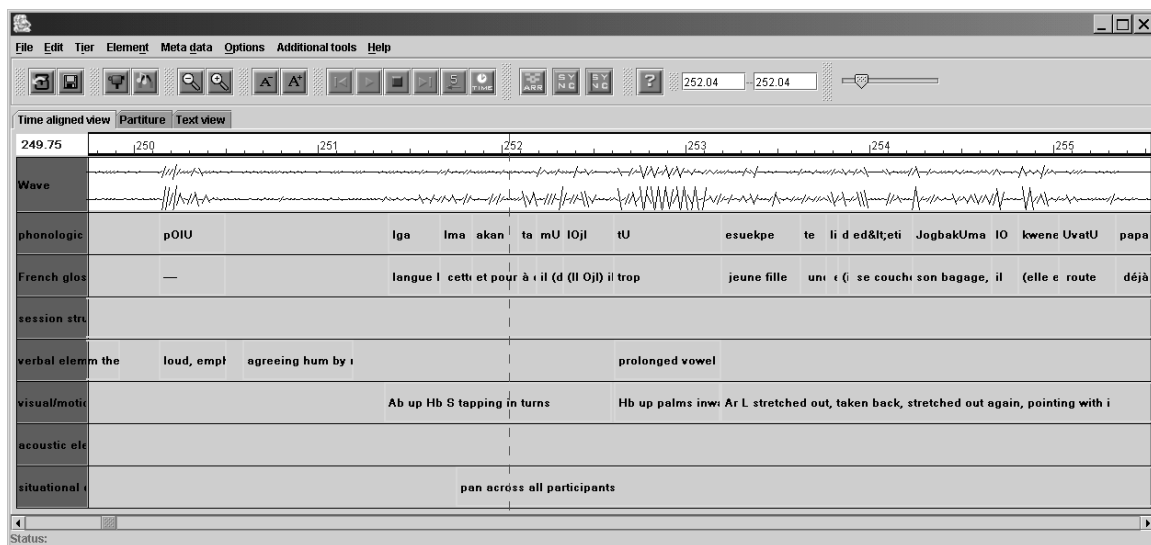


Figure 5: The annotation window of the TASX annotator

To see the complete annotation import the following files into TASX and have a look!

[video file](#)

[audio file](#)

[XML annotation](#)

### 4.1. Phonological annotation/French glossary

The phonological annotation has been done in SAMPA and is based on the transcript of a native speaker. He has not transcribed the songs, however, there are a few phrases

missing and the utterances of the other speakers (chorus, responders) have not been transcribed either.

The glossary is an interlinear word-by-word translation and sometimes gives extra information on the word, e.g. for the word *sEsE*.

#### **4.2. Session structure**

As the rest of the annotation, this had to be done intuitively and on the basis of its form, e.g. whether it is singing or speaking or something else. Content-wise, the last spoken part very likely contains a moral, more questions on that will follow in the questionnaire below.

#### **4.3. Verbal annotation**

The phrase *mo waa* (at 51s), which is followed by a pause and then by *sEsE*, seems like an introduction phrase.

The response phrase *sEsE* is transcribed by the native speaker as “onomatopée pour approuver les dires du conteur”. It usually occurs at the end of an utterance of the caller, but also within an utterance when there seems to be the end of a sub-utterance. Also, it sometimes turns up just before an utterance, this however might just be a “late” *sEsE* when the caller was faster than the chorus.

The use of pauses is difficult to determine for non-native speakers. They do not really understand the content and do not know about the “normal” use of pauses and therefore cannot judge whether an instance is a pause how it usually occurs in speech or whether it is a pause that has a particular function. That is why pauses have only been annotated when it was a clear hesitation phenomenon.

Melody manipulations to emphasise or stress something are also precarious to annotate but for a different reason. In tone languages, it is still uncertain whether there is stress or intonation in the first place. Instead, tone is used to mark semantic differences in words and what seems like an emphasis for speakers of none-tone languages might actually have a very different function. Changes in the intonation have only infrequently been described. Some, however, are very striking and, interestingly, coincide with particular gestures, which is described in more detail below.

Finally, the tempo with which the storyteller speaks varies but criteria like fast/slow would again be very subjective and based on one’s own culture’s perception, which might not be valid or reliable in this context. As a consequence, annotating the tempo

## ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO

has been reduced to a few instances of very rapid and hectic vs. particularly slow and clear speech.

Cases where it is obvious that alterations in the voice are being used by the speaker are for example from 133s onwards. There, someone is being killed in his sleep and accordingly the voice of the storyteller gets quieter and he speaks more slowly with an almost knowing tone of voice as if he was going to give away a secret and also did not want to disturb the sleep of the protagonist.

Furthermore, some words in the story occur in an unmarked way and then later on with a marked pronunciation, e.g.:

**Table 3: Verbal elements of ritualisation in the story**

Word	Meaning	Unmarked pronunciation	Marked pronunciation
<i>sata</i>	manière, quand, comme	at 157s, 211s, 286s	at 257s rhyming with <i>pata</i> , rhythmic, melodic
<i>pata</i>	piler (du foutou)	at 176s	at 257s rhyming with <i>sata</i> , rhythmic, melodic
<i>tU~</i>	trop	at 91s, 149s, 167s, 171s, 175s	at 69s, 70s, 252s prolonged vowel
<i>vEI</i>	(il) regarde	at 156s	at 279s emphasised

As far as the interaction between the participants and the discourse is concerned, there is the response phrase *sEsE*, which has been mentioned above already. Additionally, the chorus and the man from the group of the responders also make remarks, utter sounds of surprise and possibly ask questions (at 165s, 181s, 218s, 247s, 249s, 250s, 277s, 282s, 293s, 297s). At one point the storyteller directly addresses the man in the chorus with his name and the man acknowledges that by humming agreeingly.

### 4.4. Visual annotation

The person who has mainly been annotated here is the storyteller, in addition to that some of the movements of the chorus have been labelled, too. This is firstly because the camera is mainly on them and, in addition, the other participants do not change their position much. The story teller's default position is sitting upright on small chair, arms resting on his knees, hands open, palms inwards, his face turned towards the audience.

## **ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO**

Starting from that, changes in body movements, gestures, mimics of arms, hands, face, eyes and upper body have been annotated. Lips and so on and also the legs have been left out, too, because either there was no significant change there or because the picture was not detailed enough.

