



Kente: Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts

Online ISSN: 2579-0285

<https://doi.org/0.47963/jla.v1i2.1691>

# Kente

Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts

An Open Access Journal

Online ISSN: 2579-0285

<https://doi.org/0.47963/jla.v1i2.1691>

Volume (1) Number (2) 2026

Page: 48-63

---

Editor-in-Chief

Professor Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang

Managing Editor

Professor Rogers Asempasah

---

## Additional Information

Submission guide: <https://journal.ucc.edu.gh/index.php/kente/about/submissions>

Contact e-mail: [kente-journal@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:kente-journal@ucc.edu.gh)

Archive: <https://doi.org/0.47963/jla.v1i2.1691>

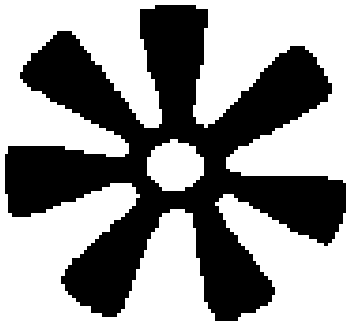
---

©Kente: Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts

## CULTURAL POETICS OF LOSS: REPETITION AND PARALLELISM IN DAGBAMBA DIRGE PERFORMANCE

Issahaku, Sulemana  
University for Development Studies,  
Tamale

Miftawu, Fuseini  
Gambaga College of Education



### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses parallelism and repetition in the Dagbamba dirge. The study aims to investigate parallelism and repetition as core elements of oral art, focusing on synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, or constructive parallelism (or sameness), which are prominent in the Dagbamba dirge. Dirge serves not only as a farewell to the deceased but also as a vehicle for cultural transmission and the expression of communal values. The paper analyses selected dirges and uncovers how parallelism and repetition function to enhance the aesthetic quality, emotional intensity, and mnemonic aid of these lamentations. The paper uses Richard Bauman's Performance Theory as its analytical tool since dirge is a mode of communication that involves the performer (addresser), the audience (addressees) and the event's setting. A qualitative research approach is adopted using both primary and secondary data. The findings reveal that parallelism and repetition serve multiple purposes: they enhance the mnemonic quality of the dirges, emphasize key thematic elements, and provide a rhythmic and emotional cadence that resonates with both performers and listeners.

**KEYWORDS:** Dagbamba, dirge, mourning, mnemonic, parallelism

## Introduction

This paper contends that the use of repetition and parallelism in Dagbamba dirge performances is more than just a stylistic feature but a technique that has a specific effect on the audience's response, emotion, and participation. Based on performance theory, the paper contextualizes these linguistic devices within the dynamic context of the performer, the audience, and the ritual space. The paper demonstrates that the meaning of these linguistic features is realized not in the text but in performance. The current body of knowledge on African oral traditions (Finnegan 2012, Okpewho 1992, Nketia 1969) asserts that it is impossible to conceptualize the notion of verbal art without the performance. However, the role of these stylistic features (repetition and parallelism) in Dagbamba dirge performances has not been adequately investigated. This paper, therefore, seeks to answer the question: *How do repetition and parallelism, as performance strategies, produce aesthetic experience, emotional expression, and audience participation in Dagbamba dirge performances?*

Performing funeral dirges is more than just an artistic form. It is a way of displaying our grief, paying respect to the deceased, and building a sense of unity in the community. In the case of Dagbamba funeral dirges, you will notice that repetition and parallelism are important elements in their construction. The Dagbamba dirges are unique for their extensive use of parallelism and repetition as key literary elements. These distinctive features are crucial and play a significant role in the structure and appreciation of these elegies. Saanchi (2002) refers to the repetition of similarly structured sentences within a discourse as 'syntagmatic repetition or parallelism,' citing Levin (1962) and Shipley (1960). According to Saanchi, Shipley refers to parallelism as the 'balance return of structure'. The devices are not empty repetitive devices that the dirge singer uses because of repertoire; rather, they serve to give unity of structure to the performance and make it memorable, i.e., it remains in the mind.

Repetition and parallelism are seen as important features of oral performance. They actually play an important role in creating structure, rhythm, and cohesion. However, in terms of performance, they are important as they act as signals that help organize the interaction and steer how the audience interprets what they are seeing. Therefore, their significance goes beyond just a form; it is all about how they come to life during performance.

The Dagbamba are one of the major ethnolinguistic groups that are located in the northern part of Ghana. They speak Dagbani, which belongs to the Mabia language family. The culture of the Dagbamba is richly enhanced by their rich oral tradition, and the performance of the funeral dirge is an important part of their culture. This paper is structured as follows. The first section presents the literature review and the theoretical framework that inform our analysis. This is followed by the methodology and how we gathered our data. The subsequent sections present the data analysis and the discussion of the results. Finally, we conclude by pointing out the contributions this study makes to the knowledge of African oral performance.

## The Dirge

Funeral dirges, also known as elegiac poetry, are known as *kuyilli* (Sg) or *kuyila* (Pl) in Dagbani. Krampah (1979: 27) describes an elegy as a poem of sorrow and reminiscence, inspired by and written to commemorate the death of a loved one. It is a dignified poem that deals with the morality of humanity and the ultimate futility of all human endeavors. The poem almost always praises the virtues of the deceased and contains a wish that these virtues might again be embodied in humanity.

