# The Perspective of the Oral Literary Performer: Role and Oral Performance in Ndoki Tales and Proverbs

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**Abstract**

This study examines Ndoki oral tales and proverbs as dynamic performance practices within the broader context of Niger Delta oral traditions. While scholarship on African oral literature has increasingly emphasized performance, much existing research remains text-centered and disproportionately focused on major ethnic groups, leaving minority communities such as the Ndoki underrepresented. Addressing this gap, the study foregrounds the oral literary performer as the central agent through whom voice, aesthetics, and cultural memory converge. Anchored in an integrated theoretical framework drawing on Performance Theory, Orality Theory, and Aesthetic Functionalism, the research reconceptualizes Ndoki tales and proverbs not as static verbal artifacts but as embodied cultural events realized in performance. Through qualitative, performance-oriented analysis, the study examines how performers deploy vocal modulation, rhythm, repetition, improvisation, and genre hybridity to animate meaning, negotiate authority, and sustain communal values. Particular attention is given to the synergic integration of narration, song, chant, and dramatic enactment in festival and ritual contexts. Findings demonstrate that Ndoki oral performers actively reshape inherited materials in response to audience, occasion, and social context, thereby transforming oral genres into sites of

aesthetic creativity and cultural production. Tales and proverbs emerge as simultaneously artistic and socially functional forms that preserve history, encode moral philosophy, and reinforce identity. By centering performative agency, the study contributes to African oral literature scholarship by extending performance-based analysis to Ndoki society and advancing a decolonizing, performer-centered model for understanding indigenous modes of meaning-making.

**Introduction**

The Ibani people, an offshoot of the Ijaw ethnic group, are located in the southern region of Rivers State, Nigeria. Oral-historical traditions trace their origin to the central Niger Delta, particularly Ebe in Kolokuma, where the Isedani lineage founded Okoloba. Following internal civil conflicts, groups led by Opuamakuba, Kala-Beni, and Asikunuma migrated northwards and temporarily settled in Ndoki territory. It was during this period that Prince Edimini, the great-grandson of Opuamakuba, was born. Although the Ibani later relocated to establish settlements in Okoloma and Opubo-ama now known as Bonny and Opobo segments of their population remained in Ndoki land. Sustained contact and intermarriage between the Ibani and southern Igbo groups contributed to the emergence of the Ndoki as a culturally hybrid community. These historical interactions have produced enduring cultural, linguistic, and performative affinities among the Ndoki, Ibani (Bonny and Opobo), Azumini, and Obohia Ndoki peoples. Such shared identities are most vividly preserved through oral literary traditions, particularly tales, proverbs, songs, and ritual performances, which function as repositories of communal memory, moral values, cosmology, and social norms. In Ndoki society, oral literature constitutes a living archive through which historical consciousness and cultural identity are continually negotiated and reaffirmed.

Oral literature, understood as verbal art transmitted primarily through speech, derives its full meaning only in performance. Finnegan defines oral literature as literature "dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion; there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product" (4). This emphasis on performance underscores the creative agency of the oral artist and challenges approaches that reduce oral texts to fixed or transcribed

artifacts. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes African oral traditions as complex aesthetic systems governed by conventions of performance, audience interaction, and contextual adaptation (Barber 12; Okpewho 67).

The centrality of orality in African societies is historically grounded. Mbiti notes that, in the absence of alphabetic writing systems, African communities relied on oral modes to preserve history, religion, and philosophy (African Religions and Philosophy 4). Consequently, the spoken word became the primary vehicle of cultural transmission. Recent studies reaffirm that African oral literature is not merely functional but artistically sophisticated, possessing internal structures, stylistic strategies, and symbolic depth comparable to written literature (Adeeko 41).

At the heart of oral performance lies voice, which Mbiti Wa Kituku metaphorically describes as a "whole library," encapsulating knowledge, memory, and cultural value (qtd. in Jaja). This metaphor foregrounds the aesthetic and epistemological significance of voice in oral performance. Voice is not a passive medium but a cultural resource actively manipulated by the performer through intonation, rhythm, repetition, pause, and improvisation. It is through these vocal strategies that meaning is activated, authority is negotiated, and communal memory is transmitted across generations.