Other elements of visual communication suggested in the articles quoted above, e.g. masks or features of dress, could not be found. At one point the storyteller is “reorganising” his *pagne* but this looks as though this is just because it had slipped a bit. The annotation has been done by first naming the part of the body, then classifying the “volume” of the gesture, that is the spatial extent of it, then optionally tempo and/or direction and finally, if possible, the perceived function of movement. To abbreviate the annotation, the following index system has been used:

<b>Parts of the body</b>		<b>Extent of the gestures</b>	
A	arm	L	large gestures
Ar	right arm	M	medium gestures
Al	left arm	S	small gestures
Ab	both arms		
H	hand		
Hr	right hand		
Hi	left hand		
Hb	both hands		
I	index finger		
F	face		
E	eyes		
B	upper body		

Like with the utterances in the verbal translation, not every instance of movement has always been described, e.g. some movements of the eyes or face have been neglected. Still, everything that seemed significant has been included.

Unfortunately, the camera moved and was focussing on different people during the recording. Therefore, the visual elements could only be transcribed and annotated when the camera was in the right position and there are some parts of the recording missing in the annotation.

## ***ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO***

During the visual annotation, the following tendencies could be observed:

Often, the gestures start a split second before the words relating to the gesture are actually being pronounced. It looks as though the gestures need more preparation time to bring everything in the right position to start the gesture than the words need to be pronounced.

Sometimes loudness and high/low tempo in the voice coincide with the spatial extent and the speed of gestures. At one point (~ 120s), the pitch rises considerably and surprisingly the right arm of the storyteller goes up high as well.

Stress marking and putting an emphasis on a word is interesting, too. As Ega is a tone language and therefore does not use stress the way English or German do, the relation of the stroke of the gesture and the word it emphasises did not always match our expectations. Sometimes there is an upward stroke (with its climax at the top) to mark the emphasis (at 57s) and often the stress marking occurs at points where it would not have been expected.

The prolonged vowel in *tU~* repeatedly concurs with a quivering hand gesture (at 69s, 252s). This is not the case however in *fI~* (at 286s).

Illustrating and referring gestures occur as spatial references, e.g. for the Ega village Ugbogotu. Here, the storyteller possibly indicates the direction to the village by his gestures (at 96s, 123s). At 211s the caller marks the way a bird is taking in its flight with a gesture.

### ***4.5. Acoustic annotation***

The elements that could be found here were chanting by the participants and occasionally the use of sounds like humming, little cries, or onomatopoeic words.

### ***4.6. Situational context***

As the description of the situational context cannot be assigned to a particular point of time, a description is given here in plain text. For better illustration, the situational context tier in the annotation contains time indexes for portraits of the people who are participating in the story telling event. These people are

- the STORYTELLER (the CALLER), who is the man wearing a stripy grey *pagne*, he is sitting in the foreground on a little chair at the table on the right
- the CHORUS, who is the man sitting on a chair wearing a hat and purple clothes; he is also sitting in the foreground on a chair at the table but on the very left

## ***ANNOTATION OF THE VIDEO***

- the RESPONDERS, which are made up of the older women and man who are sitting on chairs at the table between the story teller and the responder; they are taken to be the responders because, unlike the other members of the audience, they join in the singing
- the other members of the AUDIENCE, who are mainly children and young people but also other older people; they are more in the background and by the sides and, unlike the caller, chorus and responders, most of them are standing; they are not actively involved in the story telling

The story telling session is taking place in the village under a tree in front of a house. The time the story was recorded is the afternoon. This is not the usual time to tell stories however, normally stories are told at night but due to lack of electricity and light the story telling had to be recorded at daytime.

## **5. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questionnaire has been set up based firstly on the literature discussed in the sections above and secondly on the annotation. It was administered to the storyteller Gnaore Grogba Marc and some of the other elders in March 2002 in Gniguedougou, where the video was recorded. The questions were asked in French and translated into Ega by an interpreter, the answers were translated back into French. The whole interview has been recorded on DAT, the audio files are included as mp3 files in the appendix together with a written free translation of the answers into English.

Like the annotation, the questionnaire looks at the various levels of ritualisation proposed above. Additionally, it aims at background information that cannot be inferred from the annotation and goes into more detail when the interviewee's answers raise further questions.

### ***5.1. Discussion of the answers***

#### **5.1.1. Phonological annotation/French glossary**

The spoken part of the story had been transcribed and glossed by the native speaker, the songs however had not. Asked about the song, the storyteller said that it was in Dida (the variety spoken in Lakota to be precise) and that the protagonist was Dida, too. Originally, both the song and the text were in this language but when the story had been translated into Ega, the song had remained Dida. Translating stories from one language

into another does not seem an unusual way of circulating them and the storyteller knows many stories and remembers and recognizes them by their songs. He cannot always tell exactly where a story comes from – he knows so many. Still, there are many in many languages but, as he says, not so many in Ega.

Getting a translation of the song was rather difficult. It seems the lyrics are somewhat around those lines: “When the woman went to the village of her husband after the “passage” it was silent no more sound, why should you prepare for the return when you have already decided to kill her?” or “when the woman had gone there was a silence after her “passage” (death?) why do you prepare the food for her when you have already decided to kill her?” What seems clear though is that for certain people it was decided the woman would be killed but others did not know about that.

### **5.1.2. Verbal and acoustic communication**

The phrase *mo waa*, which means *one says*, is one possible way of beginning a story. Normally, a story starts with *no waa* meaning *I say*. *Mo waa* is used when the storyteller has only known the story for a little while and has only heard about the incident it is about, so it is like an equivalent for *once upon a time*. However, once the storytellers have known the story for some time they are tempted to say *no waa* instead.

Literally translated, the respond *sEsE* means *I listen to you* and it is meant to let the speaker know that you are following his words and still listening to him. The response is not restricted to Ega, it occurs in other languages, too, and seems to be a regional phenomenon. It is meant to be used only in story telling but it is also possible to say it in other contexts. Then however, it is used with a different intention – it makes the person who is talking stop because he realises that the others think he is telling lies.

The prolonged vowel in *tU~:* (at 69s, 70s, 252s) indicates a long duration, maybe for work that will take very long. Like the use of *sEsE*, it is not typically Ega but a regional characteristic and occurs for example in Dida. Other words with prolonged vowels are *fi:*, *fe~:* and *vo~:*.

The repetition of *vIvIa* (at 106s) is a matter of lexical distinction. The word *vIvIa* pronounced once simply means *to cut*, said repeatedly it means *to cut in little bits, to chop something up*.

With the utterance *uN*, there was a misunderstanding which brought about an interesting fact. Originally, it had been the storyteller who had used it and who we had inquired about but the answer given was on the use of the utterance by the chorus. Apparently, the chorus has certain words with which he can express approval and disapproval – *uN*



## *ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE*

is for disapproving and another word, sounding something like *lEt*, is used for approving.

The sound *blllll* (at 211s) symbolises the noise of the flight of a bird. There are various sounds similar to this which differ depending on the size of the bird they relate to.

