

Perception of Sound: A Study of Selected Nollywood Video Films

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Abstract

The creation of a believable reality in a film story requires appropriate application of both visual and auditory elements to achieve an effective communication. Thus, the film medium is a vital instrument in the hands of man for the transformation of his natural world and the projection of his ideal world to other human beings. Film is one of the fascinating and easiest means of communication in Nigeria, due to its wide range of audience consumption. Hence, the audience invariably accentuates the reality of the filmic experience. The concept of audience in film studies highlights a collective of people who are responsive to film viewership. The audience is necessary for filmmakers' profit, and as such filmmakers construct their film very specifically in the hope of pulling substantial audience turnouts, which readily predisposes the filmmakers' product to be predominantly audience-driven. Through the films produced, the audience is educated and entertained. This is therefore an obvious indication that film is a medium of mass communication that is very powerful when effectively packaged and employed. The artistic communication in film is enhanced by visual and auditory elements. Thus, film uses visual and auditory elements to create narrative messages. Sound may not be noticeable when watching a film story, but sound and music constitute powerful film technique(s) which, when appropriately applied, enhance effective communication. As a result, when watching a film, the viewers react with the variations in sound that are in tune with the action of a film story. However, despite the inseparable complementary role between the visual and auditory elements of film production, sound seems to remain a silent or a secondary issue in film production and analysis discourse. The study is therefore motivated by this apparent lack of attention, to highlight the invaluable significance of sound, while critically examining the indices that condition its perception in Nigerian Nollywood landscape.

Keywords

Film, Nollywood, Semiotics, Sound, Sound Perception

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1. Introduction

The significance of film as an invaluable and effective medium of mass communication cannot be overemphasized. With its rapid shifts of the images of a cinema storyline, film offers its audience a breadth and immediacy of vision. The artistic communication in film is unarguably enhanced by visual and auditory elements. Visual elements, as the name implies, are things that can be seen that include costume,

makeup, lighting, sets, and location, among other elements. The auditory elements in film refer to the things the audience cannot see, but hear, which include music, dialogue (voice) and sound effects. Just as visual elements of composition, colours, texture, locations, movement and spectacle, help in defining the emotional setting of the film, so also do the auditory elements of music, dialogue, and sound effects help in enhancing communication. Thus, film uses visual and auditory elements to create narrative messages. Though

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sound may not be noticeable when watching a film story, but sound and music constitute powerful film technique(s), which when appropriately applied, enhance film communication. As a result, when watching a film, the viewer reacts with the variations in sound that are in tune with the action of a film story. Yet, sound seems to be a silent or secondary issue in film production and analysis. It is in this light that Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p. 347) posit that: “we cannot stop film and freeze an instant of sound, as we can study a frame to examine mise-en-scene and cinematography”; neither “can we lay out the sound track for our inspection as easily as we can examine the editing of string shots”.

Emelobe (2008, p. 426) highlights that, “the Nigerian video films make use of narrative styles that are often erratic, acting largely over exaggerated and low quality pictures mostly blended with un-rhythmic audios.” In Emelobe’s view, sound is inferred as a component of the whole field. As much as his general comment may hold true, recent Nigerian video films show that there has been an immense improvement in narrative styles, acting and visual representation of reality. Nevertheless, sound design still leaves much to be desired in Nigerian films. Nigerian filmmakers do not take cognisance of sound design. In many cases, film-makers do not consider appropriate music and sound effects during production planning. They only apply any sound they want without considering the semiotic value of the sound in relation to the film (anything goes). Whereas most foreign movies indicate that their film industry - ‘Hollywood’ has greatly promoted improvements in sound recording, mixing, and reproduction. These developments include Dolby noise-reduction processes and four-and Six-track theatre sound. The film *Platoon of the Dead* (2009) and *Star Wars*, with their stereo and surround channels demonstrate that audiences appreciate improved soundtracks. However, Nigerian video films have made immense impact on Nigerian audiences, for these films stimulate them due to cultural inclinations depicted in these films in a way that addresses the people on their problems at the level they can understand them. Understanding of these films depends on how an audience perceives the filmmaker’s idea.

2. Definition of Sound Effects

Sound is transmitted through vibration i.e. (noise) of any frequency within the approximate range of 20-20,000 hertz, capable of being detected by human organs of hearing (Aloba, 2004, p.185). Isa Abuja (2004 p.193) defines sound as sensation due to stimulation of the auditory nerves and auditory centre of the brain, usually by vibrations transmitted in material medium, commonly air, affecting the organ of

hearing. Thus sound in film design can be defined as organised vibrations synchronized to a visual image that stimulates a viewer’s emotions when seeing a film story. It is the appropriate application of different sounds to a film story that must be believable, but may not be real that creates an effective impact on audiences. Since film is visual, it uses image, dialogue, noise, music, and thus these are manifestations of sound. Every sound in a film communicates meaning with some cultural undertone that is encoded in tune with the film story. This study will base its discussions on this issue highlighted above.