The oral performer thus emerges as the principal agent through whom oral literature is realized and sustained. Oral tradition, as Dibia explains, consists of spoken forms that preserve long-standing beliefs, customs, and practices within a community (16). However, transmission is neither static nor mechanical. In Ndoki and related Niger Delta communities, performers frequently employ a synergic performance mode, integrating narration, song, chant, dance, and dramatic enactment, particularly during communal festivals. Performances associated with Okonko and Nwaotam shared among the Ndoki, Ibani (Bonny and Opobo), Andoni, and Nkoro as well as Abiri, Egbelegbe, and Ikwut masquerade traditions along the Imo River axis, illustrate this composite aesthetic. Such performances demonstrate that oral artists do not merely reproduce inherited material but creatively reshape it in response to audience, context, and occasion. Okoh observes that performers "perform, embroider, polish, and even create stories in the course

of performance" (58). This creative intervention positions the performer as the aesthetic center of oral literature, transforming narratives and proverbs into dynamic events rather than static texts. Yet, despite this centrality, scholarly engagement with Ndoki oral traditions has often prioritized narrative content over performance practice, leaving the performer's role under-theorized.

Oral literature encompasses what is sung, spoken, and acted (Amala 15). While sung and acted forms manifest in songs, rituals, and masquerades, spoken genres such as oral tales and proverbs offer particularly rich sites for examining performative agency. Oral tales, transmitted across generations, employ human, animal, and supernatural characters to convey moral and social lessons. Animal tales, in particular, rely on personification to project human attributes and ethical dilemmas (Amala 22). Trickster narratives, a common feature of African orature, dramatize the triumph of intelligence over brute force, reflecting communal values of resilience and ingenuity. Although fictional, these narratives mirror socio-cultural realities and provide insight into the moral psychology of the communities that produce them (Nnolim 1; Ibeana and Ogbechie 5).

Proverbs, by contrast, condense communal wisdom into concise and metaphorical expressions. Finnegan notes that proverbs are marked by terseness, figurative language, and a form distinct from ordinary speech (399). Their poetic density distinguishes them from everyday discourse and enhances their aesthetic appeal. Nnolim's characterization of proverbs as "the palm oil with which words are eaten" underscores their rhetorical indispensability in African societies (2). As Okoh observes, proverbs occupy a commanding position in African rhetorical culture, functioning as tools of persuasion, moral instruction, and social regulation (123). Their allusive language enables performers to communicate complex meanings indirectly, reinforcing authority while inviting interpretive engagement. By focusing on Ndoki oral tales and proverbs as performed genres, this study foregrounds the oral literary performer as the locus where voice, aesthetics, and cultural memory converge. It examines how performers deploy vocal techniques, improvisation, and genre hybridity to animate meaning and sustain communal values. In doing so, the study responds to a critical gap in African oral literature scholarship by shifting analytical emphasis from textual abstraction to performative practice. This performer-centered approach not only deepens

understanding of Ndoki oral traditions but also contributes to broader debates on orality, performance, and literary aesthetics in African studies.

**Review of Related Literature**

Scholarship on African oral literature has evolved significantly from early text-centered documentation to contemporary performance-oriented analyses that foreground voice, context, and the agency of the oral artist. This shift has been particularly influential in redefining oral literature not as a residual or pre-literate form but as a complex aesthetic and cultural system grounded in performance.

Foundational studies by Finnegan and Okpewho established that oral literature exists fully only in performance, emphasizing the inseparability of text, performer, and audience (Finnegan 4; Okpewho 67). More recent scholarship builds on this position by interrogating performance as a site of meaning production rather than mere transmission. Barber argues that African oral forms must be understood as socially embedded performances shaped by historical moment, audience expectation, and performer creativity (19). This perspective challenges approaches that extract oral texts from their performative contexts and treat them as fixed literary artifacts. Adeeko similarly stresses that African oral forms, including tales and proverbs, operate within rhetorical and aesthetic systems that privilege voice, gesture, timing, and improvisation (41). These studies collectively foreground the oral performer as an active cultural agent whose choices shape narrative direction, moral emphasis, and aesthetic impact. However, while these frameworks are well developed at a general theoretical level, they are unevenly applied to specific cultural contexts such as Ndoki society.

