Utilisation of Domestically Sourced Materials to Substitute Special Effects for Significant Visual Experiences

By

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Abstract

Special effects constitute the cornerstone of a captivating and immersive cinematic experience. Nonetheless, procuring and utilising specialised materials for these effects frequently poses a significant challenge, particularly in Nigeria, where an unstable economy restricts access to foreign resources. This paper investigates the qualitative research methodology regarding the feasibility and efficacy of locally sourced materials to replicate foreign special effects materials for filmmaking. It includes a thorough analysis of various special effects techniques and an exploration of indigenous materials, yielding practical insights to achieve comparable results. By bridging the gap between international standards and local limitations, this study aims to produce high quality films that assist filmmakers in resource constrained regions while promoting the use of local materials as alternatives to foreign options.

Keywords: special effects, filmmaking, locally sourced materials, resource limitations, cinematic experiences

Introduction

Special effects have long been integral to the film and theatre industries. Wherever there is a cinematic or theatrical presentation, the necessity for special effects is often evident. The essence of human experience leans towards the credibility of existence. Consequently, for the film and theatre industries to maintain their allure, they must continually and innovatively strive to resonate with the believability of historical events, making the experiences depicted to the audience convincingly authentic. The adage "seeing is believing" is crucial in special effects;

when executed effectively, they enable the audience to suspend their disbelief. This suggests that elements that cannot be visually represented or that fail to accurately reflect past events or human philosophy do not resonate with human nature and may remain unrepresented visually.

Moreover, special effects represent a technical facet of film and theatre productions that necessitates collaboration, as these productions are simulations rather than authentic experiences. Consequently, the implementation of special effects is essential to enhance the believability for the audience. Subsequently, special effects facilitate the construction, definition, differentiation, transformation, enhancement, and distinction of each character or role through many elements, ranging from simple to complicated, addressing the re-creation of an actor into a character.

This study examines indigenous methods for producing or recreating special effects in the film *Adoedan*, directed by Segun Ogungbe. This dissertation examines the complex relationship between the comparative and contrasting methodologies utilised in the respective films.

Statement of the Problem

Recently, special effects have encountered numerous hurdles due to a shortage of materials. Certain materials used by early practitioners, such as Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, and Duro Ladipo, were sourced from abroad due to colonial influence. To maintain the utilisation of special effects, it is essential to raise awareness and motivate local theatre and film practitioners to explore locally available alternative materials that can serve as effective substitutes for special effects in the Nigerian entertainment and performance sector, which is the focus of this work.

Objectives

Special effects are a design element seen throughout the spectrum of human experiences, epitomising amusement and realism in film and theatre. This study intends to investigate the continual utilisation of certain local materials that may facilitate enhancement. The objective is to raise awareness and remind individuals

about our indigenous medicinal and organic resources, in contrast to the chemically imported substances used for exceptional effects.

Methodology of Research

This study utilises a qualitative research methodology, incorporating both practice-oriented and exploratory approaches. to replicate foreign effects utilising locally available materials in our environment (Nigeria) for our film projects. The methodology aims to integrate practical theatrical analysis and experimentation.

Experiments will be undertaken to assess various locally produced materials (such as food colouring, fufu, liquid white polish, etc.) to replicate the special effects of selected domestic materials in comparison to their international equivalents.

Review of Literature

Humans and theatre are inherently connected through the etymology of many events and re-enactments that simulate reality in stage and screen productions. Various productions possess distinct characteristics that influence the design from multiple viewpoints. The peculiarities are also ascertained from the viewpoints of colour, costume, scene design, makeup intensity, and special effects.