### **5.1.3. Visual communication**

The various gestures the storyteller makes with his hands and the mimics of his face do not have a particular significance or fixed meaning but correspond to the actions and emotions of the characters in the story. Depending on the story, the storyteller might “live” the story, make gestures and act out if someone is surprised or happy.

During the singing part, the storyteller made gestures almost as if to direct the singing of the audience. He himself says on the one hand that he only did that to pass the time, on the other he claims that this helps the audience to understand the song better. Considering that his gestures are rather systematic – he uses his right arm with larger gestures for his parts and his left arm with smaller gestures for the chorus’s parts (see introductory song) – it seems unlikely that the gesturing is coincidental or unintentional “moving-your-arms-around-a-bit” and instead follows maybe subconscious intrinsic rules.

However, asked whether the directing was maybe necessary for the coordination and the synchronisation of the story the story teller replied that the way he told it for the linguists (with their camera) was different from when he tells this story to the children. With the children, he is more involved emotionally when he tells the story and for the linguists he made it more lively for the recording. This, however, might also be a post-hoc explanation of his own behaviour and does not correspond to his actual story telling because in another recording session (March 2002) when there was no camera around he gestured just as lively (if not more) and even stood up to walk back and forth a bit. (Corpus Ega Contes 2002)

### **5.1.4. Session structure**

Not every story necessarily starts with a song. Some do not have one, with others the song is left out to allow for a better understanding of the story and to not confuse the audience. There are also stories about people’s foolishnesses and there the songs are simply there to entertain the audience, just for the fun.

Every story has a moral or an essence expressing the ethic standard of the community. The moral is usually addressed at a particular person but is meant to apply to

everybody. The moral has to be interpreted in relation to the situation set up in the story. Some morals are meant to make people think, others teach and some are supposed to make a change in the character of a person, e.g. to make a greedy person generous. There is no distinction between general or specific morals or different morals for different age groups. The only condition is to interpret the moral depending on the circumstances of the story. This could relate to the patterning of images mentioned by Scheub (Scheub 1985, 6): people are supposed to detect patterns and ideas and arrange them in order to understand the meaning and intention of the story.

#### **5.1.5. Situational context**

The time of the day in which stories are told is fixed rather strictly. They must be told either in the evening or at night (after all the work is done). If somebody tells a story at daytime, the punishment is rather gruesome – it is said that then this person's parents are going to die. All the same, the place where stories are told is a free choice, also there is no special sitting order, everybody sits wherever they want to, which is usually where friends are sitting already.

#### **5.1.6. People involved in the story telling/discourse rules**

Unlike in the proposal for a paradigm for African story telling, which involved five constituents, the Ega only need two people to tell a story – the one who actually tells the story and the one who listens to it.

There is no particular “dress code” for story tellers and it is not possible to tell by the clothes, ornaments or jewellery who is going to be in which role (i.e. story teller, chorus, responders). Usually, the roles change throughout a session anyway and it is everybody's turn to tell a story at one point. Again, if someone fails to do so, the punishment is frightening – this time something bad is going to happen to the mother: “sa merè va blanchir”. However, if someone does not know a story well, this person is well advised not to tell it at all, otherwise another “malheur” will happen.

But what happens if someone does not behave the way it is expected or takes on another function in the story telling session? It seems that everybody who takes part in the story telling knows very well what to do and what is expected of him or her. It may have been hard for the interviewee to imagine that someone might behave differently and at first he did not understand the intention of the question. After it had been reformulated and repeated, the storyteller replied that when someone does not say *sEsE* this is taken as a sign that he or she is not listening. Then the storyteller can remind the *sEsE*-person to

listen, which is what happened in the March 2002 recording session. Then, the person in the chorus must have been so fascinated by the story that she forgot to say *sEsE* and after a while the story teller was so irritated by this that he interrupted his story, turned towards her and let off a cascade of words and all that was understandable for non-natives was the occasional frustrated *sEsE*. When he had finished and picked up his story again and the chorus person actually said *sEsE* the storyteller, quite relieved, said *voilà* and carried on with this story.

If after a “reminder” the *sEsE*-person still fails to respond, the storyteller can choose a different person to take on this role. There can never be more than one person to say *sEsE* though and most of the time the person who starts will be the chorus all the way through the story.

There is still a relation between the storyteller and the chorus, however. Although the storyteller will not verbally signal the chorus when to utter his *sEsE*, the chorus nevertheless can tell by the body movements of the storyteller and by his hands when to say *sEsE*. Still, it stays the chorus’s responsibility not to forget his utterance, the storyteller is not obliged to signal the *sEsE*-person.

### **5.1.7. Performance**

As it has been said before, the storyteller uses gestures to act out the character in the story. This acting influences other levels of the performance as well so that for example the voice is adapted to fit the character and imitate his or her personality. Furthermore, the register and choice of words may be affected as well depending on where the story takes place, e.g. a priest in church is spoken with a solemn voice and the appropriate words.

At the point of performance, different storytellers can give the story their “personal style” by rendering it in a unique way. As long as the story still contains the same moral this is accepted and seems to be the usual case.

### **5.1.8. Spiritual and conceptual background**

Questions aiming at the conceptual and spiritual background of story telling in general were rather tricky. There were answers of course but not the ones that would have been expected after studying the literature. Whereas the articles suggested that stories come from the spiritual realm of the ancestors and therefore the ancestors are the authors, too, the storyteller had a more pragmatic approach to the question of authorship. According to him, the real author of a story is neither a spirit nor a spirit through the medium of a

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person but the storyteller himself. This means that after a while it can become difficult to determine the “first” author and a story that one person has told first may later be told to him again as someone else’s story.

Content-wise all stories are based on real occurrences. The first person to come across an incidence that suits to make a story makes it up and tells it. Then it gets passed on to others and the important thing is that the essence – its moral – is maintained. The fact that none of the stories was simply made up seems very important to the story teller, he stressed that again and said that he only told true stories and although sometimes he has not been there to see it for himself it is still a true story.

The closest the answers got to the spiritual realm was when the storyteller said he needed inspiration to tell a story, that inspiration had to be there otherwise there would not be any emotions. It remains open though where this inspiration might come from. Concluding from the literature, it is very likely that the origin is the spiritual world and the spirits of the ancestors. Nonetheless this has not been said directly.

A story and an account of something that happened in another village apparently do not differ in terms of spiritual presence either. The differences the storyteller named are firstly that a story is always something that happened a long time ago and secondly that the story always contains a moral. If it is an account the incidence has happened only lately and can maybe become a story in ten or twenty years but not before that. Thirdly, the style of telling is different from telling a story, giving an account can be compared to telling facts for example.