Voice has emerged as a key analytical concept in contemporary orature studies. Kituku's metaphor of voice as a "whole library," frequently referenced in African performance scholarship, underscores the idea that oral knowledge is embodied and vulnerable, residing in human presence rather than material archives. Jaja expands this argument by linking voice to memory, authority, and cultural continuity in Niger Delta oral traditions, demonstrating how vocal performance sustains communal identity in the absence of written records (148). Recent performance studies emphasize that voice is not neutral but aestheticized through modulation, rhythm, repetition, and silence. These vocal strategies enable

performers to negotiate meaning, command attention, and encode moral authority. As Barber notes, the aesthetic power of oral performance lies not only in what is said but in how it is voiced and received (23). This insight is crucial for understanding Ndoki oral performance, where meaning is often intensified through tonal variation and audience interaction.

Oral tales and proverbs have long occupied a central position in African oral literature studies. Nnolim describes folktales as imaginative narratives transmitted orally to entertain, instruct, and critique social behavior (1). Although fictional, such narratives reflect lived realities and function as symbolic commentaries on power, morality, and human relationships. Ibeana and Ogbechie reinforce this view, arguing that folktales illuminate moral conflict and psychological tension through artistic exaggeration and symbolism (5).

Proverbs, by contrast, condense communal wisdom into concise and metaphorical forms. Finnegan characterizes proverbs by their terseness and figurative density, distinguishing them from ordinary speech (399). Okoh extends this argument by situating proverbs at the center of African rhetorical culture, where they function as tools of persuasion, moral regulation, and cultural authentication (123). Recent studies continue to affirm that proverbs derive their force from performance context and the performer's skillful deployment rather than from literal meaning alone. Despite this extensive scholarship, many studies still treat tales and proverbs primarily as textual units, paying limited attention to the performer's role in shaping interpretation during live performance. This gap becomes more pronounced in studies of minority or less-documented communities such as the Ndoki.

Contemporary African performance scholarship increasingly recognizes the hybrid nature of oral performance. Otiono and Akọma argue that African oral literature often operates through genre convergence, blending narrative, song, chant, dance, and drama into unified performance events. Such hybridity challenges rigid genre classifications and calls for analytical models that account for performative fluidity. This insight is particularly relevant to Niger Delta performance cultures, where masquerade festivals, song-tales, and ritual narratives integrate multiple expressive modes. While studies acknowledge this

hybridity in broad terms, there remains limited sustained analysis of how individual performers navigate and control these convergences in specific cultural settings.

**Empirical Studies on Oral Literary Performance**

Empirical research on African oral literature has expanded in recent years, providing field-based evidence of how oral performance functions in contemporary societies. Abe's qualitative study of Yoruba oral traditions demonstrates how performers actively adapt inherited materials to address communal aesthetics and moral instruction, confirming that oral literature remains a dynamic and socially responsive art form (578). Similarly, Saka, Emoruwa, and Awolaoye's empirical work on Yoruba indigenous knowledge systems shows that oral literature plays a measurable role in educational and cognitive development, reinforcing communal values through repeated performance (606).

Other empirical studies have examined the psychological and social dimensions of oral performance. Ohen et al., in their discourse analysis of praise singing, reveal how vocal performance fosters emotional bonding, identity formation, and social cohesion, underscoring the continued relevance of orature in modern African societies.