The illusion of special effects is inherently dramatic and accomplished through several ways. A sharp observational acumen of various happenings typically fosters inventiveness relevant to the simulation of effects utilised at every moment of necessity in theatre or film for amusement purposes. Donald defines "Visual Effects (VFX)" as the procedure of generating digital visuals to alter or augment real-world footage captured by a video camera (2). Special effects are infused with creativity through various manipulations involving deception, cameras, and different software, which are employed to alter or simulate unique events from several perspectives during the editing process. Short and Badger affirm that “special effects encompass the domains of mechanical or practical effects and optical or camera effects” (85). The intricacies of special effects extend beyond a mere instantaneous procedure, as the realm of special effects is tripartite, encompassing the stages of pre-production, production, and post-production. In addition to software, effects, and editing, the camera can be adjusted through

various views and lens ranges. The impact of fish-eye lenses differs from that of standard prime lenses and other parameters.

Diverse strategies are typically employed to attain special effects during and post-production. Ciccone states that the word "special effects" refers to many techniques used to manipulate a staged event, rendering a fictional scene realistic (6). The credibility of any special effect is contingent upon the professional's expertise, the employed techniques, and the resources accessible for the special effects. Eldin affirms that “special effects are created where techniques beyond the normal filmmaking process are employed" (115). The methodologies of special effects typically originate from a synthesis of various materials that may be sequentially and chronologically applied to an actor's body to produce a specific concept or illusion unique to a particular style derived from the script or play text. Scripts or play texts are significant determinants that encompass the visual manifestation of the artist's vision. They facilitate creative potential that simulates the reality of life or re-enactment.

About the Director

Segun Ogungbe was born in Ibadan in 1976, although he hails from Abeokuta. He claims to have inherited his theatrical inclination genetically. His acting career commenced in early childhood through his father, Akin Ogungbe's, photo magazine. As a teenager, he participated in a play advocating for Governor Onabanjo's free education initiative. His profound passion for theatre solidified during his fourth year of primary school. His prominent acting career commenced with stage performances in 1978 for Akin Ogungbe's NTA serials. He received training from the esteemed duo of Akitola and Claudius Ogungbe. In 1996, Ogungbe established his own theatre company, writing and directing several stage plays, including Ile Agbo (2001), Oje Omo-orukan (2002), Golo (2003), and Ilekun Orun.

He transitioned to film production with Banke Desperado in 2006. His subsequent films include Bebenbe (2008), Akann iOlowoorimi (2008), Ibigiga (2009), Opeyemi Oni Tiata (2009), and Odun Ayomi (2010). He has produced more than twenty film titles in all.

Synopsis of *Ado Edan* (Glossy Gourd)

Directed by Segun Ogungbe in 2008, the film amalgamates Western and traditional religion, locale, beliefs, and philosophy. Its theme elucidates the potency of witchcraft, demonstrating its ability to transcend adversity and reclaim usurped possessions or power. The gourd is the possession of the witches, and any individual seeking to inherit the throne following the demise of the leader must don the Ado Edan. This gourd functions as the emblem of authority for the leadership role.

The ailing mother clandestinely bequeathed it to her daughter, unbeknownst to her associates. The quest for the Ado Edan incited a frenzied response among the witches. Ifedayo Rufai, portraying Omoyeni, held the gourd. She wielded her power to assist others and to exact retribution on those who wronged her.
Subsequently, she encountered a preacher, whom she aided in executing miracles. After several years, the witches posed a challenge to Odunlade and successfully reclaimed their abilities.

Special Effect in *Adoedan* (Lustrous Gourd)



Figure A



Figure B

Figure A serves as the template for the recreation of special effects. The body surface was cleansed with cleansers to eliminate excess oil from the skin. Subsequently, spirit gum was applied as an adhesive to securely attach additional materials to the skin. After five minutes, skin putty was utilised to sculpt the

actor's hands to leg. The putty was shaped using a spatula for the precise carving and formation of various toe and finger shapes.