Also, at least on the surface, it does not look as though learning to tell stories involves learning how to deal with spirits and their power. In the Ega community, the storyteller calls two boys to him every night and tells them a story. Afterwards, they tell him either the same story or another one and the storyteller listens to them. If they forget something the storyteller corrects them and they practise until they do not forget anything anymore. Learning therefore is listening, repeating and being corrected and the storyteller’s function is to show them how to tell the story better. This is not supposed to play down the importance and the meaning of the tradition of course. Whatever the content of the learning may be, the elements of ritualisation are clearly visible: again a fixed set of persons, a fixed place, fixed rules on how to do it, a fixed purpose.

As mentioned above, there are links between the words, the movements and the singing, e.g. when a song belongs to a story or when there are gestures to portray a character’s actions and emotions. In addition, though not in the story analysed here, there

sometimes are dance and the use of drums. Dance occurs either when the main character dances – then the storyteller has to dance, too. In other cases, the story requires a dance and as soon as there is dance drums are obligatory. If you dance then, it is to get inspiration, not for acting reasons. This means that movement in dance and drum rhythms are closely linked and cannot be separated.

## **5.2. Potential problems with the questionnaire**

### **5.2.1. Problem of truthful answers**

The storyteller claims he only did the gestures for the camera because he knew he was being recorded. However, as said above in a different story telling session without cameras he gestured just as much. Therefore it seems the gesturing is part of the story telling despite what he claims in his answer.

### **5.2.2. Problem of meta view**

The questions are based on the literature quoted in this paper and on the annotation of the video. Both sources have a scientific “meta” character, they talk about orature and analyse it from a linguistic, literary or other point of view. The interviewees are not used to this way of thinking and might not understand or misunderstand the focus or the intention of the questions. One way to solve this problem is to make the questions comprehensible for non-linguists as well, another is to reformulate the questions when it becomes clear that problems occur.

### **5.2.3. Problem of translation**

The questionnaire has been set up in English. Then the questions had to be translated into French and then into Ega. Obviously, the answers then had to be translated back from Ega into French into English. It is possible that during this process information got lost, was translated wrongly, was misunderstood and so on. If the researchers spoke Ega, there would not be a problem, obviously this is not the case though and therefore this risk has to be taken.

## **6. FEATURES OF RITUALISATION IN THE ANALYSED STORY**

In section 3.3, a proposal has been made for a grid for the analysis of ritualisation in African orature. This chapter now aims at filling this grid with the information collected

in the analysis of the video and the questionnaire and, by doing this, summarising the ritualistic features of African orature which occur in this particular story.

### **6.1. Level of ritualised communication**

In the model given by Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft, the story has to be placed in the category of special ritual communication.

It is comparable to public speeches, jokes or songs and verses accompanying games, which are examples of special ritual communication given by Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft.

Stories occur less frequently than for example greeting rituals and more frequently than celebrations like the ones Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft mention as extraordinary ritual communication. Stories take place in a particular framework – at least two people have to gather at a certain time, there is some sort of introduction (song, phrase, ...) and there are fixed discourse rules (response phrase, phrases for approval/disapproval, ...). The number of people involved varies between two and a crowd of people, as it was the case with the story analysed here. A story telling session requires some preparation as people have to gather and inspiration has to be found. For some stories, there is also a need for drums on order to dance and thus get inspiration. The meaning attached to story telling is to entertain, to teach and to change things or people for the better.

### **6.2. Spiritual, functional and performance level**

On the spiritual level, the conceptual, spiritual and philosophical background constitutes the framework and basis for the ritualisation. Unfortunately, both video and questionnaire did not reveal all that much information about this background. Nothing relating to the spiritual realm was ever mentioned directly, what was brought up, however, was the need for inspiration and the rather severe punishments for wrong behaviour. These concepts could possibly be traced back to the influence of spirits but this has not been verified by the interviewees.

Functionally, the aim of story telling is to teach a moral, to entertain and to bring about a change in the character of a person. The various areas story telling covers (possibly social, political, educational, to control, ...) have not been mentioned.

As well as the aims, another point should be added at this level. It is not related to the function of story telling but is also situated in between the spiritual and the performance level. This point is also fixed and explains how to learn to tell stories, which is by being called to an accomplished storyteller, listening to his stories and telling him stories until, after surely much correction, they have been told to the satisfaction of the storyteller.

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As this medium level now contains not only the function, it seems sensible to adapt the analysis grid so that it will also include this new point which has not been thought of before. We therefore suggest to join the two tiers of spiritual and functional level to make a new level called CULTURAL BACKGROUND which summarises the three aspects of spiritual basis, aims and passing on the traditions.

On the performance level, the situational context for Ega story telling is characterised like this: It takes at least two people to tell a story – one to tell it and the other to listen and to respond with *sEsE*. Of course, it is also possible for more people to attend but then only one is allowed to respond with *sEsE*. Story telling can take place anywhere but only in the evening or at night. There is no particular sitting order, everybody sits wherever they want to, which is usually with their friends.

There are no strict restrictions on who is allowed to tell a story. The only condition is that the person knows the story well.

In the actual story telling, the session is structured as follows: first there is a little pause, then a chant begins. The first spoken part of the story is initiated with an introductory phrase, then spoken and sung parts follow in turns. The story ends with a moral and finally the listeners thank the storyteller by saying *mUka*.

Ritualised verbal features of the communication include the introductory phrase *mo waa*, which can alternatively be replaced by *no waa*. The chorus replies at regular intervals with the response phrase *sEsE*, other fixed expressions the chorus can employ are for example utterances to express approval and disapproval – *uN* is used for disapproving and another word, sounding something like *lEt*, is used for approving. Also, the chorus and the responders can contribute to the story telling and make remarks, utter sounds of surprise and ask questions. The caller uses alterations in his voice and speech, e.g. some words are said with a special pronunciation or emphasis, he uses onomatopoeic words, unusual repeated word forms or words with extremely prolonged vowels. What is more difficult to determine are the use of pauses and melody, tempo and volume manipulations. Still, these phenomena do occur and they seem to be used intentionally as they coincide with other means of expressing emphasis, e.g. mimics and gestures.

Visual motifs such as masks or features of dress could not be found. There is, however, extensive use of gestures, mimics and body movements for various purposes: to emphasise and underline spoken words, to illustrate, to refer, to portray a character and his or her actions, possibly to direct singing parts. No gestures or movements with a

## *FEATURES OF RITUALISATION IN THE ANALYSED STORY*

preset meaning could be found, instead the gestures, mimics and body movements depend on the story and its content. In other stories, there may also be dance or for example walking around, this is not the case, however, in the story analysed here.

Acoustic communication occurs as singing, use of onomatopoeic words, use of sounds like humming and contributions like little cries of for instance surprise. According to the interviewee, there sometimes is need to play the drums too but this depends on the story and whether it requires drum rhythms.