Bodwell and Thompson (2004, p.380) state that music is an “auditory motif that involves the only non-diegetic sound in the film.” Music is the art or science of combining vocal and instrumental sounds that are pleasing and express emotion. For film, music is not only pleasing but also performs certain functions in which it informs the viewers on the situations and draws them into the world of the film wilfully. Sound effects are artificially created sounds laying artistic emphasis in synchronization to a film, television, video games, animations and music. As a result, sound effects are recorded natural sounds or artificially created sounds applied to enhance communication in a moving image intended to relate a story. Shaka (2007, p.130) states that sound effect may be music, a telephone ring, a siren from an ambulance, a knock on the door or a cough. Both the verbal and sound effects components form the audio track of film/television.

Mise-en-scene: this refers to entire elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, which includes the settings, and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and characters in the film.

Diegetic Sounds: this refers to any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film environment.

Non-diegetic Sound: this refers to sound, such as mood music or a narrator’s commentary, represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative. Sound and music “typically accompanies film, video and television productions. It serves a variety of general and specific psychological functions, from increasing attention to providing commentary. Bodwell and Thompson (2004, p.380) state that music is an “auditory motif that involves the only nondiegetic sound in the film.” Music is the art or science of combining vocal and instrumental sounds that are pleasing and express emotion. For film, music is not only pleasing, but performs certain functions in which it informs the viewers on the situations and draws them into the world of the film wilfully.

By intuition and training, (the crew involve in creating these visual and auditory messages such as) directors, producers,

composers and sound designers know how to obtain such effects. The onus is on the sound designer and editor to create appropriate sound effects and synchronize them in tune with the particular visual story they are meant for. Applying inappropriate sound to scene in film story can distract the viewer from the flow of the storyline. This can only occur when there is need for a symbolic representation of an impressionised image suggested by the story. For instance, two lovers are engulfed in the ecstasy of sexual intercourse; the director may represent the peak of their action with the dropping of a glass cup on top of a sideboard or dressing mirror attached to the bed as a result of the force from their animalistic prowess. Definitely, there are sounds that will synchronize with the entire visual description that can be symbolic, but also in tune with the visual display. This affirms semiotics as a technique for measuring emotional meaning. For it arouses the mood intensity of the visual story. Thus, one will understand that the effective use of symbolism in film sound that connotes and denotes many meanings to an audience is necessary. Therefore, sound communication in film makes use of signs, symbols and semantic approaches in relating a story. Moreover, a film can tell a story with less dialogue, but communicates with the aid of music and sound. In complementing this, Ekwuazi (2007) posits that:

We are dealing with a medium that is primarily visual, sound effects, music and speech they do play their roles alright; but none of the three, either as a discrete unit or in combination with any or all of the others, can occur alone without the picture, the visual image. Even if, and when they do occur like that, there is unfailingly, the visual image of the blank screen. (p.127)

The implication of the above assertion is that the film medium is primarily visual, with the sound elements playing complementary roles in communicating the purposed visual message. It is only understandable therefore that both the visual and sound elements are inseparable. Any attempt to separate them will only result to a bridge in communication flow. Equally, when appropriate sound designs are used, it aids the viewers to understand the film the more. Aloba (2001) confirms that:

good audio enhances the overall quality of a motion picture. Well recorded audio will engage viewer's sense and will ultimately give a more enjoyable experience. Whether it is music or sound effects, sound gives the viewer all kinds of cues and clues. The music sets the tone of the scene, dialogue tells about characters and the ambient sounds and sound effects add to the realism. Along with lighting, a clear well balanced soundtrack is often the difference between professional and amateur video footage. But to a good audio there is the need to mix. (p.185)

In addition, good sound quality and proper dramatic use of sound are both essential in gaining effectiveness in sound motion pictures. In general, sound is an accompaniment to pictorial rendition of action (Abuja, 2001, p.195). The dramatic use of sound in video films is introduced during editing while the sound creation or music is enhanced in a musical studio with a sound mixer before it is laid on the timeline for synchronization. This is done in such a way that the audience is unconscious of sound, except where it is used for emphasis. Isa further highlights that: "sound is an instrument of contrast.... The contrast can be volume, nature of sound or the timing. The nature of sound is even more important than volume handling. To be effective, sound must be believable but not necessarily real." In the above regard, Galadima (2001, p.143) states that in as much as film is mostly a visual element, the use of sound, music and effects to complement those visuals is equally important. It is the message of the video film story that determines the rhythmic use of sound and music in the film. Thus, the success or failure of a visual story depends on how visual elements and auditory elements are being employed in relation to the story. For instance, as Galadima (2001) highlights:

the location of the shots determines the atmosphere to be provided for the locale. Scenes at a train terminal become more real with the sound of locomotive or electric cars. The market with crowded effect will be suitable with market scene. The car horns, plane sound, gun shots, must be provided for according to the script. (p.143)

Thus, it is pertinent that filmmakers employ the use of natural and environmental sounds to bring out every minute sound at the filmmakers disposal. In the light of the above, Aloba (2001, p.186) further highlights that:

all the time night and day our ears function. The alarm clock wakes us in the morning, the tone of a voice on the telephone. We know of the presence of potential danger before a car appears around a corner and cause the jet aeroplane which we cannot see but must hear. The eyes perform in a different way: for one thing; we can only look in one direction at a time. At night our eyes are closed and vision is replaced by dreams.