Figure C



Figure D

The legs depicted in figures c and d were anomalously constructed due to the inclination of the voodoo deformity. These legs were characterised by their abnormal and massive nature. According to the director, the design of the legs and hands aimed to illustrate the efficacy of the '*Ado Edan'* (Lustrous Gourd) and the potency of witches within the African belief system. The deformities of both the hands and legs originated from the character's dream and subsequently manifested in reality, resulting in numerous predicaments for him. Ultimately, he was healed by the same power, albeit in a different context.

Following the application of putty, latex was subsequently utilised to obscure and envelop the putty, achieving a skin tone that matched the actor's through the pigment of the latex. After the latex was applied, the final skin tone was established using concealer to mask skin irregularities and harmonise the complexion with foundation that matched the actor's natural skin tone. Additionally, artificial nails were affixed to both fingers and toes for aesthetic purposes, as illustrated in figures A and B.

The use of Local Materials (*Ado Edan*)

Most special effects result from rigorous and demanding innovation, beginning with the conception and activation of concepts, which may entail extensive research and numerous practices in pursuit of perfection.

To replicate or improvise the special effects characteristic of the film *'Ado Edan'* (lustrous Gourd), directed by Segun Ogungbe, various research methodologies and practices were implemented. This study focuses on the replication of the film's principal special effects. The researcher successfully executed the transformation of a hand into a leg and vice versa using locally sourced, cost-effective materials. The special effects process commenced with Adekunle Ajasin, a student, serving as the model.



Figure 1: Presentation of local materials for the effect.



Figure 2



Figure 3

The model positioned himself on an elevated table and rested his right leg on a white plastic chair in preparation for the physical special effect depicted in figure

2. Following this, the initial step involved the application of *fufu* (white in twi) to the legs, as illustrated in figure 3. The purpose of utilising fufu as a modelling material is to emulate foreign substances such as putty, wax, gel 10, and gelatin.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Subsequently, a second layer of *fufu* (white in Twi) was applied to the legs to create the first digit from the tiniest toe as depicted in figure 4. Additionally, fufu was utilised in figure 5 to represent the remaining digits in accordance with their respective variations in height and size.



Figure 6



Figure 7

The initial application of top bond glue was executed in figure 6 to solidify the fufu beneath. This layer was allowed to harden. Following the curing of the first coat, a second application of top bond was conducted to coagulate the surface effects. After one hour, silicone was applied to the mould (the leg) to enhance flexibility, while the fingertips were utilised to smooth and blend the surface,

eliminating rough edges. This necessitated a re-application of silicone in figure 7, aimed at increasing thickness and enhancing the skin's appearance.



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the procedure of applying foundation to attain the actor's accurate skin tone.

Hand to Leg: A Local Material Intervention.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Constricting, binding, or concealing the fingers involves compressing them together for an extended duration. Tape was utilised to stabilise the fingers throughout this process. This measure prevents finger movement from distorting the mould while materials are applied, as illustrated in Figure 10. *Fufu* was subsequently applied to the taped fingers to ensure firmness and complete coverage. A second layer of fufu was then applied and seamlessly integrated with

the palm of the fingers. Water was employed to refine the surface of the *fufu*, as depicted in Figure 11.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Subsequently, the final application of the *fufu* layer was performed on the hand to sculpt the toes and integrate with water, as illustrated in Figure 12. The configurations of the toes were formed according to their variations depicted in Figure 13.

A bread knife was employed to imitate the foreign spatula, facilitating the separation of the toes and providing a distinct shape for the fabricated fingers.



Figure 14



Figure 15

Following the definition of the toes, the initial application of the top bond adhesive was executed to reinforce the surface. After thirty minutes, a subsequent coat of top bond was applied to harden the mould depicted in Figure 14. The final

application of the top bond was meticulously and cautiously administered to the toe area to prevent damaging the delicate toe moulds, utilising silicone as depicted in figure 15.



Figure 16

The application of foundation in a shade that corresponds to the skin tone was executed by hand to ensure proper blending and absorption, thereby achieving a realistic and natural appearance. Subsequently, artificial nails were affixed to enhance authenticity and credibility, as depicted in figure 16.