The hypothesis that ritualisation does not necessarily consist of particular gestures, mimics, vocal techniques and so on with a predetermined meaning seems to prove right. Instead, there is use of various different features that do not have a meaning by themselves but are assigned a meaning when they are used in the ritualised context of a story telling session.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper was to annotate and to describe ritualisation and ritualised communication in African story telling by using a story from the Ega people as an example.

To supply the background, we introduced Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft's work on ritualised communication. Their ideas were explained and criticised and, as a consequence, we extended their model on the basis of Jakobson's model of communication demonstrating that this would allow including more features relevant to the description of ritualisation and ritualised communication.

Secondly, we reviewed the literature on African orature and set the different approaches (literary, historical, anthropological, linguistic, ...) and findings in relation to each other.

On the basis of this, we set up a grid for the analysis of ritualised communication in African story telling, which proved to be a very useful and reliable tool. Still, it had to be adapted in one point where we joined two levels of analysis to make one more general category which now contains all background information not directly related to the actual performance.

The following application of the analysis grid to an actual story telling session consisted of two parts - an annotation of a video recording of a story telling session and a questionnaire. The annotation raised further questions but also brought up interesting



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facts which we both included into the questionnaire. The answers to the questions were then discussed and interpreted.

Finally, the outcome of the annotation and the questionnaire was set in relation to the theoretical findings on ritualisation and ritualised communication. As a result, the last section now gives a summary and an overview of the features of ritualisation and ritualised communication which occur in this particular story and which were additionally pointed out by the interviewees.

Some difficulties occurred with the annotation since non-native speakers as annotators do not have native speakers' competences in explaining particular incidences. Therefore, the annotation often had to rely on "educated guesses" which were, however, taken up again in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire itself also involved potential problems which were discussed in section 5.2.

What has not yet been answered properly is the question of the spiritual background of story telling since only little information on this has been revealed.

In the future, it would be interesting to go through the annotation again with a native speaker who understands the gestures and the mimics better and who can interpret them in their relation to the spoken words and in terms of their meaning. This would help to classify the gestures and possibly to distinguish between emblems, illustrators and manipulators which then could be the basis for a gesture dictionary of the language. To do this, of course other sources such as other stories and other fields of communication, e.g. discussions, explanations or conversations, would have to be taken into account, too.

Furthermore, the relation between emphasis or stress and intonation is rather striking. It seems to differ from European languages for example in the distribution and direction of the strokes of the gestures and often went against our (Indo-European) expectations.

As there apparently is a fine distinction between the onomatopoeic words for the individual birds and also other animals, it seems promising to elicit and document more of these words. Not only are they fascinating to listen to, they can also enable researchers to draw conclusions as to how the people are organised and live, e.g. maybe as gatherers and hunters, which would explain the need for these words in order to communicate in the forest without disturbing and warning their potential bag.

## *CONCLUSION*

In a word, there is still enough work to do to justify another warm night full of story telling 4° north of the equator...

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## **9. APPENDIX**

The appendix includes

- a complete IPA-transcript of the Ega story
- free translations of the story into French and English
- the questionnaire in written form
- a free translation of answers to the questionnaire

Additionally, the appendix contains

- the mp3 files of the recording of the questionnaire and the answers
- the video file of the recording of the story
- the audio file
- the xml annotation file

Finally, there is the new version of Table 1, p. 9, which was concerned with the features of the levels of ritualised communication proposed by Eibl-Eibesfeld/Senft (1987).

## 9.1. The Ega story

### 9.1.1. IPA transcript of the story in Ega

mū wàà ēsūēkpè té lí xēlí ínlí ìṅwè ká ní òtò pū jí ògbì má ɔ̄nâ má séā lí wá ínā ká lí kō ābó ká lí kō ābó fúnwēnē lí kó mí ágō ɔ̄nâ má jí klíḃiā tú ɔ̄ síē tú ká ēsūēkpè té lí nrē āpūtē ēsūēkpè mé ɔ̄ nrē ká lō gānāwá ēgbì dōē ājí lí wlixē ɔ̄nâ tāā ò wlā lí wlá jí séā lí kò wājí ìgò ā ká ìnò ɔ̄nâ nó kó wá òtò má ágō nó wāwā mí álōfó nó siēwā́tú ā ní ɔ̄sí té ɔ̄wí ēsūēkpè té ò wlā lí wlá jí ā ájí xiā ìnū gá ájí xiā ēkló ká lí dīō jí ìsò à ālí dīō ābú jáxō úgbōgòtù ònìgḃi`jíā ɔ̄fi ūwé lí mū ègbì fúē ègbì má ímí lí fúē séā má ɔ̄nâ má ɔ̄ kówā ābō ma séā jíā ɔ̄lókɔ̄lòkò gbì má lè déā jí sù íjáfḃnì séā sá ló síēwā ákpúwà ìgá ímá ìnì ìgḃéjí ìnū tu ábú ēsūēkpè mé séā kàlà májíxājí egḃóbú mú mū kó jíā fētrì òmá xiā ìjì tá ṅù séā ní òtò wāwā ìdò má ēsūēkpè mé lí dó ù glò mó úwē jáxó ugbōgòtù ká ìjì jìxā ká lī wà nòtò májíā ābú ābú ɔ̄fi té séā ìnú ɔ̄nūmōē jíṅù ìnú nó kó wá sósō ká nó síēwā fí ká dò dó lēmáájímáēkúnà ābú lā wà ìfētrì tá ṅù ɔ̄lúwō éfúē nòtò a`ídó mé séā mū wālā tròbì àtì āpákpó lògò tá sà mà wājí egḃóbú ējíā má āpūtē ló ālí dī ēdētì séā jíā ɔ̄gódōgòdò gbì tá gé òvàn ù tá tū ló ālí bù jí sù gé ló māmí kó nó mōkà nà ká lí pē āmāḃú ìjāā mōká véli véli sātá ɔ̄ kō úwē jè ájḃnì ló kó nō mōkà mà íjē xiā ímlānájì ēfā ɔ̄sí tá ló ālí bújì sùgḃé ēsūēkpè té gé ābú lí ṅúmō jie ká lí víviā víviānà jì tū āpákpó lògò tá mū lí gé ējēfì tū ēnákpékpà séā íjí ò mū kálì búddò àsò tá tú ā mū lò pátá blèséā ìgwē lī súxā séā ējrō lí bwēē ìnāgḃà là àlà níā ɔ̄fi té jíā ìfētrì gúkpā mōgḃé sé ēnákpékpàtá wá ká lí gálì ɔ̄tē àṅì sé

[chant]

ābú ògàgàsì ɔ̄lōgbó ló ēnákpékpà tá sātá lí tá xā tá ìgá lí tá xá nō ṅià xè càà ājō mū ájìḃwí āxá ògàgàsì xiā`ɔ̄bó nrāājì tá wāgbà wā ɔ̄nī ṅù àtōnú ló ɔ̄gbāṅù gbá ɔ̄nī ṅù àtōnúē ká ēnákpékpàtā tá ālí mī ālí gālì