Based on the above assertion, it is only obvious that film is a replication of our experiences in real life; the sound applications to a film story thus constitute excerpts of reality. Moreover, it borrows some significance of most sounds from our culture and environment. To this effect, the sound designers' endeavour is to create sounds that are familiar to viewers in tune with the film story. Equally, these sounds should have two meanings to the film story, which is the peripheral or original meaning of the sound and an undertone meaning to the visual story. Similarly, Metz (2004, p.234)

defined film sound expression as the “five tracks which include image, dialogue, noise, music, written materials. The three aural elements (dialogue, noise, music) simulated research into sound by undermining the formulaic view of the cinema as an essentially visual medium.” This definition of sound affirms that every piece of sound or noise used in tune with a film story is very vital to the story. In so doing, every noise or piece of sound used in tune with a moving image is referred to as sound. Thus the dialogue, noise, and music are auditory elements that complement a moving image. The sounds aid in the understanding of a film story by the viewers which draw them wilfully into the world of the film.

3. Audience Perception of Sound in Nollywood Video Film

Perception is the ability to perceive the world the way it is. It is also the ability of viewing, feeling things, smelling, tasting, and hearing sounds or things the way they are. An empirical theory of perception is a kind of explanation for how perceptions arise. The theories hold that sensory systems incorporate information about the statistical properties of the natural world into their design and relate incoming stimuli to this information, rather than analyzing sensory stimulation into its components or features. On this note, Storm (1987:105) asserts that:

Perception is an intrinsic part of communication. However, no two people ever perceive anything-whether a word, event, person, or behavior-in precisely the same way. Each person's perception reflects numerous variables that make it unique to that person. [...]. We see what we expect and want to see. We do this by selecting certain data to perceive and other data to dismiss.

People's understanding and perception of images differ according to their dispositions in life. For instance, in the case of spoken language, an utterance may be interpreted in a number ways depending on what the listener may think they heard like in the case of homonymy. Here, the pronunciation of two words is the same, but the spellings differ (pale and pail). There is no rule that ensures that every listener must hear and understand the sound in same manner. In writing language also, homographs which are words with the same spelling but with different meanings can also affect individual perception. It is only the context of usage that may direct the listener. On the other hand, perception in film is determined by the culture and the context of the film. Like the verbal and written language, there may be cases of homonymy and homographs. According to Bordwell (1985,

p.20), “even a single word can be a hybrid locution, mixing two or more semantic fields without signalling any boundary.” Here the meaning will depend on the context of usage. For film, the context in which an image/event is used will suggest the feeling/concern of the filmmaker. Thus, we view an image or hear sounds than the way it illustrates an important point. Most times, we do not just passively respond to the visual stimuli that happen to fall on our retinas. Therefore, perception is a constructive process by which we go beyond the stimuli that are presented to us and attempt to construct a meaningful situation. The viewers see the film story from the filmmaker's point of view and likening it to his or her past experiences. Most times film x-rays a real life issue which is becoming indistinguishable. Thus film sound leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, rather the eyes and ears perceive the messages encoded by the film maker.

Film music may not only assist in eliciting an emotional response in the listener, but can affect viewer's judgment about the visual contents of a film. Thus, treatment of music or sounds often exists not in the listener's social, but in their physical world. In essence, music or sounds in film narratives are perceptively positioned to convey a coherent message. In other words, music influences viewers' perceptions of the film narrative. Therefore, sound or music in any ambiguous content of film toward the character of the film narrative influences viewers' understanding of the plot.

The first few images of a film (the opening sequence) are very important because they give lots of clues as to what the film will be about. Bordwell and Thompson (2004) state further that:

we look at the opening shots of place and time, and putting them into context. We look at the actors we are presented with and make assumptions about their characters and roles in the film and their relationship to each other. We look at the title of the film- the way it is worded and the style of lettering and we try to guess what genre (type) of film it will be. We listen to the sound, which is often predominantly musical at this stage, and the tone and beat of this again gives us further clues as to how the film will develop, we do all this automatically at this time we are extremely receptive and actively involved. (p.367)

The viewer's interest is drawn to what they see and hear. Thus, sounds tend to put the viewer in the feeling or mood of the film by giving him clues to what the strings of pictures communicates, such as the characters' motives and intentions to the film. By getting the clues, the viewer either imagines or compares the situations coded in the film with their life experiences and with this they get stimulated emotionally. Consequently, the image the viewers see and the sounds they

hear make them get nostalgic about the next action that is to take place. Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p.368) further reiterate that “the edges of what we can see in a film are extended by the use of sound. For instance, when we hear a door bell ring, we acknowledge that there is someone being let into the house even though we can’t see them. Likewise, we might hear the siren of a fire engine and we know that there is a road outside.” This implies that such sound that has a source in a film story such as the spoken words by the characters, sounds made by the objects in the story, and music represented as coming from instruments in the story space are all diegetic sound. Sound not only shapes how we perceive and interpret, it equally clarifies image events, contradicts them, or renders them ambiguous. In all cases sound track enters into an active relation with the image track. Likewise, from the examples given above, some films depending on the genre of the film (Horror and Crimes stories) use sound creatively to cheat and redirect the viewer’s expectations. In so doing, the filmmaker evokes mood in the film story and stimulates the emotions and thoughts in the audience.