While these empirical studies offer valuable insights, they are largely concentrated on major cultural groups such as Ndoki community. Moreover, few empirical works explicitly foreground the oral literary performer as the analytical center of the study. This gap underscores the need for focused research on Ndoki oral tales and proverbs that examines performance as a lived, vocal, and aesthetic practice.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in an integrated, performance-oriented theoretical framework drawing on Performance Theory, Orality Theory, and Aesthetic Functionalism in African oral literature. Together, these perspectives provide a cohesive lens for examining Ndoki oral tales and proverbs as dynamic cultural performances rather than static verbal texts. The framework foregrounds the oral literary performer as the central agent through whom meaning, aesthetics, and

cultural memory are realised. At the core of the framework is Performance Theory, which posits that oral literature achieves full existence only in the act of performance. As scholars such as Finnegan and Okpewho observe, oral narratives are not fixed scripts but flexible narrative frameworks shaped by the performer's interpretive choices and audience interaction. Performance thus becomes the primary site of literary creation, where voice, gesture, rhythm, timing, and context converge to generate meaning. In Ndoki oral traditions, embedded in communal gatherings and ritual settings, the performer's creative agency determines narrative emphasis, moral direction, and audience engagement.

Complementing this is Orality Theory, which emphasizes the embodied and communal nature of knowledge transmission. In oral cultures, voice functions as a repository of history, ethics, and worldview. Knowledge resides in living memory rather than written archives, and the performer's vocal modulation, repetition, silence, and rhythm become key aesthetic resources. This perspective enables the study to analyze Ndoki performance as embodied knowledge in action, linking voice directly to cultural continuity and identity formation. The framework is further enriched by Aesthetic Functionalism, which recognizes African oral genres as simultaneously artistic and socially purposeful. Tales and proverbs entertain while instructing, regulate social conduct, and reinforce communal values. Their aesthetic force derives not only from narrative structure or metaphor but from their strategic and context-sensitive deployment in performance.

By integrating these three approaches, the study situates Ndoki oral literature within lived social interaction, highlighting the performer as the nexus of creativity, cultural preservation, and aesthetic production. This framework supports the study's aim of demonstrating how Ndoki performers deploy voice and performance strategies to transmit history, sustain communal ethics, and produce artistic meaning.

The tale below narrates a conflict between Antelope (a proud, large animal) and Lice (a small but cunning creature). Antelope's mockery of Lice leads to his downfall, but communal intervention especially through performance (Lice's song

and Antelope's wisdom) restores him. The narrative emphasizes humility, respect, and community solidarity.

**Tale (Ndoki** Version Standardized)
Akụkọ: Nwanzọnta na Igwu Isi (Antelope and Lice)
**Onye na-akọ akụkọ:** Ife Chaakpii
**Ndị na-ege ntị:** Woo

Akụkọ a gbasara Nwanzọnta na Igwu isi. Otu abalị, ụmụ anụmanụ niile kpebiri ịpụ n'ama maka nzukọ. Anụ nta na anụ ukwu niile bịara. Nwanzọnta bịara, Igwu isi bịakwa. Igwu isi, n'ihi na ọ bụ obere anụ, rigoro n'elu agada eze ka ọ nọdụ. Mgbe Nwanzọnta rutere, o hụrụ Igwu n'elu agada wee chịa ya ọchị. O wee kwuo na Igwu bụ obere ihe na-enweghị uru. Nke a kpasuru Igwu iwe. Igwu wee kwuo na Nwanzọnta ga-ata ahụhụ n'ihi ileda ya anya.

N'oge na-adighị anya, Igwu bidoro ịba n'ahụ Nwanzọnta. Afo Nwanzọnta wee gbawa, o wee na-akpọ "nyuwa shii, nyuwa shii" ruo mgbe o nwụrụ. Umu anụmanụ juru n'ọnụ, ha wee kwuo na ọnwụ a abụghị ihe nkịtị. Ha kpebiri ịkpọ nzukọ ọzọ ka ha chọpụta otu e si egbake Nwanzọnta. Anụmanụ niile gbakorotara ewu, okuko, esu, na ndị ọzọ, ma ihe niile dara ada. N'ikpeazụ, ha gara kpọọ Aghoo. Aghoo chepụtara ụzọ: ọ rịọrọ Igwu ka ọ kụọ abụ. Igwu wee kụọ abụ, ụmụ Igwu na-aza ukwe:
**"Aya ngororo, ngororo aya ooh!"**
Mgbe abụ ahụ gara n'ihu, Aghoo jiri amamihe ya mee ihe, wee mee ka Nwanzọnta laghachi ndụ.
Akụkọ kwụsịrị site n'ịkụziri na ileda onye ọ bụla anya n'ihi ịdị obere ya nwere ike ibute ọnwụnwa; na e kwesighị ile mmadụ anya n'agbanyeghị ọnọdụ ya.