[chant]

ápù ònìgḃì jíā ɔ̄fi ló nó cá má xá íwli té ápù mū ájí ɔ̄ wíā xá xá ònìgḃì ā ɔ̄fi wā wlāā xó xiā ēfí gḃolété ló éñī ṅù wlā nó ā pól ìgá ìmā tá pátá mū

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lòjí tu ésūēkpè té lí dīō édfēti jògbàkumà ló kwēnē úvātù pàpà ápù ēnīmá ìhò wlōsē mō sātá pátá ìjì èjíwā ákpúwà ká wá wlò ògèkpōsí má nīā â mí úwè mō mō mù òvànù tá tù séā nùàwlē tá hù séā mō bājí ékápē kápījù má klā ùxlùkpù dīānà úwē séā mō wlā ègbí àtí ká òjāná jrò énuédēgbē étísé lē dēá mí sù sē òfí té òkwē ìdō ìlí ā ìgá ìmá hù séā ìnī hù mù véhí ká mō bō mō òsí lí gā íjé fīi kàlà mō pù jí ògbì má ìxó tá mō pō jí ífí té ā kò ìsātáfīi ká álī jrēxēé lá jrēnèlè ká hù dōē níē ēkú ā flēnè ámu lē ātī mōfāa ìbēté wlí té ātī mōfāa āpù mō pù là òsí ífí ògbì ā ní ā

### 9.1.2. Free Translation of the Ega story into French

On dit qu'il y avait une jeune fille qui avait cinq ans. Puis son Père lui donna un mari. C'était un homme qui tuait beaucoup de gibiers et faisait plaisir à ses beaux-parents. Il leur construisit des maisons. Cet homme s'est beaucoup saigné pour ses beaux-parents. Mais quand la jeune fille atteint la puberté, elle ne voulu pas de l'homme qui lui était pourtant promis. Elle ne faisait que l'injurier quand celui-ci lui rappelait tout ce qu'il avait fait pour ses parents. Pour ne plus le rencontrer, la jeune fille décida de quitter le village pour un autre village Ega (Ugbogotu). Là-Bas, elle épousa un homme riche. Le jour du mariage, une fête fut organisée. Ce jour-là, le Père de la fille tua des bœufs. On fit piler du foutou dans des mortiers qui résonnaient; puisqu'il fallait donner à manger pour le mariage de la jeune fille. Mécontent de cette fête, l'homme à qui cette jeune fille était promise décida de se venger. Ainsi, lorsque la jeune fille voulu se rendre dans le village de son époux, l'homme décida d'aller lui barrer le chemin, armé du couteau que le père de cette dernière s'était servi pour tuer les bœufs. Lorsque, chemin faisant, elle le rencontra, elle voulut l'éviter. Mais celui-ci exigea qu'elle lui dise bonjour. Elle l'injuria et cracha sur lui de surcroît. Il insista mais elle n'obtempéra pas. Comme elle refusa de lui dire bonjour malgré son insistance et qu'elle ne voulut pas s'excuser pour ce qu'elle venait de faire, il lui dit qu'elle vivait-là ses derniers jours. Il s'empara donc du couteau, l'assoma avec puis se mis à la découper. Aussitôt, les mortiers arrêterent de retentir et le jeune homme su que la jeune fille venait de mourir. Un oiseau vint se laver dans le sang de la jeune victime.

Sur un arbre, chantait un oiseau. Une vieille femme comprit le message et alerta la foule. On ne fit pas attention à qu'elle disait et elle fut injurier. Mais le fils du riche dit avoir lui aussi entendu le chant de l'oiseau. Lui aussi fut injurié à son tour. Mais comme

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il faisait tard et que la jeune fille tardait à rentrer, deux garçons allèrent à sa rencontre. Ils découvrirent, chemin faisant, le corps décapité de la jeune fille. Stupéfaits, ils poussèrent des cris de sorte que depuis le village, on pouvait les entendre. Aussitôt les tambours cessèrent de retentir. Les femmes arrêtaient de piler le foutou. On n'eut plus le temps de manger les bœufs. C'était partout la consternation. On ne s'en revenait pas. On venait d'apprendre que la jeune fille était morte.

C'est depuis ce temps qu'on a décidé de ne plus donner en mariage une fille dès l'enfance. Parce que, celui à qui elle promis s'efforce de plaire à ses futurs beaux-parents. Mais quand la jeune fille atteint la puberté, elle refuse d'épouser ce dernier qui avait pourtant tout fait pour ses parents. C'est le fond du premier chant.

### **9.1.3. Free Translation of the Ega story into English**

Once upon a time there was a young girl and she was five years old when her father gave her a husband. It was a man who killed many animals and he pleased his parents-in-law. He built them houses. He was making a great effort for his parents. But when the young woman reached puberty she didn't want the man she was promised to. She only insulted him when he reminded her of all that he had done for his parents. The young woman decided to go to another Ega village (Ugbogotu) so that she wouldn't meet. There she married a rich man. On the day they married a party was organised. On this day, the father of the woman killed some cattle. He made foutou in the pounding pots which was rather loud until it was time to eat at the young woman wedding. Unhappy about the wedding, the man who the woman had been promised to decided to take revenge. So when the young woman wanted to go to the village of her husband the man decided to block her way armed with a knife that her father had given to kill the cattle. When she met him on her way she wanted to avoid him. But the man demanded that she said hello to him. She insulted him and spat at him, too. He insisted but she didn't want to. When she refused to say hello despite of his insistence and when she didn't want to say sorry for what she had done he said to her that she had lived there her last days. So he took the knife, knocked her down and started to cut her to pieces. As soon as the sound of the pounding pots stopped the man knew that the young woman was going to die. A bird came and washed himself in the blood of the young victim.

On a tree, a bird sang. An old woman understood the message and told the crowd. They didn't pay attention to what she was saying and that made her swear. But the son of the rich man said that he had also heard the song of the bird and then it was his turn to be insulted. But when it got late and the young woman was late two boys went to meet her.



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On their way they found the decapitated body of the young woman. Shocked they screamed so much that they could hear them in the village. Instantly the drummers stopped playing the drums and the women stopped making foutou. There was no more time to eat the beef. There was consternation everywhere. They didn't go back and they started to understand that the young woman was dead.

Since then it has been decided not to marry a woman when she is still a child. This is because the one she has been promised to makes an effort to please his future parents-in-law. But when the young girl reaches puberty she refuses the man who has done all this for his parents after all. This is the essence of the first chant.