According to Jonathan Demme, as cited by Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p.300), mood is expressed as a part of the functions of sound in film. It is based on the appropriate use of sounds that a film stimulates the audiences’ emotions as a result of what they feel and see on screen. Music ordinarily creates little emotional touchstones that they can draw upon as the story changes, so that the music that seemed so innocent and sweet earlier, in new circumstances, brings on a different meaning in tune with the visual story. The use of sound in creating mood for a film fills in the gaps that could not be achieved visually. This is based on how filmmakers use musical score and sound effects to accompany images. Therefore, the rhythm, melody, harmony, and instrumentation of the music can strongly affect the viewer’s emotional reactions. It is based on the type of instrumentation and time of the music appropriately synchronized to suit the particular event happening making the human mind to ponder on the actions in the film that stimulates their emotions. This is achieved by the way a musical phrase or a melody associates with a particular character, setting, situation, or idea. By contrast a single musical theme can change its quality when associated with different situations. This varies on the different tempo of a particular music used at the different scenes or events. If the pace and tempo of the music used at a particular point in time or event in high or lilting tempo, it conveys something ominous at peaceful and comforting environs. Consequently, the transition from a higher tempo to a lower tempo and one musical genre to another in synchronization with the events in a film is a rhythmic and harmonic decision that helps unify film indicating the

transition from one period to another.

Most often, they introduce the next sequence by using thematic issues in the films to highlight actions and reactions of characters. In this way, songs reveal the utmost depth of the singers’ feelings and desires. Yet, they demonstrate Nollywood’s style of using them as a very important element of the folktale (film) aesthetics. Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p.302, highlight that rhythm involves, “minimally a beat or pulse, pace or tempo and pattern of accents which are features of music composition. These features are equally recognizable in film music.” As a matter of fact, speech creates a rhythm where people can be identified by “voice prints,” which show not only characteristic frequencies and amplitudes, but also distinct patterns of pacing and syllabic stress. For instance, the reverberating tone of a gong may offer a slowly decaying accent, while the fast paced rhythmic beats from a drum (local drum) and local flute (Oja) gives an impression of a vibrant culture. Thus, the rhythmic use of sound involves complicating issues because of the fact that the movements in images have a rhythm as well, and it is distinguished by the same principles of beat, speech and accent. Equally, editing has a rhythm in stringing together of different shots. As a result, the succession of short shots helps to create a rapid tempo. Therefore, the creation of sound track resembles the editing of the image track. The editor and sound designer may choose the best image from several shots; they also decide on what music and sound effects that will best serve the purposes.

As a result, musical theme is associated with some aspects of the film narrative. In doing so, sound in film develops its own narrative pattern based on the film’s story. Therefore, it is necessary for filmmakers to pay attention to details in a movie, which gives it a good quality impression of a desired sound effect. This is affirmed by Bordwell and Thompson (2004) who explain that:

The ability to focus our attention on details works with sound effects as well, where each object gains a specific timber. In long middle portion of the film in which fountain works on breaking through his door making the implements of escape, this concentration on details becomes particularly a spoon handle into a chisel. The loud scraping intensifies our perception of this detail. (p.317)

From the foregoing, Bordwell and Thompson stress the need for details in sound presentation. Thus, every minute image that are silent ought to be represented either at the background or as depicted by what is projected by the camera. Therefore, the treatment of sound synch in a film narrative warrants a detailed representation and presentation to achieve the desired effect on audience. This is observed in the film

Platoon, the film makers (directors, sound designer and editor) tried portraying every image and prop in the film. For instance, the use of music when the enemies of the American soldiers attacked them in their camp, the sounds applied in the film created a little fear and suspense. Our attention is drawn to sounds of dry leaves littered in the forest, before the explosion of bombs, and the variation of different gunshots. All these sounds mentioned, gave a feeling of a war environment. It equally sets the audience heart beats racing and reacting to some actions as their attention is drawn with the aid of sound effects. To achieve good and appropriate audio quality for a film requires the filmmaker's use of quality audio instruments for recording. Of course, the instruments aid in recording sounds separately during video editing.

Therefore, it is undeniable that music and sound effects, in their typical roles, serve to reinforce, alter, and augment the emotional content of a filmic narrative. Musical sound provides a cue for the viewer concerning whether the narrative is intended to be perceived as frightening, romantic, funny, disturbing, familiar, and comforting (to mention but a few), depending on the narrative case or situation. In this capacity, the role of music is significantly enhanced by the level of ambiguity inherent in the visual scene. Specifically, the more ambiguous the meaning of the visual image, the more influence is exerted by the musical score in the process of interpreting the scene. Thus music conveys the scope of a film, effectively communicating the film story. In every film made, there is more to the film sound than just its complementary function. It signifies meaning to a film story. It denotes and connotes meaning to the total film production. To achieve this aspect of sound function, the sound designer extracts from familiar sounds we know. Most of these sounds and instruments used in production of the films are of significance to our culture.

As a result, it defines the genre of the film at a glance. Moreover, music establishes a narrative's placement in time of the film. Film scores often serve to authenticate the era or to provide a sense of nostalgia. When it evokes such effects on the audience, it is due to the fact that the audience understands the filmmaker's portrayal of his view of the world. Likewise, some viewers could go beyond the stimuli that are presented to us and attempt to compare what they see on screen in view of their life experiences. In so doing they may alter the view from the filmmaker's perspective and derives their own meaning from what they decode.