Dirges are sorrowful songs used by the Dagbamba to mourn the loss of a loved one. Although the dirge's primary purpose is to mourn the deceased, it also serves to announce to the

general public that death has visited a particular home. Dirges are sung to express sorrow and hopelessness in the face of death. They serve to demonstrate the grief that has affected the family, the clan, and the community. The Dagbamba dirge is typically sung to honour the deceased and the legacy they have left behind. Among the Dagbamba, funeral dirges are only sung when there is a death; it is considered taboo to sing them at any other time since it can easily arouse people's emotions and remind them of the past. This implies that before a funeral dirge is sung, there must be a reason. Anybody who sings a dirge for pleasure will be labelled a witch. The dirges are reserved for funerals, although they can be practiced as part of the learning process.

A Dagbamba dirge sung at someone's funeral should not be reused at another person's funeral, as they are not standardized. As noted by Finnegan (2012), these songs are created for a specific occasion and are short-lived. They are tailored to an individual's funeral and follow traditional idioms and forms. Mourning songs are only performed once and are brief. They are composed by a woman reflecting on the life of the deceased, gradually building the song by adding words and melody until it is finished. The words and manner in which a mourner expresses grief may vary depending on their relationship with the deceased. If a mourner's parent passes away, their bereavement song may differ from that of their spouse were they to pass away.

According to Nsoh, Ababila, and Fusheni (2010), among the Dagbamba, anyone can sing a dirge, but it is typically only women who express their grief for a loss by singing and lamenting while crying. The rituals associated with important life events among the Dagbamba, including death, have been influenced by religions such as Islam. Traditions such as dirge singing and funeral rites now reflect a combination of Islamic and indigenous customs. Consequently, dirge singing has declined in some Dagbamba communities. In the past, when a woman from the deceased's family first heard of the death, it was customary for her to express her grief by singing a dirge when she arrived at the funeral house. Failing to do so is seen as a lack of emotion and may lead to criticism and suspicion.

The Dagbamba dirge is not sung by professionals as they are not pre-composed, unlike dirges in other traditions. According to Saanchi (2002), citing Nketia (1955), the Akan dirge used to be performed by female members of the deceased's family, but nowadays it is mainly performed by hired female professionals. The Dagaaba dirge performance is a blend of the Roman and the Akan traditions. Some dirges, known as *kpaabu* or *komuoro*, are performed without instrumental music by female family members or male professionals. One person sings the verses while others respond (Saanchi, 2002). According to Taluah (2013), Kasena women sing dirges for deceased women, while men perform dirges and war songs for deceased men. The dirges sung for both deceased men and women are generally referred to as *Lusei*. Those sung at the fresh and final funeral rites of deceased women are known as *Lusei* and *Sogo Lei*, respectively. War songs are typically performed during the final funeral rites for deceased men. Nsoh et al. (2010) note that dirge singing contains references. When dirges are sung, references are made to the ancestors, the deceased, and the domicile of the ancestors and the deceased.

The Dagbamba *kuyilli* 'dirge' or *kuyila* 'dirges' performances are similar to the Dagaaba dirge performances. According to Saanchi (2002), the Dagaaba consider whatever the performers say during the funeral context as dirges. In the context of a Dagbamba funeral, the dirge singer may employ certain phrases that are difficult to comprehend if considered outside of their cultural context. The phrases employed are a means of expressing the depth of her sorrow. The use of phrases such as *wai, wai, ooi, mbaye, kuui*, and *hmm* is common in dirge singing as the dirge singer conveys her sorrow. Within the context of the dirge singing, the phrases are considered vital

components of the dirge. Among the Dagbamba, girls are taught how to mourn their dear ones, especially their husbands and parents, and they learn the style of delivery and the choice of words. Some Dagbamba funeral songs or dirges are fixed and are the same everywhere in the community. The Dagbamba *yaawum* song, which is always sung by the *yaansi* 'grandchildren' of the deceased, is an example. Not all deaths among the Dagbamba attract the singing of *yaawum*. The deaths of adults who have attained old age and could have biologically or otherwise raised children who have also become adults are bound to attract the performance of *yaanli*. The *yaanli* performance serves more than just a mourning function; it also provides entertainment for grieving relatives. At times, drumming is included in the performance. During the event, the *yaansi* (grandchildren) receive monetary gifts from family members, particularly the deceased's children. The *Yaansi* are expected to sing and recite phrases that were used by their grandparent (Nsoh et al., 2010).

### **Funerals that Merit Dirge Singing**

Death is viewed by the Dagbamba as a transition from earthly life to spiritual existence, signifying the end of one's physical presence on earth. It is considered a universal, unrelenting, and inevitable event that impacts everyone equally. According to the Dagbamba tradition, each death is believed to have specific causes, whether natural or unnatural, and is seen as a journey from the physical to the spiritual realm. Dirge singing is an important part of Dagbamba culture and is required at funerals that call for it.

However, not all deaths in the Dagbamba tradition are commemorated with dirges. According to Afoakwa and Mohammed (2005), an individual's behaviour in life and the nature of their death influence their inclusion in the esteemed group of ancestors. Therefore, how a person lived and the circumstances of their death determine whether dirges should be sung at their funeral. The Dagbamba believe that the death of a child does not warrant dirge singing. To qualify for this honour, a person should ideally live to old age, marry, and have children. Additionally, their death must not result from unnatural causes such as suicide, immoral actions, or violence. Knowledge of these cultural conditions gives the basis for studying dirge performance under an adequate theoretical approach.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses performance theory to highlight the interactive dynamics of dirge performances, focusing on the collaboration between the performer, the audience, and the surrounding context. Performance theory argues that the oral text is integral to the event of performance, truly coming to life only when it is performed. The text exists primarily in the mind of the performer, without whom it has no presence. The audience also plays a vital role, acting as the driving force behind the performance. Without an audience engaging with the performer and assessing the performance, the event might not happen at all. Therefore, the text, performer, audience, and patrons are all crucial elements of the performance event (Taluah, 2021). Performance is viewed as a unique mode of communicative practice that involves accountability to an audience, showcasing communicative skill and effectiveness. In this context, expression is highlighted, set apart from its surroundings, and opened to audience interpretation and evaluation.