Local Materials **Foreign Materials**



Figure I



Figure II

Figure I Figure II

Figure I illustrates the final effect attained using locally sourced materials, whereas Figure II depicts the special effect realised in *Ado Edan* (lustrous Gourd) through imported materials. The objective of replicating the special effect is to juxtapose

the outcomes derived from local materials and to propose strategies for reducing reliance on foreign materials, which are prohibitively expensive and occasionally inaccessible due to the prevailing Nigerian foreign exchange rate at the time of this thesis's composition.

Foreign Materials



Figure III

Local Materials



Figure IV

The locally sourced materials employed to create the initial special effect were utilised to replicate the hand transformed into legs in Figure III. Figure IV depicts the special effect executed with the use of foreign resources.

Approaches for Utilising Indigenous Resources

Each creature is equipped with natural resources in its environment essential for its life. The foundation of human existence is defined by the resources provided by nature.

To maintain the utilisation of special effects, it is essential to raise awareness and mobilise local theatre and film practitioners regarding the potential for sourcing locally available alternative materials that can serve as effective substitutes for special effects in Nigeria's entertainment and performance sector, which is the focus of this work.

The application of special effects in contemporary filmmaking has become an essential component of the industry, as filmmakers continually pursue innovative methods to amplify the visual and emotional resonance of their works. Nonetheless, the predominance of Hollywood techniques in special effects has resulted in the homogenisation of the industry, with insufficient acknowledgement of traditional methods that can be employed to produce special effects. Nigeria possesses a rich cultural heritage that could be leveraged for indigenous approaches to special effects; however, there is limited awareness regarding the techniques utilised and their applicability in modern filmmaking. Consequently, the issue lies in the inadequate recognition and exploration of traditional special effects techniques in contemporary filmmaking, particularly in Nigeria, alongside the potential erosion of cultural heritage within the industry.

Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of exploring domestic alternatives in cinematic special effects, particularly in Nigeria, where unstable economies restrict access to imported materials. It demonstrates that numerous practical and visual effects achievable with imported special effects materials can be effectively replicated using locally sourced resources when applied correctly. This approach not only reduces production costs but also fosters creativity within the film industry. The study concludes that leveraging local resources in filmmaking is not only feasible but also crucial for the long-term sustainability and international competitiveness of the Nigerian film industry.

Findings

Local materials exhibit significant potential for replicating special effects usually accomplished with imported options. The efficacy of special effects replication primarily relies on a comprehensive understanding of the underlying principles and the characteristics of the substitute materials. Various indigenous materials, including clay, botanical dyes, and native resins, have demonstrated potential in replicating textures, explosive effects, cosmetic applications, and atmospheric illusions in cinema. Collaboration among local artists, technicians, and filmmakers is essential for enhancing these techniques and maintaining quality control. The adoption of locally-sourced special effects approaches fosters economic sustainability and creative independence within the Nigerian film industry.

Final Analysis

This study underscores the significance of exploring indigenous alternatives in film special effects, particularly in Nigeria. Utilising a qualitative research methodology, researchers have demonstrated that local resources can proficiently replicate numerous visual and practical outcomes achieved with imported special effects materials. This approach not only diminishes production expenses but also fosters innovation within the local film sector. The study concludes that the incorporation of local materials into film production is both feasible and advantageous, given the sustainable growth and global competitiveness of the Nigerian film industry. Enhanced special effects techniques contribute to economic sustainability and creative autonomy in the Nigerian film sector.

Disparity in Knowledge

Extensive empirical data on the long-term performance, safety, and environmental impact of utilising indigenous materials in film production is still lacking. Additional multidisciplinary study is required to properly assess the chemical and physical compatibility of local materials with global production standards.

Comprehensive documenting and codification of indigenous techniques and materials for special effects are necessary to enable knowledge transfer and training.

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