Thus, every sound synch to a visual image is a stimulus available for us to interpret as information and from which we can derive further information. Our physical sensory receptors our ears, eyes among others, can well be thought of as information "transducers" that convert external stimuli

changes in air pressure, light, etc – into nerve impulses recognized by the brain scientists and philosophers have advanced many conceptual models of what the brain does with these nerve impulses to drive sound activity shapes how we perceive and interpret. Therefore sound designer, video editor and the director demonstrate the power of sound to alter our understanding of the different visual images related to us. Thus, the synchronization of appropriate sounds to the signified images such that when a certain sound is heard the audience expects to see the implied images of the sound they heard. For example, two people in a sitting-room are having a discussion, and then there is a sudden bang on the door and the two gentlemen are startled. The audience hearts will be racing at some clues to what they heard, but have yet to see something visually in the film, and so they get eager to know what is about to unfold.

Nigerian filmmakers tend to have understandings of the semiotic field regarding film production. Semiotics is about communication and without the language system there will be no communication. The procedure for signification is that you move from the known to the unknown. The known refers to adaptation from reality. While people have the capability to create and make signs, similarly, film tends to replicate reality. It reproduces what reality represents from a filmmaker point of view. Thus, the filmmakers borrow ideas from what they see in real life and creatively apply their designs to a film story. When such design idea (like sound) is applied in tune to a film story, it becomes something symbolic which can connote or denote meaning in tune with the visual story. Stam (2000) explains that, Bordwell offers a cognitive alternative to semiotics to explain how spectators make sense of films. Hence, Bordwell, interprets narration as a process whereby films furnish cues to spectators who are interpretative schemata to construct ordered intelligible stories in their minds, and from the point of view of reception, spectators entertain, elaborate, and sometime suspend and modify their hypothesis about the images and sounds on the screen. However, representation of reality plays a crucial role in understanding literature and art as a whole since ancient times. Plato and Aristotle are key figures in early western literary criticism who considered art as a form of representation. Aristotle considered each representation, including verbal, visual, and musical, as being natural to man. Therefore, what distinguishes man is his ability to create and manipulate signs. Aristotle derived mimesis as natural to man, thus he considers representation as necessary to learning. Plato in contrast, views representation with more caution. He recognized that art is a representation of life, yet also believed that representations create worlds of illusion leading one away from reality. Deducing from Plato's argument, one can imply that represented images through film intervenes

viewership and reality. Thus, filmmakers draw ideas from signs that are obtainable around their environment which is socially accepted and culturally agreed (Emelobe, 2008, p.428). The viewers are informed and educated through interpretative signs and codes. These interpretative signs and codes, which are encoded with the aid of visual and auditory elements, not only catch the eye, but also draw the viewer into the information being presented. This information in codes is interpreted in the viewer's mind comparing and likening what they see to their environment or experiences. Regrettably, a study of the Nigerian video films reveals the use of inappropriate sound designs in tune with their stories.

Viewers of the film as indicating signs can make sense of or integrate the two levels denotation and connotation only by making references to their background knowledge of the culturally based codes and various associative meanings. According to Copley and Jansz (2004, p.137), "culture is not just a store for the soviet semioticians of the 60s and 70s; culture is also "secondary modeling system". It provides an ongoing model for human knowledge and interaction. In same vein, Danes (2007, p.141) states that:

Material culture from the semiotic perspective involves, basically, asking how objects, being signs, generates meanings. Needless to say, there is much leeway in how semiotic analysis is conducted, leaving much interpretive space for the analyst in which to move. Overall, though, semioticians attempt to answer three basic questions about some cultural product: what does it mean? How does it code its meaning(s)? And why does it mean what it means? The first question involves charting the various uses and functions of a sign or text . . . second question involves utilizing basic sign theory to describe the structural features of the sign or text (iconicity, indexicality, etc).

Thus, practitioners especially sound designers and editors create and fashion out ideas and style in which to express their thoughts. Certainly, video film in its artistic form of communication is a medium through which filmmakers make representation of our world view. Based on the mode of film communication, it has its ways of system of sign coding, shots reorganization and sound making in synchronization to the moving image. As a language, sound design (music and sound effect) complement and enhance the characters in movies reflecting some ideologies 'inside'. An ideology of the shots is created by the different angle shots according to the variation of the narrative pattern of the shots. This includes, the way to deal with the relationship of sounds and pictures, the way to connect the shots and lights and shadows into whole movement coding to our needs (Ajiwe and Okwuowulu, 2010, p.110). To this end, appropriate application of visual elements and sequential arrangement of shots coalesce with appropriate synchronized sounds encoded

by the filmmaker to match the socio-economic, environmental, cultural and political context to facilitate visual beauty of a film. Thus, the sound designer and the editor in filmmaking should contribute immensely to the visual and auditory success of a film.