The research builds on the performance theory based on the analysis of how the dirge performers produce meaning out of their interaction with the audience during the funeral performances. The research delves into vocal and bodily expressions as well as the audience reaction as complements of the performance process. A lot of emphasis is also placed on how the social setting and their presence affect the content and performance of the dirges. This stance

moves the research out of the text to examine the performance aspect of dirge singing in real life. According to Bauman (1984), performance is seen as behaviour situated within and made meaningful by its relevant contexts, which can be defined by various factors, including the setting or culturally significant locations where the performance occurs. Bauman (1984) emphasizes again that by understanding the nature of performance and distinguishing it from other forms of speech, we can assess the authenticity of collected oral texts. It is almost impossible to study verbal arts without considering their performance context, as they are always realized in performance. Unlike written poetry, which undergoes revisions and editing before reaching the audience, oral compositions are created, edited, censored, and performed simultaneously during the act of performance (Taluah, 2021).

Besides Bauman and Taluah, this research also cites Finnegan's (2012) views on oral literature, emphasizing the close link between text and performance. Considering Hymes (2013) ethnography of speaking, meaning arises from culturally structured communication events. Schechner's (2006) general theory of performance also helps to illuminate performance as a restored behaviour mediated by tradition and context. All these theories offer firm theoretical grounding for this research. Having this theoretical foundation in place, the paper now discusses the structural units on which dirge performance is structured. Having this theoretical foundation in place, it is now possible to focus on structural units in accordance with which dirge performance is structured.

### **Structural Units Through Which Dirge Performance is Organized**

#### **The Line**

In written poetry, the concept of a "line" is clear as the lines are visibly separated on the page. However, in oral poetry, it is challenging to determine a clear "line" as the performer does not indicate it during their performance. Levin (1971), as cited in Saanchi (2002), defines a "line" as having a "typographical identity," acknowledging that it may correspond to an artificial pause. In verbal art, a "line" may be detected through a pause by the performer, which can also indicate the end of a full sentence. Saanchi observed that a "line" may be said to have a "pausal" identity and may consist of only one word, a phrase, or an entire sentence.

#### **Stanza**

Agyekum (2013) defines a stanza as a grouping of lines of poetry into a fixed number of lines. On a printed page, lines are used to separate stanzas from one another. According to Saanchi (2002), it can be difficult to determine exactly what constitutes a 'stanza' during a performance, as the performer may not be consciously aware of the same formal grouping of lines as a written poem. However, as already noted, what the performer says during the performance is marked by pauses, and the chorus usually comes in at these pauses. Agyekum, therefore, indicates that, in reciting poems, the stanzas are marked by deep pauses. Having defined these structural concepts, the following section outlines the methodological approach that was used in this study.

#### **Methodology**

This paper explores the use of parallelism and repetition in the Dagbamba dirge, with a particular emphasis on synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism, which are prevalent in these songs. The study adopts a qualitative research method, utilizing both primary and secondary data. Specifically, the study employed participant observation, audio tape recording of live performances, as well as informal semi-structured interviews with performers and community

members. The methods have been chosen because they can be employed to record verbal artistry in its natural setting. The research focuses on women, who are traditionally the singers of dirges among the Dagbamba.

Primary data was gathered at two different funerals, where the researchers were active observers and made recordings. Participant observation allowed the researchers to observe the performance between the performers and the audience, including gestures, voice variations, and audience response, which are significant in performance analysis. An audio recording was used to ensure accuracy in the transcription process and allowed the researchers to re-listen to the audio to identify patterns in the structure and rhythm. Informal interviews helped in the clarification of meanings, cultural references, and common ways of doing performances. The researchers engaged with native speakers to confirm the accuracy of the data collected from the funeral scenes. These qualitative methods are in line with Bauman's performance theory, which emphasizes that performance is about social context and interaction. As the meaning in performance theory emerges out of these interactions and not merely from the written word, it was necessary to study the actual funeral performance. In this way, we could gain a deeper insight into how repetition and parallelism function as very effective performative strategies. The following section, therefore, provides an analysis of data gathered from both primary and secondary sources.

## **Results and Discussions**

This section provides an analysis of the data collected, with a specific focus on the rhetorical and structural devices employed within the text. The examination concentrates on two key stylistic features: repetition and parallelism. By identifying instances where words, phrases, or grammatical structures are repeated or arranged in similar patterns, this analysis aims to uncover the intended emphasis, rhythm, and persuasive effects present in the data.

### **Repetition**

In view of performance theory, repetition is a powerful performative strategy that has deep emotional meaning. As pointed out by Bauman (2000), performance has a unique code that differentiates it from everyday conversation. In dirge performance, repetition acts as one of those codes. In this case, the audience is directly informed that the event is deeply charged with emotion and holds cultural importance. The performer, through repetition, not only showcases their verbal talent but also connects with the audience and engages them on an emotional level. Agbedo (2008) points out that repetition is a significant structural feature in oral literature. It stems from artists improvising on traditional themes to achieve artistic effects such as emphasis, clarity, ease of delivery, rhythm, and length of production. According to Mohamed (2021), repetition directs the reader's attention to keywords or phrases, emphasizing concepts and enhancing persuasion. Repetition enhances rhythm, aesthetics, and both the expectation and fulfilment in persuasive and literary writing. Khader and Kullab (2016) also notice that in Arabic poetry, repetition is used to convey meaning through repeating words. This technique is frequently used by poets to strengthen meaning and create a harmonious connection between linguistic forms, aligning with rhyme patterns and connotations. Similarly, repetition is also a common structural device used by Dagbamba dirge singers. It is a device used, purposely, to reiterate a word, a phrase, or reword the same idea to secure emphasis. Saanchi (2002) observed that repetition can take on different forms: repeating words within the same line, across different lines, repeating an entire line or part of it within a stanza, and even repeating entire stanzas during a performance.