### **9.2. The questionnaire**

#### **9.2.1. Questions**

##### *Words and phrases*

- Is /mo waa/ the typical introduction to a story?
- Is there a literal translation of the /sEsE/ respond of the second speaker? If yes, what is it?
- The phrase /kIIB<Ia tō OsIa tō/ has remarkably long nasalised vowels. What does that mean and why are the vowels so long?
- In the phrase /vIvIa vIvIa vIvIa/ the same word seems to be repeated three times and the phrase is stressed very much by the speaker as well. Why is this pronounced that way and what does it mean/express?
- After one of the chants the speaker says something like a very high and long /uN/. What is the explanation for this and why does he do that?
- At one point the speaker does a probably onomatopoeic bilabial trill. What does this stand for? Could it be a stylistic/poetic element that he is using?

##### *Mimics and gestures*

- The story teller makes various gestures with his hands, arms and his face. Do they have a particular significance?
- When there is singing it looks as though the story teller was directing the singing of the audience is that so?
- When he directs songs, is that necessary for the coordination and the synchronisation for of the story?

##### *Structure of the tale*

- What parts or components does the tale consist of?

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- In what order do the parts occur?

### *Content of the tale*

- What is the moral of this story?
- Do all stories have morals? Why (not)?
- Where does the story come from? Who makes it up?

### *Function of the tale*

- Why do you tell stories like this? For what purpose(s)?

### *Setting*

- When do you tell stories like that?
- When would you definitely not tell a story?
- Where do you tell stories like this? Where wouldn't you?
- Where and in what order do the people usually sit? Where and in what positions wouldn't they sit?
- Do the people always sit in the same positions?
- How do they know where to sit?

### *People involved*

- Which people (or roles) do you need to be able to tell a story?
- What functions (or "duties") and rights do the individual roles have?
- Who is allowed to be in which role and why? Is there anything in their clothing or "jewellery" that indicates that?
- Who chooses who is going to be the narrator, responder, chorus?
- How do you learn to be / How do you become a story teller, responder, chorus person, ...?
- What would happen if somebody didn't behave the way s/he is expected, e.g. takes on another role in the first place or doesn't behave in accordance with the given role during the tale (role-switching)?
- How do people know what they are expected to do in their role?
- How does the responder know when to react (e.g. to say /sEsE/)?
- How does the chorus know when to react (e.g. join in with the singing)?
- Do both get signs from the caller, do they react whenever they want to or is it an "unspoken" rule in the discourse?

### *Performance of the tale*

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- The voice of the narrator, is it always like that or does he use his voice in a special way here? Is this his “everyday” pronunciation and intonation or is there any “art” in his voice?
- Providing other people know and tell this story too, how do they tell this story? Any different? If yes, what is different (and which do they like better)?

### *Spiritual background*

- Are there any spirits involved in the story telling?
- How are the spirits involved?
- Do the spirits have anything to do with the words in the stories?
- What powers does “the word” have? What are its characteristics?
- What makes a tale different from a normal conversation, e.g. somebody telling somebody else about what happened in another village? (here we don’t only mean the obvious singing and dancing but what else makes it art, maybe the spirits)
- What is the relation between the word, the music and the dance (or the movements)?

### **9.2.2. The answers**

This is a rough translation of the answers given to the questions from the questionnaire. Unfortunately, the answers do not always make sense, this may well be because the questions might not always have made sense to the people who were being asked.

1. The song at the beginning of the story – what does it mean, where does it come from? – The song is in Dida of Lakota, the protagonist is Dida: The story teller was told this story by his father, the song and text are originally both in Dida, but the story has been translated into Ega. The story means to teach people, it has a moral and “ethics”.
2. How many stories are there in the original languages (Ega, Dida, other languages)? – The storyteller knows many stories and he recognizes and remembers the stories by their songs. He can explain them, but he cannot always tell where he knows the stories from, he knows so many stories. There are many stories in many languages, but not so many in Ega.
3. What is typical for a beginning of a story? – Normally a story starts with *no waa* meaning *I say*, but there is also *mo waa* meaning *one says*. The difference is that when you know a story from hearsay you say *mo waa*, it is like an equivalent for

*once upon a time*. But once you have known a story for a while you are tempted to say *no waa*, but if you've only known it for a short while you would say *mo waa*.

4. What is the translation of the song? – This was hard to understand but it seems the content is this: When the woman had gone (from or to her husband's village) there was a silence after her "passage" (death?). Why do you prepare the food for her when you've already decided to kill her? Also, some people seemed to know and had decided to kill her but others didn't know about that.
5. Is there a literal translation for *sEsE*? – It means *I listen to you* and it lets the speaker know that you are following/listening to what he says.
6. Is *sEsE* only used in Ega or also in other languages? – It is used in the other languages too, in all languages, there is always one who says *sEsE*.
7. Is *sEsE* only used in stories? – Yes, it is.

What happens if someone still says *sEsE* although it is not a story? – Then the person who is talking stops because he knows the others think he is telling lies, because it makes him look like he is telling a fairy tale, a story.

8. The phrase *klIb<Ia tō OsIa tō* has remarkably long nasalised vowels. What does that mean and why are the vowels so long? – It indicates a long duration, maybe for work, that will take very long.

Is it typical for Ega? – It exists in other languages too, e.g. in Dida.

Are there other words like that? – There are *fi:*, *fe~:*, *vo~:*

9. In the phrase *vIvIa vIvIa vIvIana* (106s) the same word seems to be repeated three times and the phrase is stressed very much by the speaker as well. Why is this pronounced that way and what does it mean/express? – If you say *vIvIa* once means *to cut*, repeatedly means to cut in little bits, to chop something up.
10. After one of the chants the speaker says something like a very high and long /uN/. What is the explanation for this and why does he do that? – The listener/responder has certain words with which he can express approval and disapproval, *uN* is for disapproval, another word (something like *IEt*) is for approval
11. At one point (211s) the speaker does a probably onomatopoeic bilabial trill. What does this stand for? – It is the sound/noise of the flight of a bird, there are various sounds like that depending on the size of the bird.