Sound synchronization deals with precision to enhance the total coding of a film story. In the film *Egg of Life*, the sound design sometimes gives a pre-information of some actions and events in the film. For example, in the first scene when the king is pacing about the palace while the queen is in labour, the musical sound used is very high in pace and rhythm. It evokes the rising tension and pressures of the queen in labour. Then at the point the music changes to a lighter mood, it implies the woman in labour has given birth. Sound equally, lightens up the mood of this particular scene. As a result, it serves as a tool for switching the mood of the film from sadness to happiness. Thus, sound denotatively tells what the character (the king) is worried about, and connotatively highlights the king's innate personality and passion. The chorus sung by the acolyte of *Efuru's* priestess, the bell sound and the sound from the scepter inform us of the priestess of *Efuru's* entrance into the palace to dedicate the child. The narrator equally intimates the viewer about the spirit world. This gives the viewer an idea of the character's significance to the theme of the film.

The sounds in the film also promote the theme of the film story which is reflected in the lyric of the soundtrack. From the introduction captions of the film *Egg of Life*, the musical sound describes the type of film that is being watched. In this case therefore, the viewer can identify the classification of the film (that is the film genre: epic, love, or crime stories). It is widely accepted that an epic film story flows with local or percussion instruments, which depicts the African culture and world view. The sound equally, differentiates one scene from another. For the echoing laughter and rattling sounds were eerie in disposition and distinctly complementing each other signifying the spiritual world. The echoing call of *Ikemefuna's* name by the mother and sudden quietness indicates another scene change from the *Ogbanje* world to the real world.

4. Background to Sound Signification

In every film made, there is more to the film sound than just its complementary function. It signifies meaning to a film story. It denotes and connotes meaning to the total film production. To achieve this aspect of sound function, the sound designer extracts from familiar sounds we know. Most of these sounds and instruments used in production of the films are of significance to our culture. Therefore, film sound

ought to portray the cultural values in which the film story is set. It may not use the actual sound adaptation of a particular place or group of people being portrayed, but it should be able to have the basic flavour incorporated in their sounds. For instance, the Arochukwu people make use of 'Ukeh' (big Wooden Gong) which produces a peculiar rhythm – *Grugudum... grugudum...dum...dum*. This patterned rhythmic sound interprets whatever information that is meant for the villagers; and they in turn understand what the message connotes. Once this 'Ukeh' sounds, it indicates bad omen or war cry for the able bodied men to gather at the village square or king's palace. This sound gives an onomatopoeic meaning because of the nature of the instrument which is hollow in its structure. That is, the gong speaks to the villagers in rhythmic sounds rather than words.

In the films analyzed, local instruments from Igbo culture were mostly used. Some of the local sounds were generated with the aid of a piano. Instruments like *Oja* (local flute), maracas, metal gong, (percussion) local drums, and xylophone. The significance of these instruments to culture is of essence to the sound applied in the films analyzed in this study. They created a background for the film texts. Instruments used in the production of films usually come from environmental and cultural materials. This depends on the filmmaker's creative ability to adapt or creatively borrow from the cultural materials, if he wished to source or research on them. An instrument such as local flute (*Oja*) is used to create sorrowful moments in film. It also informs us about a particular character in a film story. It is locally made from hollow woods or Bamboo tree. In Igbo land/culture, flute sound is very significant for mood and setting interpretations. Usually, the moods vary from pulsating, carnival heights of joy/jubilation to depths of sorrow. Sometimes it signifies to spirits, and at other times it is the palpable rhythm of jubilation. Its cosmic expression traverses the living and the ancestral worlds. Maracas (*ichaka*) produces a rattling sound. It is usually made of metal plate and bamboo stick with stone pieces of metal, or gourd with network of bead woven around the external part of the gourd, such that when the gourd is shaken, the contact between the networks of the beads produces rhythmic network sounds. It is used to add rhythm to music. It can also signify joyous or sorrowful mood. Metal gong (*ogele*) is a hollow metal like the shape of an elephant tusk. It is produced by blacksmiths. In film texts, it is used to simulate something eerie. Apart from setting up moods for jubilation, it also signals to spirits; and at other times, it is the palpable rhythm of Jubilation. Its cosmic expression traverses the living and the ancestral worlds as it communicates. Drum (*igba*) is made from tree trunk and animal skin. It can be used as musical instrument for cultural dances and it communicates like the Yoruba talking drum. In Igbo land, it

is used for announcements in a typical Igbo village setting. In some Igbo communities, some drums are sacred. It can be used to eulogize a prominent figure in the society. Big wooden gong (*Ukeh*) is Carved out of tree trunk. It can be used as musical instrument for cultural dances and it communicates like talking drum. In Igbo land, it is used for town crying or announcements.

5. A Critical Analysis of Sound Perception in Andy Amenchi's *Egg of Life* and Emekaekwue's *Mountains of Evils*

Sound in the film equally arouses empathy from the viewer on the characters. For example, when Buchi realizes she could not make it to the King's palace and handed over the *Egg of Life*, a low pitched instrumental sound plays at the background. This sound stimulates the audience emotion on the two surviving maidens. Sounds do not only enhance the characters' mood but aid in drawing the viewer's emotions and thoughts on the characters, and also events happening in the film story. The slow rhythm from a flute (*Oja*) makes the scene where *Ikemefuna's* mother pleads to the priestess of *Efuru* that her son should be cured of his ailment was moody.