### Repetition of Words in the Same Line

In terms of performance, rhythm boosts the performer's expressive skills through repeating key words within the same line. Verbs, nouns, or phrases are repeated, and this becomes the central point that captures the audience's attention. Oral performances happen in real time; therefore, repetition helps the listeners to understand the meaning and feel the emotional weight of what's being said. In this context, therefore, repetition serves as both a memory aid and a way to intensify the performance. Repetition is a common feature in Dagbamba dirge; therefore, words are normally repeated to place emphasis. Below are some examples.

- 1(a) *Ʒini*            *goma*   *ku*    *Ʒini*   *tiŋa*   *yaan̄ga*.  
 Sit-perf        walls   NEG   sit-perf down   granddaughter/son.  
 The granddaughter of the powerful.
- (b)   *Ni*    *ŋuna*   *nye*    *bi*    *biri*            *zamba*        *ku*    *che*    *zamba*  
 Def   she    def    NEG   sown-imperf   bad seed    NEG   reap    the bad seed  
 That she never sows a bad seed and will never reap a bad seed.
- (c)   *Ni*    *ŋuna*   *nye*    *bi*    *di*            *anyo*   *anyo*   *ku*        *di*        *o*  
 Def   he    def    NEG   eat-perf        evil    evil    NEG   eat-perf   3rd-pers-sg  
 That he did no evil, and no evil can affect him.

In the above examples, the verb in 1(a) *Ʒini* 'sit' occurs twice in that line. In (1b), the noun *zamba* 'bad seed' also appears twice. In line (1c), the words *di* 'eat' and *anyo* 'evil' also appeared twice.

### Repetition of Words in Different Lines

Across-line repetition highlights and strengthens the interactivity of the performance. According to Bauman (1984), performers are accountable to their audience. When phrases such as "my lover" or "broken" are continuously repeated in a line, the audience starts to expect what's next, and this connects them emotionally with the performer. This repetition creates a shared emotional rhythm between the performer and the listeners, and not only sets up those expectations. In this case, individual sorrow turns into a group one. This kind of repetition is common in the Dagbamba dirge. Examples are as follows.

- 2 (a)   *N*            *yura*    *ŋari*            *nyee*    *kuli*            *salaani*  
 1st-per-sg    lover   close-imperf   nose   go-imperf-home    heaven  
 My lover has held her breath towards heaven.
- (b)   *N*            *yura*    *tirisi*            *nyaambibirili*    *kuli*            *Bataŋni*  
 1st-per-sg    lover   walk-perf        backwards        go-imperf-home    heaven  
 My lover walked backwards home to heaven.
- (c)   *N*            *konyuriŋmani*            *ŋmaya*  
 Poss   water-drink-imperf-calabash   broken-perf  
 My drinking calabash has broken
- (d)   *Ka*    *n*            *sayidirilaa*            *ŋma*  
 CONJ Poss   food-eat-imperf-dish   broken-perf  
 And my food dish is broken

In 2(a) and 2(b), the use of words such as *N* (my), *yura* (lover), and *kuli* (go home) builds a sense of continuity in the lines. The listeners are not only listening to the lines as a source of information; instead, they are listening to a familiar pattern. This pattern builds anticipation. When the word "my lover" is used, the listeners are eager to know more about the departure of the lover.

The use of "go home" to heaven is powerful in terms of its repetition. When it is first mentioned, it subtly hints at death, and by the time it is repeated, the idea is reinforced. It is not just about conveying a message; it is about doing it rhythmically. In a performance, this is how the audience is able to respond in a vocal or emotional way to something they can see coming. The structure is one that encourages everyone to participate. For instance, in example 2(c) and 2(d), there is a similar effect with "my" and "broken." The repetition of "my" is a way of emphasizing a personal loss, but in the context of a funeral, that loss is laid bare for all to see. The loss is something that is acknowledged communally through the use of repetition, where something that is personal becomes something that is acknowledged by the community as a whole. The audience can see the connection between the broken calabash and the broken food dish, and the word "broken" really drives home the point of the metaphor of loss.

In terms of performance theory, the use of repetition also has a way of encouraging a sense of responsibility. The performer is not simply speaking into a void. Each time a word is repeated, it is a way of emphasizing the connection between the performer and the cultural symbols. The audience is able to judge how well the performance is received through these patterns. Therefore, repetition is a very powerful way of keeping the audience's attention and creating harmony.

### 7.1.3 Whole or Partial Repetition of Lines within One Stanza

This repetition is evident in the Dagbamba dirge. It is the repetition of a whole line or a phrase within the same stanza. The repetition emphasizes and shows emotions. Below are some examples.