**English Translation**
**Antelope and Lice**
**Narrator**: Once upon a time
**Audience Call**: Time time

This story concerns Antelope and Lice. One night all the animals gathered in the village square for a meeting. Both the small and large animals came. Lice, being

tiny, climbed onto the royal stool and sat there. When Antelope arrived, he saw Lice on the stool and mocked him, declaring him insignificant. This angered Lice, who vowed revenge against the insult. Shortly thereafter, Lice began invading Antelope's body, causing him unbearable pain until Antelope collapsed and died. The other animals were shocked and agreed this was unnatural. They convened again to find a way to revive Antelope. Many animals tried but failed. Finally, they called Crocodile, who devised a solution: trust Lice to sing. As Lice sang and the chorus responded with "Aya ngororo, ngororo aya ooh", Snake applied his wisdom and successfully restored Antelope to life.

The story teaches that despising others, no matter how small, can lead to calamity. One should show respect and compassion to all beings regardless of status.

**Proverbs (Ndoki Version)**

a. **Oke nkparikata uka na-ebute Nkpari**
b. **Onye ya na madu ibe ya na-ehi ura na-ama usi ahu ya.**
c. **Nti inu ihe aputaghi na o ga-ebu ibu**
d. **Ijiji na-anughi anu ihe na-eso osu abanye n'ili.**

**English Translation**

a. Familiarity brings contempt
b. He who shares a bed knows the breath of his companion
c. For an ear to hear does not mean that it will be very large
d. House flies that do not hear follow the corpse into the grave

**Analysis**

The tale Nwanzọnta na Igwu Isi demonstrates that Ndoki oral literature is fundamentally a performance-based art, realized fully only through live narration. The narrator does not merely recount events but actively constructs meaning through voice, rhythm, repetition, and audience participation. The frequent alternation between narrator and audience marked by calls such as "Woo" and the chorus "Aya ngororo, ngororo aya ooh!" confirms that the performance is communal rather than individual.

Within this framework, the oral literary performer emerges as the creative nucleus of the tale. Narrative progression, emotional intensity, and moral emphasis

depend largely on how the performer modulates tone, controls pacing, and orchestrates audience response. The performer's vocal delivery transforms the narrative from a simple animal story into a layered aesthetic experience that sustains attention and facilitates collective interpretation. Meaning, therefore, is not fixed in the narrative content but negotiated dynamically during performance. The tale foregrounds voice as an embodied and efficacious force. Igwu's song is not decorative or incidental; it functions as a performative act capable of transformation. Through vocalization, rhythm, and repetition, the song mediates the restoration of Nwanzọnta's life, suggesting that voice itself possesses agency within the Ndoki worldview. This underscores a central principle of orality: knowledge, power, and memory reside in the human voice rather than in written form. The performer's voice carries cultural authority, enacts moral judgment, and facilitates communal healing. Sound expressions such as "nyuwa shii" serve as auditory symbols of suffering, making pain and consequence perceptible through performance. In this way, the tale exemplifies how Ndoki oral aesthetics rely on vocal dramatization to intensify meaning and ethical resonance.

The structure of the tale illustrates genre hybridity, a defining feature of African oral performance. Narrative, chant, song, and dramatic dialogue are interwoven into a single performative event. The transition from narration to choral singing marks a shift from storytelling to ritualized performance, indicating that Ndoki oral tales are not confined to rigid genre boundaries. This convergence of genres enhances the tale's aesthetic richness and social functionality. The performer navigates these transitions fluidly, demonstrating creative competence and cultural mastery. Such hybridity confirms that Ndoki oral literature operates as a composite art form, where verbal narrative coexists with music, rhythm, and collective enactment.