In the film *Egg of life*, the director projected the African identity by adopting the African form of storytelling. This concept was also adopted in a foreign made film titled *300*. These two films employed narrative African narrative form in different styles. Of the two, *Egg of Life* has the pure African concept of people gathering around a real story, whereas *300* had the narrator identified in the film as one of the *300* soldiers who was sent back to narrate the story of how they fought. The *Egg of Life* also had the narrator being visible at the beginning of the film and at intervals in the background of the visual story. Moreover, the film *Egg of Life* employed good use of some African instrumental sounds which gives it the feeling of an epic movie. Once the sound track of the film is played, the film is identified anywhere. This local instrumental sounds explored in the film were informative. For example, in the beginning of the film when a child is being born, the audience is made to have the feeling that the king is in an intense mood. When the child was born, the music lightened up the mood, informing the audience that the king was about to smile. Consequently, whenever the maidens get to the point of trials, the viewer gets the feeling of distinctive eerie sounds that gets the audience heartbeat racing. For example, at the first test where they met the lost souls of the night, Ebube the whirlwind, the designer made us have the scary sound effect of these gods. The sound effects

used gives us a pre-information with a resounding strike of a bass guitar indicating danger. This danger effect could have been achieved more if the designer had adapted from natural sound like birds (e.g. owl or bat sounds), and some local instruments, such as a big wooden gong or maracas to create rattling effect, which can be eerie. Moreover, eerie sounds can be generated through some cultural activities for example the *Ekpe* festival in the practicing communities in Nigeria, eerie sounds are generated from local instruments. The sounds generated from this local effect give the impression that a god is passing-by or talking. On the other hand, it creates an effect of a powerful ghost passing-by. The designer had a good impression of the spirit world and its transition from the human world to the spirit world was well differentiated through the use of echoing of *Ogbanje* voices and claps. This scene of the spirit world was differentiated from that of the lost souls. The lost souls had rattling sounds with percussion instruments. The rattling sounds can be blended with a steady heartbeat. This equally puts the viewer in fear and suspense of what is going to happen at that point.

When creating sound effects for films, sound designers and editors do not generally concern themselves with the verisimilitude or accuracy of the sounds they present. The sound of a bullet entering a person from a close distance may sound nothing like the sound designed in the above example, but since very few people are aware of how such a thing actually sounds, the job of designing the effect is mainly an issue of creating a conjectural sound that feeds the audience's expectations while still suspending disbelief. Christopher Boyer, a sound designer who designed the sounds for *Star Wars* and working with directors who were not just looking for powerful sound effects to attach to a structure, was playing with sound (and not just sound effects, but music and dialogue as well) all through production and post productions. What directors including Francis Coppola, Walter Murch, George Lucas, and Ben Burt found out is that sound began to shape the picture. Sometimes as much as the picture shaped the sound, the reception by the film sound community was unanimous in its praise, and to this day the sound job is regarded as the *ne plus ultra* or most excellent in terms of creative use of the medium. The soundtrack of the movie *Apocalypse* was crafted in San Francisco by a large crew headed by Walter Murch, whose sound design credit was accorded billing block status on posters (Blake, 2001).

The film *Mountains of Evils* has a good soundtrack that also portrays the theme of the film. This film transits from township to a village setting. The viewer gets to hear some pop musical sounds that prevailed during the time it was produced with local instrumental sounds. The first mistake about the sounds used to portray the village setting did not really give a true picture of the particular cultural part of

Nigeria being portrayed, whereas visually they were depicting a certain timid area of Delta or middle belt of Nigeria. The designer should have found out through research on the instruments that are commonly used in this area. Then he can start blending different sounds to it. This notwithstanding, the designer was able to show, with the aid of sounds, the transition from an urban area to a village setting. Moreover, the pop musical sounds described the corp members connotatively, as agile youths who are eager to serve. The sounds that were used to create an eerie effect did perfectly achieve the desired effect. For it did not really give appropriate effect and feeling. For example, the rattling sound used in the scene where a magic rope held one of the corp members as they were running out of the village; its sounds of appearing and disappearing act with the corp member it caught, could be mixed with some other sounds that are either natural or creatively applied from any cultural festival sound production to give a desired effect.

In the film *Mountains of Evils*, sound applications denote and connote lots of meanings in relation to the film. Sounds in the film suggest the theme of the film which is man's inhumanity to man. The sound in the scene where new born children are being sacrificed and the soundtrack of the film highlight the theme of the film. The soundtrack says:

Solo: *Alakroma*
 CHORUS: *Adigbitu*
Alakroma ... Adigbitu
 Solo: Cheating and deceiving
 You are risking your life
 Oh...God! (Repeat Chorus)

The Lyrics connotatively refers to priestess *Ogoma* and king *Lanko* whose actions on their subjects are wrong.

Furthermore, the pop instrumental sound gives a pre-information that there has been a transition from a village setting to an urban setting. It describes the youth corp members' innate characteristics. That means, it indicated how these corp members are willing to serve their country. The change of pop sound to epic was used to denote that the corp members are approaching villages. The epic sounds were composed of percussion and xylophone instruments.

Sound in the film aided in defining the time of the day (day or night). For example, at night the squeaking of crickets and croaking of frogs, when corp member Humphrey trailed how the new born children are taken away into trafficking and not being killed by animals or the god.