- 3(a) Bataŋ tiŋgbani      gbihi      zeei   ka   tayiya      zu   ma  
 Bataŋ god      slept-perf      over   CONJ thief-sg      stole   me  
 The god of Bataŋ has overslept and a thief stole from me.
- (b) Zabizirigu    buya   gbihi      zeei   ka   tayiya      zu   ma  
 Zabizirigu    gods'   slept-perf      over   CONJ thief-sg      stole   me  
 Zabizirigu gods have overslept and death stole from me.
- (c) Mbaye!      N      zuɣubiɛɣu      paliya  
 Father-oh!    Poss   misfortune      confirm-perf  
 Oh, father! My misfortune is confirmed
- (d) N      zuɣubiɛɣu      paliya                      yee!  
 Poss   misfortune      confirm-perf                      yee!  
 My misfortune is confirmed yee!

In 3(a) and (b), the second line is a repetition of the first line, with a few lexical variations. Also, in (c) and (d), the phrase *N zuɣubiɛɣu paliya*, which means 'my misfortune is confirmed,' is repeated with slight variations. From a performance perspective, repetition of this kind is more than just a linguistic emphasis. According to Bauman's theory, performance is a social experience where meaning is constructed through the interaction between the performer and the audience. Through repetition of lines or phrases, the audience can easily identify the pattern and emotionally

take part in the dirge singing. This shows that the utterances are not only aesthetically pleasing but also socially significant in the context of a funeral.

The repetition in examples (3a) and (3b) draws attention to the fact that the death happened because the protective forces failed. Repetition of the same message with a slight variation draws the performer's attention to the emotional moment. This gives the audience time to react to the performance. The structure of the performance also shows the performer's skill. The audience is very much aware of the rhythm and meaning of the lines as they are spoken. This analysis is in line with Bauman's argument that performance is the display of communicative skill in front of the audience.

The repetition of the lines in a stanza makes it memorable. Repeated lines are more easily remembered and repeated by the audience. This is helpful in the mnemonic role of oral performance. It also enables non-expert audience members to easily follow the performance. This common understanding, in a funeral setting, enables individual grief to be collectively mourned.

### Repetition of Whole Stanzas

Performance theory comes to light when there is a connectivity between the lead singer and the chorus. Repetition in this instance is not aesthetic but creates a conversation. The chorus not only backs up but also verifies, proves, and enhances the utterance of the lead performer. This call-answer dynamics reveal the idea of performance as collaborative and socially approved by Bauman. The individual does not generate meaning but creates it jointly by participating in a group. Repetition thus turns out to be a process of social gluing and ritual solidarity.

The repetition of a whole stanza is evident in the Dagbamba *yaawum* songs. The *yaawum* songs are pre-composed and are sung by the grandchildren of the deceased person. In these songs, whatever the lead singer says is repeated verbatim in the chorus. In the examples that follow, LS refers to the lead singer and CH refers to the chorus.

4(a)	LS:	N	yaba	yoo yoo yoo	di	yoo	ma
		Poss	grandparent	yoo yoo yoo	COND	yoo	me
		My	grandparent	yoo yoo yoo	don't	yoo	me
	CH:	N	yaba	yoo yoo yoo	di	yoo	ma
		Poss	grandparent	yoo yoo yoo	COND	yoo	me
		My grandparent yoo yoo yoo don't yoo me					
	LS:	N	nyela naa	yaanga	n	yen	bala
		1st-per-sg	am chief	grandchild	1st-per-sg	will	ride-imperf
		wøhu- horse					
		I am a grandchild of the chief. I want to ride a horse					
	CH:	N	nyela naa	yaanga	n	yen	bala
		1st-per-sg	am chief	grandchild	1st-per-sg	will	ride-imperf
		wøhu- horse					
		I am a grandchild to the chief; I want to ride a horse.					
	LS:	Bø	n-daa ku	ti	yaba?		
		What	Past killed-perf	1st-per-pl	grandfather?		
		What killed our grandfather?					

CH:	Bɔ	n-daa	ku	ti	yaba?
	What	Past killed-perf		1st-per-pl	grandfather?
	What killed our grandfather?				
LS:	Ka	o	bi	lahi	labina
	CONJ	3rd-per-sg	NEG	never	came-perf-back
	And he never came back				
CH:	Ka	o	bi	lahi	labina
	CONJ	3rd-per-sg	NEG	never	came-perf-back
	And he never came back.				

### **The Effect of Repetition in the Dirge**

Repetition plays a crucial role in oral literature, serving both aesthetic and practical purposes. It enhances the beauty and appeal of oral expressions such as songs and narratives, and helps to organize overall performance. Agbedo (2008) emphasizes the importance of repetition in oral performance, highlighting how people express themselves on deeply impactful matters. Lahlali (2012) discusses the various functions of repetition in Nasrallah's political speeches in his paper "Repetition and Ideology in Nasrallah's Political Speeches." He indicates that repetition goes beyond its grammatical role and can have persuasive and emotional impacts, serving as a linguistic strategy to reinforce the speaker's argument. The paper demonstrates that repetition can enhance persuasion by emphasizing established truths and appealing to emotions, and it can serve didactic, playful, artistic, and rhetorical functions. Saanchi (2002) notes that dirge singers use repetition to provide unity to the dirges, make them easier to remember, and emphasize the singer's message.

### **Parallelism**

Blagoveshchenskaya, Popova, Kogan, and Strüngmann (2019) discuss parallelism as a concept borrowed from the Greek word "parallelos," meaning "going near". Parallelism is a multidisciplinary phenomenon found in many fields. In literature, parallelism refers to the similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses. This can manifest as sound parallelism (similar sounds and syllables), lexical parallelism (repeating words), and syntactic parallelism (similar sentence structures).