From an aesthetic-functional perspective, Nwanzọnta na Igwu Isi balances entertainment with ethical instruction. The use of animals as characters allows the performer to critique human behavior indirectly, avoiding confrontation while reinforcing communal norms. Nwanzọnta's arrogance and Igwu's retaliation dramatize the dangers of pride, social hierarchy, and the underestimation of others. The resolution of the tale achieved through collective effort and performative intervention reinforces values of humility, respect, and communal

responsibility. The moral lesson is not delivered abstractly but enacted through performance, making it memorable and socially binding. The performer's concluding commentary functions as a reflective closure, guiding the audience toward ethical interpretation without diminishing the tale's aesthetic appeal.

This tale substantiates the study's central argument that the oral literary performer is the principal agent of meaning in Ndoki oral literature. Through voice, performance strategy, and audience engagement, the performer transforms oral tales and proverbs into vehicles of cultural memory, ethical regulation, and aesthetic expression. The tale affirms that Ndoki oral literature cannot be adequately understood without foregrounding performance as its defining condition.

**Proverbs**

The Ndoki proverbs presented in this study function not merely as isolated wisdom sayings but as performative speech acts embedded within a wider ecology of oral literary performance. Like the tale Nwanzọnta na Igwu Isi, these proverbs derive their full meaning not from textual content alone but from the performer's embodied delivery, contextual framing, and interaction with the audience. In Ndoki oral culture, proverbs are deployed in communal settings, such as gatherings of elders and kingmakers, family instruction, and conflict mediation where speech is both aesthetic performance and social intervention.

The Ndoki proverbs illustrate that meaning in oral literature is co-produced by the performer and the audience. Proverbs such as "Familiarity brings contempt" and He who shares a bed knows the breath of his companion "" are not merely moral statements but situational commentaries activated through performance. Their social force depends on how the performer modulates tone, gesture, and facial expression to fit specific communicative contexts whether cautioning against excessive intimacy, warning against indiscriminate disclosure of secrets, or correcting behavioural excesses within the family or community. As with Antelope and lice, the performer becomes the creative nucleus of meaning-making. The proverb only acquires authority and relevance through skilled delivery: strategic pauses, expressive voice, and demonstrative gestures signal whether the utterance functions as admonition, satire, warning, or reconciliation.

This confirms that Ndoki oral literature is fundamentally performative: the proverb is not a static moral formula but a living social act, shaped by the performer's rhetorical competence and the audience's interpretive participation.

The Ndoki proverbs foreground voice as a carrier of embodied knowledge and moral power. Proverbs concerning listening to advice such as "For an ear to hear does not mean that it will be very large" and "House flies that do not hear follow the corpse into the grave" dramatize listening itself as a life-preserving act. Here, the ear is not merely a physical organ but a metaphor for moral receptivity and social wisdom. In performance, these proverbs acquire heightened affective force through vocal expressiveness. The performer's manipulation of rhythm, emphasis, and vocal intensity renders ethical instruction emotionally persuasive rather than abstract. Just as the song in Antelope and Lice operates as an efficacious performative act capable of restoring life, the performer's voice in proverb performance activates moral consequence: heed advice and live; refuse counsel and court destruction. Voice thus functions as aesthetic medium and ethical instrument, embodying cultural memory and communal norms.

The Ndoki oral tradition demonstrates genre convergence, where proverb, narrative, chant, and song co-exist within a single performative event. Proverbs are not confined to didactic moments but circulate within storytelling performances such as Antelope and Lice, where they may be invoked to interpret character behaviour, reinforce moral judgment, or frame the consequences of action. This hybridity reveals that Ndoki oral literature resists rigid generic classification: proverb performance can merge seamlessly with tale narration and dramatic enactment.