Sounds were also used in creating tension in the film which is a sound coding. It was used in suggesting that danger is lurking around and the situation going on at a

particular moment in the film. For example, before Morris and Ego could catch the disguised man that takes away the babies, the sounds suggested that he will soon be caught. This was achieved with the production of sounds from talking drums and flutes mixed with xylophone. In *Egg of Life*, talking drums and rattling maracas sounds alert the maidens and make viewers squirm in their seats. The sound track of the film is used to inform its viewers of the kind of scene or characters they were about seeing. Whenever the soundtrack is heard, it is either that King *Lanko*, *Alagoma* or *Zima* is appearing in that scene. It also reminds the audience of how the village is being held in bondage by the King and *Alagoma* (the Priestess).

6. Themes Treated in the Films

6.1. Egg of Life

Sacrifice: the seven maidens were sent into the evil forest in order to save the life of Ikemefuna. In doing so they sacrificed their life to ensure the task is accomplished.

Pride: In the film *Egg of Life*, Buchi was boastful of what she is capable of doing and her position as the leader. For example, when she got into argument with Oma for shouting at Chioma for showing weakness, Oma asked Buchi who made her the leader. Then, Buchi responded in anger that she was chosen by the priestess because of her strong will in achieving a task.

Bravery: It was due to Buchi's bravery that she was able to lead the maidens to the spirit world. She was always ensuring that she scolded anyone of them that showed weakness. It is out of bravery that Buchi and Oma entered the Ogbanje coven.

6.2. Mountains of Evils

Man's inhumanity to man: The entire story centres on this theme, from the sacrificing of a new born child in the evil forest and the cutting of a boy's hand for eating a fowl meant for the gods. The theme of man's inhumanity to man is exhibited also in the scene where Priestess of Alagoma and King ordered the punishment of the corp members for entering the evil forest without performing cleansing rite. Other themes treated are child trafficking, Promiscuity and love.

The Nigerian video films tend to develop good stories, but poor treatment of the filmic sound could be traced to poor manipulation of technical effects and application of aesthetics in sound design. In Nigerian comic films, they make use of techniques and styles that are salient. These salient techniques enhance the understanding of the comic film, and the way their shots are stringed together and harnessed with the music and sound effects. For instance, in the film *Aki na Ukwu* (2003) directed by Amayo Uzo Philips, the sound track tells us about the characters Aki and Pawpaw and it

sometimes interprets their previous actions or the ones they are about doing. This style of informative sound track is used in most Nigerian comedy films. In so doing, the filmmakers guide the perception of its viewers to the image and the unfolding events in the comedy films. Apart from the funny characters used in the film, the director explored the three auditory elements in the film which are dialogue, music and sound effects. In most Nigerian comic films, characters make some funny statements that trigger laughter in the audience. The funny statements are witty statements that sometimes ridicule the world and make the viewer see a reflection of himself/herself in a funny way. Moreover the music and sound effects are used to link the events in the film in order to achieve the basic theme of the film. These techniques are explored in films like *Aki na Ukwu* (2003), *Pampam* (1997), *Spanner 1 and 2* (2002), *Osuofia in London* (2003), *Mr. Ibu* (2003). Music and sound effects were used in these films to indicate the nature of the characters and their actions. It was equally observed that in some of these films the speech and sound effects do not synchronize effectively. Consequently, Nigerian English films tend to use sounds to define a character or group of characters and actions in the films; but the sound tracks of most of these films do not express our culture. The filmmaker either makes use of already made musical songs sung by foreign musician which depicts foreign culture to complement these films. Though some of these films are adaptations of foreign movies, sounds should be able to reflect our culture and the period of the story of the films. Galadima (2004: p.142) buttresses the above point by trying to imagine a film about 1960 Nigeria with the music of Femi Kuti who may not have started his musical carrier at that time, at the background; and infers that it would be more realistic to hear the music of I. K. Dairo or Bobby Benson instead. This implies that sound does not only depict the culture but equally establishes the period of the film. Thus, Nigerian video films should be able to use musical sounds that will express their culture in any film genre. For instance Jamaican films tend to depict their culture in the soundtracks and musical sounds used in their films.

7. Conclusion

The study unarguably reveals the invaluable role of film sound in complementing the visual image which further contributes in enhancing the perception of the audience of the film story. Film sound obviously boosts the aural representation of the video film which allows the viewer to recognize the already established meanings of the codes used in film text (Carboni, 2007, p.102). The viewer creates continuity by concentrating in uniting the codes assembled by the filmmaker to make meaning of it. Thus, in processing the signs and codes of the film text, the viewer transcends representation as a passive

audience to assume the rightful status of an active audience who plays a part in decoding the film's message. Hence, deriving the satisfaction of viewership of a video film begins with the desire to watch the film. Again, the understanding of the film story depends on the audience's experience. Using appropriate application of visual and auditory elements by filmmakers therefore, will significantly change the way viewers perceive the world. By enhancing people's perceptual abilities, they present the opportunity of experiencing everyday life in an exciting new way.

Filmography

Ezeanyaeche, E. (Producer), & Amenechi, A. (Director). (1996). *Egg of life* (Epic movie) Nigeria, OJ Production.

Ahire Nwafor, L. (Producer), & Emekaekwue (Director). (1996). *Mountains of Evils* (Fictional movie) Nigeria, OJ Production

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