Parallelism is seen as a literary device that pairs elements either structurally or semantically to enhance the symmetry and memorability of the text. It uses similar grammatical constructions, ranging from words and phrases to entire sentences, to emphasize, provide authority, or add significance to ideas. This makes the ideas easier for readers to understand and process. Parallelism is a prominent feature of artistic expression and is often used in elevated speeches and poetry (Mohamed, 2021). According to Saanchi (2002), Lowth identified three types of parallelism for Hebrew poetry in his pioneering effort at a typology. These types include synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic (or constructive) parallelism. These types of parallelism can be found in the Dagbamba dirge.

### **Parallelism in the Dagbamba Dirge**

The Dagbamba oral artist makes good use of parallelism, including the three types of parallelism identified by Lowth (i.e., synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic or constructive parallelism) in his pioneering work on Hebrew poetry. There are instances of this parallelism that would be shown under the following subheadings.

### Synonymous Parallelism

Synonymous parallelism conveys the same idea using different but equivalent terms. It involves repeating a statement either completely or partially with varied expressions while maintaining the same or nearly the same meaning. This form of parallelism is characterized by a very close similarity between two consecutive lines, where the same idea is reiterated using almost identical words (Saanchi, 2002). In line with performance theory, synonymous parallelism is a method that enables audience participation in the creation of meaning and emotional involvement with the message. Since audience participation is essential in oral performances, the theory acknowledges that meaning can only be created if there is a good relationship between the performer, the audience, and the context. Synonymous parallelism is an interaction method that uses repetition, and this enables audience participation during the dirge singing. The following examples demonstrate how synonymous parallelism is reflected in the Dagbamba dirge.

- 5(a) Bataŋ tingbani gbihi zeei ka tayiya zu ma  
 Bataŋ god-sg slept-perf over CONJ thief-sg stole me  
 The god of Bataŋ has overslept and the thief stole from me.
- (b) Zabizirigu buya gbihi zeei ka tayiya zu ma  
 Zabizirigu gods-pl sleep-perf over CONJ thief-sg stole me  
 Zabizirigu gods have overslept, and death stole from me.

In the above examples, there is synonymous parallelism. The noun in 5(a) *tingbani* means god, and the noun in 5(b) *buya* means gods. Aside from using the nouns “*tingbani*” and “*buya*” as the base of the argument, lines 5 (a) and (b) communicate the same idea. The lines talked about man's inability to control death. In Bauman's performance approach, the rhetorical repetition of the same idea with only a lexical difference is an aesthetic voice of grief and indicates the speaker's expertise to the audience. The audience understands the equivalence of the two lines and engages cognitively in the anticipation of the message, which adds to the emotional impact. The parallel structure is a performative signal that encodes the speech as poetry, and this socially impacts the funeral context.

- (c) A lɛbila zapalɛyɛ zuŋɔ yɔhim tia ka  
 2nd-per-sg turn-perf deceive-bird today deceive-perf tree CONJ  
 gbe mɔyɛ  
 sleep-perf bush  
 You have turned into a deceiving bird today, deceive the tree and sleep in the bush.
- (d) N yura chela vuya siyiri kpiimba  
 1st-per-sg lover left-perf living-imperf visiting-imperf dead-pl  
 My lover has left the living and is visiting the dead.

In the examples above, the meanings of the two expressions are synonymous. In 5(c), the word *tia* ‘tree’ represents the living, and *mɔyɛ* ‘bush’ represents death. In 5(d), the word *vuya* means the living, and the *kpiimba* means the dead. This word expresses how the deceased has deceived his family. The phrases are used to describe the transition from life to death. In a performance setting, the use of synonymous parallelism enables the performer to elaborate on the concept of death. According to performance theory, the elaboration of the concept enables the performer to exhibit verbal creativity and strengthens the performer's credibility. The audience is tasked with the responsibility to collectively interpret the metaphors and thus create a shared experience out of

individual grief. The repetition of equivalent meanings is, therefore, important in aesthetic appreciation as well as in the processing of emotions.

- (e) N                    yura    daa    zi    ni    kpalaja            gbunni            m-bəŋɔ  
 1st-per-sg    lover    did    NEG    def    pocket            under            this  
 My lover did not know the bottom of the pocket.
- (f) N                    yura    daa    zi    mambuma  
 1st-per-sg    lover    did    NEG    nagging  
 My lover did not know sorrow.

In example (5e) above, the phrase *kpalaja gbunni* ‘pocket under’ indicates the kind of commitment his lover had for him. She does not care whether there is food for them to eat or not. This shows how the woman can manage stress when the husband has nothing to offer the family. In (5f) the word *mambuma* ‘nagging’ indicates that the woman has a clean heart and does not harbour anger or hatred. She does not feel deep distress caused by loss, disappointment, or other misfortune. In view of performance theory, synonymous construction enhances characterization by listing various qualities of the deceased rhythmically. The audience is encouraged to assess the moral qualities being praised, which corresponds with Bauman's idea of performance as communicative display that is subject to evaluation by the audience.

- (g) N                    yura    ɲari                    nyee    kuli                    salaani  
 1st-per-sg    lover    close-imperf    nose    go-imperf-home            heaven  
 My lover held her breath towards heaven.
- (h) N                    yura    ləbi    Nagaŋnaa            dini    zuŋɔ  
 1st-per-sg    lover    turn    God                    own    today  
 My lover has returned to the Almighty today

The expressions in lines 5(g) and (h) indicate that the person has gone back to his maker and therefore, he/she is dead. In terms of performance, the different expressions provide the performer an opportunity to express the same reality in different ways, allowing him/her to emphasize the moments of emotional intensity. The transition from metaphorical imagery to a literal mention of God is an interpretive shift that increases the dramatic effect. The step-by-step development of interpretation corresponds to Bauman's interpretation of how performance meaning is constructed through a structured dialogue.