The performer's ability to weave proverbs into narrative flow exemplifies cultural mastery. Proverbs function as interpretive anchors, guiding audience response to key moments in the tale such as Antelope's arrogance or Lice's retaliatory power. In this way, proverb performance becomes a meta-commentary on narrative events, translating fictional action into social wisdom that resonates beyond the performance space. Both the Ndoki proverbs and the tale Antelope and Lice exemplify aesthetic functionalism: performance simultaneously entertains and regulates social conduct. Proverbs on familiarity, secrecy, and listening to advice

operate as subtle mechanisms of social control, reinforcing communal values of restraint, humility, discretion, and attentiveness to counsel. Their metaphorical language market relations, breath, ears, houseflies, corpses renders moral instruction vivid and memorable.

Similarly, the animal allegory in Antelope and Lice permits indirect moral critique. The tale dramatizes pride, power imbalance, and retribution, while the proverbs articulate the ethical logic that underpins such narrative consequences. Together, narrative and proverb function as complementary moral technologies: the tale embodies ethical conflict, while the proverb distils its lesson into portable communal wisdom. The performer's closing commentary and strategic proverb insertion guide the audience toward ethical interpretation without diminishing aesthetic pleasure. The integration of Ndoki proverbs into the analysis of reinforces the study's central Antelope and Lice claim that the oral literary performer is the principal agent of meaning in Ndoki oral literature. Through embodied voice, performative strategy, and audience engagement, the performer transforms both tale and proverb into dynamic vehicles of cultural memory, ethical regulation, and aesthetic expression. Proverbs, like songs and chants, are not ancillary to narrative performance but integral to the performative ecology of Ndoki orature. This confirms that Ndoki oral literature cannot be adequately interpreted as text alone; it must be approached as lived performance, where meaning emerges through voice, gesture, interaction, and culturally embedded moral reasoning.

**Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that Ndoki oral literature, as exemplified by Antelope and Lice and associated proverbs, is fundamentally performance-driven, where meaning, ethical guidance, and cultural memory are co-constructed by the performer and the audience. The analysis has shown that both the tale and the proverbs derive their full significance not from textual content alone but from the embodied, interactive, and aestheticized acts of narration. Through voice modulation, gesture, rhythmic pacing, and audience engagement, the performer transforms narratives and proverbs into dynamic vehicles of moral instruction, social regulation, and communal cohesion.

The study further underscores the centrality of the oral literary performer in mediating ethical and aesthetic knowledge. Proverbs such as "Familiarity brings contempt", "If you sleep with someone, the person will perceive your breath", "For an ear to hear does not mean that it will be very large", and "Houseflies that do not hear follow the corpse into the grave" illustrate how social wisdom is embedded in metaphor, communal experience, and practical moral guidance. When articulated through skilled performance, these proverbs not only reinforce communal norms but also facilitate reflection, self-regulation, and ethical reasoning among audience members.

The key value added by this study is the integration of proverbs into performance analysis, showing that Ndoki oral literature cannot be understood as discrete textual units but as part of a holistic performative ecology where narrative, song, chant, and proverb converge. The study positions the oral performer as the locus of meaning-making, revealing how Ndoki orature mobilizes voice, embodiment, and audience interaction to encode and transmit cultural knowledge, moral instruction, and aesthetic pleasure simultaneously.

Moreover, this research contributes to broader theoretical debates in African oral literature and performance studies by demonstrating that proverbs and narrative performances are mutually constitutive. The tale and the proverbs collectively illustrate the Ndoki understanding of ethics, social responsibility, and communal well-being, emphasizing the interplay of narrative artistry, moral didacticism, and participatory performance. This highlights the interdisciplinary relevance of Ndoki oral literature for scholars of orality, African aesthetics, moral philosophy, and performance studies.

In conclusion, the study affirms that Ndoki oral literature is not merely entertainment but a cultural technology of ethical and aesthetic transmission, where the performer's skill in voice, gesture, and audience engagement is essential for the realization of meaning. By foregrounding the performative dynamics of proverbs alongside narrative tales, the study provides a understanding of how oral literature functions as a site of communal memory, moral instruction, and aesthetic expression. Future research can build on these insights by exploring comparative performances across other Igbo-speaking communities or examining

how Ndoki oral aesthetics inform contemporary literary adaptations and pedagogy.

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