12. The storyteller makes various gestures with hands, face – do they have a particular significance? – Sometimes the storyteller “lives” the story, he makes gestures according to the story. If someone is surprised or happy in the story then he “lives” that, acts it out depending on the story.
13. When there is singing it looks as though the storyteller was directing the singing of the audience, is that so? – The storyteller says he has only done that to pass the time while he was singing. Then, however, he says it helps the audience to understand the song better.
14. When the storyteller directs the songs, is that maybe necessary for the coordination and the synchronisation for of the story? – He says that the way he told the story for the linguists (with the camera) was different from when he tells this story to the children. With children he has got more emotions when he tells the story, for the linguists he made the story more lively for the recording.
15. Have there been others who have come and wanted to make recordings? – There have been, but the storyteller had made certain conditions before the recordings could be made and since that he has not heard of them again.
16. Has every story a moral, ethic, implication? – Yes, it has.
17. Does every story start with a song? – Not every story has a song, also sometimes the songs are left out to allow for a better understanding of the story so that the audience does not get confused. There are stories about foolishnesses and in them you have songs to entertain the audience, just for the fun of it.
18. Is there a specific or a general moral and are there morals for children and others for adults? – A story always relates to a situation, so there are different ones: some to make people think, some to learn, some to make a greedy person generous and so on. The story depends on the circumstances.  
Is the moral always for a particular person? – The moral applies to everybody, although it is addressed to a particular person, but in the end everybody is supposed to learn from it.
19. Who makes up the stories, is it you yourself or not? – Nobody makes them up; all are based on things that really happened! The first who saw what happened and was actually there tells the story then for the first time and then it gets passed on to others, especially the moral gets passed on. The storyteller only tells true stories, although he has not always been there himself it is a true story.

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20. Is there a story that came up new in the last 2-3 years? – Marc, the storyteller, can make one, he can make something that has happened into a story.
21. In what situation, when and where do you tell a story? – Stories are told at night and in the evening. If you tell a story at daytime, the punishment is that your parents will die.
22. And where do you tell stories? – There is no special rule where you tell a story.
23. Is there a particular sitting order? – No, there is not. You just sit wherever you want to, usually that is where your friends sit.
24. How many people do you need to tell a story? – Two people, one to tell the story, one to listen to it.
25. How do they know who is going to be in which role? Is it the way they are dressed? Is it jewellery or ornaments they wear? – It is not that. Last time when they were wearing their traditional clothes it was for the recording, especially for the camera.
26. Who is allowed to tell a story? – There is no special rule. Everybody can tell one, everybody will get their turn at some point and if you do not tell a story then the punishment is that something bad is going to happen to your mother: “sa merè va blanchir”.
27. How do you learn to tell a story? – The storyteller calls two boys to him every night and tells them a story and then they tell him the/a story. The storyteller listens to them and when they forget something the storyteller corrects them and they practise until they are not forgetting anything anymore. So you learn by listening and repeating and the storyteller shows them how to tell the story better.
28. Who tells the stories usually? – The old people who know the stories well because only those who know the story well enough are allowed to tell it, otherwise a “malheur” will happen.
29. What would happen if somebody didn't behave the way s/he is expected? – At first they do not understand the question, it seems strange to them, therefore it has to be repeated and reformulated and then the answer is given. When someone forgets to say *sEsE* this is taken as a sign that he or she is not listening. Then the storyteller can remind the *sEsE*-person to listen more carefully.
30. Is there more than one person that can say *sEsE*? – No, there is not. But when this person keeps forgetting to say *sEsE* then the storyteller can choose another

person.

The first one to say *sEsE* is the person who is going to say it all the way through the story but to everybody it is clear from the beginning who is going to say *sEsE*.

31. Is there a name/term for the person who says *sEsE*? – No, there is not.
32. Does the storyteller signal to the *sEsE*-person when to say it? – There is a relation between the story teller and the *sEsE*-person, the *sEsE*-person can tell by the body movements of the story teller and by his hands when to say *sEsE* but story teller does not say when and he is not obliged to signal the *sEsE*-person.
33. The voice of the narrator, is it always like that or does he use his voice in a special way here? – The storyteller “lives” the story, reacts depending on the content of the story. He acts as the person in the story, imitates their personality in the story, acts depending on where the story takes place, e.g. in a particular register for example when the story is about a priest in church he can use a solemn voice.
34. Does the storyteller speak formally or ritually? – There are stories where you do not have to imitate or speak formally, you can speak normally, but there are also stories where you imitate, so sometimes he has got his own way of speaking.
35. Providing other people know and tell this story too, how do they tell this story? Any different? – Everybody can tell a story as long as he or she knows it well.
36. Do different people tell the same story in a different way? – Yes, they do, but the story has to have the same moral, so it is not the same way but the same moral.
37. Who is the “real” teller of the story, the storyteller, spirits, or the spirits through the storyteller? – When a story gets told you cannot find out anymore who is the real author, maybe Marc tells Baze a story (then it is Marc’s story), then Baze tells it someone else (who thinks it’s Baze’s story) and then that someone tells Marc the story and that someone would be the author so it goes round in circles.
38. Second attempt at the spirits question: The storyteller says there has to be an inspiration, otherwise there will not be any emotion.
39. What makes a tale different from a normal conversation, e.g. somebody telling somebody else about what happened in another village? – A story always happened a long time ago and it contains a moral. Something else, however,

happened only lately and it can become a story maybe in ten, twenty years but not before that.

40. And is the style of story telling different? – The style is different from story telling when something only happened yesterday. You cannot tell what happened yesterday the same way you would tell a story: You cannot compare that with telling facts, it is the same style there [as in telling what happened], but it is not told the same way as a story because the facts are not old enough yet.
41. What is the relation between the words, the music and the dance (or the movements)? – A story without a song means no dance, story with a song and drums means there will be a dance. If there is a song you dance for the inspiration.
42. Are there stories where you have to dance? – There are some where it is necessary, when the main character dances then the storyteller has to dance, too.
43. Is it obligatory to use the drums? – There are stories where you dance and then you need drums, too.

### 9.3. Features of the levels of ritualised communication

The last criterion of cultural meaning and significance attached to the piece of ritualised communication is a rather intuitive criterion. Intuitively speaking, it seems relevant and valid but it still needs further discussion and a more formal operationalisation and classification. Comments on and contributions to this and of course the other criteria are more than welcome!

**Table 4: Reorganised features of the levels of ritualised communication**

Feature	The Everyday	The Special	The Extraordinary
Frequency	very frequently	less frequently	much more rarely
	→ situated in a continuum ranging from very often to very rarely		
Interactants	small number (two to a few)	higher number or only particular “initiated” people (see magic)	high number of people sometimes from a number of communities
	→ situated in a continuum ranging from a minimum of two interactants to a very high number of interactants, e.g. whole communities		
Semantic frame and semantic script	part of everyday routine, no special frame and rather flexible script	often in a particular linguistic and social framework (e.g. an introductory phrase)	highly fixed social and linguistic frame, fixed social and linguistic script



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<b>Feature</b>	<b>The Everyday</b>	<b>The Special</b>	<b>The Extraordinary</b>
script	little effort, no conceivable preparation	before telling a joke, summoning people for a public speech), sometimes even institutionalised (public speeches)  little to quite some preparation, conceivably more effort than everyday	huge effort and lots of preparation
			→ situated in a continuum ranging from relatively free to highly institutionalised
Cultural meaning or significance attached to it			→ increasing from everyday via special to extraordinary

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