### Synthetic Parallelism

In synthetic parallelism, the second segment enhances or completes the idea presented in the first segment. Synthetic or constructive parallelism consists only of a similar form of construction (Jacobson, 1966), cited in Saanchi (2002). In this kind of parallelism, the second line contrasts or denies the first line. This type of parallelism can be observed in Dagbamba dirges. From the perspective of performance theory, synthetic parallelism offers the performers a means of developing meaning over time. The audience receives an idea and delves further as the second line either completes the idea or expands it. The process of developing meaning over time not only creates anticipation but also develops emotional involvement, and this is therefore a crucial component of performance as a mode of communication. Below are some examples.

- 6(a) Sakura            luri                    n                    zuyu    ka    n            ni    kəŋ    maabu  
 Heavy-rains    fall-imperf    1st-per-sg    head    CONJ    poss    body    unable cool

Heavy rain has fallen on me and have not been able to cool my body

- (b) Kola            pɔbi            bɛ            nina    ka    tayiya    zu            ma  
 Wild-animal    close-perf    3rd-per-pl    eyes    CONJ    thief    stole-perf    me  
 The wild animals closed their eyes, and the thief stole me.

In these examples, the second parts build on the ideas presented in the first parts. For instance, in (6a), the falling rain in the first part indicates relief, but the second part is astonished by showing that the body is still uncool. In (6b), when the wild animals close their eyes, it sets up the situation for the thief to come in. According to Bauman's performance perspective, this kind of progression showcases the performer's talent in managing the narrative. The audience is left hanging, waiting for a resolution, which keeps them interested. The difference between what they are expecting and what happens also increases the emotional effect of the lament. This shows that synthetic parallelism is an artistic tool and an interactive tool in performance.

- (c) N            yura    zili    ma    zili  
 1st-per-sg    lover    put    me    load  
 My lover has given me a burden.

- (d) Din            ka    suui    zali  
 Which            NEG    put    down  
 Which cannot be abandoned.

Line (c) introduces the concept of a "burden" given by the lover, and line (d) expands on this idea, emphasizing the weight or importance of the burden by stating it "cannot be abandoned". The second line highlights the importance of the first by indicating that this is a burden that is carried over a period of time. From a performance point of view, this structure enables the performer to express their grief over time, as opposed to expressing it all at once. According to performance theory, meaning is created through unfolding discourse. As the discourse progresses, the audience begins to appreciate the meaning that is conveyed through the dialogue. The process is not only meant to increase empathy but also creates a sense of shared experience. The synthetic parallelism, therefore, adds to the emotional intensity, memorability, and performative authority of the text in the funeral setting.

### Antithetic Parallelism

Antithetic parallelism is prevalent in Dagbamba dirges. In this type of parallelism, the lines correspond through opposition, either in expressions or in meaning. This form of parallelism involves the second line contrasting with or contradicting the first. Antithetic parallelism contrasts opposing ideas or concepts. Biays (1975, p. 14), in antithetic parallelism, the second line often begins with "but", "yet", or a similar conjunction to highlight the contrast. In performance theory, contrast is a very attractive means of grabbing the attention of the audience. The audience tunes in with the first line, expecting something similar to follow. However, the introduction of a conflicting thought in the second line creates emotional tension and keeps the audience engaged. Below are some examples.

- 7(a) N            yura    chela    vuya            ka    siyiri            kpiimba  
 Poss    lover    left-perf    living-imperf    CONJ    visiting-imperf    dead people-pl  
 My lover has left the living and visiting the dead.

- (b) A                    lɛbila                    zapalɛyɔ                    zuŋɔ                    yɔhim                    tia                    ka  
 2nd-per-sg                    turn-perf                    deceiving-bird today                    deceive-perf                    tree                    CONJ  
 gbe                    mɔyɔ  
 sleep-perf                    bush  
 You have turned to a deceiving bird today deceive the tree and sleep in the bush.

In the examples cited above, the contrast between the opposing sides is presented through movement from life to death. The contrast between living and the dead is used for emphasis. According to Bauman, the contrasts are performative cues that frame the speech act as poetry, which is socially significant. The performers showcase their verbal prowess in handling opposing ideas in similar structures. The audience can identify the contrast and become emotionally involved in interpreting the message.

- (c) N                    yura                    zaŋ                    ma                    zali                    sochira                    zuyu  
 Poss                    lover                    has                    me                    left                    crossroads                    on  
 My lover left me at a crossroads.
- (d) Din                    ka                    suui                    zali  
 Which                    NEG                    put                    down  
 Which cannot be abandoned.

In lines (c) and (d), there is a contrast between the lover leaving the dirge singer at a metaphorical "crossroad" and the idea that the burden left by the lover "cannot be abandoned". Line (c) suggests a point of decision or confusion, while line (d) emphasizes the inescapability of the situation. In terms of performance, this contrast enables the performer to convey grief in a much more powerful way than simply stating it. The audience derives the significance of the emotional impact from the contrast between abandonment and duty. According to performance theory, meaning is created as these patterned expressions are realized in the context of the performance. The type of contrasted structure is not only more emotionally charged but also more memorable for the audience.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of parallelism and repetition in Dagbamba dirges demonstrates their crucial roles within the oral traditions of the Dagbamba. These linguistic elements are more than just stylistic devices; they play essential roles in enhancing the aesthetic quality, emotional depth, and mnemonic function of the dirges. By employing these devices, the performer can emphasize the performance to convey different moods and evoke various emotions in the audience. Different forms of parallelism, combined with repetition, create a rhythmic and thematic framework that supports the preservation and sharing of cultural values and collective experiences. Applying performance theory, this study highlights the interactive dynamics of dirge performances, demonstrating the collaboration among the performer, the audience, and the surrounding context. Qualitative research, which includes direct observations and interactions with native speakers, aligns scholarly insights with real-life experiences to deepen the understanding of these oral traditions. The results reveal that parallelism and repetition not only make the dirges more memorable but also intensify their emotional impact, ensuring the dirges effectively honour the deceased while strengthening communal identity and unity. The paper suggests that the Dagbamba should accept inevitable cultural change. Therefore, there should be a focus on teaching dirges, as

they serve not only as a way to say farewell to the deceased but also as a means of cultural transmission and expression of community values.

### Authors' Bios

**Issahaku Sulemana** is a lecturer at the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, Ghana. He is a member of the Faculty of Education, Department of Humanities and Social Science Education. His area of specialty is Ghanaian Language (Dagbani), and he teaches courses in both English Language and Ghanaian Language, including oral literature and written literature. His research interests include oral literature, textual analysis, and African popular culture. He is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Education, Winneba, specializing in literature.

**Fuseini Miftawu** is an Assistant Lecturer at the Gambaga College of Education in the North East Region. He is a member of the Department of Languages. His area of specialty is Applied Linguistics and Ghanaian Language (Dagbani). He teaches courses in both English Language and Ghanaian Language (Dagbani) that include oral and written literature, Communication Skills, as well as Introduction to Language and Literacy. His research interests include Oral Literature, Sociolinguistics, Morphology and Syntax of Dagbani, and Pragmatics. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Education, Winneba, pursuing Applied Linguistics, specializing in Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, and Discourse Analysis. Email: mfuseini@gace.edu.gh

### List of Abbreviations

Perf	Perfective
Imperf	Imperfective
CONJ	Conjunction
NEG	Negation
Def	Definite
Poss	Possessive
Sg	Singular
Pl	Plural
1st-pers-sg	First person singular
3rd-pers-sg	Third person singular
LS	Lead singer
CH	Chorus

### Works Cited

- Afoakwa, Kofi Anane, and Mohammed, Karimu. *Ghanaian language and culture II; for UTDTBE Programme (Distance)*. Teacher Education Division, Ghana Education Service, (2005).
- Agbedo, Christopher Uchenna. Parallelisms in Ezikeoba Igbo Praise Song: Evidence from Imaryima Text. *Journal of Igbo Studies* 3.1 (2008): 72-91.
- Agyekum, Kofi. *Introduction to Literature (3rd Edn)*. Adwinsa Publication (Gh) Ltd, (2013).
- Bauman, Richard. Language, identity, performance. *Pragmatics. Quarterly publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)* 10.1 (2000): 1-5.
- Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Waveland Press, 1984.
- Biays, Paul M. Parallelism in Romans. *Fort Hays Studies Series*. (1967).

- Blagoveshchenskaya, Ekaterina, et al. Parallelism as a universal principle of structuring information flows. *Proceedings of the XI International Scientific Conference Communicative Strategies of the Information Society*. (2019).
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral literature in Africa*. Open Book Publishers, (2012).
- Hymes, Dell. *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Routledge, (2013).
- Krampah, D. E. K. *Helping with Literature*. Ghana Publishing Corporation, (1979).
- Khader, Khader Tawfiq, and Mohammed Mostafa Kullab. The structure of parallelism in Sa'adi Yusuf's Poetry. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* 4.2 (2016): 39-51.
- Lahlali, El Mustapha. Repetition and ideology in Nasrallah's political speeches. *Arab Media & Society* 15 (2012): 1-13.
- Mohamed, Amany Hamed. Parallelism and Repetition Relationships with the Productivity of the Text: A Linguistic Study of Dr. Mostafa Mahmoud's A Dialogue with an Atheist. *CDELTA Occasional Papers in the Development of English Education* 75.1 (2021): 49-75.
- Mutia, Babila J. Stylistic patterns in oral literature: the form and structure of Bakweri dirges. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 12.3 (2003): 20-20.
- Mueller, Michelle. "Parallelism as Repetition: A Case Study of Betti Alver's Elu on alles uus and Jälle ja jälle." *Methis* 13.16 (2015).
- Nsoh, Ephraim Avey, Abdul-Rahaman Fusheini, and James Azuure Ababila. Aspects of Oral literature in Ghana: with illustrations from selected languages. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, (2010).
- Owusu, Okyere Martin and Asante, Okyere Benjamin. *Poetry appreciation*. RICHKISS PUBLISHERS, (2010).
- Okunowo, Yomi. Patterns of parallelism as trope of meaning in Osundare's poetry. *Academic Research International* 2.2 (2012): 715-723.
- Raji, Olalere Waheed, and Rasaq Atanda Ajadi. A stylistic analysis of Ekun Iyawo. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3.9 (2013): 143.
- Saanchi, James Angkaaraba. Linguistics parallelism and the Dagaaba dirge. *New directions in Ghanaian linguistics* (2002): 409-423.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Routledge, (2006).
- Taluah, Asangba Reginald. *The Context and Poetics of Kasena Dirges and War Songs*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, (2013).
- Taluah, Asangba Reginald. *Grandmasters of the Drum: A Literary Linguistic Analysis of the Dagbamba Panegyrics*. Doctoral dissertation, Universität zu Köln, (2021).